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Moral Education in Plato's Gorgias

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Moral Education in Plato's Gorgias

by

Wenhui Xie

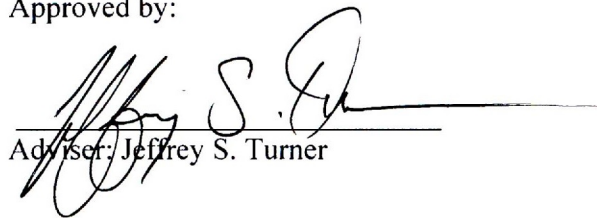
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I want to thank my family for their selfless support, without which I would not study philosophy and classics. I want to thank the classics department for the warm and supportive attitude, especially professor Mitchell Parks and Thomas Beasley, both of whom help me learn the culture and language of ancient Greek civilization. Last but not least, I want to thank my dear advisor, the Socratic educator Professor Jeffrey Turner: your help to me goes beyond this thesis. They will last long.

POLUS: It's obvious, Socrates, that you won't even claim to know that the Great King is happy.

SOCRATES: Yes, and that would be true, for I don't know how he stands in regard to education and justice.

POLUS: Really? Is happiness determined entirely by that?

SOCRATES: Yes, Polus, so I say anyway. I say that the admirable and good person, man or woman, is happy, but that the one who's unjust and wicked is miserable.

Plato, *Gorgias*, (470e; Zeyl trans)

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Abstract

In this thesis I argue for the theme of moral education as an important theme for Plato's *Gorgias*. The *Gorgias* has been commonly understood in terms of politics and philosophy either separately or jointly. I argue that the theme of moral education is equally important and deserves attention. I first contextualize the *Gorgias* into the cultural background of late 5th century BCE when the decline of traditional morality stimulated the Greeks to ask whether virtues (which were traditionally conceived to be hereditary traits exclusive to members of noble family) were teach-able (and thus, could be learned). Next, I analyze the three conversations in the *Gorgias* as a unity that demonstrates the impact of Gorgias' teaching. Then, through an analysis of the relationship between morality, education, and politics, I argue that the *Gorgias* as a whole presents two contrasting modes of education, namely, Gorgias way of teaching and Socrates' education, between which Socrates' education is preferred, but not without its problems.

Introduction

Marked by its philosophical richness and literary craftsmanship, the *Gorgias*¹ has received extensive attention from scholars. However, moral education, or even education in general as a topic of the *Gorgias* is seldom mentioned.² I argue that the *Gorgias* should be analyzed from an educational perspective or with an eye on the issues about education, and the question that I want to ask is “how do I (and thus, everyone) become a good person.”

The dialogue is well-known for its political and philosophical undertones. Because of this, there are scholars who suggest that the real theme of the dialogue is about “the ethical postulates required for social well-being.”³ For instance, Dodds, Kahn and Friedländer all argue in various ways that the *Gorgias* is about the relationship between morality and politics in a society that intends to flourish.⁴ There are other scholars whose treatments of the *Gorgias* focus on either the philosophical theme or the political theme. For instance, Tarnopolsky in her book *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants* undertakes an analysis of the *Gorgias* with the view of modern political

¹ The translation that I use throughout this thesis is by Donald J. Zeyl, the Greek text is by E. R. Dodds.

² “Morality” is not a word used by Socrates. Instead, he uses “virtue.” I use them interchangeably. For a clear definition of “morality,” see p32. “Morality for Socrates is concerned about how one should deal and interacts with oneself, those around him or her, and the environment in which one lives so that one can have a good life that is not only good for the agent, but also the interacting partners.”

³ Dodds, 1959, p1.

⁴ Dodds, 1959. Kahn, 1983. Friedlander, 1964.

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atmosphere.⁵ Irwin writes a reputable commentary emphasizing the philosophical elements of the dialogue.⁶ Vlastos writes a seminal paper on the philosophical problem of the Socratic Method called “*the Socratic Elenchus: Method is All,*” and uses the *Gorgias* heavily as textual evidence. Some scholars analyze the dialogue from other perspectives. For instance, Levin uses the *Gorgias* to reflect on modern medical ethics through the notion of *techne*.⁷ Among all the approaches that have been taken to analyze the *Gorgias*, however, there has been very little scholarship, let alone extensive ones that talk about education in the *Gorgias*. I argue that the dialogue can and should be analyzed with an eye on educational issues because first, education is a latent yet important theme in the *Gorgias*. At 470e, Socrates explicitly says that education and justice are what determine the happiness of a person. Beside this passage, the discussion of proper education also appears at 453d-457c (where Socrates asks Gorgias what he teaches as a teacher) and 485b-486b (where Callicles speaks about philosophy as a part of education that is only meant for boys). These passages show that even though education is not a theme as explicit as that of morality and politics, it is in fact a theme that intertwines with the other two in a sense that whether or not morality is considered a factor of education would fundamentally influence the effect of education, which in turn has serious impact on the political and social life. This leads to the second reason that in terms of the effect of education, the *Gorgias* is one of the rare dialogues in which the teacher, the disciple, and the admirer of the teacher all speak extensively. Therefore, readers are able to see the effect of education from its source to its ultimate development. This feature is not available in other dialogues. Finally, through an analysis of education, the *Gorgias* is shown to be a unity in which two contrasting modes of education are presented, and the Socratic education is preferred, though not without its own problems.

⁵ Tarnopolsky, 2010.

⁶ Irwin, 1979.

⁷ Levin, 2014.

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At this point, it is helpful to look at one of the rare exceptions that treats the *Gorgias* from the perspective of education. Thomas Pangle in his paper “Plato’s *Gorgias* as A Vindication of Socratic Education” tries to defend Socrates as a life-long educator.⁸ Through comparing the different kinds of education that are taught by Gorgias and Socrates, Pangle argues for the superiority of the Socratic education as manifested in the *Gorgias*. For Pangle, Socrates’ teaching of philosophy is the sober antidote to Gorgias’ self-conflicting teaching that craves for public recognition while at the same time, looks down upon civic justice as “masking irreconcilable antagonisms between competing individuals and groups.”⁹ This function of philosophy requires Socrates to be a certain kind of distant observer who engages in civic life to the degree of a caring critic who constantly looks for the next philosophical soul. I agree with Pangle that the *Gorgias* offers two competing kinds of educations and clearly advocates the Socratic education as the superior. However, I disagree with Pangle in that based on my analysis, Socrates is not a mere caring critic just like a modern New York Times columnist. Socrates engages in a different kind of political life that is based on his conception of what is the real good for humans, which is the good of the soul. According to his conception, there is no distinction between private meeting and public life in that in both spheres, Socrates practices the same Socratic interrogation that cares for the soul of himself and his fellow citizens.¹⁰ In order to support my argument, I will analyze how Socrates argues with the interlocutors and his understanding on the interconnection between education, morality, and politics, all of which are also lacking in Pangle’s analysis due to the difference of analytical focus.

⁸ Pangle, 1991.

⁹ Pangle, 1991, p9.

¹⁰ By private meeting, I am referring here the situations where Socrates is not talking to another interlocutor in a public setting, but rather in a more or less private setting.

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Before I turn to a brief description of my thesis, I want to address a more general question of “who cares” regarding the subject of my study (namely, moral education) and the specific text that I choose to analyze (i.e. the *Gorgias*). Readers might wonder that even if the topic of moral education should be analyzed in the *Gorgias*, why should we focus on this ancient text instead of learning about moral education through modern ethical discussions? The first reason, as well stated by Gilbert Murray, is that “in order to see the problems clearly, we must, as far as we can, try to get outside the thick atmosphere of tradition and convention in which all our thought, like the thought of practically every human society known to us, is stifled and imprisoned.”¹¹ To study issues regarding moral education, reading ancient texts like the *Gorgias* can tell us, through great contrast of different cultures, the idiosyncrasy of our modern understanding of morality and education, and thus, offer us a fresh view on the issues of concern. Furthermore, this confidence in the relevance of ancient text to our modern conceptualization lies not only in the fact that ancient Greek civilization is one of the breeding grounds of the entire Western civilization, but also on the basis of great human commonalities across millennia. Different generations of human beings differ more in their technological advancement or conscious intellectual activity than in their mental behavior that dictates their daily practice.¹² Thus, great thinkers are not only penetrating and profound for their contemporary generation, but later generations as well.

Having said these, it is now proper to turn to the central claim of my thesis. Understood as a whole, the *Gorgias* presents readers two modes of education of virtues that have great impact on politics, between which the Socratic education is preferred, though not without

¹¹ Murray, 1946, p66.

¹² Dodds, 1951, II. “Primitive mentality is a fairly good description of the mental behavior of most people today except in their technical or conscious intellectual activities.”

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problems. One mode of education is represented by the three interlocutors, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. Gorgias teaches the skill of rhetoric¹³ with a morally irresponsible mindset. His teaching gets a negative development in Polus, and culminates in Callicles who embodies egoistic hedonism. The other mode of education is the Socratic education. It cultivates the moral character of a person, and aims for the orderliness and harmony of the soul. Socrates interrogates people one on one with the goal of understanding truth and purging false beliefs in himself as well as the other speaker.

While it is true that Socrates' teaching is ultimately the kind of education that the dialogue advocates, the other kind of teaching is also important because first, having a contrast makes the Socratic education more eminently understandable; and second, the other kind of education is worth-noting by itself, because it is a negative example that should alert us about a dangerous path. The kind of education represented by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles begins with Gorgias' morally irresponsible attitude, and develops into one of the most well-articulated acclamations of egoistic hedonism stated by Callicles.¹⁴ It shows the danger of taking a morally irresponsible attitude as an educator, and the analysis of this kind of education is highly alarming because this seems to be an unstated practice in much of modern higher education. By contrast, Socrates' teaching is demonstrated through his whole person from words to deeds. It is a teaching that emphasizes the caring of the soul or in a modern expression, the "health" of one's psyche. The caring of the soul begins and develops through cross-examination of beliefs among individuals, and aims at an existential understanding of how to live one's life, the result of which forms a consciously self-regulating soul. Thus, the caring of oneself is at the same time the

¹³ I use "rhetoric" and "oratory" interchangeably.

¹⁴ See Shorey, *What Plato Said*, 1933, p154. Shorey famously calls the statements by Callicles "the most eloquent statement of the immoralist's case in western literature."

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caring of others because they are realized in the same process of reciprocal examination. With this establishment of the basic contrast between the two kinds of education, it can be seen that the difference between the two kinds of teaching originates from their different understandings of the good.

To the extent that Gorgias' teaching has a conscious formulation of what is good, the good is understood as personal affluence and liberation from the influence or will of others.¹⁵ Polus and Callicles further develop this idea in the negative direction and provide more substance to it by holding that the good is unrestricted power to do whatever one wills, and to bring endless pleasure by having as much as one can in the name of natural justice. This power is good because it ultimately leads to happiness. Thus, the central focus of Gorgias' lineage is individual power, the power to satisfy all kinds of desires so long as they bring about pleasure and thus, happiness. Socrates understands the good to be the goodness of the soul which points to a soul with self-legislated order. This good brings about a harmonious soul that is not troubled by insatiable desires or the possible fate of death. Once a soul focuses on how to live as well instead of as long as one can, it pursues the true source of happiness, namely, morality. Morality does not come from the dictates of the gods or rules of the society, but a conscious realization that it is good to have certain order in one's soul, and this realization comes about both intuitively, and through serious contemplation that ontologically, orderliness is the nature and name of the universe.¹⁶

To further explicate my understanding of moral education in the *Gorgias*, my thesis will be divided into four substantive chapters besides a conclusion. In the first chapter, I will present the cultural background in which the *Gorgias* can be contextualized and understood. The

¹⁵ 452d. Also Irwin, 1979, p116.

¹⁶ 508 a. Also, *Kosmos* in Greek means both the universe and order.

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Gorgias can be understood as participating its contemporary debate about whether virtue is teachable, and one of the most important and unique pairs of concepts is the *agón* (or contest) between the soul and the body. To understand how exactly this pair of concepts is related to issues regarding moral education, it is necessary to have a detailed analysis of the three conversations that happen between Socrates and Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles respectively. Thus, Chapter Two tries to give a detailed analysis of the whole dialogue by first inquiring into an important problem of the general features of Socratic Method. An analysis of his methodology of philosophy is essential to the understanding of “how one becomes a good person.” In a nutshell, the Socrates Method requires the two participants to talk openly about their dearest matters in relation to virtue. Both participants are under scrutiny for the purpose that false beliefs can be purged. After an inquiry into the Socratic Method and specific details of the dialogue, Chapter Three will take on a macro-view and focus on a thematic issue of the real topic of the dialogue. In this chapter, I will argue that the real topic of the *Gorgias* is an inquiry into the moral practice and beliefs of proper education that is required for the well-being of a society. With the relationship between education, morality and politics clearly laid out, the importance of moral education becomes obvious. Then, in the fourth chapter, I will give an analysis of Socrates’ moral education as the one that we should reasonably choose over Gorgias’ teaching. Socrates’ moral education brings the real good to individual as well as the society by focusing on the well-being of the soul. It is done through the typical Socratic Method of examination and refutation through which both participants benefit. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I will offer a criticism on Socratic education that its style of destructive construction is not easy to bear for everyone.

1

Cultural Background and Introduction to the *Gorgias*

1.1 Cultural Background of the *Gorgias*

Where does the *Gorgias* “come” from? Where shall we “locate” this fine composition that discusses perennial questions about education, morality, and politics among the great inheritance of Greek literature? There are several approaches that scholars usually take. First, there is the chronological approach. The problem with this approach is that the dialogue does not have a strict chronological “location” because interestingly, it points to several historical events that happened in different chronological periods.¹ Then, in the storyline of the life of Socrates, the conversations in the *Gorgias* probably happen somewhere near the end of Socrates’ life. However, this does not help us much in determining either the content or style of the dialogue. Third, based on the bitterness of the later pages of the dialogue, the deep sense of agony that is shown through Socrates’ conscious awareness of a possible unjust death, and poignant criticism of Athenian politics, the dialogue seems to reflect a long period of personal struggle of Plato,

¹ See Dodds, 1969, p17-18. “No ingenuity can reconcile the various chronological data which he has obligingly supplied.”

during which he was torn between pursuing a political career and opening a school of philosophy.² These previous approaches, while insightful in their own ways, fail to offer the readers the cultural background against which Plato writes this dialogue. I want to locate the dialogue in terms of the cultural background of 5th BCE Athens and to see the questions the dialogue poses in the light of the intellectual undercurrents of the time. Plato, in his writing is contemplating and responding to some of his contemporary questions in a certain way. Both the questions and the specific style of how he handles the questions are alien to us. In order to understand the cultural context of the *Gorgias*, I will proceed by first discussing one of the fundamental values of Athenian culture, namely, *agón*. Then I will demonstrate how this value is manifested in three aspects of the Greek culture, all of which appear in the *Gorgias*. They are the debates about the difference between orator and philosopher,³ the controversy of culture versus nature (or more accurately, *nomos* versus *phusis*), and the contrast between the body versus the soul respectively.

The Greek word “*agón*” (*ἀγών*) means contest, and this competitive spirit is deeply rooted in almost all aspects of life in the whole Greek world. The four panhellenic *agónon* (plural of *agón*), namely, the Olympic game, the Pythian game, the Nemean game, and the Isthmian game are great examples of the overall agonistic spirit. Within city-states, especially Athens, the *agón* takes place in assembly, law court, and even tragedy and comedy performance. This wide appearance of *agón* is reflected in its usages: besides the meaning of contest, it also has a meaning of gathering, assembly, or trial. As MacIntyre says,

² See Dodds, 1969, p31-34.

³ Rhetor, rhetorician, and orator are equivalent. The sophists, while different from the orators, are in general seemed as equally against the philosophers. This contrast is not held absolute, but rather a conceptual “standard line” against which ancient intellectuals made their claims. For instance, Isocrates claims himself a philosopher even though he is considered a rhetorician, and Alcidas group rhetoric and philosophy together and considers sophists a noble name. See Isocrates, *Against Sophists*; Alcidas, *Concerning Sophists*, 2;

In understanding each of these as a manifestation of the *agón*, we ought to recognize that the categories *political*, *dramatic*, *philosophical* were much more intimately related in the Athenian world than in our own. Politics and philosophy were shaped by dramatic form, the preoccupations of drama were philosophical and political, philosophy had to make its claims in the arena of the political and the dramatic. (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 138)

For instance, in law court, defendants and prosecutors often begin their speeches by condemning the ill-intention of the opponent, or alarming the juries with the danger of words. Words such as “justice” and “piety” are often emphasized to remind the juries their duty of fair judgment that is enacted by the gods.⁴ The whole process of trial may look like a play, and is expected to be so. In tragedies, it is not uncommon to bring up a trial against the protagonist. In the *Orestes* by Euripides, Orestes’ act of homicide is both praised and condemned by the people because he both protects and violates traditional values. On the one hand, he takes revenge for his father through punishing his mother (who both killed his father and committed adultery). On the other hand, he kills his mother, and has thus, cursed the whole city with pollution. In both realms of politics and drama, the progression (of either a trial or a play) is carried out with philosophical discussions of value, dramatic style of confrontation, and political relevance to the society. This tight interaction holds true to the *Gorgias* in various ways. One of the manifestations is the *agón* of the characters between Socrates (and Chaerephon to a certain extent) as representing philosopher on the one hand, and Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles as representing orator on the other hand. This intellectual debate between philosopher and orator is not only important in the age of Plato, but also holds its resonance till now.

⁴ For instance, in the works of Antiphon, speeches I, V, VI all contain a warning to the juries that if unjust verdicts were made, they would incur pollution to the entire city.

To the extent which sophists could be clearly distinguished from orators, Gorgias would belong to the latter group.⁵ He was certainly one of the active people in the sophist movement in the second half of the 5th BCE. The sophists were a group of people who offered intellectual teaching that was scarcely seen anywhere in the Greek world.⁶ The traditional education for male Athenians was not only limited in subject content, but also age. Boys were taught by the *paidotribes* who basically taught gymnastics, the *kitharistes* or music master, and the *grammatistes* who taught reading and writing.⁷ Also, after the boys reached their puberty, which was “traditionally assigned to the fourteenth year,” their education was basically finished,⁸ and they were on their own for further education. The teaching of the sophists was essentially an expansion of this education and importantly, the sophists claimed to make a person a better citizen by offering training in practical skills, the most essential one of which was persuasive speaking. As Kerferd suggests, this teaching was in fact “supplying a social and political need” in a democratic society where first, private wealth was much greater than earlier generations and second, almost every citizen needed to take part in the running of the government or defend himself in the court.⁹ However, this is not saying that the sophists were pioneers of broad-scale higher education. In fact, they charged a high fee from their students to make a fortune for themselves, and this was one of the differences between sophists and philosophers such as Socrates and the Pythagorean School. The philosophers did not charge any fee for their students or followers. A more fundamental difference was about their teachings. The important contrast was not between a practical education (sophistic education) versus a non-practical learning (the

⁵ Dodds, 1969, pp6-7.

⁶ De Romilly, 1992, p30.

⁷ See G.B. Kerferd, 1981, p17; De Romilly, 1992, pp30-32. Kerferd suggests that one of the three major subjects is arithmetic (*logistike*) instead of music. Whichever the third one is, De Romilly and Kerferd agree that male Athenians receive very limited education.

⁸ G.B. Kerferd, 1981, p17.

⁹ G.B. Kerferd, 1981, p15-16.

teaching of philosophers). Rather, it was between what was pragmatic versus what was true and real. In the context of the Greeks, the sophists' teaching was a teaching of *areté* (ἀρετή), virtue or excellence that makes a citizen good. At the heart of this teaching, however, was the training that attempted to ensure personal success through the acquisition of power to do whatever one desires.¹⁰ Compared to other sophists (especially Protagoras) who claimed to teach virtues, Gorgias "concentrated solely on rhetoric and refused to be included among the teachers of *areté*, for he held that rhetoric was the master-art to which all others must defer."¹¹ In other words, Gorgias' self-proclamation as an orator instead of a sophist was only a difference of name, but not fact. In contrast, Philosophers bore the search for truth (and moral truth in the case of the *Gorgias*). What the nature of virtues was, and who had the claims to them come up as the next stage of *agón*.

From a philosophical perspective, the sophists' education was a response to the decline of the authority of the gods as the ultimate judges of moral behavior.¹² Along with the decline of the authority of gods was the equally shaky traditional moral scriptures in which a man's proper practice was to behave in accordance with his social background, or to put it more brutally, his heredity.¹³ With the loosening of faith in traditional values, besides the question of "how I am" as the son of my father, the Greeks now had another question of "what is due to me" as a man.¹⁴ In this sense, although not in a broad scale, the sophistic education was responding to this question yet at the same time deepening the doubt of hereditary virtue beliefs. To see clearly how

¹⁰ MacIntyre, 1984, p139. "the acquisition of power to do and to get whatever one wants [is] the entire content of success."

¹¹ Gurthrie, 1971, p39.

¹² Gurthrie, 1971, pp55-56.

¹³ MacIntyre, 1984, pp131-133. Also, see Murray, 2010, p12. "This is the time when the Greek mind... made its first response to the twofold failure of the world in which it had put its faith, the open bankruptcy of the Olympian religion and the collapse of the city-state."

¹⁴ MacIntyre, 1984, p133.

the sophistic education is both responding yet deepening the moral skepticism of the time, it is important to discuss one of the most famous controversies of late 5th century BCE, and that is the controversy of *nomos* versus *phusis* – the controversy “between the real law of nature and the law of mere convention, accepted so long and practiced so instinctively that it seems like nature.”¹⁵

Already in this description, we have seen a preference of nature over convention: the law of nature was real, whereas the law of convention was only pretending to be the law of nature. “Law, then, and moral standards enforced by public opinion, was not gods-given as was formerly believed. They were something imposed by man on his fellows, or at best created by agreement to set a limit on the freedom of each individual.”¹⁶ This view of conventional law as man-made and had only relative authority gave way to a view that “‘interest’ was what seemed to underline ethical standards, an attitude which readily lent itself to some sort of hedonistic or utilitarian interpretation.”¹⁷ Thus, in practice, “it must be believed to be more profitable to be *nomos*-abiding than ‘*nomos*-less’ if the *nomos* was to be respected.”¹⁸ This pragmatic view of law as something profitable that appeared as a trend of thought in the late 5th century BCE would warmly welcome the sophistic education which, as stated before, focused on the attainment of success that connoted material advantage, social status, and all together, an *agathos* (ἀγαθός) or good human being. This is the way in which the sophistic education is responding to the decline of traditional moral values.

However, the sophists were not completely welcomed by their intended “customers.” The skepticism of traditional moral scripture was far from being a complete eradication. Thus, *nomos*

¹⁵ Murray, 1948, p69.

¹⁶ Gurthrie, 1971, p59.

¹⁷ Excerpt from Gurthrie, 1971, p59. From Greenleaf, *Order, Empiricism and Politics*, extracts from pp.197-9.

¹⁸ A. W. H. Adkins, 1972, p106.

still functioned to a good degree, and the group of people that was impacted the most by this skepticism was the traditional *agathoi* or to put it differently, the people who claimed to be *agathos* (good) by *phusis* (nature). The term *phusis* in a moral and social lense “denotes ... and commands ‘birth and breeding’ in ordinary Greek.”¹⁹ In other words, one’s “nature” was traditionally determined by one’s birth and breeding, and this, not surprisingly, “reinforces the effect of traditional *areté* [virtue], which also tends to commend high birth ... and of which external advantages form a considerable part.”²⁰ In other words, for a long period of time, *phusis* denoted a natural superiority by birth, and this superiority included not only external goods, but innate qualities as well. The *agathoi* were the children of *agathoi*, and this hereditary system had existed for so long that it seemed to be how things should be. The skepticism of traditional morality not only questioned the authority of *nomos*, but also challenged the traditional *agathoi* because now the connection between *agathos* and *phusis* was questionable. The newly rich could also become politically influential and attain social recognition, and this was exactly what the sophists claimed to offer: to give a “new breed of man” by offering the teaching of *areté* or “all those qualities in a man which made for success in Greek society.”²¹ This is the way in which the sophistic education deepens the moral skepticism of the second half of the 5th century BCE.

The sophists’ teaching of procuring personal success was in fact not an alien thought, and it was presented at a national level in the Melian Dialogue in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*. When interest becomes the measure for ethical considerations, justice ceases to be the principle of fair play among both the weak and the strong, becomes a property of power, and consequently, speaks for the interest of the strong that “the strong do what they have

¹⁹ A. W. H. Adkins, 1972, p108.

²⁰ A. W. H. Adkins, 1972, p108-109.

²¹ G.B. Kerferd, 1981, p131.

the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”²² Gods do not protect honor or moral righteousness, but protect “the law of nature to rule whatever one can.”²³ Thus, it is in the interest of Athens to subdue all the inferior islanders even if they want to maintain a neutral stance. The authority of gods is manipulated, and invading the weak becomes justified based on the law of *phusis*. As we shall see, this blatant expression of the dominance of power is only one step different from the position of Calicles, the admirer of Gorgias, in which the reason for dominance is tied to pleasure instead of security. In a macro view, it can be seen that this controversy of *nomos* versus *phusis* which originated from the moral skepticism was an intellectual undercurrent that ran through domestic conflict of political power to international policies of diplomacy. The seriousness of moral skepticism made the danger of the sophists’ answer ever more imminent. The Melians gave a good response to why the Sophists’ answer was not satisfying: the strong and the weak can easily be changed in a swing of luck. Therefore, the kind of justice based on the Sophists’ understanding of morality (which, in fact, is “might makes right”) is essentially not morality, but a cover for the exploitation of the weak. This crisis was also felt by philosophers, and to an extent, Plato was trying to re-establish the authority of *nomos* by rethinking the entire moral system. Inevitably, he would face the challenge from the sophists who offered their answer to this skepticism. The answer from Plato therefore, needs to address this controversy of *nomos* versus *phusis* in a way that can demonstrate the problems of the sophists’ approach, and re-stabilize morality. How exactly Plato did this in the *Gorgias* is, in a sense what this entire thesis is about. However, in here, it is worth pointing out one aspect of Plato’s treatment on morality, and that is about the soul and the body.

²² Thucydides, 5.89.

²³ Thucydides, 5.104-105.

The soul and the body is another pair of concepts that has an agonistic relationship. In a way, this pair of concepts addresses one question: where does morality reside? As mentioned before, until the second half of the 5th century BCE, morality came from the gods. Gods were the ultimate judge and protector of morality. Once a serious doubt about the gods arose, morality lost its basis and became a convention or *nomos*. Whether or not morality was guaranteed by the gods or was a mere convention that probably benefits society as a whole, but not individuals, it was seemed as constraints posed from forces external to human beings themselves. Plato takes a different route, and wants to suggest that morality comes from within. This is where the distinction between the soul and the body comes in. Humans have soul and body. If morality is based on the body, which is driven by desires for food, drinks, sex, and bodily pleasures in general, it is essentially a morality that praises individual enjoyment and material possessions. This morality shares important features with the sophists' answer. In contrast, Plato suggests that morality is rooted in the soul of humans and is literally *good*. It is good not because the gods or society require individuals to do so. Rather, the individual sees and understands that it is literally *good* not only for him or her, but also the community. To put it in a more concrete example, the virtue of justice in its proper sense is about "someone's behavior towards other people, especially towards the associations and communities he belongs to."²⁴ Plato in his dramatic dialogue would need to offer a teaching that demonstrates how justice is also beneficial to the individual who behaves justly. To do this, an understanding of the soul and its relationship to morality is needed. In the *Gorgias*, this pair of concepts is one of the underlying concepts upon which the whole dialogue is constructed. Thus, in order to have a clear understanding of the soul and the body, as well as other pairs of concepts mentioned in previous discussions, an analysis of the dialogue is needed.

²⁴ Irwin, 1979, p3.

1.2 Introduction to the *Gorgias*

Before I start the analysis of the dialogue, it is first helpful to give a basic introduction to the dialogue, and I will talk about the setting, the activity, the people, and the conversations of people of the *Gorgias* respectively.²⁵

Setting and Activity: we are told that the whole dialogue is set under the background of a public, social environment.²⁶ Multiple evidence points to this fact, and the first one is the word “epideixis.”²⁷ Translated as either “display”²⁸ or “presentation,”²⁹ the word refers to a “public demonstration of oratorical skill.”³⁰ In other words, the passage 447a tells us that Socrates and Chaerephon come late for Gorgias’ public display of his oratorical prowess. By comparison, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles are already at the place for some time. The main players of the dialogue and their “ally” formation are presented at this first encounter. As readers who try to reconstruct the dramatic situation, we can reasonably imagine that Gorgias not only has finished his *epideixis*, but because of the display, he is at the peak of public reputation and admiration. At this moment, the two newcomers, Socrates and Chaerephon, arrive late and want to ask Gorgias questions about what his skill amounts to, and what he openly claims and teaches.³¹ Callicles, being the host of Gorgias, seems to consider these two latecomers the same as other audience, and says that “there’s nothing like asking him, Socrates. This was, in fact, one part of his

²⁵ The focus here will be the framing section of the dialogue (447-449c), though relevant information from the later parts of the dialogue will be used as well.

²⁶ See Dodds, 1959, p188; Stauffer, 2006, p17 etc. While there are disputes about whether the whole dialogue happens in open space or inside a building, it is commonly agreed that throughout the whole dialogue, it happens in a public scenario where other audience are present, besides the four main characters.

²⁷ 447a.

²⁸ See Irwin, 1979, p13, 110; Dodds, 1959, p189.

²⁹ See Zeyl, 1997, p792.

³⁰ Dodds, 1959, p189.

³¹ 477c.

presentation.”³² As pointed out by both Irwin and Dodds, receiving questions from audience and thus beginning a new display is a common practice by Gorgias.³³ Thus, Socrates’ questioning is not only welcomed, but is considered as a further demonstration (or even glorification) of Gorgias’ already admirable skill. Callicles seems to think so, and we can imagine that the audience at the place probably thinks the same way as well.³⁴ However, Callicles’ admiration for Gorgias makes him “deaf” to the nuance of Socrates’ request, and ignores the real intention of Socrates, which marks the beginning of a new kind of conversation. This nuance is about the difference between a presentation (or “*epideixis*”) and a discussion (or “*dialektike*”).³⁵

People and Conversations of the People: Who are those involved in this dialogue? We are introduced to five people: Callicles, Socrates, Chaerephon, Gorgias, Polus. Here I focus on the three interlocutors who have conversations with Socrates sequentially.

Gorgias is obviously the center in the prelude. “A man who in his own time and for several generations afterwards would need no introduction, Gorgias was one of the ancient world’s most famous rhetorician and teacher of rhetoric.”³⁶ His worldwide reputation is indicated by the prelude: among all of the five people who are introduced, only Socrates is not acquainted with him. In the prelude, however, Gorgias is presented with noticeable complacency³⁷ and naïve vanity.³⁸ I want to point to one specific line to emphasize Gorgias’

³² 477c.

³³ See Dodds, 1959, 190; Irwin, 1979, p111.

³⁴ I argue that Gorgias thinks the same way too, and he takes this as a chance to further build his reputation. This is why he keeps making complacency claims for three times (448a, 449b, c).

³⁵ The first sentence by Socrates echoes “the latter end of a fray and the beginning of a feast fits a dull fighter and a keen guest” by Shakespeare. Socrates’ late arrival is thus, a hint of the end of a “fray” or Gorgias’ display, and a beginning of a new “feast,” which seems to be Socrates’ dialectical interrogation. Interestingly, taking the dialogue as a whole, whether this line is indicating a beginning of a “*dialektike*” or a new kind of “*epideixis*” is not that clear, because in the last pages of the dialogue, Callicles becomes a silent audience to Socrates’ lengthy and crafty presentation.

³⁶ Stauffer, 2006, p16.

³⁷ 448a.

identity as a rhetorician. When asked by Socrates whether people are supposed to call him an orator, Gorgias replies that “yes, and a good one, Socrates, if you really want to call me ‘what I boast myself to be,’ as Homer puts it.” This line is used by Glaucus in Book VI of the *Iliad*, where he meets his enemy Diomedes for a fatal fight. In his self-introduction, Glaucus tells the story of his family line of royalty, and concludes with this sentence that “that is the blood I claim, my royal birth.”³⁹ Comparing this background, Gorgias’ use of this line is interesting. The Greeks use legend stories and family genealogy to claim their aristocracy and legitimacy of ownerships. Gorgias, by alluding to this line, is indicating that rhetoric is a new power to honor and superiority as that of family genealogy, an act that is fitting to his identity as a rhetorician. This use of the *Iliad* would likely ring a bell to the ancient Greeks who were the intended audience of the *Gorgias*. Finally, note that in the whole dialogue, Gorgias seems to be the only person who possibly undergoes a positive change of his moral beliefs.⁴⁰ This will be important in helping readers evaluate the success of Socrates’ intent.

Polus, historically, is a professional teacher of rhetoric who has written a book on rhetoric.⁴¹ In the dialogue, he is a student of Gorgias. From the beginning, Polus has shown an eagerness for public recognition:⁴² noticing the arrival of the newcomers and having listened to his master’s demonstration, Polus is ardent and impatient to mimic his master and to display his own rhetorical prowess. The most memorable words by Polus are no doubt the answer he gives to Chaerephon’s question. He gives us a first understanding of craft, which seems to come out of

³⁸ See Dodds, 1959, p9.

³⁹ 449a. *Iliad*, vi. 211. Trans. Fagles.

⁴⁰ Gorgias participates throughout the entire conversational process. He jumps into Socrates and Polus’ conversation to help Socrates proceed his explanations of rhetoric (463b-464b), and also help facilitate the conversation between Socrates and Callicles when Callicles has clearly lost his interest in talking to Socrates (497b, 506a-b, etc.).

⁴¹ Dodds, 1959, p11.

⁴² 448a.

experience, and has a tendency to perform effectively, and brings in the idea of the “admirable.”⁴³ These two notions, namely, craft and the “admirable”, turn out to be essential concepts for the rest of the dialogue. So much can be said about Polus in the prelude.

Callicles is a fascinating interlocutor about who we know the least (virtually no historical record), and yet he plays the most important role in the dialogue.⁴⁴ Almost the entire second half of the dialogue is dedicated to his conversation with Socrates. However, this formidable enemy appears to be very friendly and hospitable at the beginning. His words in the prelude tell us that he is an admirer of Gorgias and his oratorical skill, and that he hosts Gorgias. His first utterance, however, invokes an image of war that seems to foresee the nature of his conversation with Socrates: their opinions are conflicting so much that only one side can “win” out, and the other side must be abandoned.

⁴³ Polus also brings in the idea of the “best.” However, he does not distinguish it from the admirable, which is later used by Socrates to refute him. Socrates’ seemingly clear response to Polus’ answer actually brings in an interpretation problem of the Greek words. Dodds (1959, p193), Stauffer (2006, p19), and Irwin (1979, p112-113) all have different understandings about what exactly is Socrates trying to get across. Because of the focus and page limit of my chapter, I will not discuss this issue here.

⁴⁴ Callicles’ name in Greek is consisted of two parts: Calli (or καλλι-) from καλός, which means “good, beautiful, fine, noble,” and -cles (or -κλής) from κλέος, which, in its positive sense means “glory, renown.” Thus, Callicles’ name means something like “noble glory.” Plato probably chooses this name on purpose, since the meaning of the name is quite revealing about the character of Callicles.

2

Socratic Interrogation in the *Gorgias*

2.1 General Features

The way Socrates argues has fascinated generations of scholars because of its philosophic importance and literary effect. Gregory Vlastos in his seminal paper “*The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All*” claims that he has found the standard pattern that is applicable to the “early dialogues” of Plato, including the *Gorgias*.¹ In fact, the paper draws its most decisive textual evidence from the *Gorgias* that Vlastos’ observations should at least properly reflect the way Socrates argues in the *Gorgias*, if not other dialogues. This paper carries out this test and intends to examine the important topic of the Socratic Method in the *Gorgias*. I attempt to abstract some important features of the Socratic Method or more properly, Socratic interrogation in the *Gorgias* by reflecting carefully upon Vlastos’ paper. Then, I will offer a detailed exploration of the three conversations in the dialogue so as to first support my arguments about the general features, and second, to draw out important philosophic messages while at the same time responding to some scholarly disputes about interpretations of the *Gorgias*. I argue that Socratic interrogation is a

¹ Vlastos, 1994, p1.

search for the truly good way of living. It is done through a logical examination of the existential beliefs of the interlocutors about the things that are the dearest to them in relation to virtue.

Vlastos' paper carefully examines several aspects of the Socratic Method (which he termed Socratic elenchus). Based on his understanding of the Socratic elenchus, there is a double objective behind Socrates' seemingly censorious questioning: "to discover how every human being ought to live *and* to test that single human being who is doing the answering – to find out if *he* is living as one ought to live."² It is called a double objective because Socrates does not use two types of elenchus to achieve the two goals. There is one type of elenchus, and it does both a philosophical search for truths about "what a good life is", and "a therapeutic one, searching out the answerer's own in the hope of bringing him to the truth."³ Whether or not an elenchus can achieve its double objective depends on two conditions. First, Socrates requires interlocutors to "refrain from speechifying – to give short, spare, direct, unevasive answers to the questions."⁴ At the same time, it is necessary for the interlocutor to submit to what gets called the doxastic constraint: to speak only about what one believes, but not random, hypothetical propositions.⁵ Vlastos emphasizes the importance of the second constraint that this is how Socrates can get a hold of the way of life that a specific interlocutor lives. Having said what Socrates wants to do in his conversation and the conditions upon which he relies to achieve his goal, it is proper to see how exactly Socrates carries out his interrogation. Vlastos gives what he thinks a standard pattern of how the majority of elenchus are done.⁶ He names it "standard elenchus," and there are four steps in this pattern. First, "the interlocutor asserts a thesis, *p*, which Socrates considers

² Vlastos, 1994, p10.

³ Vlastos, 1994, p10.

⁴ Vlastos, 1994, p7.

⁵ Vlastos, 1994, pp7-9.

⁶ Vlastos, 1993, pp11-17.

false and targets for refutation.” Second, Socrates gets the interlocutor to agree on further premises, say q and r , the justification of which are not given. Third, “Socrates then argues, and the interlocutor agrees, that $q \& r$ entails $not-p$.” Finally, Socrates claims that he has not only proven that p is false, but also that $not-p$ is true. At this point, the big picture of Vlastos’ understanding of the Socratic elenchus is completed.

While Vlastos’ interpretation might not be accurate in all the details, the areas it touches upon and the questions to which are alluded in the paper have generated a whole field of study of the Socratic Method. Many insights are built upon Vlastos’ seminal work, and in this paper, I want to raise three points of objections to Vlastos’ interpretation. First, the proper name of the Socratic Method needs to be examined. Second, the two well-known constraints of the Socratic Method seem strangely out of place in the *Gorgias*. They are not applied as strictly as Vlastos (and many other scholars who agree with Vlastos on this point) want them to be. Finally, I want to discuss the nature of the double objective, which is a subtle yet significant relationship that gets treated lightly by Vlastos.

2.11 Issues about Naming the Socratic Method

Vlastos uses the name of the Socratic elenchus for the Socratic Method because first, historically, elenchus has been used by scholars to connote the Socratic Method; and second, it has also been used quite frequently by Plato. Last but not least, the word *elenchus* means refutation or censure and it emphasizes an important aspect of the Socratic Method, even though refutation “is not an end in itself.”⁷ The problem of using “elenchus” is that this term can mislead

⁷ Vlastos, 1994, p4.

readers to think that Socrates is eristic and concerns primarily about winning the conversation. Vlastos does not think that Socrates is eristic, and tries to counter this tendency by saying that “the adversary procedure which is suggested (but not entailed) by the Greek word is not an end in itself.”⁸ Rather, the object of Socratic dialectic “is always that positive outreach for truth which is expressed by words for searching, inquiring, investigating.”⁹ Harold Tarrant suggests that in order to avoiding misunderstanding, it is better to use another word, *exetasis*, which is properly translated as close examination, scrutiny or interrogation, to name Socratic dialectic.¹⁰ He deploys a stylometric analysis of both words and shows that *elenchus* is not used exclusively by Plato to describe Socrates’ practice. Rather, “elenchus” is used primarily either by the interlocutors against Socrates, or to describe the practice of the interlocutors. In contrast, “exetasis” has also been used widely by Plato, and is strongly associated with the way Socrates speaks.¹¹ More importantly, Tarrant thinks that this term fits Socrates better because it properly depicts Socrates as a friend and benefactor instead of a competitor in the conversations.¹²

I agree with Tarrant’s opinion because through this change of name there comes a different emphasis on the nature of the Socratic Method that is particularly fitting for the *Gorgias*, if not other dialogues. The name “interrogation” indicates that even though the conversation ends in a refutation of an interlocutor’s viewpoints, it is not meant to be a process where winning and losing becomes the primary goal. Socrates does not see the conversations to be about triumphing

⁸ Vlastos, 1994, p4.

⁹ See Above.

¹⁰ Tarrant, 2002, p61. Tarrant translates *exetasis* as “interrogation.” I adopt this translation, and will also use other translations of the word that are listed above, since they do not alter the message that I want to convey. For an extensive discussion of the word *exetasis*, see *Liddle-Soot Greek to English Lexicon*.

¹¹ Tarrant, 2002, pp69-72. Tarrant counts that the verb *exetazein* and its cognates are used 47 times.

¹² Tarrant, 2002, P72.

over his interlocutors, even though the refutation is unmistakably essential.¹³ How the interlocutors view their conversation with Socrates (and the conversations between Socrates and other interlocutors) is a different story, and this will be discussed in the second half of this chapter. At this point, it is appropriate to point out that Socrates in general views his conversations with his interlocutors to be a joint search for certain understanding that can lead to real knowledge.¹⁴ This is why the refutation, which includes both a negation of the interlocutor's view and some kind of positive affirmation of Socrates' view,¹⁵ is essential: it is through refutation that one can be purged of false beliefs, and head towards truths.¹⁶

The change of name and its implication emphasize that Socratic interrogation is a search for a certain kind of knowledge. In this regard, a discussion of the two constraints upon which Socratic interrogation is conducted become pertinent and necessary. The brief speech constraint and the doxastic constraint guarantee that the conversation can be a testimony of the interlocutors' life. The doxastic constraint is especially important because it seems necessary for Socrates to put the doxastic constraint upon the answerers so that the conversation can be about the interlocutor's life. While this understanding is accepted by scholars such as Terence Irwin¹⁷ and Hugh Benson,¹⁸ the *Gorgias* presents a perplexing challenge as to how exactly this doxastic requirement is applied because this requirement is not applied strictly to any interlocutors. The same holds true for the brief speech. Hereby I will demonstrate the applications of these two constraints in the *Gorgias*.

¹³ About how Socrates sees his conversations with Gorgias, see 453b-d, 457c-458b, etc; with Polus, see 461c-e, 465d, 466c, 469b, 473a, etc; with Callicles, 481c-482c, 486d-e, 487a-488b, etc. Regarding the importance of refutation, see 458a-b, 487e, etc.

¹⁴ 487c-488b.

¹⁵ What is confirmed is not necessarily propositional "knowledge". It can be about some assumptions that Socrates has about an interlocutor. See 453b.

¹⁶ See 458a.

¹⁷ Irwin, 1979, see Introduction.

¹⁸ Benson, 2002, p105, 107, etc.

2.12 The Two Constraints Examined

The condition for making short and brief answers is clearly stated by Socrates at 449b where he starts to converse with Gorgias about the definition of oratory. The same requirement is restated at the beginning of Socrates' conversation with Polus at 461d. Importantly, there are two places where Socrates apologizes for breaking this rule himself, and they are at 465e and 519d respectively. These passages seem to give an impression that Socrates tries to hold this condition as well as he can.¹⁹ I argue that however, the *Gorgias* seriously challenges this understanding. One of the most noticeable pieces of textual evidence is that Socrates does not request Callicles to follow this rule throughout their conversation, and Callicles makes several lengthy speeches.²⁰ Besides, Socrates himself makes a lot of long speeches, especially in his conversation with Callicles.²¹ How shall we understand these important exceptions? Why does Socrates apply this requirement selectively?

I think there are two reasons. First of all, as it is stated by Gorgias at 449b, there are some places in the conversations where long speeches are needed. Socrates realizes this and makes a similar comment at 465e that delivering a long narration or speech can be forgiven when it is needed for the sake of understanding. If Polus does not understand what Socrates says, Socrates is justified in giving a long speech, and Polus is allowed to do the same. It seems, however, that in other situations, the condition of making short speech is preferred, and Socrates' comment at 519e shows that he is sincerely concerned about speaking for too long. One possible interpretation is that Socrates is using this condition to guard against something. This has led us

¹⁹ In fact, this requirement seems so reasonable and well-supported that there are other scholars who consider this to be one of the decisive features of dialectic, another term that is used to describe how Socrates converses with the interlocutors. See Stauffer, 2006, p19.

²⁰ 482c-486d, 491e-492c, etc.

²¹ 487a-488b, 492e-494a, 507a-509c, 511d-513c, 523a-527e, etc.

to the second reason for why Socrates waives the constraint to some interlocutors but not others. At the beginning of the dialogue where Polus gives a short speech that praises Gorgias, Socrates jumps in and stops him. The reason he gives is that what Chaerephon is asking for is not what something is like, but what that thing is.²² By saying what something is like, what is given is a shadow or image of the thing, which is not what Socrates wants. Socrates cares about the thing itself.²³ Thus, once he notices that both Gorgias and Polus tend to speak about what things are like, he puts the constraint onto them so that there is no space given for long and unessential elaborations. Callicles is different because he boldly and openly asserts his thoughts on the subject matter of discussion. Socrates has no worry about Callicles, and thus, waives the constraint on him.

The second constraint of “say what you believe,” which gets called the doxastic constraint,²⁴ also faces interpretive challenges in the *Gorgias*, because there is textual support for both sides of the issue. At 466c, Socrates asks Polus whether he is revealing his own view or simply asking questions, to which Polus replies the latter. At the beginning of his conversation with Callicles,²⁵ Socrates praises Callicles approvingly for his frankness to speak his own opinion. At 500b, Socrates requests Callicles to be serious and not to jest with him, because the matter at stake is important. These are the pieces of textual evidence for arguing that Socrates does apply this constraint to the interlocutors. However, at the same time, Socrates also says that Gorgias and Polus lack frankness,²⁶ and Callicles also says that they were refuted because they

²² 448c-449a.

²³ For comments on this passage, see Dodds, 1959, p193; Irwin, 1979, p112-113.

²⁴ See Benson, 2002, p105. On scholars’ general agreement on the importance of this constraint, see Vlastos, 1994, p7-8; Irwin, 1979, p4; Benson, 2002, p105.

²⁵ 487b-e.

²⁶ 487b.

were too shameful to express what they truly believe.²⁷ In other words, while Socrates cares about the sincerity and frankness of his interlocutors, he does not pose the doxastic constraint strictly and explicitly on them, and the refutations of Gorgias and Polus are done precisely on account of their insincerity. How should we understand this perplexing application of the doxastic constraint?

One reason why this constraint is considered essential by some scholars is that this doxastic constraint guarantees the second goal of the double objective of the elenchus,²⁸ namely, a refutation of one's way of life: it seems obvious that if someone does not say what they really believe, it is not possible to conduct a refutation of someone's life. However, the perplexing nature of Socratic elenchus in the *Gorgias* is that apparently, Socrates has achieved the double objective of the elenchus in his conversation with both Gorgias and Polus without applying this constraint explicitly and strictly. Gorgias and Polus are both refuted logically and personally because they try to cover their true beliefs. At the same time, we also seem to get a glance of what Gorgias and Polus truly believe. At this point several questions come up. While it is agreed that the Socratic elenchus is ad hominem in nature, what exactly is being attacked at a personal level for the three interlocutors? How does Socrates get to understand at least some of the true beliefs of Gorgias and Polus without applying the doxastic constraint explicitly? Since the purpose of the constraints is to ensure the proper procession of Socratic interrogation, to answer these questions, it is necessary to discuss the aims of Socratic interrogation, because they are what the constraints are for.

²⁷ 482c-483a.

²⁸ I use elenchus instead of exetasis here because I am explaining Vlastos' understanding and this is what Vlastos uses. In my own voice, I use exetasis.

2.13 The Double-Objective Unified: What Is The Truth?

As long as Socrates gets to examine the interlocutor's way of life, he does not mind waiving the two constraints. Importantly, then, what is Socrates trying to get at through interrogations of the interlocutors' lives? Up to this point, I have termed it "a certain kind of knowledge" because of its complex nature. Vlastos suggests that Socrates is doing two things with the same interrogative process: one thing is a philosophic search of real knowledge in the moral domain, and the other thing is a therapeutic practice to change the interlocutor's life. However, having constructed the general picture of Socratic elenchus, in the rest of the paper, Vlastos puts much of his attention to the objective of philosophic search. It leaves the other part of the double objective, namely, the therapeutic part, unattended.²⁹ What this means is not that Vlastos does not explain what he means about this therapeutic part of the elenchus. Rather, he has left out the relationship between the two parts of the double objective unclarified. Vlastos uses the term "double objective" instead of two objectives, because they are achieved by the very same elenchus. However, he does not give a reason for this special term.³⁰

Readers might reasonably assume that by using this term, he tries to point towards a kind of fundamental relationship between the two parts that makes him want to call them parts of a double objective, but not two objectives. Vlastos's own words signify an element of this

²⁹ Vlastos segments his paper into three parts, the first of which (pp1-11) deals with the definition of the Socratic elenchus, and also includes a discussion of the double objective and the two constraints. In the second part (pp11-17), he introduces the standard pattern of elenchus, and sets out to defend the second step of the pattern, in which he examines truth value of the premises *q&r*. In the third part (pp17-29), Vlastos defends his fourth step, which he considers the most novel of his contributions. He tries to give an answer to why Socrates confidently claims that his arguments are true, and the whole discussion does not have direct connection with the therapeutic goal of the elenchus. Thus, after the first part of his paper, Vlastos very much leaves the therapeutic part of the double objective unexplained.

³⁰ I am assuming that there are other reasons for his terminology except for the sheer fact the two goals are achieved at the same time, because it is well accepted that a single process of action can aim for two objectives (if not more) at the same time. For instance, in the process of walking, I can aim for two objectives of both exercising and arriving at the bus stop. Thus, there should be an important reason for Vlastos' intentional choice of terminology.

relationship. He thinks that the thing that connects the philosophical search with the therapeutic goal is the moral question of "how one shall live one's life." The connection seems to be a certain kind of knowledge (or truths) about this moral question which on the one hand, is the goal of the philosophic search, while on the other hand, is applied by Socrates in an attempt to change the interlocutors' life. However, in Vlastos' view, it seems that the operation of these two parts does not proceed simultaneously.³¹ When Socrates tries to use the elenchus to attain consistent moral beliefs, the philosophic part comes to the fore. In a different situation, presumably when Socrates starts to believe that he has found moral truths after a long time of searching, he would use the same elenchus to examine his interlocutors and try to change their way of life. It follows from Vlastos' view that the philosophic search needs to be done in advance of the therapeutic purgation. Another distinction implied from this is that the philosophic search is for Socrates' own knowing while the therapeutic goal is for the benefit of the interlocutors. Based on these two distinctions, it also seems that the therapeutic goal is only adjunctive, but not necessary in the elenchus process. With these three points of observations, I will proceed to a deeper analysis about whether they describe correctly the Socratic interrogation of the *Gorgias*.

I argue that there is no such distinction between the philosophical search and the examination or the refutation process.³² Socrates learns by interacting with the interlocutors, and the examination is right there within the interaction. Thus, there is no sequential advancement or dis-advancement. To draw out the full picture of my understanding, I will argue in the following passage for the unity of Socratic interrogation by first exploring the core of that unity – Socrates'

³¹ See Vlastos, 1994, 10. "There is one elenchus and it must do both jobs, though one or the other will be to the fore in different phases of it."

³² Here I have replaced Vlastos' term of "therapeutic," and replace it simply with "examination." This is because "therapeutic" is a descriptive term of the function of "examination" or "refutation," and the latter of which can well have multiple functions depending on the occasions.

notion of truth. Then, based on my understanding of Socrates' truth, I will give a general statement about the direction and goal of Socratic interrogation, through which the unity of Socratic interrogation (regarding its goal) is shown.

The two aspects of Socratic interrogation seem related and yet distinct. How is a search for moral knowledge connected with an examination of someone's life? I argue that for Socrates, they are not only connected but are indeed a unity because moral knowledge ultimately is about living a good life. All other questions about virtues are pursued for the sake of a better understanding of what a good life is.³³ To see clearer this unity of Socratic interrogation, it is helpful to get an image of what this search and moral truth is.

To begin with, for Socrates, searching is a process through which one gets to see better things that are not clear before.³⁴ It is a process in which understanding gradually deepens, if it is conducted and understood properly.³⁵ For Socrates, his search for an answer to the question of a good life is both specific and general (or theoretical). He searches for an answer to what a good life is from every interlocutor, and examines their answers in relation to virtues, their own ways of living, and broader societal implications. It is an interactive and reciprocal process in which the two sides get to know each other in three aspects: the character, the beliefs, and the deeds. Hence, in searching, Socrates looks for the three inseparable aspects of a person: who the

³³ Here I am making the assumption that virtues are essential for a good life, an assumption that I believe Socrates presupposes as well. Thus, even though sometimes Socrates only asks about questions relating to virtues, I include them in the category of the quest for good living because they are all pointing towards the ultimate question of "what a good life is."

³⁴ 453b, 454c.

³⁵ 458c. Note that from 457c-458a, Socrates is suggesting that if the interrogative process is *perceived* as eristic, it would cause anger and spite that leads astray the whole discussion, even if the process is done correctly. In other words, the interrogative process can be a waste of time if it is not perceived properly.

interlocutor is, what he believes, and how he behaves. Since the process is reciprocal, Socrates also shows who *he* is, what he believes, and how he behaves, and is challenged in some cases.³⁶

Morality for Socrates is concerned about how one should deal and interact with oneself, those around him or her, and the environment in which one lives so that one can have a good life that is not only good for the agent, but also the interacting partners. It resides in human beings, but its root can go beyond the scope of human society.³⁷ Everybody has different moral beliefs and practices, and the shared experience of different individuals makes it possible for the communication and examination of moral beliefs and practices to happen.³⁸

For Socrates, the search for moral truths is both about individual moral beliefs and practices, and moral truths per se. Moral truths appear in an individual when what she believes and practices (an individual) is consistent with what one should believe and should do (and thus, universal or general). In other words, moral truths are found in a person who knows the right way of life, and lives it. Thus, moral truths are epistemological and existential, and possibly cosmological or ontological.³⁹ The mere theoretical understanding of it is at best insufficient since life does not stop where logical validity halts.

The search for moral truths thus cannot be separated from individuals who live their lives: straightforwardly, moral truths are about how to live as an ontologically distinctive species of

³⁶ This challenge appears most prominently in Socrates' conversation with Callicles, and has already surfaced in the *Polus* part (466b-c, 467b-c, 471a-d), though to a much less degree. *Polus* is able to let Socrates present his beliefs about morality, power, and happiness, but is not able to argue against Socrates even though he strongly disagrees with Socrates. In his conversation with *Gorgias*, Socrates' way of living is not challenged. However, by subtly disagreeing with *Gorgias* (459c) and pointing out his inconsistency (458e-461b), Socrates has already presented himself to be on the opposite side of *Gorgias*' view. This sets up a thread that comes out prominent in later sections of the dialogue.

³⁷ 508a.

³⁸ 481c-d.

³⁹ 507e-508a. Also see Friedländer, *Plato I: introduction* 1969, pp221-229, especially pp224-229.

human beings in real life.⁴⁰ Socrates' standard of moral truths is very high. Moral truths are neither just theories or just practices, but practically examined theories or theoretically supported practices, depending on how one views them. Nonetheless, both the root and the destination of this search are about living, but not theorizing.

2.14 The Double-Objective Unified: How Does It Work?

Having explained Socrates' notion of truth, it is now proper to discuss how this understanding helps unite the two aspects of Socratic interrogation. In fact, Socrates' way of interrogation is a corresponding reflection of his notion of truth. Socrates wants to examine the genuine beliefs of the interlocutors about the thing that is the dearest to them⁴¹ *in relation to virtue*. To see how this way of practice is a corresponding reflection of Socrates' understanding of truth, there are three points that I want to clarify about the general statement. First, it is helpful to see how, in my understanding, Socrates formulates the direction of his questioning.

It seems that the search for a good life needs to consider two aspects for a presumably well-rounded answer: how the answerer lives (i.e. practice) and what he or she believes or says about living a life (i.e. beliefs). In terms of practice, there are two categories: daily behavior and the one thing that one cares the most (or is most recognized or is most aspired to). For instance,

⁴⁰ Since truths cannot be found in separation from individuals, does it mean that there are multiple truths? While I use "truths" instead of "truth" or even "Truth," my understanding of Socrates' (or Plato's) notion of truth is this: there is only one truth. However, only the gods are able to see it. Human beings can only have a limited view of the truth (this is perhaps why Socrates thinks human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that the reason why he is wiser than others is because he does not hubristically claim that he knows what he does not). However, the truth, even though it is one, is known only through individuals who embody it and manifest it, for otherwise the truth would be unknown. Therefore, the knowing of truth is inseparable from humans, and on every human being who comes to grasp truth, there are manifestations of the truth. What this means is that for everyone grasps the truth, they would live a life that reflect the same truth, but express through their individualities. See *Phaedrus*, 246e-248e.

⁴¹ 449a .

for Gorgias, oratory is the thing that he is most proud of.⁴² How Gorgias behaves when he does not offer public speeches or teach pupils will be counted as his daily practice or behavior.

In terms of beliefs, one can speak about either things that do not matter much to him or her or things that he or she really believes. Socrates draws out the second two categories from the two divisions of words and deeds. This formulates the first part of the general description of Socratic interrogation: Socrates wants the interlocutor to say what he or she genuinely believes about the thing that is the dearest to him or her. This direction of questioning is a fitting correspondence to Socrates' understanding of truth, which is neither merely theoretical nor practical but both.

What this means is that first, Socrates is not merely asking the interlocutors to say their real beliefs (instead of giving assumptive arguments). A person can speak about his or her own genuine beliefs about a variety of different things. What Socrates cares about is not a person's real beliefs about daily practices (and this is not saying that daily practice contains no value in revealing a person). Socrates wants to know the thing that the interlocutor cares most about, and knows his opinion on that thing.⁴³ Socrates is a philosopher of the apex in a sense that he pays attention to the most noteworthy aspects of a person's life.⁴⁴

Second, by making the interlocutors to say their own opinion on the thing that is dearest to them, Socrates thus succeeds in bringing the complex of one's life into words, and therefore, makes it possible that an examination of words can be an examination of life. This is where the propositional aspect of the Socratic interrogation comes in the picture: a life expressed through

⁴² 449a.

⁴³ Again, here I am only talking about Socratic interrogation in the *Gorgias*. While my observation may apply to other dialogues, my analysis is specific and thus, attends the most to the *Gorgias*.

⁴⁴ This is where the doxastic constraint ideally applies.

the channel of words is subject to the rules of logic, and logical inconsistency is therefore able to reflect some kind of inconsistencies of one's life.⁴⁵

Finally, the kind of inconsistency that Socrates points out is specific. He is not trying to point out a kind of inconsistency about one's knowledge of a *techne*. For instance, Socrates does not ask Gorgias how to produce convictions and then try to find out whether Gorgias' technical account is accurate. Socrates has in mind a moral concern that directs all his questioning. Expressed in a different way, this concern is about "the well-being of soul," "happiness," or "a good way of life." It is in this domain that Socrates examines and refutes the interlocutors.⁴⁶ This reflects the existential aspect of Socrates' understanding of truth.⁴⁷

Last but not least, since truth is revealed in a reciprocal process, Socrates does not only ask for the real beliefs, but also examines them so as to get closer to the truly good life.⁴⁸ A process of refutation is inevitable here because of the deployment of logic. However, refutation is not the purpose, and therefore, it does not end when one of the participants is refuted: it intends to illicit the exact problems and to look for reasons of wrongdoing until all the problems are fully and clearly revealed. By revealing the reasons of wrongdoing, a transformation also takes place because if one is able to bear the sense of shame and embarrassment and truly see

⁴⁵ How strong this method of life-webbed verbal examination is another question. In other words, if an interlocutor is revealed as ignorant or inconsistent, how much does this conclusion tell us about this person? Apparently, this depends on how sincere Socrates is, how well the interlocutor can express himself, etc. Since this thesis is not about Socratic Method, my discussion of the validity of Socratic Method stops at the assumption that Socrates is sincere and has been successful in revealing realistically how each interlocutor is like as a person of a complex life.

⁴⁶ The standard for judging moral truth is perhaps happiness, and it is connected with internal harmony or an ordered soul.

⁴⁷ What the soul should model upon so as to become good touches upon ontology, and if this ontology expands towards the entire universe, an understanding of cosmology is involved. This is the sense in which a search for the truth of the well-being of the soul is ontological or cosmological.

⁴⁸ The reciprocity thus requires Socrates to say his real beliefs about his dearest concern – virtues, and Socrates does speak about his beliefs affirmatively in the *Gorgias*. The problem of understanding Socrates' beliefs is not on the conclusions, but on the premises: what are Socrates' premises based on which he draws the conclusions? It is a rather difficult problem because Socrates seldom makes it explicit that whether the premises he speaks about belong to his own (i.e. 467c-468b), the interlocutors (i.e. 474d-475a), or are merely provisional (i.e. 451e-452d).

that the examined belief is problematic, one would make changes to amend it.⁴⁹ Ideally, the finish of a full refutation will therefore be the establishment of truth at the same time. This truth is not only for Socrates or for the other interlocutors, but also the society, and ideally, human beings in general.

It can be understood clearly now that the double objective Vlastos speaks about is really one: it is one search for moral truth that contains aspects of theoretical inquiry, existential examination, and perhaps cosmological or ontological understanding. Socratic interrogation does not have a double objective, but only different aspects of one objective, and that is to search for the truth that can direct a good way of life for humans. This is a project that when it is carried out in details would necessarily involve logical inference, and refutation, which can be viewed as being either therapeutical or educational. However, they are only two aspects of one single search, but not a double-objective.

2.2 Individual Analyses of the Three Conversations

The *Gorgias* is particularly revealing of the Socratic interrogation because there is a contrast formed between Gorgianic oratory and Socratic interrogation. In order to see the detailed features of Socratic interrogation, it is important to show that first, how each conversation is tailored to fit the characters and beliefs of each interlocutor; second, the relationship of beliefs among Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles; and third, how Socrates argues.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Here, one premise is implied, that people do things for the sake of what is good (467c-468c). I consider this a fundamental motivation or even a desire, rather than a mere intellectual comprehension.

⁵⁰ I will not dive deep into the controversies about the validity of the arguments, though undoubtedly, they will be dealt with when they are relevant to the topics of my concern.

2.21 Socrates' Conversation with Gorgias (449c-461b)

Socrates clearly says that he wants to "find out from the man what his craft can accomplish, and what it is that he both makes claims about and teaches."⁵¹ This is an important thread that guides Socrates' conversation with Gorgias. The first part is particularly important, as it sets the range of the other two questions that Socrates has in mind. To put the first question in a different way, it is Gorgias, but not anyone else whom Socrates wants to ask about the power or capacity of Gorgias' craft, rhetoric. This is important in two senses: first, Socrates is looking for the capability, but not actuality of this craft.⁵² Second, Gorgias is apparently not the only person who practices oratory. However, he is the one whom is sought after by Socrates. This is not only because Gorgias is the epitome of an orator, but also that he claims to be a teacher who can train other orators as well.⁵³ The second feature holds special significance because the other two interlocutors, Polus and Callicles are associated with Gorgias as either disciple or admirer. Thus, Gorgias' education shows its influence from Polus and Callicles. The two following questions of "what it is that he both makes claims about and teaches" can be seen as explication of the two aspects of the first question. This line is spoken before this conversation actually starts. As readers, we can sense that Plato has subtly laid out the contrast between philosopher and orator along with the theme of education in the background.

⁵¹ 447c.

⁵² The difference is about what one *can* do with rhetoric and what one *actually* does with it. Human beings have the capability of running 10 miles. However, I as an individual cannot even run 5 miles. In a similar vein, Socrates looks for what rhetoric *can* do according to Gorgias, but not what he does with the craft. The Greek word is *dunamis*, which can mean either power, capacity or point, function. Dodds (1959, p 190) chose the meaning of function. I prefer the meaning of power or capacity because in my analysis, translating *dunamis* as the capacity of rhetoric rather than the exact functions fits this part of the conversation better (see 452d, 456b), and can better manifest the relationship among Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles in terms of values.

⁵³ 449b.

The conversation begins in a more or less typical way that focuses on the "what is" question about rhetoric. Socrates rejects Gorgias' first definition⁵⁴ that oratory is about speaking or speaking wisely, because there are other crafts that also make its practitioners speak wisely. For instance, medicine can make doctors speak wisely about drugs and health. Gorgias then offers another definition⁵⁵ that its (oratory) activity and influence depend entirely on speeches, and it is also rejected on the ground that there are other crafts such as arithmetic, computation and astronomy that are the same in this aspect.⁵⁶ Since rhetoric is different from them, there must be something that separates rhetoric from others, implies Socrates. Gorgias thus says that oratory is the greatest and best of human concerns.⁵⁷ However, Socrates says that again, there are other crafts that claim to be the greatest and the best of human concerns in colloquial talks. Being healthy is the best. Next in line is handsome, and becoming rich honestly claims the third. So says the common belief. "How would you refute them, Gorgias?" Socrates asks.⁵⁸ Gorgias replies with his now noticeable tone of boastfulness and vagueness: rhetoric is indeed the greatest good and is the source of freedom for humankind and power of ruling.⁵⁹ With further pushes from Socrates, Gorgias says more that it is done through persuasive speeches in large public gatherings.⁶⁰ Now Gorgias' understanding of oratory is becoming clear, though Socrates is still not satisfied, because there are other crafts that carry out persuasions, such as teaching. Finally, Gorgias makes it clear that oratory is to produce persuasive speech about things that are

⁵⁴ 449e-450a.

⁵⁵ 450c.

⁵⁶ 450c-d.

⁵⁷ 451d.

⁵⁸ 451e-452d, my paraphrase.

⁵⁹ 452d.

⁶⁰ 452e.

just or unjust, and it is delivered in large public gatherings.⁶¹ This, relating back to the guiding thread, is Gorgias' claims about what his craft is.

Socrates seems to be temporarily content about Gorgias' answer, and goes on to ask the other part of his initial questions which is about Gorgias' claim on his teaching. Based on his craft, what does Gorgias teach? Socrates picks up the previous agreement on different types of persuasion⁶² and gets further agreement from Gorgias that there are two kinds of persuasion. The first kind brings about convictions without knowledge, whereas the other kind brings about knowledge.⁶³ Importantly, Gorgias agrees that rhetoric belongs to the first kind,⁶⁴ which implies that rhetoric does not teach knowledge about things that are just or unjust in public gatherings, even though they are its subject matter. Then, if Gorgias teaches rhetoric, but rhetoric does not contain knowledge about its subject matter, what does he teach?⁶⁵ Gorgias does not answer Socrates' question directly. Instead, he says that basically, oratory can "subordinate to itself just about everything that can be accomplished."⁶⁶ He gives the example about how for multiple times, he has successfully changed the minds of disobedient patients to listen to doctors. Gorgias even says that if competitions were held for public positions, orators would be the winners, even though they do not have real knowledge about what they argue for.⁶⁷ Readers with the cultural background of late 5th BCE would probably recall the practical approach of teaching that the Sophists and orators take. The emphasis on personal success comes out so strongly and dangerously that Gorgias immediately says that the teacher of orator should not be accused, since

⁶¹ 454b.

⁶² 453d-454b

⁶³ See above.

⁶⁴ 455a.

⁶⁵ 455b-d.

⁶⁶ 456b.

⁶⁷ 456b-c.

it is the student who makes the decision about how to wield the power of rhetoric.⁶⁸ Going through a big circle, Gorgias' reply seems to resonate with Polus' comment about rhetoric at 448c-e: even though Socrates is asking Gorgias what he teaches, Gorgias feels the need to address himself as a responsibility-free teacher, as if someone is accusing him. Even though Gorgias does not say what he teaches, Socrates has got a hold about his teaching.⁶⁹ Going back to the two types of persuasions, it is safe to suggest that since Gorgias does not teach knowledge about the subject matter of its craft, he teaches students how to produce convictions. Socrates has thus finished his second part of inquiry indicated in the guiding thread.

At this point (457c), Socrates has conducted an inquiry about the things that are dearest to Gorgias: his “craft” of rhetoric and his identity as a teacher of rhetoric. Gorgias has also indicated his moral attitude. According to Gorgias, rhetoric produces convincing speeches in public gatherings about things that are just or unjust. However, an orator does not teach his audience the subject matter of his craft. Instead, he only tries to convince his audience to believe in whatever he says. Because of this skill of oratory that they possess, orators can accomplish amazing deeds, such as looking more knowledgeable than those with real knowledge in front of ignorant audience,⁷⁰ and procuring great political power to command in areas where they should have no authority.⁷¹ Socrates in his questioning has pulled out the danger of the traditional sophistic education of which Gorgias' teaching shares a fundamental part. Relating back to the cultural background, the danger is that students of Gorgias can possess a highly powerful skill that promote their personal interest, but they are on their own to decide whether they want to

⁶⁸ 456b-457c.

⁶⁹ Notice that the moral aspect of Gorgias' teaching is lurking beneath the surface: he does not want to take responsibility of his students' practice. The moral attitude of the interlocutors will be the focus for the rest of the conversation because this is the concern of Socrates' interrogation.

⁷⁰ 459a-b.

⁷¹ 456a.

respect the customs and laws. Gorgias is well aware of this problematic nature of his craft once Socrates puts his finger upon it. Nonetheless, he is not concerned so much with the possibility of his students doing wrong than with his status and safety as a teacher of rhetoric who is a foreigner to Athenians. He is like a businessman who sells dangerous products and claims that whatever happens is not part of his business. How can he be irresponsible for bringing such a powerful yet unrestrained skill into a society that highly values speech, as readers might reasonably ask? Socrates does not think that Gorgias can claim innocence and snares Gorgias by asking him whether his students are equally ignorant regarding justice and injustice, and what is good versus what is shameful. Here the focus of moral truth comes out strongly. As a foreigner who teaches students from elite families, Gorgias has to say that his students will learn about justice and injustice from him if they do not have knowledge about them in advance (since otherwise, his “customers” would reject such a corruption to their sons). This implies that Gorgias will be responsible for any unjust practices of his students, which contradicts with his previous statement.⁷² However, Socrates does not stop here. He pushes it further that since Gorgias would make sure that his students have knowledge about justice and injustice, the students would not be able to do unjust things, because a man with knowledge of justice is a just man who would not do unjust deeds.⁷³ This again contradicts Gorgias' previous statement that his students might do unjust things. Gorgias has thus been refuted by Socrates and failed to defend himself and his craft, and this marks the end of the long conversation between Socrates and Gorgias.

⁷² Cf. 456b-457c.

⁷³ As Charles Kahn points out, there are scholars who find fault in this reason because having the knowledge of a virtue does not mean that the person has that certain virtue (Kahn, 1983, p79). I want to make two comments about this scholarly dispute: first, Socrates would not agree that knowing a virtue but not being virtuous in that specific aspect would really count as knowing, even though we modern people would have no difficulty acceding to the separation of knowledge and practice; second, whether this logic is flawed or not, Gorgias is already defeated by the previous contradiction, as Kahn has noted in his paper (Kahn, 1983, p82-83).

Gorgias' answers have displayed a consistent tendency of subtle exaggeration. This kind of answer is not unfamiliar to readers, if we remind ourselves of the fact that at the beginning of the dialogue, Polus answers the same question (what is the craft of Gorgias?) in roughly the same way: both Gorgias and Polus speak of what rhetoric is like instead of what it is, and both of them at some point speak of rhetoric as if someone is discrediting it. The current conversation as a lengthened and more complex exchange of the framing section shows the skills of the two masters (Socrates and Gorgias) who represent two different styles of speaking. This parallel reminds us that Polus, as the pupil of Gorgias not only learns the skill from his master, but also shares his attitude about rhetoric. In other words, Gorgias' beliefs about oratory is inherited by Polus and we can expect to see from Polus that first, orators do not have knowledge about its supposed subject matter (namely, things that are just or unjust, or in fact everything that he speaks about); second, orators, with some kind of device, can come out better than those who really know and thus do whatever they want since Gorgianic rhetoric has put no moral constraint upon its practitioners.⁷⁴

Finally, I want to address one last point before analyzing Socrates' conversation with Polus, and that is about the specific features of the Socratic interrogation in this conversation. First, Socrates applies the doxastic feature implicitly by first rejecting all the broad and vague definitions of rhetoric, and then “provoking Gorgias into enlarging the scope of rhetoric to include subject matter on which other arts are experts.”⁷⁵ The enlarged claim of rhetoric immediately invokes Gorgias' alarm of his status as a foreigner and his real intention of being

⁷⁴ Another point of observation on this conversation between Socrates and Gorgias is that Gorgias, may it be the real Gorgias of Leontini or the fictional character in the dialogue, has shown a belief about the power of rhetoric or words (*logos*) in general and its influence upon souls. The soul is subservient to the power of *logos*. As long as speeches are constructed properly, the soul is ready to obey the command of words and change their previous decisions. Socrates' attitude on this issue is not clear at this stage, and will need to wait until he converses with Callicles.

⁷⁵ 456a-c. Kahn, 1983, p81.

merely a “salesman” of rhetoric without deeply involved in the Athenian politics. However, this irresponsible attitude is pointed out by Socrates. Gorgias thus reluctantly takes on another claim that he will teach justice and be responsible for his students act. It is precisely the irreconcilability of Gorgias’ true beliefs and his insincere claim that gets him refuted.⁷⁶

Second, Socrates has repeatedly made clear about his intention as well as his character that he is not after Gorgias.⁷⁷ At 453b-d, Socrates expresses clearly that what he really wants is the knowledge of the subject under discussion (namely, the relationship between oratory and justice), but not winning over the other person. He asks questions on issues about which he already has assumptions because he wants to make sure that what gets said is “most dear to us [Socrates and Gorgias].”⁷⁸ At 454c, Socrates repeats that he asks questions that seem clear to him not because he is after Gorgias. He wants to prevent second-guessing and allow Gorgias to work out his assumptions freely. At 457c-458b, when Socrates has elicited the problematic nature of Gorgias’ rhetoric, Socrates explicitly says that he is afraid of being thought as someone who tries to win against Gorgias. Socrates says that he is the kind of person who is happy to be refuted and to refute people who have wrong beliefs because having false beliefs is the worst thing there is.⁷⁹ To put it differently, Socrates engages in refutation not for the sake of winning, but for a kind of cleansing of his own false beliefs as well as that of his interlocutors (i.e. Gorgias). Relating this back to the discussion of general features, Socrates is telling the audience that he is trying to explicate Gorgias’ and his beliefs and to get rid of the false beliefs for the sake of truth. Gorgias has seen a teacher of rhetoric who wants to claim moral irresponsibility for his students’ practice,

⁷⁶ For a detailed analysis of Gorgias’ refutation, see Kahn, 1983, pp81-83.

⁷⁷ However, Polus’ reaction to this conversation shows that he thinks the conversation is an eristic debate (461b-c), and the fact that Gorgias loses the debate urges him to stand out and to defend his master. This might be the attitude of the surrounding audience who witnesses how Socrates “tricks” Gorgias into contradiction.

⁷⁸ 453c. In other words, Socrates tries to hold the doxastic quality by not projecting his own understanding into the conversation beforehand.

⁷⁹ 458a.

and Socrates holds a different view. The refutation of Gorgias has suggested that oratory should have a strong relationship with justice. This turns out to be a point of contention for the next conversation.

2.22 Socrates' Conversation with Polus (461b to 481b)

Notice that what enrages Polus and brings him into the conversation is not the second contradiction that Socrates emphasizes upon (which is that the students would all be just), but the first contradiction that Gorgias teaches his students things about justice and injustice.⁸⁰ In other words, Polus holds the same view as that of Gorgias' that oratory has no relationship with justice. Interestingly, while Socrates does not allow Polus to answer his questions at the beginning, he is willing to discuss with Polus now.⁸¹ I postulate that Socrates did not want to talk to Polus before because first, Polus did not answer Chaerophon's question properly; and second, the real target for Socrates was Gorgias. Now, Socrates is willing to talk to Polus because his conversation with Gorgias has reached a temporary conclusion about the relationship between oratory and justice from the perspective of the teacher. More importantly, as Socrates indicates in his first response to Polus,⁸² this conversation with Polus would be a continuation of the previous one from the perspective of a student, and can serve as an examination of "what we [Socrates and Gorgias] do and what we say."⁸³ Thus, the topic of "what rhetoric is" and the nature of it in relation to justice continue to be the topic of contention at the beginning of this conversation.

⁸⁰ 461d.

⁸¹ Stauffer has noticed this new willingness of Socrates to talk to Polus, but did not give a reason for this. See Stauffer, 2006, pp42-43.

⁸² 461c-d.

⁸³ 461c.

Socrates' gratification of Polus as someone who can correct the wrongs of his master immediately gets Polus to calm down and to listen to Socrates. He agrees to follow the way Gorgias and Socrates have conversed to each other, namely, cross examinations of ideas, and chooses to ask Socrates' opinion about what rhetoric is. Openly and explicitly, Socrates says that rhetoric is not a craft, but a knack that produces gratification and pleasure.⁸⁴ Obviously, in order to make this statement not simply a compilation of different terms, further explanation is needed to explain the difference between a craft and a knack. However, Polus does not ask for any clarifications. Instead, he immediately asks whether Socrates considers oratory admirable because it can gratify people. Socrates is annoyed because as a questioner, Polus simply does not do what he agrees to do: he lets go of the distinction between craft and knack as if he already knows it, a practice which is not fitting for a proper cross-examination. As we will see more clearly, this is because first, Polus is not able to conduct a cross examination; and second, Polus cares keenly whether the craft he practices is admirable or honorable.⁸⁵ Compared to his master Gorgias who is already well acclaimed internationally, Polus is yet known among people and craves public recognition avidly. This is shown from his very first utterance at 448a, and now when Polus talks to Socrates, this tendency comes out prominently. Socrates picks up this hint from Polus' words and asks Polus to gratify him by asking him the questions that he speaks of. Since Polus thinks that gratification is valuable, Polus agrees without hesitation.⁸⁶ In this way, Socrates gains control of the conversation and redirects the conversation to a more careful examination of ideas.

Socrates draws Gorgias back in by suggesting that his understanding might not fit Gorgias' rhetoric, and speaks to both Polus and Gorgias that he thinks oratory is a part of flattery

⁸⁴ 462c.

⁸⁵ See Friedländer, 1964, *Plato II*, p254.

⁸⁶ 462d.

that guesses at what is pleasant. The other parts of flattery are pastry baking, cosmetics and sophistry.⁸⁷ Socrates tries to direct the conversation and lets Polus ask him further about this categorization. However, once again, Polus brings back his deep concern and asks whether this (oratory) is something admirable or shameful.⁸⁸ This time, Socrates answers that he thinks oratory is shameful, even though the meaning of the categorization is not clear yet. Gorgias interestingly comes back to the conversation at this point and helps Socrates clarify the full meaning of the categorization.⁸⁹ Politics is a name of the fitness state of soul, and has legislation and justice as its two parts. The difference between craft and knack is that knack "has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies."⁹⁰ Rhetoric⁹¹ is a kind of a knack, namely flattery. It does not know the nature of its subject (namely, justice and injustice), but only offers flattery. Thus, oratory is shameful indeed.

Polus certainly does not feel comfortable with this understanding, and disagrees with Socrates. Polus believes orators, like tyrants are not held in low regard because they possess great power to do whatever they intend to do. They can either put people to death or confiscate properties at their will.⁹² This signals that the reason why Polus cares about fame so deeply: it is because of the fame and honor that can bring about influence, and thus manipulative power. Socrates disagrees with Polus. He says that as long as power is understood as a positive thing, which Polus agrees, the orators or tyrants who do whatever they see fit do not possess great

⁸⁷ 463a-d.

⁸⁸ 463d.

⁸⁹ That Gorgias is again brought into the conversation, as Friedländer points out, not only shows how helpless Polus is in conducting a proper discussion, but "is also a structural symbol indicating that the level of the first conversation here penetrates the second stage." See Friedländer, *Plato*, II, 253.

⁹⁰ 465a.

⁹¹ The rhetoric discussed here is exactly Gorgias' rhetoric, despite Socrates' deliberate blurring at 462e-463a. The lack of knowledge is a characteristic of Gorgias' rhetoric that makes it a knack, and Polus as Gorgias' pupil has agreed that oratory gives gratification and pleasure, which is the trait of flattery (465a). Thus, Socrates's description of oratory as a part of flattery, which is a knack is exactly characterizing Gorgias' oratory.

⁹² 466b-c.

power because what they intend to do might end up bringing worse results for them.⁹³ Polus disagrees strongly with Socrates, and their disagreements evince most completely when their second point of divergence on happiness shows up at 470d. Friedländer highlights these two disagreements as "the power of oratory and the fact that it is conducive to happiness."⁹⁴ disagreements can be represented as following:

Polus: (Gorgianic) rhetoric grants its practitioners power to do whatever they want, and thus, brings happiness to the practitioners;

Socrates: whether or not (Gorgianic) rhetoric gives the practitioner power depends on how this power is acquired, namely whether it is acquired justly or unjustly; also, whether or not this power brings happiness to the person depends on whether the person uses the power justly, or unjustly.⁹⁵

For Polus, this skill of rhetoric that he learns from Gorgias can give him the might of a tyrant, and this great might will make him happy unconditionally. For Socrates, whether Gorgias' rhetoric can give its practitioners power depends on whether or not the skill is used justly. Gorgianic oratory probably leads to might. However, whether might leads to happiness depends entirely on how the person with might "stands in regard to education and justice."⁹⁶ I will discuss the two lines of thoughts respectively.

From Polus' words we see a clear and deep influence from Gorgias not simply in terms of the skill of oratory. More importantly, Polus' values and beliefs also show traces of Gorgias'

⁹³ 468d.

⁹⁴ Friedländer, *Plato*, II, 253.

⁹⁵ Importantly, Socrates remains silent about the fact that orators have or can have the power of a tyrant. This is the second time that Socrates remains silent about the capability of oratory, and the first time appears at 452d when Gorgias says that oratory is the source of freedom for human beings in general and the source of rule over others in terms of individual. It seems that perhaps, Socrates agrees with this capability of oratory at least in Athens. On a different matter, for the sake of clarification of terminologies, I will use "power" the way Socrates defines it, and "power" is always a good thing. I designate "might" to Polus and Callicles, which refers to the autocratic forcefulness that they desire.

⁹⁶ 470e.

influence. “That orators are like tyrants”⁹⁷ comes out naturally from Gorgias' practice that oratory is a mighty skill⁹⁸ and has no internal moral constraints.⁹⁹ Polus gives an additional reason for the pursuit of power, and that is happiness.¹⁰⁰ However, the amoral attitude or ignorance of morality persists: happiness comes naturally from might, no matter one uses might justly or not.

Socrates' insistence on the importance of justice on every link that leads to happiness first of all draws the previous conversation back into the scene. This thematic connection, either the lack of justice in Gorgias' lineage or the emphasis of justice on the part of Socrates, indicates to the readers again that the current conversation between Polus and Socrates is a continuation of the previous conversation between Gorgias and Socrates. Second, the epistemological concern that Gorgias' teaching lacks the knowledge of what is just and unjust has shown its practical consequence: Gorgias' pupil Polus not only lacks the knowledge of what is just and unjust, but also does not take justice with any seriousness. Gorgias' own worry about immoral student has become real. Third, regarding Socrates' beliefs, it is not straightforward why happiness depends entirely upon justice and education. Irwin sharply points out that “it is fairly easy to see how my courage and my temperance benefit me as Socrates claims they do. It is less obvious how my justice benefits me” because this virtue concerns with one's behavior towards others.¹⁰¹ One indication about how justice contributes to an individual's happiness is that justice is relevant to the “healthiness” of the soul,¹⁰² which is deeply connected with happiness. Readers might recall the fact that for Plato, the contrast between the soul and the body is essential. In other words, the

⁹⁷ 466b.

⁹⁸ 456b.

⁹⁹ 457a-c. Here again, readers might recall the nature of Gorgias' teaching that it merely helps students attain their personal success. The consequence of this teaching is coming out.

¹⁰⁰ 470d.

¹⁰¹ Irwin, 1979, introduction section 11.

¹⁰² 464a-d, 478d, 479b-c.

kind of happiness that is being indicated here is happiness of the soul, as opposed to happiness of the body.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, a more robust explanation of the relationship between justice and happiness awaits the last part of the *Gorgias*.

This emphasis on the connection between justice and happiness indicates a relationship between education and happiness. Even though the theme of education is not mentioned as explicitly and frequently as that of rhetoric and justice, it is no less prominent.¹⁰⁴ At this point, the connection between education and happiness seems to be that those who are educated with the wrong view (that happiness can be independent from justice) cannot be really happy. By eliciting Polus' views on issues about rhetoric, power, and happiness, refuting those views, and instilling a different set of values, Socrates can be seen as the second teacher of Polus. The contrast between two modes of education is becoming clearer in that the *Gorgias*' lineage emphasizes on the teaching of oratory without proper regard to morality, whereas Socrates emphasizes on the teaching of morality through interactive and careful interrogation.

Since justice has influence on one's claim to power and happiness, the topic of discussion thus shifts to how justice influence the relationship between rhetoric on the one hand, and power and happiness on the other hand. Socrates makes two statements about justice, that "doing injustice is worse than suffering injustice" nor "doing injustice without paying due or punishment." Due the purpose of this analysis, I will not explore the validity of these two

¹⁰³ Happiness of the body pertains to bodily desires and pleasures, which are discussed with more details in the last conversation between Socrates and Callicles.

¹⁰⁴ It can be said that the discussions of rhetoric and justice are the obvious threads that links the whole dialogue, and the theme of education (which is concerned with "how one is educated" or "what is the education that one receives") is the undercurrent that becomes obvious when one contextualizes the dialogue in its cultural background and pays close attention to the relationship among Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles regarding their beliefs.

arguments in details.¹⁰⁵ Instead, I want to focus on one important premise that is being used in both proofs, and then comment on the way Socrates argues.

This premise is that if A is admirable, it is either useful or pleasant or both.¹⁰⁶ Both Kahn and Vlastos put great emphases on this premise because, as Kahn points out, this is one fundamental premise deducing from which Socrates makes his arguments.¹⁰⁷ One of the problems of this definition is that it has reduced the moral sense of admirable, which neither Plato nor Socrates would agree. Then, why does Socrates use this premise? Kahn suggests this is because Polus has no position of his own and only speaks the public opinion, which would lead to an understanding admirability in terms of utility or pleasure.¹⁰⁸ I disagree with Kahn and argue that Polus agrees to this premise not because he has no position of his own, but precisely because this premise is his position. First of all, Polus would wholeheartedly agree with the understanding that something is admirable because it brings pleasure. This comes out noticeably in the conversation between Socrates and Polus. After Socrates' first definition of rhetoric as a knack that produces gratification and pleasure, Polus immediately questions Socrates: “don't you think that oratory's an admirable thing, then, to be able to give gratification to people?”¹⁰⁹ Thus, considering something that can bring about pleasure as being admirable is one of Polus' own beliefs.

That Polus also believes in the other part of the premise (namely, to consider utility as a criterion of something being admirable) is less obvious, but still has its source in Polus' own words. At the beginning of the dialogue where Polus gives out his definition of rhetoric, he says

¹⁰⁵ For a robust discussion of the validity of these two arguments, especially the first one, see Kahn, 1983, p87-92.

¹⁰⁶ 474d.

¹⁰⁷ Kahn, 1983, p88-89. Kahn also points out the importance of this premise in both arguments, see Kahn, 1983, p86, footnote 18.

¹⁰⁸ Kahn, 1983, p94.

¹⁰⁹ 462c.

that “it is experience that causes them to march along the way of craft, whereas inexperience causes them to march along the way of chance, the best men partaking of the best of them. Our Gorgias is indeed in this group; he partakes of the most admirable of the crafts.”¹¹⁰ In other words, a thing (or a “craft”) is admirable because it leads people away from being chancy and inefficient. Thus, Polus would agree to use utility as a criterion of admirability. Last but not least, it is clear from previous analysis that Polus would have no concern over justice. Therefore, it is natural for him to agree to this premise without hesitation. Besides the logical importance, this premise also shows readers how Socrates subtly applies the doxastic constraint to the interlocutors. Socrates applies the constraint to Polus by first picking up the words and phrases that indicate what Polus cares most about. Then, Socrates restates his assumptions about Polus’ beliefs and also offers his own beliefs. In disagreements, the point of divergence is particularly telling about the interlocutors’ true beliefs. In agreements, Socrates finds either Polus’ own beliefs, or his fake beliefs. Finally, the analysis of this premise also provides an understanding to one of Socrates’ strong claims that everyone would agree with him that doing what is unjust is worse than suffering it:¹¹¹ for those who hold the same values as Polus and have no moral consideration (or only at a verbal level) for what is good and what is admirable, they are subject to the force of the argument and would need to agree that based on their own premises, doing injustice is worse than suffering injustice. Much can be said about this premise.

Finally, I will discuss the Socratic interrogation in this conversation. In the previous conversation, Socrates gives extensive amount of explanation to who he is as a person and the intention he has in the conversation. In this current conversation, Socrates talks quite a bit about

¹¹⁰ 448c.

¹¹¹ 474b, 475e, 482b.

his way of arguing and how it is different from the style of refutation used in law court.¹¹² Socrates emphasizes that his style of refutation cares for truth, and thus, does not make a verdict based on how many people agree with one side of opinion or disagree with the other side. All Socrates needs and can do at one time is to talk to one person, and even though he only talks to one person, as long as the reasoning is not refuted, everyone else would be subject to the same conclusion. This is a unique feature that Socrates emphasizes about his way of speaking. While it is true that Socrates only talks to one person at a time, it is also worth noticing that in the dialogue, Socratic is conducting his interrogation in public, which gives it an interesting dynamic that on the one hand, Socrates is only talking to one person, while on the other hand, he is giving an unusual public speech about oratory, justice, and education.

The last passage about how rhetoric can be useful is particularly helpful. The proper use of rhetoric is that “[he should] accuse himself first and foremost, and then too his family and anyone else dear to him who happens to behave unjustly at any time.” Even though Socrates does not refer to himself, he does exactly what he thinks is the proper use of oratory. This is highly important because first, it indicates that the Socratic interrogation is perhaps another kind of rhetoric, and this question of the true kind of rhetoric will be further explored in the next conversation. Second, this passage resonates with a passage from the previous conversation in which Socrates says that the reason why he refutes people and welcomes refutation is because he believes that having false beliefs is the worst thing there is.¹¹³ Therefore, if oratory aims to be helpful, it should focus on getting rid of the false beliefs of the audience. In this conversation between Socrates and Polus, we come to see clearer that one of the false beliefs is about the significance of justice in attaining power and happiness. Finally, in terms of moral searching, on

¹¹² 461c-462a, 471e-472c, 473e-474b, 475d-476a, 480b-e.

¹¹³ 458a-b.

top of the conclusion established in the previous conversation (that oratory should be tightly connected with justice), another conclusion is reached: that the only use of oratory is to examine oneself and others about the false beliefs that one might have, and to register proper punishments for the person who commits wrong deeds. However, as the disagreements between Socrates and the interlocutors widen, the conclusion becomes less of a mutual agreement than a mark of disengagement. Polus has basically become a “yes” man roughly from 475 on. With regard to the conclusion, at 480d, Polus expresses his dissent as openly as a “yes” man can: “I think these statements are absurd, Socrates, though no doubt you think they agree with those expressed earlier.” In other words, despite Socrates’ superlative skills in applying the doxastic constraint and benign intention, the divergence between Socrates and the interlocutors only becomes wider, and seemingly unbridgeable.

2.23 Socrates’ Conversation with Callicles (481b-522e, selectively)¹¹⁴

The first thing that readers would notice about Callicles is that Callicles is a politician who, because of his “love” for the Athenians, would change his position and say what the people want to hear.¹¹⁵ In other words, Callicles appears to be the full-scale practitioner of Gorgias’

¹¹⁴ While the dramatic tension culminates in this conversation, the recursive feature of the previous conversations reaches its minimum: while it is true that on the one hand, since this is the culminating conversation, all the previous threads and thoughts come fore at the same time and thus, create the most bewildering conversation by far. On the other hand, the problem of disingenuity that puzzles readers in previous conversations is basically gone (487a-488b). The disagreements between Callicles and Socrates are brought up in a straight confrontational manner (at least from 481b to 499c). Therefore, the focus of this analysis will shift to the contrast of beliefs, rather than attempting to decipher the literary complexity. I will also omit the ending myth, for its complexity requires a dedicated analysis that is beyond scope of the current project. For a detailed analysis of the myth, see David Sedley, 2009, p51-76. One comment on the character of Callicles: compared to Gorgias and especially Polus, Callicles appears to be more open about his own beliefs, yet he is not without crooked-ness. In fact, while Polus is still trying to cover his own thoughts because of shame, Callicles is almost shameless: every time he is refuted, he not only says that the better argument is what he actually thinks, but also attacks Socrates as being either shameless (489b-c), or naïve (499b). Callicles has no trouble shifting his position as long as it fits his image as the winner of an oratorical contest. Regarding the practice of actual orator, see Alcidas, *On the Sophists*, 24.

¹¹⁵ 481d-e.

rhetoric in a descriptive sense: he is the one who gives speeches in large public gatherings about political matters,¹¹⁶ and has no problem of changing sides to please his audience.¹¹⁷ Among the three interlocutors, Gorgias is the teacher who “sells” his skill without any intention of responsibility for his students’ conduct; Polus is the pupil of Gorgias who not only practices the skill but inherits the values of practicing oratory without moral consideration; and finally, Callicles is the “actual product” who, right from the outset, is the exemplar of Gorgianic orator. Based on the previous analysis of the conversation between Polus and Socrates in which the values hold by Polus and Socrates are already irreconcilable, it is almost certain that in this conversation, Socrates would encounter his most dreadful opponent who would show no mercy to his beliefs. Callicles does exactly what is expected, and does it formidably.

“A true crowd pleaser,” says Callicles to Socrates.¹¹⁸ Although Socrates says that he is searching for truth, all he brings to the previous discussions, according to Callicles, are only things acknowledged by laws or *nomos*, but not nature or *phusis*. Nature has it that “all that is worse is also more shameful, like suffering what’s unjust, whereas by law doing it is more shameful.”¹¹⁹ The justice by law is instituted by those who are weak, and is meant to shackle the more powerful and capable so that no one can get more than one’s share. However, by nature, it is only just for the more powerful and capable individuals to have a greater share than the weak and less capable. In a word, the superior should rule and get more than the inferior.¹²⁰ This line of thought that the rule of nature is the true rule, according which the strong should rule over the weak resonates strongly with the Athenians’ argument in the Melian dialogue mentioned in the

¹¹⁶ 452e.

¹¹⁷ 462c.

¹¹⁸ 482c.

¹¹⁹ 483a.

¹²⁰ 483d.

first chapter. In a different fashion and on a smaller scale, Callicles presents this dreadful idea blatantly. At the core of his idea is the education of Gorgias that cares about morality only to the extent of avoiding punishment. However, Callicles has developed Gorgias' education to an extreme and says that the punishment of injustice which is found on conventional laws is based on wrong principles. It is just and proper for the strong to get as much as they can and the weak deserves to be ruled and deprived of their property or freedom.¹²¹

Whereas Polus is ashamed to say what he really believes because he also recognizes the widely-held moral attitude that condemns unjust acts, Callicles sees the possible conflict of these two moral attitudes¹²² clearly, and boldly defends the morality of unrestricted pursuit of personal ambition. Furthermore, he asserts that it is a just thing to do so.¹²³ This criticism targets Socrates' belief of justice, or at least Callicles thinks so. However, as it is indicated in the first chapter, what exactly does Socrates think about justice seems to be different from traditional Athenian understanding. Based on the previous discussions in which the healthiness of the soul is the reason for avoiding unjust acts,¹²⁴ it is doubtful that Socrates would take justice to be rooted in nature on the one side, or in law, customs (or culture) on the other side (although there are certainly connections between Socrates' belief of justice and the dichotomy of *nomos* and *physis*). One of the important features of Socrates' understanding about justice is that it is from a concern over the mental or inner state of a person, rather than a concern over the resource distribution among social members. The contrast between the soul and the body is about to come up strongly.

¹²¹ 483e-484c.

¹²² They are, on the one hand, the moral attitude of social norm that protects the operation of social justice, and on the other hand, the attitude of personal well-being that cares about individual success.

¹²³ See Dodds, 1959, 483c7 – 484c3, p 266. "Immoralist' is perhaps a misleading word; for Callicles believes that to obey the law of nature of not only profitable but *right* (491d1)."

¹²⁴ 478b-c, 479b-c, etc.

The second criticism from Callicles is more personal and therefore, seemingly more devastating to Socrates: philosophy is a good thing, but only to a certain extent. If one spends more time on it than one should, philosophy undoes the man to be incapable and “inexperienced in everything that a man who’s to be admirable and good and well thought of is supposed to be experienced in.”¹²⁵ He would have no idea about the laws of city, matters of business both in private and public, and human pleasure and appetites. Therefore, if Socrates is accused of injustice when in fact he is not, he would get dizzy and do not know how to defend himself in court. He would be bereft of property, reputation, or even life, if that is what his accuser wants. “How can this be a wise thing, the craft which took a well-favored man and made him worse?”¹²⁶ What Socrates should do is to “leave those subtleties to others” and practice the skills that make his intelligence renown, says Callicles.¹²⁷

The criticism has set up a contrast between two different ways of life, the first of which is a life of philosophy embodied in Socrates. The second way of life is a life of a practical man which is represented by Callicles. Even though Callicles seems to have warm regard to philosophy, his view of philosophy as a delightful thing¹²⁸ or a part of education¹²⁹ indicates a fundamental difference between him and Socrates’ understanding of philosophy. To use an analogy that might speak to us moderns, Callicles’ criticism of Socrates as a life-long practitioner of philosophy amounts to a criticism of a modern adult who is a life-long practitioner of spelling bees. Philosophy (as is spelling bees) is something helpful for the intellectual development of a youngster. However, if one “comes of age” and still practices philosophy (or

¹²⁵ 484d.

¹²⁶ 486b.

¹²⁷ 486c.

¹²⁸ 484c.

¹²⁹ 485a-c.

spelling bees), he is a worthless man because he can do nothing important. This is Callicles' view of philosophy. For Socrates, however, philosophy is not a thing or a subject of study. It is his way of life that runs through every aspect of his being, from thinking, speaking, to behaving. Thus, to Socrates, philosophy is not a skill or a subject of study that can be replaced by another skill or subject of study, as it is for Callicles.¹³⁰ The last part about not being able to defend oneself in front of law court not only has a strong resonance to the *Apology* and previous discussion, but also alludes to an evaluation of two different kinds of lives. The standard of judgment used by Callicles is that of living (and "flourishing") versus death (or indirectly giving up one's life by not practicing "practical" skills). Callicles' comment that Socrates might be wrongly sentenced to death is in fact realistic. This problem of life or death is so poignant and relevant that if Socrates wants to defend his way of living which may come at a cost of his life, he needs to give another standard of judgment that answers the question of "is there something more important than life (or living)?"

The two criticisms are not disconnected. We have, through these two criticisms a general shape of the life of a practical man: it is a life of becoming the superior or the dominating one so that one can rule over others, get more than one's own share, and protect oneself against any unjust accusations. And this way of living is a just one.¹³¹ This is, again, the ultimate development of the sophists and Gorgias' teaching. By comparison, the life of Socrates is not well presented here because of the misunderstandings discussed above. Nonetheless, a general

¹³⁰ In a rough and general way, philosophy to Socrates is like the ability of carrying things to a wagon: it is what Socrates is, existentially and even ontologically. In other words, Socrates not only chooses to spend his life searching for truth, as suggested in the *Apology* (and this is the existential significance of philosophy to Socrates), he seems to *be* philosophy in a sense that philosophy is a naturally expression of who he is, just like the ability of carrying things to a wagon, or the ability of hammering to a hammer.

¹³¹ This is very close to Gorgias' speech about the greatness of rhetoric at 452d. See Irwin, 1979, p116 for the understanding of freedom. It is thus not a surprise that Callicles would be an admirer of Gorgias: Gorgias offers training that corresponds squarely to what Callicles wants. See 513a-c for Socrates' comment.

picture that guides the following discussion has been drafted: ultimately, the whole conversation will address the conflict of the two ways of life. To make a judgment of which way is better, we need a consensual standard of judgment that can give full explications of Callicles' way of life and Socrates' way of life. The first way of life that gets full demonstration is Callicles' way of a practical man.

There are two questions that need to be addressed in order to fill out the details of the life of a practical man: first, who is the superior and why; second, what exactly are the things that the practical man looks for. The two questions are certainly connected with each other: presumably, the practical man wants to become the superior person and possesses whatever comes with the status of superiority. After being refuted by Socrates for multiple times for giving unsatisfactory definitions of superiority, Callicles spells out his best answer that being superior is being intelligent "about the affairs of the city, about the way it's to be well managed" and being brave in taking necessary actions to accompany whatever he has in mind.¹³² In other words, politicians are the superior men, and Callicles clearly sets apart the city managers or politicians from other craftsmen such as doctors or cooks, who, even though they are also intelligent in their own fields, are not comparable to politicians. This belief is not a self-absorbed acclamation, because it is the politicians who decide how the city should be managed and give out orders to other members of the society, even though they may not have the proper knowledge to instruct commands.¹³³ Callicles believes that since they are the ones who rule over others, they should use this freedom to grow their own appetites as large as possible without any constraint, and fill the appetites with

¹³² 491b.

¹³³ 455d-456a.

one's bravery and intelligence as good as one can.¹³⁴ In other words, the practical man desires freedom of absolute wantonness and boundless pleasure.¹³⁵ Doing this is just and admirable.¹³⁶

That Callicles is the full-scale expression or the utmost manifestation of Gorgianic education can be better explained here. It is clear now that Callicles is not only a Gorgianic orator in terms of appearance (skills, occupation, etc), but also in terms of beliefs. From Polus, we have already seen that oratory is not simply a skill. It is integral to what he wants to be (i.e. an orator as "powerful" as a tyrant) and the ultimate goal of his life (namely, to enjoy happiness). Rhetoric is existential in a sense that it is one fundamental part of who he is. Thus, in Polus, we see the outcome of Gorgias' education: it "forms" the moral beliefs of Polus. Callicles has taken the same line of development to a new level. Callicles says what Polus did not say about happiness, and reverses the definition of justice. While Polus expresses his admiration for tyrants who can come to power unjustly and are still happy, Callicles makes clear that this happiness is justifiable as long as the person achieves this happiness with his boldness and cunning,¹³⁷ and this happiness is the maximal fulfillment of wanton appetite or desires. By doing these, Callicles has indeed presented a way of living: it is a life that aims to pursue pleasure and satisfy the insatiable desires by constantly bringing in resources through the use of social influence or power.¹³⁸ This is not simply the way that Callicles wants to live. This is almost the way to live for the elite Athenians who by their birth possess great resources and want to continue their claim of superiority. Thus, in Callicles, we get a final stage of the development of Gorgias' education: it teaches a very powerful political skill without any concern for morality, and produces individuals

¹³⁴ 492a.

¹³⁵ 492c, 494a-b.

¹³⁶ 491a.

¹³⁷ 492a.

¹³⁸ 494a-c.

who want to powerful regardless of whether they are acting justly or not, and finally, develops a way of life that that justifies the unjust claim of natural superiority.

Socrates' position is diametrically opposed to Callicles, and the contrast between the soul (and its happiness) and the body (and its pleasure) is one central pair of ideas that Socrates deploys. First of all, in terms of desires, Socrates considers them insatiable, and says that the soul that is in charge of desires is like a leaky sieve that can never carry water.¹³⁹ The satisfaction of desire is a process that is not only futile because the desires never get fulfilled completely, but also highly consuming for there are numerous desires.¹⁴⁰ The most fundamental mistake of a complete wanton pursuit of pleasure is that it mistakes pleasure as the good. Using Callicles' own sense of honor, Socrates successfully lets Callicles agree that pleasure does not equal to good because if pleasure equals good, then a coward man is equally good as a courageous man because they all feel pleasure in the retreat of enemies.¹⁴¹ Then, Socrates invites Callicles to deploy one criterion from the previous discussions to search for the good, and the criterion is that of craft versus knack.¹⁴² With this criterion (which implies that we should look for someone who has the knowledge to distinguish good kind of pleasure from the bad kind) and the distinction of the soul and the body, Socrates gets Callicles to understand (though not agree) that the real good is the goodness of the soul, and the craft that knows the nature of the soul and how to bring about "healthy" status of the soul is the real politics.¹⁴³ This goodness of soul is brought about through order that is given by the person himself or herself.¹⁴⁴ This good leads the possessor to conduct just practice towards fellow citizens, to be piety towards gods, and to become happiness as a

¹³⁹ 493b-c.

¹⁴⁰ 493e-494c.

¹⁴¹ 497e-499c.

¹⁴² 500b.

¹⁴³ 504a-e.

¹⁴⁴ 506e-507a.

result. Regarding the question of death, Socrates suggests that this fate is not escapable and therefore, what we should consider is not to live as long as possible. Rather, what we should consider is how to live life as good as possible.¹⁴⁵ This goodness of soul as having a self-given order is good not only because it stops people from the futile and endless pursuit of appetites, but also that orderliness is the nature of universe. Therefore, by having an orderly soul, one corresponds to the nature of the universe.

Socrates' way of life is a lot more complex than that of Callicles. In a way, Callicles is still deeply imbedded within the traditional Athenian values. As it is emphasized before, his beliefs belong to Gorgias' lineage and the sophists' education, and it is a response to the moral skepticism of the long-held traditional values. Callicles chooses to praise individual pursuit of personal success, and naturally considers Socrates to be the other end of the spectrum, that Socrates is a crowd-pleaser trying to defend the social norms. However, Socrates is in fact trying to redo the whole moral system that not only gives morality a new basis, but also encompasses the traditional values. Against the criticisms of Callicles, Socrates has at least established one statement that that which brings pleasure to people is not necessarily good. Socrates suggests that the search for the real good ends up in the good of the soul, which is orderliness. However, when Socrates has given the fullest expression of his beliefs, the disagreements between him and Callicles also become the strongest. Callicles has completely lost interest in the conversation and becomes simply indifferent.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ 512e-513a.

¹⁴⁶ 500c, 504c, 505c-d, etc.

3

Morality, Education, and Politics in the *Gorgias*

In the previous chapter, we have noticed that the *Gorgias* has many discussions about morality, education, and politics. As indicated in the first chapter, there was a tight relationship between education, morality, and politics in the ancient Greek society in which the sophists and the philosophers' education respond to the decline of traditional moral values and the demand of practical, political skills. Socrates' conversation to Gorgias touches upon all three aspects of education, morality, and politics. Therefore, even though in general, scholars in analyzing the *Gorgias* only focus on the interplay between morality and politics, I consider it important to see how education is also involved in this relationship. Besides, this analysis is also important for our understanding of Socrates. The reestablishment of morality mentioned in the previous chapter goes so deeply and broadly that education and politics also take on a new look. Thus, an understanding of the interplay between morality, education, and politics is fundamental for the overall thesis of Socratic education. Having said these, I will turn to the main discussion of this chapter.

Fundamentally, there are two groups of notions in the *Gorgias* around which the whole dialogue is constructed: the distinction between the soul and the body, and the categorization of what is good versus what is bad or what is neither good nor bad. The interplay between the soul and the body on the one side, and what is good versus what is otherwise on the other side, are present in every discussion of education, justice, and politics. The criticisms and reestablishment of oratory and its education, the discussion and emphasis on justice, and the discussion and reconstruction of politics are all inferences of these two groups of notions. One specific relationship between them, namely, the goodness of the soul is the ultimate aspiration of this dialogue. I aim to demonstrate that for both Gorgias' lineage and Socrates, education, justice, and politics are fundamentally connected through an understanding of what the good is. First, it is necessary to provide an understanding of these two groups of notions.

3.1 Two Pairs of Concepts: The Soul versus the Body, and What Is Good versus What Is Bad or neither Good nor Bad

The distinction between the soul and the body is at the heart of all the discussions in the *Gorgias*.¹ They are not only distinctively different, but are also hierarchically arranged.² The distinction has direct references quite early on in the dialogue³ and is applied throughout the dialogue with the care of the soul being the more urgent and important one than the care of the body.⁴ One way to get a better sense of “what the soul is” is to compare and discuss it with the

¹ 513d, e, 517d.

² 465c-d.

³ 453a, 464a, etc.

⁴ 465c-d, 477b-479c, 512a-513a, etc.

body. There are two passages that can be helpful, and they are spoken by Gorgias and Socrates respectively.

From 452a-453a, Socrates asks Gorgias that if colloquially, healthiness, good looking, and richness all claim the crown of the greatest human concern, in what aspect does oratory triumph over them? Gorgias answers (in Socrates and his words) that by “instilling persuasion in the souls of an audience,” an orator can get doctors, financial experts, and physical trainers to work for them. This passage not only suggests that the ability of owning one’s soul is stronger than having material or physical-biological advantages, it also provides a grouping of two different kinds of advantages that deserves attention. The contrast between being able to influence the soul and having good physical-material conditions corresponds to the distinction between the soul and the body. Good health, good looks and being financially well-off are all related to body in a sense that they work towards the physical and biological advantages and desires of the body. The soul, on the other hand, is able to control and choose the means to the advancement and satisfaction of the body. Notice that this answer is from Gorgias, but not from Socrates. In other words, the basic attitude of the hierarchical importance of the soul over the body is the same for both Gorgias and Socrates.⁵ Another passage from 511c-513a remarks on this line of thought, and this time, Socrates is the speaker.

Socrates bluntly says that if politics is done in its traditional way in which policies are made neither based on those who have real knowledge nor on the real good for citizens, but on satisfying the needs and desires of the citizens indiscriminately, politicians are not better than a helmsman. There is a fundamental similarity between a traditional Athenian-style politician, who

⁵ However, how deeply Gorgias understands the significance of this distinction is a different story, and this relates the understanding of the soul. If Gorgias sees clearly that the soul is different from the body, and that the soul should be in charge of the body, it is doubtful that he would ignore morality, which cares for the soul.

makes public policies, and a helmsman, whose skill of saving the lives of the drowning is comparatively worthless and trivial: they try to hold on to this material world that is limited by the biological nature of human beings as well as they can. Following this kind of physical and biological nature of human being, which culminate in the endless pursuit and satisfaction of fluctuating appetites and desires, what one does can only amount to a futile preservation of the constantly flowing attachments to life (such as well and fame). In contrast, Socrates suggests that one should “give consideration to how he might live the part of his life still before him as well as possible.”⁶ This alternative, based on the context of the dialogue, can only be about the care of the soul. Unsatisfying as it might be,⁷ this passage, along with the previous one, points out the two aspects of life indicated by the distinction between the soul and the body: the body is associated with the physical and biological nature of humans and thus, desires and appetites. It extends to and is limited by the material world. The soul, in comparison, is not limited by the material world, and can in fact control the body. In other words, the soul is associated with autonomy.⁸ Implicated in the discussion of the soul and the body is the second group of notions, namely, what is good versus what is bad or what is neither good nor bad.

Socrates in the *Gorgias* has persistently deployed one criterion to distinguish and evaluate all the different ideas that have been discussed, and that is the good.⁹ In Aristotle’s word,

⁶ 512e. This seemingly intuitive statement bears more weight than it appears, especially when we consider the fact that for Socrates, choosing to live as well as he can literally means an untimely death. See Callicles’ criticism on Socrates in the previous chapter. Textually speaking, see 485e-486c, 508c-e, 511a—b, etc. Also, see Plato’s *Apology*.

⁷ It is not quite satisfying because it does not mention how the physical and material aspects of life should be handled. This is partly due to the limitation of this dialogue (regarding its topics) and partly due to Socrates’ deliberate ignorance of the material world.

⁸ 491d-e, 493d, 504d, 506d-507a, etc.

⁹ With this criterion, Socrates has differentiated and judged the relative values of the soul and the body (453a, 464a-465d, e, 477b-e, 478d, 479b-c, 512a, etc.), the good and the pleasant (494b-499b, 500a, d, etc.), craft and knack (which will be discussed in below), living well and living long (512d-513a), true oratory and Gorgianic oratory (501d-502d, e, 517a, etc.), and so on.

“the good is that at which all things aim.”¹⁰ This criterion is spelled out from 467c-468c as having three parts: what is good, what is neither good nor bad, and what is bad. People do what is neither good nor bad, or even bad things for the sake of what is good. For instance, patients take bitter medicines for the sake of health. Athletes take on painful physical trainings for the sake of outstanding physical capacities. Socrates does not always use this intuitive criterion explicitly. For instance, in distinguishing different kinds of skills, Socrates certainly thinks crafts are *better* than knacks, and knacks in general are bad.¹¹ However, it is not clear that crafts are necessarily *good* (my italics).¹²

Among all the different notions and their varying combinations, there is one that is good for certain: the goodness of the soul (or sometimes, the “healthy” state of the soul).¹³ In other words, the ultimate good is for the soul to be good, and everything else will be good if they aim for this true good. What is this goodness of the soul then? This good state of the soul is one that has appropriate order and self-control.¹⁴ At 506c-507a, Socrates says that “and an orderly soul is a self-controlled one... a self-controlled soul is a good one.”¹⁵ The implication that “an orderly soul is a self-controlled soul” is significant. Whereas the orderliness of other things, such as boats or dockyards or walls, are given to them by the specific craftsmen that construct them,¹⁶ the order of the soul is given by the self. The order of the soul is in the control of the self. In

¹⁰ Aristotle, 2002, p1.

¹¹ 463a-c, 464b-465d, 500e-501c etc.

¹² 511d-513c. In fact, I argue that though crafts are better than knacks, they are not necessarily “good” unless in applying the crafts, the craftsmen take care of the souls of people they are interacting with. From 511 c - 513, Socrates uses the example of a helmsman to explain his idea that as long as the condition of the soul of whom they apply their craft is not considered, helmsmen, doctors, engineers, and orators are the same. See analysis below.

¹³ 477b-d, 478d-e, 482b-c, 504c-d, 506c-508a, 512a-513b, etc.

¹⁴ 506d-507a.

¹⁵ 506e-507a.

¹⁶ 504a-b.

other words, for Socrates, we can (and should) be our own craftsmen and rulers.¹⁷ Having said these, I will now turn to the three aspects of this dialogue and discuss how they are carried out under the interplay of these two groups of notions.

3.2 the Interplay between Morality, Education, and Politics

The theme of education is prominent when readers consider the internal connection between Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. By education, I have in mind two questions: how is one educated and what is being taught. The *Gorgias* is one rare dialogue in which the effect of education is demonstrated through the beliefs of Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. While Gorgias is the source of the problematic beliefs, Callicles is the full-scale expression or the utmost manifestation of Gorgianic education. Thus, I will explore the theme of education through a discussion of Callicles' beliefs.

Callicles is ultimate development of Gorgias' education, and this is shown through three aspects:

1. Callicles is the full-scale practitioner of Gorgias' rhetoric in a literal sense ;
2. Callicles has developed Gorgias' morally irresponsible attitude to its negative extreme by giving a reversed understanding of justice that by nature, the superior should rule the inferior;
3. Callicles gives a definition to happiness and argues that it is pleasure. Thus, Calliles has completed the moral view that it is morally just for the superior to rule over the

¹⁷ 491d-e.

inferior, and the great power associated with ruling brings happiness, which means fulfills the desires and appetites of the superior.

The first point has been stated in the previous chapter. Callicles is the “real product” of Gorgias’ education because he is the one who gives speeches in large public gatherings about political matters,¹⁸ and has no problem of changing sides to please his audience.¹⁹ More importantly, he has developed Gorgias’ moral irresponsible attitude to its negative maximum. Callicles not only ignores the civic virtues of justice, as Polus wants to do, but indeed reverses the definition of justice: by resorting to the justice of nature, Callicles has changed the meaning of justice from fair play among the weak and the strong to an exploitation of the weak by the strong. Since this exploitation takes the name of justice, it is morally justified. Finally, Callicles speaks clearly about happiness, which is also missing in Polus. Callicles has made clear that happiness is the maximal wantonness and freedom to pursue pleasure and to satisfy appetites or desires.²⁰ From Callicles, we get a full picture of what seems to be hedonistic egoism in the ancient Greek world: a person should learn rhetoric to become a good public speaker (or a teacher); he should involve in public affairs, increase his power and influence so that he can satisfy his own desires; as long as he is successful, whatever he does is not only justified, but morally righteous.²¹ As Dodds famously puts it, “Gorgias’ teaching is the seed of which the Calliclean way of life is the poisonous fruit.”²²

¹⁸ 452e.

¹⁹ 462c.

²⁰ 492a.

²¹ Notice that while the civic virtues have been completely dismissed and even reversed (in the case of justice), the virtues that promote personal excellence are emphasized to its extreme. Therefore, it is not accurate to say that Callicles is a-moral, but rather egoistic and hedonistic.

²² Dodds, 1959, p15.

Socrates' refutation (though unsuccessful) is that Callicles has a wrong understanding of the good. At 512c-513a, Socrates has commented that the claim of excellence of politicians over other occupations is indeed ridiculous if by "excellence," they mean to "preserve yourself [themselves] and what belongs to you [them]." Callicles is an archetypal example of someone with this attitude. Callicles' vision goes no further beyond the biological nature of humans and the material world. Thus, he emphasizes on pleasures, appetites, living long and getting as much as one can: in the material world, getting more means survival and dominance over others, the latter of which further confirms survivability, and this is why politicians in this sense are the same with helmsmen: all they do and the only thing they do is to preserve their lives. This line of thoughts fails to see the realm of the soul, even if Socrates tries to explain the issues about the soul by using analogies in the realm of the physical world.²³ In other words, the criticisms Socrates put on Gorgias' teaching is less about the style or specific skills than about the beliefs and attitudes regarding life. This has led the discussion into the next section of justice and morality in general.

It is helpful to lay out the contradiction between Callicles' morality and that of Socrates. One of Callicles' most noticeable notions of morality is his argument that the "real" justice operates in such a way that the superior group of people *should* get more than their proper share (or in fact, as much as their desires will). He criticizes Socrates for slyly mixing nature (physis, φύσις) with law (nomos, νόμος).²⁴ The laws are instituted by those who are weak and numerous to restrict the strong and powerful from getting more than their share. Justice based on law would therefore condemn those who try to have as much as they can. However, justice of nature as it is

²³ 517c-518b.

²⁴ 483a.

exemplified in animal world and the practice of strong kingdoms shows the opposite.²⁵ Invoked by Socrates to amend his understanding of who the superior is, Callicles says that he means those who are more intelligent “about the affairs of the city, about the way it’s to be well managed” and being brave in taking necessary actions to accompany whatever they have in mind.²⁶ Such men should rule, and it is just for the rulers to be better off than the rest. To sum it up, Callicles believes that as the superior person in the city, he²⁷ has the claim to as much as he has an appetite for according to the rule of natural justice. Thus, he should fulfill his insatiable appetite as good as he can with intelligence and boldness. This is Callicles’ morality of a practical man.

Quite differently, for Socrates, the root of justice and morality in general is neither nature in its corporeal sense, nor law as something externally imposed upon people. Rather it is the proper order of the soul that is given by the person himself or herself. In other words, self-control (or self-ruling) is the basis of justice, courage, and piety, because a self-controlled person would do what is appropriate to men (therefore, be just) and gods (therefore, be pious), and stand fast where he or she should (thus, be courageous).²⁸ This virtuous person is a good person, and she would be happy and blessed because she would do well and admirably whatever she does.²⁹ Socrates further suggests that it is not only in the human world where order brings excellence to

²⁵ 483a-e.

²⁶ 491b.

²⁷ In Athenian politics, even though it is democracy, women have no political say. Therefore, in terms of things relevant to politics, I use “he” instead of “he or she.”

²⁸ 507b-c.

²⁹ 507c. The statement that a good person is (or would be) a happy person is just one word different from (or intentionally omitting) Polus and Callicles’ belief that a powerful person is a happy person. In fact, if we use Socrates’ understanding that power is unconditionally good and reverse it, we have that real good is power, or better yet, powerful. Whether this reversion is logically permissible, the link between power and goodness is unmistakably strong. Thus, we can slightly change Socrates’ statement without changing its meaning: a good person is (or is likely) a powerful person, and a powerful person is a happy person. This interpretation has another minor philological support. At 466e where Socrates says power is good, the Greek word is ἀγαθόν, which is the same word used at 507c where Socrates says that a just, brave and pious man is a completely good man. Again, this shows that formally and linguistically speaking, Socrates’ belief is not very different from Polus and Callicles’ beliefs. The fundamental difference is in their specific content.

things. "... orderliness, self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a world order."³⁰ To put it differently, orderliness is the nature of the universe. Therefore, by controlling oneself and harmonizing oneself, one is harmonizing with the principle of the universe.

There are fundamental differences between the two kinds of morality. For Callicles, his modeling of morality upon nature (or the world of animals) leads him to consider morality in a very pragmatic manner: justice is about appropriation of resources; courage and practical judgment are different temperaments that can aid to procure one's goal. Bound and tied to the material world, his way of life is appropriately described by Socrates as the life of a man with leaking jars, who, driven by the "holes" (or desires) on his soul, he constantly pursues materials to avoid the pain of "emptiness" and having (and therefore, being) "nothing." Socrates also seems to base his understanding on nature, but with a different understanding. The cosmological and ontological basis of justice is contrary to Callicles' notion of basing justice on nature. First of all, whereas Callicles lets himself be led by the part of the soul where appetites reside, Socrates uses the controlling ability of the soul to metaphorically, "make the jars sound and full."³¹ Controlling or ruling one's desires is in a sense to give an order to the soul through which the material craving is curbed for the sake of self-harmonization. Secondly, the cosmological and ontological basis is important because otherwise, the entire process of moral cultivation results in a kind of selfish destination: all the troubles that Socrates gets himself into (interrogation, talking to others and provoking their hatred and so on) are for the sake of clearing myself off the burden or shackle of desires and appetites. Mapping one's way of life onto cosmology and the ontology of beings, what Socrates does is not for himself, but to respond to the nature of the entire

³⁰ 508a.

³¹ 493d-e.

universe. By harmonizing with oneself, one therefore harmonizes with the universe. This, believed by Socrates, is the good of the soul.

Finally, the pursuit of morality lays demand for political life in a sense that political life is the expression of moral beliefs, and the contrast in morality extends to the contrast in politics. For Callicles, the great examples of politicians are Themistocles, Cimon, Pericles, and Miltiades. What they are good at, according to Socrates, is providing material goods to the satisfaction of the city's appetites.³² However, they do not prove to have making Athenians better citizens, and by this criterion, they are not to be considered good politicians.³³ A true politician³⁴ takes into consideration the souls of the citizens, and attempts valiantly to say what is best to them, regardless of whether the audience find his words pleasant or not.³⁵ This best thing is argued at 504a to be the order and self-control of soul. In fact, the ruling of politicians starts with them ruling themselves: from 507d-508a, Socrates speaks of the action of a truly happy man, and says that he should "direct all of his own affairs and those of his city to the end that justice and self-control will be present in one who is to be blessed." This short passage is in fact describing the behavior of a true politician without using the phrase.³⁶ In other words, the pursuit of morality (namely, to become a truly virtuous person) is to take up the political craft. To draw a whole image of Socrates' practice and beliefs in the *Gorgias*, it seems that the process to become a virtuous person is the same process as attempting to practice the political craft: it is a process of practicing true oratory (which has the vision of what is good to the soul in mind) and using it to examine the souls of oneself and those around him or her so as to create a society consists of

³² 517b-c.

³³ 517a-519d.

³⁴ The text is about good orator, but not politician. However, they are interchangeable terms in the culture background of Athenian society. An orator is a public speaker who involves in public debates, either in the assembly or jury. Either way, he is a politician by fact.

³⁵ 503a.

³⁶ Compare this passage with the notion of a true orator at 503a, 504d, 521d-e.

self-rulers. This, unmistakably in both words and deeds, is the life of Socrates.³⁷ It is also a life spent in philosophy. Therefore, a life spent in philosophy demonstrated by Socrates is not a private life or a life of self-absolving contemplation that does not participate in the public arena. The life of philosophy is a life of true politician who bears the true well-being of citizens in the most serious way.

At this point, it can be seen that there is the same concern across education, morality, and politics: it is the caring of the soul. There are two kinds of education, two different understandings of virtues, and two kinds of politics represented by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles on the one hand, and Socrates on the other hand. In either Gorgias' lineage or Socrates' teaching, morality is imbedded in education, which then is expressed through political life at large. In Gorgias' lineage, the core of his teaching is individual freedom, which derives from power, and develops into hedonistic pursuit. The teaching of rhetoric is the essential means for this morality, for power comes from rhetoric, and the political agenda is the manifestation of this morality. It is only through the manifestation of politics that this kind of education finishes its "curriculum." Therefore, among Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, only Callicles fully represents this teaching. The core of Socrates' teaching is the caring of the soul, which derives from an understanding of what is the real good, and develops into a reformation of politics that focuses on the souls of the citizens. The essential means of this morality is the Socratic interrogation, and significantly, this means is also the end: under the new understanding of politics, the political arena is where the Socratic interrogation takes place. Wherever Socrates speaks to his fellow citizens, there is the political arena where political endeavor happens. This reformation is so thorough that moral investigation, education, and politics are all conducted in the same process, by the same means,

³⁷ 521d-e.

and ideally, achieved the same goal of mutual improvement of the souls. This is the goal that Socrates *aspires* for. To see clearly how the process of Socratic interrogation is at the same time the process of education and political endeavor will be the work of next chapter.

4

Socratic Education in Plato's Gorgias

4.1 Knowledge and Teacher-less Education

How shall we understand Socratic education on account of Socrates' famous statements that he neither teaches anyone,¹ nor has any knowledge?² The cultural background tells readers one reason why Socrates does not claim himself as a teacher. When Socrates says that he is not a teacher (which primarily comes from the *Apology*), he is distancing himself from the sophists or orators such as Gorgias, Prodicus, and Hippias.³ In other words, Socrates' claim of not being a teacher is made explicitly against the sophist that he is not a teacher like the sophists or the orators. The difference is that first, Socrates does not take money from his followers. Second, and more importantly, Socrates "teaches" a different kind of virtues. Socratic virtues are not skills or practical knowledge that can have direct effect on the procurement of political power in Athenian society. Nor are they uncritically accepted social norms that do not cultivate the souls of citizens. Compared to the traditional understanding of virtues, Socratic virtues come from the

¹ Plato's *Apology*, 19d.

² Plato's *Apology*, 20a-c.

³ Plato's *Apology*, 19e.

self-ruling psyche, and bring about a self-controlled person who will be good in both private and public life.

However, the difficulty of interpretation still remains: how can someone who claims to be ignorant “teach” such a new kind of virtues? Further, it is not that Socrates really claims he has no knowledge at all: while it is true that he never claims to have wisdom about things above the sky and below the earth (or what gets to be called natural science), in what he terms human wisdom, Socrates sometimes speaks in very strong tones that he seems to say he knows the best. To further complicate the issue, in the *Gorgias*, right after Socrates says that he thinks his arguments are held down by “iron and adamant,” he immediately follows immediately follows that he does not know “how these things [that are held down by iron and adamant] are.”⁴ These conflicting assertions of knowledge are where the difficulty of interpretation lies.

It is very common among readers and scholars to consider this attitude irony, and Gregory Vlastos has a famous treatment on Socratic irony in which he suggests that Socrates both does and does not mean what he says. “He wants it to assure his hearers that in the moral domain there is not a single proposition he claims to know with certainty. But in another sense of ‘knowledge,’ where the word refers to justified true belief ... there are many propositions he does claim to know.”⁵ I agree with Vlastos with his basic stance on Socratic disavowal of knowledge that while Socrates has come to grasp some moral doctrines through his life-time practice, he nonetheless confesses that he does not know for certain whether what he knows is really true. However, I disagree with Vlastos on this point that I do not consider this attitude to be ironic. Instead, I consider this attitude to be humility. Socrates in his education cultivates the moral character of a person, and aims for the orderliness and harmony of the soul. He

⁴ 508e-509a.

⁵ Vlastos, 1991, p32.

interrogates people one on one with the goal of understanding truth and purging false beliefs in himself as well as the other speaker. However, he is always aware of his own ignorance that first, only the gods know the truth and second, the interlocutor may have something that he does not know before. This is an attitude that comes from conscious self-assessment and humbleness in front of the truth. It is consistent with another famous saying by Socrates that what he does not know, he does not think he knows.⁶ As it is said in the second chapter, the truth is only known to gods. Human beings can only know and manifest the truth through their particularities. Therefore, Socrates does not say that he knows the truth even if he has talked a lot of people and no one has yet been able to refute some of his arguments that he holds dear.

Since every individual manifests the truth in a particular form according to who they are, every individual is valuable for grasping the truth. The truth gets revealed in the dynamic process of conversation in which everyone contributes either to the advance towards truths, or expungement of falseness. This attitude on truth is reflected upon Socrates' practice of "teacher-less education":⁷ since no one holds the absolute authority of truth, everyone involved in a conversation can benefit each other on the search for truth. Thus, the interlocutors are equally important as Socrates in this learning process, and no one is the educating teacher. Nor is anyone always the receiving student. As said in Chapter Two, the conversations between Socrates and interlocutors are in a sense a joint search for a better understanding of moral truth. It is important here to recapture some key elements of Socratic interrogation and see it in the light of education.

⁶ *Apology*, 21d.

⁷ Woodruff, 1998, p14.

4.2 Characteristics of Socratic Education

The first point is the fact that there is no one who always takes the definite authoritative role as a teacher (or a submissive role as a student) in this process of reciprocal learning. What is examined is the genuine beliefs about intimate issues that pertain to the speakers, and what can be achieved, thus, depends heavily on the participants willingness to be open about their real beliefs, the level of sophistication of the interlocutor, the real intention of Socrates, and the speaking skills of Socrates to push forward the conversation in a certain direction. Socrates' skills of holding a conversation in a certain direction are not the focus here, and it is sufficient to say that Socrates' skill is superb. In fact, Socrates' skill is so great that even if the interlocutors are not always genuine, he is able to pull out their beliefs on moral issues and holds the conversation until the point of refutation, at the point of which some interlocutors simply leave.⁸ The next point about the sophistication of the interlocutors is not mentioned frequently, though it is undoubtedly significant. An example is Polus. Even though Polus is young and coltish (as his name "young horse" indicates), he is shown to have a clear belief about what he wants to do: he looks for happiness, and has a clear belief that rhetoric can bring him power and happiness regardless of whether he acts morally or not. Whether or not Polus' beliefs are philosophical valid or impressive, they are no doubt clearly formulated. It is this strong position of Polus that gets Socrates to put forward his two controversial theses about just and unjust, right and wrong. In other words, every conversation is so strongly reciprocal that how much the interlocutor gives heavily influences what and how Socrates speaks, and thus, how far the pursuit of truth can reach.

⁸ See Plato's *Euthyphro*. At the end of the dialogue where all the definitions of piety are refuted by Socrates, Euthyphro says that he is in a hurry and must go (16a).

Socrates can certainly keep on speaking if the interlocutor decides to be silent, and this situation actually happens in his conversation with Callicles.⁹ However, if we are to take Socrates seriously when he says that he is a man who is happy to refute people as well as being refuted,¹⁰ then it is clear that speaking alone is not what Socrates wants, for there will be no one to challenge him directly. The challenges from the interlocutors are important in two ways. First, a good partner in a conversation is like a test stone¹¹ who can bring out the real quality of Socrates' thoughts, and see whether they are truly valuable (i.e. philosophical insightful) and can withstand challenge (i.e. logically valid regarding specific interlocutor). It seems that without the challenge of an interlocutor, Socrates will lose the context against which his thoughts gain significance and relevance. Second, the search for truth is not an individualistic activity. Merely speaking of one's own beliefs without interacting with others makes no sense to Socrates, because the search, even though it is done by two individuals at a time, aims at the common good that benefits everyone equally.¹²

The next characteristic of Socratic education is refutation. Refutations appear strongly in the *Gorgias* and play important roles in the three conversations. Refutations are usually not welcomed because they may appear that Socrates is only trying to win a debate by tricking the interlocutors into inconsistency.¹³ However, what Socrates sees himself doing is quite different. At 480a-d, 503a-b, and 506d-508a, Socrates speaks about the real use of rhetoric and the practice of a true rhetorician which he aspires towards:¹⁴ to use rhetoric for the perfection of citizens, to speak of what is best, and to examine people and administrate justice to people when they do

⁹ 505d.

¹⁰ 458a.

¹¹ 486d.

¹² 505e.

¹³ 461b-c, 482c-486d, etc.

¹⁴ 521d.

wrong. In other words, the refutation is, at least in intention if not in reality, an attempt to purge the false beliefs in people's mind, which is consistent with the Socrates' comment about how he is as a person at 458a.

Last but not least, since Socrates only has one method of speaking, and it is the same method for conducting political endeavor, moral inquiry, and education, the Socratic interrogation is how Socrates "educates" his interlocutors.¹⁵ In here I want to address one specific point about the Socratic interrogation that is particularly relevant to Socratic education. In the *Apology*, Socrates also describes what he does, and he says that he examines people and finds out that most of those whom he examines are not wise, but they think that they are wise. This has left the impression that Socrates is trying to show that people pretend to have knowledge *in their own realm of practice* but are actually ignorant. However, this impression is wrong. As discussed in chapter Two,¹⁶ Socrates does not ask Gorgias about the details of how to give a persuasive speech. Rather, the focus is on Gorgias' teaching (or attitude) about how rhetoric should be practiced. Socrates is voicing to Gorgias a civic concern that such a powerful skill may go haywire and bring destructive consequences to the society if Gorgias does not change his way of teaching and take up the moral responsibility as a teacher. In other words, Socrates' questioning always directs to moral concerns about how a *techne* (or craft) should be used or more broadly, how should one live one's life. The refutation process bears the same goal. Therefore, what gets refuted is not about the expertise per se, but rather how a certain expertise should be used and the interlocutor's knowledge on the virtues that is relevant to their expertise. Therefore, the kind of ignorance that is being exposed is rather specific: it is one's understanding on relevant moral concerns about one's *techne*. The psychological consequence of this exposure

¹⁵ See Chapter 3 section 3.2.

¹⁶ For detailed discussion, see Chapter 2 section 2.14.

is usually a strong sense of shame or embarrassment, which can lead to resentment. However, if the interlocutor bears the shame, it opens up a different dimension of consideration, and makes room for enhancement of knowledge about the real good of human beings. Then, what exactly is learned from this exposure?

4.3 Transformation as Intended

If the refutation is thorough and sufficiently penetrating, a full and genuine realization of one's problem serves adequately the motivation and perfection of transformation. This transformation is a complete transformation of one's life, in which the concern of morality gives the person a new view of the world. To put it differently, the consideration of morality is in a sense "horizontal," in that it goes through different fields of practices and different spheres of life. At 506d-508a, a moral person is said to demonstrate a kind of consistency across all aspects of living. From the most private life in which one deals with one's own desires to communal life of religious service to public life of political engagement, he who is virtuous demonstrates a quality across different spheres of life regardless of the actual occupation or craft (which determines his social identity and occupation). This quality, which is self-control, roots in one's psyche and gives orders to one's soul.

This uniting and consistent aspect of a human being is what I call moral character, which refers to the existential beliefs and contemplations about how one should deal with oneself (one's own desires and emotions, for instance), others, and the environment in which they are live.¹⁷ The relationship between moral character and the soul is that a person's moral character is the

¹⁷ Moral character is the morality of a real person with all his or her particularities.

entirety of soul's beliefs (or the orders of soul) on how to be a human. In the *Gorgias*, moral character of a person is a more defining feature of a person than occupation, legal status, or ancestral background because different spheres of life (may it be private or public) are connected by moral character of a person. Thus, what really connects Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles is not the fact that they all partake in the knack of rhetoric. Rather, it is their moral characters or their views on morality that put them into the same group.¹⁸ Socrates is different from the three interlocutors by the same measure,¹⁹ but not the fact that he practices Socratic dialectic instead of rhetoric. This is because the essential difference between Socratic dialectic and rhetoric in the *Gorgias* is not the specific techniques, skills or formal features (such as making long speeches, speaking in brief style, or even using flattery to gain what one wants), but the purpose, concern, or the entire value system. Understanding the *Gorgias* in terms of moral characters, the whole dialogue, even though having three parts, can be seemed as one extended examination (and contrast) that goes from the practice of a certain skill (i.e. rhetoric) to a complete expression of a mature moral character. The moral beliefs and characters of Polus and Callicles are certainly not the only possible outcomes of Gorgias' education. They are likely the representations of the most extreme development of Gorgias' moral attitude. However, they are undoubtedly fruits of which Gorgias' education is the seed.²⁰ Thus, the conversations between Socrates and Polus and that of Callicles are still examinations of Gorgias in terms of the impact of his teaching.²¹ To view the

¹⁸ This is not to say that they all have the same view, which is obvious false: Gorgias is morally irresponsible, whereas Callicles is openly selfish and hedonistic. However, they share a view of placing personal interest above the concern of the society.

¹⁹ This is not saying that Socrates places society above his own personal interest. Rather, it is more proper to say that for Socrates, there is not conflict between personal interests and societal benefit, because what he aims for and what the society really needs are the same: they both look for a good soul.

²⁰ See Dodds, 1959, p15.

²¹ Reversely, for Polus, the refutation of Gorgias enrages him because of his deep concern of the status and power of rhetoric. The refutation of Polus ignites Callicles because Callicles's direct concern is political power, and rhetoric is one step further from this direct concern. Therefore, it can be said that Socrates' examination of Gorgias

three examinations as a whole, it is ultimately an examination of moral character through the lens of rhetoric. Gorgias is questioned about whether the teaching of rhetoric and the teaching of justice should not be done spontaneously. Polus is first allured and then forced to rethink the issue of whether rhetoric can bring power and therefore, happiness regardless of justice. Callicles is challenged by Socrates that pleasure is not the same as good, and that the real good that gives power and happiness to a human being in either private life or public life is virtue. Socrates offers a consistent moral viewpoint differently to the three interlocutors based on their specific moral character. It goes through education, morality, and politics, yet expresses the same concern of a virtuous development and cultivation of moral character: a person should be the ruler of one's own desires and appetites, and happiness comes from this harmony of the soul.

This examination of moral character, if it is thorough and sufficiently penetrating, will be a transformative process for both Socrates and the interlocutors. In order for the examination to be thorough and penetrating, it requires the cooperation of both participants in terms of first, their openness to express their personal beliefs. The personal beliefs are restricted to the most important aspects of their life, which in the case of Gorgias, is about rhetoric. Second, both participants need to be genuinely eager to learn and improve themselves such that shame and embarrassment do not let them put up defense or directly leave. If these requirements are fulfilled, there might come a full realization of one's problem so completely and revealing that the realization itself serves as the motivation and perfection of transformation. If one genuinely sees and fully realizes the problems of one's moral character, it means that one has admitted one's wrong. For Socrates, this realization is sufficient for the person to change because

is also an examination of Polus because of their shared commitment to rhetoric. The examination of Polus is also an examination of Callicles because of their shared commitment to political might.

everyone has the will for the good.²² This is the transformation process through which both participants take on a new look of the world.²³

²² 467c-468c.

²³ The judgment on whether or not a trait of moral character is really a problem or wrongness requires absolute knowledge that perhaps none of the participants possess. Nonetheless, even if no one knows for the ultimate truth, Socrates certainly thinks that it is still possible to make progress towards it by interrogating with the interlocutors. This presupposes that everyone has a share of truth. This touches on the issues of recollection of knowledge, a topic of which I will not discuss in this these.

Conclusion

The Culture and the History

One way to understand the *Gorgias* is to read it as presenting two answers to the question “can virtue be taught?” that sprang out of the late 5th BCE controversy of *nomos* versus *phusis*. The ancient Greeks understand *areté* or virtue as the quality that makes something excellent. Thus, a knife can have its excellence or virtue if it is sharp. Sharpness is the virtue of knife. By the same token, there are some qualities that make humans excellent, and these qualities are the virtues of humans. In the beginning of 5th BCE, the connection between the well-born and the aristocrats and virtues were seen as a default relationship. In order to claim that one possessed virtue, one claimed that he was the descendent of a certain ancient familial or heroic line. This relationship was questioned in the late 5th century, which gave rise to the controversy of *nomos* versus *phusis*. The traditional aristocrats wanted to hold their superiority as natural – they were born *kaloi k’agathoi* (the beautiful and the good), whereas the newly rich wanted to have more say in political matters and emphasized *isonomia* or equality before law. Virtue as hereditary was thus questioned, and the problem of the teachability of virtue arose.

This question of whether virtue can be taught was answered by the sophists, who openly claimed to teach virtue, and Gorgias, though wanting to distance himself from the sophists, was

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in fact making the same claim that through the learning of rhetoric, a person can become a better citizen (or a more virtuous citizen). Rhetoric is the skill to speak well in public political gatherings.¹ Through the training of rhetoric, a person can speak persuasively, gain freedom for himself and rule over others.² Although speaking well was one of the traditionally held *areté*, it was by no means the only one. By emphasizing rhetoric, Gorgias' teaching had implicitly brought up another problem of the nature of *areté*. What counts as an *areté*? By emphasizing rhetoric, Gorgias challenged the traditional understanding of virtue as being able to both speak well and to perform deeds, and judged words to be more important than deeds. Plato (or probably Socrates) came along, and pushed this question further. Are the traditional understandings of virtues really worthy of its name as the qualities that make human beings excellent? What exactly are virtues? Importantly, these questions are only one type of sub-questions about the nature of virtue, the type that emphasizes virtue as the goodness of the agent.

The other type of the sub-question is about virtue as the goodness for community, which can be named civic virtue or communal virtue. One typical example is justice. This kind of virtue does not seem to have direct benefit to the individuals, and used to be protected by gods. Once the authority of the gods was questioned, there was no necessary reason for behaving justly and fairly other than the fact that it has been the norm to do so. Therefore, a trend of thought came up that individuals would decide whether or not they want to behave justly based on calculation of personal interest, and this gave rise to hedonistic practice. Here comes another problem: are the two kinds of virtues, namely, the one that is good for the agent, and the other that is good for the community in conflict with each other? Or are they in harmony with each other? The *Gorgias*

¹ *Gorgias* 452e.

² *Gorgias* 452e.

can therefore be understood as addressing these questions³ through an initial discussion of rhetoric, and there are two solutions presented in the dialogue. They are Gorgias' teaching and Socratic education.

Gorgias' Lineage and the Interplay between Morality, Education, and Politics

As indicated in the first chapter, Gorgias' teaching is a response to the controversy of *nomos* and *phusis*. By teaching rhetoric but not virtues directly as other sophists did, Gorgias avoided the trouble of establishing himself as having a real occupation. Nonetheless, he was involved in the intellectual undercurrent of giving men a new breed by teaching them important skills. Rhetoric was a well-acknowledged craft that is *better* than other ordinary skills such as shoemaking because it brings more power and influence in a society that heavily emphasizes public speaking. A man who could deliver himself well in public gatherings on political matters was a man of respect and influence. In other words, rhetoric had a close connection with *kalos*, fine or admirable, which was a term that designated nobility in terms of social hierarchy. Gorgias' teaching of rhetoric therefore had intimate connection with the kind of virtues that brought the agent excellence. As Gorgias puts it in an exaggerated yet revealing way, "it [rhetoric] encompasses and subordinates to itself just about everything that can be accomplished."⁴ In the dialogue the *Gorgias*, the problem that Gorgias has about his teaching comes from the relationship between individual *areté* and civic virtues. While Gorgias has clearly stated that his teaching would bring great personal advantage,⁵ he also states that he would (and should) not be

³ These questions are: is *areté* teachable? What is the nature of *areté*? What is the relationship between two kinds of *areté*?

⁴ 456b.

⁵ 452e.

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responsible for how his students practice the skill. In other words, Gorgias takes the position that individuals would decide whether they want to hold on to the communal virtues or not. For such a skill that can bring about great personal influence, Gorgias' care-free attitude not only opens the door for practitioners of rhetoric to use it as an essential tool for personal attainment (as it is represented in Polus), but ultimately leads to an extreme view that justifies the endless pursuit of personal power and enjoyment (as in the case of Callicles), since now the only criterion for morality seems to be personal interest.

Polus is Gorgias' student who is not as famous as his teacher. This gives him the advantage to openly express his own view without worrying about the possible social condemnation that his teacher fears. Besides the skill of rhetoric, he inherits from his teacher the attitude of moral irresponsibility. He craves fame and reputation, and is eager to demonstrate his rhetorical capacity.⁶ This eagerness, however, is not vainly for the sake of showing off. Polus craves fame because fame brings about influence and power. Great power would allow him to do whatever he wants to do, and thus, makes him happy. A typical exemplar of this logic is tyrant. Tyrants such as Archelaus usurp the throne of power regardless of customs or laws or justice, and they are exemplars of the happy people who break the yoke of laws and freely do whatever they desire.⁷ Polus admires tyrants, and considers rhetoric as possessing the capacity to give him tyrant-like power.⁸ This signals that Polus has taken a worse stance than his teacher: while Gorgias is morally irresponsible for his students' conduct, Polus admires tyrants for their power even though they come to power unjustly. However, Polus cannot totally disregard communal virtues. Holding on to both personal pursuit of power and communal virtue leads him to conflicts

⁶ 448a-c.

⁷ 471a-c.

⁸ 448a-c.

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that he does not know how to reconcile. For instance, from the perspective in which personal affluence triumphs the concern of community, he thinks that suffering injustice is worse than doing injustice.⁹ However, understood from the perspective of the community, doing injustice is more shameful.¹⁰ With his beliefs in which being good or admirable means either pleasant or beneficial,¹¹ Polus comes to agree the opposite that doing injustice is *simply* more shameful,¹² and suffering injustice is better than doing injustice without receiving punishment.¹³ Not knowing how to solve the conflict, Polus gets refuted by Socrates and agrees with him for further arguments that ultimately enrages Callicles.¹⁴ To solve the conflict, Callicles goes further into the direction of selfish procurement and justifies this position by saying that all the communal virtues are only constraints imposed by those who cannot protect themselves to prevent those who are strong and superior to get as much as they can, a principle that is the real justice of nature.

Callicles is a young politician who engages in rhetorical practice in real life. Thus, he is the real-life exemplar of Gorgias' teaching. He does not have the problem that troubles Polus because he takes a more extreme position than Polus on the pursuit of personal interest and regards the law and custom as chains on the superior and powerful people.¹⁵ The pursuit of personal affluence is natural justice, and the superior should rule over the inferior as it is the case in the natural world as well as the human world on military conflicts.¹⁶ Men should aspire to become as powerful as possible by engaging in the management of city, familiarizing oneself

⁹ 474c.

¹⁰ 474c.

¹¹ 474d-e.

¹² 475e.

¹³ 479d-e.

¹⁴ 480e-481b.

¹⁵ 483b-c.

¹⁶ 483d-e.

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with speeches on matters of business, and becoming experienced in human pleasures and appetites.¹⁷ This kind of superior men should use their intelligence and courage to satisfy their endless appetites for pleasure as well as they can. If they do this, it is not only a just practice. It brings about happiness.¹⁸

Callicles is the only real representative of Gorgias' teaching because rhetoric is meant for politics. Therefore, in Callicles, the full effect of Gorgias' teaching is demonstrated. Callicles completely disregards communal virtues and argues for a life that aims for the pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction by constantly bringing in resources through the use of social influence and power.¹⁹ The impact of this moral attitude plays into education, and is expressed in politics. The cultivation of moral attitude is education, and the real life impact of education channeled through occupation is politics. This tight connection between education, morality, and politics is highlighted through a disturbing example of Gorgias' lineage.

Callicles has "solved" Polus' problem of the possible conflict between personal procurement and communal concern by totally dismissing the communal concern. However, he falls into another problem that comes precisely from his attitude regarding the community. On the one hand, Callicles wants to become a superior man who can take as much as he can and claims it a just practice. On the other hand, this power can only be gained from paying attention to the people, which presumes at least nominal respect for the communal virtue. His deeply-rooted sense of superiority runs in conflict with the necessity to flatter and listen to the masses, and Socrates points out that the only way to get the kind of happiness that Callicles desires is to

¹⁷ 484d-e.

¹⁸ 491e-492c.

¹⁹ 494a-c.

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become a demagogue, who Callicles despises.²⁰ Becoming a mouthpiece of the *demos* (or the mob) is clearly not acceptable for Callicles because it is in a sense giving up the claim of his individual excellence (intelligence, courage, etc). Thus, in Callicles, the conflict between individual excellence and communal virtue is brought out in more seriously than in Polus. On the one hand, the pure advancement of personal gain would damage the welfare of the community. On the other hand, a submission to the needs of community would make the individual leaders only puppets of the public. Furthermore, Socrates points out the problem of a demagogue that he who merely tries to satisfy the desires of the public would not bring about the real good to the people. Socrates wants to claim that individual excellence needs not run in conflict with communal virtue, and that a politician should look for the real good for the people. To better understand Socrates' teaching on morality and politics, it is important to understand his position in general.

The Socratic Education

To begin with, Socrates believes that there is no conflict between the virtues that benefit individuals and the virtues that benefit the community. In fact, individuals come to grasp the self-benefiting virtues by benefiting the community, and this link is built upon an understanding of the real good for human beings. For Socrates, the real good is the goodness of the soul as opposed to the goodness of the body or pleasures of either the body or the soul. This understanding comes from two groups of notions: the distinction between soul and body, and the categorization of what is good versus what is otherwise. The interplay of these two groups of notions lays out the most basic understanding of Socrates' beliefs. For human beings, the soul

²⁰ 513a-c.

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should govern the body, but not the other way around.²¹ Since the real good is the goodness for the soul and everyone does things for the real good instead of the intermediate or the bad, everyone should care about the goodness of the soul as long as one comes to see it. The goodness of the soul comes from a proper order of the soul that is given by the individual himself or herself.²² Morality finds its root in the orderliness of a good soul, through which every action is governed. What this means is that morality is about ruling oneself with laws that are made by oneself.²³ Neither gods nor social norms dictate morality. However, nor does morality contradict religion or social norms either, because a self-ruling or self-controlled person would do what is appropriate to both gods and other social members and thus be pious and just.²⁴

If this is the case, then in terms of education, what is aimed for in the educational process is equally the goodness of the soul, and the lack of it would be a serious mistake instead of an unimportant personal choice. Therefore, Gorgias is wrong for taking a morally irresponsible stance on his teaching of rhetoric because without including morality into the picture, students would lose sight of what is the real good and build false beliefs about the good, which is exactly what happened to Polus. What is problematic is not rhetoric or the skill of public speaking itself.²⁵ Rather, Socrates criticizes Gorgias' teaching for the lack of moral concern that makes rhetoric open to dangerous use. Without moral concern, rhetoric is a knack that only tries to produce conviction in its audience on large political gatherings,²⁶ and its practitioners do good or

²¹ 465c-d.

²² 506c-507c.

²³ 491d-e, 504d, etc.

²⁴ 507a-c.

²⁵ This is demonstrated by the fact that Socrates in the *Gorgias* would also speak in the style that seems to characterize rhetoric. For instance, Socrates makes long speeches throughout the whole dialogue (452a-d, 455b-d, 464b-466a, 471e-472d, 492e-494a, 506c-509c, 511d-513c, 517b-519d, 523a-527e, etc.), uses flattery-like speeches to calm Polus down and test him out (461c-d), complement Callicles as a good friend of his while it is not the case (487a-488b), etc. Therefore, the formal characteristics of rhetoric are not Socrates' target criticism.

²⁶ 452e, 454b-455a.

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ill with the powerful skill depending on their personal willing.²⁷ In contrast, having moral concern would lead one to focus on the goodness of soul,²⁸ and use rhetoric to examine the soul of oneself and others, and implement punishments if necessary so that the condition of one's soul is well tended.²⁹ The caring of one's soul leads to a different understanding of power. For Polus and Callicles, power is more or less the political might or influence that can allow them to do whatever they want. For Socrates, power is not a tool that is seemingly neutral, but the property of *good*. Having power is possessing goodness, and the real goodness for Socrates is the goodness of the soul. Thus, power is related to the goodness of soul. This power of a good soul naturally connotes the caring of community.³⁰ Therefore, the problem that troubles Polus about the conflict between personal power (or political might, from Socrates' point of view) and communal fairness is solved. This power of being able to control oneself benefits not only the individual, but also the community, and this power brings happiness to the person.

Finally, in the field of politics where the course of morality and education ends, this understanding of the real good of soul bears implications that the real measurement of a good politician is not the amount of ships, dockyards, and walls or other material affluence that he brings, but the cultivation of citizens' souls. Socrates denies the great examples that Callicles mentioned, namely, Themistocles, Cimon, Pericles, and Miltiades.³¹ What they are good at, according to Socrates, is providing material goods to the satisfaction of the city's appetites.³² However, they fail to make Athenians better citizens. Therefore, they are not to be considered

²⁷ 456b-457c.

²⁸ 458a.

²⁹ 480b-d.

³⁰ This will be further explained below.

³¹ 503c.

³² 517b-c.

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good politicians.³³ A true politician³⁴ takes into consideration the souls of citizens, and attempts valiantly to say what is best to them, regardless of whether the audience find his words pleasant or not.³⁵

To take Socrates' position as a whole, it becomes clear that the task for an educator, a politician, and a citizen who aspires to become good is the same. They need to see clearly that the real good for a human being is the well-being of soul. Therefore, they need to pay attention to the soul of themselves as well as others if they are truly to become good. In Socrates, we see that he is taking on the identities of a politician, an educator and a citizen. The way he does this is through what he calls philosophy, and what we name "Socratic Method" or Socratic interrogation in my preferable term. Socrates questions people about the most important aspects of their life (such as rhetoric for Gorgias), and questions them about their thoughts on the relationship between morality and their crafts in hope that he can learn from the interlocutors issues about morality that he does not know for certain.³⁶ If he thinks that the interlocutor is wrong, he will try to show the problems by refuting the interlocutor's statements. However, this refutation is not for the sake of winning or humiliating the interlocutors. It is, as Socrates describes, to care for the interlocutors' the soul and make sure that it is as good as possible.³⁷ In doing this, Socrates is essentially an educator and a politician. At the same time, by examining the interlocutors, Socrates is able to examine his own beliefs and sees if they can withstand the criticisms from the interlocutors. He improves the goodness of his own soul by knowing clearer

³³ 517a-519d.

³⁴ The text is about good orator, but not politician. However, they are interchangeable terms in the culture background of Athenian society. An orator is a public speaker who involves in public debates, either in the assembly or court. Either way, he is a politician by fact.

³⁵ 503a.

³⁶ 453b-c, 454c, 458a, 487a-488a, etc.

³⁷ 480b-d, 502e, 503a, 504d-e, 507c-e, 513e, 515c, etc.

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that what he believes in and how he acts accordingly are close to truth.³⁸ In this way, he is being an individual citizen who takes care of himself. Therefore, Socrates seems to have also solved the problem that troubles Calicles, the problem of the possible rivalry between advancement of personal interest and that of the community. If the ultimate good is not material good but the goodness of the soul, there is no rivalry between personal interest and communal interest: for an individual to become good, he or she needs the help from other community members to point out his or her problems regarding morality because it is hard to notice one's own problems by oneself. At the same time, he or she points out the problems of others as a way to know that he or she is on the right track towards true knowing. No one is absolutely the teacher. However, everyone can be the teacher for each other. The advancement of a person depends on the community, and the advancement of a community depends on each individual to care about the soul of others. This is the solution that Socrates in the *Gorgias* offers to the serious problems of moral education that bear important implications on politics.

Criticism

Based on Socrates' model, whether a person is virtuous does not depend on his or her occupation, but on whether she pays attention to the order of the soul and works on improving it. While this seems to be a fine and acceptable criterion, it brings up the problem of the relationship between Socratic education and social production: for instance, what is the relationship between Socratic virtues and other crafts and thus, other occupations? Do Socratic virtues help craftsmen in some way? Also, can a shoemaker become a virtuous person, which, using the Socratic

³⁸ 508e-509b.

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education in the *Gorgias*, would require a person to in fact take up the practice of philosophy? The *Gorgias* does not give any direct answer to these questions. However, it does point to a not-promising direction because of the difficult nature of philosophy and that it is the only way to virtues.³⁹ This problem can lead to two more specific questions: first, how can the popular mass become virtuous in the Socratic sense, considering that the majority of people would not be able to do philosophy in the Socratic way because of the very basic necessity of survival? Second, if only a very limited group of people is able to practice philosophy in the Socratic style, what are the positive (or negative) effects on the soul of citizens can we expect from their activity?

Finally, there is the problem of the proper audience for the Socratic interrogation. Socrates may not be wrongly prosecuted for corrupting the youth: for anyone who goes through a serious questioning of social norms and values, it is very easy for them to think that “morality is just social construction, and there is no truth.”⁴⁰ In this sense, Socrates is doing what the Sophists are doing: both groups make morality dissolute, though for different aims.⁴¹ Then, who can actually benefit from the Socratic interrogation? Is there a proper audience for the Socratic interrogation?

³⁹ The difficulty is demonstrated through Socrates who spends his own life doing this, but still fails in making Athens a more cultivate city.

⁴⁰ I heard this from my friend.

⁴¹ Socrates does this for a destructive construction, whereas the Sophists do this mostly for personal success.

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