GORGIAS
INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

Ancient Greek culture is often described as agonistic. This word, “agonistic,” comes from the Greek word agôn (ἀγών), which means contest, trial, struggle. The Greeks created and inhabited a competitive society. They made everything a contest—athletics, politics, drama, even vase painting, as when Euthymides, on one of his own paintings, named a rival and wrote in effect “you can’t paint like this!” The ultimate struggle, of course, is war; and classical hoplite combat was much closer to a contest governed by rules than our modern wars of total destruction. Philosophical disputation, too, was often regarded as an agôn. Indeed, the first words of the Gorgias are “of war and of battle” (πολέμου καὶ μάχης). This is appropriate given the tone of the work. Socrates goes to war in this dialogue, and not only in self-defense.

This conception of philosophy as an agôn may surprise many readers, for we moderns tend to think of philosophy as an occupation more suited to the armchair than to the field of battle. But this is because the modern world has forgotten what is—or anyway what can be—at stake in philosophy. Among the Greeks philosophy was directly relevant to one’s life; philosophical doctrine was imbued with existential significance. In selecting a school of thought one selected a way of life.¹ In Plato’s dialogues the choice is often articulated more broadly; that is, the choice is not between one specific philosophical school and a rival, but between a philosophical and a non-philosophical life. The latter form of life is usually represented by politics or oratory, or some combination of both. This is the first thing we must understand about the Gorgias: the philosopher and the orators are waging war over rival conceptions of the good life. It is a war bounded by

¹ For more on this idea see the two excellent books by Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life (Blackwell 1995) and What is Ancient Philosophy? (Harvard 2002).
regulations and proprieties to which the combatants are expected to adhere. But it is combat all the same.

But what exactly is to be gained—or lost—by battling in this way? Socrates is obviously committed to his life of philosophy, as the orators are committed to their way of life. Surely the loser of this fight will not abandon his accustomed practices and sit as a disciple at the feet of the victor. Nor will he be taken prisoner and forced to reform. What trophy, then, can the winner expect to carry away from this contest?

With this question we begin to see what is distinctive about the philosophical agôn. Unlike the typical contest, which demands exclusively physical excellence, philosophy requires excellence of soul—virtue. And whereas competition in the physical arena is rewarded with material possessions, power, or fame, each of which becomes the personal and exclusive possession of the victor, the rewards of true philosophical insight may be shared among many individuals. In other words, when a philosopher like Socrates defeats an opponent he may walk away from the contest with nothing obvious to show for it—but someone will come away with something. Who is this someone? And what is this something?

Let’s answer these questions by looking specifically at the Gorgias. Just prior to the opening of the dialogue Gorgias exhibited his oratorical talents before a crowd of admirers and potential students. Such displays have made Gorgias famous throughout the Greek world; his fame has brought him power, for he is in demand everywhere and students flock to pay a fee just to hear him speak; and these fees have enriched him to such a degree that he can acquire whatever material possessions he desires. This sort of reputation and influence was attractive to young Greek men, especially to
ambitious young Athenians. They wanted to learn from Gorgias because their history and their standard course of education taught them that the acquisition of political power was the greatest good for which a man can strive. In other words, they admired Gorgias because they desired a certain way of life.

Socrates represents something altogether different. He does not respect the political life as envisioned by the typical Athenian, as he makes clear near the end of the Gorgias (515c ff). He believes, in fact, that what passes for success in that life is an impediment to true well-being. The skills one must acquire, and the actions one must perform, to be considered a “good” politician usually condemn one to being a bad human being. What does it profit a man if he gains the world but loses his soul? Socrates did not pose the question in precisely these terms, of course; but the words do communicate concisely and accurately one of his deepest concerns. Socrates cares about the souls of his fellow citizens, especially the young, for whom there is still hope because their souls are malleable. Their potential is a cause for optimism; but it is equally a cause for fear. The lure of gaining the world is always and everywhere more strikingly seductive than the promise of saving one’s soul. This is true especially for the young, who in adolescence are dominated by bodily desires and who have yet to accumulate the life-experience and develop the foresight that empower them to oppose the harmful among their impulsive inclinations. They are, therefore, easily seduced by the sort of physical gratifications that the oratorical life dangles before their watery eyes.

To return, then, to our question: when Socrates is victorious in a philosophical agon, who is benefited and what is his prize? In the Gorgias, as indeed in many other dialogues as well, the answer to the first part of this question is: the members of the
audience, the young men who witness the clash, are benefited. In this dialogue Plato intentionally alerts us to the presence of an audience. It is not insignificant that Socrates explicitly mentions Gorgias’ potential students just after the orator admits that he and his students need have no knowledge whatever of the subjects about which he will teach them to speak so persuasively (455c6-d5). Socrates knows how dangerous this can be. The power to persuade coupled with ignorance of the truth may very well lead to disaster. This is especially true if one’s business is to persuade others about justice and injustice, which is precisely what Gorgias promises to teach his students. If a man persuades a city to undertake a particular course of action by convincing the citizens of its justice, when it is in fact unjust, he may lead them into a grave error. Consider the example of Cleon, who in 427 convinced the Athenians to execute all the adult males in the city of Mytilene. They dispatched a ship to carry out the orders only to regret their decision and rescind the directive the following day. The second ship managed to arrive in time to prevent the executions, but this was pure luck: had the ship encountered contrary winds, a stormy sea, or any one of countless other eventualities, the men of Mytilene—many of whom the Athenians knew full well to be innocent of any crime—would have been put to death unjustly.

And so we approach the answer to the second part of our question. The prize young men take away from Socrates’ victories is the preservation of their souls. Socrates contends with orators so often and so vigorously because he is trying to defend the souls of Athens’ youth. He has seen the rise and fall of supposedly great men. Plato, too, knows this history; he writes with the memory of men like Alcibiades constantly in mind—men who possessed enormous potential for greatness but whose lusts for “power” and “glory”
destroyed them. Indeed, Alcibiades’ career may be the greatest, and hence also the
gloomiest, illustration of the promise and the danger that attend those who have been
blessed with natural gifts. They can do almost anything they want; but as a result they
must select among a dizzying assortment of possible futures. Will they be seduced by the
lure of immediate pleasure; or will they toil up the arduous incline of self-discipline?
Socrates labors to expose the immense difference between the rewards that lie at the end
of these two ways. The smooth road leads to enjoyment; the rough road leads to
greatness.

Socrates fights, then, to win a good life (εὐδαιμονία) for the non-combatants who
are just coming of age. Of course, this is possible only if the spectators are able to learn
the lesson Socrates’ peculiar form of combat is meant to teach. His method is indirect; at
times it can be hard to follow. It is also often frustrating, especially to those who entertain
only facile and agreeable ideas. Socrates’ pool of potential associates (we do not say
“students”), therefore, is necessarily small. One imagines the philosopher had no illusions
about the number of souls he might reach. Of the many men who gathered round his
public confrontations Socrates’ way would appeal to only a few—but what men these
few were! Plato, for example. So let us keep in mind that the agôn depicted in the
Gorgias is fought on behalf of an audience. And mark this fact, too: that audience
includes us.

So Socrates and Chaerephon arrive too late to experience Gorgias’ thrilling
exhibition. No matter: Socrates would rather converse with the man than passively
imbibe the mellifluous flow of his voice. He has no interest in being seduced by words;
he wants to scrutinize them. Fortunately, Gorgias boasts not only that he can answer any
question put to him, but that he can do so with the utmost brevity. He is a trained speaker, after all; and the art of speaking involves more than just delivering long-winded orations.

Socrates begins with what appears to be a simple question: what is oratory? Gorgias should respond to this without difficulty. But he does not; it turns out that he is incapable of providing a concise definition of the practice at which he claims to be an expert. Socrates must guide him step by step through the process of clearly distinguishing one thing from another:

Oratory involves speeches.
Yes, but what *kind* of speeches?
Persuasive speeches.
Yes, but persuasive speeches *about what*?
Persuasive speeches about justice and injustice.
All right; but does this persuasion result from the communication of knowledge—as a mathematician is persuasive because he teaches the truth—or is it merely persuasive without any connection to knowledge of the truth?
Persuasive speeches about justice and injustice not accompanied by knowledge.

Finally!

Socrates’ first lesson to the audience of potential students: there are some questions that Gorgias cannot answer as concisely as he promised. More, he cannot even answer them *at all* without assistance. And who is the man who knows how to pose these questions and what it takes to answer them appropriately? Socrates, a philosopher.

This is the moment when Socrates refers to Gorgias’ potential students. He wonders what Gorgias can offer them given that any man who possesses knowledge of a specific field would make a better adviser regarding matters related to his expertise than an orator who is entirely ignorant of the subject. This is a legitimate concern; Gorgias has
no doubt met such skeptical queries before. His reply, therefore, may be one of many stock orations that he has memorized for just such an occasion. However that may be, he addresses the issue by delivering a longish speech concerning the mighty power of oratory. The appeal is directed to the basest instincts of his audience. But he knows his audience well: his most avid students are those who are most eager to satisfy precisely these instincts. They crave power; and the promise of this power is enough to blind them to the sort of doubts manifested in Socrates’ question.

Power exists most obviously through its manifestations, especially power of the kind Gorgias has on offer. This generates new trains of thought, one of which Gorgias pursues in the course of his address. To his promise of power he appends the request that the public not hold orators responsible if their students use their power unjustly. This is a clever rhetorical ploy: on the surface it expresses an earnest and concerned respectability; yet beneath this lurks the intimation that from Gorgias one may acquire a power unregulated by legal or ethical constraints. This is ominous, but only if one thinks about it critically. Gorgias does not expect his audience to do this. The type of man he attracts will consider this, not ominous, but enticing.

But Gorgias is not addressing his typical audience; nor is this an exhibition. That business ended earlier in the day. Gorgias is now speaking to Socrates, and this is an agôn. Now we, reading Gorgias’ address, might detect nothing amiss. A little hyperbolic, perhaps; but otherwise unobjectionable. But we are not Socrates; we have not fought as many battles as this calloused old philosopher; we have not trained ourselves to detect, even in the thrusts and parries of combat, the exposed flesh of falsehood. Socrates is always alert; and on this day his reflexes are precise. He has observed a flaw in Gorgias’
armor—and he moves in for the kill…

Yet Socrates does not attack before warning Gorgias that he is about to strike and securing his permission to proceed. Notice, however, that Gorgias’ mind is still on his audience. He says that he doesn’t want to bore them with a prolonged discussion. It is more likely that he would rather they not witness the blow that he now expects to fall but that he cannot deflect because he doesn’t even know where it will land. When the audience begs them to proceed Gorgias must weigh his options: if he continues, he may suffer a dialectical defeat; if he bows out, he will be ashamed, especially since he has boasted so about his ability to answer questions. He chooses to continue: he just might rally and defend himself after all.

It is not to be. Socrates gradually draws Gorgias in, maneuvers him into position, and delivers the fatal blow. Now at first Socrates’ strike appears to many readers to be insignificant, anticlimactic. After all, it consists only of revealing an inconsistency in Gorgias’ statements: Gorgias mentioned the possibility of his students acting unjustly but later assured Socrates that he would teach his students justice and agreed that if they learn justice, they will be just and so never act unjustly. These statements are indisputably inconsistent. But so what? Aren’t we making too much of this?

We are not. This will be clear if we recall the nature of this agôn. Gorgias is an orator; he has claimed to be able to answer any question put to him. Words, persuasive words, are his business. Inconsistencies are not persuasive; they are the opposite of persuasive. A man of Gorgias’ talents should not succumb so easily on the field of his own expertise. Socrates even alerted him to the fact that he suspected his statements were inconsistent. In fact, at the time Socrates said this, they were not inconsistent. Socrates
thought Gorgias’ allusion to unjust students of oratory was incompatible with his earlier assertion that oratory involved persuasive speeches about justice. But since Gorgias had said that oratory need not involve knowledge of justice, there was no inconsistency. The problem does not arise until after Socrates’ warning, when he secures Gorgias’ agreement that he will teach his students justice and that as a result they will know justice and so never be unjust. He should have resisted this line of reasoning. But he either could not or would not, or he failed to realize that this is where he had to make his stand.

However we account for the outcome, the fact is that Gorgias has been beaten at his own game. He had just awed the crowd with a spectacular verbal display, and assured everyone present that there was much more where that came from. Then, in off the street walks this silly old philosopher who displays a verbal and intellectual dexterity that Gorgias cannot begin to match. And Socrates does it so effortlessly.

We said that Socrates’ dialectical victory, his triumph over the famous Gorgias on the field of the orator’s own specialty, was his first lesson to the audience. There is a second lesson as well. Like the first, it exposes something about Gorgias; but it goes deeper and so is more revealing. The first lesson involves Gorgias’ competence as an orator; the second addresses his character as a man. The Greeks were fond of weighing a man’s deeds against his words. They wanted to know whether he puts his money where his mouth is, as we would say. Consider Gorgias with this in mind: when speaking extemporaneously, uninhibited by ulterior motives—when, in short, expressing his sincere beliefs and so exhibiting his true character—he himself raises the possibility that his students might be unjust. He seems genuinely concerned that his apprentices’ depraved deeds might somehow be attributed to him. This tells us something about
Gorgias’ deeds: he does not teach his students justice, nor does he examine potential students and accept only those of whose justice he is confident. He doesn’t care one whit about the justice or injustice of his disciples. As long as he is not blamed when they misbehave, he is content. Now we know that he believes that the skills he imparts provide his students with unmatchable power, for he said this explicitly. Adding this fact into our calculations, what more do we learn about his deeds? Gorgias knowingly supplies an instrument of immense power to men who may very well use it for unjust ends—and he does this regularly and for a fee!

Thus Gorgias’ deeds. But what of his words? Well, when he is asked explicitly whether he will teach this skill, of whose tremendous power he has recently boasted, to just anyone, whether just or unjust, he lies. He assures Socrates—and everyone attending to his words—that he will ensure that his students are just. But, as we have just seen, he does not do this at all. Who among us would admit to empowering the unjust? Come to think of it, who among us would empower the unjust in the first place? But this is precisely Gorgias’ business; he is just too ashamed to admit it.

The intervention of Gorgias’ student Polus confirms all that we have said here. He acknowledges Gorgias inconsistency, attributes his misstep to shame, and through his own line of argument reveals that he, Gorgias’ student, cares far more for power than for justice. Before we examine Polus’ contribution to the argument, however, we should note a third lesson one may take from Socrates’ victory. It is appropriate to mention it here since it is a generalization based upon the second lesson and is supported also by Polus himself.

This third lesson is a general point about oratory, or the oratorical life. This life
promises to make one persuasive and powerful; yet it may also be characterized by ignorance and injustice. As we have noted, these are explosive combinations. Persuasion plus ignorance, power plus injustice: though these do not guarantee a reign of unrestrained hedonism, violence, and brutality, they certainly make such a regime more likely. The point is that oratory can do nothing of itself to prevent this menace—it cannot even recognize such a state as dangerous in the first place. This regime, moreover, may manifest itself in an individual soul as well as in a city. The man seduced by oratory believes that he will acquire power over the city. The Gorgias teaches that unless he has power over himself he will have no opportunity to dominate his city, for he will sooner destroy himself from within. It teaches, moreover, that this internal power cannot be had by pursuing oratory, but only by loving wisdom.

Socrates’ encounter with Polus is really just a prelude to his titanic battle with Callicles. This is not to say that Polus’ section of the dialogue is devoid of substance. Far from it: this section lays out not only the central problems of the dialogue, but much of the material upon which Socrates will later draw to resolve them. The early distinction between a “craft” (tékhē) and a “knack” (ēμπειρία) is particularly relevant in this regard. We would like, however, to attend for a moment to another feature of Plato’s work that Socrates’ exchange with Polus sets in relief. Readers of the dialogues often complain that Socrates’ interlocutors are easy targets. They assent to Socrates’ arguments too readily: “Yes, Socrates.” “Of course, Socrates.” “Indeed you are right, Socrates.” In short, Socrates’ opponents too often bob when they should weave. One often hears this complaint regarding Socrates’ “proof” that whatever is shameful is bad (474c-475c), which seems somehow weak but which Polus does not resist at all. This can be irritating.
It can also make one skeptical of Socrates’ arguments, for the fact that he can defeat a weak opponent proves little about the merits of his own position. “So his argument can defeat that opponent? Big deal; he was a feeble opponent!” The best arguments are those that overcome the most powerful opposition. Opponents like Polus simply lack the resources to produce any serious resistance.

These are legitimate concerns; and one should always read Plato with one’s mind on high-alert. The dialogues are swollen full of content, so many ideas to contend with, so many levels of meaning and significance to attend to, so many puzzles, twists, and turns. That said, consider two points regarding the merits of opponents such as Polus.

First: Socrates says again and again throughout the dialogues that he is less interested in general statements of truth or falsity than in the specific beliefs of the man in front of him. He wants to know what he believes; he addresses his arguments and proofs specifically to him. This is related to the fact, mentioned earlier, that Socrates cares about the souls of individual men. His philosophy does not float idly in a realm of abstract propositions; it dwells within living and breathing individuals. But also, considered from a rhetorical point of view and with the audience in mind, Socrates tailors his arguments to the individual before him because this man is his immediate antagonist. If Polus cannot oppose Socrates’ argument, the audience learns something about him, both as a thinker and as an orator. Polus is weak. Remember, this is an agôn. Socrates employs this same technique during his clash with Callicles. His “proofs” that the many are stronger than the few and are therefore the measure of natural justice (488b-489b) and that the more intelligent man should have more food or wear more shoes than anyone else (489b-490e) are not meant as definitive refutations of Callicles’ position. Rather, they serve to reveal
Callicles’ failure to provide an adequate definition of “superior,” which is a key term in his account of justice. Moreover, with these arguments Socrates as it were throws Callicles to the floor two times in quick succession. The expert orator should have detected the trajectory of Socrates’ line of questioning and defended against it. But he did not; he did not because he could not. In this way Socrates notifies the audience that he can dominate Callicles just as he dominated Gorgias and Polus. He will go beyond this, of course; he will develop more sophisticated and legitimate arguments. But he begins by letting everyone know who the real champion is here.

The second point about the dialogues’ weak arguments is two-fold. First, the arguments may not in fact be weak. One must never judge an argument after a first reading. Socrates is not averse to presenting an argument under a thin veil of disguise if doing so serves a tactical-rhetorical purpose. He may arrange the premises in a surprising order; he may employ as a premise a proposition that appears at first to be immaterial; he may incorporate into the argument an inference from a previously accepted proposition without making his reasoning explicit. One must not evaluate the arguments before rereading them closely, sorting out and clarifying their premises, and studying them with attention to nuance and detail.

Now for the second half of this second point: Suppose we have carefully evaluated one of Socrates’ arguments and still find it wanting. Are we finished; may we now reject the argument and everything that depends upon it? Not so fast. Recall Socrates’ argument that if Gorgias teaches his students justice, they will never be unjust. This is another line of reasoning that readers often find specious. But this is not all Socrates has to say on the subject. His point here is related to his famous—or infamous—
claim that he who knows the good will do the good. Socrates constructs other and more fully developed arguments for this point elsewhere in the dialogues. In the _Gorgias_ he relies upon an argument sufficient to deal with a specific interlocutor. If, in another dialogue, he faces a more clever or more thoughtful man, he will employ a correspondingly sophisticated argument. The _Gorgias_, in fact, is remarkable in this regard, for it functions almost as three separate dialogues. Within this one work Socrates’ confronts three different opponents, each one more formidable than the last. To meet this challenge he must constantly improve his arguments. Polus identifies the very weaknesses in Socrates’ arguments as well as in Gorgias’ responses that we readers detect. Precisely where Gorgias landed in the soup with a “Yes, Socrates,” Polus stands firm with a “No, Socrates.” This compels Socrates to develop the argument in more detail, to argue explicitly for its hidden premises. With this more powerful version of the argument he is able to surmount Polus’ objections. But then he confronts a still mightier opponent: Callicles rejects the very points to which Polus too readily assented. And so Socrates must improve his argument yet again. This process enables Plato to develop an argument at higher and higher levels of sophistication, or to reverse the metaphor, it provides him the opportunity to reveal to his readers the argument’s hidden depths. Plato seems always to have kept something in reserve, disclosing only so much as the situation calls for. Sometimes less, sometimes more. On occasion he reveals very much indeed. Yet one suspects that he never divulged the full extent of his treasure.

So far we have written at length about Socrates and Gorgias, a little about Socrates and Polus, and next to nothing about the main event, Socrates’ bout with Callicles. This exactly reverses the amount of space devoted to these episodes in the
dialogue. We justify this by noting that the present essay is intended not as an argument-by-argument analysis or commentary, but rather as a summation of what we take to be one of the dialogue’s most important lessons. Socrates’ discussion with Callicles is brilliant and exciting, exasperating and challenging; one should read and reread it, arguing the while with both men, arguing as well with oneself. The specific arguments are fascinating, and their conclusions are spectacularly illuminating; the chains of reasoning provide material for rowdy debate and silent contemplation alike. The dramatic elements are noteworthy as well (note, in particular, Callicles’ conduct). Yet these many dialectical and dramatic details are not so many random and dangling loose ends; they serve a larger purpose. And this larger purpose, the dialogue’s higher end, is implicitly present in its beginning. The development that culminates in Socrates’ encounter with Callicles produces nothing entirely new; rather it gradually reveals the full significance of what he has already said to Gorgias.

During his conversation with Gorgias Socrates remarks, “I think nothing is so bad (κακὸν) for a man as having a false opinion about the things we are now discussing” (458a8-b1). Really? Nothing so bad as misunderstanding the nature of oratory? What a thing to say! Socrates’ statement must remain either mysterious or outrageous so long as one assumes that oratory is in fact the subject of this dialogue. It is not, and Socrates’ remark is the first overt indication that something more is at stake. Not merely something more: something much more, for it involves what is best or worst for us as humans. What can this be? Socrates is more explicit when arguing with Polus about the merits of the life of a tyrant. “The main point of these [matters in contention between us] is knowing or not knowing who is happy (εὐδαιμον) and who is not” (472c8-d1). Now this makes more
sense of Socrates’ earlier assertion. If we consider that “eudaimonia” is best translated as “the good life,” then we shall see that it is not at all outrageous to claim that a false opinion about eudaimonia is a terrible thing. Eudaimonia is that for the sake of which we do all that we do. We all want a good life. If we misidentify our ultimate end, we shall direct our actions toward the wrong goal, which goal will by definition be inferior. We shall think we are progressing toward the good life when in fact we are moving in some other direction toward a life less than good. We must, therefore, strive to identify our goal—our telos—correctly, for otherwise we will not attain it except intermittently and by chance. How, then, may we arrive at our goal, actualize our telos; how does one live the good life? Yes: this is the question, as Socrates makes clear when disputing Callicles’ equation of eudaimonia with the life of self-indulgence. “You see,” he says, “that our discourse is about this…namely, in what manner we must live—whether in the manner you advocate for me, conducting the business of a “man,” speaking to the assembled masses, practicing rhetoric, and engaging in politics in the way you orators do; or in the manner I advocate, according to the life of philosophy” (500c1-8). So this was Socrates’ point all along; this is what lay behind his surprising statement to Gorgias. This dialogue is not about oratory per se. It is the expression of an agôn between rival conceptions of the good life: the life of oratory—a life, that is, of bodily pleasures and worldly power, which in the end are mere ephemeral appearances, versus the philosophical life—a life based upon knowledge of reality and love of the good, which ultimately are manifestations of eternal and actual Being.

In summary, then, let us say this: the Gorgias depicts an agôn, a competition between rival conceptions of the good life. Or we might stress the competitors
themselves, in which case we should say that the struggle is not between concepts but among men. In this way we stress the point that although these men are debating ideas, the ideas are meant to be embodied and actualized in living beings. The dispute does not concern a mere concept: “the good life,” but an existential reality: the good life. The contestants, then, are men. In a way this makes the proceedings radically unfair, for Socrates stands alone against three combatants, one of whom is the greatest orator of his day. Yet this quantitative disparity is counterbalanced by an opposing qualitative inequality. The single philosopher, though inferior in body to his three antagonists, is far and away their superior in soul. His superiority is so great, in fact, that it compensates for his material shortcomings. Three against one—yet in the end the one stands alone, victorious.

Near the end of the dialogue Socrates admits that he cannot claim to know for certain the truth of the position he has maintained throughout the proceedings. Yet he does claim to know this: in all his years of dialectical disputation no one has refuted his conception of the good life. To the contrary, all those who have advocated rival conceptions have proven unable to defend them (508e-509a). Thus Socrates and his opponents. But what about the third party? We must not forget, here at the conclusion of these reflections, the audience. There they sit, these young men whose lives are still ahead of them. Socrates has fought mightily for them—“for them,” which is to say on their behalf. The orators have fought for them too—but in their case “for them” means “over them.” They have fought over these young men in order to acquire them; they have fought, in short, on their own behalf. When these orators are victorious they collect their fees and embellish their bodies with gaudy refinements. Socrates in victory remains
barefoot and poor. His reward is shared among those in the audience with ears to hear, and it flows from a purse that cannot be exhausted. To say it again: Socrates fights to save the souls of Athens’ youth. As for Gorgias and his crew, their souls are already lost.