SOCRATES AND CHAEREPHON ARRIVE:

447a-c: Socrates and Gorgias:
Gorgias, who has been boasting that he is capable of answering any question put to him,\(^1\) agrees to engage in a discussion (διαλεξεῖναι).

447c-449a: Chaerephon and Polus:
Who is Gorgias? Polus’ unhelpful rhetorical display.

SOCRATES AND GORGIAS:

449a-461b: Definition of rhetoric:
a) Rhetoric is concerned with speeches (449c-e);
b) Speeches of persuasion, such as those spoken in the assembly and the law courts (449e-453a);
c) Persuasive speeches concerning matters of justice and injustice (453a-454b);
d) Persuasion that is based not upon knowledge but upon belief without knowledge (πίστιν...ἀνευ τοῦ ἐιδέναι) (454b-455a).\(^2\)

455a-456c: The scope and power of rhetoric:
Gorgias reveals the awesome power of rhetoric (to which he had previously alluded at 452e).

456c-457c: The unjust rhetorician:
The teacher of oratory should not be blamed if a student uses his oratorical skills unjustly.

457c-458e: On method:
There is nothing worse than to be mistaken about the subject they are presently discussing.\(^3\)
Socrates and Gorgias agree that it is good to have one’s false beliefs refuted.

458e-461b: Socrates exposes Gorgias’ inconsistency:
Gorgias will teach his students justice if they are not already just.
If someone learns justice, he is just.
A just man does just things.
A man who has been taught justice is just.
Therefore, Gorgias’ students will not do what is unjust.
Gorgias’ earlier plea that teachers of rhetoric not be blamed for the unjust acts of their students is incompatible with the present conclusion that his students will not act unjustly.

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\(^1\) See also 458d-e.

\(^2\) Socrates prefaces this final inquiry with an assurance that he is not attacking Gorgias but only trying to ensure that everything is clear (454b-c; compare 453c). This is significant because the point raised in this section, namely that rhetoric is based not upon knowledge but belief, will be an important part of Socrates’ critique of rhetoric. Socrates will similarly assure Gorgias of his intentions before he refutes him at 457c-d.

\(^3\) This would be an extraordinary claim if their conversation were really only about the proper definition of rhetoric. This is the first intimation of the fact, which becomes clearer as the dialogue progresses, that the real question at issue is how one should live one’s life (see also 472c-d and 500c-d).
SOCRATES AND POLUS:

Preliminaries:
Socrates shamed Gorgias into contradicting himself.

Craft v. knack:
Rhetoric is not a craft (τέχνη); it is a knack (ἐμπειρία) for producing pleasure.
A craft is based upon knowledge, aims at the good, and is admirable; it produces real states of health in both body and soul.
A knack is based upon opinion, aims at the pleasant, and is shameful; it produces merely the appearance of health and fitness.
In short, rhetoric is a sort of fawning and flattery (κολακευτική; κολακεία).

Polus on the power of rhetoricians:
Rhetoricians a) have the greatest power in their cities, for b) like tyrants they do whatever they want and whatever seems good to them to do.

Socrates’ first objection: rhetoricians lack power (against a):
To have power is something good.
Rhetoricians do whatever seems best to them to do (ποιεῖν ὁτι ἄν αὕτοῖς δόξη).
It is not good for one who lacks intelligence (ὡς) to do what to him seems best (for his ignorance may cause him to mistake the bad for the good).
Rhetoricians lack intelligence.
Therefore when rhetoricians do what seems good to them, they do what is bad.
But power is good.
Therefore, rhetoricians lack power.

Socrates’ second objection: rhetoricians do not do what they want (against b):
If someone acts toward some end, what he wants is not the act itself but the end.
Everything is either good, bad, or sometimes good, sometimes bad, and sometimes neither.
We perform those actions that are bad or neutral for the sake of the good.
Therefore, what we want is the good.
If a rhetorician acts in such as way as seems best to him, but which really is bad for him (which will happen given his lack of knowledge), then he is not doing what he wants.

Socrates’ conclusion:
Therefore, it is possible for a man who does whatever seems good to him neither to have power nor to do what he wants.

Disagreement concerning a) doing versus suffering injustice and b) the value of punishment:
Socrates: doing what is unjust is the worst of all things (μέγιστον τῶν λακὼν κακῶν).
Polus: suffering injustice is the worst; the only problem with committing injustice is that the unjust man might be punished (ζημιουσθα). Archelaus, tyrant of Macedonia, acts unjustly and is happy (ευδαιμων). Socrates: happiness is determined by education and justice; the noble and good man (ὁ καλος καγαθος) is happy; the unjust and wicked man is wretched (ἀδικου και πονηρου...ἀθλιου).

471a-472c: **Polus’ sophistical refutation of Socrates’ claim that the unjust man cannot be happy:**
Polus: Archelaus ascended to the throne unjustly but he considers himself happy, as do many others.
Socrates: a mere tallying of opinions is not evidence of truth.

472d-473d: **Polus’ sophistical refutation of Socrates’ claim that the unjust man who goes unpunished is wretched:**
Socrates: the unjust who are punished are less wretched than those who escape punishment.
Polus: punishment is painful.
Socrates: this is telling scary stories, not a refutation.

473d-474b: **Polus’ sophistical refutation of Socrates’ claim that neither the unjust tyrant nor the unjust and punished tyrant is happy:**
Socrates: the unjust tyrant is wretched, though a tyrant who is punished for his injustice is less wretched than one who avoids punishment.
Polus: laughs.

474b-476a: **Socrates’ argument that to do is worse than to suffer injustice:**
It is more shameful (ἀφοσιον) to commit than to suffer injustice. One thing is more shameful than another because it surpasses it in pain or badness (κακου) or both. Doing injustice is not more painful than suffering injustice. Nor, therefore, is it both more painful and worse. The only remaining option is that doing injustice surpasses suffering injustice in badness.
Therefore, doing injustice is worse than suffering injustice.

476a-478d: **Socrates’ argument that discipline is good for the soul.**
Being justly disciplined (το κολαζεσθαι δικαιως) and submitting to justice (το διδοναι δικην) are the same. All just things, insofar as they are just, are admirable. He who is justly disciplined has admirable things done to him. Admirable things are good.
Therefore, he who is justly disciplined has good things done to him.

477a-e: He who is justly disciplined is benefited in that his soul is improved by the excision of badness. Corruption of the soul (injustice, lack of discipline—ἡ ἀκολασια) is the worst and most shameful sort of corruption.

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4 In this section Socrates addresses his disagreement with Polus over the value of punishment (469c-470a). At this point, however, he employs the nomenclature of discipline (ἡ κολασια) rather than of punishment (ἡ τιμωρια). This sets up his later dispute with Callicles over the merits of self-indulgence (ἡ ἀκολασια).
478a-d: Justice administered by judges through the correct application of discipline cures one’s soul of injustice. It is good to have badness in one’s soul removed (i.e., to submit to justice), and better still never to be so corrupted.

478d-479e: **Consequences of the above arguments: justice, discipline, and happiness:**
Therefore, happiest (ἐυδαιμονέστατος) is the man who has no badness in his soul.
Second is the man who gets rid of it through submitting to justice.
He who retains badness in his soul has the worst life.
This is the man who is most unjust and who is able to avoid punishment.

480a-481b: **Socrates on the uses of rhetoric:**
If rhetoric enables one to commit injustice with impunity, then rhetoric is useless or harmful.
One should use rhetoric to secure punishment for one’s unjust friends and freedom for one’s unjust enemies.

481b-522e: **SOCRATES AND CALLICLES:**
481b-482c: Callicles is incredulous.
482c-484c: **Nature (φύσις) versus custom/law (νόμος):**
Socrates defeated Gorgias and Polus because they were ashamed to express their true thoughts, namely that a life of injustice is superior to a life of justice.
The truth according to nature: the better man should have a greater share than the lesser man.
The customary belief that the just life is superior to the unjust life is a lie spread by the weak in violation of the laws of nature.

484c-485e: **Critique of philosophy.**
Philosophy impedes a man’s development of the skills required for success in public and private life.

485e-486d: **Socrates on trial.**
Socrates is so inexperienced in public activities that if an enemy should drag him into court and charge him with crimes of which he is innocent, he would be unable to defend himself.

486d-488b: **Callicles as interlocutor:**
Callicles has the three qualities that make for an ideal interlocutor: knowledge, goodwill, and frankness (ἐπιστήμην τε καὶ εὐθυμίαν καὶ παρρησίαν).

488b-490e: **Two quick refutations of Callicles’ position.**
488b-489b: **a) Superior = stronger:**
When Callicles says that the superior should rule the inferior he means that the strong should rule the weak.
Superior = stronger = better.
The many are stronger than those upon whom they impose the laws.
Thus the laws of the many are the laws of the superior and the better.
Therefore, the laws of the many are admirable by nature.
But it is a law of the many that it is wrong to take more than one’s share, and that to do what is unjust is more shameful than to suffer it. Therefore, Callicles’ previous distinction between nature and custom/law is illegitimate—according to his own agreements, the two coincide.

489b-490e: b) Superior = more intelligent:
The more intelligent man (φρονιμότερος) should rule over and have a greater share than the many less intelligent men. But this leads to ridiculous results, such as that the weaver should wear the most and the most beautiful garments, and the cobbler should wear the largest and greatest number of shoes.

490e-491d: Callicles clarifies his position:
By the superior Callicles means men who can intelligently manage the affairs of the city and who are courageous and able to enact their intentions without succumbing to softness of soul (μαλακία τῆς ψυχῆς). These men should rule and have a greater share than those who are ruled.

491d-509c: SELF-DISCIPLINE, PLEASURE, AND HAPPINESS.5

491d-492e: Callicles declares that self-indulgence produces happiness:
Superior men must not practice moderation and self-discipline (σωφροσύνη and ἔγκρατεια). The life of wantonness (τρυφη), self-indulgence (ἀκολοχία), and freedom (ἐλευθερία) is virtue (ἀρετή) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία).

492e-494b: Socrates’ two images of the soul:
Callicles’ ideal man is like an uninitiated soul wondering unhappily through the underworld.

494b-495a: Socrates’ reductio ad absurdum:
According to Callicles’ standards the happy life would be the life of scratching itches or the life of a passive homosexual. These are the results if one reduces happiness to the enjoyment of pleasure and refuses to discriminate between good and bad pleasures.

495a-c: Callicles declares the identity of the pleasant and the good:
Callicles insists that the pleasant and the good are identical.6

495c-497d: Socrates’ first argument against the identity of the pleasant and the good:

5 In this, the longest continuous section of the dialogue, Socrates develops an argument to counter Callicles’ position that radical self-indulgence produces happiness. Socrates’ refutation depends upon the premise that pleasure and the good are not identical. Thus, before he can make the case for the life of self-mastery, he must prove that the good and the pleasant are different, which he attempts to do from 495a-499b.

6 In the first explicit indication that Callicles is not the ideal interlocutor after all, he seems to have formulated his answer not according to his actual belief, but so as to guard against contradicting his earlier assertions. Later [at 499b], when Socrates concludes his argument against the identity of the pleasant and the good, Callicles responds that no one would ever deny that some pleasures are better than others. This directly contradicts his position here at 495a. So, Callicles is being uncooperative, disingenuous, or dishonest either here or at 499b. However we characterize his behavior, and whichever of the two responses we label misleading, the point is the same: Callicles is trying to avoid refutation rather than seeking the truth.
Neither the good nor the bad is acquired or gotten rid of simultaneously. Both the pleasant and the painful are acquired and gotten rid of simultaneously. Therefore, the good and bad are not identical to pleasure and pain.

497d-499b: **Socrates’ second argument against the identity of the pleasant and the good:**
Whoever feels pleasure is good and whoever feels pain is bad; and the more pleasure or pain one feels the better or worse one is. But foolish and cowardly men feel pleasure to the same degree as or more than intelligent and brave men. Therefore, foolish and cowardly men are as good as or better than intelligent and brave men. But Callicles previously called foolish and cowardly men bad and intelligent and brave men good. Therefore, Callicles’ agreements commit him to the inconsistent position that bad men are as good as or better than good men, and good men are no better than or worse than bad men.

499b-d: **Callicles denies the identity of the pleasant and the good:**
Some pleasures are good and some are bad.

499d-500a: **Good and bad pleasures:**
Good pleasures are beneficial (ἄγαθα...ἀί ωφέλιμοι). Bad pleasures are harmful (κακα...αί βλαβεραί). Similarly, some pains are good and some are bad. Therefore, we should strive for the good pleasures and pains and avoid the bad ones. Only a man with craft (Τεχνικός) can distinguish good from bad pleasures.

500a-503a: **Craft v. knack:**
The real subject of the discussion is the sort of life one should live.

500e-501c: **A craft investigates the nature of its objects and the causes of their activities, and it is able to provide an account (λόγος) of each of these. A knack knows nothing of the nature or causes of the pleasures it attempts to secure; it proceeds irrationally (ἀλογώς), and through routine and experience retains a memory of the usual outcome of its procedures.**

501d-503a: **The rhetorician is not concerned with the good of the citizens he addresses; his business is to gratify their desires for the sake of his own private advantage.**

503a-d: **Two types of rhetoric:**
Rhetoric may be divided into two types, namely that which is directed to the common good and is admirable, and that which is merely shameful flattery. Dispute over which type of rhetoric was practiced by men such as Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles.

503d-505c: **Order, discipline, and happiness:**

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7 This is the point that Socrates required as a premise for his argument against Callicles’ claim that a life of self-indulgence produces happiness. To this argument he now returns.
An organized soul is a good soul.
Ordered and organized souls are called lawful (νόμιμοι) and orderly (κόσμιοι).
Lawful and orderly souls are produced by justice and moderation.
The good rhetorician must produce justice and moderation in the souls of
his audience, and eliminate injustice and self-indulgence (ἀκολασία).
It is harmful for a corrupt soul to indulge its appetites.
To prevent a soul from satisfying its appetites is to discipline it
(κολαζείν).
Therefore, discipline is better for a soul than self-indulgence.
505c-508a: Socrates’ recapitulation of the argument:
505c-506c: Callicles drops out of the conversation.
Socrates does not know the truth of these matters (οὐδὲ... ἔγωγε ἐνδόξος
λέγον ἐλέγω), but in sum:
506c-508a: The pleasant and the good differ.
The pleasant must be done for the sake of the good, not vice versa.
We are good when some excellence (ἀρετή) is present in us.
Excellence comes to be in a soul through order, correctness, and craft.
Therefore, a good soul (ἀγαθή) is a soul which has its own proper order.
A soul so ordered is a temperate (σωφρων) soul.
Therefore, a temperate soul is a good soul.
A foolish (ἄφρων) and self-indulgent (ἀκόλαστος) soul is bad (κακή).
The good man is just, pious, and brave.
The bad man is unjust, impious, and cowardly.
Therefore, the temperate man is completely good, he does what he does
well and nobly, and he is blessed and happy.
The self-indulgent man does badly and is wretched.
Therefore, happiness requires temperance.
The self-indulgent man, to be happy, must be disciplined.8
508a-509c: Consequences and reflections:
508a-c: Therefore, (a) a man should accuse himself, his family, or his friends if he
or they have done anything unjust; (b) the unjust life is both more
shameful and worse than the just life; (c) the man who would be a proper
rhetorician should be just and have knowledge of justice.
508c-509c: Socrates’ positions appear to be bound by arguments of iron and adamant.
509c-522e: JUSTICE, POLITICS, AND HAPPINESS:
509c-511a: To avoid suffering injustice:
To avoid suffering injustice one must be a ruler oneself, or an associate of
the ruler.
To be a friend of the ruler one must have a character similar to that of the
ruler.

8 This concludes the refutation, begun at 491d, of Callicles’ claim that the life of self-indulgence produces happiness.
If the ruler is an unjust tyrant, then to be his friend one must be unjust oneself.
Therefore, by ensuring that one does not suffer injustice one ensures that one commits injustice, which is the worst of all things.

511a-513a: **Living well:**
A talent (like rhetoric) for preserving the lives of unjust men is not admirable.
One should strive not just to live, but to live as well as possible (ὡς ἀριστα). 

513a-521a: **Athenian political life:**
The noble politician must improve his fellow citizens.
Under Pericles’ leadership the people became rebellious, unruly, and wild.
Since, as Homer says, the gentle are just, the people must have become unjust as well.
Therefore, Pericles could not have been a good politician—for under his influence the citizens became unjust and bad.

517c-519b: Pericles, Themistocles, et al. enriched Athens with material possessions; but as a result the citizens lost all sense of justice and self-discipline.

519b-521a: Politicians who claim to improve the citizens but then complain that these same citizens treat them unjustly are foolish—if they had really improved the citizens, the citizens would not be unjust.
Similarly, sophists claim to be teachers of excellence (ἀρετή) but often accuse their students of treating them unjustly. But had they really improved their students, these same students would never be unjust to anyone. 

521a:-522e: **The life one should strive for:**
Socrates claims to be the only true politician in Athens, for he is the only man who refuses to gratify the citizens’ appetites for pleasures and instead strives to improve them.
He may not be able to protect himself from suffering injustice, but he can provide the protection that the argument has consistently proven to be most admirable, namely protection against being unjust.
One should beware of being unjust even more than one should fear death. For of all bad things, the worst is to arrive in Hades with an unjust soul.

523a-527a: **THE UNDERWORLD:**
Socrates’ account (λόγος)—not a myth (μύθος)—of the underworld, which he tells as true (ὥς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέει).
Souls are judged with no consideration of their worldly influence and prosperity; the only criterion relevant to the evaluation is justice.
Punishment (τίμωρία) is inflicted on souls who can benefit from it, or as an example to others.

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9 This point recalls Socrates’ exchange with Gorgias at the start of the dialogue.
10 Socrates later says that he believes these things to be true (πιστεῦω ἀληθῆ ἐνναί, 524a-b1) and that he has been persuaded by these accounts (ὑπὸ τούτων τῶν λόγων, 526d3-4).
Socrates may not be able to defend himself in a trial before an Athenian jury. But Callicles, if he continues to live in admiration and pursuit of injustice, will be unable to defend himself before the jury in Hades: he will be condemned in the most important trial of all.

527a-e: **FINAL SUMMATION:**

527a-c: Neither Gorgias, Polus, nor Callicles—the wisest of the contemporary Greeks (σοφώτατοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων)—has been able to refute Socrates’ arguments for the following conclusions: (a) doing injustice is worse than suffering it; (b) being good is more important than seeming good; (c) the best life is the just life, and the unjust man should submit to justice and discipline; (d) in all activities, rhetoric included, one must look to the good rather than the pleasant.

527c-e: We should practice justice in life as well as in death.