Plato, *Gorgias*

PHIL 102, Summer 2015

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Main topics in *Gorgias*

1. What is rhetoric and what might it be good for?
   - How does it differ from philosophy?

2. What is the best kind of life/how should we live?
   - Is it better to keep our desires under control, living moderately, or let them grow strong and fulfill them as much as we can?

3. Which is better, rhetoric or philosophy?
   - Socrates speaks of philosophy as the “true rhetoric” (see below)

What is rhetoric, in this text?

- Making long speeches (3) for purpose of persuasion (6)
- Gorgias: “use speeches to persuade “the judges in a court, or the senators in the council, or the citizens in the assembly, or at any other political meeting” (6).

Who would be modern day rhetoricians?
Polus and Gorgias can’t explain rhetoric well

They are good at praising it as something great, not explaining what it is (that’s what rhetoricians do)

- Polus bottom of p. 2
- Gorgias p. 5, 6

Notice how rhetoric is linked to battles & winning

- p. 1: a fray and a feast
- rhetoric & fighting (10)
- discussions & quarrels (10)
- Socrates not trying to “confute” Gorgias (7-8)
- Callicles accuses Socrates of trying to ”win” in the argument they’re having (not in our selection)

How does Socrates differentiate what he does from rhetoric?

Q&A, rather than making speeches (3)

This method is “most likely to set forth the truth” (6)—why/how? (not in our selection)
- Come up with a claim/argument
- Try to refute it as much as you can, in dialogue
- If it’s not refuted, take it as provisionally true until/unless is refuted (not certain)

Need other person to:
- Say what they really believe (8, 27)
- Be willing to refute the other and be refuted (10)

Gorgias on rhetoric

“the art of persuasion in courts of law and other assemblies, ... about the just and unjust” (7)

Two types of persuasion:

“belief-persuasion” and “knowledge-persuasion” (my terms) (8)

“the rhetorician need not know the truth about things; he has only to discover some way of persuading the ignorant that he has more knowledge than those who know” (12)
Gorgias contradicts himself

Socrates notes on p. 13 (second to last paragraph) that Gorgias has fallen into an "inconsistency".

Groups: Outline the argument for this, with the following as the first premise:

1. Rhetoricians should use their skills justly, not make a "bad use" of them; and if they do use them badly/unjustly, blame them rather than their teachers (10)

Then find the other premises starting on p. 12 …

http://is.gd/PHIL102Plato2

Socrates on rhetoric (with Polus)

- Rhetoric is a part of flattery, which is not an "art" but an "experience" aimed at producing pleasure rather than what is what is good (14-16)

- Difference between an "art" and an "experience"

- Rhetoric is "the ghost or counterfeit of a part of politics" (16)

Rhetoric & flattery: counterfeits (16-17)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soul</th>
<th>Body</th>
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<tr>
<td>arts</td>
<td>flattery</td>
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<td>legislation</td>
<td>sophistry</td>
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<td>justice</td>
<td>rhetoric</td>
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Callicles: How ought we to live?

- Callicles: philosophers live badly (19-20)

  - Don’t know how to deal with others in politics or business

  - Socrates wouldn’t be able to defend self in a court even if accused wrongly

- Callicles' view of how we should live

  - Be involved in politics or business, be able to defend your goods and reputation

  - Socrates' explanation of this: “speaking in the assembly, and cultivating rhetoric, and engaging in public affairs” (31)

  - (below) Have strong desires and the means to fulfill them
Callicles’ view of justice

- **Justice**: includes what is morally right, how we should live as individuals and how we should organize societies and states
- **Natural justice vs conventional justice**, acc. to Callicles (18)
- What is wrong with Callicles’ view of the “superior” being the “stronger”?
  - Outline (on your own) the argument pp. 21-22
  - Premise 1: C believes that natural justice is not equality

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Callicles on pleasure and the good

Implied in Callicles’ view of happiness: **pleasure** and what is **good** are the same
- Nothing is good except pleasure
- All pleasures are good; there are no bad pleasures

Note: if this is true, then **Socrates is wrong** to say rhetoric only aims at pleasure, not what’s really good

Socrates’ **criticism** of this: pp. 27-30

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Which is better, rhetoric or philosophy?

**Callicles agrees that**:
1. Only some pleasures are good/beneficial; we should only fulfill those pleasures (30)
2. It takes an “art” or knowledge to know which pleasures are good (31)
3. There are two kinds of rhetoric: flattery and the “true rhetoric” (33-35)
   - Only the latter has the knowledge for (2)

**Socrates**:
- true rhetorician will try to improve the souls of citizens, make them as good as possible (33, 35)
- Claims (not in our selection) that he does this; this seems to be philosophy

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Callicles on the happy life

Callicles: the **happy life** is having desires grow strong and then having the means to fulfill them (24)

Socrates: this is like having a vessel full of holes (25)

Poll on LC about this…
Socrates’ view of the best life

From this and pp. 35-36, what does Socrates seem to think is the best way to live, as opposed to what Callicles thinks?

Introduction to Epicurus

Socrates: 469-399 BCE
Plato: 427-348 BCE
Epicurus: 341-271, BCE (also lived in Greece)
Texts you’re reading for Thursday

• “Letter to Menoeceus”: a letter by Epicurus to someone named Menoeceus, telling him how to live a good life

• “Principal Doctrines”: a list of short sayings by Epicurus, designed to be easily remembered and put into practice