

Gorgias Study Guide

Gorgias by Plato

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Contents

Gorgias Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter I (447-457).....	4
Chapter II (458-469).....	6
Chapter III (470-479).....	8
Chapter IV (480-491).....	10
Chapter V (492-502).....	12
Chapter VI (503-514).....	14
Chapter VII (515-527).....	16
Characters.....	18
Objects/Places.....	24
Themes.....	26
Style.....	29
Quotes.....	32
Topics for Discussion.....	33



Plot Summary

When Socrates endeavors to question Gorgias about rhetoric, their discussion turns into an exposition of arguments between Socrates, Gorgias, and Polus. While defining rhetoric, Socrates provokes discussion as to the nature, influence, and practice of rhetoric. In the debate various moral, philosophical, and spiritual issues are raised.

When Gorgias is unable to define rhetoric and contradicts himself, his disciple Polus defends him. Socrates delves into the difference between the concept and form that for him is more flattery and sham. Just as cookery elicits pleasure, rhetoric evokes gratification. Both involve skill rather than art.

The argument advances as Gorgias and Polus find rhetoric to be a powerful tool that Socrates ridicules due to their inability to show why rhetoric teaches everything although knows nothing. Through a series of paradoxes, Socrates proves that rhetoric has no power at all, while raising issues of justice, morality, and philosophy.

The final part of the argument that deals mostly with the relation of power to justice is driven through the dialogue between Socrates and Calicles. For Calicles, pleasure should be pursued, while power is the consequence of strength and natural order. Those who are strong should govern those who are weak, and the law is part of conventions designed by the weak to defend the weak.

Socrates views power as a tool of self-control and the ability to choose between what is right or wrong rather than as a control others, proving that those who derive evil from power are wretched and must necessarily be unhappy. His definition of happiness involves pursuing virtue and honor.

For Socrates, it is most important to preserve his soul in the healthiest condition when the final judgment occurs. As the final judgment exonerate no flattering appearance or pretense, only bare truth matters.

Socrates is critical of rhetoricians and Sophists, who are little concerned about the effects of their influence as long as it benefits them. When his opponents are at a loss to answer any more questions, he makes the final speech.

In his view, doing wrong is worse than suffering, while justice is beneficial to those who wrong and need to be corrected. Flattery should be avoided and pleasure, just as all other actions, should achieve good. As only justice can assure healthy soul, justice is of utmost importance and needs to be pursued.



Chapter I (447-457)

Chapter I (447-457) Summary and Analysis

When Socrates endeavors to question Gorgias about rhetoric, their discussion turns into an exposition of arguments between Socrates, Gorgias, and Polus. While defining rhetoric, Socrates provokes discussion as to the nature, influence, and practice of rhetoric. In the debate various moral, philosophical, and spiritual issues are raised.

Callicles, Socrates, and Chaerephon arrive at Callicles' house, where Socrates wants to listen to Gorgias declaim. He wants to learn the art of rhetoric from Gorgias. Questioning Gorgias is to unveil his conversation skills and show his conversational abilities. When asking a single question, Gorgias is to meet the challenge of responding to anything that is asked. Chaerephon also propels Polus to present his conversational skills. As mastering a skill involves professional description, they try to define the way skills are mastered, which involves gaining experience. Lack of experience reduces such ability to chance.

Socrates shows that mastering rhetoric involves the ability to converse in such a way that it delivers responses precisely rather than delightfully. He wants Gorgias to present the way such responses should be given and define the art of rhetoric. Gorgias regards rhetoric as an art that deals with words. Such words are to produce the ability to speak and to comprehend, but not to impart knowledge as there are no manual labor and activities involved. Activity and effectiveness is achieved through words; hence, the art of rhetoric does incorporate words but action is equally important. Other sciences also involve language although they deal with various other areas, such as numbers, calculations, or movements of stars as part of astronomy. Rhetoric is one of the arts that is based on language, where achievements are effected through language. Socrates intends to analyze the sciences in terms of their benefits to humans. According to Gorgias, health, wealth, and beauty are most important, but through rhetoric it is possible to persuade authorities, such as judges, senators, and assemblymen. In this way, rhetoric has the power to engage other sciences and gain benefits through the power of persuasion. Although other arts also involve persuasion, rhetoric deals with persuasion in law courts and public meetings in public matters.

Socrates and Gorgias analyze the meaning of belief and knowledge. There can be a false and true belief, but there cannot be false and true knowledge. Learning involves persuasion in a similar way that belief is acquired, although belief can be imparted without certainty. Gorgias concludes that rhetoric involves only belief without instruction. There is no teaching as part of persuading, only changing opinions.

Socrates delves further in the matter of rhetoric, attempting to identify its meaning. In response, Gorgias reveals the entire power of rhetoric as generating opinions through orators that advise and whose opinions become accepted. Its power influences all other areas because rhetoric can allow doctors to persuade their patients to take medicines.



Rhetoric enables one to be elected over the other and against any opposition. The ability to speak in a crowd on any subject is only available to the rhetorician. Gorgias indicates, however, that such power should be used in an ethical way and not for evil purposes.

Socrates is interested in the subject of rhetoric, the way it is enacted, and how it achieves its objectives. Through a conversation in form of questions and answers, he attempts to gain insight into rhetoric and its meaning. Questions presented are to be full of meaning themselves, with evidence and proof to support them. Socrates regards Gorgias's remarks as useful because of their precision, and more to the point than Polus's responses, which are long speeches.

The art of rhetoric is presented through questioning Gorgias, who imparts his knowledge of it. According to Polus, art is necessarily involved with experience, while Gorgias regards rhetoric as powerful due to its persuasion abilities enacted through words. It is the basis for all other sciences and arts that all involve language and words. The knowledge in other arts involves labor and activities. Rhetoric achieves its objectives through speech. Linguistic abilities are crucial in rhetoric, which is the expression of human concerns. Socrates questions the way sciences are categorized and rated. Their classification can be subjective, as many professions deliver the necessary benefits and also it may be difficult to assess what is most beneficial.

According to Gorgias, the ability to persuade is the greatest good as it changes opinions and can shape matters in the public interest. Although other areas also involve persuasion, they require other means such as instruction or knowledge. Such knowledge differs from imparting belief, which is the sole purpose of rhetoric that deals with matters in public interest.

The benefit of rhetoric is to gain power, and it is the orators that effect power through providing advice in important matters and who are able to express winning opinions. Gorgias regards opinion as most important as it can decide the course of events and the type of policies that may be elected. The superiority of rhetoric involves its dealing with all other branches and sciences. Other sciences can use rhetoric to achieve effectiveness in the same way that doctors need rhetoric to persuade their patients to take their medicines.

Gorgias has gained such power as he was able to persuade his brother's patients to take their medicines or even undergo an operation. His abilities are such that he could even persuade to be better even as a physician. In fact, any opposition, if it has no knowledge of rhetoric, would lose against those who have rhetorical abilities. Every proficiency requires that it is used in such a way that it is not harming. In the same way that physical abilities give strength, they shouldn't be then used to kill. Any art shouldn't be misused in any way and if it is, teachers are not held responsible for only those who commit such deed.



Chapter II (458-469)

Chapter II (458-469) Summary and Analysis

The rhetorician has the ability to talk on any subject, and Socrates indicates that when personal emotions interfere with judgment there is lack of consistency. He has no intention to discredit Gorgias when doubting his arguments. As he is happy if others to correct him, he may improve.

Chaerephon, Callicles, and Socrates encourage Gorgias to continue his responses even if they are agreeable with the arguments. Socrates is concerned with the ethics of rhetoric that can be superior to other sciences due to its ability to persuade. As through rhetoric one may appear more knowledgeable than others, it can become a dangerous tool. Learning rhetoric involves learning about justice as well as acquiring knowledge. Such knowledge also determines the type of person one becomes. A rhetorician necessarily needs to act justly when learning about justice.

Socrates denies any responses that come from Polus that may be too long or not on the subject, and he allows him to ask questions instead. Polus is trying to elicit answers from Socrates about rhetoric. Socrates regards rhetoric not as art but more as a skill that elicits gratification and pleasure. It is different from other skills that may be dealing with delivering gratification and pleasure in a clever way, where flattery seems to be the main point while being concerned with the political area.

Socrates regards politics as presiding over the soul, while gymnastics and medicine deals with the body. Legislation is part of politics and justice is in opposition to medicine. Medicine has various things in common with gymnastics in the same way that justice has with legislation. Socrates has a low regard for Sophists, considering rhetoric as being little concerned with justice. He views rhetoricians and Sophists as confused with their art, unable to define themselves. The need for distinction is necessary to define various areas. Socrates has rhetoricians in low esteem, and considers their influence as insignificant.

Power is defined as beneficial to those who are in control, but those with little common sense are unable to judge what is best for them. Socrates accuses Polus of making his speech meaningless. He further defines certain qualities such as health and wealth as good. Actions that are performed need to elicit good results in the same way that the subject of desires is to obtain benefits. Socrates proves that power can lead to obtaining one's desires, which can be of disadvantage even if they may seem to be advantageous.

Socrates is careful about his arguments, which are not intended to discredit anyone but to gain insight into important matters. He wants to be corrected himself to avoid harm. Arguments are beneficial not just in terms of avoiding wrong but also as a means of learning.



The persuasion of rhetoric in areas of knowledge can only be imparted among those who are not knowledgeable themselves. To persuade of superiority among physicians would be difficult without the necessary knowledge. Such persuasion can only be effected among a crowd that Gorgias regards as those who are ignorant and not knowledgeable.

Rhetoric involves persuasion without knowledge of facts and can persuade the ignorant as opposed to those with knowledge. A rhetorician must know the knowledge that is part of the profession itself, and which involves justice and injustices. Professions are such that they influence those who practice them. Learning about justice leads to acting in a just way.

Freedom gained through various abilities may lead to self-indulgence. It can then become useless because it has no benefit for others. Socrates makes this point when warning Polus about his long speeches that are part of freedom of speech, but their meaninglessness can deter due to being pointless.

Gratification and pleasure can only be produced as a result of a knack or skill rather than art. The division between body and soul has similarities with the duality of arts, such as medicine being related to gymnastics in the same way that justice relates to legislation. Abilities that are gained through a knack provide no account of methods that are used and causes that are produced. Various areas of art need to be distinguished and classified so that they are not confused with other professions, which results in lack of professionalism. Socrates compares these distinctions to the way the soul is in charge of the body. If there are no distinctions, everything becomes mixed and confused.

According to Socrates, power enables the achievement of results, but if power allows freedom to do anything, those who do injustice commit greater evil than those who suffer as a result.



Chapter III (470-479)

Chapter III (470-479) Summary and Analysis

Socrates is against tyranny, which involves power to do anything one pleases. Tyrannic power allows for destruction, but such power has little to do with greatness. Power to destroy requires punishment. As Polus indicates, punishment is the result of destructive actions. Punishment in itself is a negative action, although some negative actions may be considered positive.

For Socrates, just actions are better than unjust as they lead to happiness. Polus thinks that even those who commit injustice are happy, and argues that even a king such as Archelaus is happy despite committing many crimes. Socrates maintains that such an argument is not valid as there is no statement here that leads to the truth. As the consequence of wrongdoing is punishment, it is impossible to be happy when being unjust. Wrongdoers are even more wretched when they are not punished, because committing an injustice is worse than to suffer it. Socrates is in agreement over such an opinion, as he believes that good is beautiful and bad is ugly.

The analysis of what is good leads to the classification of various degrees of good, and how beautiful can be delimited by pleasure and what is good while ugly can be delimited by opposites such as pain and evil. As Socrates argues, the degree of ugliness can be compared to doing wrong that is uglier than suffering. Hence, it is worse to do wrong than to suffer. Also, the consequence of such actions can be measured by degree of ugliness. Those who do wrong suffer less pain than those who are the object of their action.

Just actions are beautiful and require both deeds and objects to be performed. Those who are brought to justice undergo punishment. Those who punish perform just actions; hence, those who are subject to their actions suffer justly. Consequently, Socrates regards such acts as beautiful and beneficial. The benefits are part of soul improvement.

The definition of what is ugliest for the soul involves injustice or depravity of the soul. It is also the ugliest of defects such as poverty and disease. In the same way, lack of justice and principles is worse than being poor and sick. As medicine rids diseases, justice rids wrongdoing. Socrates proves in this way that justice is more beautiful than money-making and medicine; therefore, it produces the most pleasure and utility. It is also better never to be sick than to be sick and cured. Therefore, happiness can be assured if evil or wrongdoing is never experienced. Those who have no vice should also be the happiest, while those who deliver others from evil are the second happiest. Socrates considers those who escape justice as unaware of the extent to which justice would be beneficial for their souls and bodies.



To possess power is good and can be beneficial, but power that destroys and corrupts cannot be classified as great or beneficial. Such power ultimately leads to punishment. Socrates regards punishment as good and considers that consequences don't necessarily define the ethics. Not everything that is advantageous is beneficial if it is achieved in an unjust way. Wrong actions can be considered to be beneficial if they are just. Also, those that are involved in unjust actions are unhappy according to Socrates, who regards honorable men happy and those who do injustice as wretched.

Injustice and wrongdoing are worse than undergoing justice that can free from evil as part of wrongdoing. Categorizing bad as ugly leads to viewing justice as most beneficial to society, where those who enact justice are most happy.

Those who escape justice suffer because they lose the opportunity to be rid of vices that inflict harm to their souls and bodies. They will never be as happy as those who have never committed crimes. Even though punishment may involve suffering, pain can be beneficial if the result is health or soul improvement.

Social evils such as poverty, disease, and injustice lead to evil; justice is most superior as it frees souls from their vices. The greatest evil is to do wrong rather than to suffer it. For Calicles, pleasure and good are the same, while knowledge and courage are different. Socrates regards desires as painful when unsatisfied. Only when satisfied do desires become pleasures. Feeling pleasure or pain involves lack of proper management, thus pleasant differs from good. Good differs from pleasant in a different way than bad differs from pain, as only good and pleasant can cease at the same time. Those who are cowards and brave experience pleasure and pain equally, although cowards feel more than brave. Feeling pleasure is associated with the presence of good because of the effect of being pleased. Socrates concludes that good people feel pleasure and bad people feel pain.

As pleasures can be good when they are beneficial and bad when they are harmful, pain can also be useful. Useful pleasures and pains should be undertaken for the sake of the good. It is necessary to distinguish between good and bad pleasures that can only be done with professional knowledge. According to Socrates, such arguments should engage intelligent men as they pertain to the way one should live life. As music involves only gratification, it involves flattery rather than usefulness.



Chapter IV (480-491)

Chapter IV (480-491) Summary and Analysis

Only justice can assure getting rid of evil that otherwise persists. To do wrong requires being brought to justice that is equal to curing from the disease of the soul. Socrates views those who commit crimes in need of denouncing so that the crime can be revealed and penalty obtained so that growth is allowed. Also, rhetoric shouldn't be used to defend injustice that is the greatest evil.

There are various criteria that can be used to judge whether something is wrong. Callicles regards different types of wrong actions as related to whether they are judged according to nature or convention. Those who suffer wrong should have the ability to help themselves which makes them strong. Those who make laws and conventions do that because they are weak themselves. When such laws are enforced it can frighten those who are stronger so that they can be superior while they are in fact inferior. Callicles regards unjust acts as ugly only according to conventions. When judging such acts according to nature those who are better and stronger are superior to those who are weaker. This order prevails among various communities and animals. According to Callicles, stronger kingdoms and kings, such as Xerxes, can rightly invade other countries. As men are mostly driven to action by natural justice, legislation appears to be unnatural, especially when those who are stronger can defeat conventions. Also, convention can justify violence, as in the legend of Heracles driving off the cattle without payment indicates. It is due to nature that those who are stronger and better also have the right to be in possession of property, while those inferior who are weaker are deprived of it.

Callicles regards philosophy as destructive as it deprives of experience that is necessary for gaining attention of the world. Philosophers lack the knowledge of laws and regulations as well as conversational abilities. As they have little experience in language, they lack the ability to engage in debates. Philosophy is beneficial for education and is good for the youth because it inspires towards noble actions. Older people who engage in philosophy, though, appear childish. Nature should never be neglected as it is the only way to maintain the noble soul and only nature allows for the ability to persuade and counsel. If philosophy or any art leads to weakness, it is harmful.

Socrates recognizes certain benefits in these remarks, which can only be made if one has knowledge, good will, and candor. He elicits from Callicles responses that define better humans as more intelligent, more vigorous, and more courageous. According to Callicles, happiness equals freedom that is only assured through strength. It involves releasing passions and desires.

Justice is the only way to deliver one from evil. To have the immunity from justice imposes even more misery as part of philosophy that is reasoned and constant as



opposed to various opinions that can be whimsical. According to Socrates, disharmony is the greatest of evils.

Even though Socrates regards the social order as part of harmonious nature, his remarks are criticized as being dictated by convention rather than nature. The law and conventions can be viewed as certain protection against those who are in fact stronger. Such a view engages Callicles, who considers being wronged as a lesser evil only as according to convention. In fact, superiority is natural and should be imposed if one is stronger.

Callicles regards conventions as fear used to defend those who are weak. Throughout history, strength involved invasion. Morality that comes with equality in fact enslaves while it is claimed to be beautiful. Thus, legislation is unnatural, as those who are stronger can destroy it. Callicles cites Pindar, who calls convention to be the lord of all. Such conventions can also justify violence. He also regards philosophy as unnatural as it lacks experience and uses pretense for effect. According to Callicles, philosophy benefits in education, but it lacks meaning and liberty. For him, delving too deep in philosophy is even dangerous as it has no practical use for those in trouble, such as prison, for example. As it allows for suffering, it leads to suffering while it is also trivial. He considers the art of business as superior.

Men of substance avoid engaging in things that are not reputable as they must only strive for what is good. For Socrates, everything needs to be tested and tried to assure that it is correct. Thus, even golden souls need to be tested to prove that they are in fact golden. He attempts to test Callicles's statements.

As strength can be relative and there are various types of strength, it implies treatment that can be unfair. Power gained through strength is difficult to define as it can signify more wealth, abundance, rule, or courage. If rule is important, it is more important to rule oneself than others. Such rule views self-control and mastery as superior over pleasures and desires.



Chapter V (492-502)

Chapter V (492-502) Summary and Analysis

According to Callicles, anything that limits freedom limits the enjoyment of life and leads to subjugation through language, law, and censorship. He regards the truth to be luxury. As conventions are made by men, they are against nature.

Socrates considers such views as spontaneous. Those who are weak lack conviction and memory and thus can lose everything. He therefore considers order as being happier than the lack of restraint. Callicles views being content as lacking desires and not wanting pleasures. Satisfaction leads to indifference.

Simply satisfying desires can lead to happiness, but pleasures differ from good as good and evil fortunes differ and what is pleasant must differ from what is good. Socrates proves that bad differs from pain in the same way that what is good needs not necessarily be pleasant. Those that are good have good qualities in them in the same way that those who are beautiful possess beauty.

People, regardless their qualities, experience emotions in similar ways. Thus those who are cowards feel pleasure in the same way as those who are brave, but experience different degrees. In the same way, good things are pleasant while bad things are painful. As those who are evil have evil qualities, good people feel pleasure while bad people feel pain.

What benefits is good while what effects evil is bad; hence, certain pleasures as well as pains can be useful. Only those pains and pleasures that are useful need to be employed as all actions should benefit. Skills that are used for pleasure such as cookery cannot be classified as art, as only medical art delves into the nature of things and reasons for treatment. Cookery only deals with creating pleasure for the very sake of it. Thus, certain activities can be classed as flatteries without the engagement of the body or soul. They only administer pleasure without any consideration of benefits.

The influence over masses can be instilled without any consideration for any benefit it creates. Such practices only indulge and please. Socrates concludes that if art is created for pleasure and gratification, it is not useful. As it only flatters, it has little benefit for the public.

For Socrates, Callicles only expresses other people's views when seeing desires as something that cannot be repressed as part of virtue that needs to be fostered. To want in this way is to live for those who want nothing, which is equal to being dead. While those who are foolish can be compared to leaky souls as they are unable to retain anything, those who can retain order and who can control self-indulgence should be happier. For Socrates, happiness is restraint.



Fullness can be associated with lack of desires and pleasures as there is no need to gain anything more. There is a distinction between good and bad pleasures just as there is a distinction between good and evil fortune.

To want and to desire is to feel pain, while satisfying it is equal to pleasure. Feeling pleasure involves being in pain, and hence good may differ from pleasant. There are differences between what is good and pleasant as well as between what is bad and painful. Different extents of pleasure or pain can also be part of one's character, as cowards feel more pain and pleasure than do brave men.

Socrates claims that those who are good feel pleasure while those who are bad feel pain. As some pleasures are good and some bad, there are different benefits in them. Those pleasures that benefit are good, and those that do evil are bad. In the same way, those pains that are useful are good and those that are not useful are bad.

All actions should involve good results and should be undertaken for the sake of the good. Men need professional knowledge to select between good and bad pleasures. Socrates classifies activities such as cookery as a knack that is used for pleasure, while medicine as an art is used for the benefit of others. If flattery is made for the sake of pleasure without considering what is good or bad, it can lead to meaningless gratification of the crowd.

For Socrates, arts that only gratify involve mere flattery. Orators should also have in mind that they need to have the best interests of the crowd in mind so that those who are addressed receive maximum benefit. Gratification often involves private self-interest and neglect of the common good. In this way, the public is treated in a childish manner to gratify, but the effect of such address is neglected.



Chapter VI (503-514)

Chapter VI (503-514) Summary and Analysis

Arts such as prose and poetry satisfy crowds. As poetry is a public address, it should be rhetorical. When orators only gratify, they address only their own private interests and fail to consider the common good. Only those desires that improve need to be accepted, in the same way that only things that harmonize and are orderly can benefit the body. Order and harmony indicate positive effects. The body that is in harmony is healthier and stronger and the soul that is in harmony acquires the quality of being lawful, leading to one being law-abiding. Such states also involve self-control and justice.

For Socrates, the sick body needs no abundant food, but the wretched body should be deprived of life because such life would also be wretched. Only those who are healthy can fulfill their desires. The soul that lacks control and is unjust should be allowed no action besides improvement in form of punishment. Such punishment is better than the lack of control.

Pleasure and good differ as pleasure should only be sought for good purposes. Pleasant things should give pleasure in the same way as good should make people good. Excellence can lead to goodness but it cannot be acquired accidentally, except for order or arrangement. Order implies that something is good even when it pertains to the soul. The soul that is in control is a good soul, while the soul that lacks self-control cannot maintain discipline. Those who can control themselves are able to do just things. Such men are brave, do things well, are happy, and have the blessing of gods. Those who do evil are wretched without self-control. To be happy requires practicing self-control and no need for punishment. If such punishment is required, it must be received to maintain happiness. Desires that are out of control lead to the life of a brigand, which makes it difficult to maintain friendships or faith because of the inability to share, something necessary to maintain friendship. According to Socrates, order between men, heaven, and earth can only be maintained through sharing, friendship, self-control, and justice as part of the cosmic and universal order.

Those who want to escape injustice should do so by acquiring power to prevent it rather than escaping it. Those who exert destructive power must necessarily acquire friendship among those who think in a similar way. Young people under such government will also be adopting similar views and become duplicators of their masters. They will also acquire power so that they cannot be wronged. Their souls will become deformed just like their masters'. Such people will commit crimes and will become immune from punishment.

There are two ways for improvement, such as aiming at pleasure and good. Pleasure is meaningless as it is part of flattery. Only good can be beneficial as it leads to becoming better.



Flattery is harmful when used in public address as it rarely takes into account the common good and thus it cannot be beneficial. Only those desires that improve should be fulfilled. Thus, speakers that have the common good in mind would not say anything at random and have certain results in view. Professions in general need to concentrate on the task to attain positive results. The fixed order and adjustment of parts are necessary for harmony and the whole so that it can become well-ordered. Those that deal with human bodies should also have in mind the practice of achieving harmony as everything that is harmonious is good.

Order and harmony are necessary to make souls excellent. As health and strength involve the harmony of the body, law and law-abiding involves the harmony of the soul. Wretched body and soul leads to wretched life, and once wretched it cannot be happy. For only the healthy can attain their desires and acquire food and drink that is beneficial. Souls that are in bad condition are uncontrolled, unjust, and immoral. They should be prevented from any kind of desires, as what they need is only improvement. The only thing that can lead to improvement is punishment.

Socrates leads the argument in the direction that he desires but he wants to be corrected when he is wrong or agreed with when he is right so that he can get to the truth. As the debate is coming to an end, he sums up the conclusions toward which he was striving and reached, such as that pleasure and good differ, and that pleasure should be sought for the sake of good and not for the sake of pleasure. What is pleasant imparts pleasure and what is good attains good results, although excellence is needed to achieve good results. Such excellence can only be achieved through correct order and arrangement. As Socrates is primarily concerned about the soul, he questions matters that makes the soul good. When the soul is in a good condition it has self-control and discipline, influencing at the same time the body and actions. Those with good souls are just and holy while doing what is right and holy. These qualities require that other features such as courage are also present and necessary, because only with courage can one avoid pleasures and pains that are harmful. It is also a duty to do what one ought to do rather than avoiding what one ought not to do. Self control is a feature of an entirely good person, and such person can then do everything well and justly. Through the well-performed work happiness can be attained, and those who fail to perform well have a wretched life. Those that attain wealth through vice have a wretched life and cannot be happy. Socrates thus regards self control as a means to attain happiness. Domination and power lead to unhappiness.

As it is greater evil to do wrong than to be wronged, those that are wronged need to acquire protection. Power to prevent wrong is more effective than the ability to escape it. Souls need to be protected from those in power who dominate and pursue evil. Those that rule should exercise the responsibility for their actions so that they do no harm. The only way souls can be protected from those who rule society in a bad way is to make the rulers exercise responsibility.



Chapter VII (515-527)

Chapter VII (515-527) Summary and Analysis

Citizens only can be improved when they are cared for and benefit from such care. Those that are governed unjustly become unjust. Justice involves gentleness, and good politicians should encourage self-improvement among citizens. Socrates accuses Callicles of being unfair when praising politicians who supply wine, food, and who satisfy desires while failing to notice faults, such as lack of self-control or justice. When the effects of such treatment will be apparent, those that are in the vicinity will be blamed. People sometimes complain wrongly about harsh treatments they receive from politicians when they deliver beneficial things.

Socrates claims to be one of the few in Athens that is engaged in true politics and is practicing it. His discussions are not meant to gratify, but to do good and not just be pleasant. He engages no rhetorical tricks and regards death as the separation between the body and soul. Following death, the body maintains its shape along with all experiences gained during life. Hence, large bodies turn into large corpses. The soul also maintains all acquired features and characteristics in form of habits and traits. Souls that have been exposed to lies and crime are twisted as they fail to be nourished by truth. When such souls are judged, they are sent to prison where they suffer.

Hence, punishment improves or at least becomes an example to avoid similar deeds and avoid punishment. Only those with curable sins may improve, but they also have to suffer. Those who commit incurable injustice experience most pain and suffering, and power inclines to wickedness because it is difficult to be good when holding power due to an inherent freedom to do wrong. Socrates is only able to give one example of a person, Aristides, who managed to remain good despite of power. Others mostly become evil.

Socrates considers the soul of a philosopher as being less concerned with meddling in other people's affairs. He wants to present his soul in the best way possible and hence is devoted to the truth and being good. He wants to encourage other people to do the same and thinks that Callicles, Polus, and Gorgias are unable to prove how essential it is to lead an ethical life, where doing wrong is worse than suffering it. Flattery needs to be avoided while rhetoric should only be used for just purposes. To be honorable requires the pursuit of virtue, and then one can engage in politics or other matters.

Socrates concludes that the best way to live life is to pursue justice and virtue. Others should also do so.

To assure that those in power are responsible in their ruling, they need to be tested and inquired about their abilities and previous performances. Such inquiries should be conducted even before those who intend to rule enter public service. Socrates examines arguments to determine how political life should be conducted so that they



benefit citizen souls. The main obligation of the politician is to care for improvement of citizens. Certain rules can lead to corruption, such as the system of public fees in Athens. Those that institute such system, such as Pericles in Athens, display their little concern about the benefits of citizens. Despite the good reputation of Pericles, Socrates regards him as a bad politician because people under his care become less just and violent.

Politicians in Athens use no rhetoric or even flattery. They should transform desires rather than flatter and strive for improvement. As the most essential for Socrates is the health of the body and the soul, those that assure such health need to be examined. These are not merely crafts who provide food or care for the body, but those who govern these crafts. Governance has a better grasp of benefits that are more essential for the body than crafts. Among the crafts there is only one that is the most essential and which is medicine and gymnastics. Only such crafts have a good understanding of what is beneficial for the body. Those that provide indulgence for the body inflict harm without and those who receive it blame others for ill effects of such actions.

Improvement should be made through the removal of injustice as it is the sole reason for the wrong. The benefit of becoming good is so important and those advising in matters such as architecture deserve fees. Sophists or orators have a lesser responsibility for their actions, thus they should provide their services free of charge. The power that Socrates holds involves his true engagement in the true art of politics while never using his discussions for gratification but only for the highest good. He avoids rhetorical tricks and thus he is unable to conduct speeches in a courtroom. To be in court is similar to being among children, and thus the best line of defense is to never commit any injustice.

Ultimately, it is for the benefit of the soul that injustice should be avoided so that one can die in peace and arrive free of burden in Hades. Souls that appear before judges are examined with their identity unknown, and if scares are discovered they are sent for punishment. In the same way, punishment is beneficial through suffering and setting an example for others. Tyrants and kings can be more exposed to the evil of their power, unlike private persons who have opportunities to sin. Studying should lead to becoming good and not simply to appear good, while flattery needs to be avoided. Only in this way can one attain happiness, because such a way transcends life and death. Only when life is led in accordance with such rules may one enter politics and other important areas of debate. The best way to live one's life is to pursue justice and virtue.



Characters

Callicles

Callicles of Acharnae in Attica, the Athenian Demos, is the son of Pylilampes and one of the three main characters in *Gorgias*. He engages in the dialogue when Socrates recognizes that his knowledge and frankness benefit the discussion, although he later accuses him of having evil spirit. Callicles has a high regard for the art of business and encourages Socrates to undertake it. He is an accomplished and worldly man. He is direct and can defend himself, although he loses his temper and can easily be provoked. It is the nature and natural laws that govern the world for Callicles, who believes that strength determines justice.

Callicles is the enemy of sophists and despises philosophy. As philosophy is based more on theory rather than real experience, he considers it useless. Practice is most essential for him because it delivers results, being also part of the natural order of things that in the end prevails. The law is only for the weak, defenseless against those in power. Unscrupulous, he is also attracted by unscrupulous displays of power. He is also interested in powerful people, such as Miltiades, Themistocles, and Pericles.

Callicles is a man of great desires, which he regards as beneficial to all men. According to him, such desires should fulfill one's life and be fully explored and experienced. He has no regard for morality or principles of justice. His intellectual capabilities provide further stimulation to the debate. As he also has a short temper, Socrates takes advantage of it and manages to advance his argument against Callicles as a representative of those in power and evil. Both Callicles and Socrates accuse each other of playing tricks with words.

Socrates

Socrates Alcibiades, the son of Clinias, from Alopece, is one of the three main characters in *Gorgias*. He dislikes Sophists, rhetoricians, and politicians. He has many qualities, although he is interested in intellectual argument, and learns the art of rhetoric. He engages in it by answering questions. He challenges others, provoking and displaying irony. Through his analysis of power and consequences of weakness, he is also teaching. He thinks that envy should be avoided and the wretched should be pitied.

He has a strong sense of justice that he considers to be most important, condemning mostly those who commit injustice. His concern for the soul and the body leads to defining what is happiness and how one should live life. It is only through honor and justice that one can be content. He uses sarcasm but applies meaning to search the truth only.

Socrates also wants to learn by being corrected so that he can arrive at the truth. In this way he can improve. His high regard for what is right is part of his earnest nature. When



doing wrong, one should be corrected and punished. He is proud of never engaging in flattery and having only benefit in mind when addressing the public. Flattery should be avoided as it serves only private interests. As justice is most important, rhetoric should only be used to maintain justice. He calls himself the only politician of his age. He manages to surprise Gorgias, who lets others continue the discussion. His analytic mind allows him to examine rhetoric, the effect philosophy and sophism has on rhetoric, and the way rhetoric should be practiced.

Gorgias

Gorgias is another main character in *Gorgias*, a famous rhetorician, Sophist, and a guest in Callicles' house. He is well known to be the master of rhetoric, professing superiority in his skills and confidence to prove them. He also claims that he can be an equally good teacher. Gorgias unveils boastfulness with tendencies to public displays. Brevity and shortness of his expression gain the approval of Socrates, yet through his vain attitude, Gorgias ultimately loses in dialectics.

His experience in oratory gives him the ability to handle surprises that are too few to overwhelm him. Such stance may have also been inspired by the gained sympathy of the audience. He welcomes the challenge that Socrates presents through his argument and delves into the examination of the nature of rhetoric, its power, and the argument itself. Gorgias lets Callicles to take over and finish responding. He is generous and skilled, yet lacks the full insight into the art of rhetoric, failing to recognize the importance of knowledge besides power itself. Gorgias is unable to determine why rhetoric is powerful while knowing nothing. He is permissive of using rhetoric for those immoral purposes which are up to students and not teachers who hold no responsibility for any consequences.

Gorgias gains the recognition as a skilled rhetorician in a speech that is concise and to the point. His preoccupation with verbal victory makes him appear less persuasive, especially when he fears that the audience may lose interest if the discourse is not interesting enough. It is also his personal interest rather than concern about the audience that stimulate him to ensure that the argument reaches the final conclusion. He is ignorant about other aspects of rhetoric that allow flattery when engaged as a powerful tool of persuasion.

Polus

Polus is youthful, full of vigor, and eager to respond to Socrates to display his talents. He is more enthusiastic about the power of oratory rather than its definition. His interest in performance instigates belief and even promotion of rhetoric. Due to his impatience, the discussion is maintained. Soon, however, his emotions take over and he fails to keep up with Socrates.

Polus admires his master, Gorgias, and feels upset when the conversation between Socrates and Gorgias becomes unfair. His impulsiveness influences his speech and he



becomes imprecise, allowing Socrates to control the discourse. Polus believes in the power of rhetoric, which he considers as beneficial if one can master it. He considers punishment as an evil that needs to be avoided, recognizing that those who are in power can be happy regardless their ethics. Polus displays vulnerability to the influence of power that is sufficient to avoid punishment, despite committed crimes. His grasp of power as part of rendering justice is biased as he only considers its possibilities rather than consequences of unjust actions.

His view of the influence that power can have is egocentric and he considers only the benefits of being in possession of power, although the consequences to society can be deeper. Such attitude attracts reproach, as crime mostly leads to retribution.

Polus is unable to maintain discipline in his discourse that fails to be tight. He ignores rules, applying his own instead, saying as much as he pleases. Socrates criticizes his responses as meaningless. He calls him polished and elusive. As Polus is young and with high spirits, he is untamed as a colt, displaying unnecessary envy.

Chaerephon

Chaerephon is a disciple of Socrates who is almost inseparable. He assists in the discourse, assisting Socrates when necessary to unfold the argument. His speech and words emulate his master to help effect the intended meaning. Chaerephon imitates the manner in which Socrates asks questions. While rendering his aid, he is also learning. His assistance can sometimes be important, as he is able to introduce Socrates to his other friend, Gorgias. Chaerephon is obviously well known in social circles and his confidence of arranging the meeting indicates that he is also popular. With his talkative and friendly nature, he is able to fulfill his master's desire to question Gorgias.

Although Chaerephon has been known to exist in reality, his role in the discourse involves advancing the dialogue and supporting Socrates. The incident of being Socrates's friend adds to the significance of the discourse that acquires a deeper dimension when dealing with real and significant people. The real personality can predispose attitudes to the character of Chaerephon that is known to have a certain physic and pale appearance. His eagerness to help in the discourse indicates that he is also impetuous, although readily happy to withdraw from the discussion, especially when Socrates wants to continue questioning Gorgias. Such attitude indicates that he was devoted to Socrates and had faith in his ideas.

Despite differences between Socrates and Chaerephon, Socrates trusts his friend in executing his wishes. He has confidence in his friend with whom he shares views that are to be discussed. Chaerephon renders his aid in a similar way that Polus supports Gorgias, providing a certain balance in the argument advanced by Socrates.



Eurypides

Eurypides changed the structure of Attic tragedy, showing inner lives, strong women characters, intelligent slaves, and satires of Greek heroes. He was born in Salamis in 480 BC. His father was Mnesarchus or Mnesarchides and his mother was Cleito. He questioned religion and was influenced by Protagoras, Socrates, and Anaxagoras. His greatest plays are *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Electra*, and the *Bacchae*. He also influenced modern drama.

Archelaus

Archelaus was a philosopher involved in the Ionian school and first taught natural philosophy at Athens. He was a native of Athens, the son of Apollodorus (or Mydon, Midon, Myson), and also taught Socrates and Eurypides. He regarded air and infinity as the principle of living things, excluding Mind from the world creation, abandoning in this way the doctrine of Anaxagoras. He thought the Earth has a shape of an egg, the Sun is the largest of the stars, and speech is made through the motion of the air.

Cinesias

Cinesias is the character in *Lysistrata* written by Aristophanes. He visits Acropolis to propose sex with Myrrhine. She agrees only if he is going to end war that he is engaged in between Athens and Sparta. When, in the end, he admits that he will only think about it, she leaves.

Herodicus

Herodicus was a Greek physician, born in Selymbria in the 5th BC. He was the first to use therapeutic exercise as part of disease treatment and health maintenance. He taught Hippocrates. He thought good diet and massage with herbs and oils are beneficial, recommended long walks. His theories founded sports medicine, and he was to be a gymnastic-master, and a sophist.

Polygnotus

Polygnotus was a Greek painter, born in Thasos, in the 5th century BC, and son of Aglaophon. He acquired the Athenian citizenship, and painted on the Stoa Poecile walls, mostly for charity. His most important works are frescoes at Delphi, depicting Odysseus visiting Hades. He used few simple colors, but he engaged beauty in individual figures, showing the ethical character in his art that was gentle, and almost childlike.



Homer

Homer purportedly wrote the early Greek poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey in 8th or 7th century BC. He first wrote the Western Canon and gained recognition due to his poetic talent. There is also a possibility that such works were written by various writers. He started the period of Classical Antiquity. He was to be blind and born on the island of Chios in Ionia and visited Heliopolis of Egypt. He listened to Demodocus in the court of Phaeacian king. His style was eminently rapid, plain, and direct, both in thought evolution and substance.

Zeuxis

Zeuxis was born in Heraclea at 464 BC, was taught by Apollodorus, regarded himself as misunderstood, and was disliked by Aristotle. He painted gods, Eros, Alcmene, Menelas, Pan, an athlete, Marsyas chained, and an old woman. His best work is Helen, Zeus Enthroned, and the Infant Hercules Strangling the Serpent.

Zeuxis competed with Parrhasius of Ephesus in the 5th century BC to determine which artist was greater. He painted grapes that were so luscious and inviting that they attracted birds. When Parrhasius was to reveal his paintings, it turned out that the curtains themselves were a painting, and Zeuxis conceded defeat.

Archelaus

Archelaus, son of Perdiccas, king of Macedonia, was a Macedon king between 413 and 399 BC after the death of Perdiccas II. He murdered his uncle, cousin, and half-brother to get the throne. He was then known to be a capable ruler, introducing radical changes in state administration, military, and commerce.

Alcibiades

Alcibiades was the son of Cleinias (450-404 BC) born in the deme of Skambonidai. He was an Athenian statesman, orator, and general. He was the famous member of the aristocratic family, the Alcmaeonidae, which ceased to be prominent following the Peloponnesian War. He advised on strategy, was a politician, and a military commander. He supported aggressive foreign policy, proposed the Sicilian Expedition, but fled Sparta.

Nicias

Nicias (470-413 BC) was a statesman and a Strategos in Ancient Athens, a member of the Athenian upper class due to his success with his investment in the silver mines at Mt Laurium around Attica. Although his family were not patricians, his wealth allowed him to



be part of aristocracy. He then could enter politics, aided by entering the conservative party of the Athenian doves. In 421, he was the main contributor to the halt in the Peloponnesian War and was then considered to be the savior of Athens.

Socrates

Socrates was a Classical Greek philosopher, creator of Socratic irony and the Socratic Method, or elenchus. He developed the philosophical type of pedagogy, where the student gains insight when answering questions made by the teacher. He influenced Western philosophy, Plato, and Aristotle in areas such as ethics, epistemology, and logic.

Gorgias

Gorgias was a Greek sophist, pre-socratic philosopher, and rhetorician born in 487 BC in Leontini, a Greek colony in Sicily, and died in 376 BC. He found first Sophists, was taught by Empedocles, and practiced in various cities, displaying his skills while charging for his teaching and performances. He gave responses upon being asked questions. He brought Sicilian rhetoric to Attica and was one of the rhetoricians who diffused the Attic dialect as the literary prose language. He modified rhetorical structure and ornamentation, introduced paradoxologia, and hence was called the father of sophistry.

Pindar

Pindar was a Greek lyric poet, born in 522 in Cynoscephalae, in Boeotia, and died in 443 in Argos. His canonical lyric works are regarded as the greatest and best preserved. He composed choral songs, including hymns, paeans, preludes, laments, and victory odes.



Objects/Places

Athens

Athens has been occupied since 3000 BC. It has been situated on the mountain known as the Acropolis. With its expansion, political thought also evolved. The Dorians are held responsible for changing political thought in Athens, where democracy has been first practiced.

Aegina

Aegina is part of the Saronic Islands in Greece in the Saronic Gulf, some 30 km from Athens. As part of Greek mythology, Aegina's father was the river god Asopus, and the mother nymph Metope. She had two children, Menoetius with Actor and Aecus which she had with Zeus. Zeus abducted her to Oenone, one of the islands in Attica, later called Aegina island. Her son Aeacus was the king of Oenone.

Black Sea

Black Sea is between south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor, formed in the Miocene orogenies, dividing the ancient Tethys Ocean into basins. It is located between southeastern Europe and the Anatolian peninsula, connecting to the Atlantic Ocean through the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas and other straits. Its most important river is the Danube. Countries that border with Black Sea are Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia, and Georgia.

Acharnae

Acharnae was in the northwest part of Attica and was one of its largest subdivisions, 10 km from Athens. The inhabitants grew cereals, grapes, and olives, and were described by Pindar as brave and as charcoal-burners by Aristophanes in his comedy the Acharnians.

Attica

Attica is one of the subdivisions in Greece, with Athens as the Greek capital. It is subdivided into prefectures of Athens, Piraeus, East Attica, and West Attica. It is part of Southern Greece and consists of Peiraeus, Eleusis, Megara, Laurium, Marathon, and the islands of Salamis, Aegina, Proros, Hydra, Spetses, Kythira, and Antikythera.



Chariots

Chariots were two-wheeled vehicles that were drawn by two or three horses, first known to be at 2500 BC in the southern Mesopotamia. The word "chariot" meant car, while the chariot was incorporated in ancient warfare and later for travel, processions, and races in games. Due the smaller size of horses, they were unable then to carry larger weights, and hence chariotry was part of military force.

Tartarus

As part of Greek mythology, Tartarus was lower than Hades, while according to ancient sources Tartaros has been the first object from which the light and the cosmos has evolved. It was also the third force that appeared in the void of Chaos.

As Hades was the place of the dead, Tartarus had various inhabitants, such as Cyclopes or the three Hecatonchires imprisoned by Cronus. Prisoners in Tartarus were to be guarded by the Hecatonchires. Tartarus is also found in Roman mythology as the place for sinners, and in the Bible as the place of darkness and where some angels are to be sent for cohabiting with women.

Delphi

Delphi is located on the south-western part of Mount Parnassus, in the Phocis valley. It was the place, where Apollo was worshiped and where the Delphic oracle resided. It was to be the center of the universe as well as the earth. In the Appollo Temple, an eternal flame was kept burning. Delphi represented the value of gods and their priestesses were known as Pythia. Apollo was to speak prophesies through a chosen older woman.

Islands of the Blessed

As part of Greek mythology, the Islands of the Blessed, called also the Fortunate Isles, were located in the Western Ocean, near the Madeira, the Canary Islands, Cape Verde, and the River Oceanus, where heroes and mortals were placed into paradise. According to modern geography, they are part of Macaronesia.

Demos

A rhetorical term signifying the population of an ancient Greek state that is to be a political entity, also the common people.



Themes

Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the main theme in Gorgias, where the entire discourse is initiated by Socrates to examine its nature, practice, and effects. Socrates is interested in rhetoric as a powerful tool that Gorgias claims to have mastered. He is critical of the way Gorgias practices rhetoric, respecting his abilities but contesting his insight into rhetoric. The very definition of rhetoric as a profession that deals with words and persuasion provokes Socrates to inquire about its effects. If defined as power, it needs to be used with caution as unjust power makes men wretched and unhappy. When defined as skill, its students need to learn about justice so that it can be used in a just way. There are various views of what is just and unjust; hence, teachers need to teach about justice so that students acquire it in practice.

Gorgias defines the art of rhetoric as the ability to persuade in courts, the Senate, and the Assembly in matters of public interest. The nature of such persuasion and functions are such that it deals with justice and injustice. Socrates unveils that there is persuasion that produces belief without certainty and persuasion that leads to knowledge. Rhetoric is the type of persuasion that leads to belief. Beliefs and opinions are crucial in various matters, such as elections, while also embracing other arts where persuasion is needed. It may be applied by physicians or to win contest with any kind of opposition. Rhetoric, however, can only be effective in a crowd or among those who are ignorant on the subject. Socrates views rhetoric as producing gratification and pleasure while being a form of flattery dealing with politics that presides over the soul rather than medicine that presides over the body. As part of pleasure, rhetoric has no consideration as to the best effects while lacking the nature and methods that are applied.

As various aspects of rhetoric are considered, various issues such as power, pleasure, justice, and injustice are raised. Socrates concludes that as other arts, rhetoric should be practiced only with the highest good in mind and not gratification while serving justice alone.

Justice

Socrates is mostly concerned about presenting his soul in the healthiest condition following his death. Thus, he prefers to abandon any pursuits but those that deal with truth. Only such life is worth living that can be shown without guilt during the final judgment. As justice allows happiness both in life and death, it is essential to study how to be good and it is even more essential to be punished when doing wrong. Justice is essential to rhetoric which can be beneficial if only practiced in a just way. For Socrates, pursuing justice is the best way to live life.



The question of justice is most important, for it is one of the main obligations of a politician. Socrates is concerned with politics that corrupt rather than improve. Its influence is crucial as just rule produces just people, while it is also beneficial to the soul. Good politicians make just people, while desires like power corrupt and destroy. Justice involves self-control, and unjust power leads to destruction because unjust actions involve unjust purposes and therefore inflict harm on the perpetrator as well as the victim. As wrong is committed through injustice, only justice can make others good.

Callicles associates power with strength and superiority, where natural order is just and those who are stronger rule over those who are weaker. Those stronger take advantage of the weaker while laws and principles are mere conventions. For Callicles, justice involves a larger share for those who are stronger, more intelligent, and courageous. Thus, full exploitation of desires and passions should not be repressed by language or censure. Socrates contests such views, claiming that desires can never be truly fulfilled as they tend to grow. More desires require greater effort than desires that are controlled. Hence, those with self-control are happier than those who are forced to satisfy a multitude of desires. Socrates proves that pleasure is not necessarily good, but needs to achieve what is good. Power is only to be used to choose between those pleasures that are good and those that are bad in the same way that it is necessary to choose between good and bad actions. When power involves injustice it leads to wretchedness and unhappiness, all the more if unpunished. According to Socrates, power needs to be just and used as part of one's own self control rather than to control others. Hence, the only just way is the one that creates harmony.

Socrates concludes that to do wrong is greater injustice than to suffer wrong. As injustice creates disharmony of the soul; only justice can create a healthy soul, hence, justice is of utmost importance to the soul.

Ethics

Ethics as part of the way of living and attaining purpose is one of the central themes in Gorgias. When engaging in any pursuit, it is essential that one is able to restrain desires, flattery, and tendencies to be vain. Only just and honorable life can lead to true happiness, as those who possess power gained through violence and injustice ultimately lead wretched lives and invite punishment. Ethics that define proper living is a complex inquiry into what is right and wrong. For some, natural order exerts natural justice. Socrates regards happiness as an inherent part of both life and death. An honorable man must lead an honorable life and pursue what is right as part of life and death.

Pretense and vanity can lead to moral destruction, as they indicate what is unimportant. It is therefore most essential to know ethical life through which confidence can be gained and wrong conditions abandoned. Disgrace and practice of virtue should be the guidance. The ultimate measure of an ethical way is when it pertains to attaining happiness in both life and beyond. As part of after-life judgment, deeds are determined purely through the qualities of the soul that are barren of clothing and pretense, and it is

the qualities of the soul that are most important and need to be cultivated to benefit the body while preserving both in good condition. For Plato, ethical life, as Socrates argues, is more than just principles that guide one through life but instill the necessary harmony that is also part of the universal harmony that needs to be maintained. Such harmony can only be achieved when ethical life of both the body and soul can be achieved.



Style

Perspective

Points of View:

The main points of view in *Gorgias* involve perceptions on power, good and evil, and philosophy. The two conflicting points of view whether power can justify wrong is represented by Callicles and Socrates. Those in power are often excused for doing wrong and considered immune from harm. Callicles regards power as part of a natural order due to natural advantage of those who are stronger. Socrates has a completely different view of power, distinguishing between power gained through evil or good. Evil ways leads to wretchedness regardless of the amount of power one has, while power should only be used for self-control rather than control others.

Socrates also considers it necessary to distinguish between good and evil as pleasure may be mistakenly associated with what is good. Not all pleasures are good, while some pains may be beneficial and good. For Callicles, the fulfillment of desires and pleasures is only available to the elite, awarding good life. Such desires justify means as well as wrong that can be inflicted by those who are more powerful.

There are also two opposing views of what rhetoric should attain. For *Gorgias*, rhetoric is a display of skills and a powerful tool of persuasion. Socrates regards rhetoric as flattery and gratification if not used for a just purpose.

Callicles considers philosophy to be useless and even more wasteful for older men. As it is purely theoretical and not practical, it lends no ability in any circumstances. Socrates praises philosophy as contrary to various opinions and beliefs, always stays the same. The advantages that can be derived from philosophy depend on the way it is studied.

Tone

Setting:

The dialogue is conducted at Callicles house, where *Gorgias* is staying as a guest along with Polus, his disciple. Other guests arrive at Callicles's house as well to listen to *Gorgias*. Socrates, Chaerephon, and Callicles have just been to the market and strolled along the streets of Athens. Socrates is late to listen to *Gorgias*, who has just finished displaying his abilities in front of the audience. When Callicles informs Socrates that *Gorgias* has just finished speaking, Chaerephon suggests that he is confident that *Gorgias* is going to agree to display his skills as his friend. Upon their arrival, *Gorgias* agrees to answer questions as part of conversational dialogue between him and Socrates. The boastful nature of *Gorgias* instigates a line of questioning that is to delve into the nature of rhetoric.



Gorgias invites speakers to ask questions as he can respond to all and any, professing to have such experience that he rarely deals with new questions. Socrates confronts Gorgias, who undertakes the discourse and is led into defining the nature of rhetoric, its essence, and practice. Socrates at first asks Chaerephon to question Gorgias. It has been his intention to interrogate him about rhetoric about which he has his own views that he wants to confront with Gorgias. Socrates is a philosopher, while Gorgias is Sophist. Socrates manages to get Gorgias to admit that the way he practices sciences is more effective among those who are ignorant rather than among those who are knowledgeable. Socrates has a critical view of rhetoric, considering it to be a form of flattery without a basis such as knowledge. Socrates respects Gorgias for his abilities and brief speaking, but he disproves the way he practices it, especially in that it cannot be defined as art due to the absence of knowledge.

Language and meaning

Gorgias is written in a dialogue between three main characters as part of rhetoric and dialectic. Through the dialectics, expressions are based on meanings and concepts rather than superficial statements. The way Plato engages in the dialogue is by giving prominence to such concepts rather than words that are not noticed. Gorgias, on the other hand, is more concerned about the manner in which he speaks rather than what he says. It uses language that involves paradoxical expression, based on the rhetoric, and absurd. The argument presented in Gorgias is to oppose the very view of the way Gorgias himself understood rhetoric. Plato criticizes the performance and flattery of form used by Gorgias that he considers more as a dangerous skill rather than art due to the way it is used and its power of persuasion.

The beginning and the end of the dialogue connect, and seemingly unexpected questions carefully advance the argument to incorporate broader terms until the final conclusion involving the very nature of life is reached. As Gorgias doubts that there can be anything unexpected, it is the unexpected death that determines the final conclusion. The language used involves sarcasm, displays of anger between the characters that are at war with each other. At certain points, the dialogue turns into a concluding monologue.

Both Socrates and Gorgias express with precision and brevity. Socrates uses various metaphors and myths to advance his argument. His questions are to the point to manifest beliefs and feelings. They condemn each other with little sensitivity, as it is more crucial to reach the point even though it can be painful to the other side. The references made transfer between depth and surface while the dialogue is often interrupted and even ceased by one party. The language consists of statements and refutations. Through dialogue, philosophical issues and meanings are considered while also being disputed, and refuted.

Structure

The dialogue in *Gorgias* advances along with an intensifying drama that is generated as part of conflicting emotions as well as conflicting arguments. All characters contribute to this dialogue in different ways. Their involvement in the discussed subject is crucial to the way the dialogue progresses. The plotting involves a series of statements that are false, yet the other party fails to perceive it this way.

The question of the nature of rhetoric is considered until a contradiction leads to further refutations and arguments presented by Gorgias and defended by Polus fail. Callicles undertakes to defend Polus, but he also fails to deliver his arguments in a convincing manner.

The drama unfolds, revealing complexities involved while some arguments that are clearly wrong invite pondering and thinking about the issues involved. Conversations are formulated in such a way that they form a journey through discovery. This process is presented with precision and order reflected through issues involved, where even language and words advance the dialogue.

Interactions become more intense as various opinions are weighed and rejected. Statements become longer towards the end while the depth of the argument also increases.

The structure may seem to be chaotic at times, but it is carefully thought through in such way that the final conclusion is reached after considering a sequence of smaller arguments, thus gaining weight in convincing the reader. The play is divided in this way into three parts, where Socrates responds respectively to three of his respondents, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. With different modes of responding that are addressed to each of them, different approaches are presented: as Socrates respects Gorgias, he addresses him with dignity, but he is short with Polus and even more short and sarcastic with Callicles.



Quotes

"For our guidance, then, let us make use of the argument which has now revealed itself, declaring that this is the best way to spend one's days: to live and die in the pursuit of justice and the other virtues." p. 527

"At least it is certainly true that good charioteers are not those who keep their footing in their chariots at the beginning; then, when they have trained their horses and have themselves become more proficient in the art of driving, fall out." p. 517

"But as for transforming its desires instead of toadying to them, as for persuading and coercing fellow citizens to the point of self-improvement, there is not, in a word, a whit of difference between generations." p. 517

"What greater good have men than health?" p. 10

"For it is of greater benefit to be oneself delivered from the greatest harm than to deliver another." p. 458a

"We must never envy the unenviable or the wretched, but pity them." p. 470

"To do injustice is the greatest of all evils." p. 469

"I call a good and honorable man or woman happy, and one who is unjust and evil wretched." p. 470

"But in my opinion, at least, Polus, the wrongdoer and the unjust man are completely wretched, yet even more wretched if they are not punished and do not meet retribution for their crimes; and less wretched if they are punished and chastised by gods and men." p. 472

"Truth, you see, can never be refuted." p. 473

"Injustice, then, and lack of principle and the rest of the soul's depravity are the greatest existing evils." p. 477

"Of two men who have an evil either in body or soul, which is the more wretched, the one who is cured and rid of his evil or the other who is not cured and still has it?" p. 478

"For my Alcibiades says now one thing, now another: but Philosophy speaks always the same." p. 481

"Everyone, of course, is pleased with speeches that accord with his own way of looking at things and annoyed with a foreign point of view." p. 513



Topics for Discussion

What is the role of art in how it can benefit society?

Is the description of true art and false art in Gorgias justified?

What is the nature of politics, justice, power, and good living according to Socrates?

What is the nature of true power for Socrates?

Why is the greatest evil disputed in Gorgias controversial?

How are wrong and evil are related to art, justice, politics, virtue, and temperance in Gorgias?

In what way does Plato defines virtue in Gorgias?