

Short summary of the dialogues between Socrates and Gorgias and Socrates and Polos in Plato's Gorgias

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Plato's dialogue Gorgias deals with the right way of living, especially on how to heal the soul. In the main focus in the whole work is the ῥητορική which according to Gorgias and Polos is considered to be a τέχνη, however Socrates, tries to show that rhetorics is not an art – and even further – nothing good, but rather something bad.

In the introduction of Gorgias, Socrates and Chairephon are late to a speech given by Gorgias who just finished (447a-c), though Socrates gives the hint that they came late on purpose, as he prefers the dialectic, rather than Gorgias' *epideixis*. The *epideixis*, which is often translated with *presentation*, *performance* or *presentation* stands in a contrast to the dialectic, which consists of διά which means 'through' and λέγω, which means 'to speak' (I speak), but goes back to λόγος which does not only mean speech, but also mind or reason. Thus, the demonstration of Gorgias is contrary to the speech through reason, even further as Gorgias' speech is regarded to be a 'long speech' in the pejorative sense of quackery, in contrast to Socrates' way of short speech in which one replies through an objection (449b). Therefore, short replies and arguments are required to find truths, while the *epideixis* cannot fulfill this requirement.

If rhetorics is a τέχνη, then there must be a way to teach it to make others rhetoricians, too, as Socrates points out (449b). Gorgias replies that he can make anyone a rhetorician. Socrates also puts in the word ἐργασία, which is a kind of work performed by hand and thus equals *fabrication*. Socrates wants to know what the ῥητορική 'fabricates' (449c). Gorgias replies that the ῥητορική fabricates speeches, which triggers Socrates to precise his reply, since other professions – such as doctors – use spoken language as well as part of their profession (to talk to the clients). Therefore, Gorgias precises that rhetorics is a profession where speech stands in the foreground and is of major necessity (450c). Thus, the professions using speech are separated from the professions using tools (χειρουργίας), literally: handwork or handworkers. Through this διαίρεσις, the rhetoric is more and more clarified. But this division goes further,

as Socrates is not yet satisfied, as there are several professions that are not using handtools to work, such as those who do mathematics and analyze numbers. Gorgias further states that the rhetorics is a way of **conviction**.

Socrates wants to know which kind of conviction, and Gorgias replies 'the conviction in courtrooms and other assemblies' (454b), and therefore the rhetorics have to deal with what is just and unjust. Here Gorgias conducts a category error, thus doing the same mistake as Polos in 448d, when he talks about the ποιεῖν, and thus 'how' something is, when Socrates wanted to know 'what' something is. Gorgias does the same mistake in 451d, when he says that rhetorics is the most important thing in life, thus not satisfying Socrates' question what it is. In 454b, Gorgias replies where the rhetoric works, but he still not replied what he does, but only where he does. As a result, one must ask what conviction really is. Someone who tries to convict someone else does not necessarily teach someone something, a person can be convicted without knowledge. Thus, there is '**conviction with knowledge**' and '**conviction without knowledge**'. In this division, the rhetorics belong to the latter group as Gorgias shows that even a rhetorician has more power on the client's health than a doctor (456a), and that's why Gorgias thinks that rhetorics is more important than anything else.

Socrates ironically mocks Gorgias saying that a fool (the rhetorician) can convict another fool (459b) and defines the ῥητορικὴ as mechanism of conviction – a μεμηχανημένος (459d).

The question now that arises is, if a rhetorician is stronger than anyone else then isn't he dangerous since he can manipulate everyone? Since the ῥητορικὴ deals with δίκαιος (justice) and ἄδικος (injustice), Gorgias thinks that people use rhetorics to spread justice, thus rhetorics is always just, and therefore a teacher cannot be blamed if a student uses it not correctly (ὀρθός) –i.e. for 'just' deeds. The difference between δίκαιος and ὀρθός is very important here, since the art is always just, but people might use it unjustly (=incorrectly) as Gorgias wants to show from 456b-c. Thus, someone who studies rhetorics must either know what is just before or learns it from the teacher, as the rhetorics deals with justice. Someone who knows justice must act just. As a result, Socrates smashes Gorgias' argument about the unjust student, since someone who has realized justice always acts just, and if someone acts unjust one has not understood justice, as no one can act unjust on purpose and therefore he must be necessarily (ἀνάγκη) just. This means, someone who acts knowingly is free, someone who is unknowingly is unfree. But as soon as one has realized justice, one is about to act after it.

The way Socrates gets Gorgias into a situation in which he has to reject his own claim is regarded to be unfair by Polos, as he calls it 'πολλὴ ἀγροίκια ἐστίν' (461b), and thus Polos continues to talk to Socrates. However, Socrates makes the dialectic method to be his

condition to talk (461d-e). Polos asks Socrates what kind of τέχνη, the ῥητορικὴ is. Socrates replies that it is not any τεχνικὸν (artistic skill) at all (463a). Instead, he sees rhetoric to be an ἐμπειρία (experience) to get pleasure (462c). Polos wants Socrates to precise his answer, however, he goes back to his own words and says it might be μὴ ἀγροικότερον (even more uneducated) to say the truth, but Gorgias and Polos want him to precise. As a result, Socrates reveals that rhetorics, cooking, cosmetics and sophistications are no art (technē), but just a **κολακεία (flattery)**. Socrates shows that all four flatteries have four arts, however, the flatteries are hiding under the arts pretending to be good. The real good things are in the soul, the flatteries however are in the body. Cooking might be good for the body, but is just a flattery, as only the medicine is good for the soul. Thus the art of the medicine is a true art, while the art of cooking is just flattery that pretends to heal the body, but in fact just makes things worse (464b-466a). Same as the relation among cooking and medicine is the relation among justice and rhetorics. Justice is good for the soul, rhetorics is pleasurable for the body, but not for the soul. We already can assume that as a result, the rhetorics can not heal the ill soul, while justice is able to do so.

Even further, Socrates provokes when he tells Polos that neither rhetoricians nor tyrants have any might in the city (466b). Polos thinks that a tyrant can do what he wants and thus has the biggest might. Socrates tries to smash this argument with logic. He suggests a complete disjunction in which there are things that are (a) either good, (b) either bad, (c) neither good nor bad (which means they participate at both). Polos agrees with this idea. Socrates further shows that people tend to strive for the good because people want happiness (eudaimonia). If something tends to be good, people prefer to choose it. No one chooses something which is bad for oneself. However, things which are in between good and bad must have a use (utilitas) for the person who conducts them, and if it is useful then it must have a good result, because no one conducts something if he or she knows that it turns out bad. Therefore, the things subsumed under (c) are just a means for the telos, the things subsumed under (b) are avoided, and the things subsumed under (a) are things people strive for. Thus, he cannot do whatever he wants which means he has no might.

Does the rhetoric help to reach eudaimonia? Does might have a share with eudaimonia? – Might does not make happy! Therefore, we have to distinguish between what **'is good'** and what just **'seems good'** (468d). Even further Socrates divides the bad deeds in two categories now, as it is a difference whether one does it to be just, or to be unjust (468e). Those who do unjust deeds are unhappy and deserve our compassion, while those who do deeds to restore

justice are not to envy (469a). Therefore, someone who kills another person is unhappy, while a person who is conducting a state-sanctioned execution is not to envy, since it is no joy.

Polos states the thesis that doing unjust things is better than receiving injustice. Socrates however wants to show that this claim is wrong and that receiving injustice is still better than doing injustice.

As a result, in 470e Socrates defines what happiness is as Polos asks him whether the Great King, i.e. the Persian King is happy or not, and **Socrates says that every courageous and good (γὰρ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν) man and woman (ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα) is happy (εὐδαίμονα εἶναι), while the unjust (ἄδικον) are not happy.** As such, Socrates has defined the whole concept of happiness (eudaimonia) as it rules in the whole antiquity.

“Πῶλος: δῆλον δὴ, ὃ Σώκρατες, ὅτι οὐδὲ τὸν μέγαν βασιλέα γινώσκεις φήσεις εὐδαίμονα ὄντα.

Σωκράτης: καὶ ἀληθῆ γε ἐρῶ: οὐ γὰρ οἶδα παιδείας ὅπως ἔχει καὶ δικαιοσύνης.

Πῶλος: τί δέ; ἐν τούτῳ ἢ πᾶσα εὐδαιμονία ἐστίν;

Σωκράτης: ὡς γε ἐγὼ λέγω, ὃ Πῶλε: τὸν μὲν γὰρ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα εὐδαίμονα εἶναι φημι, τὸν δὲ ἄδικον καὶ πονηρὸν ἄθλιον.” (470e)

Socrates further shows that the ‘beauty’ is either (a) pleasurable, (b) useful, or (c) both. Polos agrees that something is beautiful, because it is useful or gives pleasure, or fulfills even both of it (474c-e). The things that are useful are good. The things that are pleasurable seem good. The shameful things bear exactly the opposite, they are either (a) painful, (b) bad, or (c) both (475a). We can say that the bad things are the opposite of the useful things, because the useful is good, and the opposite of good is bad. The opposite of pleasure is pain.

So while Polos still thinks that doing bad is better than receiving bad (because someone who does bad things at least has pleasure), Socrates wants to show that doing bad is worse than receiving bad. At first it shall be analyzed whether one thing is more painful or more bad. Polos agrees that both things are painful. If both things are same painful, then one thing cannot have more pain. So as a result, it must be bad. The logic works like this: $a \vee b \vee (a \wedge b)$. If it is not a, then it automatically cannot be $(a \wedge b)$, because the condition is that a is valid. As a result, only b stays. As a result, one can say, if doing bad is not good (= not useful) and not painful, it has to be bad. Doing bad is worse than receiving bad, because it has more badness or shame than receiving bad (475d).

As next, Socrates introduces causality: **If someone gives something, someone else must receive something. The impulse one gives must automatically lead to an affection on something else** (476a-c). If one person gives punishment, another person receives punishment. If the punishment is just, we can say 'one gives justice, another receives justice'. As justice is something good: one gives something good, while the other person receives something good. It is good because it is useful. If it is useful, then it is beautiful, so the punisher gives something beautiful and the punished receives something beautiful (476d-e).

Indeed, being punished is not pleasurable as it hurts, so it must be useful, as it is good (477a). Socrates compares injustice to an illness. An illness is bad to the body, and so is injustice to the soul. If one is ill, one goes to see a doctor, so that the body is healed, but where does someone go if the soul shall be healed? – One goes to the court (478a). As there is nothing worse than injustice, one has to heal the soul. If one never conducted injustice, one lives best. However, if one conducted injustice, then the one who has healed his soul lives a better life (479c).

Anyways, the rhetoricians try to avoid a just punishment and try to hear witnesses that will talk in favor for the one who shall be punished, and therefore instead of a just punishment, one receives less punishment or no punishment at all, which will avoid that the soul is healed and a person might be happy. Therefore, rhetorics is shameful as such (480c). Socrates even makes the joke that one shall wish for one's enemy that he is not punished, so that he will stay unhappy. Kallikles turns to Chairephon and asks him whether Socrates is making a fool out of everyone. Chairephon however thinks that Socrates is not spoofing, and thus a third dialogue, this time between Socrates and Kallikles starts.

To put it in a nutshell, the dialogues deal with the question, which art the rhetorics belong to, coming to the result that the rhetoric is no art at all, but only flattery that avoids healing the unhappy soul. A soul becomes unhappy when someone conducted unjust deeds, therefore the soul becomes unjust, too. Only if justice is restored, the soul can become just and as a result happy, and a happy soul is a good soul. However, one does not receive punishment because it is pleasurable, but only because it is useful, and therefore the punisher is not to envy (but not unhappy, because he is doing something good = something useful).

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