

through an argument. I really don't think I am a bad man, certainly the last man to harbor ill will. Indeed, I have told many people that I admire you more than anyone I have met, certainly more than anyone in your generation. And I say that I would not be surprised if you gain among men high repute for wisdom. We will examine these things later, whenever you wish; now it is time to turn our attention elsewhere."

362 "That is what we should do, if it seems right to you. It is long since time for me to keep that appointment I mentioned. I stayed only as a favor to our noble colleague Callias."

Our conversation was over, and so we left.

GORGIAS

(462a-481b)

In the following selection, Socrates examines Polus, a younger follower of Gorgias, the famous teacher of rhetoric (some fragments of whose writings are included in this anthology). The initial topic is the nature of rhetoric and its relation to politics. Very quickly, this is subsumed under a larger question about the goals of life (467a-468e). The discussion then focuses on the contribution of virtue to achieving those goals, with Socrates arguing, and Polus forced—kicking and screaming—to agree, that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it.

What's the nature of rhetoric and its relation to politics? → goal of life

SOCRATES: You say, I take it, that you're an expert in the same craft as Gorgias is? Or don't you? 462

POLUS: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: And don't you also invite people to ask you each time whatever they like, because you believe you give expert answers?

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So now please do whichever of these you like: either ask questions or answer them. b

POLUS: Very well, I shall. Tell me, Socrates, since you think Gorgias is confused about oratory, what do you say it is? What is oratory?

SOCRATES: Are you asking me what (craft) I say it is?

POLUS: Yes, I am.

SOCRATES: To tell you the truth, Polus, I don't think it's a craft at all. What craft is it?

POLUS: Well then, what do you think oratory is? c

SOCRATES: In the treatise that I read recently, it's the thing that you say has produced craft.

POLUS: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: I mean a knack.

POLUS: So you think oratory's a knack?

SOCRATES: Yes, I do, unless you say it's something else.

POLUS: A knack for what?

SOCRATES: For producing a certain gratification and pleasure.

POLUS: Don't you think that oratory's an admirable thing, then, to be able to give gratification to people? oratory is a knack for producing pleasure

Translated by D. J. Zeyl.

SOCRATES: Really, Polus! Have you already discovered from me what I say it is, so that you go on to ask me next whether I don't think it's admirable?

POLUS: Haven't I discovered that you say it's a knack?

SOCRATES: Since you value gratification, would you like to gratify me on a small matter?

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Ask me now what craft I think pastry baking is.

POLUS: All right, I will. What craft is pastry baking?

SOCRATES: It isn't one at all, Polus. Now say, "What is it then?"

POLUS: All right.

SOCRATES: It's a knack. Say, "A knack for what?"

POLUS: All right.

SOCRATES: For producing gratification and pleasure, Polus.

POLUS: So oratory is the same thing as pastry baking?

SOCRATES: Oh no, not at all, although it is a part of the same practice.

POLUS: What practice do you mean?

SOCRATES: I'm afraid it may be rather crude to speak the truth. I hesitate to do so for Gorgias's sake, for fear that he may think I'm satirizing what he practices. I don't know whether this is the kind of oratory that Gorgias practices—in fact in our discussion a while ago we didn't get at all clear on just what he thinks it is. But what I call oratory is a part of some business that isn't admirable at all.

GORGAS: Which one's that, Socrates? Say it, and don't spare my feelings.

SOCRATES: Well then, Gorgias, I think there's a practice that's not craft-like, but one that a mind given to making hunches takes to, a mind that's bold and naturally clever at dealing with people. I call it flattery, basically. I think that this practice has many other parts as well, and pastry baking, too, is one of them. This part seems to be a craft, but in my account of it it isn't a craft but a knack and a routine. I call oratory a part of this, too, along with cosmetics and sophistry. These are four parts, and they're directed to four objects. So if Polus wants to discover them, let him do so. He hasn't discovered yet what sort of part of flattery I say oratory is. Instead, it's escaped him that I haven't answered that question yet, and so he goes on to ask whether I don't consider it to be admirable. And I won't answer him whether I think it's admirable or shameful until I first tell what it is. That wouldn't be right, Polus. If, however, you do want to discover this, ask me what sort of part of flattery I say oratory is.

POLUS: I shall. Tell me what sort of part it is.

SOCRATES: Would you understand my answer? By my reasoning, oratory is an image of a part of politics.

POLUS: Well? Are you saying that it's something admirable or shameful?

SOCRATES: I'm saying that it's a shameful thing—I call bad things shameful—since I must answer you as though you already know what I mean.

GORGAS: By Zeus, Socrates, I myself don't understand what you mean, either!

SOCRATES: Reasonably enough, Gorgias. I'm not saying anything clear yet. This colt here is youthful and impulsive.

GORGAS: Never mind him. Please tell me what you mean by saying that oratory is an image of a part of politics.

SOCRATES: All right, I'll try to describe my view of oratory. If this isn't what it actually is, Polus here will refute me. There is, I take it, something you call body and something you call soul?

GORGAS: Yes, of course.

SOCRATES: And do you also think that there's a state of fitness for each of these?

GORGAS: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: All right. Is there also an apparent state of fitness, one that isn't real? The sort of thing I mean is this. There are many people who appear to be physically fit, and unless one is a doctor or one of the fitness experts, one wouldn't readily notice that they're not fit.

GORGAS: That's true.

SOCRATES: I'm saying that this sort of thing exists in the case of both the body and the soul, a thing that makes the body and the soul seem fit when in fact they aren't any the more so.

GORGAS: That's so.

SOCRATES: Come then, and I'll show you more clearly what I'm saying, if I can. I'm saying that of this pair of subjects there are two crafts. The one for the soul I call politics, the one for the body, though it is one, I can't give you a name for offhand, but while the care of the body is a single craft, I'm saying it has two parts: gymnastics and medicine. And in politics, the counterpart of gymnastics is legislation, and the part that corresponds to medicine is justice. Each member of these pairs has features in common with the other, medicine with gymnastics and justice with legislation, because they're concerned with the same thing. They do, however, differ in some way from each other. These, then, are the four parts, and they always provide care, in the one case for the body, in the other for the soul, with a view to what's best. Now flattery takes notice of them, and—I won't say by knowing, but only by guessing—divides itself into four, masks itself with each of the parts, and then pretends to be the characters of the masks. It takes no thought at all of whatever is best; with the lure of what's most pleasant at the moment, it sniffs out folly and hoodwinks it, so that it gives the impression of being most deserving. Pastry baking has put on the mask of medicine, and pretends to know the foods that are best for the body, so that if a pastry baker and a doctor had to compete in front of children, or in front of men just as foolish as children, to determine which of the two, the doctor or the pastry baker, had expert knowledge of good food and

Not pleasant
at the moment

No thought of
what is best

Two crafts
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gymnastics
medicine
legislation
justice

flattery
masks
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Gorgias

clapping

body & soul

464

real vs apparent

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What part
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465 bad, the doctor would die of starvation. I call this flattery, and I say that such a thing is shameful, Polus—it's you I'm saying this to—because it guesses at what's pleasant with no consideration for what's best. And I say that it isn't a craft, but a knack, because it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it's unable to state the cause of each thing. And I refuse to call anything that lacks such an account a craft. If you have any quarrel with these claims, I'm willing to submit them for discussion.

b So pastry baking, as I say, is the flattery that wears the mask of medicine. Cosmetics is the one that wears that of gymnastics in the same way; a mischievous, deceptive, disgraceful and illiberal thing, one that perpetrates deception by means of shaping and coloring, smoothing out and dressing up, so as to make people assume an alien beauty and neglect their own, which comes through gymnastics. So that I won't make a long-style speech, I'm willing to put it to you the way the geometers do—for perhaps you follow me now—that what cosmetics is to gymnastics, pastry baking is to medicine; or rather, like this: what cosmetics is to gymnastics, sophistry is to legislation, and what pastry baking is to medicine, oratory is to justice. However, as I was saying, although these activities are naturally distinct in this way, yet because they are so close, sophists and orators tend to be mixed together as people who work in the same area and concern themselves with the same things. They don't know what to do with themselves, and other people don't know what to do with them. In fact, if the soul didn't govern the body but the body governed itself, and if pastry baking and medicine weren't kept under observation and distinguished by the soul, but the body itself made judgments about them, making its estimates by reference to the gratification it receives, then the world according to Anaxagoras would prevail, Polus my friend—you're familiar with these views—all things would be mixed together in the same place, and there would be no distinction between matters of medicine and health, and matters of pastry baking.

e You've now heard what I say oratory is. It's the counterpart in the soul to pastry baking, its counterpart in the body. Perhaps I've done an absurd thing: I wouldn't let you make long speeches, and here I've just composed a lengthy one myself. I deserve to be forgiven, though, for when I made my statements short you didn't understand and didn't know how to deal with the answers I gave you, but you needed a narration. So if I don't know how to deal with your answers either, you must spin out a speech, too. But if I do, just let me deal with them. That's only fair. And if you now know how to deal with my answer, please deal with it.

466 POLUS: What is it you're saying, then? You think oratory is flattery?

SOCRATES: I said that it was a part of flattery. Don't you remember, Polus, young as you are? What's to become of you?

POLUS: So you think that good orators are held in low regard in their cities, as flatterers?

SOCRATES: Is this a question you're asking, or some speech you're beginning?

POLUS: I'm asking a question.

SOCRATES: I don't think they're held in any regard at all, —>

POLUS: What do you mean, they're not held in any regard? Don't they have the greatest power in their cities?

SOCRATES: No, if by "having power" you mean something that's good for the one who has the power.

POLUS: That's just what I do mean.

SOCRATES: In that case I think that orators have the least power of any in the city.

POLUS: Really? Don't they, like tyrants, put to death anyone they want, and confiscate the property and banish from their cities anyone they see fit?

SOCRATES: By the Dog, Polus! I can't make out one way or the other with each thing you're saying whether you're saying these things for yourself and revealing your own view, or whether you're questioning me.

POLUS: I'm questioning you.

SOCRATES: Very well, my friend. In that case, are you asking me two questions at once?

POLUS: What do you mean, two?

SOCRATES: Weren't you just now saying something like "Don't orators, like tyrants, put to death anyone they want, don't they confiscate the property of anyone they see fit, and don't they banish them from their cities?"

POLUS: Yes, I was.

SOCRATES: In that case I say that these are two questions, and I'll answer you both of them. I say, Polus, that both orators and tyrants have the least power in their cities, as I was saying just now. For they do just about nothing they want to, though they certainly do whatever they see most fit to do.

POLUS: Well, isn't this having great power?

SOCRATES: No; at least Polus says it isn't.

POLUS: I say it isn't? I certainly say it is!

SOCRATES: You certainly don't, by . . . I, since you say that having great power is good for the one who has it.

POLUS: Yes, I do say that.

SOCRATES: Do you think it's good, then, if a person does whatever he sees most fit to do when he lacks intelligence? Do you call this "having great power" too?

POLUS: No, I do not.

SOCRATES: Will you refute me, then, and prove that orators do have intelligence, and that oratory is a craft, and not flattery? If you leave me

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unrefuted, then the orators who do what they see fit in their cities, and the tyrants, too, won't have gained any good by this. Power is a good thing, you say, but you agree with me that doing what one sees fit without intelligence is bad. Or don't you?

POLUS: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: How then could it be that orators or tyrants have great power in their cities, so long as Socrates is not refuted by Polus to show that they do what they want?

POLUS: This fellow—

SOCRATES: —denies that they do what they want. Go ahead and refute me.

POLUS: Didn't you just now agree that they do what they see fit?

SOCRATES: Yes, and I still do.

POLUS: Don't they do what they want, then?

SOCRATES: I say they don't.

POLUS: Even though they do what they see fit?

SOCRATES: That's what I say.

POLUS: What an outrageous thing to say, Socrates! Perfectly monstrous!

SOCRATES: Don't attack me, my peerless Polus, to address you in your own style. Instead, question me if you can, and prove that I'm wrong. Otherwise you must answer me.

POLUS: All right, I'm willing to answer, to get some idea of what you're saying.

SOCRATES: Do you think that when people do something, they want the thing they're doing at the time, or the thing for the sake of which they do what they're doing? Do you think that people who take medicines prescribed by their doctors, for instance, want what they're doing, the act of taking the medicine, with all its discomfort, or do they want to be healthy, the thing for the sake of which they're taking it?

POLUS: Obviously they want their being healthy.

SOCRATES: With seafarers, too, and those who make money in other ways, the thing they're doing at the time is not the thing they want—for who wants to make dangerous and troublesome sea voyages? What they want is their being wealthy, the thing for the sake of which, I suppose, they make their voyages. It's for the sake of wealth that they make them.

POLUS: Yes, that's right.

SOCRATES: Isn't it just the same in all cases, in fact? If a person does anything for the sake of something, he doesn't want this thing that he's doing, but the thing for the sake of which he's doing it?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now is there any thing that isn't either good, or bad, or, what is between these, *neither good nor bad*?

POLUS: There can't be, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Do you say that wisdom, health, wealth and the like are good, and their opposites bad?

POLUS: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: And by things which are *neither good nor bad* you mean things which sometimes partake of what's good, sometimes of what's bad, and sometimes of neither, such as sitting or walking, running or making sea voyages, or stones and sticks and the like? Aren't these the ones you mean? Or are there any others that you call *things neither good nor bad*?

POLUS: No, these are the ones.

SOCRATES: Now whenever people do things, do they do these intermediate things for the sake of good ones, or the good things for the sake of the intermediate ones?

POLUS: The intermediate things for the sake of the good ones, surely.

SOCRATES: So it's because we pursue what's good that we walk whenever we walk; we suppose that it's better to walk. And conversely, whenever we stand still, we stand still for the sake of the same thing, what's good. Isn't that so?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And don't we also put a person to death, if we do, or banish him and confiscate his property because we suppose that doing that is better for us than not doing it?

POLUS: That's right.

SOCRATES: Hence, it's for the sake of what's good that those who do all these things do them.

POLUS: I agree.

SOCRATES: Now didn't we agree that we want, not those things that we do for the sake of something, but that thing for the sake of which we do them?

POLUS: Yes, very much so.

SOCRATES: Hence, we don't simply want to slaughter people, or exile them from their cities and confiscate their property as such; we want to do these things if they are beneficial, but if they're harmful we don't. For we want the things that are good, as you agree, and we don't want those that are neither good nor bad, nor those that are bad. Right? Do you think that what I'm saying is true, Polus, or don't you? Why don't you answer?

POLUS: I think it's true.

SOCRATES: Since we're in agreement about that then, if a person who's a tyrant or an orator puts somebody to death or exiles him or confiscates his property because he supposes that doing so is better for himself when actually it's worse, this person, I take it, is doing what he sees fit, isn't he?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And is he also doing what he wants, if these things are actually bad? Why don't you answer?

POLUS: All right, I don't think he's doing what he wants.

SOCRATES: Can such a man possibly have great power in that city, if in fact having great power is, as you agree, something good?

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468

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POLUS: He cannot.

SOCRATES: So, what I was saying is true, when I said that it is possible for a man who does in his city what he sees fit not to have great power, nor to be doing what he wants.

POLUS: Really, Socrates! As if you wouldn't welcome being in a position to do what you see fit in the city, rather than not! As if you wouldn't be envious whenever you'd see anyone putting to death some person he saw fit, or confiscating his property or tying him up!

SOCRATES: Justly, you mean, or unjustly?

469 POLUS: Whichever way he does it, isn't he to be envied either way?

SOCRATES: Hush, Polus.

POLUS: What for?

SOCRATES: Because you're not supposed to envy the unenviable or the miserable. You're supposed to pity them.

POLUS: Really? Is this how you think it is with the people I'm talking about?

SOCRATES: Of course.

POLUS: So, you think that a person who puts to death anyone he sees fit, and does so justly, is miserable and to be pitied?

SOCRATES: No, I don't, but I don't think he's to be envied either.

POLUS: Weren't you just now saying that he's miserable?

b SOCRATES: Yes, the one who puts someone to death unjustly is, my friend, and he's to be pitied besides. But the one who does so justly isn't to be envied.

POLUS: Surely the one who's put to death unjustly is the one who's both to be pitied and miserable.

SOCRATES: Less so than the one putting him to death, Polus, and less than the one who's justly put to death.

POLUS: How can that be, Socrates?

SOCRATES: It's because doing what's unjust is actually the greatest of evils.

POLUS: Really? Is *that* the greatest? Isn't suffering what's unjust a greater one?

SOCRATES: No, not in the least.

POLUS: So you'd want to suffer what's unjust rather than do it?

c SOCRATES: I certainly wouldn't want either, but if it had to be one or the other, I would choose suffering over doing what's unjust.

POLUS: You wouldn't welcome being a tyrant, then?

SOCRATES: No, if by being a tyrant you mean what I do.

POLUS: I mean just what I said a while ago, to be in a position to do whatever you see fit in the city, whether it's putting people to death or exiling them, or doing any and everything just as you see fit.

d SOCRATES: Well, my wonderful fellow! I'll put you a case, and you criticize it. Imagine me in a crowded marketplace, with a dagger up my sleeve,

saying to you, "Polus, I've just got myself some marvelous tyrannical power. So, if I see fit to have any one of these people you see here put to death right on the spot, to death he'll be put. And if I see fit to have one of them have his head bashed in, bashed in it will be, right away. If I see fit to have his coat ripped apart, ripped it will be. That's how great my power in this city is!" Suppose you didn't believe me and I showed you the dagger. On seeing it, you'd be likely to say, "But Socrates, *everybody* could have great power that way. For this way any house you see fit might be burned down, and so might the dockyards and triremes of the Athenians, and all their ships, both public and private." But then *that's* not what having great power is, doing what one sees fit. Or do you think it is?

POLUS: No, at least not like that.

SOCRATES: Can you then tell me what your reason is for objecting to this sort of power? 470

POLUS: Yes, I can.

SOCRATES: What is it? Tell me.

POLUS: It's that the person who acts this way is necessarily punished.

SOCRATES: And isn't being punished a bad thing?

POLUS: Yes, it really is.

SOCRATES: Well then, my surprising fellow, here again you take the view that as long as acting as one sees fit coincides with acting beneficially, it is good, and this, evidently, is having great power. Otherwise it is a bad thing, and is having little power. Let's consider this point, too. Do we agree that sometimes it's better to do those things we were just now talking about, putting people to death and banishing them and confiscating their property, and at other times it isn't?

POLUS: Yes, we do.

SOCRATES: This point is evidently agreed upon by you and me both?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: When do you say that it's better to do these things then? Tell me where you draw the line.

POLUS: Why don't you answer that question yourself, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well then, Polus, if you find it more pleasing to listen to me, I say that when one does these things justly, it's better, but when one does them unjustly, it's worse.

POLUS: How hard it is to refute you, Socrates! Why, even a child could refute you and show that what you're saying isn't true!

SOCRATES: In that case, I'll be very grateful to the child, and just as grateful to you if you refute me and rid me of this nonsense. Please don't falter now in doing a friend a good turn. Refute me.

POLUS: Surely, Socrates, we don't need to refer to ancient history to refute you. Why, current events quite suffice to do that, and to prove that many people who behave unjustly are happy.

SOCRATES: What sorts of events are these?