Like *Protagoras*, *Gorgias* is a work principally designed to differentiate Socratic dialectic or elenchus from oratory. Oratory, Socrates argues, aims at persuasion through cleverness, while elenchus endeavors for truth through reason. To demonstrate the superiority of his own method as well as the futility of oratory, Socrates sets out to defend the thesis undergirding the whole of another of his works, *Republic*: Justice is sufficient for happiness. Socrates’ defense of dialectic, then, takes him to a defense of justice against three separate interlocutors—Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles—each of whom are eager to prove Socrates wrong. In defending justice, Socrates is not just upholding elenchus as the correct method of persuasion, he is more importantly championing philosophy as the best way of life.

In a dialectical exchange with Socrates (448d–461b), Gorgias maintains that oratory frees people and enables each to rule over others through persuasion in a polis. Socrates counters that there is persuasion through knowledge and persuasion without knowledge and that oratory is of the latter sort. He then convinces Gorgias that oratorical persuasion, being wholly indifferent to truth, can be used justly or unjustly. Gorgias ultimately concedes that he should know justice before practicing oratory (i.e., a knowledge of what you are doing is a prerequisite of doing that thing).

Polus (461b–481b) comes to Gorgias’s rescue in arguing that the unjust use of oratory is not proof of its undesirability. The orator is supremely happy simply because he has the power to do precisely what he sees fit to do in his polis. In contrast, living under the constraints of justice quashes happiness. He gives, as an example, the tyrant, Archelaus. Socrates goes forth to convince Polus that it is less shameful to suffer injustice than to commit it, because suffering injustice is not as bad as doing something unjust. A happy person, then, is one who is just, while the unjust person must do all that he can to requite his unjust acts. Polus is uncomfortable with the overall turn of events, yet, not knowing where things went wrong, he withdraws from the conversation quietly.
Callicles (481b–527e) now enters into the verbal fray. He begins by denying that suffering injustice is less shameful than committing it. It may be less shameful in the eyes of law, but not in the eyes of nature. Judged by nature, those superior deserve a greater share of things. The philosophic life, equipping its adherents less for public life, is thus inferior to that of the orator qua politician, who by nature rules over others. Though a tyrant to others, the orator qua politician is a willing slave to his own passions and indulges them to any extent at any time. Socrates, however, gets Callicles to admit that pleasures admit of degrees and this is a short step to the conclusion that degrees are measured by a standard of goodness. While the orator politician lives according to pleasure, the philosopher takes goodness as a standard.

Toward the dialogue’s end, we find the standard of philosophic goodness is rational order—that is, internal and psychic harmony patterned after the harmony in the cosmos (507c–508a). Cosmic order is a model for human happiness, and true politicians are philosophers who strive for their own order and happiness as well as for the order and happiness of those whom they govern.

The selections from this dialogue are from Socrates’ exchange with Callicles. I begin with a defense of injustice by Callicles (482e–486d), then take up with the first part of the dialectical exchange between Socrates and Callicles (designed to clarify just what Callicles means by “superior” person and what it is that he deserves by virtue of being superior) (488b–494b), and, last, finish with that part of the dialectical exchange suited to show that order, self-control, and justice are necessary attributes of the just soul, the happy person, and even the cosmos (503e–508c).

Questions and items for consideration while reading this exchange:
How does Socrates’ notion of happiness differ from ours today? Rate, overall, the cogency of Socrates’ lengthy argument that justice is sufficient for happiness.

Although you claim to be pursuing the truth, you’re in fact bringing the discussion around to the sort of crowd-pleasing vulgarities that are admirable only by law and not by nature.¹ And these, nature and law, are for

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the most part opposed to each other, so if a person is ashamed and doesn’t
dare to say what he thinks, he’s forced to contradict himself. This is in fact
the clever trick you’ve thought of, with which you work mischief in your
discussions: if a person makes a statement in terms of law, you slyly ques-
tion him in terms of nature; if he makes it in terms of nature, you question
him in terms of law. That’s just what happened here, on the question of doing
what’s unjust versus suffering it. While Polus meant that doing it is more
shameful by law, you pursued the argument as though he meant by nature.
For by nature all that is more evil is also more shameful, like suffering
what’s unjust, whereas by law doing it is more shameful. No, no man would
put up with suffering what’s unjust; only a slave would do so, one who is
better dead than alive, who when he’s treated unjustly and abused cant pro-
tect himself or anyone else he cares about. I believe that the people who
institute our laws are the weak and the many. They do this, and they assign
praise and blame with themselves and their own advantage in mind. They’re
afraid of the more powerful among men, the ones who are capable of having
a greater share, and so they say that getting more than one’s share is “shame-
ful” and “unjust,” and that doing what’s unjust is trying to get more than
one’s share. They do this so that those people won’t get a greater share than
they. I think they like getting an equal share, since they are inferior.

These are the reasons why trying to get a greater share than most is said
to be unjust and shameful by law and why they call it doing what’s unjust.
But I believe that nature itself reveals that it’s a just thing for the better man
and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the
less capable man. Nature shows that this is so in many places; both among
the other animals and in whole cities and races of men, it shows that this is
what justice has been decided to be: that the superior rule the inferior and
have a greater share than they. For what sort of justice did Xerxes go by
when he campaigned against Greece, or his father when he campaigned
against Scythia? Countless other such examples could be mentioned. I
believe that these men do these things in accordance with the nature of
what’s just—yes, by Zeus, in accordance with the law of nature, and presum-
ably not with the one we institute. We mold the best and the most powerful
among us, taking them while they’re still young, like lion cubs, and with
charms and incantations we subdue them into slavery, telling them that one
is supposed to get no more than his fair share, and that that’s what’s
admirable and just. But I believe that if a man whose nature is equal to it
were to arise, one who had shaken off, torn apart, and escaped all this, who
had trampled underfoot our documents, our tricks and charms, and all our laws that violate nature, he, the slave, would rise up and be revealed as our master, and here the justice of nature would shine forth. I think Pindar, too, refers to what I’m saying in that song in which he says that

Law, the king of all
Of mortals and the immortal gods

—this, he says,

Brings on and renders just what is most violent
With towering hand. I take as proof of this
The deeds of Heracles. For he... unbought...3

His words are something like that—I don’t know the song well—he says that Heracles drove off Geryon’s cattle, even though he hadn’t paid for them and Geryon hadn’t given them to him, on the ground that this is what’s just by nature, and that cattle and all the other possessions of those who are worse and inferior belong to the one who’s better and superior.4

This is the truth of the matter, as you will acknowledge if you abandon philosophy and move on to more important things. Philosophy is no doubt a delightful thing, Socrates, as long as one is exposed to it in moderation at the appropriate time of life. But if one spends more time with it than he should, it’s the undoing of mankind. For even if one is naturally well favored but engages in philosophy far beyond that appropriate time of life, he can’t help but turn out to be inexperienced in everything a man who’s to be admirable and good and well thought of is supposed to be experienced in. Such people turn out to be inexperienced in the laws of their city or in the kind of speech one must use to deal with people on matters of business, whether in public or private, inexperienced also in human pleasures and appetites and, in short, inexperienced in the ways of human beings altogether. So, when they venture into some private or political activity, they become a laughing stock, as I suppose men in politics do when they venture into your pursuits and your kind of speech. What results is Euripides’ saying, where he says that “each man shines” in this and “presses on to this,

allotting the greatest part of the day to this,
where he finds himself at his best.”5

And whatever a man’s inferior in, he avoids and rails against, while he praises the other thing, thinking well of himself and supposing that in this way he’s praising himself. I believe, however, that it’s most appropriate to
have a share of both. To partake of as much philosophy as your education
requires is an admirable thing, and it’s not shameful to practice philosophy
while you’re a boy, but when you still do it after you’ve grown older and
become a man, the thing gets to be ridiculous, Socrates! My own reaction to
men who philosophize is very much like that to men who speak haltingly
and play like children. When I see a child, for whom it’s still quite proper to
make conversation this way, halting in its speech and playing like a child,
I’m delighted. I find it a delightful thing, liberal and appropriate for the
child’s age. But when I hear a small child speaking clearly, I think it’s a
harsh thing; it hurts my ears. I think it is something fit for a slave. And when
one hears a man speaking haltingly or sees him playing like a child, it strikes
me as ridiculous and unmanly, deserving of a flogging. Now, I react in the
same way to men who engage in philosophy, too. When I see philosophy in a
young boy, I approve of it; I think it’s appropriate, and consider such a per-
son a liberal one, whereas I consider one who doesn’t engage in philosophy
illiberal, one who’ll never count himself deserving of any admirable or noble
thing. But when I see an older man still engaging in philosophy and not giv-
ing it up, I think such a man by this time needs a flogging. For, as I was just
now saying, it’s typical that such a man, even if he’s naturally very well
favored, becomes unmanly and avoids the centers of his city and the market-
places—in which, according to the poet,6 men attain “preeminence”—and,
instead, lives the rest of his life in hiding, whispering in a corner with three
or four boys, never uttering anything liberal, important, or apt.

Socrates, I do have a rather warm regard for you. I find myself feeling
what Zethus, whose words I recalled just now, felt toward Amphion in
Euripides’ play. In fact, the sorts of things he said to his brother come to my
mind to say to you.

“You’re neglecting the things you should devote yourself to, Socrates,
and though your spirit’s nature is so noble, you show yourself to the world in
the shape of a boy. You couldn’t put a speech together correctly before coun-
cils of justice or utter any plausible or persuasive sound. Nor could you
make any bold proposal on behalf of anyone else.” And so then, my dear
Socrates—please don’t be upset with me, for it’s with good will toward you
that I’ll say this—don’t you think it’s shameful to be the way I take you to
be, you and others who ever press on too far in philosophy? As it is, if some-
one got hold of you or of anyone else like you and took you off to prison on
the charge that you’re doing something unjust when in fact you aren’t, you
can know that you wouldn’t have any use for yourself. You’d get dizzy, your
mouth would hang open and you wouldn’t know what to say. You’d come up for trial and face some no good wretch of an accuser and be put to death, if death is what hell want to condemn you to. And yet, Socrates, “how can this be a wise thing, the craft which took a well-favored man and made him worse;” able neither to protect himself nor to rescue himself or anyone else from the gravest dangers, to be robbed of all of his property by his enemies, and to live a life with absolutely no rights in his city? Such a man one could knock on the jaw without paying what’s due for it, to put it rather crudely. Listen to me, my good man, and stop this refuting. “Practice the sweet music of an active life and do it where you’ll get a reputation for being intelligent. Leave these subtleties to others”—whether we should call them just silly or outright nonsense—“which will cause you to live in empty houses;” and envy not those men who refute such trivia, but those who have life and renown, and many other good things as well.

SOCRATES: Please restate your position for me from the beginning. What is it that you and Pindar hold to be true of what’s just by nature? That the superior should take by force what belongs to the inferior, that the better should rule the worse and the more worthy have a greater share than the less worthy? You’re not saying anything else, are you? I do remember correctly?

CALLICLES: Yes, that’s what I was saying then, and I still say so now, too.

SOCRATES: Is it the same man you call both “better” and “superior”? I wasn’t able then, either, to figure out what you meant. Is it the stronger ones you call superior, and should those who are weaker take orders from the one who’s stronger? That’s what I think you were trying to show then also, when you said that large cities attack small ones according to what’s just by nature, because there superior and stronger, assuming that superior, stronger and better are the same. Or is it possible for one to be better and also inferior and weaker, or greater but more wretched? Or do “better” and “superior” have the same definition? Please define this for me clearly. Are superior, better and stronger the same or are they different?

CALLICLES: Very well, I’m telling you clearly that they’re the same.

SOCRATES: Now aren’t the many superior by nature to the one? They’re the ones who in fact impose the laws upon the one, as you were saying yourself a moment ago.

CALLICLES: Of course.

SOCRATES: So the rules of the many are the rules of the superior.
Callicles: Yes, they are.
Socrates: Aren’t they the rules of the better? For by your reasoning, I take it, the superior are the better.
Callicles: Yes.
Socrates: And aren’t the rules of these people admirable by nature, seeing that there the superior ones?
Callicles: That’s my view.
Socrates: Now, isn’t it a rule of the many that it’s just to have an equal share and that doing what’s unjust is more shameful than suffering it, as you yourself were saying just now? Is this so or not? Be careful that you in your turn don’t get caught being ashamed now. Do the many observe or do they not observe the rule that it’s just to have an equal and not a greater share, and that doing what’s unjust is more shameful than suffering it? Don’t grudge me your answer to this, Callicles, so that if you agree with me I may have my confirmation from you, seeing that it’s the agreement of a man competent to pass judgment.
Callicles: All right, the many do have that rule.
Socrates: It’s not only by law, then, that doing what’s unjust is more shameful than suffering it, or just to have an equal share, but it’s so by nature, too. So it looks as though you weren’t saying what’s true earlier and weren’t right to accuse me when you said that nature and law were opposed to each other and that I, well aware of this, am making mischief in my statements, taking any statement someone makes meant in terms of nature, in terms of law, and any statement meant in terms of law, in terms of nature.
Callicles: This man will not stop talking nonsense! Tell me, Socrates, aren’t you ashamed, at your age, of trying to catch people’s words and of making hay out of someone’s tripping on a phrase? Do you take me to mean by people being superior anything else than their being better? Haven’t I been telling you all along that by “better” and “superior” I mean the same thing? Or do you suppose that I’m saying that if a rubbish heap of slaves and motley men, worthless except perhaps in physical strength, gets together and makes any statements, then these are the rules?
Socrates: Fair enough, wisest Callicles. Is this what you’re saying?
Callicles: It certainly is.
Socrates: Well, my marvelous friend, I guessed some time ago that it’s some such thing you mean by “superior,” and I’m questioning you because I’m intent upon knowing clearly what you mean. I don’t really suppose that you think two are better than one or that your slaves are better than you just...
because they're stronger than you. Tell me once more from the beginning, what do you mean by the better, seeing that it's not the stronger? And, my wonderful man, go easier on me in your teaching, so that I won't quit your school.

CALLICLES: You’re being ironic, Socrates.

SOCRATES: No I’m not, Callicles, by Zethus—the character you were invoking in being ironic with me so often just now! But come and tell me: whom do you mean by the better?

CALLICLES: I mean the worthier.

SOCRATES: So do you see that you yourself are uttering words, without making anything clear? Won’t you say whether by the better and the superior you mean the more intelligent, or any others?

CALLICLES: Yes, by Zeus, they’re very much the ones I mean.

SOCRATES: So on your reasoning it will often be the case that a single intelligent person is superior to countless unintelligent ones, that this person should rule and they be ruled, and that the one ruling should have a greater share than the ones being ruled. This is the meaning I think you intend—and I’m not trying to catch you with a phrase—if the one is superior to these countless others.

CALLICLES: Yes, that’s what I do mean. This is what I take the just by nature to be: that the better one, the more intelligent one, that is, both rules over and has a greater share than his inferiors.

SOCRATES: Hold it right there! What can your meaning be this time? Suppose we were assembled together in great numbers in the same place, as we are now, and we held in common a great supply of food and drink, and suppose we were a motley group, some strong and some weak, but one of us, being a doctor, was more intelligent about these things. He would, very likely, be stronger than some and weaker than others. Now this man, being more intelligent than we are, will certainly be better and superior in these matters?

CALLICLES: Yes, he will.

SOCRATES: So should he have a share of this food greater than ours because he’s better? Or should he be the one to distribute everything because he’s in charge, but not to get a greater share to consume and use up on his own body if he’s to escape being punished for it? Shouldn’t he, instead, have a greater share than some and a lesser than others, and if he should happen to be the weakest of all, shouldn’t the best man have the least share of all, Callicles? Isn’t this so, my good man?
CALLICLES: You keep talking of food and drink and doctors and such nonsense. That’s not what I mean!

Socrates: Don’t you mean that the more intelligent one is the better one? Say yes or no.

CALLICLES: Yes, I do.

Socrates: But not that the better should have a greater share?

CALLICLES: Not of food or drink, anyhow.

Socrates: I see. Of clothes, perhaps? Should the weaver have the biggest garment and go about wearing the greatest number and the most beautiful clothes?

CALLICLES: What do you mean, clothes?

Socrates: But when it comes to shoes, obviously the most intelligent, the best man in that area should have the greater share. Perhaps the cobbler should walk around with the largest and greatest number of shoes on.

CALLICLES: What do you mean, shoes? You keep on with this nonsense!

Socrates: Well, if that’s not the sort of thing you mean, perhaps it’s this. Take a farmer, a man intelligent and admirable and good about land. Perhaps he should have the greater share of seed and use the largest possible quantity of it on his own land.

CALLICLES: How you keep on saying the same things, Socrates!

Socrates: Yes, Callicles, not only the same things, but also about the same subjects.

CALLICLES: By the gods! You simply don’t let up on your continual talk of shoemakers and cleaners, cooks and doctors, as if our discussion were about them!

Socrates: Won’t you say whom it’s about, then? What does the superior, the more intelligent man have a greater share of, and have it justly? Will you neither bear with my promptings nor tell me yourself?

CALLICLES: I’ve been saying it all along. First of all, by the ones who are the superior I don’t mean cobbler or cooks, but those who are intelligent about the affairs of the city, about the way it’s to be well managed. And not only intelligent, but also brave, competent to accomplish whatever they have in mind, without slackening off because of softness of spirit.

Socrates: Do you see, my good Callicles, that you and I are not accusing each other of the same thing? You claim that I’m always saying the same things, and you criticize me for it, whereas I, just the opposite of you, claim that you never say the same things about the same subjects. At one time you were defining the better and the superior as the stronger then again as the
more intelligent, and now you’ve come up with something else again: the superior and the better are now said by you to be the braver. But tell me, my good fellow, once and for all, whom you mean by the better and the superior, and what they’re better and superior in.

CALILLES: But I’ve already said that I mean those who are intelligent in the affairs of the city, and brave, too. It’s fitting that they should be the ones who rule their cities, and what’s just is that they, as the rulers, should have a greater share than the others, the ruled.

SOCRATES: But what of themselves, my friend?

CALILLES: What of what?

SOCRATES: Ruling or being ruled?

CALILLES: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: I mean each individual ruling himself. Or is there no need at all for him to rule himself, but only to rule others?

CALILLES: What do you mean, rule himself?

SOCRATES: Nothing very subtle. Just what the many mean: being self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself.

CALILLES: How delightful you are! By the self-controlled you mean the stupid ones!

SOCRATES: How so? There’s no one who’d fail to recognize that I mean no such thing.

CALILLES: Yes you do, Socrates, very much so. How could a man prove to be happy if he’s enslaved to anyone at all? Rather, this is what’s admirable and just by nature—and I’ll say it to you now with all frankness—that the man who’ll live correctly ought to allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them. And when they are as large as possible, he ought to be competent to devote himself to them by virtue of his bravery and intelligence, and to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite for at the time. But this isn’t possible for the many, I believe; hence, they become detractors of people like this because of the shame they feel, while they conceal their own impotence. And they say that lack of discipline is shameful, as I was saying earlier, and so they enslave men who are better by nature, and while they themselves lack the ability to provide for themselves fulfillment for their pleasures, their own lack of courage leads them to praise self-control and justice. As for all those who were either sons of kings to begin with or else naturally competent to secure some position of rule for themselves as tyrants or potentates, what in truth could be more shameful and worse than
self-control and justice for these people who, although they are free to enjoy
good things without any interference, should bring as master upon them-
selves the law of the many, their talk, and their criticism? Or how could they
exist without becoming miserable under that “admirable” regime of justice
and self-control, allotting no greater share to their friends than to their ene-
mies, and in this way “rule” in their cities? Rather, the truth of it, Socrates—
the thing you claim to pursue—is like this: wantonness, lack of discipline,
and freedom, if available in good supply, are excellence and happiness; as
for these other things, these fancy phrases, these contracts of men that go
against nature, they’re worthless nonsense!

SOCRATES: The way you pursue your argument, speaking frankly as you
do, certainly does you credit, Callicles. For you are now saying clearly what
others are thinking but are unwilling to say. I beg you, then, not to relax in
any way, so that it may really become clear how we’re to live. Tell me: are
you saying that if a person is to be the kind of person he should be, he
shouldn’t restrain his appetites but let them become as large as possible and
then should procure their fulfillment from some source or other, and that this
is excellence?

CALLICLES: Yes, that’s what I’m saying.

SOCRATES: So then those who have no need of anything are wrongly said
to be happy?

CALLICLES: Yes, for in that case stones and corpses would be happiest.

SOCRATES: But then the life of those people you call happiest is a strange
one, too. I shouldn’t be surprised that Euripides’ lines are true when he says:

But who knows whether being alive is being dead
And being dead is being alive.\(^9\)

Perhaps in reality we’re dead. Once I even heard one of the wise men say
that we are now dead and that our bodies are our tombs, and that the part of
our souls in which our appetites reside is actually the sort of thing to be open
to persuasion and to shift back and forth. And hence some clever man, a
teller of stories, a Sicilian, perhaps, or an Italian, named this part a jar
[pithos], on account of its being a persuadable [pithanon] and suggestible
thing, thus slightly changing the name. And fools [amuëtoi] he named uni-
initiated [amuëtoi], suggesting that that part of the souls of fools where their
appetites are located is their undisciplined part, one not tightly closed, a
leaking jar, as it were. He based the image on its insatiability. Now this man,
Callicles, quite to the contrary of your view, shows that of the people in
Hades—meaning the unseen [aides]—these, the uninitiated ones, would be the most miserable. They would carry water into the leaking jar using another leaky thing, a sieve. That’s why by the sieve he means the soul (as the man who talked with me claimed). And because they leak, he likened the souls of fools to sieves; for their untrustworthiness and forgetfulness makes them unable to retain anything. This account is on the whole a bit strange; but now that I’ve shown it to you, it does make clear what I want to persuade you to change your mind about if I can: to choose the orderly life, the life that is adequate to and satisfied with its circumstances at any given time instead of the insatiable, undisciplined life. Do I persuade you at all, and are you changing your mind to believe that those who are orderly are happier than those who are undisciplined, or, even if I tell you many other such stories, will you change it none the more for that?

Callicles: The latter thing you said is the truer, Socrates.

Socrates: Come then, and let me give you another image, one from the same school as this one. Consider whether what you’re saying about each life, the life of the self-controlled man and that of the undisciplined one, is like this: Suppose there are two men, each of whom has many jars. The jars belonging to one of them are sound and full, one with wine, another with honey, a third with milk, and many others with lots of other things. And suppose that the sources of each of these things are scarce and difficult to come by, procurable only with much toil and trouble. Now the one man, having filled up his jars, doesn’t pour anything more into them and gives them no further thought. He can relax over them. As for the other one, he too has resources that can be procured, though with difficulty, but his containers are leaky and rotten. He’s forced to keep on filling them, day and night, or else he suffers extreme pain. Now since each life is the way I describe it, are you saying that the life of the undisciplined man is happier than that of the orderly man? When I say this, do I at all persuade you to concede that the orderly life is better than the undisciplined one, or do I not?

Callicles: You do not, Socrates. The man who has filled himself up has no pleasure any more, and when he’s been filled up and experiences neither joy nor pain, that’s living like a stone, as I was saying just now. Rather, living pleasantly consists in this: having as much as possible flow in.

Socrates: Isn’t it necessary, then, that if there’s a lot flowing in, there should also be a lot going out and that there should be big holes for what’s passed out?

Callicles: Certainly.
SOCRATES: Take a look at painters for instance, if you would, or house-builders or shipwrights or any of the other craftsmen you like, and see how each one places what he does into a certain organization, and compels one thing to be suited for another and to fit to it until the entire object is put together in an organized and orderly way. The other craftsmen, too, including the ones we were mentioning just lately, the ones concerned with the body, physical trainers and doctors, no doubt give order and organization to the body. Do we agree that this is so or not?

CALICLES: Let’s take it that way.

SOCRATES: So if a house gets to be organized and orderly it would be a good one, and if it gets to be disorganized it would be a terrible one?

CALICLES: I agree.

SOCRATES: This holds true for a boat, too?

CALICLES: Yes.

SOCRATES: And we surely take it to hold true for our bodies, too?

CALICLES: Yes, we do.

SOCRATES: What about the soul? Will it be a good one if it gets to be disorganized, or if it gets to have a certain organization and order?

CALICLES: Given what we said before, we must agree that this is so, too.

SOCRATES: What name do we give to what comes into being in the body as a result of organization and order?

CALICLES: You mean health and strength, presumably.

SOCRATES: Yes, I do. And which one do we give to what comes into being in the soul as a result of organization and order? Try to find and tell me its name, as in the case of the body.

CALICLES: Why don’t you say it yourself, Socrates?

SOCRATES: All right, if that pleases you more, I’ll do so. And if you think I’m right, give your assent. If not, refute me and don’t give way. I think that the name for the states of organization of the body is “healthy,” as a result of which health and the rest of bodily excellence comes into being in it. Is this so or isn’t it?

CALICLES: It is.

SOCRATES: And the name for the states of organization and order of the soul is “lawful” and “law,” which lead people to become law-abiding and orderly, and these are justice and self-control. Do you assent to this or not?

CALICLES: Let it be so.
SOCRATES: So this is what that skilled and good orator will look to when he applies to people’s souls whatever speeches he makes as well as all of his actions, and any gift he makes or any confiscation he carries out. He will always give his attention to how justice may come to exist in the souls of his fellow citizens and injustice be gotten rid of, how self control may come to exist there and lack of discipline be gotten rid of, and how the rest of excellence may come into being there and evil may depart. Do you agree or not?

CALLICLES: I do.

SOCRATES: Yes, for what benefit is there, Callicles, in giving a body that’s sick and in wretched shape lots of very pleasant food or drink or anything else when it won’t do the man a bit more good, or, quite to the contrary, when by a fair reckoning it’ll do him less good? Is that so?

CALLICLES: Let it be so.

SOCRATES: Yes, for I don’t suppose that it profits a man to be alive with his body in a terrible condition, for this way his life, too, would be necessarily a wretched one. Or wouldn’t it be?

CALLICLES: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now, isn’t it also true that doctors generally allow a person to fill up his appetites, to eat when he’s hungry, for example, or drink when he’s thirsty as much as he wants to when he’s in good health, but when he’s sick they practically never allow him to fill himself with what he has an appetite for? Do you also go along with this point, at least?

CALLICLES: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: And isn’t it just the same way with the soul, my excellent friend? As long as it’s corrupt, in that it’s foolish, undisciplined, unjust and impious, it should be kept away from its appetites and not be permitted to do anything other than what will make it better. Do you agree or not?

CALLICLES: I agree.

SOCRATES: For this is no doubt better for the soul itself?

CALLICLES: Yes, it is.

SOCRATES: Now isn’t keeping it away from what it has an appetite for, disciplining it?

CALLICLES: Yes.

SOCRATES: So to be disciplined is better for the soul than lack of discipline, which is what you yourself were thinking just now.

CALLICLES: I don’t know what in the world you mean, Socrates. Ask somebody else.
SOCRATES: This fellow won’t put up with being benefited and with his undergoing the very thing the discussion’s about, with being disciplined.

CALLICLES: And I couldn’t care less about anything you say, either. I gave you these answers just for Gorgias’s sake.

SOCRATES: Very well. What’ll we do now? Are we breaking off in the midst of the discussion?

CALLICLES: That’s for you to decide.

SOCRATES: They say that it isn’t permitted to give up in the middle of telling stories, either. A head must be put on it, so that it won’t go about headless. Please answer the remaining questions, too, so that our discussion may get its head.

CALLICLES: How unrelenting you are, Socrates! If you’ll listen to me, you’ll drop this discussion or carry it through with someone else.

SOCRATES: Who else is willing? Surely we mustn’t leave the discussion incomplete.

CALLICLES: Couldn’t you go through the discussion by yourself, either by speaking in your own person or by answering your own questions?

SOCRATES: In that case Epicharmus’s saying applies to me: I prove to be sufficient, being “one man, for what two men were saying before.”10 But it looks as though I have no choice at all. Let’s by all means do it that way then. I suppose that all of us ought to be contentiously eager to know what’s true and what’s false about the things we’re talking about. That it should become clear is a good common to all. I’ll go through the discussion, then, and say how I think it is, and if any of you thinks that what I agree to with myself isn’t so, you must object and refute me. For the things I say I certainly don’t say with any knowledge at all; no, I’m searching together with you so that if my opponent clearly has a point, I’ll be the first to concede it. I’m saying this, however, in case you think the discussion ought to be carried through to the end. If you don’t want it to be, then let’s drop it now and leave.

GORGIA: No, Socrates, I don’t think we should leave yet. You must finish the discussion. It seems to me that the others think so, too. I myself certainly want to hear you go through the rest of it by yourself.

SOCRATES: All right, Gorgias. I myself would have been glad to continue my discussion with Callicles here, until I returned him Amphion’s speech for that of Zethus. Well, Callicles, since you’re not willing to join me in carrying the discussion through to the end, please do listen to me and interrupt if you think I’m saying anything wrong. And if you refute me, I shan’t be upset
with you as you were with me; instead you’ll go on record as my greatest benefactor.

CALICLES: Speak on, my good friend, and finish it up by yourself.

SOCRATES: Listen, then, as I pick up the discussion from the beginning. Is the pleasant the same as the good?—It isn’t, as Callicles and I have agreed.—Is the pleasant to be done for the sake of the good, or the good for the sake of the pleasant?—The pleasant for the sake of the good.—And pleasant is that by which, when it’s come to be present in us, we feel pleasure, and good that by which, when it’s present in us, we are good? That’s right.—But surely we are good, both we and everything else that’s good, when some excellence has come to be present in us?—Yes, I do think that that’s necessarily so, Callicles.—But the best way in which the excellence of each thing comes to be present in it, whether it’s that of an artifact or of a body or a soul as well, or of any animal, is not just any old way, but is due to whatever organization, correctness, and craftsmanship is bestowed on each of them. Is that right?—Yes, I agree.—So it’s due to organization that the excellence of each thing is something which is organized and has order?—Yes, I’d say so.—So it’s when a certain order, the proper one for each thing, comes to be present in it that it makes each of the things there are, good?—Yes, I think so.—So also a soul which has its own order is better than a disordered one?—Necessarily so.—But surely one that has order is an orderly one?—Of course it is.—And an orderly soul is a self-controlled one?—Absolutely.—So a self-controlled soul is a good one. I for one can’t say anything else beyond that, Callicles my friend; if you can, please teach me.

CALICLES: Say on, my good man.

SOCRATES: I say that if the self-controlled soul is a good one, then a soul that’s been affected the opposite way of the self-controlled one is a bad one. And this, it’s turned out, is the foolish and undisciplined one.—That’s right.—And surely a self-controlled person would do what’s appropriate with respect to both gods and human beings. For if he does what’s inappropriate, he wouldn’t be self-controlled.—That’s necessarily how it is.—And of course if he did what’s appropriate with respect to human beings, he would be doing what’s just, and with respect to gods he would be doing what’s pious, and one who does what’s just and pious must necessarily be just and pious.—That’s so.—Yes, and he would also necessarily be brave, for it’s not like a self-controlled man to either pursue or avoid what isn’t appropriate, but to avoid and pursue what he should, whether these are things to do, or people, or pleasures and pains, and to stand fast and endure
them where he should. So, it’s necessarily very much the case, Callicles, that
the self-controlled man, because he’s just and brave and pious, as were
recounted, is a completely good man, that the good man does well and
admirably whatever he does, and that the man who does well is blessed and
happy, while the corrupt man, the one who does badly, is miserable. And this
would be the one who’s in the condition opposite to that of the self-con-
trolled one, the undisciplined one whom you were praising.

So this is how I set down the matter, and I say that this is true. And if it
is true, then a person who wants to be happy must evidently pursue and prac-
tice self-control. Each of us must flee away from lack of discipline as
quickly as his feet will carry him, and must above all make sure that he has
no need of being disciplined, but if he does have that need, either he himself
or anyone in his house, either a private citizen or a whole city, he must pay
his due and must be disciplined, if he’s to be happy. This is the target to
which I think one should look in living, and in his actions he should direct all
of his own affairs and those of his city to the end that justice and self-control
will be present in one who is to be blessed. He should not allow his appetites
to be undisciplined or undertake to fill them up—a never ending evil—and
live the life of a marauder. Such a man could not be dear to another man or to
a god, for he cannot be a partner, and where there’s no partnership there’s no
friendship. Yes, Callicles, wise men claim that partnership and friendship,
orderliness, self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and
gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a world order, my
friend, and not an undisciplined world-disorder. I believe that you don’t pay
attention to these facts, even though you’re a wise man in these matters.
You’ve failed to notice that proportionate equality has great power among
both gods and men, and you suppose that you ought to practice getting the
greater share. That’s because you neglect geometry.

Very well. We must either refute this argument and show that it’s not the
possession of justice and self-control that makes happy people happy and the
possession of evil that makes miserable people miserable, or else, if this is
true, we must consider what the consequences are. These consequences are
all those previous things, Callicles, the ones about which you asked me
whether I was speaking in earnest when I said that a man should be his own
accuser, or his son’s or his friend’s, if he’s done anything unjust, and should
use oratory for that purpose. Also what you thought Polus was ashamed to
concede is true after all, that doing what’s unjust is as much more evil than
suffering it as it is more shameful, and that a person who is to be an orator
the right way should be just and have expert knowledge of what’s just, the point Polus in his turn claimed Gorgias to have agreed to out of shame.

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