Charis and philia in Plato's Gorgias

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Charis and philia in Plato's Gorgias

by

Jan Marie Christiansen Beane

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication)

Major Professor: Scott P. Consigny

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
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Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Jan Marie Christiansen Beane

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLITERATIONS

Unless otherwise stated, my Greek texts for the Gorgias and other Greek works are the Loeb Classical Library editions. Translations are taken from the Loeb texts; however, for the sake of emphasis, I sometimes leave the word charis untranslated.

Greek words are transliterated according to accepted conventions. As an aid to readers unfamiliar with ancient Greek, when I use a Greek word I normally transliterate the form listed in the Liddell and Scott lexicon. I use the Latinized version of Greek proper names if the Latinized version is more familiar to most readers (e.g., Socrates). Long vowels in all Greek words except proper names are indicated by a circumflex. Thus,

\[ \hat{e} = \eta \]
\[ \hat{o} = \omega \]

and so forth.
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPM</td>
<td>Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle (Dover)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il.</td>
<td>Iliad (Homer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Od.</td>
<td>Odyssey (Homer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMLA</td>
<td>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhet.</td>
<td>Rhetoric (Aristotle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soph. Ref.</td>
<td>Sophistical Refutations (Aristotle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAPA</td>
<td>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In addition to thanking my major professor, Scott Consigny, and the other members of my committee for their assistance and their patience, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Professor David L. Roochnik, now of Boston University, who influenced profoundly my thinking about Plato.

To all, charin echô.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The major themes of the Gorgias, according to E. R. Dodds, are the nature of rhetoric and the nature of the good life, or eudaimonia (Gorgias 1-3).^ These two themes are closely related because the discussion of the good life is, in part, an examination of the value of the political life — which in ancient Greece was synonymous with rhetoric — versus the value of the philosophical life. As with many Platonic dialogues, however, these general themes allow Plato to employ other, related motifs which support the main structure of the work. In the Gorgias, one of these motifs is philia, a Greek word usually translated as “friendship” or “love.” The importance of philia in the Gorgias may not be immediately obvious since Plato produced other dialogues, notably the Lysis, which treat the concept more openly; moreover, there are but two brief sections of the Gorgias which deal with the concept explicitly: 507d7-508a5, where Socrates emphasizes the importance of justice and temperance to friendship, and 510b4-513c4, where Socrates and Callicles discuss the friendships (or lack of them) of the despot or intemperate person. Nevertheless, Howard J. Curzer is correct in asserting that the reference to friendship starting at 507d7 “does not introduce the issue of friendship . . . but rather continues a discussion about friendship that is already underway” (157). Curzer himself gives little evidence for his assertion (the main subject of his article is temperance), but it is a reasonable claim, given the hints which Plato drops in the preceding sections of the dialogue:

Chaerephon, in the prologue, claims to be a friend of Gorgias (447b3); Gorgias,  

^Hereafter, E. R. Dodds’ translation of and commentary on Plato’s Gorgias will be referred to simply as “Dodds.” The single citation “Dodds, Greeks” (p. 31) refers to Dodds’ The Greeks and the Irrational.
through an analogy to combat sports, advises Socrates that rhetoric should be used for helping friends and harming enemies (456d1-c4); Socrates proclaims himself a friend to Polus (470c10-11, 473a3); Callicles states that he is "fairly friendly" to Socrates (485e2); and included in the theme of eudaimonia is the idea of being a philosophos, a lover of wisdom. Moreover, the Greek concept of friendship, as Mary Whitlock Blundell describes it, "involves a general requirement of reciprocal help and benefit" (32), and terms of help and benefit meet one at every turn of the Gorgias. Apallassô (458a9), boêtheô (483b3), diôkoneô (521a10), euergetês (506c2), therapeia (517e6), charis (462c8), charizomai (462c10): all of these terms either denote or imply relief, help, care, assistance, favor, or service of various kinds to another human being. It seems clear, then, that the Gorgias considers some aspect of philia which is related to the two main themes of rhetoric and eudaimonia.

It is my intention to trace Plato's treatment of one aspect of philia in the Gorgias — its relationship to both rhetoric and philosophy — by choosing one of the above "terms of assistance" and following it through the dialogue. My term of choice is charis and its cognates. Like the meanings of such Greeks terms as logos and kairos, the meaning of charis is not easily delimited. Mary Scott calls the term "clearly untranslatable into English" but suggests that it involves both "the feeling of pleasure itself and the appearance, feature or quality which produces this pleasure" (2). At its deepest etymological level, charis does mean something like "pleasure," but in contrast to hédonê, a more general Greek word for pleasure often limited to a strictly individual response, charis implies the joy found in social exchange and interaction. According to Gregory Nagy, for example, the word "conveys simultaneously the social aspect of reciprocity as well as the personal aspect of pleasure" (37 n13.2, emphasis his). Bonnie
MacLachlan concurs that "charis-pleasure was not private: It entailed enjoyment that was mutual, reciprocal" (5). Because charis is a social, reciprocal pleasure, it is intimately tied to the concept of philia, so much so that Blundell calls charis "fundamental to philia and the personal and social relations it governs" (33). Philia itself covers a range of relationships wider than our English word "friendship," extending from the relationship of human beings with the gods, through the intimate personal affection of family and friends, to the fellowship of citizens in a polis. As Chapter One will demonstrate, charis is a part of all these different kinds of friendship, including erotic friendships, where the special charis of beauty provides the impetus for amorous pursuit. In consummated erotic relationships, moreover, including but not limited to marriage, sexual intercourse or gratification provides a special kind of charis-pleasure which helps unite the couple in philia. As the dialogue unfolds, it becomes apparent that we are speaking primarily of charis as it relates to political friendship versus philosophical friendship. Nevertheless, I will show how Plato uses other types of charis to develop his larger themes.

It may seem needlessly complicated to approach a discussion of philia by way of a second concept, charis. Why not discuss philia directly? There are two reasons for proceeding in this rather oblique manner. First, although it is my contention that philia is discussed implicitly throughout the dialogue, there is little explicit theoretical discussion of friendship, most of it concentrated in the passages noted above. Second, because of the complex structure of the Gorgias it is extremely difficult and frustrating to attempt to move with one concept in a

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2Martha C. Nussbaum believes that philia necessarily entails personal affection (328n); A. R. Hands disagrees on this point, but concurs that the term implies a relationship with some obligation of mutual support (33). For K. J. Dover, philos means "anything on a scale from casual but agreeable acquaintance to intimacy of long standing" (Greek Homosexuality 49).
straight line from beginning to end. The intertwining of charis and philia only adds to the difficulty; indeed, any discussion of the former concept must somehow include discussion of the latter. Fortunately, instances of charis are sufficiently numerous to serve as a convenient vehicle with a range wide enough for navigating the dialogue and connecting the bulk of the work, where references to friendship often seem to be made almost in passing, with the specific discussions of philia at 507d7 and 510b4. Charis can help clarify what is being said about philia, rhetoric, and philosophy.

I have chosen to use charis as a focal point, rather than one of the other terms for help or obligation, because Socrates himself uses the word charis to describe the products of rhetoric. Rhetoric, he tells Polus, produces charis (gratification) and hédoné (pleasure):

P: Then do you take rhetoric to be a habitude (empeiria)?
S: I do, if you have no other suggestion.
P: Habitude of what?
S: Of producing a kind of gratification (charis) and pleasure (hédoné).
P: Then you take rhetoric to be something fine (kalos) — an ability to gratify (charizomai) people? (462c5-10)

The meaning of hédoné, the familiar word for “pleasure,” seems plain enough as it is used here. But Socrates also uses charis — a particular kind of pleasure which has to do with social relationships. If nothing else, Socrates’ use of the term, and Polus’ assumption that an ability to produce charis is good, indicate

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3E. R. Dodds describes the flow of the Gorgias as an “ascending spiral” (3).
4Each instance of charis, philia, or a derivation of these is listed in Appendix A.
5When I refer to “Socrates,” I mean only Plato’s character in the dialogues. I will briefly discuss the relationship between Socrates and Plato in the section on method.
that the term had some importance in Greek culture and is worthy of closer study. In fact, we shall see that charis has special relationships with eloquence in general and poetry in particular, associations which reach back to Homer. This raises the following questions: What is the particular relationship of charis to rhetoric? If charis is a product of rhetoric, does that preclude its having an association with philosophy? If not, what, if anything, distinguishes philosophical charis from rhetorical charis? Ultimately, these questions must be related to what can be said of the role of philia in the life of the rhetor and the life of the philosopher.

Before I make an attempt at the dialogue itself, however, I must discuss some important preliminary matters. First, any attempt to understand a concept which appears in Plato must consider the general problems of interpreting a Platonic dialogue. Chapter Two takes up some of these problems and also explains how I use historical and philological studies in my interpretive strategy. Second, since charis is (from our modern perspective) a more exotic concept than philia, and likely to be unfamiliar to my primary audience of non-classicists, Chapter Three briefly summarizes its role in Greek culture and literature, including its connection with eloquence. In Chapter Four I examine the rhetorical situation of the Gorgias, including discussions of place and character, with particular attention to Gorgias, after whom the dialogue was named. Finally, I turn to the dialogue itself in Chapter Five. In brief, I argue that Plato, through Socrates and the other characters, uses two meanings of charis -- "pleasure" and "favor" -- to point out some faults of ancient Greek rhetorical (political) practice and to suggest ways in which both personal and civic friendships based on philosophy might be superior to those based on rhetoric.
For my part, then, I focus on the rhetorical aspects of the dialogue -- how the critique of rhetoric is accomplished. I should state as clearly as I can, however, that it is not my intention to criticize this critique. In other words, my goal is neither to examine every argument for logical flaws, as Terence Irwin does, nor to defend rhetoric against Socrates' pointed criticisms, as many rhetoricians have done and continue to do. This is not because I think these projects unworthy. Although I respect Plato's intellect, I do not believe that he and his character Socrates cannot and should not be criticized; as we shall see in Chapter Five, it is Socrates himself who implies that refutation is an act of friendship. Nevertheless, such acts of criticism, while vital, deserve more attention than I can reasonably allow here, given the primary focus of my work on the concepts of charis and philia. However, I do hope to contribute to a better, more thorough understanding of the critique of rhetoric presented in the Gorgias. In the present study, then, I concentrate on showing how Plato, through his characters, takes beliefs about favor and friendship which are current in his time and makes them his own.
CHAPTER 2. INTERPRETIVE STRATEGY

Since the Gorgias is written in dialogue form, I must first discuss my method of interpreting such a work. The body of scholarship on hermeneutics is immense, and I cannot even attempt to discuss thoroughly textual interpretation in general. What I can do is outline my own method of interpreting this particular text and give some reasons why it seems appropriate. I have already declared my intention to use the concept of charis as a way of exploring the Gorgias, with the ultimate goal of saying something about Plato’s view of philosophical and rhetorical friendships, and I have given as reasons both the intimate connection between charis and philia, and the significance of Socrates’ identification of rhetoric with charis. The general method I use -- examining the significance of one or more concepts in an ancient text -- is certainly not a new one, and my approach is similar to the methods of two classicists: first, Bonnie MacLachlan, who traces the history of charis in the Greek poets and dramatists; and, second, S. E. Scully, whose 1973 dissertation outlines the workings of philia and charis in the plays of Euripides. My study of the Gorgias owes a great deal to their scholarship. From them I borrow the technique of examining how the recurrence of a concept such as charis can illuminate the characters and develop the themes of a dramatic text. However, since Platonic dialogues rest at a nexus of three fields in which I am interested -- philosophy, the history of rhetoric, and classics -- my modus operandi has been influenced by all three.

The Dialogues as Drama

I was careful to call the Gorgias a dramatic text in the above paragraph because doing so raises an important issue: Are Platonic dialogues to be read and
interpreted in the same way as other philosophical texts in the Western
tradition? In the field of ancient philosophy, one recent controversy concerns
the significance of Plato's dialogues as drama. In 1968, Drew A. Hyland published
an essay, "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues," in which he argued that readings of
Platonic dialogues in the twentieth century have been primarily analytical in
nature; that is, the commentator concentrates on analyzing the logical structure
and validity of the arguments presented in each work. Although lip service is
often paid to the importance of dramatic action, character, and rhetorical
situation, in practice these things are often ignored, and the dialogues are
interpreted as if they were treatises in which Plato presents an unproblematic
exposition of his views (38). However, according to Hyland, and to like-minded
philosophers such as Richard McKim, David Roochnik, and Charles H. Kahn,
the dramatic features of the dialogues are an inseparable part of the philosophy
of the dialogues, which reflect in profound ways Plato's conceptions of reason
and of philosophizing. In other words, Hyland and others argue that scholars
such as Terence Irwin, Gregory Vlastos, and Gerasimos Santas, who primarily
analyze arguments, often overlook the philosophical import of the dramatic
elements of the dialogues and, hence, the significance of any dialectical
arguments which may seem feeble when taken out of context.6

A look at relevant commentary on a passage from the Gorgias will
illustrate this controversy nicely since the logical elements of the dialogue have
been the target of a great deal of criticism. Dodds, for one, finds the logic of the
work "seldom entirely convincing and sometimes transparently fallacious" (3).

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6As Charles L. Griswold, Jr. remarks, the question of how to read and interpret Platonic dialogues
is allied to the question of why Plato wrote dialogues (1-2). These two questions are examined
thoroughly in the collection of essays Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings, Ed. Charles L.
Irwin, too, finds it "amply stocked" with weak logic (v). Socrates' conversation with Polus at 474d3-475e8 is a case in point. In this passage Socrates and Polus discuss the reasons why something is kalos (beautiful, noble, fine, admirable), and Socrates leads Polus to the conclusion that acting unjustly is always more harmful than acting justly. However, several philosophers have found the logic of Socrates' argument to be questionable. Irwin, for example, discusses several ambiguities in Socrates' terms that lead to logical weaknesses (154-158); Gregory Vlastos also presents a critique of this passage concentrating on a specific ambiguity that, had Polus recognized it, would have given him a way to avoid refutation. Vlastos concludes that Socrates' victory is merely ad hominem and not enough to refute Polus (459). Santas, in an analysis of the same passage, agrees with Vlastos and adds an objection of his own (233-240). For these three authors, these localized ambiguities and logical weaknesses are enough for them to question the philosophical significance of the passage as a whole. Neither Vlastos nor Irwin nor Santas, however, account for the manner in which the dramatic elements of the dialogue could affect our understanding of the dialectical exchange. Their analyses concentrate exclusively on the logical structure and validity of the argument. Charles H. Kahn and Richard McKim also see some weaknesses in the logic of the dialectic (sometimes for reasons other than Vlastos'), but both argue that we must go beyond the logic to the dramatic aspects of the exchange. Kahn, for example, argues that it is important to understand both why Polus makes the responses that he does and why he fails to respond adequately to Socrates' logical loopholes. This can be done only by considering Polus as a specific character with a specific personality — in other words, by taking into account the dialogue as a drama. Kahn claims that all three

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7The argument is summarized in Appendix B.
refutations (Gorgias, Polus, Callicles) are indeed *ad hominem* in ways that illustrate the Socratic elenchus "as a test of the harmony between the life and the claims" of Socrates' interlocutors (76). Richard McKim goes even further than Kahn, claiming that Socrates is "not even trying to meet the standards of logical proof" (34 emphasis his). For McKim, Socrates' battle is fought on "psychological, not logical" ground (36-37, 46); Socrates uses the sense of shame possessed by all three of his opponents (even Callicles), not to prove logically to them that virtue is more beneficial than vice, but to show them that they *already believe* that it is (36-37).

Clearly, the kind of insights one draws from a Platonic dialogue will greatly depend on whether one interprets the dialogues as dramas or as mere collections of logical arguments strung together with entertaining but insignificant filler. My own strategy strongly emphasizes dramatic action and characterization, as well as the literal statements of the characters. As someone trained in rhetorical analysis, I naturally find the dramatic approach appealing since it takes into account the context in which the arguments occur. Beyond that, however, I agree with Hyland's claim that because Plato's Socrates is always in conversation with specific people in specific situations, Plato may be "teaching by example that there is truly no such thing as abstract philosophy, philosophy that occurs in no place, philosophy the *topos* of which has no significance for the content of the thought" (Finitude 14-15). Such a lesson may seem paradoxical coming from an ancient philosopher who is generally thought of as the father of the otherworldly Forms. Nevertheless, the dialogues remain prime examples of philosophic thought deliberately contextualized. It is my conviction, then, that context matters in the interpretation of a Platonic dialogue, and when I do undertake an analysis of an argument, as in the passage on friendship at 510b4-
511a3, I try to do so with a sensitivity to the “who, what, when where, and why” in which it is embedded.

Interpreting the Gorgias as a drama also demands that readers be aware of the implications of Plato’s status as the author of a drama. In other words, since Plato says nothing in his own voice, one must be very cautious in making pronouncements about “Plato’s theory” of this or that” (Hyland Finitude 2). Specifically, one should be careful not to conflate Socrates with Plato himself, and scholars who take a “dramatic” approach to the dialogues are usually careful to distinguish between the character Socrates and his creator. This is certainly a difficult task, for it seems fairly clear that Socrates often expounds essentially Platonic ideas (the Palinode of the Phaedrus comes to mind). Nevertheless, there are also times when what Socrates says appears to be at odds with what Plato does as an author. It seems strange, for example, that Socrates should utter a devastating critique of tragedy in the Gorgias, when Plato the author uses tragedy overtly in references to Euripides’ Antiope and covertly in at least one allusion to Aeschylus’ Agamemnon. These apparent contradictions suggest, if nothing else, that one should consider carefully before deciding which, if any, utterances of Socrates can be equated with Plato’s own thought. I do not mean to imply that Socrates is not the hero of Plato’s works and represents much of what Plato thinks is good and noble about philosophy. Nor do I think that nothing can be said about Plato’s philosophy as a whole. One of my goals, after all, is to examine the ways I think Plato has used the concept of charis to say something about political and philosophical philia. I simply think that Plato’s teachings, as

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8 On these and other issues of interpreting Plato’s dialogues, see the cited works by Hyland, the aforementioned volume edited by Griswold, and the introductory remarks in Jacob Klein’s A Commentary on Plato’s Meno, p. 3-31.
far as they can be discerned, arise out of the whole of the dialogues as drama, not simply out of the literal statements of his main character.

Historical Context and Intertextuality

Next, a word should be said about the role that elements of cultural history, including other texts of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., play in my analysis of the Gorgias. I have previously stated my belief that if Socrates uses the term charis to describe the effects of rhetoric, then Plato, as author, must have a reason for making him do so, and that reason necessarily has to do with how the term was used and understood in ancient Greece. Since my goal is to understand how Plato, through his characters, uses charis in making his critique of rhetoric, understanding how the term was used in Greek culture will aid in interpreting not only Socrates’ use of the term but also his interlocutors’ responses to it. In his commentary on the Meno, Jacob Klein reminds us of the importance of consulting the vast amount of historical scholarship available to us as an aid to interpretation:

In one respect, however, the philological and historical work which began with the Alexandrians and reached such amazing heights and depths in the nineteenth and present centuries remains indispensable to us: it provides the means, limited though they may be, of restoring some of the immediate intelligibility which so many allusions, situations, names, proverbs, and puns in the dialogues must have had for Plato’s contemporaries. We should not forget that, in most cases, there is a direct link between the possibility of restoring their intelligibility and their being widely familiar in their own day. It is the familiar that Plato is bent on exploiting. (10)
Although Klein does not specifically say so, we may reasonably extend his list beyond names and proverbs to concepts and ideas such as charis, which also had an "immediate intelligibility" to the Greeks. Indeed, the exploitation of the familiar is everywhere in the Gorgias, from the opposition between chance and art, to the popular code of behavior "helping friends and harming enemies," to the concept of charis itself. All of these words, concepts, and ideas have histories in Greek culture which will help us understand their importance to Greek ways of thinking and behaving. In part, then, I perform what Michael Herzfeld calls the "excavation of concepts" because I highlight the cultural history of a small part of Plato's vocabulary and attempt to restore for modern readers the resonance these words and ideas must have had for Plato's contemporaries (57, 59, and passim). My project, therefore, incorporates what Richard Rorty calls a "historical reconstruction" of the context in which Plato lived and worked (50-55). In other words, I try, first, to understand charis and philia and other concepts important to my analysis as they were understood by ancient Greeks, and, second, to interpret the Gorgias in light of that understanding (Schiappa, Protagoras 64-69). Although such an ancient culture can never be completely understood on its own terms, trying to comprehend it as nearly as we are able makes for an incomparably richer reading of the dialogues. It is by understanding these familiar elements of Greek culture that we can see how Plato interprets them and transforms them into philosophy.

Since "the familiar" for the ancient Greeks includes tragedies, comedies, and other poetry, including Homer, we can use these artifacts also in understanding the Platonic dialogues. There has long been interest in

9I find Rorty's term useful in describing my methodology, but I am not in complete agreement with Rorty's views on the history of philosophy.
comparing tragedy and comedy with Platonic dialogues and Platonic philosophy (Hyland, Finitude 111-137; Nightingale; Rochnik, Tragedy), and Paul Woodruff, for one, believes that "an adequate literary [i.e., dramatic] reading of Plato should make more use of the literature of Plato's period" (213). Indeed, the Gorgias fairly begs us to do so since there are numerous explicit references to Euripides' Antiope and a poem by Pindar, a mention of the comic poet Epicharmus, and several allusions to the Agamemnon of Aeschylus. Nor does this exhaust the list of allusions to other ancient Greek works. Although I do not discuss all of these works in what follows, I do discuss passages from tragedy or comedy which illuminate either the characters of the Gorgias or the terms used to describe rhetoric. In fact, I refer to these plays more often than I refer to Aristotle for help in understanding the Greek cultural context. This not because Aristotle is unhelpful but because he is a different philosopher from Plato, much more systematic, and often uses terms in particular ways for his own purposes. So although Aristotle has something to say about charis and a great deal to say about friendship, it seems more helpful to use texts which preceded Plato and may have had some influence on him rather than to read Aristotle backwards into Plato and to risk conflating teacher and student unnecessarily.

10Unfortunately, the Antiope is extant only in fragments. For translations and a plausible reconstruction, see Bruno Snell, Scenes from Greek Drama. Berkeley: U of California P, 1967, p. 70-98. On the role of the Antiope in the Gorgias, see the cited work by Nightingale.
CHAPTER 3. CHARIS IN ANCIENT GREEK CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Charis, as defined earlier, is a kind of social pleasure found in giving and receiving favors. This definition, while not inaccurate, is a bit simplistic, and in this chapter I give a more detailed exposition of the different applications of charis. I have already indicated that charis is intimately connected with love and friendship. Moreover, because of the social component of its meaning, charis permeates the erotic, ethical, economic, and religious spheres of ancient Greek life. Bonnie MacLachlan describes the scope of its importance in archaic literature:

Charis flickered when beautiful women sparkled; soldiers brought charis to their commanders on the battlefield or expected to win it when they fought well; charis graced appropriate behavior and speech and was a distinguishing mark of nobility; it was at the center of the feast; in the verses of the love poets it sat upon the hair or the eyes of the beloved. (3-4)

Obviously, charis ranges widely through Greek social life, and it will be impossible in this short summary to discuss all its applications in detail. I shall, however, discuss three aspects of charis most important to my analysis of the Gorgias: its association with beauty and sexuality, its connection to giving and receiving favors between friends, or philoi, and its special relationship to eloquence. As we shall see, these three aspects of charis are related in important ways.

11 For a more complete treatment, see Bonnie MacLachlan's excellent work.
Charis, Beauty, and Philia

As MacLachlan says in the passage above, charis was present to the ancient Greeks “when beautiful women sparkled.” In fact, one of the most important facets of charis is this association with great beauty and sexual gratification. The mythical Charities, for example, in addition to their roles as chthonic goddesses of vegetation and fertility, are said to be companions of Aphrodite. As her attendants, they are the divine source of the pleasure human beings feel when responding to sexual allure (MacLachlan 44-46, 60; Scott 1-3; Zielinski). In human relationships, the charis of beauty — often the beauty of adolescent boys and girls — prompts desire and love, causing a lover to praise and to pursue the beloved (MacLachlan 56-72). But the charis belonging to and prompted by beauty is more than a delight in ordinary good looks; charis comes from something extra, something that gleams or glitters or shines from the beloved. The dewy glow of youth, the glimmer of beautiful jewelry, or the radiant light in a loved one’s eyes are all associated with charis-pleasure (MacLachlan 34-39). Two examples from Homer illustrate this charis: In the Iliad, when Hera prepares to seduce Zeus in order to distract him from the Trojan war, she anoints her body with oil, dresses in embroidered robes fastened with golden brooches, and adorns herself with earrings which shine with charis (XIV.170-183). The luster of her oiled skin, the flash of the golden brooches, and the sparkle of the finely-made earrings are all erotically attractive and contribute to her personal charis-allure (Scott 3; MacLachlan 34-35). Similarly, when Odysseus confronts the Phaeacian maiden Nausicaa after he is washed up on the shores of her homeland, the goddess Athena anoints him with charis, “as when a man overlays silver with

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12 I borrow several terms from MacLachlan which describe situations involving charis. These include such terms as charis-event, charis-pleasure, and charis-relationship.
gold.” As Nausicaa watches the hero, who is “gleaming with beauty and charis,” she marvels at his god-like appearance (Od. VI.232-243). In the first example, sexual intercourse is the result of Hera’s charis. In the second, Nausicaa loses her fear of a strange man and agrees to help him. In both cases, the charis of great beauty facilitates social interaction, either by being a spur to erotic love, or by rendering another person more willing to assist, more willing to treat one as a friend.

When a loved one grants sexual gratification to an amorous pursuer, in either heterosexual or homosexual encounters, the verb used to describe the act is often charizomai. This usage is similar to our now quaint expression “giving [someone] our favors” (Dover, Greek Homosexuality 44-45; Henderson 160). Although a part of any erotic arrangement, sexual charis plays a primary role in cementing the bonds of marital philia.13 The Charities of myth were thought to attend the wedding ceremony to guarantee such an “active” sexual relationship (MacLachlan 45). Although MacLachlan notes that the charis of marriage encompasses all types of reciprocal favors and mutual obligations in the shared life of wife and husband (228), sexual charis in marriage is most often associated with female sexuality and is part of the woman’s contribution to the smooth functioning of the union (MacLachlan 28; Redfield 196). According to James Redfield, the specific charis of sexual pleasure was thought to be a physical instantiation of a couple’s homophrosunê, “oneness of mind” (197).14 Once again, charis facilitates human interaction.

13 The difference between erotic love, erôs, and the love of philia is not insignificant, especially in Plato, but in general Greek usage the boundaries are blurred when speaking of relationships with a sexual component. See Dover, Greek Homosexuality, 49-50.
14 Admittedly, this is an ideal. I do not imply that the husband-wife relationship was at all “equal” in the modern sense. It was not.
Charis, Favors, and Philia

As both MacLachlan (5) and Scott (2, 6) note, a charis event is not limited to states of mind or emotions but usually includes a more tangible object or activity. In one of its most important manifestations, charis ties gods with human beings, or human beings with each other, through the mutual pleasure of gift or favor exchange: gifts bestowed by a lover on a beloved obtain sexual favor; sacrifice given the gods is rewarded (one hopes) with benevolence and protection; excellence in battle or on the athletic field receives honor (timē) in the form of both praise and more tangible spoils; favors done for family members or friends are returned in appropriate ways and at opportune times -- xenia, for example, the mutual hospitality of the Homeric guest-code, is based on reciprocal favors and is thus a kind of charis-relationship (Blundell 41; Kurke 135-159; MacLachlan 7, 67-70; Scott 8-9; Herman, passim).\(^{15}\)

Because of the notion of reciprocity inherent in the concept, the importance of charis (even into the fourth century) as a creator and sustainer of social cohesiveness cannot be overestimated. A favor (charis) done on one's behalf is to be returned in kind or otherwise actively and publicly acknowledged. Thus, the charis-event of "doing a favor" could encompass the original feeling of good will on the part of the giver,\(^{16}\) the tangible gift itself, the feeling of gratitude on the part of the receiver, and any active return for the favor. The continued reciprocity driving such events clearly can become a cycle of mutual benefit which solidifies social relationships (MacLachlan 77-78). In the archaic period, however, charis-favor was not "charity" in the modern altruistic sense.

\(^{15}\)Scott argues that the notion of reciprocal favor-exchange is not explicit in Homer, but there are "signs which . . . point to a concept of exchange of charites" (8).

\(^{16}\)According to Scott, "although the intention to please cannot be proved to be present in charis or charizoma" in Homer, "this intention may reasonably be presumed to have been present" (12).
Reciprocity was expected. To fail to return or to acknowledge a favor, or to do so parsimoniously, was a grave social error and could cause one to be ostracized (MacLachlan 6; Hands 26-28). Only later, as the old ways became incorporated into life in a polis, does charis-as-favor come to be identified more closely with altruism.17

As a reflection of power, charis flows readily between social equals; however, the reciprocity of charis is more appropriately described as proportional rather than equal, reflecting the social status of the participants. This is true even in Aristotle’s time (MacLachlan 81). Perhaps the most important way in which Homeric charis works in an unequal relationship is between gods and human beings. Although charis can forge a bond between the human and the divine, as Walter Burkert puts it, “the sense in which men need the gods is quite different from the sense in which the gods need men” (189). Since the gods do not stand in the same relationship with human beings as human beings with one another — the gods are athanatoi, (immortal) and forever apart from humanity -- charis is not required to be given and returned equally. In other words, if human beings make sacrifice to the gods, the gods may — or may not -- answer favorably.

**Charis and Speech**

Polus’ enthusiastic approval of charis is thus deeply rooted in Greek culture. Of particular interest, however, is the relationship of charis-pleasure and speech, an association not unique to Plato; indeed, as MacLachlan demonstrates, it is a venerable association found in the works of Homer and Hesiod. In Homer especially, eloquence is considered a charis from the gods, as illustrated by the following passage from the Odyssey. When Euryalus the

17See Aristotle’s definition, Rhet. 1385a21-23.
Phaeacian insults Odysseus, impugning his athletic ability, the wily hero replies in terms of *charis*:

So true is it that the gods do not give *charis*-gifts (*charienta*) to all alike, not form nor mind nor eloquence. For one man is inferior in comeliness, but the god sets a crown of beauty upon his words, and men look upon him with delight, and he speaks on unfalteringly with sweet modesty (*aidōs*), and is conspicuous among the gathered people, and as he goes throughout the city men gaze upon him as upon a god. Another again is in comeliness like the immortals, but no crown of *charis* is set about his words. (VIII 167-175)

*Charis* is here attributed not to the words in themselves (Scott 5) nor to mere human skill in speaking; the *charis* of eloquence is something more, an addition that comes from and adds a spark of the divine, like the *charis* that gleams from god-like physical beauty.

That *charis*-filled speech should be persuasive is no surprise; in MacLachlan’s words, it has “a softening effect” on the audience, producing respect (*aidōs*) for the speaker (25). In this effect it resembles the *charis* of beauty which Athena granted to Odysseus on the shores of Nausicaa’s homeland. In the passage from the Odyssey just above, Odysseus reproaches the Phaeacian for his insult — a form of speech which is “unmannerly” (*ou kata kosmon*) and provocative of anger — and stresses its inferiority to eloquence, which is full of “sweet modesty” (*aidoi meilichiē*) and brings the speaker respect and awe (VIII.167-185). This passage of the Odyssey introduces another term of social reciprocity which is associated with *charis* in archaic speech situations — the term *aidōs*, which may be translated as “modesty,” “respect,” or even “shame.”

According to Richard P. Martin, “the possessor of *kharis* transmits *aidōs* (and
therefore receives it also)” (45 n35). An accomplished speaker, through the
generation of mutual respect, thus calms violent emotions, diffuses tension, and
aids in conflict resolution (Martin 43-45; MacLachlan 26). This notion of the
civilizing influence of eloquence survives as a commonplace in the history of
rhetoric.18

Although the gift of eloquence is usually a positive one, the potential for
excess and deceit is recognized, and charis is usually associated with moderation
and circumspection in speech, as it is in the previous example from the Odyssey.
Similarly, Hesiod proclaims in Works and Days that the greatest charis comes
from speaking moderately (719-21), and that charis should not be produced
through falsehood (709).19 Moderation is also associated with the speech of the
symposium, where, according to MacLachlan, it is “the moderation of the tongue
(guaranteed by moderation in drink) that ensures the presence of charis” (81-82).
Charis in speech thus appears to be related to the rhetorical concepts of to prepon
and kairos — appropriateness and timeliness.

Although charis is not limited to one kind of discourse, it has a special
relationship to poetry, where it often “conveys the notion of ‘pleasure, mirth’ in
conventional descriptions of poetry and its effects” (Nagy 91). In the Heroic Age,
poetry was an integral part of the communal feast, an occasion filled with the
charis of human community and delight in song (Nagy 18-19; MacLachlan 23-24,
82-83). One ancient source20 uses the phrase “charities of the Charities”
(Charitôn . . . charitas) as a metaphor for both the wine drunk at a symposium
and his proffered poem, which he hopes will prompt a return gift of an ode

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18See Isocrates, Antidosis, 253.1-257.7; Plato, Protagoras, 320c8-323a4; Cicero, De Oratore I.33-34.
19The translation of Works and Days 709 is somewhat controversial. On this see MacLachlan 161-62.
20Dionysius Chalcus, fr. 1.
In Pindar (early fifth century), charis is specifically associated with praise in poetry; the poet's victory ode is a charis for the athlete, celebrating his aretê and his success in competition. The gift of praise, which can be repeated again and again in the form of song, gives the victor a kind of immortality (Kurke 62-82; MacLachlan 87-89). But this charis, though directed toward specific individuals and transmitted through the medium of the poet, is still a gift of the gods:

God brings about all things for mortals

and plants charis in song. (fr. 141)

Charis in the Fifth- and Fourth-Centuries B.C.E.

In most early Greek literature, as in the quotation from Pindar above, the gods serve as an external standard for the basis of charis-relationships and the source from which all charis flows (MacLachlan 87-90). Already in Pindar's time, however, much of Greek life began to be secularized, and MacLachlan argues that "charis-exchange, as a strictly human practice, no longer had an external, absolute point of reference which would preserve the symmetry of the exchange" (152). She attributes this change in part to the intellectual and social upheavals of the fifth century and the questioning of traditional values in which the sophists played such a large role. Who could say any longer what constituted a true charis if the value of charis depended on the differing social conventions of human beings? (152-153). Like many other Greek concepts such as aretê and dikê, then, charis seemed to float freely.

In Athens, of course, these changes coincided with the rise of democracy, and the old relationships and values of the Homeric aristocracy formed an uneasy mix with the newer values of the democratic polis. Loyalty to friends and
family, for example, came into conflict with loyalty to the city-state. Although the notion of reciprocal favors remained an important part of community life, since one's fellow-citizens are, in a sense, one's philoi (Blundell 41-49; MacLachlan 80-82), it was now possible to distinguish both personal and public charis. Wealthy individuals gave gifts to the state through expenditures known as liturgies, financing public works such as ships or choruses for dramatic productions (Fine 433-435; Stockton 107-08). Although the benefactor ideally performed these duties, as Aristotle says, "for the nobility of the action" (NE IV.iv.7-8), there is evidence that some return was expected. It was a commonplace in forensic cases, for example, in which a citizen might be charged with treason or taking bribes, for the defendant to enumerate all of the benefits — military and cultural — previously bestowed on the state by both himself and his ancestors. These recitals amount to a defense of the character of the accused, and the defendant often asks for charis from the jury in return for all of his previous benefactions. Although the term charis in these speeches is often translated as "return" or "gratitude," the meaning sometimes seems to approach that of our word "mercy." This use of charis in the law courts will become an important theme in the Gorgias.

Since the concept of charis itself became controversial, it is not surprising that the relationship of charis to speech also came into question, particularly in light of the increasing importance of rhetoric in the life of the democratic polis. As we shall see, the notions of personal and political favor, as well as the power

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21 This conflict is a favorite theme of the tragedians. The Antigone of Sophocles is perhaps the best-known example.

of the social pleasure produced by speech, are issues which inform the Gorgias. At the risk of stating the obvious, however, I think it worth noting that these questions did not originate with Plato. There is an easy tendency among scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition to think of Plato as the sole opponent of the sophists and of rhetoric, and thus to dismiss his criticisms as "carpings" (Enos 75). Although Plato was certainly a vocal opponent of sophistic rhetoric, the urgency of the concern about rhetoric in ancient Greece cannot be overestimated. Plato was certainly not alone in exploring the potential for good and bad in rhetoric, nor in dramatizing the connections among speech, pleasure, and political oratory. Aristophanes in comedy and Euripides in tragedy, to name only two examples, raised many of the same questions during Socrates' own lifetime. In the Knights, for example, Aristophanes parodies political oratory and orators (Cleon in particular) through the actions and words of a slave and a sausage-seller who attempt to control the old man "Demus" through flattery and gifts of food. And in Euripides' Hecuba, the chorus of captive Trojan women bitterly describe Odysseus as dēmocharistēs, "charis-pleaser of the demos." Some scholars have noted that the Hecuba shows the awful acts -- murder, for instance -- which travel under the name of charis (Pearson 144-147). While there are, of course, differing interpretations of these plays -- some see the Hecuba as an indictment of rhetoric while others believe it offers a defense -- it is clear that the questions raised about rhetoric in the Gorgias are not simply "carpings" but

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23 The analogy between rhetoric and cookery is an interesting parallel between the Gorgias and the Knights, in which the slave advises the sausage-seller to "Win over Demus with the savoury sauce/ Of little cookery phrases" (215-216). In the final scene, the sausage-seller and his rival, Paphlagon (whose name means "blusterer") open their food hampers and ply Demus with delicacies.

24 This is MacLachlan's translation.

part of a vital controversy. I now begin to examine that controversy as Plato presents it in the Gorgias.
CHAPTER 4. THE RHETORICAL SITUATION OF THE GORGIAS

Place and Time

Although the Gorgias begins with a prologue, some commentators note that it lacks much of the descriptive scene-setting found in other works like the Protagoras and the Symposium (Dodds 6; Plochman and Robinson xx). We know that the dialogue takes place in Athens in front of an audience which has come to hear Gorgias speak. Beyond this simple fact, however, matters are less clear, and neither the setting nor the exact dramatic date are known. Several dramatic dates have been suggested for the dialogue — from the textual evidence itself, Dodds finds a wide range of possible dates, from 429-405 B.C.E.26 As to setting, Dodds argues that the initial contact between Callicles, who has attended Gorgias' speech, and Socrates and Chaerephon, who have come from the marketplace, takes place outside a "gymnasion or other public building," whereupon the trio immediately moves inside for the bulk of the conversations (188). Although the evidence for this movement from outside to inside is based on only one small phrase (Callicles' reference at 447c8-9 to "those inside," tôn endon ontôn), such movement seems consistent with the general emphasis in the dialogue on moving toward a charis of the "inner" soul and away from a more materialistic and "worldly" charis. At the same time, however, we never really leave the realm of the public since there is always an audience of undetermined size in attendance. It seems to me, then, that the situational ambiguity of the dialogue — a semi-public space — suggests a Platonic conception

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26The date of composition of the dialogue is also uncertain. Thompson suggests 395-389 B.C.E. (xx); Dodds 387-385 B.C.E. (26-7); and Ledger 386 B.C.E. (224).
of the individual soul as both separate from society yet always connected to it.
This idea of separate-yet-connected will recur in Socrates' conversation with
Polus, and it recurs again when we consider the life of Socrates himself.

Dodds attributes this ambiguity of setting, in part, to the dialogue's "direct
dramatic" form, which is acted by the characters rather than narrated by Socrates
or another party (6). On the question of why Plato so constructed the Gorgias,
Dodds merely speculates that Plato was "less interested" in this dramatic
situation than in some others (6). But why should this be so? Although we can
never know Plato's real intentions, we can try to identify some possible effects of
this direct dramatic construction and ask why it should be important to the
dialogue as a whole. As Strauss remarks, one effect of the "performed" dialogue
is distancing -- a removal of the "bridge between the characters of the dialogue
and the reader" (58). A narrated dialogue, on the other hand, is more intimate in
that it creates a special bond between reader and narrator -- in dialogues narrated
by Socrates (the Lysis, for example), we are often privy to Socrates' thoughts and
motives, an access not necessarily enjoyed by his interlocutors (58). In such cases,
this intimacy provides a filter through which the reader sees the dramatic action.
A performed dialogue gives us no special "privileges" in entering the characters' inner thoughts. We are more spectators at a play than friends listening to a story.
Consequently, the most important effect of this form might be that it distances us
from Socrates. Indeed, Dodds has remarked that the character of Socrates seems
different in this dialogue: he seems less playful, more strident and dogmatic,
with less of the self-deprecating humor he exhibits in other dialogues (16-17).

27 Many "performed" dialogues, however, are notable for their emphasis on scene-setting. The Phaedrus is a prominent example.
Audience

There are many levels of audience in a Platonic dialogue, and the Gorgias is no exception. First, there is apparently a crowd in attendance, many of whom are likely to be young men contemplating an association with Gorgias. They remain anonymous throughout the dialogue but offer approval of and encouragement to the speakers. Second, all of the main characters except Socrates (and even he, for a brief time) become part of the audience when they are not actively engaged in conversation. Third, we ourselves who read the dialogue are members of another audience. I will not consider all the implications of these different levels of audience in detail; however, it is important to keep in mind the public (or, at least, semi-public) nature of the dialogue because doing so reminds us that while Socrates appears to converse with only one person at a time, there is always a connection to a wider audience.

Characters

Plochman and Robinson remark that the “dramatic-fictional aspects of the dialogue are concentrated here” rather than in any descriptions of action or scene (xx). This seems to me to be true and appropriate to the dialogue’s focus on politics as a shaper of souls. In this section, then, I give a brief summary of what we know (or think we know) about the characters as historical figures, along with my view of how they function in the dialogue. It is important to do so because understanding as much as we can about the characters as historical figures aids in establishing the context of the dialogue. In other words, since Plato has taken the trouble to construct his dialogue around certain historical figures, we as readers should attempt to become familiar with them. Again, the characters are part of the cultural “familiar” that Plato is attempting to exploit.
With respect to Gorgias, it seems especially worthwhile to review some recent scholarship before starting the analysis of the dialogue. This is not because recent theory will be used to berate Plato for presenting Gorgias as something of a dolt, as some rhetoricians charge. Plato is, after all, writing dialogues, which are neither histories nor treatises, and as the author of a drama, albeit a philosophical drama, he is free to make Gorgias a slightly comic figure. In this he is little different from Aristophanes, whom we do not generally berate for painting Socrates as a scalawag in the Clouds. However, it is important to realize that Plato's picture of Gorgias is probably distorted with regard to the actual man. Although it is not the purpose of this study to dwell on those distortions, it is important for each reader to look for possible inconsistencies and to decide for him- or herself how significant they are. And if, as Jacob Klein argues, the name of a character conjures up an image that we carry into the dialogue with us (35-36), it seems important to highlight a variety of those images as they currently stand.

Gorgias: Since the title of our dialogue is Gorgias, it is appropriate to start with the question, "Who is Gorgias?" The answer is both easy and extraordinarily difficult, involving as it does the question of the relationship between dramatic character and historical figure. In the simplest terms, we know that Plato named the Gorgias after the famous Sicilian rhetorician who visited Athens as an ambassador in the fifth century B.C.E. (Enos 74). Beyond this crude fact, however, things become controversial very quickly. Scholars, often split along "party lines," have commented with varying degrees of indignation on Plato's portrayal of Gorgias and his views in this dialogue — in fact, Gorgias himself is said to have read the dialogue and commented on Plato's ability "to satirize" (iambizo) (DK 82A.15a). Among classicists, Lamb calls Plato's Gorgias "a
man of fine sense and integrity” though possessed of some “absurd” pretensions (255); Dodds describes him as “a well-meaning but somewhat muddleheaded old gentlemen” (9); and George Kennedy calls him an “amiable, if pompous” interlocutor who is nevertheless “inept” at arguing for his views (19, 35). To no one’s surprise, stronger statements about the character come from rhetoricians such as Richard Enos, who calls the characterization “biased . . . a gross misrepresentation” (72), and “blatantly unfair” (85); and Gronbeck, who proclaims it a “degradation” (27). On the other hand, philosopher Guthrie sees “no marks of caricature” in Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias (181 n2).

Certainly the historical accuracy of Plato’s portrayal of the Sophists has been controversial for many decades; Guthrie shows that the debate dates back well into the nineteenth century (9-13). That the debate has such a long history is testimony to the difficulty of determining accurately the nature of both Sophistic teachings in general and Gorgian teachings in particular. On the one hand, the character Gorgias does not seem an accurate portrayal of the historical figure, if only because Plato’s Gorgias makes some admissions inconsistent with remarks made in Gorgias’ extant works. For example, at 454e4-7, Gorgias’ admission that there is a form of persuasion that can produce knowledge (epistêmê) seems absurd in the light of both the On Not Being, which, according to some scholars, debunks the whole idea of true knowledge, and the Encomium of Helen, where persuasion is said always to be achieved by “false argument” (DK 82B11.11).28 Still, one must be cautious in appealing to Gorgias’ speeches as flat statements of intellectual doctrine since the works, which are regrettably few, are notoriously

28Bruce McComiskey has recently written a critique of Plato’s Gorgias which spells out many possible inconsistencies between the dialogue and Gorgias’ speeches. See list of Works Cited. For English translations of the Diels-Kranz Greek fragments, see Rosamund Kent Sprague, ed., The Older Sophists, Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1972.
difficult to interpret, often show distinctive elements of linguistic play, and raise a strong possibility of parody. These hermeneutic problems have raised doubts about the seriousness of Gorgias' intentions in producing his speeches (Robinson). Accordingly, agreement on the nature of Gorgias' intellectual orientation has been hard to come by, and over the years a variety of philosophical and epistemological labels have been attached to him. Gronbeck, for example, draws parallels between Gorgias' thought and modern existentialism-phenomenology. Bett (150) and de Romilly (20) call him a skeptic; Guthrie (272), McComiskey (82f), and Consigny ("Gorgias' Use" 288) a relativist (or "relativistic"); Smith (344) and Hunt (28-29) a nihilist; and Untersteiner an "irrationalist" (159).

Within the fields of English Studies and Speech Communications, the variety of opinions is nearly as diverse. In 1991, Susan Jarratt identified three approaches to Sophist scholarship, and these three categories seem appropriate to scholarship which deals more specifically with Gorgias, at least within the fields of English Studies and Speech Communication. The first approach, which Jarratt calls "historical legitimation," sees Gorgias as opposed to Plato and Aristotle but possessed of an alternative philosophy and epistemology (6-7). The most prominent representative of this position is Richard Enos, who argues that Gorgias belonged to "a philosophical tradition" begun by Empedocles, which "stressed probability, antithesis, relativism and sense-perception" (83); but he also hints at a hermeneutic stance for Gorgias, "a belief that speech . . . does not demonstrate an essence or truism but reveals through interpretation partial 'knowledge' of real-world phenomena" (80). Enos' remarks are generally compatible with the work of several other scholars, who largely agree that Gorgias 1) rejected the possibility of human knowledge of essences, if not their
actual existence (Consigny 49; Gronbeck 30-32; Guthrie 194, 253-54, 271; Kerferd 80-81, 98-100; Segal 99-102, 113); 2) recognized opinion (doxa), which is controlled by logos, as the primary medium of human judgment (Segal 111-112, Untersteiner 116-117); 3) practiced a pedagogy based on commonplaces and controversia, similar but perhaps not identical to that of Protagoras and other sophists (Aristotle Soph. Ref. 183b36-184a1; Cicero, Brutus 46-47; Untersteiner 141); 4) held a relativistic notion of rhetoric based on kairos, in which arguments are generated and judgments made according to their appropriateness in particular circumstances (Enos 83; Schiappa, Protagoras 73-74; Poulakos 38-42); and 5) had an “empirical” bent, including an early interest in physical science and in the physiology of perception and human psychology (Gronbeck 29; Kerferd 39; Segal 99, 101, 135n4, n6).

The second approach to Sophistic scholarship identified by Jarratt grows out of, but is not identical to, Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction and his critique of Western philosophy (7-9). In the area of composition studies, for example, Sharon Crowley and Victor Vitanzahave interpreted Gorgias through a deconstructionist and postmodernist lens. Vitanza, for example, uses Gorgias’ On Not Being as a springboard for his promotion of a post-modern, non-foundational pedagogy which is subversive of traditional Western thought. Crowley, too, has connected Gorgias with Derrida, arguing for a pedagogy which uses writing less as “a handmaiden of speech” and more as a powerful device in its own right (284). Jarratt herself uses a “feminist appropriation of deconstruction as a search for historically located and politically significant difference” (xxiii) in her historical readings of Gorgias’ Helen. Although many of Enos’ remarks about Gorgias’ intellectual position, especially those about kairos and anti-essentialism, are accepted by scholars who give more decidedly
"deconstructive" readings of Gorgias, it remains controversial whether "philosophy of communication" or "epistemology" are appropriate labels for Gorgian thinking. Consigny, for example, argues that Enos, Gronbeck, and Untersteiner are too eager to interpret Gorgias' sometime-use of antithesis as an "epistemology" and that Gorgias is better understood as a non-foundational, hermeneutic thinker in a Rortian sense ("Styles" 48-50). Consigny presents Gorgias' rhetoric as radically opposed to mainstream Western philosophy in that Gorgias attempts to adapt himself to different styles and genres of discourse, each of which may have their own set of possible truths, rather than seeking an overarching discourse which can articulate a final Truth (49-50). In fact, Consigny argues that each of Gorgias' extant works -- defense speech, funeral oration, encomium, Eleatic speculation -- are better seen as parodies of genre, playful speeches by which Gorgias undermines the notion of any reliable connections among thought, language, and reality, thus freeing the listener from the tyranny of privileged discourses ("Sophistic Freedom"). Once again, these views are supported by the work of other scholars who believe Gorgias had an anti-essentialist position which raised serious questions about, if not altogether denied, the referential capacity of language (Kerferd 80-81; Moss 215-216), but focused much of his attention, at least in his later years, on practical applications of rhetoric in political life (Segal 99, 102-103; Smith 4-5; Enos 84; Gronbeck 35).

29 There is general agreement between Enos and Consigny that Gorgias rejected the notion of ontological essences, but there is some disagreement over terminology. It seems possible for Enos to speak of a non-foundational epistemology, although he uses the term "nonformal" instead of "non-foundational" (83). Consigny follows Rorty, however, for whom an epistemology is by definition foundational.
30 For an account of the similarities between the ancient sophists and post-modernism, written from a Platonic perspective, see Rochnik, The Tragedy of Reason, passim.
Jarratt’s third identified approach to the Sophists is social constructionism, which posits the human community as the locus of knowledge (9-10). Although Protagoras is the Sophist normally appealed to in discussions of sophistic social and educational theory and practice (Jarratt 98-102; Guthrie 145-146, 173-75), and no one to my knowledge has explicitly linked Gorgias to social constructionism, his anti-essentialism, his apparent emphasis on both the power of language (Helen, DK 82.11), and his practical applications of rhetoric to political life (Enos 85; Gronbeck 35) would seem at least partly compatible with this modern social theory of knowledge.

Jarratt’s scheme of classification is useful for trying to place Gorgias with respect to modern and post-modern ways of thinking, but such efforts sometimes say more about modern and post-modern thought than they do about Gorgias. Indeed, any single contemporary label seems to fail to describe Gorgias’ thinking completely, and for good reason. As Edward Schiappa has recently pointed out, Gorgias belongs to a time period before any such classifications; in Schiappa’s words, Gorgias is “predisciplinary” (310). He lived at the end of the pre-Socratic era, when discourse types and intellectual products in general were distinguished by only the roughest of categories, and the magico-religious coexisted with the empirical and rational in many intellectual practices, including the protodisciplines of medicine and science (Dodds, Greeks 144-146, 192-193; Grmek 210-244). Thus, modern efforts to squeeze Gorgias into an intellectual Procrustean bed will surely lop off parts of the whole. As Schiappa notes, “It is easy to fixate on Gorgias’ exotic style and his “magical” use of language and, as a

31 This definition is admittedly a bit simplistic since “social constructionism,” at least in composition studies, is now part of a broader category of social theories of knowledge. The original “social constructionism,” in which knowledge is formed by the consensus of members of a particular community, has come under attack by feminists, for example, for its neglect of the power relationships in human society.
result, neglect his more ‘rationalistic’ side” (315). According to Schiappa, Gorgias was part of a general trend toward a “literate/rationalistic,” style in prose composition through his combination of more logical organization and apagogic argumentation with poetic/mythical subject matters and commonplaces (315-317).

With regard to the pleasure of logos, however, there is little reason to doubt that, whatever his intentions, the historical Gorgias was lauded for the pleasurable effects of his speeches. Ancient sources testify to his use of rhetorical figures of all types, which were often novel and extremely attractive to Athenian audiences. Philostratus, for example, reports that Gorgias became famous for using rhetorical strategies and figures “by which speech becomes sweeter (hēdion) than it has been and more impressive” (DK 82.A1.2).32 Even Gorgias himself, in the Encomium of Helen, calls the speech a paignion — a game, a sportive poem, an entertainment (DK 82.B11.21).33 Moreover, Gorgias does seem to imply in the Helen that one purpose of a speech is to bring delight (terpsis) to the audience (DK B82.11.5), and he appears to emphasize the emotional effects of logos as well (DK 82.B11.8-14). Of course, this is but one speech, and perhaps modern scholars have exerted too much effort in turning it into a definitive commentary on logos. Nevertheless, Gorgias’ statement that poetry is “speech with meter” at least implies a profound connection between poetry and rhetoric (DK 82B.11.9), and scholars such as Verdenius, Segal, and Untersteiner have all emphasized the connections of Gorgias’ rhetoric with both the emotional effects and the delight of poetry, mainly through analyses of these and other passages of

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32 See also DK 82A.2-5; DK 82A.35.
33 Sprague translates paignion as “diversion.”
the Helen. Perhaps it was this aspect of Gorgian rhetoric that caused Plato to choose him as a basis for his fictional character.

Ultimately, "what Gorgias really thought" may remain something of an enigma to modern readers, and so it will be impossible to know how much Plato has distorted the historical Gorgias. For Schiappa, however, the fact that Gorgias appeared to be questioning traditional forms of thought "is a more important step... than any particular claim" he may have made ("Gorgias's Helen," 320). For example, one of the most important aspects of Gorgias’ work, with regard to the Helen, at least, is its tendency to humanize; that is, Gorgias shows a willingness to incorporate various "secular" explanations for what were previously considered completely supernatural phenomena (316-321). This is not surprising since Gorgias lived in a time when there was a general trend toward secularization in ancient Greece. We shall revisit this issue of secularization in another context in Chapter Five when we consider the concept of technē.

Polus: Dodds reports that Polus was a Sicilian (11). He was probably a student of Gorgias, also a Sicilian, or at least had a close association with him. Polus apparently wrote a treatise on rhetoric or public speaking, which Plato parodies at Gorgias 448c4-10 (Dodds 11; Renehan 69-71). In the Gorgias, he is as brash and impatient as his name ("colt") suggests. Some scholars have remarked on what they perceive to be Polus' reprehensible moral character (Dodds 11-12), yet Socrates twice declares himself philos to Polus. It is worth asking, then, why Socrates should make a point of his friendly feelings for someone so base, especially since these two declarations of friendship do not seem (at least to me) to be ironic. Richard McKim argues that while Polus may on the surface

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34Cf Aristotle, Metaphysics, 981a 5-7.
advocate some morally reprehensible ideas, he always answers Socrates frankly with statements which he really believes to be true, and although he tries out some of his rhetorical "tricks," he never attempts to evade the discussion in order to avoid being refuted, as Callicles does at various points. In short, McKim claims that Socrates considers Polus "salvageable" where Callicles is not (46, 46n33). There is some truth to McKim's argument, but I hope to show that Socrates considers Callicles potentially salvageable as well. Polus' blatant honesty seems more attributable to the fact that he is neither disciplined enough in his thinking nor experienced enough in dialectic to "think ahead" to the consequences of his answers; he simply responds with the first thing that comes to mind. Socrates' use of the word phile seems more didactic than factual, used to draw attention to Socrates' belief that refutation is an act of friendship.

**Chaerephon:** Chaerephon was a companion of Socrates, who tells us in the *Apology* that Chaerephon was "a companion to the masses" (i.e., he was a democrat) and was exiled during the brief oligarchy (21a1-2). Socrates also says elsewhere that his friend is excitable (*Charmides* 153b3) and impetuous (*Apology* 21a4). According to Dodds, Chaerephon appeared as a character in many comedies, perhaps because he had a high-pitched voice which earned him the nick-name "the bat" (6). In the *Gorgias*, Chaerephon is well-educated enough to make literary allusions and sharp enough to use them in good-natured banter (Dodds 189-190); he is less accomplished in dialectic, however, and still in need of guidance from Socrates. He professes a fondness for conversation and speeches, as did most Athenians, yet is easily distracted by the hustle and bustle of the market-place. I would suggest, for reasons that will become more clear when examining the prologue of the *Gorgias*, that Chaerephon functions as Plato's
conception of a typical upper-class Athenian democrat: essentially well-meaning but inclined to intellectual shallowness.

Callicles: According to Dodds, there is no historical record of Callicles, although he is the most prominent of Socrates' interlocutors. Dodds, however, makes a reasonable case that Callicles is a bona-fide historical figure: All the other participants in the dialogue are real; Callicles has relatives and friends (hetairoi) who are historically real; and he has an erômenos, or love-object, who is historically real. Dodds sees nothing to suggest that Callicles was not also historically real and speculates that Callicles may have died a young man, too soon to make a lasting impact on history (12-13).

In this dialogue, Callicles is an accomplished speaker, wealthy and important enough to entertain a prominent rhetor-ambassador like Gorgias. Apparently an aristocrat by birth (494e10) and certainly one by temperament, he is politically very ambitious. He advocates a rather extreme form of hedonism (see Klosko), an attitude which is foreshadowed throughout the dialogue by his use of words associated with desire and gratification (for example, at 458d1-5). The word epithumia in particular, which Callicles uses several times (447b5, 481c1, 484d7, 491e10, 492a4), is associated with strong, lustful desires, especially in Plato's works. According to Drew Hyland, Plato uses the word — in the Phaedrus, the Symposium, and other dialogues — to denote an animal-like emotion which has no component of reason ("Eρως" 37). Hyland describes it as "the lowest faculty of the soul, the brute desire to possess what one lacks," associated with, among other things, sexual gratification (40-41). These are the terms in which Callicles thinks. Although Lamb calls Callicles "the typical Athenian democrat"

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35 However, as Dover points out in Greek Homosexuality (43n11), Plato's use of the word may be different from popular usage.
(252), I agree with Dodds that Lamb is misguided (13). As I have already suggested, Chaerephon is more likely to fulfill that role. Indeed, Callicles is hardly typical, if only because his desires for gratification, for charis, are so strong. As the dialogue shows, that is part of both his danger and his promise; it is because of this strong desire that Socrates can, and must, offer him an alternative to the political life to which he aspires.

**Socrates:** In his commentary on the Gorgias, Dodds declined to give a character analysis "either of the historical or of the Platonic Socrates" (16). Indeed, the subject is so complex and the available literature so extensive that such an analysis would itself fill many volumes, and it is not my intention to rush in where Dodds feared to tread. However, I have already noted Dodds' remark that Socrates is, or "becomes" a character much different from how he appears in other Platonic dialogues (16). Other commentators have remarked on the relative strangeness of Socrates' character, speculating that it may emphasize the alienation of Socrates (and Plato) from the political culture of classical Athens. Although these speculations are reasonable, I would also argue that the Gorgias presents Socrates as an example of a way of life -- philosophy -- that is alien to tradition but nevertheless a vital part of the community. In other words, as L. B. Carter argues in a recent study of Athenian political quietism, Socrates does not pursue a career as a politician, but he does pursue individuals in conversations, asking questions on issues that are important to all (185). Like the semi-public setting of the Gorgias, Socrates' life both is and is not public.
CHAPTER 5. CHARIS AND PHILIA IN PLATO’S GORGIAS

The Prologue: 447a1-448c10

Many of Plato’s dialogues begin with a prologue in which some of the main themes of the work are foreshadowed, and the Gorgias is one of these. The prologue begins with Callicles’ greeting and Socrates’ response:

C: To join in a fight or a fray, as the saying is, Socrates, you have chosen our time well enough.

S: Do you mean, according to the proverb, we have come too late for a feast? (447a1-4)

Callicles’ greeting, which apparently gives a twist to a familiar saying, is like a small riddle, a test of Socrates’ wit and a small display of Callicles’ own verbal quickness. The feast, as Callicles confirms, is Gorgias’ epideictic performance, which has just concluded. Thus Callicles provides the dialogue’s first association of public speaking with pleasure, the charis of the feast, which from Homeric times was understood as full of merriment, fellowship, and the gratification of appetite (MacLachlan 23). Indeed, Callicles seems well-satisfied with the “many things and fine things” (polla . . . kai kala) of Gorgias’ display. With this small exchange, Callicles has suggested two social activities, fighting and feasting, and identified Gorgias with the pleasure of the former and Socrates with the strife of the latter — perhaps a humorous but pointed reference to Socrates’ reputation for contentiousness. But there is also a charis associated with the battlefield, and

36 Several commentators (Dodds, Thompson, Hamilton) compare this exchange to an English proverb, “First at a feast, last at a fight,” but this association does not seem certain. In any case, the phrase to legomenon, literally, “the thing said,” indicates a familiar saying. According to Hamilton (19n), Olympiodorus reports that the days on which Gorgias spoke were called “feast-days,” but perhaps this is a reference to the Gorgias itself.
Socrates will later take up these two associations for his own purpose, showing how there can be a kind of charis in striving, and drawing a distinction between the fellowship of rhetoric and that of philosophy.

Socrates playfully accuses Chaerephon of "forcing" them to tarry in the marketplace. Chaerephon does not protest but says that he himself will cure the injury he has inflicted: he claims that Gorgias will immediately give another display out of friendship for him (philos gar moi Gorgias, For Gorgias is my friend), if Socrates so desires (447a7-b4). This claim of philia seems odd. Perhaps Gorgias is a friend of Chaerephon's, although their level of intimacy is not clear. Nevertheless, can it be truly in the spirit of philia to demand of one's friend, especially an elderly person such as Gorgias, that he perform once again after having already given a lengthy display? Chaerephon's use of philia seems boastful, perhaps used in order to make himself look good in the eyes of the assembled company, and possibly in the eyes of Socrates. This Chaerephon seems a well-educated and gregarious man, but shallow, eager to claim an intimacy with a popular public figure like Gorgias. Chaerephon expects that Gorgias will gratify his wishes, but his conception of philia seems lacking in any real concern for the other person's welfare. It seeks only advantage. In this way, Chaerephon embodies what Socrates considers the typical attitude of the Athenian dèmos toward its orators, a relationship expanded upon in later sections.

37 Although Chaerephon does not deny this, we suspect Socrates of being ironic, for Callicles is incredulous that Socrates should want to attend one of Gorgias' displays. ("What, Chaerephon? Has Socrates a desire to hear Gorgias?" 447b5-6) We are thus not sure whether Socrates has really been "detained" by Chaerephon or whether he has simply gone along with his friend, intending all along to miss Gorgias' display. But given Socrates' famous dislike of long speeches, we suspect so.

38 There is some historical evidence that they knew each other, but no real evidence of a close relationship. See DK 82A.24.
Like Chaerephon, Callicles also asserts that Gorgias will give a display, but this time in return for Callicles' hospitality: "Gorgias is staying with me, and he will give you a display" (447b8-10). In this way Callicles resembles the Callias of Plato's Protagoras, who also associated with prominent intellectuals. Traditionally, as we have seen, the bond between host and guest was an important charis-relationship, and the expectation of reciprocal favor would be an accepted value among aristocrats. But does Callicles have the right to exploit the reciprocity of hospitality in order to satisfy the whims of others? Like Chaerephon, Callicles assumes that Gorgias will give a display whenever Socrates desires, apparently without regard for the wishes of Gorgias. Both men make a claim of reciprocity, assuming that Gorgias owes them a charis, which is to be repaid on demand. Although their personalities and their ambitions are different in scale — Chaerephon is essentially harmless while Callicles is revealed as a potential tyrant — both are willing to use Gorgias to further their own interests, to make themselves seem important or powerful. Callicles, like Chaerephon, offers Socrates a charis: to obtain for him one of Gorgias' displays, another feast. But where Chaerephon speaks in terms of "curing" a wrong done, Callicles thinks in terms of gratifying a desire (epithumeo). Socrates, on the other hand, will offer Callicles a friendship based on an unusual and paradoxical charis.

In the last part of the prologue, there is an exchange between Polus and Chaerephon that foreshadows more of the criticisms Socrates will make of both rhetors and the rhetor-audience relationship. Chaerephon, with some prompting from Socrates, attempts to question Gorgias but is interrupted by Polus, who offers to take Gorgias' place on the grounds that "Gorgias must be quite tired out" (448a8). Here, apparently, is the concern for Gorgias' well-being.
absent in Chaerephon, a concern we might reasonably expect from a student solicitous of a respected teacher. Yet, as Plochman and Robinson point out, Polus has not been invited into the conversation by Gorgias as Chaerephon has been invited by Socrates, nor does he ask for advice from his teacher as Chaerephon does (12). Polus' concern for Gorgias is suspect, and smacks of self-promotion, not true concern for his friend. Polus does break in, however, and challenges Chaerephon, who asks if Polus thinks he can answer "more excellently" (kallíōn) than the master Gorgias. Polus replies, "And what does that matter, if I should satisfy you?" (448a10-b2). Unfortunately, Chaerephon willingly accepts this poor substitute (11). The political relationship between politician and dēmos which Socrates will later criticize is thus embodied on a personal level in Polus and Chaerephon — the one, a self-promoter seeking only to satisfy his audience without regard for the best, and the other, a shallow thinker too eager to settle for what is offered. Thus, the prologue introduces the issue of civic, as well as personal, philia.

We see, then, that while the word charis is yet to be uttered, the idea of charis is present implicitly in the prologue. First, it is present in the traditional conceptions of feasting and fighting. Second, it is present by association through the concepts of personal and civic philia. Moreover, in addition to the problematic relationship between rhetor and citizenry, the prologue also raises the issue of education. Teacher and student can be said to have a relationship which, through the bonding of individuals and the training of future citizens, combines the charis of both personal and civic philia. Polus and Chaerephon are, if not students, then at least close associates of Gorgias and Socrates. Yet both men, self-centered and clumsy at argument, prove to be poor advertisements for their mentors. What have Polus and Chaerephon received from their teachers?
What charis, if any, flows between teacher and student? The conversation between Socrates and Gorgias begins to explore this issue by inquiring into the nature of rhetoric — what the student receives from the rhetorician.

Gorgias: The Charis of Rhetorical Power, 448d1-461b2

Asking the “What is it” question (ti esti) is Socrates’ standard procedure in many Platonic dialogues, and Socrates’ goal in the conversation with Gorgias is to seek an answer to the question “What is rhetoric?” (448e9-449a5). In particular, Socrates wants to know what kind of art, or technē, Gorgias professes to have. This question is important to the present discussion of charis because rhetorical ability — the power in operation between rhetor and audience — is what is given or transmitted from teacher to student. The skills of rhetoric — whatever they may be — are thus in themselves a kind of gift, a charis which the teacher bestows on the student, and Socrates wishes to know the exact nature of that gift. Socrates himself puts the “what is it” question in terms of education at 445c7-445d7, when he supposes that many of those in the audience wish to be Gorgias’ students and are asking themselves, “What shall we get, Gorgias, by coming to hear you?” Although the term charis is still yet to come, it is again implicit in the discussion which follows. There, Socrates begins to ask what charis the rhetorician brings to the reciprocal relationship of teacher-student. What will the student have or be able to do when the transaction is complete?

In an assertion which introduces the issue of power, Gorgias claims that his art is a cause of freedom for human beings at large and also a way for

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39Dodds (202), Irwin (19), and Hamilton all translate this first portion as either freedom “for a man himself” or freedom “for himself” but do not explain how the plural construction “tois autois anthrōpois” yields a translation in the singular. Surely this must mean “human beings themselves,” or “hankind.” Plochman and Robinson (26), Lamb, and Woodhead use the plural.
individuals to dominate in their cities (452d7-9). As this assertion stands, there appears to be a tension between the two halves of the claim, as Plochman and Robinson rightly point out. Domination for one means less freedom for others (26). It is worthwhile, however, to examine this apparent contradiction and to speculate on what Gorgias might be referring to when he says that his art is a cause of freedom to mankind at large. For freedom would seem to be a large and valuable charis indeed. A clue, I think, comes from a line in Polus’ speech at 448c6-7. At this point Polus says that “experience conducts the course of our life according to art (techne), but inexperience according to chance (tuche).” This opposition between chance or luck on the one hand, and art or skill on the other, traditional in Greek thought, helps explain not only how rhetoric could bring freedom to all human beings but also why the concept of techne was so important to both Socrates and the sophists and rhetors in Plato’s dialogues.

For the Greeks, tuche meant the contingencies of human life, those things which happen to us, not necessarily at random, but without our own intervention or intention (Dover, GPM 138). As Martha Nussbaum puts it, “What happens to a person by luck will be just what does not happen through his or her own agency, what just happens to him, as opposed to what he does or makes” (3, emphasis hers). Chance or luck, closely allied with fate, was much more psychologically present to and far more forbidding for the ancient Greeks than it is for twentieth-century moderns. Bernard Williams notes that for the archaic Greeks in particular, “human beings were largely powerless against fate and chance . . . . they [fate and chance] belong to an order of things that has the shape and the discouraging effect of a hostile plan, a plan that remains incurably hidden from us” (150).
To be so deeply subject to chance is to possess little control over one's life. A *technē*, however, gives us hope for a measure of control. A *technē* is any skill, craft, or art, "intelligent skill in a very broad sense" (Roochnik 18). Indeed, the concept is broad enough to include such things as painting or sculpture, mathematics, engineering, carpentry, weaving, and wood or metal working. It is this systematic use of human intelligence which is deployed against chance. Consider a simple example. If I try to make a shelter for myself by proceeding at random, I shall probably fail outright or my final product will be inferior. If I learn carpentry, however, I can produce dwellings reliably and predictably, and I can teach others to be carpenters as well. Because of my skill, I and my friends will be less subject to the whims of the weather, our future more secure. I cannot stop the rain, but I can stop my getting wet. The Great Myth of Plato's *Protagoras* is about the reception of such *technai* from the gods and the difference they made to human civilization. Before art, life proceeded, as in Polus' commonplace, according to chance. But *technē*, "a deliberate application of human intelligence to some part of the world," helps us mitigate the effects of chance and makes us more secure (Nussbaum 95).

In this sense, then, *technē* gives human beings a measure of freedom—freedom from chance and contingency. It is this general sort of freedom that underlies Gorgias' claim that rhetoric brings freedom to human beings at large. More specifically, however, this will include freedom from the contingencies and dangers that arise from dealing with other human beings. These social dangers can be regarded as abstract, as in Consigny's claim that Gorgias' rhetoric brings freedom from the tyranny of one discourse (see Chapter Four, page 28), or

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40 In fact, the word *technē* is descended from the word *tektōn*, "woodworker" (Roochnik, *Tragedy* 18). For general discussions of *technē*, see Roochnik, *Tragedy* 18-21, and Nussbaum 94-99. Nussbaum's book examines the connection between *tuchē* and Greek ethics.
they can be considered in a more concrete way as freedom from the practical actions of others. Especially in Athens, for example, citizens were subject to lawsuits of all types, including, if one was wealthy, malicious accusations by sycophants hoping to profit from their victims' misfortunes. This type of danger was not remote. When Callicles warns that someone might haul Socrates into court on a trumped-up charge, he is speaking of fairly common occurrences in classical Athens (Carter 105-109; Ober 173-174). If one could not defend oneself, one was at another's mercy. Thus, freedom for the Athenians would include, as Irwin says, freedom from being "dependent on the power or goodwill of others" (116). To be so dependent was, for many Greeks, to live a life little better than that of a slave. But rhetoric could give a measure of control over human contingency by allowing one to defend oneself in court. This is the charis of rhetoric which Callicles will later emphasize; Socrates, on the other hand, will try tease out the implications of being completely free from harm.

We see, then, how "freedom," both broadly and more narrowly conceived, could be claimed as a charis of rhetoric and of the rhetorician-student relationship. The other half of Gorgias' claim involves personal power; and it is the ability of individuals to rule which Gorgias emphasizes: the doctor, the trainer, the moneygetter will be "as slaves" to the competent rhetor who can persuade the multitude (452e5-9). This is a dominant theme in Gorgias' praise of rhetoric, occurring again at 456b7-c6, where Gorgias declares that a skilled rhetor could beat out all comers for any appointed position in the city, and again at 459c4-6, where he asks Socrates if it is not a convenience that learning just one art will make one "not inferior" to other skilled workers (dēmiourgē). Gorgias asserts, however, that although rhetoric is a great power, encompassing nearly all other powers (456a9-10-b1), it should be used "justly" (dikaios), against one's
enemies and other wrongdoers, not against one’s philoi — parents, other relatives, friends (456d1-457c4). This notion that acting justly means helping friends and harming enemies was a code of behavior widely held, if often criticized, by the ancient Greeks (Blundell, 26-59 and passim; Dover 180-184; Pearson 141-142, 161-179). It is this traditional definition of justice which Socrates refutes in the first book of the Republic.

Thus, Gorgias implies that his students will obtain a great charis by coming to study with him; they will obtain a technē which will bring them freedom and power. But earlier Gorgias had claimed, under Socrates’ questioning, that rhetoric was about justice and injustice (454b8-9); in other words, the subject matter of the rhetorical technē is justice and injustice. Now, however, Gorgias proclaims the moral neutrality of rhetoric itself; like the skills associated with combat sports, it can be used for either good or ill, depending on the character of the speaker. The speaker is the one who should be held responsible for his use of rhetoric, not the art itself or the teacher of the art. Accordingly, Socrates pursues the justice angle and goads Gorgias into claiming that if students do not already know what is just, he will teach them (460a4-5).41 Socrates finds this incompatible with Gorgias’ admission that some people might use rhetoric unjustly. In other words, if rhetoric is a technē (which by tradition has a definite and reliably teachable subject matter), and if, as Gorgias seems to claim at 454b8-9, the subject matter of that art is justice and injustice, then if the rhetorician claims to have this technē, he should be able to teach students to be just. But Gorgias has just admitted that students of rhetoric may in fact act unjustly; using the traditional conception of technē, Gorgias has been caught in a

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41This particular statement seems incompatible with statements made about the historical Gorgias, who supposedly claimed not to teach justice. On this see McKim’s article.
contradiction. Thus, in this exchange with Gorgias, Socrates has begun to question whether the rhetorician can actually provide a valuable charis to potential students. In other words, Gorgias claims, or at least implies, that he has a technē, a skill which would be a great charis in itself and a producer of charis for others. Yet, regardless of the freedom and power that rhetoric may bestow upon the student, if the subject matter of his art is justice, but students of rhetoric act unjustly, perhaps the teacher of rhetoric does not after all posses a technē which he can pass on to his students. And if he cannot teach students to be just, then perhaps the charis that the rhetorician offers is not in fact the great charis that he claims it is.\(^\text{42}\)

At this point, moreover, Socrates begins to suggest that there might be a charis of dialectic, of the elenchus, which is not conventional but nevertheless there. Socrates begins by remarking on the difficulty of communication in discussion. It is hard to distinguish the issues at hand, he says, and people often get annoyed when they are challenged, thinking they are being personally attacked. The spirit of inquiry is lost and all become contentious; soon even the audience is disgusted (457c5-e2). Clearly, then, the charis-pleasure traditionally associated with speech is sometimes lacking in dialectic. However, Socrates says that he would continue questioning Gorgias “with pleasure” (hēdeōs) if Gorgias is the same sort of man as Socrates himself: someone who would be refuted “with pleasure” if he says anything untrue, and who would refute anyone else “with pleasure” if they said anything untrue (458a1-5). Socrates’ emphasis on pleasure in this passage suggests an alternative charis-pleasure in dialectic.

\(^\text{42}\)But even if rhetoric is not a technē which produces justice, might rhetors still not use it to obtain the charis of freedom and power which Gorgias has also claimed as a benefit of rhetoric? Socrates will take up this issue in the final two sections of the dialogue by undermining the value of the rhetor’s alleged freedom and power.
Socrates does not mean that being refuted is in itself a pleasurable activity but that being in a better state than before is pleasurable. Indeed, to be refuted is a gain or an advantage (*kerdos*) (461a3-4). Socrates takes pleasure in refuting or being refuted, that is, purging oneself or others from "the greatest evil" (*kakou ta megistou*) — having a false opinion on the questions at hand (458a6-b1). As the next conversation with Polus will make clear, Socrates believes it is a pleasure to improve one's soul, or to improve someone else's, because it is a good (*agathos*). It is a greater good, however, to have one's own soul improved.

As he does so often, Socrates makes this suggestion about dialectic in the form of a paradox. Dialectic is often not conventionally pleasurable to the participants — indeed, it can be quite painful — and cannot be called a traditional *charis*. Yet it does provide its own kind of pleasure because of the benefits it provides and so is a *charis* after all. A similar kind of paradoxical *charis* which breaks apart the two notions of pleasure and favor can be found in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. At one point in this play, the chorus considers that all the violence and suffering of the events of the Trojan War may be part of the order of things decreed by Zeus:

it is Zeus who has put men on the way to wisdom by establishing as a valid law 'By suffering they shall win understanding'. Instead of sleep there trickles before the heart the pain of remembrance of suffering: even to the unwilling discretion (*sóphronein*) comes.

There is, I think, a *charis* from the gods, who, using force (*biaiós*), sit on the dread bench of the helmsman. (176-183)

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Here we have a picture of a divine charis, a charis which is not conventionally pleasant. In fact, it is composed of suffering in the greatest degree. Yet through this suffering comes learning (pathei mathos), a gift from the gods. As Fraenkel remarks, “In our first impression the suffering . . . seems anything but charis; it is only in its results, in what we learn by it, that it proves to be a favour” (112). Socrates suggests much the same of his elenchus; it is a charis which is not a charis, a favor which is not a pleasure, like a violent gift from the gods. In fact, Callicles will later accuse Socrates of being biaios, “forceful, overbearing” (505d5).

In this first conversation with Gorgias, the issue of favor-exchange in communication has been raised. Both Socrates and Gorgias imply or suggest a charis associated with their respective discourses. Gorgias, by accepting Socrates’ assumption that rhetoric is a technē, implies that he can provide his students with a great charis, the power of rhetoric which allows us both to dominate other human beings (presumably our enemies) and to provide our friends with help. And as Callicles has implied in the prologue, this charis of power is combined with the charis-pleasure of the feast. Socrates, however, by driving Gorgias into contradiction, hints that Gorgias might not be able to make good on his offer of charis. Socrates’ charis is quite different from that of Gorgias. Apparently it is not traditionally pleasurable, yet it does provide a charis, the greatest benefit of all — being delivered of false opinion. Moreover, instead of emphasizing power, Socrates suggests that one is dependent on someone else for the greatest charis. Indeed, throughout the rest of the dialogue, Socrates will urge his interlocutors to refute him if they can. To Polus, for instance, he will say that he will be

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44Naturally there is disagreement about the interpretation of this passage. In addition to Fraenkel’s commentary, see MacLachlan for a more complete discussion of charis in the Oresteia, particularly page 126n2 for a brief summary of various points of view on lines 176-183. I am deeply indebted both to MacLachlan and to Fraenkel for the idea of the paradoxical charis in the Agamemnon. As far as I know, the extension of the concept to the Gorgias is my own.
grateful (*charis echo*) if he is refuted. He implies that the proper *charis* is correction, which will be reciprocated with the *charis* of gratitude. But at this point, Socrates has not said why rhetoric does not or cannot provide this same *charis*. This he takes up in the next section with Polus, where the concept of the paradoxical *charis* will be reversed and applied to rhetoric.

**Polus: The Paradox Reversed, 461b2-481b5**

At this juncture, Polus breaks in and accuses Socrates of shaming Gorgias into admitting that he would have to teach his students justice (461b2). So begins the conversation with Polus, wherein Socrates gives his own views (or so he says) on the nature of rhetoric. In doing so he elaborates on what the audience gains from the rhetor-hearer relationship, while Polus' reply suggests a benefit to the rhetor. When Polus asks Socrates what kind of *technē* he considers rhetoric to be, Socrates says no art at all but a "familiarity" in producing *charis* and *hēdonē*, gratification and pleasure. Polus immediately asks Socrates if he therefore thinks rhetoric is "a fine" thing (*kalos*) since it is an ability to gratify (*charizomai*) people (462b3-c10). Polus' use of the word *kalos* suggests the kind of exchange he expects from the rhetor-audience relationship. In Irwin's view, the word *kalos* is used in a very general sense in this passage, and it is not clear if Polus thinks rhetoric is *kalos* "because it benefits us, or because it benefits other people, or both" (130). Certainly this passage is a bit ambiguous because of the ambiguity of the word *kalos* itself. Being useful is one reason something or someone might be called *kalos*, but often the notion of public approval is

45 "Familiarity" is Plochman and Robinson's translation of the Greek *empeiria* (12), which means, generally, "experience" (L&S). Terms used by other translators include "routine" (Woodhead); "knack gained by experience" (Hamilton); and "habitude" (Lamb).
46 As a term in popular Greek usage, *kalos* can also refer to the physical characteristics which produce beauty in someone or something. Socrates includes this meaning of *kalos* later in the
implicit in the meaning of the word, and this sense of public acclaim is important in the present context. According to K. J. Dover, *kalos* often refers in Greek oratory to "any action, behaviour or achievement which evokes any kind of favourable reaction and praise," anything which brings the agent honor or respect (*tīmē*). Words close in meaning in English are "admirable, creditable, honourable" (70). It is certainly possible that Polus considers rhetoric to be *kalos* for this reason, and that he thinks of *charis* — which has not been specified here as anything other than gratification in a general sense — as the rhetor's contribution to the audience, in return, perhaps, for respect or honor. This is really a very traditional association of *charis* and eloquence with respect or honor, as we have seen earlier in the passages from Homer. It is not clear, however, exactly what Polus has in mind at this point. It only becomes apparent as the conversation proceeds that Polus has left out altogether the idea of mutual respect from the equation and is fixed on the power of the rhetor to do what he likes and to avoid the consequences of his actions.

In response to Polus' clumsy questioning (with a little help from Gorgias), Socrates further describes rhetoric as a species of flattery (*kolakeia*), along with sophistry, cookery, and cosmetics. These four pseudo-arts are opposed to their counterparts justice, legislation, medicine, and gymnastics. Socrates outlines his objections to flattery thus:

> Now these four [the real arts] . . . are noticed by the art of flattery which, I do not say with knowledge (*gignōskō*), but by speculation (*stochazomai*), divides herself into four parts, and then, insinuating herself into each of those branches, pretends to be that into which she has crept, and cares nothing for what is the best, but dangles

controversial section at 474d3-475e8.
what is most pleasant for the moment as a bait for folly and deceives it into thinking that she is of the highest value. (464c5-d4)

On Socrates' account, then, rhetoric and sophistry (and the other forms of "flattery") are shameful for two reasons: 1) on ethical grounds, since they aim at what is pleasing, without distinction between good and bad; and 2) on epistemic grounds, since they do not know but only guess, that is, they are alogos or irrational, unable to give an account of what they are or how they proceed (464e2-465a7). According to Socrates, the soul is "in charge of" (epistêmi) the body and can "survey and distinguish" (katatheôreō kai diakrínō) things — such as medicine from cookery, art from pseudo-art — that the body cannot. If the soul were not in command of the body, but the body were left to try to distinguish on the basis of charis-pleasure (tais charisi), everything would be as jumbled up as the pre-ordered cosmos of Anaxagoras (465c9-d7). Rhetoric is the cookery of the soul (465d7-9) and provides charis for the soul. At least two questions arise. First, what does Socrates mean by "flattery," and what is the charis provided to the soul by this flattery? Second, if the soul makes distinctions on behalf of the body, how does the soul distinguish for itself what is good for itself? Is the soul "in command" of itself? In order to answer the first question, a brief excursion into Attic comedy will be helpful. The second question introduces the issue of sôphrosunê, which will be discussed more fully in Socrates' conversation with Callicles.

According to Socrates, the pleasure which rhetoric gives the audience is that of flattery, kolakeia. Although flattery is certainly not a concept alien to our time, we might shed some light on the impression Socrates wishes to convey by

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47 Anaxagoras believed that the cosmos was organized by the action of Mind (Nous) on an undifferentiated mixture of "things."
considering the traditions of ancient comic drama. The flatterer or *kolaxs* (sometimes called a parasite or *parasitos*) appears in ancient comedy as a stock character, a clever yet pathetic figure who cadges meals from rich patrons in exchange for fawning behavior and witty table-talk (Norwood 102-104).

According to the account in the *Deipnosophists* of Athenaeus, the parasite was originally a quasi-religious figure appointed by the state who assisted priests in ritual sacrifices, shared in feasting on the sacrificed animal, and performed other duties connected with the communal food-stores. The idea of the person who dines at another’s table was eventually applied to hangers-on and passed into comic poetry as the flatterer or *kolaxs* (vi.234c-237a).

The first known comic portrayal of the parasite is in Epicharmus’ *Hope or Wealth*, in which a parasite supplies this description of his life:

I dine with whoever wishes -- he needs only to invite me; yes, and with the man who doesn’t wish-- no need of invitation. At table, I am witty (charieis t’eimi) and cause much laughter. I praise our host, and if anyone wishes to contradict him, I insult the man and take the quarrel on myself. Then, full of meat and drink, I depart. No servant accompanies me with a lantern, but I trudge along all by myself, stumbling in the dark. Whenever I meet the watch I thank my stars that they are satisfied with thrashing me. And when I reach home all to pieces I lie without bedclothes, not noticing their absence so long as the potent wine enfolds my brain.  

Eupolis, too, a contemporary and rival of Aristophanes, puts the *kolaxs* to use. In his comedy *Flatterers* (*Kolakes*), a chorus of flatterers describe their typical day:

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48 Socrates mentions Epicharmus with approval at *Theaetetus* 152e.
49 For Greek text and translation, see Norwood 103.
Once there [the agora], whenever I espy some one with no brains but plenty of money, I am at him instantly. If my plutocrat lets fall a remark, I praise it (epainô) vehemently, filled with pretended rapture. Next we make off dispersedly to dine at the table of others, where the flatterer must straightway discharge a flood of wit (charienta) or be flung out into the street.  

If anything, Eupolis presents the more derogatory description of kolakeia, since he emphasizes the contempt the flatterer has for his victim. This comedy, of which only a few fragments are extant, holds particular fascination for historians of rhetoric and philosophy since it is apparently a send-up of Callias, the rich Athenian who entertained sophists like Protagoras (who appears as a character in the play). Indeed, as Norwood remarks, Eupolis’ play seems to be a comedic “analogue” of Plato’s Protagoras (190).

Although we can’t know the exact degree to which both Socrates and Plato himself were influenced by these comedies, this picture of rhetoric as flattery seems to owe a great deal to the comic tradition; it is reasonable also to assume that Plato’s audience, if not Socrates’ audience, would have made the connection, if only because Eupolis’ play was quite famous, having won the first prize for comedy in 421 B.C.E. The two poets quoted above present the flatterer as a human being who makes a living sponging off rich but dull fellow-citizens in exchange for pleasurable, charis-filled speech -- praise and sparkling conversation. The analogy between the flatter of comedy and the rhetor of the polis is plain enough. What obtains between a flatterer and his patron is (apparently) extended by Eupolis to the relationship between a Protagoras and a

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50Norwood 191. Norwood does not discuss all the fragments of the comic poets. For the complete Greek text of the fragments, see Poetae Comici Graeci, Ed. Colin Austin and Rudolf Kassel, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983 — .
Callias; Socrates takes it still further and brings in the relationship between rhetor and citizen. The demagogue or popular orator must continue to satisfy the people with praise and sparkling oratory or risk being thrown out — ostracized. Underlying the comedy, then, is a commentary on both personal and civic philia. No true friendship or fellowship exists between the flatterer and his patron — and, by extension, between rhetor and citizen — for the former holds his patron in contempt while revealing himself to be a person of slavish habits.51 Nor is the affection a patron holds for the kolax anything but fleeting. If the flatterer cannot provide adequate entertainment, he is cast out. The apparent fellowship that exists between the flatterer and his dinner companions is a veneer made to seem deeper by the charis of the clever speeches and the ensuing laughter of the group. Thus, the charis of the flatterer’s friendship — the praise, the witty talk — is like the charis given by cosmetics — something added on. It is impermanent and allotrios (extraneous, unnatural, foreign), not oikeios — that which is one’s own (465b2-8). Plato’s Socrates will exploit these features of the flatterer most emphatically in his conversation with Callicles, where the issue of civic philia is taken up explicitly for the first time.

Charis in a more specific context obtains in the case of the law courts, which Socrates considers to be rhetoric’s legitimate arena. In Chapter Three, we saw that charis was part of many defense speeches in Athenian courts. As part of his defense, a speaker would often list the services and gifts he had provided for the community. In essence, these are speeches of praise directed at oneself — they are “epideictic” in that they attempt to display both the good character of the accused and his value to the community. On the basis of these good works, the

51Cf Aristotle, NE VIII.viii.
defendant asks the jury for charis, a favor reciprocated, as in this example from Lysias:

Our benefactions to you were not intended to make financial gain for ourselves, but to ensure that if we were ever in danger we might ask from you the charis we deserved and receive it (xx 30).

Although this sounds suspiciously like an attempt to bribe the jury into ignoring evidence, we should also bear in mind the character of Athenian trials. There most likely were some attempts at pure bribery, but K. J. Dover reminds us that in ancient Athens there were no modern methods of determining guilt and innocence in a trial — no fingerprints or DNA tests, no paper trails or tape recordings, no cross-questioning of witnesses. The prosecutor and the accused simply spoke for themselves and called whatever witnesses each could muster for his own side. (This is the point of Socrates' remark at 471e3-5, when he says that Polus attempts to refute him "in rhetorical fashion." ) In such circumstances, the ethos of both defendant and prosecutor, as well as that of the witnesses, could be the decisive factor in a jury's verdict (GPM 292-3; Greek Homosexuality 14). As Dover remarks, appeals to charis give the impression that the defendant is saying, "Never mind the charge; let me off because I have been a good friend to you and deserve your gratitude" (GPM 293). It is this plea for charis in the name of philia which Socrates will later disdain. However, it is not the act of giving favors in itself to which Socrates objects — it is the nature of the "favor" given. The next section of Socrates' conversation with Polus examines the nature of that favor.

So far, Socrates has presented a picture of rhetoric-as-flattery that challenges Polus' conception of rhetoric as something which brings respect and honor. On the contrary, suggests Socrates, rhetoric, because it is a species of
flattery, involves behavior that is shameful, like the behavior of a flatterer. In this way, Socrates has reversed the paradox of charis originally suggested in the conversation with Gorgias. There, dialectic was presented as a charis which is not a charis — a favor which is not a pleasure. On the other hand, through the analogy with flattery and false friendship, the first part of the conversation with Polus describes rhetoric as the opposite paradoxical charis — a pleasure which is not a favor. In the rest of this section, Socrates continues the paradox of charis by returning to the theme of power — the charis that Gorgias suggests he gives to his students. Socrates attempts to show that this power is not really power at all and, hence, not a true favor — rhetoric provides only a veneer of power. Socrates will also return to and elaborate the notion that the real charis is correction; this he does by comparing not only his own elenchus but also punishment in the law courts to treatment by a doctor. As indicated in Chapter Two (pages 7-8), this portion of the dialogue is problematic for many scholars because the logic of much of the dialectical exchange is questionable. However, since Vlastos, Irwin, McKim, and others have already analyzed in detail the various logical problems, I will not revisit them all here. I will merely state my agreement with both Kahn and McKim that Socrates' strategy is basically both ad hominem and psychological, and give some reasons why this type of ad hominem argument is in keeping with the criticisms of rhetorical charis that Socrates has made to this point.

Polus apparently believes that great power is being able to do anything one thinks fit, escaping any bad consequences of one's actions — in particular, not suffering punishment (470a1-8). So then, says Socrates, if doing what one thinks fit brings advantage, then this is not just a good thing but also the possession of great power (470a9-12). But, says Socrates, it is actually of more advantage to the
agent to act justly than to act unjustly (470c2-4). This belief, that acting justly is always better for the agent than acting unjustly, Richard McKim calls the “Socratic Axiom” (35). According to McKim, Socrates’ primary goal in this section is to persuade Polus that, despite Polus’ protestations to the contrary, he already believes in the Socratic Axiom. Indeed, McKim points out that Polus, further on in the discussion at 477b4-c7, quite readily accepts the proposition that “that committing injustice engenders sickness of soul and that this is far more shameful than poverty or bodily sickness” (47). Moreover, McKim argues that Socrates “is convinced that we all share the Axiom by nature as our deepest moral belief” (36). In other words, what Socrates is attempting to do is to elicit from Polus what he truly believes by nature -- a belief that, like the charis of a body made strong by gymnastics, is oikeios, his own. On the one hand, then, Socrates is attempting to draw out from Polus a set of beliefs that are “his own,” and not another’s. This is why Socrates makes such a point of disregarding the opinions of the masses and chiding Polus for his rhetorical strategy of appealing to popular opinion. On the other hand, in yet another paradox, Socrates indicates that the belief he is attempting to elicit from Polus, that acting justly is always beneficial for the agent, is actually shared by all others. As Charles H. Kahn argues, although Polus’ view that the tyrant is unjust may be merely a reflection of popular opinion (as Callicles charges), “the recognition that this is the popular view connects Polus . . . with the ‘deposit of truth’ that perceives criminal acts as destructive not only for the society but ultimately for the criminal himself” (117, emphasis his).52

52I am indebted to Francisco J. Gonzalez, whose essay “Plato’s Lysis: An Enactment of Philosophical Kinship” impressed upon me the importance of to oikeion, that which is one’s own. Although Gonzalez’ essay analyzes a different dialogue, I believe that his discussion of oikeios (and related terms) is compatible with mine.
Socrates' goal, then, is to persuade Polus to discover in a "private" conversation what he also holds in common with others — that doing wrong is bad for both community and individual and that escaping punishment is the worst evil of all. At this point, Socrates uses an analogy comparing his elenchus to medical treatment: "Do not shrink from answering, Polus; you will get no hurt by it: but submit yourself bravely to the argument, as to a doctor, and reply yes or no to my question" (475d8-11). Socrates thus returns to the theme, begun in the conversation with Gorgias, that to be refuted is a great charis which brings relief from the greatest evil, having a false opinion on matters of the utmost importance. Indeed, he repeatedly invites Polus to do the same for him. At one point Polus incredulously tells Socrates that a child could refute him; Socrates replies that he "will be grateful to the child (to pais charis echō), and equally to you, if you refute me and rid me of foolery (apallassō phluària). Come, do not grow weary in well-doing (euergetēô) towards your friend (philos), but refute me." (470c8-11). This time, however, Socrates unites the "private" charis of dialectic with the political charis of just punishment through the medical analogy, which is used throughout the remainder of this section to compare just punishment with the pain of cautery and incision. Since being unjust or wicked is the greatest evil of all because it makes the soul ill as sickness does the body, then everyone should attempt to relieve themselves of being unjust, even though the treatment is no more pleasant than a trip to the doctor (478a-e). Once again, the notion that a true benefit is not always pleasurable breaks the traditional union of charis as favor and charis as pleasure.

This being so, asks Socrates, what is the use of rhetoric, since all it apparently does is allow wrongdoers to escape punishment by equipping themselves with "money and friends and the ability to speak persuasively"?
Socrates concludes that rhetoric is of no use in defending injustice since avoidance of penalty leaves the soul in the worst condition. On the one hand, says Socrates, rhetoric might be useful if one were to prosecute self or friends or family (480b8-d8) since being relieved of evil is a great benefit. On the other hand, if we are supposed to harm our enemies, we should let them go unpunished (480e6-481b1). This as another startling paradox. By shifting the focus of “help” and “harm” to the soul, Socrates comes to a conclusion that flies in the face of a commonly accepted notion of justice in ancient Greece: that one should help one’s friends and harm one’s enemies. Part of the Homeric heroic code, this view of justice was still current in the classical period (Dover 180-184; and Blundell passim). According to Socrates, however, one should help one’s friends by prosecuting them and harm one’s enemies by letting them go free. This apparent upending of common sense is too much for Callicles, who enters the conversation at 481b6-7. Thus begins the final section of the Gorgias. Here Plato brings together all the strands of charis that have been running through the dialogue, sometimes only as subtext. The charis of personal, educational, and civic philia are all revisited, this time more explicitly, and the possibility of a charis allied to philosophical philia is explored.

Callicles: An Offer of Philosophical Friendship, 481b6-527e9

Callicles first asks Chaerephon, and then Socrates himself, if he is serious or joking, expressing himself, as he does so often, in terms of desire (epithumeō) (481c1). Socrates immediately attempts to persuade Callicles that people who share things in common have an easier time communicating because of it

53“Helping friends and harming enemies” is one of the first definitions of justice to be discussed and discarded in Book 1 of the Republic.
In this case, Socrates appeals to one of the primary *charis* relationships in ancient Greek culture, and one of the most important images in Platonic philosophy: the erotic love of beauty in the form of the amorous pursuit of a boy or young man (*erōmenos*) by an older man (*erastês*). According to David M. Halperin, this kind of pederastic love was not considered shocking or even remarkable among most Athenians of Plato’s time, and neither man nor boy were censured for this relationship as long as accepted rituals and rules of conduct were observed (91-94).

Socrates says that he and Callicles are both enamored of two things: Socrates of Alcibiades and philosophy, and Callicles “the Athenian Demus” and “the son of Pyrilampes,” (who also happens to be named Demus) (481d3-7). In other words, according to Socrates, Callicles is as infatuated with the Athenian people as he would be of another *erōmenos*, changing his opinion to match that of his favorite. Indeed, says Socrates, “if anyone showed surprise at the strangeness of the things you are constantly saying under that influence, you would probably tell him, if you chose to speak the truth, that unless somebody makes your favourite stop speaking thus, you will never stop speaking thus either” (481e8-482a3). Philosophy, however, unlike the other beloved of Socrates, always says the same thing (482a8-b1).

The analogy that Socrates draws between Callicles’ erotic life and his political ambitions works in several ways. The first and most obvious way is that Callicles is in thrall to the public as if to a loved one, changing his own opinion to please that of his beloved –this makes him akin to the flatterer discussed

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54 Attitudes towards so-called “passive” male prostitution were far more hostile, witness Callicles’ reaction to Socrates’ reference to it (494e2-9). The penetration of a male citizen’s body was anathema, and anyone engaging in passive homosexual intercourse could be stripped of his citizenship rights. Intercourse in pederastic relationships, at least ideally, was apparently intercrural, to spare the boy this degradation. The Athenian attitude towards sexual behavior in general is complex. See Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* and Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* for the complications and political implications of Greek homosexual behavior.
earlier. Second, in erotic relationships, the man would often brings gifts to or perform services for the boy, hoping both to convince the boy of his sincerity and to persuade the boy to give him sexual charis out of gratitude and philia—affection (Dover 92). This "bringing of gifts" will later become the basis of Socrates' criticism of the "walls and ships" that politicians bestow on the people. Third, as in other charis-relationships such as that between husband and wife, the man-boy relationship is not, according to Dover, one of "reciprocated sentiment of equals but of the pursuit of those of lower status by those of higher status" (84). The man, in other words, has a higher social status than the boy, just as Callicles, an upper-class Athenian, has a higher social status than the general population. Socrates implies here what he later says more openly, that the Athenian people are like children. This erotic analogy is neither subtle nor original and has a comic effect. It would have been familiar to Plato's audience—and perhaps to Socrates' audience—from the Knights of Aristophanes, in which another "Demus" is courted by two rival erastai-politicians, who urge him to "find out which loves you best/ And so decide, and give that man your love (747-748).56

We now have two comic analogies comparing political relationships with other social relationships, both involving charis and some type of love or friendship. In the first case, the charis of the flatterer's speech and the charis of

55 I do not mean to imply that in erotic relationships the man was upper class and the boy lower class, only that children in general, like women, had inferior social and political status in ancient Greece. For an account of how Plato might be challenging the traditional Greek conception of man-boy eroticism, see David M. Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," Classical Antiquity, 5 (1986): 60-80.

56 In the Knights, Demus is an old man (gerón), but the sausage-seller describes him as being "like the eromenoi" (737). Political commentary in ancient comedy is often highly sexualized, and there is evidence that Plato and other writers of Socratic dialogues continue this practice. See Madeleine Henry, Prisoner of History, especially pages 19-56; and Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, pages 113-151.
the friendship between flatterer and patron are deceitful and false, and they obscure the true nature of the relationship. They are transient, lasting only as long as the feast. In the case of erotic charis, however, the case is somewhat different, and while Socrates' analogy is comic, its indictment of Callicles is not so harsh. In fact, Socrates identifies himself as being an erastès and a lover of philosophy. Socrates implies that he and Callicles are alike in at least this respect: they are both men of Erôs, but the objects of their respective desires are different. This is another indication that Socrates does not consider charis in itself to be bad; there may be a good kind of charis which is similar to both the charis of beauty and the charis of an erotic relationship. Furthermore, by introducing erôs, Socrates attempts to draw Callicles' attention to a particular kind of desire and invites him to think about what charis could mean in connection with a desire for sophia. In other words, Callicles had previously spoken in terms of brute desire, epithumia. Socrates now tries to shift the focus to erôs. Somehow, Socrates suggests, philosophy has the charis of that young man you are enamored of.

Callicles answers Socrates with an extended speech, by far the longest example of rhetoric in the Gorgias except for Socrates' concluding muthos of judgment. Callicles begins by charging that Polus and Gorgias were shamed into making admissions that they did not really mean (482c5-e7). To suffer injustice — to allow someone to wrong you or to insult you -- is by nature (phusis) always shameful, and what is shameful is always evil. It is only by convention (nomos) that doing evil is more shameful (483a7-9). It would be better to be dead than to not be able to protect (boëtheô) oneself or those one cares for, which is the lot of a slave (483a9-b4). Nomoi, laws or convention, are made by the masses, who are weak or inferior, in order to hold down those who are stronger and more
superior by nature (*phusis*), and who would dominate if given free rein (483b4-c5). To illustrate this point about natural behavior, Callicles appeals to the natural world, where, he says, the strongest always dominate (483d1-9). To support this claim he appeals to a fable in which the naturally strong men are compared to young lions taken from nature and kept confined. As the lions are subdued by their captivity, so the strong men are subdued by the "spells and witchcraft" of laws until an exceptionally strong one breaks free, disdaining man-made laws and asserting his natural dominance (483e6-484b1).

It is not certain from what source Callicles (and Plato) draw this analogy of human beings to lions raised in captivity, but both Dodds (268) and Fraenkel (342) recognize that the same image was used by Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* to refer to Helen of Troy. It is worthwhile looking at the fable as it occurs in the *Agamemnon* because it not only helps illuminate the character of Callicles but also reinforces the claims about *charis* that have been made to this point. There is no guarantee, of course, that Callicles (or Plato) was referring to the play by Aeschylus and not to the underlying fable itself, which was well-known in classical times (Dodds 268-269, Fraenkel 342); nevertheless, I think it is fair to assume that Greek audiences could have made this connection straight away. The relevant passage is *Agamemnon* 717-735, which I quote in full:

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So, once, was a lion's offspring reared by a man in his house, getting no milk from its mother, still fond of the teat, in the prelude of its life tame, a good friend of the children (*euphilopais*) and a delight to the elders; and many a time it was in their arms, like a nursling child, looking bright-eyed to the hand and fawning under the constraint of its belly. But matured by time it showed the character it had from its parents: for, making a return (*charis*) to those who
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had reared it, it made ready a feast as an unbidden guest in a horrid slaughter of the flock, and the house was befouled with blood — to the house-folk an agony not to be warded off, a vast havoc wherein many were killed; by the will of the god it had been reared in the house to be a sacrificer in the service of Ate.57

In this fable, a lion cub, which in its youth was full of *charis* — charming and friendly to its foster family — shows its true nature when older by slaughtering both the flocks and the people who raised it. As in many contemporary cultures, the Greeks believed that the reciprocal bonds of parent-child *philia* demanded that the child give *charis* — repayment, gratitude — to his or her parents (or foster parents) in return for nurture and care (Blundell 41-42). In the fable, the lion returns the *charis* of its adopted family by violating the reciprocal bonds of caregiving. In the *Agamemon*, the reference is to Helen of Troy, a woman possessed of the *charis* of great beauty, whose abduction brings destruction to the Trojans, her “adopted” family (MacLachlan 128-129).

When Callicles uses the lion analogy, it is not clear how far he intends to take it. It is important to note that Callicles professes to recognize some forms of social obligation. He claims, for instance, that a strong, free man will be able to protect himself “or anyone else for whom he cares (*kēdetēs*)” (483b). This phrase is ambiguous. For whom does Callicles care? Since Callicles appeals to nature, perhaps he cares for “natural” family members such as parents, children, perhaps even his *erōmenos*, since this relationship is based on a “natural” erotic impulse. But what of other relationships — wife, in-laws, friends? Are these natural? Perhaps. Given Callicles’ disdain of community law, however, it appears certain

57Eduard Fraenkel’s text and translation.
that civil *philia* is on shaky ground in Callicles' moral universe. By casting off *nomos*, Callicles is willing to set aside the conventions and laws of the *polis*, the "adopted family" of citizens who have raised him. He repudiates any *charis* he might owe to the community. Yet the fable leaves us wondering if, in matters of *philia*, it is often difficult to distinguish the natural from the conventional. The lion image is deeply troubling.

Callicles further responds to Socrates' humorous critique of his political behavior by returning the favor and criticizing philosophy. Socrates has subtly suggested a connection between philosophy and *charis*, and Callicles cleverly turns Socrates' notion against him. According to Callicles, philosophy does produce a sort of *charis*. In young boys, says Callicles, philosophy is *charieis* — a charming thing, full of *charis* — if done in moderation. But grown men should concentrate on greater things (484c5-8). Too much philosophy leads to the corruption (*diaphthora*) of men (484c8-10) because they remain ignorant of the ways of human beings — ignorant of their laws, of their ways of reaching agreement, of their pleasures and desires (484c10-d8). Philosophy should be undertaken only to "gratify" one's educational needs (*paideia charin*) (485a5). It is like the "pretty* (*charieis*) lisping of a child, in which one delights (485b4). However, the sight of an old man like Socrates philosophizing is not pleasing but ridiculous (*katagelastos*) (485a7-8). Even worse, it is slavish and deserves a whipping (485b9-c2). Philosophy will make even the most promising young

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58 Contrary to some interpretations, Callicles is not amoral. He has a code of behavior. One of Socrates' tasks is to tease out both the implications and the inconsistencies of this code.
59 The word *diaphthora* at 484c9 is very strong. It means rape, destruction, ruin, death, or corruption in a moral sense. One of the charges against Socrates was that he corrupted the youth of Athens.
60 The accusative singular of *charis* functions here as a preposition with the general meaning "for the sake of." When so used, says MacLachlan, *charin* "retains little of the original semantic color of the word" (161). However, given the prominence of *charis* in Socrates' and Callicles' reciprocal critiques, this use of *charin* seems to retain much of the semantic "concreteness" of the original meaning. See MacLachlan 161-164 for a discussion of the prepositional use of *charis*. 
man "unmanly" (485d4-6). In this part of his speech, Callicles tries to make of Socrates a comic figure who whispers in a corner with boys and who would be mute when required to defend himself in court (485d8-e1; 486a8-b4). He has, in fact, called Socrates no better than a slave, probably one of the most insulting things one could say to a Greek male citizen. Socrates' situation is "disgraceful" (aischros) because he will be as powerless as any slave to save himself should someone haul him into court unjustly. He will be unable to succor (boethed) himself or to save (eksozod) himself or others from danger (486b6-c2).

Callicles' and Socrates' criticisms of each other are reciprocal, very similar to one another on the face of things. Socrates criticizes rhetoric and rhetoricians as ethically deficient because they aim only at the pleasant, not the good, and they fail to improve the souls of the audience; Callicles thinks that philosophy is dangerous because it corrupts a man's phusis, making even the best man unmanly. Socrates says that rhetoricians lack nous, intelligence; Callicles retorts that Socrates lacks practical wisdom, to phronein. Socrates accuses rhetoric of producing charis; Callicles criticizes philosophy for producing only certain kinds of charis. In other words, philosophy produces charis in others only when practiced by young boys; in this it resembles the charis of beauty, and is appropriate. But when practiced by older men, it fails to produce the practical charis expected of a real man, who gives aid and comfort to his friends, and who thwarts the actions of any enemies who do him wrong. Taken as a whole, these criticisms constitute the main arguments which have for centuries shaped the debate between the "active life," and the "contemplative life."

61 Other things are to infantilize or feminize him, both of which Callicles has implied here. The attempt to identify one's opponent with the politically powerless is unfortunately still a common tactic in modern discourse. Note that Socrates is not immune to this behavior.
Socrates spends the next part of the discussion trying to pin Callicles down about what he means by those who are "superior." It is the stronger? Yes, says Callicles. But on this view, replies Socrates, then the masses, who are naturally stronger than the single individual, would be superior. Callicles accuses Socrates of catching at words. Of course I mean, he says, that the superior persons are the better persons (to beltious). But Socrates again stops him: what does he mean by the better sort of people? Is it the wiser? Of course, says Callicles. Then the wiser should rule and have more than the baser sort? Yes. Well, then, the wiser at what? At health? Then the doctor shall be wiser and he shall rule and have more food. Socrates continues in this vein until he drives Callicles to admit that when he says "the superior," he means those who have political skills (488b11-491b6).

At this, Socrates abruptly shifts gears to a discussion of temperance: Should one be able to rule oneself? Callicles says emphatically that to be temperate is to be slavish. Justice and fairness, according to nature, is to let one's desires (epithumia) be as strong as possible and to satisfy every desire to the utmost. Those who believe in temperance do so only because they are unable through their weakness to secure their own advantage. Luxury and licentiousness and freedom are virtue and happiness. All else is unnatural (491d7-492c9). If Callicles really believes that natural justice consists in gratifying any pleasure, however, then he should approve this behavior not only for himself but for others as well. But Socrates uses increasingly outrageous examples of gratification -- beginning with scratching and ending with the passive homosexual prostitute, one of the most vilified characters in Greek
society — in order to drive Callicles to admit that he does not approve of all types of gratification pursued by everyone (492d6-494e9).62

It becomes more and more clear that satisfying his own desires is the ultimate goal for Callicles. By appealing to phusis and rejecting nomos, Callicles apparently attempts to ground morality in something outside of one community’s laws; in his original argument, he appealed to the animal kingdom as well as to other human societies besides Athens. On the surface of things, such an appeal regulates human conduct by something that is foundational. As Betts argues, “to downgrade existing norms by comparison with some supposed natural standard of right — whatever that natural standard might be — is precisely to reject relativism about values; it is to set up an objective, neutral criterion by which existing norms can all be weighed on a common scale” (163, emphasis his). But Callicles’ focus on the gratification of his own desires, as opposed to desires he does not personally approve of, calls the neutrality of his moral foundation into question — at the very least, it makes his own motives suspect. As Blundell says in a related context, an appeal to such a superficially neutral code of behavior “conflates the legitimate pursuit of a neutrally desirable end with the indulgence of personal passion” (267). Blundell also remarks that this kind of false neutrality in one’s moral code can lead to inconsistency in application (267), and we see this kind of inconsistency working in Callicles’ rejection of his former position that all gratification of desire is good. Socrates finally prods Callicles into admitting that pleasure and the good are not synonymous, that he believes some pleasures to be better than others, that some pleasures and pains are good and some bad (499b5-d13).

62 After Socrates offers the example of the male prostitute, Callicles begins to break the “rules” of dialectic by giving answers designed only to save himself from inconsistency. I will take up this issue in a later section.
Socrates then asks if professional skill is necessary to tell the good pleasures from the bad ones (to which Callicles assents), and this leads back to a discussion of rhetoric and a recap of Socrates’ discussion with Polus about cookery versus medicine and so forth (500a7-503d4). According to Socrates’ technē-analogy, all true craftspeople endeavor to create a certain form in their products. It is this regularity and order which make the products good. This is what trainers and doctors do with the body, creating health and strength. Analogously, the same applies to the soul. A good soul has regularity (taxis) and order (kosmos). If an orator has a true art and is good, he will endeavor to create regularity and order in the souls of the audience — and these states are the same as justice (dike) and temperance (sôphrosunê) (503d6-504d5). This soulcraft is to be the goal of the orators in word and deed:

and in giving any gift he will give it, and in taking anything away he will take it, with this thought always before his mind — how justice may be engendered in the souls of his fellow-citizens, and how injustice may be removed. (504d9-e3)

Charis is involved here in two ways. First, the good orator engenders order (kosmos), which is the same as temperance (sôphrosunê), in the soul. The word kosmos has several meanings in Greek, but two of the most important are “order” and “ornament or embellishment” (L&S 446). As Irwin remarks, the use of this word may suggest that the order of temperance — the capacity to order

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63This time, Socrates includes in the class of charis-producing flatteries flute-playing, choral productions, dithyrambic compositions, harp playing, and tragedy. In an echo of Gorgias’ comment in the Helen that poetry is speech with meter, Socrates says that speeches are “the leavings” (to leipomenon) of poetry when stripped of melody and rhythm and meter. Poetry is therefore a species of rhetoric because poetry is essentially a kind of public speaking. Hence, poetry is also flattery (501d1-502d9). Orators are like the poets, who are set on gratifying the citizens, not attempting to improve them; for the sake of their private interests, they take little heed of the common good (502d11-e11).
one’s soul and keep one’s desires in check -- has something like the attractiveness of jewelry or cosmetics, those same producers of false charis which Socrates rebuked at 465b1-8 (214-215). I agree with Irwin that this association is important. Previously, in his discussion with Polus, Socrates contrasted the beauty of cosmetics, a charis that is allotrios or foreign, with a charis that is brought about by gymnastics -- one that is oikeios, one’s own (465b7). Here, with respect to the soul, is that kind of “inner” charis-beauty – the order and self-control of sôphrosunê. Again, associating sôphrosunê with attractiveness is not a new idea in Greek culture -- and those who possess sôphrosunê, like the “good” oratory which imparts it (503a4-b1), are kalos, noble or admirable.

Moreover, sôphrosunê, like the charis of beauty, enables social relationships. In order to be philos to someone, one must be able -- not always, but sometimes -- to treat that person’s interests as primary. This often requires temperance. If we, like Callicles, consider justice to be the satisfaction of our desires to the utmost degree, then we are bound to come into conflict with the desires of others. Philia then requires that we restrain ourselves if we are to avoid interminable conflict. As Blundell says, sôphrosunê is “the self-discipline which, amongst other things, enables one to place the desires of a philos above one’s own” (61). This seems to be the reasoning behind Socrates’ assertion that the licentious can have no true friendship, since they have no power (adunatos) to share or to hold anything in common (koinôneô) with either gods or other men. Since friendship depends on community (koinonia), on sharing things in common, sôphrosunê is itself a power, the power to share with another. Where Callicles thinks that rhetoric will give him the power to satisfy his desires, Socrates implies that for all his rhetorical skills he will lack power – the power of sôphrosunê and, hence, the power to form friendships, one of the very things
Callicles accepts as part of the life of the "manly" citizen (Irwin 225). Indeed, concludes Socrates, the entire kosmos, according to "wise men" rests on such community, and on orderliness, temperance and justice (507e7-508a5).

This is not to say that one should encourage any and all desires of a friend. This point, on which Socrates is perfectly clear, was not an unusual one in Greek culture. But for Socrates, human beings naturally wish (boulomai) what is just and good — this was the point of the "Polus" argument. There is no problem for Socrates to say that a human being always promotes a friend's desires, if desire is properly understood. In giving there is charis and the ultimate charis is justice and temperance. This is what the rhetor ought to provide to the citizens, and what the teacher should provide to a student. In this way, the relationship between rhetor and audience, or rhetorician and student, should resemble the friendly relationships Socrates spoke of with Polus. The role of the orator or the teacher is like the role of the personal friend, who in correcting wrong opinions becomes a great benefactor (euergetês) (506c1-3).

Socrates now reviews Callicles' accusations against him. Socrates is supposed by Callicles to be unable to defend himself or his loved ones against injustice (508c6-d6). This seems a reasonable criticism. What is wrong with defending oneself against injustice? Socrates and Callicles agree that one would have to equip oneself with some power (dunamis) in order to avoid being wronged (509d2-6). Callicles is clearly thinking of rhetoric and political power. Socrates argues that in order to avoid being wronged one must make oneself either a despot or a ruler or an ally of the existing political regime. To this, Callicles enthusiastically agrees (510a8-b3); this is his ambition, to attain the political power that will allow him to act as he likes. But Socrates will go on to show that Callicles' ambitions -- to be politically powerful and to avoid being
wronged -- are at odds with other beliefs that he holds dear, namely, his belief in the value of friendships and his belief in his own superiority over the masses.

Socrates begins with the premise that the closest possible friendship is that between "like and like" (510b5). This is a commonplace of ancient Greek culture, an assumption that those who share many things in common, as brothers do, would be the best friends. Callicles accepts this premise. According to Socrates, however, a tyrant will be friendly with neither those much better than himself (because he will fear them) nor those much inferior (because he will despise them). Only one who is of the same moral character as the tyrant will be a friend to, have the same attitudes and beliefs as, and be willing to be ruled by the tyrant. So to be assured of not being wronged, one must strive to be *philos* to those who are in control, which in this case will mean becoming as like the other as possible (510b9-510d2). But being like the tyrant will cause a person to do much wrong -- since the tyrant does wrong with impunity -- and to try to avoid paying the penalty, the two most egregious moral wrongs, according to Socrates. Political power will mean corrupting the soul (510e5-511a3).

In this argument, Socrates does not intend the "like to like" commonplace to serve as a definition of friendship in general; rather, Socrates uses the common belief of "like to like," with which Callicles agrees, to try to force Callicles into the admission that in order to have power in the city, he must become like, not merely imitate, the people he pretends to love but merely has contempt for -- the many (512e6-513b9). Although Socrates uses the word "tyrant" in most of this argument, he clearly states in the beginning that he

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64 That Socrates introduces this premise does not mean that Socrates himself necessarily accepts it, but he might. In the *Lysis*, "like to like" is examined and dismissed as a definition of friendship. But, again, Socrates is not seeking a definition of friendship in this dialogue; he seeks to expose inconsistencies in Callicles' belief system.
includes any sort of political regime (510a8-10). In the democracy of Athens, the masses are in charge of the existing political regime, at least in theory (and Socrates seems to agree here that this is the case). In other words, in order for Callicles to have great power in the state as it exists, he must become like the very people he despises. On the other hand, using rhetoric to defend ourselves against the actions of wrongdoers, continues Socrates, is of the most supreme value only if we value our lives above all else (511b8-c2, 512d8-e6). But if rhetoric is used merely to prolong one’s life, then it is not the status-filled occupation that Callicles thinks; for other men save people’s lives — men such as navigators and engineers — but in return they charge only a small fee and do not put on airs since they do not know if they have benefited or harmed the souls of their customers by their actions. They recognize the moral neutrality of their respective technai. Yet Callicles despises such people as being inferior to himself (511c7-512d8).

Socrates returns to the technê analogy: If we were builders, wouldn’t we first examine ourselves to make sure we understood the art of building and had learned it from a reputable source? (514a5-b4). And would we not see if we had already built a good building in private before we presumed to build a public building, and so with the other arts? (514b5-e12). If the object of a political career is to make the citizens better (so Socrates argues), then we should also examine our private behavior to see if we have ever made another person better (515a1-5). Socrates is quite strident here and issues a direct challenge to Callicles: How has Callicles been a true friend to anyone in private by making that person better? (515a8-b5). Indeed, Socrates continues, the rhetors of the past, like Pericles, have not made the public better (515c6-516a3). Like a herdsman who fails in his job by taking tame (hémeros) animals and making them wild (agrios), the politician
who does not tame or civilize the people — that is, make them more just — is not a good rhetor (516a5-d7). This argument of Socrates' is most offensive to our modern sensibilities, relying as it does on an analogy of human beings to domestic animals. But it can be seen as a reply to the fable of the lion which Callicles used to support his idea that the strong man should assert his nature against nomos, like a wild animal in captivity who turns on its adopted family. In Aeschylus' version, when the lion is young, he is tame (hameros) and philos to the children of the house (721).65 "Tame," in this sense of the word, is to be civilized, that is, to tame one’s appetites in order that one may live with others and be philos to them. At least, this is one implication.

Socrates’ real point in making the analogy, however, seems to be that citizens should never turn on their leaders, regardless of either the leaders' moral characters or their skills in rhetoric. A truly good and just leader would never be thrown out since he would be able to make the citizens just, and a good speaker (a good flatterer, according to Socrates) would be able to gratify the populace indefinitely and so would be kept on (see Irwin on this point, 235-6) (516d8-517a7). In any case, Socrates finds it ironic that politicians claim to be unjustly treated after all of their valuable service to the people and the state. They fail to recognize that while they have given the people what they want, they have not made the citizens more just and so cannot expect just treatment. Socrates believes this parallels the behavior of the sophists, who claimed to teach aretē, or excellence:

The sophists, in fact, with all their other accomplishments, act absurdly in one point: claiming to be teachers of virtue, they often accuse their pupils of doing them an injury by cheating them of

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65Hameros is the Doric form of hêmeros.
their fees and otherwise showing no recognition of the good (charis) they have done them. (519c4-d1)

If the sophists truly taught aretē — since, in Socrates' view, they would have knowledge of it — they would have no need to accuse their students of injustice. Socrates argues that only true or just rhetors and sophists are guaranteed a just reward (charis); other teachers have no such assurance. A gymnastic master, for example, teaches us to run fast, not to be just. Since he does not teach justice, there is no objection to his charging a fee as a charis for his good service (euergesia) (520c2-d3). But in the case of those who claim to have a technē of excellence, who claim to teach others how to be superior and how to manage personal and public affairs for the best, it is considered disgraceful to give advice for pay, the reason evidently being that this is the only sort of good deed (euergesia) that makes the person so served desire to do one in return; and hence it is felt to be a good sign when this service that one has done is repaid to one in kind; but when this is not so, the contrary is felt. (520e8-13)

This criticism of teachers who take money for their services is perhaps in need of clarification since the objection is often puzzling for modern readers. According to Hands, there certainly was an upper-class prejudice against transactions that were sales for money since it implied that "the recipient was the employee of the other party, that he needed to accept such for his living, and was not a man of quality at all" (33). Hunt, too, speculates that the Socratic/Platonic objection to taking fees is rooted in the feeling that taking fees "made the teacher seem to be a

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66For the historical Gorgias, too, who apparently claimed not to teach justice and virtue, this would be consistent.
servant of the pupil" (18). But Socrates’ criticism in the Gorgias seems more concerned with the moral corruption of a student-teacher relationship which is transient and not based on philia. This attitude is best explained by Gabriel Herman, who writes in the context of ritualized friendships (xenia):

Outside the context of friendship -- in trading relationships, for example -- the exchange is a short-term, self-liquidating transaction. Once the benefits are obtained, the social relationship is terminated. The transaction does not create moral involvement. By contrast, within the framework of amiable relations (kinship, friendship, ritualized friendship), exchanges have a long-term expectancy. Gifts beg counter-gifts, and fulfill at one and the same time a number of purposes: they repay past services, incur new obligations, and act as continuous reminders of the validity of the bond. (80, emphasis mine)

While not explicitly stated, this is the language of charis: the good deed done prompts the receiver to return in kind, creating and sustaining the moral framework in which philia thrives. This is the point of Socrates’ criticism of the teaching of rhetoric: the exchange “rhetoric for money” does not create a moral obligation between teacher and student. And it is this same lack of a moral framework to which Plato’s Gorgias is unwilling to admit, but which creates morally confused products like Polus. Rhetoric, as currently taught by sophists, is a charis which is not a charis, since it is powerless to guarantee a just return. It must be bought and sold like any commodity since it cannot trust getting back what it claims to impart, virtue and justice.

Socrates extends this same criticism to politics. The leaders of the city protest that they have done many good things for the state but are nevertheless
prosecuted for wrongdoing (519b2-10). Their charis, however, consists of walls, ships, and armaments (519a1-4), "favors" which cannot be returned with justice, for the souls of the citizens have not been made temperate or just. In a remarkable statement, Socrates says he is perhaps the only man in Athens to attempt (epicheireō) a true political technē, since anytime he makes a speech the object is not charis (in the bad sense) but what is the best (521d6-5). That Socrates should call himself a statesman is not so strange a statement as it might seem at first. Socrates' charis is small-scale, in the sense that it primarily benefits one soul at a time. But according to Dover, "The Athenians did not draw a clear distinction between generosity to the community, channeled through the machinery of state, and charity to individuals" (GPM 177). One of Socrates' purposes in the Gorgias has been to show that public friendship and private friendship are very similar. Socrates' difference is that his charis is not in the form of material goods or entertainments. Because he has no material charis to point to, Socrates predicts that he will be put to death if he is brought into court, since he will "have no pleasures to plead as having been provided by me — which they regard as services (euergesia) and benefits (ōpheleia)" (522b3-6).

In Socrates' conversation with Callicles, then, the relationship between orator and audience, as Socrates presents it, is mutually corrupting of citizen and politician alike. Where Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles see rhetoric as a path to power, Socrates repeatedly emphasizes the power the audience has over the speaker, forcing the orator to mold his opinions to fit those of the people he purports to lead. The citizens, for their part, are given no true benefit from those leaders; that is, their souls are not made more just, and, as a result, they turn on their leaders and ostracize them. At least one interpretation of Gorgias' extant works has portrayed Gorgias' view of rhetoric as one-sided. In other words, to
borrow Thomas M. Conley's description, Gorgias views rhetoric as "a unilateral transaction between an active speaker and a passive audience" in which the speaker wields most of the power in the relationship (6). While this is only one possible interpretation of Gorgian rhetoric, it is consistent both with the criticisms of rhetoric that Socrates makes in this dialogue and with Plato's portrayal of "rhetorical" characters. Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, who all focus on the rhetor's power as the primary benefit of rhetoric, do not seem to consider how their own souls are affected by the exchange. Socrates tries to convince them that they, too, are potentially changed by the act of speaking to an audience. Indeed, the emphasis on charis in Plato's Gorgias indicates that, for Socrates, and probably for Plato as well, oral human communication is rarely, if ever, one-sided; there is always an exchange in oral human discourse, a reciprocal exchange which has the potential for either moral benefit or moral corruption.

In the closing passages of the Gorgias, Socrates makes an explicit invitation to Callicles, and to all others, to join him in a life of inquiry into the truth (526d4-e5). On the face of things, it is strange that Socrates would extend such an invitation to a man like Callicles, who seems so opposed to and so incompatible with Socrates' sort of life. Yet we have noted an important similarity between Socrates and Callicles, which Socrates himself has pointed out: they are both men of Erôs, possessed of a strong desire which borders on madness. Although the object of Callicles' desires are different from Socrates', Callicles' strong erôs for public recognition shows that he has the philosopher's capacity to enter into an erotic relationship with something larger than a single human being. Socrates' arguments have been designed to show him a different object for his desire. This object, as I have tried to show, is the beauty of justice and sophrosunê, which shines with a charis that is oikeios, one's own, and yet is akin to us all. Socrates
does not seek to destroy Callicles' desire; he does seek to redirect it. As David Roochnik puts it, "Socrates attempts to reform Callicles by offering him a vision of an orderly and knowable whole. In other words, Socrates follows the advice that Aristotle later will give: the only effective cure for the man of tyrannical desires is philosophy" ("Counting" 557).67

Socrates therefore offers Callicles a particular, and peculiar, kind of friendship, becoming philos to wisdom. This final invitation continues the offer of friendship inherent in his repeated challenges to Gorgias, to Polus, and to Callicles to refute and be refuted, to question and be questioned. To be refuted, the paradoxical charis of Socrates' elenchus, is an act of the highest friendship whereby, to use Socrates' medical analogy, the soul is cured of sickness. Since to share in such activities is to engage in philosophy (however imperfectly or clumsily), the questions and answers function like the gifts given and received in ordinary friendships. If I may borrow again the words of Gabriel Herman quoted earlier and apply them in a slightly different context, the gifts of questions and answers "repay past services, incur new obligations, and act as continuous reminders of the validity of the bond" the philosopher shares with both the interlocutors and the object of their mutual desire. Since gift-giving, both private and public, was, like so many other activities, a sort of contest for the Greeks (Hands 26-27), Socrates expresses this mutual give and take in agonistic terms. We should strive with each other, he says, to find out the truth of the matters under discussion, for, if found, it would be a good common to all (505e). He invites Callicles and others to this philosophical contest (526e), using the same verb (parakalō) used to call one's friends to witness at law.

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67See Aristotle, Politics 1267a10-16.
Any gift or any offer of friendship may be refused, however, and this is what happens to Socrates. As Howard J. Curzer remarks, “Philosophic friendships are based upon cooperation in the pursuit of truth and are ruined when one or both of the friends is unwilling to abandon false beliefs in order to continue the elenchus” (158). In the end, none of the assembled company is even willing to enter into dialogue with Socrates -- they only wish to hear him talk to see what he will say (505d8-506c4). Callicles, especially, refuses Socrates’ offer by refusing to participate in question and answer. At one point in the discussion of pleasure and gratification, Callicles starts violating the “rules” of dialectic by answering not with what he truly believes but only with those answers that will keep him from “losing” the argument. In other words, his answers are designed only to save himself from inconsistency (495a6-7). He tries some avoidance tactics, claiming an inability to follow Socrates’ “sophistics” and professing ignorance of Socrates’ meaning (497a7-b4). Finally, Callicles agrees to answer but protests that he does so merely to give charis to Gorgias (501c9-10). Thus, Callicles rejects Socrates’ offer of a philosophical friendship based on the unpleasant charis of refutation for a more traditional friendship based on the pleasurable but worthless charis of gratification.

Indeed, several scholars have remarked on Socrates’ failure to convince any of his interlocutors of the rightness of his position (Kastely 97-98; Kennedy 36; Nightingale). In fact, Charles Kauffman argues that Socrates fails as dialectician, as rhetorician, and as statesman since he has also failed to make his interlocutors more just (116-125). Surely part of this failure, as Socrates himself is aware, is due to the rigorous and unpleasant nature of the elenchus. Instead of the softening effect of rhetorical pleasure, which produces aidōs and persuasion, the elenchus seems to produce the opposite effect. Polus and Gorgias are
"shamed," and Callicles, who claims no conventional shame, becomes angry. Indeed, the conversations in the Gorgias often show a remarkable lack of conventional charis-pleasure, the kind of good feeling present at the feast or the symposium. In particular, Socrates' exchange with Callicles, as Guthrie notes, is marked by "unmistakable bitterness and ill-temper" (107). While I would not go quite so far as Guthrie, I do agree that the dialogue becomes progressively bitter in tone. Kauffman argues that Plato uses Socrates' failure as a criticism of both rhetoric and dialectic, which he (Plato) regards as "complementary arts" (126). Moreover, Kauffman argues that the dialogue form "is itself an example of the skillful use of rhetoric and, as such, illustrates the proper use of rhetoric (126-127). I do not really disagree with Kauffman's conclusions, for I think -- although I cannot prove here -- that Plato believes rhetoric to be an inescapable part of human communication and intends his dialogues to be examples of good rhetoric. Does this mean, however, that Plato created his dialogues to be an antidote to both rhetoric and dialectic, both beneficial to the soul and pleasurable in the conventional sense, combing the best charis of both worlds, so to speak? This is a difficult question. Certainly many Platonic dialogues are delightful, and they seem filled with charis, not only for the characters but also for us readers. The Phaedrus and the Symposium come readily to mind. However, in order to benefit from a Platonic dialogue -- indeed, from any dialogue -- one must participate. As Jacob Klein says, one must become part of the dialogue, ask ourselves the questions that Socrates asks, attempt some answers, criticize those answers (5-9). I can attest that this is not always pleasant. As to the charis of benefit, I would submit that the Gorgias, as a commentary on the pitfalls of human communication, may also suggest that we revise our conceptions of success and failure. Perhaps it is true that Socrates "fails" to persuade his
interlocutors and, hence, to make their souls more just. But in real-life rhetorical situations, too, complete victory is a rarity and utter failure all too common. As Socrates says to Callicles, we often need “to examine these same questions more than once, and better” in order to persuade others or to decide what we ourselves believe (513c9-d2). As a commentary on philosophy, then, the Gorgias may suggest that the attempt is as important as the result, the question as important as the answer.

There are many questions which go unanswered in the Gorgias, and many answers which are suggested but not discussed in detail. For example, although Socrates has suggested that a “good” rhetoric might exist, we know little about it except the requirements that it must proceed with knowledge and aim always at justice and the good. But a conventional notion of justice — helping friends and harming enemies — is itself questioned in this dialogue. What does it mean to help a friend or harm an enemy? Is this notion of justice even tenable? What is the nature of friendship and of the philosophical friendship in particular? How can we be philos to both wisdom and to each other? What are the connections between eros and philosophy? All of these questions, however, are considered in more depth in other dialogues — Phaedrus, Republic, Lysis, Symposium.

We saw in Chapter Three that the fifth-century B.C.E. was a time of change for the concept of charis in Greek culture. Cut loose from its moorings in the divine, charis became a problematic concept, filled with contradiction and uncertainty. This uncertainty was given voice by playwrights such as Aeschylus, who split the charis of pleasure from the charis of benefit. Plato’s Socrates exploits this paradox as well, incorporating it into the Gorgias as commentary on rhetoric and dialectic. At the end of the dialogue, however, Socrates attempts to stabilize the concept. In her discussion of charis, Bonnie MacLachlan notes that
the charis that flows between human beings is transitory and unstable. Human beauty, like all of human life, is fleeting; we are ephémeroi, creatures of a day. Death removes us from any human communion and, according to MacLachlan, "social interchange is no longer possible: Charis cannot operate" (148-149). Thus, the charis that Callicles seeks through rhetoric and power and pleasure is ephemeral as well. But in the closing myth of the afterlife, Socrates points towards a charis that abides. In the final courtroom, each soul is judged, stripped of its body and the trappings of physical charis (523c9-524a8). Temperance and justice and virtue finally receive their due, and the soul is awarded a divine charis in the Isles of the Blessed, the paradise reserved for heroes (526c2-526c7). Charis is once again grounded in the eternal. The grounding of charis is mythical, however, and is not justified in the Gorgias by any explicit metaphysics. But suggestions are here, and they point the way to the erotic dialogues, the Symposium and, especially, the Phaedrus, where the charis lighting a loved one's eyes is revealed as the charis of Beauty itself, shining in eternal splendor.
APPENDIX A. INDEX TO CHARIS AND PHILIA IN THE GORGIAS

charis, char-
458d5, 462c8, 462c10, 462d5, 462d6, 462e1, 465d3, 470c8, 484c7, 485a5, 485b4, 501b9, 501c10, 501d4, 502a1, 502a10, 502b4, 502c1, 502e9, 505c7, 516b4, 516b5, 520c6, 521a5, 521d9

philia, philos
447b3, 456d5, 456d6, 456d10, 466c10*, 470c10, 471a3*, 473a3, 479c3, 479d10*, 480c3, 482a6*, 485e2, 486a4*, 487e7, 492c2, 497d6, 499c4, 500b7, 507e4-5, 507e6, 508a2, 508c9, 509b9, 510b5, 510c2, 510c6, 510c9, 513b6, 513c3*, 515b7, 519e3

* indicates a term of address in the vocative case, phile or philê

philosophia, philosopheô, and other compounds of phil-
457d5, 481d6, 482b1, 484c6, 484c11, 485a5, 485a6, 485a8, 485b1, 485c3, 485c4, 485c7, 485d2, 486a7, 487c8, 500c8, 505e5, 514b6, 515b6, 515e9
APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF SOCRATES’ ARGUMENT AT 474D3-475E8*

Polus’ view is that suffering wrong is more evil or harmful (kakos) than doing wrong, but that doing wrong is more shameful (aischros). He believes that kalos is not the same as agathos, nor kakos the same as aischros (474c4-d2). Richard McKim summarizes Socrates’ refutation as follows (Polus has already professed to believe both HT and ST):

(HT) Suffering injustice is more harmful to the sufferer than committing it is to the agent.

(ST) Committing injustice is more shameful than suffering it.

(A) Whatever is admirable (kalon) is so on account of being either pleasant (hedu) or beneficial (chresimon, ophelimon) or both (474d3-475a4).

(B) The opposite of admirable is shameful (aischron), and the opposites of pleasant and beneficial are painful (luperon) and harmful (kakon) (475a4-5).

(C) Therefore, whatever is shameful is so on account of being either painful or harmful (475 a5-b2).

(D) But committing injustice is certainly not more painful than suffering it (475b3-c4).

(E) Therefore, since it is more shameful by ST, it must be so on account of being more harmful, contrary to HT (475c4-9).

(F) Therefore, nobody would prefer to commit injustice rather than suffer it (475d1-e6)

* This summary is taken from the cited work by Richard McKim, pages 43-44. HT and ST are McKim’s terms.
WORKS CITED


