

## KEY IDEAS OF PLATO' GORGIAS [OUP EDN]

Item	Idea	Para
1.	Gorgias says he teaches rhetoric, and is proud of his concise answers.	449b
2.	<b>Rhetoric</b> enables you to win over public meetings to your side - the art of persuasion.	452e
3.	But surely <u>every</u> expertise attempts to persuade people about its subject?	453d
4.	The special aim of rhetoric is persuasion about right and wrong.	454b
5.	'Conviction' and 'knowledge' are different, because the first can be false, but not the second.	454d
6.	Persuasion leads to both, so there are two kinds of persuasion.	454e
7.	Persuasion in law courts involves no understanding, and only aims at conviction.	455a
8.	Rhetoricians can't give useful advice about practical affairs.	455b
9.	But they are more persuasive than the professionals about practical matters.	456b
10.	If rhetoric is misused, that is not the fault of the people who teach it.	456d
11.	We must be careful not to take philosophical disagreements personally.	457d
12.	<b>It is admitted that rhetoricians are persuasive without any actual knowledge.</b>	459c
13.	However, Gorgias claims that rhetoricians <u>do</u> have knowledge of morality.	460a
14.	Presumably, therefore, rhetoric can't be misused after all?	460e
15.	Polus objects that everyone is bound to claim knowledge of morality.	461b
16.	Socrates says rhetoric is merely the knack of pleasing people ( <b>like cookery</b> ).	462c
17.	Rhetoric is bad because it is "a phantom of a branch of statesmanship".	463d
18.	Cookery and ornamentation are false forms of medicine and exercise.	465b
19.	Similarly, sophistry and rhetoric are false forms of legislation and justice.	465c
20.	Only the intellect can save us from the chaos caused by cookery and rhetoric.	465d
21.	Rhetoricians lack power, and do what they think best, but <u>not</u> what they want.	467b
22.	The good we want from actions is in the ends, not in the means.	468a
23.	<b>So having power over people isn't good, if misjudgement leads to a worse end.</b>	468d
24.	Nonsense, says Polus. Everyone would enjoy having power over other people.	468e
25.	But we should pity unjust dictators, and not envy the power of good ones.	469a
26.	<b>Being wronged is not pleasant, but it is preferable to doing wrong.</b>	469c
27.	<b>Anyone can commit murder or arson, so that doesn't count as true power.</b>	469e
28.	For those you get punished, though you did what you want. Power gets what is <u>best</u> for us.	470a
29.	To prove that immoral power is good, look at the much-envied Archelaus, a successful murderer.	470d
30.	Just getting lots of people to say they envy Archelaus doesn't prove anything.	472b
31.	Socrates says a criminal is better off if punished than getting away with it.	472e
32.	So it is better for a traitor to be tortured to death than to attain supreme power?	473c
33.	Polus admits that it is 'contemptible' to do wrong, although it is also 'good'.	474c
34.	Things are judged 'admirable' or 'contemptible' according to certain standards.	474d
35.	Things are admirable or contemptible if they are useful, or pleasant, or both.	474e
36.	<b>Since doing wrong is contemptible but pleasant, it must therefore be harmful.</b>	475c
37.	<b>Since doing wrong is clearly more harmful than suffering wrong, it must be worse.</b>	475c
38.	In all actions, the quality of the deed is transferred to the recipient.	476b
39.	For example, if a person hits hard, the victim receives a hard hit.	476c
40.	<b>It follows that if punishment is done justly, the wrong-doer receives justice.</b>	476d
41.	<b>The wrong-doer receives no pleasure, and must therefore receive a benefit.</b>	477a
42.	<b>The benefit for the criminal must be an improvement of the mind.</b>	477a
43.	Immorality is the vice of the mind, equivalent to poverty and disease for the body.	477b
44.	Immorality is "the worst thing in the world", because it is the most harmful.	477e
45.	Judges cure immorality, as doctors do disease, and business cures poverty.	478a
46.	Justice is more admirable than medicine or business, so it confers most benefit.	478b
47.	Best is to be moral, next best to be cured of immorality, and immorality is worst.	478e
48.	Criminals avoid punishment as patients fear treatment, because they don't properly understand health.	479a
49.	Criminals, then, should <u>seek</u> punishment, not defend themselves with rhetoric.	480b
50.	The only use of rhetoric is denouncing criminals, including ourselves!	480c
51.	In fact, the only corruption we should defend is that of our enemies, in order to prolong it!	481a
52.	Callicles says Polus lost the foregoing argument with his first concession.	482d

53.	It is <u>natural</u> to hate suffering wrong, but <u>conventional</u> to hate doing wrong.	483a
54.	In fact only weaklings suffer wrong - proper people avenge them!	483b
55.	The conventional rules that are against doing wrong are created by weaklings.	483c
56.	<b>The strong take what they want, and the weak use the law to achieve equality.</b>	483c
57.	Education is used to tame the strong, who would naturally dominate.	484a
58.	Callicles attacks philosophy, because it is impractical (especially in law courts).	484c
59.	Socrates says Callicles is confusing 'superior' and 'stronger'.	488c
60.	<b>If they're the same, the whole populace is superior, because it is the strongest.</b>	488d
61.	<b>But this superior populace supports equal distribution and doing right.</b>	489a
62.	<b>Therefore <u>nature</u> endorses justice and morality, not just convention!</b>	489b
63.	Callicles says that clever people are superior, not a gang of stupid slaves.	490a
64.	But surely doctors shouldn't scoff all the food, because they are dietary experts?	490c
65.	No, the greatest share should go to <b>political experts, and the bravest.</b>	491b
66.	But surely even the experts should be controlled - by themselves?	491d
67.	No. The ideal for superior people is <b>total freedom in satisfying desires.</b>	491e
68.	People praise self-discipline and justice because they are too timid.	492a
69.	No one with a dynamic potential for power and pleasure wants self-discipline and justice.	492b
70.	But wise men suggest that only fools pursue insatiable desires - it's like filling leaky jars.	493a
71.	Pleasure is <u>satisfying</u> desires, not avoiding them (only stones and corpses do that!)	494a
72.	Surely we must admit <b>there are bad pleasures</b> , like scratching an itch, or male prostitution?	494e
73.	Callicles is adamant that pleasure and the good are identical.	495a
74.	We agree, though, that knowledge, courage and pleasure are distinct things.	495d
75.	Happiness and unhappiness are reciprocally related (cf. health/disease, and fast/slow).	496b
76.	So if two things are lost simultaneously, they aren't the good and the bad?	496c
77.	But thirst is distress and drinking is pleasure, and they happen simultaneously.	496e
78.	<b>After a drink, we also lose the distress and the pleasure simultaneously.</b>	497c
79.	<b>Therefore pleasure and distress aren't the same as happiness and unhappiness.</b>	497d
80.	<b>Fools and cowards are not 'good', but they get plenty of pleasure - and maybe <u>more</u> than others.</b>	498a
81.	If pleasure is the same as good, then bad people must be good!	498c
82.	<i>Callicles</i> : obviously we must concede that there are good and bad pleasures.	499b
83.	So we should aim for beneficial pleasure, but pleasure isn't the ultimate goal.	500a
84.	We must now decide between rhetoric and philosophy (as we did between cookery and medicine).	500c
85.	Medicine is superior to cookery, as it involves <b>means and ends and explanations.</b>	501a
86.	Similarly with the mind, there is the knack of getting pleasure, and there is careful thought about it.	501b
87.	Whole crowds of people can be led to <b>thoughtless pleasure</b> , by music and theatre.	501e
88.	Rhetorical speakers and dramatic poets both flatter large audiences to please them.	502d
89.	A speaker who really cared for the welfare of the audience would be superior to a pleasing rhetorician.	503a
90.	Even famous speakers like <b>Pericles</b> didn't make their audiences into better people.	503c
91.	A <u>really</u> good speaker is a craftsman who aims at <b>justice, self-control and mental order.</b>	504c
92.	People who are sick in mind should no more pursue pleasure than physically diseased people.	504e
93.	A summary confirms that a good mind is self-disciplined and appropriately organised.	506e
94.	A just person shows <b>appropriate behaviour</b> in religion, courage and social affairs.	507b
95.	Such behaviour leads to success and happiness (and self-indulgence brings unhappiness).	507c
96.	We should devote ourselves to justice and self-discipline, in ourselves and in the community.	507d
97.	<b>Self-indulgent people are incapable of co-operation and friendship.</b>	507e
98.	We have proved that committing unpunished crime is the worst thing that can happen to someone.	509b
99.	To avoid suffering wrong we need ability, but mere effort of will seems to avoid <u>doing</u> wrong.	509d
100.	<b>But no one willingly does wrong, so we must also need some ability to avoid it.</b>	509e
101.	We need the ability to control our community, or befriend the controllers.	510a
102.	This involves <b>being like a dictator</b> in character, in order to befriend any dictators.	510c
103.	<b>Therefore we must be able to <u>do</u> wrong, in order to avoid <u>suffering</u> wrong.</b>	510e
104.	Of course befriending dictators gives power, but so do swimming and helmsmanship.	511d
105.	Helmsmen are modest, because they know their help doesn't actually improve people at all.	512a
106.	You aristocrats look down on people like mechanics, who are as helpful as rhetoricians.	512c
107.	Excellence does not consist in survival, but in using our allotted time well.	512e

108. To live well in a democracy, perhaps you should befriend and adapt to the common people.	513a
109. Political leadership (and medicine) requires experience and expertise (not just talk).	514c
110. Neither Calicles nor Pericles has actually improved the people of Athens.	515c
111. The Athenians became more like wild animals after Pericles's rule.	516c
112. Eventually the people turn against the leaders of our democracy.	516e
113. <b>All leaders bend to the people's needs, when they should be <u>changing</u> those needs.</b>	517b
114. Praising politicians above moralists is like praising cooks above doctors.	518c
115. The blame for Athenian disasters lies in the values of the old leaders like Pericles.	519a
116. Sophists sue their pupils for non-payment, so they can't have taught them justice!	519c
117. Other services must demand payment, but surely sophists should have secured just treatment?	520d
118. One day Socrates may be on trial - for giving people medicine instead of sweets.	521e
119. The best defence then will be innocence, and fine speaking will be irrelevant.	522d
120. I am not frightened of death, but of facing judgement with a corrupt soul.	522e
121. In life people may look good, but <b>Zeus judges us truly after we die.</b>	523d
122. After death the body still bears its scars, and souls too can remain ugly and inharmonious.	524d
123. Punishment in Hades can cure a soul - or at least offer a lesson to others.	525b
124. The worst criminals are political figures (who work on a large scale), not petty criminals.	525d
125. Power corrupts, so politicians who live well are especially praiseworthy.	526a
126. <b>The best chance of having a pure soul is through the detached life of philosophy.</b>	526c
127. When your soul is judged, only goodness will defend you, not speeches.	527a
128. Join me in the pursuit of a moral life, which must precede any political involvement.	527d

INDEX - to be filled in....

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# 'GORGIAS' – STUDY GUIDE (BASIC READING: PENGUIN EDITION PP.32-54 AND 104-113)

**BACKGROUND:** Written in about 387, after the death of Socrates, but set in 427, during the visit to Athens of the aged Gorgias and Polus, from Sicily. Callicles is an Athenian aristocrat. Rhetoric is the art of public speaking, taught to young men by the sophists. It is comparable to a barristers' skill, advertising, party politicals, spin doctoring and job interviews. Behind it lies a belief that morality is relative, merely a matter of convention (*nomos*), and that the aim of life is power and pleasure, achieved by persuasion.

**SOCRATES:** He was in his prime at this time. He engages in interrogation of people's views (his *elenchos*), which he insists must be sincerely held. He passionately believes in virtue, but always protests his ignorance of true wisdom. His aim is for people to follow the oracle's advice to 'know yourself'. He argues for 'moral egoism' - that virtue is in your own interest, because it brings a healthy soul. He is opposed to the view that pleasure is the good, and believes that all desire is guided by belief, so that all wickedness results from ignorance, and weakness of will (*akrasia*) is impossible.

## A. GORGIAS CLAIMS THAT RHETORIC IS THE HIGHEST SKILL

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|---|--|---|
| 1. <b>Rhetoric is amoral</b><br>Rhetoricians deny responsibility for their pupils' acts<br>Clearly some pupils still behave immorally   | <i>Election of doctors</i>                             | 456b,459a<br>460d                             |
| 2. <b>Rhetoric is not a proper skill (<i>techné</i>)</b><br>It lacks a proper subject matter<br>It is not a rational activity<br>It is analogous to cookery and ornamentation | <i>Boxing</i> 456d<br><br><br><i>Helmsmanship</i> 511d | 460e<br>465a-e<br>465a-e<br>465a,501a<br>465c |

## Discussion

## B. POLUS CLAIMS THAT RHETORICIANS ARE SUPREME POWERFUL

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|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 3. <b>Rhetoricians are not really powerful</b><br>Power gets what you want, not what you judge best<br>Rhetoric is a neutral means, and may not get the end you want                      | <i>Tyrants, dagger</i> 469d | 466b<br>466b-468d<br>468a | Jocasta, the dentist  |
| 4. <b>It is better to be wronged than to do wrong</b><br>Doing wrong is obviously more contemptible than being wronged  |                             | 469c<br>474c              | At 482c, Callicles says Polus should never have conceded this |
| Contemptible things are either unpleasant or harmful<br>Doing wrong is more pleasant than suffering it, so it must be more harmful<br>Therefore doing wrong is worse than suffering wrong | <i>Good physique</i> 474d   | 474d-475a<br>475b<br>475c | Harmful for the doer, or for the victim?                      |

## C. POLUS SAYS WE ADMIRE ARCHELAUS FOR GETTING AWAY WITH HIS CRIMES

- |   |                     |                                      |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 5. <b>It is better to be punished than to get away with crime</b><br>If punishment is administered justly, the culprit receives justice<br>Punishment is unpleasant, so it must bring a benefit<br>The benefit must be to the mind (like medicine for the body) | <i>Torture</i> 473c | 472e<br>476d<br>477a<br>477a<br>492c |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|

## D. CALLICLES SAYS THE GOOD IS SELF-INDULGENCE AND PERSONAL PLEASURE

- |   |  |   |             |
|---|--|---|-------------|
| 6. <b>Pleasure is not the good</b><br>Power is mainly used to achieve justice, not personal pleasure<br><br>Morality is natural ( <i>physis</i> ), not just conventional ( <i>nomos</i> )<br>Pleasure is an insatiable tyrant<br>Some pleasures are obviously bad, and can't be good<br><br>Some people are obviously bad, although they obtain a lot of pleasure<br>Quenching thirst makes us happy as the pleasure fades<br>Intelligent pleasures are better than thoughtless pleasures | <i>The mob want equality</i> 489a<br><br><i>Food distribution</i> 490c<br><i>Leaky jar</i> 493b<br><i>Scratching and prostitution</i> 494c,494e<br><i>Cowards</i> 498b<br><br><i>Drinking</i> 497c | 489a<br><br>489b<br>493b<br>494c,494e<br>498a<br><br>497c-d<br>501e       | Cf. 482e    |
| 7. <b>The good consists of virtues, not pleasures</b><br>Benefit and welfare are good, rather than pleasure<br>The benefit is an organised, healthy and controlled mind<br>Justice is innately good<br>Appropriate behaviour is always desirable<br>Co-operation and friendship are good in themselves<br>In politics we should lead the people, not follow them  | <br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><i>Pericles</i> 515d-516d  | <br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>506e-507a<br>507a<br>507e<br>517b | 477a? 479b? |

Table showing why rhetoric is not a true *techné* (see 464b-466a):

	Expertise ( <i>techné</i> )	Impersonates	Knack/Flattery
Body	Exercise	←	Ornamentation
	Medicine	←	Cookery
Mind (Statesmanship)	Legislation	←	<b>Rhetoric</b>
	Justice	←	Sophistry
Status:	Rational		Irrational
Aim:	Welfare		Pleasure