

Analyzing Callicles' Great Speech in the Gorgias:
Plato's Unveiled Insights from Callicles' Perspective

"[Callicles'] diagnosis is only a preface to a comprehensive denunciation... of the Socratic outlook, the essence of which he correctly identified as a commitment to (a certain conception of) philosophy."

Doyle¹

In this paper, I argue that Callicles presents plausible reasons to accuse Socrates of employing subtle rhetorical maneuvers concerning the concepts of nature and convention. The central focus here is not whether Callicles' accusation against Socrates holds, but rather, it is an exploration of how Plato, through the dialogue between Socrates and Callicles, reveals the compelling rationale behind Callicles' belief in his correctness. Initially, Socrates treats Callicles as a worthy opponent in the conventional sense, engaging in dialectic discourse. However, as Socrates' philosophical approach fails to resonate with Callicles, it becomes apparent that Socrates holds a different perspective on Callicles than he initially expressed. To support this thesis, this paper will closely examine Callicles' Great Speech and Socrates' concise speeches preceding and following it.

I will base my analysis on four key assumptions. Firstly, I assume that when Callicles inquired whether Socrates was joking or serious, he genuinely sought to understand Socrates' intentions. Secondly, Callicles' conception of natural justice is still

¹ Doyle, *Saying and Showing in Plato's Gorgias*, 210

formative and not yet fully developed. Thirdly, I contend that Socrates employs clever linguistic maneuvers in the discussion surrounding the concepts of convention and nature, particularly in his interaction with Callicles. Lastly, I propose the possibility that Socrates could adapt his philosophical approach to accommodate Callicles' perspective, potentially guiding Callicles toward a more profound comprehension of Socrates' views and the implications for how he should lead his life.

Socrates' Speech after Callicles' Great Speech

In this paper section, I aim to illustrate the method and the reasons behind Socrates' failure to effectively engage Callicles, particularly within the framework of Socrates' philosophical approach. This failure is primarily attributed to Socrates' unwavering commitment to his philosophical methodology, which impedes meaningful engagement with Callicles.

Following Callicles' Great Speech, Socrates' discourse exposes the plausible grounds for Callicles' suspicion that Socrates might be employing deceptive tactics concerning the concepts of nature and convention. In his statement, Socrates expresses his desire for his soul to be assessed as of the highest quality, akin to testing gold.² In essence, Socrates wishes for Callicles to evaluate his soul favorably. It is worth noting that Socrates' expectation contradicts Callicles' typical interrogative approach, as Socrates seeks affirmation of the excellence of his soul. Socrates' statement implies that if Callicles were to engage in such an evaluation, Socrates' soul would be found in such a pristine state that it no longer requires testing. However, the dialogue takes a different

² C[2]486d2-5

course. As Callicles begins scrutinizing Socrates' philosophical methodology, he promptly asserts that Socrates is not a trustworthy interlocutor. At this moment, Socrates conventionally attributes to Callicles the same position that Socrates holds in his philosophical method, attempting to secure Callicles' agreement. However, Callicles' mistrust of Socrates leads Plato to reveal that Socrates instinctively conceals his true thoughts about Callicles.

In simpler terms, Callicles finds himself uncertain whether Socrates genuinely means what he says or has ulterior motives. Socrates regards Callicles as a worthy adversary in their dialectical engagement if he acts honestly. However, suppose Callicles falls short of Socrates' expectations regarding assessing his soul. In that case, it highlights potential shortcomings in Socrates' philosophical approach, especially in its aim to involve Callicles and guide him toward a better understanding of how to lead his life. Considering Callicles' sincere attempt to grasp the meaning behind Socrates' words and his valid concerns that Socrates might be employing subtle rhetorical tactics concerning the concepts of nature and convention, Socrates' approach fails to engage Callicles effectively. Conversely, if Socrates is being deceitful, Plato portrays Socrates as offering Callicles legitimate reasons to doubt both Socrates and his method of philosophy. Due to Socrates' steadfast adherence to his methodology without adapting it to accommodate Callicles, Callicles eventually disengages from Socrates' approach. Consequently, Plato demonstrates Socrates resorting to rhetorical maneuvers while expecting Callicles to evaluate the state of his soul.

Socrates' unwavering commitment to his philosophical method results in a misguided perception of the effectiveness and status of his philosophy. When Socrates asserts, "I am quite sure that if [Callicles agrees] with me about anything of which I am convinced in my soul, we shall have the actual truth,"³ Plato reveals that Socrates presupposes a notion of truth. This presupposition implies that if Callicles were to align with Socrates, he too could recognize it as the ultimate truth. Furthermore, Plato demonstrates that the pathway to this perceived truth, according to Socrates, involves Callicles embracing Socrates' philosophical dialectic. However, Callicles possesses compelling reasons to suspect that Socrates may not be entirely honest. Consequently, any truth arrived at through Socrates' method is not deemed "actual" by Callicles. Socrates' tenacious adherence to his particular way of doing philosophy hinders him from adapting and accommodating Callicles' initial perspective, potentially leading to a more effective and gradual change in Callicles' mindset.

As Callicles perceives the shortcomings in Socrates' ability to achieve the goals of his philosophical method, Plato offers additional evidence of Socrates employing subtle rhetorical tactics concerning the concepts of nature and convention in his dialogue with Callicles. For instance, when Socrates asserts that Callicles is wise because "I encounter many people who are not qualified to put me to the test because they are not wise like you,"⁴ he is engaging in conventional flattery by attributing wisdom to Callicles, all the while holding a natural belief that Callicles is merely a student of rhetoric. This instance underscores how Socrates navigates his interactions, drawing from the previous Oracle

³ C[2]486e5-7

⁴ C[2]487a4-5

of Delphi's statement that no one is wiser than Socrates. Since Socrates' philosophical method serves as the vehicle to affirm this proclamation, it implicitly suggests that Socrates considers himself wiser than Callicles. Thus, when Socrates labels Callicles as wise, it becomes evident that he cannot mean it, highlighting Socrates' deployment of wordplay. Plato skillfully illustrates how Socrates unintentionally harms Callicles by imposing his method of philosophy upon him. Socrates firmly maintains that the truth resides within his soul and insinuates that this truth is accessible exclusively through his philosophical approach. Consequently, Socrates sees no compelling reason to modify his method to accommodate Callicles' perspective.

Socrates' self-deception becomes increasingly problematic for Callicles when Socrates invokes his previous discussions with Gorgias and Polus. Socrates mentions that "though they are well disposed toward me as well as wise, [they] are... lacking in frankness and more hampered by inhibitions than they ought to be."⁵ This statement reveals yet another instance of Socrates' subtle wordplay. While Socrates had previously labeled Callicles as wise in a conventional manner but with a contradictory natural belief, he now extends this designation to Gorgias and Polus. Plato skillfully illustrates how Socrates engages in deception by equating all three individuals. From Callicles' perspective, Socrates' use of word tricks and equivocations in his interactions with Gorgias and Polus implies that he may have deceived them regarding the notions of nature and convention. Consequently, Plato demonstrates how Socrates draws an inference about Callicles that differs from the conventional label Socrates assigns him.

⁵ C[2]487b1-3

This leads Callicles to question whether Socrates is genuinely honest or perhaps employing irony or if he is even aware of how his wordplay reflects poorly on his method of philosophy when it concerns the concepts of nature and convention.

Plato consistently unravels Socrates' inconsistencies in his dialogue with Callicles. One such instance is when Socrates, despite earlier claiming that Callicles possesses the qualities needed to assess his soul and that Callicles is well-disposed toward him, states, "[but] if you ask what evidence I have of this, Callicles... I know you have been a partner in philosophical discussion [with others]."⁶ However, the nature of the philosophical discussions in which Callicles and the others engaged differs significantly from Socrates' assertion. Their discussions revolved around the notion that one should avoid delving deeply into the study of philosophy and not succumb to the perils of philosophical overindulgence – precisely the same accusations Callicles levels against Socrates. This incongruity raises doubts about whether Socrates genuinely means what he claims when citing this as evidence of Callicles' goodwill toward him.

Furthermore, Callicles' accusation regarding Socrates' prolonged study of philosophy can be viewed from an alternative perspective that differs from Socrates' interpretation. Callicles may have intended to convey that Socrates had become so engrossed in his particular method of philosophy that he failed to establish himself as a respected and influential figure within the city. If Socrates had achieved a more prominent status within the city, he might have had the opportunity to immerse himself in the city's laws and culture, allowing him to adapt his philosophical approach without

⁶ C[2]487c1

compromising its ultimate goal of guiding citizens toward improved lives. Regrettably, Socrates maintains his unwavering commitment to his method of philosophy, refusing to make the necessary adjustments that could lead to a more effective engagement with the city's citizens.

Moreover, as Socrates asserts that any point upon which he and Callicles find agreement signifies that it has been sufficiently examined, Plato skillfully demonstrates how Socrates imposes upon Callicles an agreement to propositions that Callicles neither actively pursued nor requested. For instance, when Socrates claims that "agreement between us is bound to result in truth,"⁷ he appears to hold an unreasonable expectation, given that Plato has already depicted Callicles' suspicion of Socrates employing deceptive tactics. In a conventional sense, Socrates seems to assume a sort of equality between himself and Callicles. However, genuine agreement leading to the discovery of actual truth is implausible because Callicles fundamentally disagrees with the premises and methods of Socrates' philosophical approach. Plato astutely illustrates how Socrates somewhat carelessly attributes to Callicles an agreement to propositions that would effectively bind him to Socrates' method of philosophy. In response, Socrates inadvertently leads Callicles to assert that he holds no obligation to engage in dialectical discourse with Socrates. This underscores how Socrates, in his pursuit of philosophical engagement, may unwittingly use wordplay that seems to ensnare Callicles but, in reality, lays bare the pitfalls of his philosophical methodology.

⁷ C[2]487e7-8

Socrates' habit of unconsciously projecting onto Callicles to align him with Socrates' method of philosophy becomes a recurring theme. Even though Socrates seems oblivious to this tendency, he often asserts, "If anything in the conduct of my life is amiss, be sure that it arises from ignorance on my part."⁸ He then proceeds to request that Callicles provide him with a comprehensive demonstration of the vocation he ought to pursue.⁹ However, asking Callicles for such a thorough demonstration inherently involves a type of rhetoric, given that Callicles is a student of rhetoric himself. It is likely that Callicles typically delivers thorough demonstrations through the art of rhetoric. Thus, Socrates conventionally projects onto Callicles the capacity to liberate him from ignorance, even though Socrates privately believes that Callicles is ill-suited for this task due to his background in rhetoric. The irony is palpable, as Socrates is essentially asking Callicles to engage in rhetoric to prove Socrates wrong. Plato astutely illustrates how Socrates inadvertently sets Callicles up for failure when he desires to learn from him. While Socrates claims that Callicles should notify him if he fails to put into practice anything to which he has given his assent, setting Callicles up for failure foreshadows Socrates' impending failure in dialectically engaging with Callicles through his unique method of philosophy.

In certain sections of Socrates' response to Callicles' speech, it becomes apparent that Callicles perceives Socrates as less than forthright in their dialogue. Plato adeptly illustrates how Socrates' reaction to Callicles' Great Speech suggests that Socrates himself may be oblivious to the subtle wordplay he employs concerning the concepts of

⁸ C[2]488a3-5

⁹ C[2]488a6-7

nature and convention during their conversation. Consequently, Callicles has valid reasons to suspect that Socrates employs such rhetorical maneuvers. As Callicles arrives at this conclusion, he fails to regard Socrates as a qualified instructor from whom he can glean valuable insights on how to lead a more fulfilling life. Consequently, Socrates' method of philosophy falls short in its attempt to engage Callicles, let alone succeed in refuting Callicles' perspectives. In summary, Plato's portrayal underscores how Socrates remains steadfast in his philosophical approach, ultimately rendering him incapable of adapting it to accommodate Callicles and instigating any meaningful transformation in him. Thus, Socrates' method of philosophy ultimately disappoints Callicles despite Callicles' sincere efforts to comprehend Socrates' teachings.

Socrates' Speech before Callicles' Great Speech

Having demonstrated Socrates' lack of straightforwardness in his dialogue with Callicles, even as Callicles sincerely attempts to grasp Socrates' teachings, I now aim to elucidate the broader repercussions of Socrates' inability to adapt the means of his philosophical approach without compromising its ultimate goals.

Socrates professes his love for philosophy, yet Plato reveals that his affection is primarily directed toward the philosophy embodied by his method of inquiry, which Callicles discerns as distinct from a broader love for philosophy in its entirety. When Socrates declares, "I am in love ... with philosophy,"¹⁰ Plato effectively portrays Socrates' profound attachment to his specific approach to philosophy. By doing so, Plato underscores how Socrates' love extends to what he perceives as the "genuine"

¹⁰ C[2]481d3-4

truth attainable through his philosophical method. However, Callicles' dissent is not against philosophy per se but rather against Socrates' method of philosophy. From Callicles' standpoint, another truth may exist within philosophy, distinct from the one achieved through Socrates' method. Consequently, Callicles struggles to comprehend how Socrates' approach can be objectively deemed the definitive path to philosophical truth. In his view, Socrates' truth is merely a subjective result of adhering to Socrates' unique method.

Moreover, Plato's portrayal of Socrates adhering to the subjective truth generated by his philosophical approach leads to the inference that this is why Callicles argues that Socrates should have occupied a respected place within society. Had Socrates exposed himself to the diverse subjective truths held by other esteemed members of society about philosophy, he might have been compelled to confront the limitations of his method. This situation becomes especially problematic because Socrates accuses Callicles of being captive to public opinion. Plato illustrates how Callicles believes that Socrates missed a valuable opportunity to adapt the means of his philosophical method in a way that could have achieved its ultimate aim: guiding individuals who adhere to popular opinions toward a more profound understanding of how to lead meaningful lives – an objective coinciding with the very purpose of Socrates' method of philosophy.

I have previously highlighted that Callicles may not express his true thoughts in his dialogue with Socrates, primarily because he assumes, with valid reasons, that Socrates is not entirely forthright. Consequently, when Callicles asks, "Won't we have human life turned upside down, and won't we be doing, apparently, the complete

opposite of what we ought,"¹¹ he raises deeper concerns regarding the implications of Socrates' unwavering commitment to his method of philosophy.

In Callicles' yet-to-be-fully developed perspective, which Socrates fails to effectively challenge through his method, the dominance of the strong over the weak is perceived as a natural occurrence. Consequently, Callicles concludes that if Socrates had not steadfastly adhered to his particular method but assumed a respected position within the city, he might have been more persuasive in guiding the city's citizens toward a more profound understanding of how to lead their lives. However, Callicles' perception of Socrates extends beyond mere philosophical differences; he sees in Socrates not only a man whose opinions diverge from those of the city but also someone who has utterly failed to achieve the ultimate objective of his professed method of philosophy. Therefore, in Callicles' view, Socrates' convictions appear to be turned upside down, fundamentally at odds with what he should strive to achieve.

Consequently, Callicles' foresight regarding the consequences awaiting Socrates due to his unwavering commitment to his method of philosophy is compelling evidence of what Callicles perceives as Socrates' deceptive use of wordplay. By persisting in his adherence to his method, Socrates inadvertently became oblivious to the complications arising from his rigid approach. As a result, Callicles infers that Socrates utilizes his method of philosophy as a shield to protect himself from the disapproval of the city's citizens. In Callicles' eyes, however, Socrates has metamorphosed into a scornful elder. It is worth noting that Callicles asserts that his opposition is not directed towards

¹¹ C[2]481c3-5

philosophy but rather towards how Socrates has employed it. Callicles finds no compelling reason to engage in dialectical discourse with Socrates because he believes that the objectives of Socrates' method are degrading. In Callicles' not-yet-fully-articulated viewpoint, a hierarchical structure where the strong rule over the weak is deemed appropriate. Consequently, he perceives Socrates, whom he regards as a failed and scornful elder, as incapable of persuading him that Socrates' method of philosophy could lead to a more fulfilling life.

Moreover, when Socrates seizes upon Callicles' inquiry into whether he is being earnest as an opportunity to launch an attack and ridicule Callicles, Plato vividly illustrates how Socrates becomes increasingly enmeshed in the ramifications of his steadfast adherence to his method of philosophy. As Callicles questions Socrates, asking whether "you are serious and what you say is true,"¹² rather than addressing Callicles' query directly, Socrates introduces the metaphor of the two lovers as a potential means by which they might share a common understanding. This move leaves Callicles bewildered as he struggles to discern how this metaphor contributes to his comprehension of Socrates' stance.

Moreover, it underscores how Socrates debases the dialectical nature of his method of philosophy by employing it as a weapon to attack Callicles. When Socrates charges that "you [Callicles] are... incapable of opposing the wishes and statements of your darlings [the opinions held by his beloved and the city's citizens],"¹³ Callicles infers that Socrates is resorting to an attack because his method of philosophy is incapable of

¹² C[2]481c2

¹³ C[2]481e5-6

persuading Callicles. Callicles' accusation thus implies that Socrates cannot challenge his affection for the way he practices philosophy. This reasoning leads Callicles to deliver his Great Speech and ultimately condemn Socrates' methodology.

Adding to Callicles' negative perception of Socrates, Plato skillfully portrays how Socrates evades taking responsibility for his philosophical limitations by attributing them to philosophy itself. In his own words, Socrates suggests that the key for Callicles to grasp is that he intends to "stop [Socrates' beloved philosophy] from talking like this."¹⁴ In doing so, Plato illustrates how Socrates, albeit unconsciously, ascribes the wordplay and rhetorical maneuvers he employs to his unwavering commitment to his method of philosophy and philosophy itself. This only exacerbates Callicles' unfavorable view of Socrates, whom he already regards as a failed elder incapable of defending himself against those who seek his demise – individuals whom Socrates could have persuaded otherwise had he acquainted himself with the laws and customs of the city and utilized them in pursuit of genuine philosophy and the ultimate goal of his method of philosophy.

As Socrates endeavors to guide Callicles toward the pursuit of the virtuous and a deeper understanding of how to lead a fulfilling life through a method of philosophy that Callicles remains skeptical of, Plato portrays Callicles' growing apprehensions about the limitations of Socrates' steadfast adherence to his method. In Callicles' perspective, Socrates' attempts to impose his method of philosophy come across as disingenuous, particularly when it becomes evident that Socrates' shortcomings are

¹⁴ C[2]482a6-7

becoming apparent. From Callicles' standpoint, there appears to be no sincerity in Socrates' endeavor to advocate for his method, given that it becomes increasingly evident that Socrates' flaws are becoming pronounced. Socrates inadvertently leads Callicles to perceive his method of philosophy as a lover who leads its devotee, Socrates himself, to his eventual demise. In this context, it becomes challenging for Socrates to fault Callicles for his reluctance to embrace a "lover" that ultimately leads to self-destruction.

Moreover, from Callicles' perspective, Socrates goes a step further by attributing the responsibility for the conclusions Callicles deems unjustified, which arise from Socrates' particular method of philosophy to philosophy as a whole. When Socrates asserts that "you [Callicles] must then prove her [philosophy] wrong,"¹⁵ Callicles, who perceives philosophy as distinct from Socrates' method, interprets this as yet another example of Socrates employing deceptive tactics regarding the concepts of nature and convention. Callicles sees Socrates as conventionally conflating his method of philosophy with the broader field of philosophy itself. In contrast, by not aligning with the claims made by Socrates' method, philosophy inadvertently reveals Socrates, perhaps unconsciously, as someone who deceives even the very concept of philosophy. Plato once more demonstrates how Socrates may remain unaware of his role as a participant in this deception as he tenaciously clings to his unique method. While Socrates deftly sidesteps responsibility for his reasoning, shifting it onto philosophy, he concurrently imposes the responsibility on Callicles to disprove philosophy, even

¹⁵ C[2]482b2-3

though Socrates' method stands in question. This convoluted dynamic highlights Socrates' evasion tactics and leads Callicles to perceive him as evading genuine philosophical engagement.

Furthermore, Socrates not only shifts the responsibility onto Callicles but also outlines the repercussions if Callicles fails to align with Socrates' conclusions. Socrates warns that Callicles "will never be at peace with himself but will remain at variance with himself all his life."¹⁶ Plato demonstrates how this admonition serves as a stark illustration of how Socrates inadvertently harms Callicles through his unwavering commitment to his method of philosophy. Paradoxically, Socrates seems to desire that Callicles suffers from the consequences of not adhering to his philosophical stance, even as Socrates inflicts harm on Callicles by failing to adapt his approach to achieve the ultimate goals of his philosophy. Plato lays bare Socrates' dilemma: If he seeks inner harmony, he must engage in dialectical discourse with Callicles, as prescribed by his method of philosophy; however, if he wishes to avoid self-contradiction, he must adhere to his method, despite its inability to effectively engage Callicles. Thus, Socrates finds himself in a predicament where achieving self-harmony necessitates following his unique philosophical approach – even though it has proven ineffective in engaging Callicles.

In this section, I aimed to demonstrate that had Socrates has been more open to adapting his approach to philosophy, he could have likely acquired the qualifications needed to effectively promote the goals of his method among the city's residents. If

¹⁶ C[2]482b6-8

Socrates had chosen this path, he might have earned the respect of individuals like Callicles, thus enabling him to reshape and potentially refute Callicles' not-yet-fully-developed system of natural justice in a manner that Callicles could have considered. However, by evading accountability for the outcomes of his method, Plato effectively illustrates how Callicles deduces that Socrates resorts to wordplay and rhetorical devices concerning the concepts of nature and convention. Consequently, Socrates fails to convince Callicles of the merits of his method of philosophy.

Callicles' Great Speech

After establishing that Socrates lacks transparency in his dialogue with Callicles and that Socrates holds a misconceived view of the efficacy of his method of philosophy, I aim to demonstrate that Callicles does, indeed, possess valid justifications for the assertions he presents in his Great Speech. This is despite the apparent inconsistencies in Callicles' statements, which can be attributed to the fact that he has not yet fully formulated a systematic framework for natural ethics.

Hence, it is understandable that Callicles accuses Socrates of employing the rhetoric of an orator. In Callicles' own words, he tells Socrates, "O Socrates, your language shows all the extravagance of a regular mob-orator."¹⁷ Orators are known for using wordplay and persuasive techniques, and Callicles interprets Socrates' similar employment of these techniques as a direct consequence of Socrates' chosen method of philosophy. To Callicles, this represents a symptom that suggests Socrates should have reconsidered his commitment to this approach. Callicles perceives Socrates as adhering

¹⁷ C[2]482c5-6

to his method of philosophy to maintain internal consistency and avoid self-contradiction. However, in doing so, Callicles believes Socrates resorts to wordplay and rhetorical devices, particularly in his handling of the concepts of nature and convention. In Callicles' view, this is where Socrates' method falters, and he conventionally adheres to it, inadvertently revealing its deficiencies through his interactions with Callicles.

As Callicles articulates his as-yet-unrefined perspective on the concepts of nature and convention, he meticulously examines how Socrates exploits these notions to his advantage. In Callicles' viewpoint, which Socrates' method of philosophy has failed to alter, he posits that "nature and convention are opposed to one another; so if from a feeling of shame, a man does not dare to say what he thinks, he is forced into an inconsistency."¹⁸ In simpler terms, Callicles contends that because Socrates encourages others to suppress their natural thoughts due to conventional shame, Socrates' very method of philosophy ultimately leads them into a state of inconsistency. From Callicles' perspective, Socrates' method of philosophy fosters these linguistic manipulations. Socrates claims that he guides those who engage in his method toward a superior comprehension of how to live life, primarily through the lens of convention. While this may be conventionally lauded, it naturally reveals Socrates' employment of these rhetorical devices.

Hence, Callicles firmly believes in the validity of his argument that conventions are established by the weak, who endure injustices at the hands of the strong. As Callicles perceives it, "nature... herself demonstrates... that it is right that the better man

¹⁸ C[2]482e7-9

should have more than the worse and the stronger than the weaker."¹⁹ Callicles rationalizes that by obstinately adhering to his method of philosophy, Socrates has rendered himself weaker when confronted by individuals like Callicles, who are considered vital. In simpler terms, while someone as strong as Callicles acknowledges the place of philosophy in life alongside other pursuits, he views someone like Socrates, whom he regards as weak and uncritically dedicated to philosophy, as lacking the capacity to persuade him. In Callicles' perspective, Socrates attempts to regulate natural law by applying his method of philosophy to counter the natural behavior of the strong. However, since Callicles already doubts Socrates' qualifications as a teacher, Socrates' method of philosophy falls short in persuading Callicles that it is a suitable means to understand better how to live one's life.

While there are several instances in Callicles' Great Speech with which I disagree, I perceive them as expressions from a man who is a worthy candidate for dialectical engagement. Callicles appears to have approached his interactions with Socrates in good faith, seeking to learn and open to having his viewpoints refined or even refuted by Socrates. However, as Callicles discerned Socrates' unwavering commitment to his method of philosophy, his perception of Socrates shifted, and he became disenchanted with Socrates' approach. Consequently, he chose not to embrace Socrates' way of doing philosophy. It is, therefore, valuable to conclude by examining the counsel that Callicles offers to Socrates. While it may contain elements of disdain, it also offers insights into

¹⁹ C[2]483c8-10

how Socrates could have adapted his method of philosophy to be more effective in helping individuals like Callicles.

Callicles' objection is not directed towards philosophy per se but rather against Socrates' specific approach to philosophy. From Callicles' perspective, a young man who neglects philosophy misses out on an opportunity for personal growth and a higher sense of purpose. Callicles contends that such an individual likely lacks "fine or noble ambition for himself."²⁰ Callicles' main critique of Socrates is that he has adhered to his method of philosophy for an extended period, causing him to become negligent in his duties and incapable of contributing effectively to the intellectual development of the city's citizens, as Callicles sees himself doing. Plato illustrates Callicles' resentment towards Socrates for failing to educate him and his consequent refusal to engage in philosophical discourse with him.²¹ Most ominously, Callicles predicts that if the city's citizens were to take legal action against Socrates, he would be left powerless and speechless, regardless of the questionable integrity of the prosecutors.²²

It is well-established that if put on trial, Socrates would not be left bewildered and would mount a vigorous defense in his favor. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Callicles' ultimate counsel to Socrates is to "abandon the argument."²³ In Callicles' perspective, Socrates' method of philosophy has turned him into an enthusiast of argumentation, characterized by intricate wordplay rather than genuine engagement in philosophical discourse. Callicles' advice to Socrates does not necessarily entail

²⁰ C[2]485c5-6

²¹ C[2]486b1-2

²² C[2]486b1-2

²³ C[2]486c5

completely forsaking philosophy. Instead, it suggests that Socrates should relinquish his current method of philosophy in favor of a more genuine and constructive approach to philosophical discourse. Plato offers us a glimpse of the potential benefits of such a transformation in Socrates' approach, highlighting how both Callicles and Socrates might have benefited from such a shift.

In conclusion, I aim to demonstrate that Socrates' unwavering commitment to his particular approach to philosophy has hindered his ability to engage Callicles in meaningful dialectic. Callicles, as a formidable interlocutor, could have significantly benefited from a more adaptable Socrates – one willing to step outside the confines of his philosophical toolkit, acquire new methods, and accommodate students like Callicles in order to guide them toward a better understanding of how to lead their lives. Instead, Callicles encounters Socrates, who has become ensnared by his philosophical method. This ensnarement has led Socrates to resort to wordplay and rhetorical tactics, often unknowingly, to maintain his philosophical stance. Hence, I endeavor to show how Callicles has compelling reasons to believe that Socrates uses such tactics. It is crucial to emphasize that whether Callicles' accusations against Socrates are accurate or not is not the central question. The critical inquiry revolves around how Plato illuminates the plausible reasons that drive Callicles to perceive himself as justified in his accusations against Socrates. This exploration sheds light on the complex dynamics between these two characters and the nuances of philosophical engagement within the dialogue.

Objections

I will now introduce and address potential objections to the assumptions presented in this paper. To do so, I will draw upon insights from James Doyle's unpublished manuscript on the *Gorgias*, specifically regarding Callicles' alleged indifference toward philosophy.

In the concluding section of his chapter concerning Callicles' Great Speech, Doyle emphasizes the need to delve deeper into the underlying factors shaping the conflict that Callicles presents in his speech. He aptly notes that we should go beyond Callicles' explicit statements about ethics, philosophy, and politics and instead focus on what the speech reveals about Callicles himself.²⁴ This approach is crucial because it highlights how the Great Speech is a product of Callicles' disillusionment with Socrates' mode of philosophical discourse. Given Callicles' disillusionment, it becomes essential to exercise caution in interpreting his statements, as inconsistencies may arise from his changing perspectives and sentiments throughout the dialogue.

Doyle references Woolf's interpretation of Callicles' denunciation of philosophy, where Woolf suggests that Callicles is attacking the adult preoccupation with philosophy.²⁵ However, I disagree with this interpretation. In my view, Callicles' critique is not directed at an adult preoccupation with philosophy in a general sense. Instead, Callicles is specifically targeting Socrates and his particular approach to philosophy, which involves his stubborn adherence to his way of doing philosophy.

²⁴ Doyle, 246

²⁵ Doyle, 243

Callicles' criticism concerns not philosophy but Socrates and his philosophical methods. While Callicles may acknowledge the value of philosophy for young individuals,²⁶ he questions the worthiness of an older man like Socrates, who continues to cling to his way of doing philosophy even when it has failed to guide Callicles toward a better understanding of how he should live his life.²⁷ Therefore, it is inaccurate to claim that Callicles is attacking an adult preoccupation with philosophy, as suggested by Woolf's interpretation.

Doyle's assumptions regarding Callicles' supposed denunciation of philosophy are somewhat misleading. He characterizes Callicles' denunciation as "shocking"²⁸ and emphasizes that doctrinal inconsistency is just one aspect of Callicles' inner conflicts.²⁹ However, it is essential to understand that Callicles' apparent doctrinal inconsistencies may arise from his disillusionment with Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Callicles' inner conflicts and apparent inconsistencies can be attributed to Socrates' philosophical approach failing to engage him effectively. Socrates' method has not guided Callicles toward a clearer understanding of concepts like the good, the good life, or how he should live his own life. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect Callicles to express inner conflicts and exhibit inconsistencies in his views. This reflects Socrates' failure to effectively persuade or educate Callicles rather than a fundamental flaw in Callicles' character or beliefs.

²⁶ C[2]485c3

²⁷ C[2]485c6

²⁸ Doyle, 242

²⁹ Doyle, 242

Doyle further argues that Callicles' natural ethics ultimately contradicts his views. He asserts that Callicles seeks rhetorical advantage by appealing to something as unequivocal as what happens,³⁰ and this leads to the endorsement of the conventional status quo in justice³¹ because nature, according to Doyle, includes convention within its domain.³² However, I believe Callicles' primary concern is not merely what happens but instead what appears to happen. He seems more interested in the observable behavior of individuals in society, particularly how the strong assert dominance over the weak. Plato's portrayal of Callicles suggests that he perceives the weaker members of society as conforming to a conventional view of justice that seems to reflect reality. Callicles views this conventional justice as a response to a more fundamental and primal nature. It is important to note that drawing conclusions from Callicles' not yet fully developed worldview and criticizing him for those views may be uncharitable. Callicles initially approached Socrates in good faith, attempting to engage with his ideas and perhaps even being open to having his views modified or refuted. Therefore, it is not fair to blame Callicles for not fully embracing Socrates' way of doing philosophy when the shortcomings of that approach are apparent to him, as Plato illustrates.

Doyle makes additional claims regarding the natural ethics he attributes to Callicles and the consequences thereof. He suggests that Callicles recommends a specific regime³³ but is mistaken in lamenting the widespread adherence to the conventional conception, which, according to Doyle, hinders the implementation of

³⁰ Doyle, 238

³¹ Doyle, 238

³² Doyle, 238

³³ Doyle, 237

Callicles' bold and ruthless program.³⁴ However, it seems unlikely that Callicles is genuinely recommending a system, given the inconsistencies in his views and the frustration he experiences in his dialogue with Socrates. Callicles may not fully believe in any particular system because what he says may not reflect his true beliefs, particularly in his engagement with Socrates. Instead of recommending a system, Callicles might reveal it as he perceives it, based on his observations and experiences. Thus, if Callicles appears to recommend any system, it is more likely the system that he has observed others adhering to rather than his not-yet-fully-developed natural ethics and its unintended consequences. Therefore, Callicles may not have been wrong to lament, as Doyle suggests, because his true intentions and beliefs may have differed from what Doyle assumes. Plato's depiction of Callicles shows that Callicles initially engaged with Socrates in good faith, hoping that he could help him make sense of his ideas about natural ethics through his philosophical approach. However, when Socrates began employing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention, Callicles felt alienated and disillusioned with Socrates' way of doing philosophy.

In his critique of Callicles, Doyle seems to attribute more significance to certain aspects of Callicles' views than may be warranted. He acknowledges that Callicles' ethical vision is both underspecified and problematic.³⁵ This under-specification can be understood as Callicles not having fully developed or thought out his views on natural justice into a comprehensive system. Consequently, Callicles remains open to modifying or refining his thoughts, mainly through engagement with Socrates. The

³⁴ Doyle, 238

³⁵ Doyle, 227

critical issue here is not necessarily the consequences of Callicles' underspecified views but rather the breakdown in the engagement between Callicles and Socrates. Callicles begins to see that Socrates is using word tricks and not engaging in a productive philosophical dialogue. This realization leads Callicles to distance himself from Socrates' way of doing philosophy. In essence, the primary problem does not lie with Callicles' incomplete or evolving ethical vision but rather with Socrates' approach to philosophy. Callicles' changing views and inconsistencies may reflect his frustration with Socrates' methods more than any inherent flaws in his perspective. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that the core issue in the dialogue is not Callicles as the problem but rather the inadequacies of Socrates' philosophical approach, even if they are not immediately apparent.

Doyle's interpretation of Socrates' victory over Polus in the dialogue may not fully align with Callicles' perspective. Doyle suggests that Callicles logically commends Socrates for triumphing over the weak (Polus) instead of accusing him of employing word tricks.³⁶ However, Callicles' viewpoint appears to differ significantly. To Callicles, Socrates is not seen as a perpetrator but rather as a victim due to his unwavering commitment to his way of doing philosophy. Callicles accuses Socrates of using similar word tricks on Polus to expose Polus's flaws, but he perceives Socrates employing the same tactics in their dialogue, which prompts Callicles to point out these tricks to Socrates. From Callicles' perspective, Socrates' dominance, as dictated by his philosophy, does not deserve applause or commendation. Instead, Callicles views it as a

³⁶ Doyle, 121

misguided approach that fails to persuade him, and he is more concerned with challenging Socrates' methods than congratulating him for victories over others like Polus.

Doyle suggests that Callicles' desire for victory is misplaced, leading him to avoid engaging with Socrates' way of doing philosophy effectively. According to Doyle, Callicles' focus on victory is directed toward his interlocutor (Socrates) rather than the subject of their discussion.³⁷ However, it is worth noting that Socrates attacked the interlocutor when he introduced the theme of the two lovers into the conversation. Additionally, Plato's portrayal of the dialogue suggests that Callicles had valid reasons to doubt Socrates' honesty. In such a context, it is reasonable to expect that Callicles would be hesitant to agree with any "truth" derived from Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Callicles likely perceived that the essence of their dialogue was not to ascertain the ultimate truth of philosophy but rather to uncover the truth about Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Given these considerations, it becomes apparent why Callicles was unwilling to let Socrates off the hook and challenged him rigorously.

This does not necessarily imply that Callicles opposes philosophy as a whole; instead, his opposition is directed toward Socrates' particular approach to philosophy. While Doyle argues that "the rationale for the philosophical life, while perfectly objective, can only be discerned by those who have in some sense already chosen it,"³⁸ this should not be misconstrued to suggest that Callicles has intentionally rejected philosophy. In Callicles' perspective, Socrates' way of doing philosophy lacks objectivity

³⁷ Doyle, 218

³⁸ Doyle, 216

and may even come across as somewhat dishonest. Callicles has previously expressed an appreciation for studying philosophy that liberates individuals rather than enslaving them to a specific philosophical method. He values an approach to philosophy that does not hinder individuals from developing skills that could enhance their ability to argue for the philosophical principles they hold as true effectively. Therefore, it can be argued that Callicles is not fundamentally opposed to philosophy but rather to how Socrates practices it.

Finally, it becomes evident through Plato's narrative that, in Callicles' perspective, Socrates' way of doing philosophy is akin to a type of psychic disorder. As Doyle suggests, these underlying disorders are not explicitly articulated in specific statements; instead, they are subtly revealed by Plato as the foundation for the surface-level confusion in their dialogue.³⁹ Plato illustrates that the core of Socrates' false belief lies in his assumption that he can persuade Callicles through his particular approach to philosophy. This disorder is deeply rooted in Socrates' stubborn adherence to his philosophical method. In this conversation, there is much more at play than just the validity and cogency of individual arguments. Callicles rejects Socrates as a qualified teacher from whom he can glean insights on leading a better life. Socrates' unwavering commitment to his unique way of doing philosophy leads Callicles to have plausible reasons, regardless of their ultimate correctness, to believe that he is correct in accusing Socrates of deception and manipulation.

³⁹ Doyle, 215

Works Cited

Hamilton, Walter, and C. J. Emlyn-Jones. 2004. *Gorgias*. Rev. ed. London; New York: Penguin.

Doyle, James. *Saying and Showing in Plato's Gorgias*. Unpublished manuscript.