



# What Plato Shows that Callicles Infers in the Gorgias

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Callicles' Great Speech in the *Gorgias*:

What Plato Shows that Callicles Infers

*"[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."*

Doyle<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I argue that Callicles has plausible reasons to accuse Socrates of playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention. Whether Callicles is right or wrong to accuse Socrates of doing so is not the question here but how Plato makes us see by what Socrates and Callicles say the plausible reasons Callicles thinks he has to think he is right. At first, Socrates conventionally regards Callicles as an opponent worthy of engaging in dialectic. As his way of doing philosophy fails to engage Callicles, however, it naturally reveals that Socrates thinks otherwise of Callicles than what he conventionally said. To substantiate this thesis, I will focus extensively on Callicles' Great Speech and Socrates' short speeches before and after it.

I will be working with four main assumptions. One is that Callicles tried in good faith to understand Socrates when he asked whether Socrates was joking or being earnest. Another is that Callicles' view of natural justice is not yet a thought-out version. Another is that Socrates plays word tricks around the notions of convention and nature in the dialogue with Callicles himself. Another is that Socrates could have

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<sup>1</sup> Doyle, *Saying and Showing in Plato's Gorgias*, 210

modified his way of doing philosophy to accommodate Callicles' view, gradually leading Callicles to a better understanding of his views and of how he should live his life.

### Socrates' Speech after Callicles' Great Speech

In this section of the paper, I want to show how and why Socrates has failed to engage Callicles according to Socrates' way of doing philosophy. This is a consequence of the stubborn way Socrates clings to his way of doing philosophy.

After Callicles' Great Speech, Socrates' speech reveals how Callicles has plausible reasons to think Socrates is playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention. Socrates claims that "if my soul were made of gold... how happy I should be to light upon one of those touchstones by which gold is tested... [for] I should like it to be of the best possible kind,"<sup>2</sup> In other words, Socrates would like Callicles to assess his soul to be of the best possible kind. It is thus against Callicles' method of interrogation that Socrates wants the gold in his soul to be assessed. Socrates' statement implies that if Callicles were to do so, Socrates' soul would be well cared for, thus making Socrates perfectly confident of being in such a good state that his soul would no longer need tests. This is not how their dialogue unfolds, however. As soon as Callicles starts assessing Socrates' way of doing philosophy, Callicles at once points out that Socrates is not to be trusted. Socrates here conventionally ascribes to Callicles the position Socrates has in his way of doing philosophy to have his position agreed to by

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<sup>2</sup> C[2]486d2-5

Callicles. Because Callicles thinks Socrates is not to be trusted, Plato shows us that Socrates naturally hides what he thinks of Callicles.

In other words, Callicles does not know whether Socrates says what he means or means what he says. If Socrates is honest, he considers Callicles a worthy opponent to engage in dialectic. Suppose Callicles fails to live up to Socrates' expectations to assess Socrates' soul. In that case, there are problems with Socrates' way of doing philosophy if it is supposed to engage Callicles and lead Callicles to a better understanding of how he should live his life. Considering that Callicles, in good faith, tried to understand what Socrates meant by what he said and that he has plausible reasons to think Socrates played word tricks around the notions of nature and convention, Socrates' way of doing philosophy ends up failing Callicles. Conversely, if Socrates is being dishonest, then Plato shows Socrates giving Callicles plausible reasons not to trust Socrates and his way of doing philosophy. Because Socrates sticks to it and fails to modify his way of doing philosophy to accommodate Callicles, Callicles then disengages from Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Plato then shows Socrates playing word tricks as he expects Callicles to assess Socrates' soul.

The stubbornness with which Socrates clings to his way of doing philosophy leads him to a misplaced view of his philosophy's power and status. When Socrates claims that "I am quite sure that if [Callicles agrees] with me about anything of which I am convinced in my soul, we shall have there the actual truth,"<sup>3</sup> Plato shows us how Socrates already presupposes an idea of truth that, were Callicles to agree with him,

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<sup>3</sup> C[2]486e5-7

Callicles also could see it as the actual truth. Plato also shows us that the method by which Callicles can arrive at this actual truth is by agreeing with Socrates through the dialectic of Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Callicles, however, has plausible reasons to think Socrates is being dishonest. Thus, whatever actual truth arrived at through Socrates' way of doing philosophy is not actual at all to Callicles. Socrates's misplaced clinging to his way of doing philosophy prevents Socrates from altering his way of doing philosophy and accommodating Callicles' initial view, perhaps effectively and gradually changing his mind.

Because Callicles sees how Socrates fails to accomplish the ends of his way of doing philosophy, Plato shows us further evidence of Socrates playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention in his dialogue with Callicles. As Socrates claims 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,"<sup>4</sup> Socrates conventionally plays to Callicles' emotions by calling him wise while naturally thinking that Callicles is nothing but a student of rhetoric. The oracle at Delphi has already played to Socrates' emotions by stating that no one is wiser than Socrates. As Socrates' way of doing philosophy is the method by which the statement that "no one is wiser than Socrates" is affirmed, by forcing Callicles to engage with his way of doing philosophy, Socrates already claims that he is wiser than Callicles. Socrates then cannot mean what he says when he calls Callicles wise. By playing such word tricks, unconsciously as it may seem, Plato shows us how Socrates harms Callicles by forcing his way of doing philosophy onto him.

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<sup>4</sup> C[2]487a4-5

Because Socrates claims that what he has in his soul is the actual truth and implies that such truth is arrived at by how Socrates does philosophy, he sees no reason to modify his way of doing philosophy to accommodate Callicles.

Socrates' deception of himself becomes even more problematic to Callicles when Socrates brings up his discussion with Gorgias and Polus. Socrates mentions that "though they are well disposed toward me as well as wise, [they] are nevertheless... lacking in frankness and more hampered by inhibitions than they ought to be."<sup>5</sup> In other words, Plato shows us another word trick by Socrates. Socrates has previously called Callicles wise. Socrates conventionally says so but naturally means otherwise. In calling Gorgias and Polus wise, Plato shows us how Socrates equates all three of them. Callicles reasons that Socrates had deceived Gorgias and Polus by playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention. Thus, Plato shows us how Socrates infers that Callicles is not what Socrates conventionally says he is. To Callicles, it becomes unclear whether Socrates is being honest or ironic - or even if he is aware that by playing such word tricks around the notions of nature and convention, Socrates makes such word tricks poorly reflect on his way of doing philosophy.

Plato continues to show how Socrates' inconsistencies in his dialogue with Callicles unfold. For example, while Socrates has claimed that Callicles possesses both qualities to assess Socrates' soul and that Callicles is well disposed toward him, Socrates says, "[but] if you ask what evidence I have of this, Callicles... I know that you have been a partner in philosophical discussion [with others]."<sup>6</sup> What Callicles and the others

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<sup>5</sup> C[2]487b1-3

<sup>6</sup> C[2]487c1

discussed, however, was that one should not aim at any very detailed study of philosophy and not ruin oneself by philosophical over-education. These are precisely accusations Callicles shoots at Socrates. Socrates may not be meaning, then, what he says when he says that is the evidence he has for Callicles' goodwill toward him.

Besides, Callicles' charge of a prolonged study of philosophy invites another interpretation than what Socrates makes it out to be. Callicles may have meant that Socrates had so over-dedicated himself to his way of doing philosophy that he has failed to become a reputable person in the city. Had Socrates become a reputable person in the city, he might have been able to learn the laws and language of the city's citizens so that Socrates could modify the means of his way of doing philosophy without compromising its end of leading them to live better lives. Socrates keeps on stubbornly sticking to his way of doing philosophy, however.

Furthermore, as Socrates claims that any point on which both he and Callicles agree, that point has been adequately assessed, Plato shows us how Socrates projects onto Callicles an agreement to propositions that Callicles has neither pursued nor demanded. For example, when Socrates claims that "agreement between us is bound to result in truth,"<sup>7</sup> it is unreasonable for Socrates to expect it to occur when Plato has already shown that Callicles senses that Socrates is playing word tricks. Conventionally, Socrates presumes some kind of equality between him and Callicles. However, naturally, there will be no actual truth because Callicles disagrees with the terms of Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Plato shows us how Socrates carelessly projects onto

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<sup>7</sup> C[2]487e7-8

Callicles an agreement to proposition binding Callicles to Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Socrates then leads Callicles to posit that he has no obligation to engage in dialectic with Socrates. To Callicles, Socrates uses word tricks to trap him, unaware that he instead reveals the traps of his way of doing philosophy.

Such projections by Socrates to bind Callicles to Socrates' way of doing philosophy become common, unconscious as Socrates seems to be of them. According to Socrates, "if anything in the conduct of my life is amiss, be sure that it arises from ignorance on my part."<sup>8</sup> He then asks Callicles to "give me a thorough demonstration of what occupation I ought to follow."<sup>9</sup> However, to request that Callicles give a thorough demonstration requires a type of rhetoric because Callicles is a student of rhetoric. Most likely, Callicles gives thorough demonstrations by way of rhetoric. Thus, Socrates is conventionally projecting onto Callicles the ability to rid Socrates of ignorance even as Socrates naturally thinks that Callicles is not fit for the job because Callicles is a student of rhetoric - even as Socrates is asking him to engage in rhetoric to prove Socrates wrong! Plato then shows us how Socrates sets Callicles up for failure when he says he would like to learn from Callicles. Although Socrates claims that Callicles should alert him if Socrates fails to put into practice anything Socrates gives his assent to, his setting up Callicles for failure already predicts Socrates' failure at engaging dialectically with Callicles through Socrates' way of doing philosophy.

From some of the sections in Socrates' response to Callicles' speech, I hope to have shown how Callicles sees that Socrates is not being straightforward with him.

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<sup>8</sup> C[2]488a3-5

<sup>9</sup> C[2]488a6-7



Plato shows that Socrates' reaction to Callicles' Great Speech shows that Socrates himself may be unaware that he is playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention in the dialogue with Callicles. Thus, Callicles has plausible reasons to think Socrates is indeed playing such tricks. Because he reasons that Socrates is doing so, Callicles does not see Socrates as a qualified teacher from whom he could learn how to live his life better. Thus, Socrates' way of doing philosophy fails to engage Callicles in modifying his views – let alone being refuted by Socrates. In sum, because Plato shows us how Socrates sticks to his way of doing philosophy, one infers how Socrates cannot modify his way of doing philosophy to accommodate Callicles and eventually effectuate change in him. Thus, Socrates' way of doing philosophy has failed Callicles even as Callicles, in good faith, tried to understand Socrates.

### Socrates' Speech before Callicles' Great Speech

Having shown that Socrates is not straightforward with Callicles even as Callicles is trying, in good faith, to understand Socrates, I want now to show further consequences of Socrates' failure to modify the means without compromising the ends of his way of doing philosophy.

Socrates claims to be in love with philosophy; however, Plato shows us that the philosophy he is in love with is the philosophy represented by his way of doing philosophy, which Callicles sees as different from a love for philosophy overall. Socrates says, "I am in love ... with philosophy."<sup>10</sup> In other words, by showing how Socrates is in love with his way of doing philosophy, Plato shows us how Socrates is in

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<sup>10</sup> C[2]481d3-4

love with the “actual” truth arrived at by his way of doing philosophy. As Callicles is not opposed to philosophy, but to Socrates’ way of doing philosophy, for Callicles, there may be another truth that philosophy can arrive at without its being the truth arrived at by Socrates’ way of doing philosophy. Thus, Callicles does not understand how Socrates’ way of doing philosophy can objectively be known as providing for the truth of philosophy. As he sees it, Socrates’ truth is only a subjective following Socrates’ way of doing philosophy.

Furthermore, because Plato shows us how Socrates subscribes to the subjective truth arrived at by his way of doing philosophy, one infers that is the reason Callicles affirms that Socrates should have taken a respectable place in society. Exposing himself to other subjective truths other respectable people in society have about philosophy would have forced Socrates to confront the shortcomings of his way of doing philosophy. This is especially problematic as Socrates accuses Callicles of being enslaved to popular opinion. Plato shows us how Callicles thinks that Socrates has missed an opportunity to alter the means of his way of doing philosophy to achieve its end of leading those who hold popular opinions toward a better understanding of how to live their lives, which happens to be the end of Socrates’ way of doing philosophy.

I have already noted that Callicles may not mean what he says in his dialogue with Socrates because he assumes, with plausible reasons, that Socrates is being dishonest with him. Thus, as 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”<sup>11</sup> if

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<sup>11</sup> C[2]481c3-5

Socrates is being honest, his question leads to further concerns about the consequences of Socrates' sticking to his way of doing philosophy. In Callicles' not yet thought-out view, which Socrates fails to refute by his way of doing philosophy, the strong ruling over the weak is what naturally happens in nature. Thus, Callicles reasons that had Socrates not stubbornly stuck to his way of doing philosophy but taken up a respectable position in the city, Socrates could have more efficiently persuaded the city's citizens, thus leading them to a better understanding of how they should live their lives. However, what Callicles sees in Socrates is not only a man whose opinions diverge from those of the city but a man who has miserably failed at the end of his professed way of doing philosophy. Thus, Socrates' opinion seems, to Callicles, to be upside down and opposed to what Socrates should be doing.

Consequently, Callicles' prediction of what will happen to Socrates because of his stubborn clinging to his way of doing philosophy powerfully attests to what Callicles sees as Socrates' dishonesty word tricks. Because Socrates prolonged his study of philosophy by sticking to his way of doing philosophy, he became blind to the complications brought on him by how he clings to his way of doing philosophy. Thus, Callicles infers that Socrates uses his way of doing philosophy to protect himself against the scorn of the city's citizens. To Callicles, however, Callicles, Socrates has become a scornful older man. It is noteworthy that Callicles claims that he is not opposed to philosophy but to how Socrates has been using it. Callicles sees no reason to engage in dialectic with Socrates because he sees that the ends of Socrates' way of doing philosophy are ignominious. Because in Callicles' not yet thought-out view, it is

suitable for the strong to rule over the weak, Socrates, whom Callicles sees as a failed older man, cannot hope to persuade Callicles that Socrates' way of doing philosophy will lead him to a better life.

Furthermore, when Socrates uses Callicles' question of whether Socrates is being earnest as an opportunity to attack Callicles and ridicules him, Plato shows us how Socrates becomes more and more entangled in the consequences of his sticking to his way of doing philosophy. As Callicles questions Socrates whether "you are serious and what you say is true,"<sup>12</sup> instead of responding to Callicles' question, Socrates introduces the theme of the two lovers as a possibility by which they share something in common. It is unclear to Callicles how the theme would help him understand Socrates. Besides, it further shows Socrates debasing the dialectic of his way of doing philosophy to attack Callicles. In charging that "you [Callicles] are... incapable of opposing the wishes and statements of your darlings [the opinions of his love and the citizens of the city],"<sup>13</sup> Callicles infers that Socrates is attacking him because Socrates cannot win over him with his way of doing philosophy. Callicles' accusation then is that Socrates cannot contradict his love for the way he does philosophy which further leads Callicles to his Great Speech and the denunciation of Socrates' method.

Even worse for Callicles' view of Socrates, Plato shows us how Socrates skirts responsibility for his philosophical shortcomings by assigning to philosophy responsibility for leading him to speak as he does. In Socrates' own words, the way for Callicles to understand what Socrates means is for Callicles to "stop [Socrates' beloved,

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<sup>12</sup> C[2]481c2

<sup>13</sup> C[2]481e5-6

philosophy] from talking like this.”<sup>14</sup> Plato shows us how Socrates, unconscious as it may seem, assigns to philosophy the word tricks he plays by sticking to his way of doing philosophy. This leads Callicles to have an even worse impression of Socrates, whom he already considers a failed older man who will not be able to defend himself from those who will put him to death – those Socrates could have persuaded otherwise had he learned the laws and languages of the city and used them for the purpose of philosophy proper and the end of his way of doing philosophy.

Thus, while Socrates urges Callicles toward the good and a better understanding of how he should live his life by a way of doing philosophy into which Callicles does not buy, all Plato makes us see are Callicles’ inferences of the shortcomings of Socrates’ sticking to his way of doing philosophy. In Callicles’ view, there is no way Socrates can be earnest by trying to impose his way of doing philosophy when all such shortcomings in Socrates’ personality are coming out in view. Socrates leads Callicles to see Socrates’ way of doing philosophy as a lover that leads its beloved, Socrates, to his death. Socrates can hardly blame Callicles for his unattachment to a lover that might kill him!

Furthermore, in Callicles’ view, Socrates further assigns responsibility to philosophy for the conclusions Callicles sees as unwarranted and arrived at by Socrates’ way of doing philosophy. Socrates claims that “you [Callicles] must then prove her [philosophy] wrong.”<sup>15</sup> Because Callicles does not regard philosophy as the same as Socrates’ way of doing philosophy, however, that is further evidence for Callicles of how Socrates plays word tricks around the notions of nature and convention. He

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<sup>14</sup> C[2]482a6-7

<sup>15</sup> C[2]482b2-3

conventionally engages in his way of doing philosophy as if it were philosophy. In contrast, philosophy, by not being what Socrates' way of doing philosophy claims it is, naturally reveals Socrates, unconscious as it may seem, as deceiving philosophy itself. Again, Plato makes us see how Socrates may be unaware of his role as a victim as he clings to his way of doing philosophy. While Socrates skirts responsibility for his reasoning, projecting it onto philosophy, he projects responsibility on Calicles to prove philosophy wrong when philosophy itself shows Socrates' dodging.

In addition, not only does Socrates project onto Calicles a responsibility that Socrates himself skirts, but also the consequences in case Calicles fails to follow Socrates' conclusions. Socrates admonishes that Calicles "will never be at peace with himself but will remain at variance with himself all his life long."<sup>16</sup> Plato shows us that this is a telling example of how Socrates harms Calicles by sticking to his way of doing philosophy. Socrates hopes that Calicles suffers wrong by not agreeing to his philosophy, even as Socrates harms Calicles by failing to modify his means to accomplish the ends of his philosophy. Plato shows us Socrates' dilemma: if he wants to be in harmony with himself, he has to engage Calicles in dialectic because it is what his way of doing philosophy tells him to do; and if he wants not to contradict himself, he has to follow his way of doing philosophy according to how he practices it. Thus, if Socrates wants to be in harmony with himself, he has to do philosophy his way – even though it has failed to engage Calicles.

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<sup>16</sup> C[2]482b6-8

In this section, I hope to have shown that had Socrates not stuck to his way of doing philosophy, Socrates could likely have garnered more efficient qualifications to attempt the ends of his way of doing philosophy onto others in the city. Given that Callicles would have respect for Socrates had Socrates done so, Socrates would be in a position to modify the way Callicles' not yet thought-out system of natural justice works and even refute it in a way that Callicles could accept. By skirting responsibility for the consequences of his way of doing philosophy, however, Plato makes us see how Callicles infers that Socrates ends up playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention, thus failing to persuade Callicles of the merits of his way of doing philosophy.

### Callicles' Great Speech

Having shown that Socrates is not straightforward with Callicles even as Callicles is trying, in good faith, to understand Socrates and that Socrates is mistaken about the power and status of his way of doing philosophy, I want to show how Callicles does have plausible reasons for the statements he makes in his Great Speech despite the inconsistencies he states by not yet having a thought-out system of natural ethics.

Thus, Callicles understandably accuses Socrates of speaking like an orator. In Callicles's own words, "O Socrates, your language shows all the extravagance of a regular mob-orator."<sup>17</sup> Orators use wordplays, and Callicles sees Socrates' employment of the same as a consequence of Socrates' way of doing philosophy and as a symptom

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<sup>17</sup> C[2]482c5-6

that Socrates should not have stuck by it. As Callicles sees it, Socrates stuck to his way of doing philosophy because that is how Socrates tries to keep in harmony with and not contradict himself. However, Callicles sees how Socrates is playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention. He conventionally sticks to his way of doing philosophy which naturally reveals its shortcomings in Socrates' behavior toward Callicles.

As Callicles presents his not yet thought-out view of what nature and convention mean to him, he reasons through how Socrates played such word tricks to Socrates' advantage. In Callicles' view, which Socrates' way of doing philosophy has failed to modify, "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."<sup>18</sup> In other words, Callicles reasons that because Socrates leads others not to say what they naturally think out of conventional shame, Socrates' way of doing philosophy is guilty of being the method by which Socrates leads them into inconsistency. As Callicles sees it, Socrates' way of doing philosophy leads Socrates to engage in such word tricks. It is only by way of convention, then, that Socrates claims that he leads those he engages in his way of doing philosophy toward a better understanding of how they should live their lives. While this is conventionally admired, it naturally reveals Socrates' tricks.

Thus, Callicles thinks he is right when he argues that conventions are made by the weak who suffer wrong against those who do wrong. As Callicles sees it, "nature... herself demonstrates... that it is right that the better man should have more than the

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<sup>18</sup> C[2]482e7-9



worse and the stronger than the weaker.”<sup>19</sup> Callicles reasons that by stubbornly clinging to his way of doing philosophy, Socrates has made himself weaker against the strong ones like Callicles. In other words, while a strong man like Callicles accepts a place for philosophy in life while pursuing other interests, a weak man like Socrates, who, in Callicles’ view, has given himself uncritically over to philosophy, has become unable to persuade Callicles. In Callicles’ view, Socrates tries to regulate natural law by applying his way of doing philosophy against the natural behavior of the strong. However, because Callicles already thinks Socrates is not qualified to teach what he teaches, Socrates’ way of doing philosophy fails to persuade Callicles that it is a suitable way to know how better he should live his life.

Although there are several instances in Callicles’ Great Speech where I disagree with his stances, I understand them as utterances by a man worthy of being engaged in dialectic, who tried to learn from Socrates in good faith, and whose view is not yet solidified. By claiming that Callicles, in good faith, tried to understand Socrates, Callicles was open to having his views modified or even refuted by Socrates. However, when Callicles saw through Socrates’ stubborn clinging to his way of doing philosophy, Callicles became disillusioned with Socrates. Then, he decided not to buy into Socrates’ way of doing philosophy. Therefore, it is worthwhile to dwell lastly on the advice Callicles gives Socrates because, although it is not free from despising, it shows the way Socrates could have modified his way of doing philosophy to help Callicles.

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<sup>19</sup> C[2]483c8-10

Callicles is not opposed to philosophy but to Socrates' way of doing philosophy. As Callicles sees it, a young man who neglects philosophy is not free and likely has no "fine or noble ambition for himself."<sup>20</sup> Because Callicles argues that Socrates has been clinging to his way of doing philosophy for too long, Socrates has become careless about what he really should care for and thereby cannot contribute to the philosophical betterment of the city's citizens like Callicles. Plato shows how Callicles resents Socrates for failing to instruct him, thus angrily refusing to argue with him. Fatally, Callicles predicts that Socrates would be helpless if the city's citizens were to arrest him. Callicles claims that Socrates would be "in a daze and gape and have nothing to say"<sup>21</sup> in court "however unprincipled"<sup>22</sup> the prosecutors may be.

It is known that Socrates will not be in a daze and will have plenty to say on his behalf in the court. It is, nonetheless, telling that Callicles' final advice to Socrates is to "abandon argument."<sup>23</sup> In Callicles' view, Socrates' way of doing philosophy has made him a lover of arguments engaged with wordplays that differ from engagement with philosophy proper. Callicles' advice to Socrates does not imply abandoning philosophy altogether but abandoning his way of doing philosophy to engage with philosophy proper. Plato makes us see how Callicles would have benefited from such a Socrates.

In conclusion, therefore, I hope to have shown that Socrates has failed to engage Callicles in dialectic because of his stubborn clinging to the way he does philosophy. As a worthy opponent, Callicles would have benefitted from a Socrates, who stepped

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<sup>20</sup> C[2]485c5-6

<sup>21</sup> C[2]486b1-2

<sup>22</sup> C[2]486b1-2

<sup>23</sup> C[2]486c5

outside his philosophical toolkit, acquired new tools, and accommodated students such as Callicles, eventually leading them to know how better they should live their lives. Instead, Callicles is left with a Socrates who has become a victim of his way of doing philosophy. Socrates' victimhood has caused him to play word tricks, unconscious as it may seem to Socrates. Thus, I hope to have shown how Callicles has many plausible reasons to think he is right when he accuses Socrates of doing so. Again, whether Callicles is right or wrong is not the question here. What demands questions is how Plato makes us see by what Socrates and Callicles say the plausible reasons Callicles thinks he has to think he is right.

## Objections

I want now to introduce and respond to some objections against the assumptions I have been working on within this paper. I will be quoting from James Doyle's unpublished manuscript on the *Gorgias*, especially concerning Callicles' supposed disregard for philosophy.

At the very end of his chapter on Callicles' Great Speech, Doyle affirms what he sees are the prerequisites to understand the conflict Callicles claims in the speech. In his own words, "we need to look beyond what Callicles is telling us in the Speech about ethics, philosophy and politics, to what the Speech is telling us about Callicles."<sup>24</sup> This is important because the Speech tells us that Callicles' Great Speech results from Callicles' disillusion with Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Because Callicles is disillusioned, he

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<sup>24</sup> Doyle, 246

may not mean what he says or says what he means. Thus, one should not extrapolate from the inconsistencies in his lines of the Great Speech dialogue.

Doyle quotes Woolf on Callicles' denunciation of philosophy. According to Doyle, Woolf claims that Callicles "attacks the adult preoccupation with philosophy."<sup>25</sup> In my view, it is not that Callicles attacks an adult preoccupation with philosophy. Callicles attacks Socrates and his way of doing philosophy and Socrates' sticking by it. While Callicles claims that he respects philosophy in "a young lad,"<sup>26</sup> "an older man"<sup>27</sup> doing philosophy is not worthy in his eyes. An adult preoccupation would be a preoccupation with a man between young and old ages. That is not Socrates and is not what Callicles has claimed. Instead, he refers to the older man Socrates who refuses to abandon his way of doing philosophy even as his way of doing philosophy has failed to lead Callicles toward a better understanding of how Callicles should live his life. Thus, Callicles does not attack an adult preoccupation with philosophy as Woolf claims.

However, Doyle's assumptions about Callicles' supposed denunciation of philosophy are also misleading. He claims that Callicles' denunciation is "shocking"<sup>28</sup> and that "it is important to see that doctrinal inconsistency is only one manifestation of Callicles' inner conflicts."<sup>29</sup> However Callicles seems to espouse doctrinal inconsistencies, nevertheless, they result from Socrates' way of doing philosophy failing to engage Callicles. It has not led Callicles toward a clarification about the good, the

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<sup>25</sup> Doyle, 243

<sup>26</sup> C[2]485c3

<sup>27</sup> C[2]485c6

<sup>28</sup> Doyle, 242

<sup>29</sup> Doyle, 242

good life, or how he should live his life. It is reasonable then that Callicles has inner conflicts from which he pronounces doctrinal inconsistencies. As I have noted, Callicles often does not mean what he says because his view is not yet a thought-out view. That is a failure of Socrates' way of doing philosophy to engage Callicles.

Doyle further claims that Callicles' natural ethics contradicts Callicles' views. According to Doyle, Callicles "seeks the rhetorical advantage that comes with an appeal to something so unequivocal as *what happens*."<sup>30</sup> Doyle then concludes that Callicles' natural ethics "end up endorsing the status quo's conventional justice"<sup>31</sup> because "if nature simply amounts to *what happens*, it includes convention within its domain."<sup>32</sup> In my view, however, it is not what happens that matters most to Callicles. What seems to happen is much more interesting to him. Plato makes us see how Callicles sees that the weak goes along with a view of justice that conventionally represents reality when it is, in fact, a response to a nature that Callicles sees as much more primal. Extrapolating conclusions from Callicles' not yet thought-out view and blaming Callicles for those views is uncharitable. Callicles, in good faith, tried to understand Socrates, perhaps, as I mentioned, even willing to have his views modified or even refuted. One cannot blame Callicles for failing to live up to Socrates' way of doing philosophy when so many shortcomings of that way have become evident for Callicles, as Plato makes us see.

Doyle makes further claims, however, about the natural ethics he ascribes to Callicles and its consequences. In his own words, a regime is "recommended by

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<sup>30</sup> Doyle, 238

<sup>31</sup> Doyle, 238

<sup>32</sup> Doyle, 238

Callicles,"<sup>33</sup> who is wrong "to lament the widespread subscription to the 'conventional' conception as blocking any implementation of his bold and ruthless program."<sup>34</sup>

However, Callicles cannot recommend such a system because he cannot recommend a system in which he does not fully believe. He does not believe it because what he says may not be what he means as he deals with his frustration with Socrates' way of doing philosophy. One should not claim that Callicles is recommending a system. It is more plausible to claim that Callicles reveals the system as he sees it for what it is. Thus, if Callicles recommends any system, it is not the system of his not yet thought-out natural ethics and its unintended consequences but the system he has seen others reasoning it to be. Thus, Callicles was not wrong to lament, as Doyle claims, because that is not what Callicles may have had in mind. As Plato makes us see, Callicles, by trying in good faith to understand Socrates, may even have wanted to see if Socrates could help him make sense of natural ethics with his way of doing philosophy. However, once Socrates started playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention with Callicles, Socrates lost him.

In blaming Callicles for the consequences of a not yet thought-out view, Doyle ends up reading into Callicles' view issues that may not be ultimately important. Even Doyle recognizes that "Callicles' ethical vision is in crucial respects undescribed and otherwise problematic."<sup>35</sup> It is underdescribed because Callicles has not yet thought it out as a system of natural justice. If he has not done so, he is still open to having his

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<sup>33</sup> Doyle, 237

<sup>34</sup> Doyle, 238

<sup>35</sup> Doyle, 227

thoughts modified by Socrates. That does not occur because Callicles sees that Socrates has played word tricks around the notions of nature and convention. He then decided not to buy into Socrates' way of doing philosophy. This problem has priority over the consequences of Callicles' not yet thought-out system. The problem is not that Callicles is the problem, but that Socrates' way of doing philosophy is it, although it seems not to be.

Likewise, Doyle uses Socrates' victory over Polus in that dialogue to claim that Callicles, according to his natural ethics, should congratulate Socrates for having won over the weak instead of accusing Socrates of playing word tricks around the notions of nature and convention. In Doyle's own words, "there is an instructive irony in Callicles' complaining about Socrates' subterfuge practically in the same breath as he calls shame on the victim rather than the perpetrator of injustice."<sup>36</sup> To Callicles, however, Socrates is not a perpetrator but a victim of sticking to his way of doing philosophy. In other words, Callicles has accused Socrates of playing such tricks on Polus to get Polus caught, while Socrates plays the same word tricks on Callicles, causing Callicles to point out those tricks to Socrates. Because Callicles does not buy into Socrates' way of doing philosophy, Socrates' domination, according to his way of doing philosophy, is not the type of domination for which Callicles would applaud Socrates.

Likewise, Doyle ascribes to Callicles a love of victory that leads Callicles to fail to engage with Socrates' way of doing philosophy. In Doyle's own words, this love of Callicles "has the wrong spirit or, equivalently, the wrong object: it is directed at his

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<sup>36</sup> Doyle, 121

interlocutor, not at the subject of discussion."<sup>37</sup> As I have noted, Socrates was the one first to attack the interlocutor when he brought up the subject of the two lovers. Besides, Plato makes us see that Callicles already has plausible reasons to believe that Socrates is not being honest. In that case, it is reasonable to expect that Callicles will not agree with a truth arrived at by Socrates' way of doing philosophy. Callicles sees that the philosophical point of their dialogue is not the truth of philosophy but the truth of Socrates' way of doing philosophy. He sees no reason to let Socrates get away with it.

From all this, it does not follow that Callicles opposes philosophy; he opposes Socrates' way of doing philosophy. While Doyle claims that "the rationale for the philosophical life, while perfectly objective, can only be discerned by those who have in some sense already chosen it,"<sup>38</sup> he cannot mean that Callicles has deliberately not chosen it. In Callicles's view, Socrates' way of doing philosophy is far from objective, somewhat dishonest. Callicles has already stated that he appreciates the study of philosophy that frees man, does not keep them enslaved to it, and does not prevent them from developing skills that could make them effectively better at arguing for the philosophical points they claim truth. Thus, Callicles is not opposed to philosophy, but to the way Socrates does it.

Finally, Plato makes us see how, in Callicles' view, Socrates' way of doing philosophy is a type of psychic disorder. As Doyle claims, "these root disorders were not made explicit in any particular utterance; rather, they are *shown* by Plato to underlie

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<sup>37</sup> Doyle, 218

<sup>38</sup> Doyle, 216



the various surface confusions."<sup>39</sup> As Plato makes us see, Socrates' false belief lies in thinking he can persuade Calicles through his way of doing philosophy. The disorder has its root in how stubbornly Socrates sticks to his way of doing philosophy. By doing so, Plato shows us there is much more to this conversation beyond the validity and cogency of any particular argument. Calicles does not accept Socrates as a qualified teacher from whom he can learn how better to live his life. Because Socrates sticks to his way of doing philosophy in his dialogue with Calicles, I reiterate that Plato makes us see that Calicles has plausible reasons, whether they are right or not, to think he is right when he accuses Socrates of doing so.

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<sup>39</sup> Doyle, 215

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