



The *Gorgias*: On Power and Freedom

Approximately 2400 years ago a man named Socrates was executed by the city/state of Athens in Greece. The official charges were corrupting the youth and not believing in the Gods of the city. But official charges aside, he was primarily guilty of calling the moral health of the Athenian demos into question. The people of Athens, claimed Socrates, paid greater attention to the acquisition of wealth, reputation, and power than they did to the moral quality of their souls. Important public figures were not spared his relentless inquiries and so Socrates had made many enemies. Yet there were young men who admired his courage, his keen intelligence, his dogged pursuit of truth – among them Plato, who was so touched by this remarkable man that he went on to dedicate his life to the pursuit of wisdom, founding the Academy in Athens that remained vital for almost 600 years and writing dialogues in, almost all of which, Socrates figured as the primary character

An interesting story to be sure - but what always amazes me about Plato's work is how relevant it still is; how utterly applicable Socrates' critique still is; how much these ancient works still have to say to us about our nation, our communities, our lives. And so, what I would like to do today is to tell you the story of one of the dialogues - one of my favorites, one not read enough, I think, called *Gorgias*. In the time that follows as we are together I hope that I can whet your appetite for the beauty and truth of these works and convince you that they are not just a sumptuous intellectual feast but healing medicine for the rational soul in a time of need. It is also appropriate here in a college, in my role as an educator that I speak of what this dialogue has to tell us about education – its place and purpose.

The dialogue is in a certain sense about education but it is not necessarily about formal education. Hence, the title of my talk today, "Plato's *Gorgias* and the Responsibility of the Educator", is somewhat misleading, but only in that we will ultimately be asked to redefine who are educator and educated and what the purpose of education ultimately is. The line between teacher and learner will become blurred; the notion of a professional educator will be challenged. I (led on by Socrates) will be speaking ultimately about the community of human persons and about the citizens of the democracy. So, I will start by summarizing the content of the dialogue itself. For those of you who may be familiar with this dialogue it will, I hope, serve as a helpful refresher; for those who have never had the pleasure of reading *Gorgias*, it will provide the background necessary to follow the points that I wish to highlight today.

First a note. Plato is a meticulous craftsman and every aspect of the dialogue reveals its content. For example, the ambiguity that I just referred to regarding the status of the educator, the educated, and the status of education is revealed even in the characters present in this dialogue. Socrates and his friend Chaerephon have arrived at the home of Callicles – a young man of considerable political ambition. Callicles, it turns out, is a student of Gorgias. Gorgias is a self-professed teacher of rhetoric. Also present is a second student of Gorgias' whose name is Polus. [I have listed the dialogue's characters on your handouts for you to refer to as I speak.]

Plato's <i>Gorgias</i>	
Gorgias	professional teacher of rhetoric (speech-making)
Polus	one of Gorgias' students -- naively accepting of popular opinion but well-meaning
Callicles	another of Gorgias' students -- ruthlessly ambitious, desires to be perceived as important, intelligent, and right.
Socrates	"teaches" (informally) through dialogue (engaged conversation)
Chaerophon	Socrates' friend (one who engages in dialogue with Socrates)

Now Socrates himself has never claimed to be or acted the part of a professional teacher although many young persons participate in and witness the art of his dialectics. He discourses with whomever will join him in the search for truth. All too often, those who will speak with him are not entering the conversation honestly - they want to "show off" or prove themselves to be right or prove Socrates to be wrong. But Socrates truly believes that persons engaged together in open and honest dialogue in pursuit of the truth can, not only learn to better approximate such truth, but also can become better persons in that very questioning process. He has what might be known as "a bit of a following". In this dialogue it is Chaerephon who accompanies him. In a very loose sense then one could say that Chaerephon is a "student" of Socrates.

Gorgias, on the other hand, is a teacher in the more formal sense. He takes on pupils and charges a fee for his services. The subject he teaches is rhetoric. Rhetoric was the art of speech-making. Those young men who desired to have influence in the polis (particularly in the Assembly and in the law courts) would learn to construct rhetorically powerful speeches that could be used to persuade others to support their position or cause. Through such speeches young men earned both public acclaim and political influence. Ah - the more things change the more they stay the same.

Two of Gorgias' students are with him - Polus who is a well-meaning but rather naive young man. He wants to please. He has been heavily influenced by popular opinion and (one can tell) by Callicles himself. Polus is not a bad person though. Just a bit misled.

Callicles is another matter entirely. He is ruthlessly ambitious. He wants power and he wants to learn the skills of rhetoric in order to expand his political and personal influence. To put it bluntly, he has no scruples and cannot understand why anyone would want scruples. He sees such niceties as a sign of weakness. According to Callicles, if you must be kind it can only be because you are too weak to be cruel. One of the ultimate (implied) questions of the dialogue is this - who is responsible for Callicles' character?

Interestingly, and again revealing Plato's considerable talents, the first line belongs to Callicles. He says, "The wise man...is late for a fray, but not for a feast." This line alone perfectly sums up Callicles' position - a position to which Socrates will be most vehemently opposed. It is a position uncritically accepted by most - a proverb of the times - seemingly unquestionable. After all, wouldn't we all want to miss a fray? And wouldn't we all hate to miss a feast? But this is the point of Socratic dialogue at its best. It calls us to question all unquestioned assumptions. It moves us to put all such assumptions on the table for discussion. No stone is left unturned and, by the end, what seemed to be an innocent and obvious opening line will carry new weight and meaning - it will be shown to be neither innocent nor obvious nor, most importantly, good. Unless, of course, you radically redefine what you consider to be the fray and what you consider to be the feast.

So, let me begin to summarize the contents of the dialogue:

The first exchange is between Socrates and Gorgias. In it, Socrates requests that Gorgias explain "who" or "what" he is. Gorgias' response, drawn out in a series of questions by Socrates, is as follows: He is a teacher of the art of rhetoric. Rhetoric enables men to speak about the best things. It is an art that uses words in order to produce persuasion regarding the just and the unjust. Socrates shows that persuasion is a technique that produces belief but not necessarily knowledge and that, as we know, beliefs (or opinions) can be either true or false but that knowledge, in order to really count as knowledge, would have to be true. Therefore, rhetoric "produces belief about the just and unjust but gives no instruction about them." In other words, the art of persuasive speech is an art of leading others to hold particular beliefs about what is just and what is unjust but it does not, in fact, have any interest in whether those beliefs are actually true or not. The rhetorician is not interested in teaching his or her pupils about the nature of justice itself.

Egged on by the others, Socrates and Gorgias continue. This time Socrates asks who it is that is persuaded by the speech of the rhetorician. This time Gorgias is led to admit that rhetoric is capable of persuading the multitude - those who generally have no knowledge or expertise in the area being discussed. In other words, the persuasive power of rhetoric is most effective with those who are ignorant. After all, if the rhetorician were speaking of matters concerning, let's say, the design of buildings, s/he would be unable to persuade the professional architect of anything regarding the topic but the truth. After all, the architect will know whether what the rhetorician says is true or not - whether the recommended plan will work or not. But those who are ignorant of the requirements of architecture may believe anything. Here is the power of the skill of rhetoric then, one can talk the ignorant into believing anything. Ah, and all of a sudden we see that this is a very dangerous tool indeed.

I remember once when I was enrolled in graduate school at Fordham University walking through the commons and seeing a poster advertising the debate club. It said: "What if you could walk into a room and talk anyone into anything?" Come to the Debate Club. And I thought, how awful. If there is such a skill is it one that we would really want to give to just anyone? I started to imagine some of my students endowed with this skill - I shuddered.

Socrates too is shuddering at this point and he asks Gorgias what might happen if someone who was himself unjust were to use this skill. I quote "Does [the student] of rhetoric really know anything of what is good and evil, base or honourable, just or unjust; or has he only a way with the ignorant of persuading them that he, not knowing, is to be esteemed to know?" So you have a case of the blind leading the blind here. Gorgias admits that he not only needs to teach the skill but needs to teach these things as well - the just and unjust, the base and honourable, the good and evil. In other words, he would need to teach the just use of the skill as well. But note the problem here. If teaching rhetoric is, as Gorgias has already admitted, the skill of persuading the ignorant to believe what one wants regarding the just and the unjust then of what use would it be if you already actually knew what was just and unjust? If indeed Gorgias could teach a young person to actually be just then this person would only desire to speak in a just manner - why would s/he need rhetoric when s/he could just speak the truth? Is rhetoric then useless for the just person? If Gorgias could truly teach a person to be just then would that person need rhetoric at all? Gorgias, himself an honest soul, realizes his error.

At this point though Polus (as you remember, one of Gorgias' students) intervenes on his behalf - this will be interesting indeed to see what in fact Gorgias has been teaching these young persons. Has he taught them justice as he has claimed he would need to do? Let us see.

Polus clearly sees what has been going on not as a search for the truth but as a contest, this round of which Socrates has clearly won. But, Polus insists that Gorgias was just ashamed to admit that he does not teach justice. Polus wants to take on Socrates and, thinking he will do better this way, insists on asking the questions. (You see, he thinks that Gorgias only fared poorly in the dialogue because he was not controlling it. He believes that through his questioning Socrates led Gorgias along and that this time, if he can control the questions he will be able to do the same with Socrates.) So, he insists that Socrates tell him what **he** believes rhetoric to be. What emerges in the exchange that follows is this. Socrates believes that rhetoric is not an art at all but is a type of experience that produces delight and gratification - much like cookery - your know, culinary skill. It operates through flattery. In other words, the way that culinary skill produces something that gratifies the bodily appetites by flattering those appetites, appeasing them, catering to them even to the point of excess, so rhetoric produces a gratification of the baser parts of the soul by flattering them, catering to them. However, Socrates points out, cookery does not bring about the real health of the body any more than rhetoric brings about the real health of the soul. In fact, quite the opposite. He produces a complex system of analogies to illustrate his point. (These are at the bottom of the handout I gave you.)

There are two general areas of concern being discussed - the body and the soul. His concern is the relative health or well-being or goodness of each, both internal and external. Different practices produce either the reality of a condition of well-being or the mere

appearance of well being for the body and soul respectively. So for the body first - As fashion and make up produce the mere appearance of the external health of the body, so it is gymnastics brings about the real external health of the body – the glow and tautness of the skin, the strength of the muscles, the firmness of the physique. As cookery parades as the internal health of the body, so medicine produces the real internal health of the body. Getting this? On to the important one - the Soul --As sophistry (being adept at debate and argumentation) masquerades as the external or public health of the soul, so legislation produces the real public health of the soul. And finally, as rhetoric (the ability to persuade through speeches) flatters us into the belief that the soul is internally well off, so justice is the real internal health of the human soul. Socrates was right from the beginning – if your soul is actually just, then you do not need rhetoric.

Now I have to tell you, the bit about cookery somewhat bothered me, first, because I have always loved to cook, second because I dearly love to eat well prepared food. But the more I thought about it, the more I could see Socrates' point. Let's face it, fast food tastes really good and it is marketed to us a great stuff -- "you deserve a break today", "have it your way" Isn't the sophistry of the advertising interesting here. There is an appeal to our desire for freedom -- flattering our sense of ourselves: our stressed lives, how we deserve to do as we please. Recently chains have begun to hawk their new healthy options menus. And we drive through and make excuses the whole way to justify our belief that it is ok. But we know that almost invariably, the richer, the creamier, the crunchier, the sweeter the food tastes, the less healthy it is for us. Let's face it, we should not be getting advice concerning our health from Emeril but he gives it all the time - "bam!" Come on, you deserve a little sugar. "Bam!" Come on you deserve more butter. Flattery. It is only when the person with true knowledge - the doctor - gives us advice about our diets that we will have true internal physical health. Get the point?

Well, it is the same thing with rhetoric. Each and every human being should desire to have justice in his or her soul. Justice is the state of health of the human soul. The good person is the just person – one who knows, or at very least desires to know what to do, what is best. Rhetoric, on the other hand, persuades us to reach beliefs concerning these matters – what is just and unjust, what is right and wrong, and flatters us that we are correct. It makes us believe that we are doing the right things when, in fact, we may be doing just the opposite. How often can we be talked into questionable courses of action through flattery? "Oh you look beautiful today..." "Now, I know you are an intelligent man..." Or even, "America is the greatest nation in the world.." How often has our very sense of deservedness, our right to freedom, our sense of entitlement, our sense of dignity and decency, our sense of our self-worth been appealed to on the basest level in order to get us to support or carry out actions the inherent goodness or badness of which we have not really examined? And then the question is this – how is such examination to take place? Not, says Socrates, through being persuaded by rhetorically powerful speeches or flattering images, but by honest and open dialogue with one another in which all parties are honestly and openly seeking the truth of the matter. Not trying to win an argument, not trying to look good in front of others, not testing how much verbal power s/he can wield but genuinely entering into important questions with open minds and open hearts, asking, probing, searching, willing to be shown to be wrong if it is in service of the search for truth, willing to abandon a position and take another up anew, willing to be humble as all persons ought to be, in the face of the daunting task of pursuing what is best, most right, most just.

But Polus is confused – isn't the power of rhetoric a mighty power? Does it not give one freedom to do as s/he pleases? No says Socrates, not if by "what one pleases" you mean what one merely **believes** or merely **thinks** to be best. For "what is done without sense is evil." We do whatever we do because, on some level, we believe it to be good for us. Even if we harm another person, we do so because we think that the end result is good. But if it turns out that one does not know what is good and what is evil or, worse yet, does not care, and only acts on the basis of belief, swayed by whomever is capable of it - only on the basis of what "seems" good to him, then one does not really will his or her own act, he or she is being controlled, buffeted about by other's desires. The sensible person would only will what is good for him – and this person does not know. And it is at this point that Socrates begins to turn Polus' little world upside down.

Polus wants to insist that if one does as she pleases then she is best off. But Socrates insists that if **what** one pleases is ultimately unjust then s/he has not in fact done what is good but what is bad and is not, therefore, well-off for the act. The mere imposition of an arbitrary will is not to be envied. An arbitrary will is a will without direction - a will that "knows not" what it does. If someone imposes upon others an act of arbitrary will it does not make that person happy. Only the just are truly happy, whereas the wicked are miserable and worst off of all, if their wickedness goes unpunished.

Polus is at a loss – he must agree to what argument has shown to be true - that one wills what he or she perceives to be his or her good and that the just is the good and that, therefore if one wills the unjust s/he is not willing what s/he wants at all and that, in having willed what is not in fact good, s/he needs to be corrected. In other words, that the worst situation for any person is to do the unjust in an arbitrary act of power and then to go unpunished for it. But Polus cannot accept what rationality has revealed. His response is - But most people think that the tyrant is happy! Socrates' response is simple – Polus, that is not an argument. Just because most people believe it, does not make it true. We ought not just follow the mob; we ought to pursue the truth. It's just like your mom used to say, "if everyone else jumped off a bridge would you do it too?" Wise moms...

Now Callicles busts in (you remember, the other student of Gorgias) and here begins the object lesson, for the discussion with Callicles makes manifest the true danger of Gorgias' teaching. Showing off his rhetorical skills, Callicles launches into an extraordinarily long speech. He begins by decrying Socrates' position as ridiculous – he must be joking - he cannot be in earnest - it is not natural. In all of nature, says Callicles, the superior rule over the inferior; the strong over the weak. (Ah..NOW we know what he wants rhetoric for) You Socrates are being idiotic and naive. In fact your position is the position of the weak majority who, in order to protect themselves from the strong, will say that justice is better. It is a mere convention that protects the useless multitudes. The truly superior do not need justice - they are justice. Their will is done. He turns to insults - Philosophy is a lovely pastime for the young but when people pursue philosophy into old age they become like lisping little children, ridiculous and unmanly - your position and practice is, in fact, so feeble that were you ever brought to court yourself you would be defenseless and would be killed. It is a

poignant statement considering what is to be Socrates' ultimate fate.

But Socrates' response to this insulting tirade is truly remarkable. He expresses joy at Callicles' attack and expresses his sincere desire to dialogue with him because, he says, if he can get Callicles to agree with him then he will know for sure that his position is correct. In what follows, Callicles position is basically this: that might makes right. That the superior deserve to rule over the inferior and that, if they do so by imposing their will physically or otherwise, then that is just fine. The stronger, the superior should be able to do anything they please, they should be able to take whatever they please. They should live in unbridled license and luxury and that this is the truly virtuous and happy life. To think anything else is, according to Callicles, mere naivete and a definite sign of weakness.

Socrates tries several times to get Callicles to define the "good" as we normally do - as what is just and right and temperate - but Callicles will have none of it. He is insistent. The unjust and intemperate are what is best and the best is what brings us the most pleasure and that is what makes us happy. So, Socrates takes this point and just pushes it, and pushes it, and pushes it: Such a person, he declares, would have a soul like a leaky sieve. She would be forever trying to fill herself up and never be fulfilled - all good would just pour out the bottom. It would be a life endlessly searching for the next pleasure - the next excitement - the next spectacle - one would never be fulfilled. Yes, says Callicles and that is the happy life. Socrates pushes farther. It would be like having an itch that no amount of scratching would make disappear. Is that happiness Callicles - forever scratching away, tearing the skin, creating a festering wound? Yes, he declares, this is happiness. Callicles is revelling in his own shamelessness - proud of it.. This, says Socrates is the life of a cormorant. You cannot possibly mean what you say - It is the life of a Catamite - do you mean to say that the life of a Catamite is the happy life. Callicles declares that Socrates should be ashamed bringing such subjects into their conversation. A catamite, after all, was the boy toy of a pederast. Who should be ashamed? But Callicles holds his ground. Socrates pauses and patiently begins questioning again.

But Callicles is not really interested in pursuing the inquiry. He wanted to win. He wanted to be congratulated. But that did not happen. He was just pushed to a point that revealed the shameful and utter ridiculousness of his claims. So he begins to concede to Socrates' points - making it very clear that he is only doing so because he is no longer interested in the discussion. And so, begrudgingly, he ends up through careful rational dialogue being led to admit that, in fact, the pleasurable and the good are, indeed different. Callicles is, by this time just going through the motions. Socrates implores him to discourse honestly saying, "I must beg you Callicles, not to jest, or to imagine that I am jesting with you; do not answer at random and contrary to your real opinion - for you will observe that we are arguing about the way of human life; and to a man who has any sense at all, what question can be more serious than this? - whether he should follow after that way of life to which you exhort me, and act what you call the manly part of speaking in the assembly, and cultivating rhetoric, and engaging in public affairs, according to the principles now in vogue; or whether he should pursue the life of philosophy - and in what the latter way differs from the former." And we see the difference in the quality of each person so vividly. Socrates, begging this impudent and abusive young man to converse with him about those things which matter most in life - how we should live it - what is best - whether our way is best - whether, perhaps we have gone astray. Callicles, pouting, dare I say like a child, refusing to converse seriously any more now that he feels he has "lost", unable to see that in matters like these it never was a contest, **it never was a fray** (pause) or, if it is, it is a battle for Callicles' soul and for the well-being the goodness of the Athenian demos - the real internal and external (i.e. public) health of the human soul itself - the kind of fray that we would never want to be late for, next to which, the mere feast of the rhetorical exhibition is just fluff - easily missed with no regrets.

And so, they come back to the place from which they started - rhetoric. And Callicles admits (if it can be called admission) that rhetoric is just the flattery of the soul, providing delight for the assembly without any regard for their true interests. Rhetoric is just bent on giving pleasure, "forgetting the public good in thought of their own interests. Playing with the people." Suddenly Callicles reenters the conversation for real (don't worry, it won't last). He asks Socrates a real question, an important question. (Look what has been accomplished) He asks Socrates to make a distinction. "There are some," he says, "who have a real care of the public in what they say, while others are as you describe." If this is so though, sadly neither of them can think of any at present. Many rulers have tried to do well for the city but all too often they have seen to the physical well being of the populace alone without attending to the justice of their souls. A leader who would truly benefit the people, says Socrates, would speak in reference to a standard, would seek to construct the soul as a harmonious, regular, and systematic whole. Would punish the senseless souls in order to set them a-right.

Socrates is speaking on his own now - giving a speech (being, perhaps the person to whom Callicles just eluded). "Make sure I tell the truth," he entreats them. The good of anything is its order. The good soul is the orderly soul. The intemperate soul, the soul that is in disarray is incapable of true communion with others (sounds like someone we know - eh?) It is the Good that binds the cosmos together. And, Callicles, if someone **were** to take me to court they might be capable of harming me bodily but they could not harm my soul. The best life is one in which we neither do nor suffer evil. But if we must suffer evil it is far better than doing it. After all, there is nothing about the indefinite extension of just any life that is, in itself, worthwhile. Better that we have a short and virtuous life than a long and miserable one. Safety is not always the best way.

There are two processes of training : one which proceeds with a view to pleasure, another which proceeds with a view to the highest good. To truly teach another is to make him or her a better person. This alone should be the measure of our worth as educators - Have you ever made anyone a better human being by being with them? For this alone is the duty of the public person. Our statesmen, says Socrates, just rhetorically feast the citizens, they do not develop in them justice and temperance. I, says Socrates, will be brought to trial and most likely put to death because I alone practice politics. But my trial will be like a physician being tried by a jury of cooks. The dialogue ends with a myth about the final judgement of the soul.

Socrates, of course, was brought to trial. Socrates, of course, was tried and found guilty. Socrates, of course, was put to death. Oddly, he did have a great deal to say at his trial (as is recounted in the *Apology*), but none of it was aimed at his own defense and all of it was aimed at saving the Athenian demos by improving the persons gathered in the courtroom on that day. Teacher to the

end – in the true sense of that word.

Let me draw some of these pieces together from a pedagogical standpoint. There are arts that are taught that require specific knowledge: medicine, ship-building, carpentry, engineering mechanics, etc.. These are necessary to provide for the physical well-being of the state. But what about the inherent “goodness” of the polis itself? What about the quality of the persons leading the state? What about the quality of the souls of the citizens? How are we to provide for these? Do we leave such important matters to the persuasive whims of the skillful rhetorician whether he be politician or advertiser or PR man? Do we simply allow ourselves to be swayed by the promises that flatter our desires?

You see, Gorgias’ definition of rhetoric from the very beginning contained an interesting truth. He said that it enables men to speak about the best things and perhaps that is what it ought to do, at its best. But doesn’t this beg the question? How do we know what the best things are? Surely we speak about them. But HOW we speak makes all the difference and what we have seen throughout the dialogue *Gorgias* is a modeling of different kinds of speech acts. To speak of the best things one needs to be pursuing the good and the true. But the truth of the best is an ideal vanishing point. It is not something any one person possesses - you don’t have it, I don’t have it. It is, though, the object of desire. Therefore, we should be pursuing that ideal. Since none of us possess it, none of us can simply get up and give a long speech telling others what the truth really is. We can get up and give a long speech which ultimately persuades others that we know it - even make them believe that they know it. But we won’t even know what it is we claim to know. No. What we need is to engage one another in dialogue. We need to pursue the object of our desire, dare I say our love, together in community and in honest, open inquiry. It is not a contest of rightness, but a joint venture in which every person benefits and in which, often he who benefits most is he who will admit the greatest ignorance. Now, I ask you, what else is this but a real participatory democracy?

In this we may discover that what is “commonly” held to be true is in fact merely unexamined. We may need to pull sacred assumptions out of the darkness of mere public favor where they have been placed by skillful rhetoric and truly ask about whether they are good or not. We may need to stop swallowing each and every opinion that is trucked out for our belief and waved about as “so obviously true”. Maybe being “beautiful” and “skinny” and “acquiescent” are not the best ways of being for women. Maybe being “assured” and “strong” and “invulnerable” are not the best ways of being for men. Maybe human excellence surpasses gender stereotypes, and race stereotypes, and class stereotypes, and yes, even cultural bias. But you certainly wouldn’t know it by looking at our society. Maybe we need to put unquestioned policies up for public discussion. Maybe we need to stop unthinkingly waving a flag long enough to examine the state of the nation. What we need is an old Greek virtue - what we need is courage. The moral courage required to stand up in the face of public opinion and ask the difficult questions and to try to engage others in dialogue about the most important of matters – how to live well individually and as a community of persons. But it takes great courage to fly in the face of public opinion. It takes courage to move forth against the rush of bodies. And it takes the greatest courage to admit ignorance in the first place so that the dialogue can begin. Years ago one of my students, one who had taken Plato with me, brought me a sticker for my door. She said it reminded her of Socrates. It said: “What is right is not always popular, and what is popular is not always right.” I was never so happy because if that is all she remembers in her entire life about the class then she has indeed learned something truly beneficial.

But this is, of course, the heart of democracy - isn’t it? The people, participating together in inquiry after what is the best way and the best life. It is not a question that gets answered and then stands still - it is an ongoing pursuit of the truth. It is the heart of democracy and thus is the heart of the true meaning of freedom. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever one pleases. Freedom without the guidance of the pursuit of the good is an empty imposition of the arbitrary will. It is anarchy - it is tyranny. The tyrant does as he pleases but the tyrant is not free because he does not know what he wants - what is good to want. One needs to begin by asking what one ought to want – what is best. Not an easy question certainly but nothing truly valuable in life is easy and it is certainly not a question that is answered alone because we do not live alone, hence we are back to the dialogue and the community - back to the democracy as it should be.

One thing is certain by the end of the dialogue. If Callicles does become a powerful politician and rule in the polis neither he nor the Athenians will be free. And then the embarrassing question, is Gorgias responsible if the rhetoric he teaches to Callicles is used by him to obtain power? His model of teaching is all wrong. There is teaching of a skill but the political person needs more than this because it takes the dialogue even to reveal Callicles’ true nature. Would Gorgias ever have discovered who Callicles truly is without this conversation?

The most important education is in **our** hands – all of us in dialogue as active participatory citizens. The best a mere professional educator like myself can do is to prepare students to become just such citizens by helping them to always pursue unflinchingly the most important questions - Is this right? Is this good? Is this true? Only in this way will they be prepared to join in the democratic conversation.

If conversation and dialogue are indeed the best forms of communication then it is appropriate now that I open this up to dialogue with you and apologize for engaging in this form of speech of which Socrates would have so disapproved. Forgive me and please let the true education begin. I thank you so very much for your kind patience and attention today. And for giving me the opportunity to speak about what I so dearly love.
