

**Socratic Callicles, Calliclean Socrates:  
Mass and Elite in Plato's *Gorgias* (*Gorg.* 481b6-494a1)**

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Socrates: As I said, the masses are truly incapable of being philosophical.

Φιλόσοφον μὲν ἄρα, ἧν δ' ἐγώ, πλῆθος ἀδύνατον εἶναι [*Res.*494a3]

**Abstract:** Examining the shared antidemocratic language used by Pseudo-Xenophon in the *Athenian Constitution* and by the dialogue itself, this paper offers an analysis of sections *Gorg.*481b6-494a1 and argue that Callicles' and Socrates' so-called differences are significantly undermined by their shared ideological critique of late fifth-century B.C. Athenian democracy. In doing so, this paper criticizes the tendency of reading Callicles and Socrates as two warring characters in Plato's *Gorgias*.

Many readers of Plato's *Gorgias*, from very different interpretive communities, have arrived at a certain consensus: they read Plato's two widely discussed characters of the dialogue, Socrates and Callicles, as dramatic foils or polar opposites.<sup>2</sup> Leo Strauss, for example, characterized the *Gorgias* as “a fighting dialogue” that reaches its highest tension in the fraught conversation between Callicles and Socrates (Strauss 1963, 16). Similarly, E.R.Dodds saw it as Plato's most “bitter” dialogue that presents “two different choices of life” through those two characters (Dodds 1959, 1; 19). While H. Thesleff voiced this opposition most vigorously: “Callicles [is] Socrates' most formidable adversary” (Thesleff 2007, 80). This antagonism is also expressed by ancient readers such as Olympiodoros of Alexandria (495 - 570 CE), who provided a moral reading of the *Gorgias* that rendered Callicles as that “harsh, stubborn...[and] appetitive” character, whose soul Socrates attempted to redeem philosophically (Jackson, Lycos, Tarrant 1998, 194-198; *Olym.* 28).<sup>3</sup> Pre-Neoplatonic interpreters were often in full agreement: the *Gorgias* sets Socrates as the protagonist, whose “anatrepic” arguments are designed to refute the positions undertaken by his “opponents,” notably Callicles.<sup>4</sup> These contemporary and ancient readings were doubly motivated. They dramatized the difference between philosophy and rhetoric in 5th- and 4th-century Athens. But, they also used this disciplinary gap to celebrate Socrates as a philosopher who transcended his ideological horizons, and vilified Callicles as the unabashed sophist who indulged in an elitist, hedonist, and nihilist vision of politics. Indeed, oppositions of this sort resonate well with the overall theme of war in the dialogue, which is foreshadowed already at the very beginning: “*In war and battle*, this is how they assert that we should participate” (*Gorg.* 447a1: Πολέμου καὶ μάχης φασὶ χρῆναι, ὃ Σώκρατες, οὕτω μεταλαγχάνειν. my emphasis).

<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> On representation of both as polar opposites, see e.g., esp., Klosko 1984, 126-139; Stauffer 2002, 627-657.

<sup>3</sup> For other ancient readers, see also e.g., esp., Themistius 474d, 487a; Libanius 459c, 477b. See also Jackson, Lycos, and Tarrant 1998, 22, ff. 83 for a further discussion.

<sup>4</sup> For a further discussion on classifying the *Gorgias* as an anatrepic dialogue, see e.g., esp., Tarrant 1993, 58-72.

In my view, this overall interpretation lacks adequate explanatory power when we return to the often neglected section that records Socrates' initial engagement with Callicles in the *Gorgias* (481b6 - 494a1).<sup>5</sup> It seems unbecoming, for instance, for Socrates to refer to Callicles as his friend (487e5-7: φίλος). Furthermore, when Socrates confesses to Callicles that he finds considerable common ground with Callicles (481c5-d4), this hero-villain narrative cannot explain why Socrates, who holds a rational notion of philosophy and politics, would say something like this to Callicles, his supposed intellectual opposite. What are we to make of this supposed antagonism yet friendship between the two characters? Is Socrates just being ironic, as he generally is said to be?<sup>6</sup>

A second confounding matter regarding this interpretation concerns Callicles' relationship to the sophists. Commonly, Callicles is portrayed as just another sophist among the sea of "mendacious" sophists, and is received as the most capable user or articulate defender of Gorgianic rhetoric (Dodd 1959, 15).<sup>7</sup> However, Callicles' systematic absence from ancient sources concerning sophistic rhetoric seems to suggest otherwise. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for instance, does not mention Callicles' name at all in his discussion of the "vulgar" Gorgianic rhetoric (*Lysias* 3.18). Instead, only the names Gorgias and Polus appear (*Lysias* 3.18-22).<sup>8</sup> In the *Gorgias* itself, Callicles' own action also seems to run contrary to the contemporary image that depicts him as a sophist. In the beginning of the dialogue, we see Callicles not physically present for Gorgias' reputedly "charming" (447a5: ἀστείας) speech; Leo Strauss thinks that he must have been bored, and was stepping outside the gymnasium in need of "some fresh air" (Strauss 1963, 17). So why was Callicles not listening to Gorgias' speech, if he is said to be Gorgias' strongest cheerleader?

This essay offers an analysis of 481b6 - 494a1 in Plato's *Gorgias*. Examining the shared antidemocratic language used by Pseudo-Xenophon in the *Athenian Constitution* and by the dialogue itself, I argue that Callicles' and Socrates' so-called differences are significantly undermined by their shared ideological critique of late fifth-century B.C. Athenian democracy. In the first two sections, I examine the literary function of Chaerephon — Socrates' oftentimes neglected friend — to distance Callicles from the sophists and situate him closer to Socrates. Next, I demonstrate that Callicles' resemblance to Socrates is intimately connected with their views on the inadequacy of contemporary sophistic education in fifth-century BCE Athens. With reference to the writings of Pseudo-Xenophon, I show that Plato offers an aristocratic conception of what is "noble and good" (καλὸς καγαθὸς), dialogically articulated through Callicles' and Socrates' conversation at 481b6 - 494a1. Here, Plato, the fourth-century dramatist, illustrates two grades of elitism: a political one and a philosophical alternative that builds upon, rather than

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<sup>5</sup> In Ivan Jordović's summary of Socrates and Callicles' engagement with one another, this initial part recording their mutual friendliness towards one another is insufficiently discussed (Jordović 2019, 81).

<sup>6</sup> see e.g., esp., Scolnicov 2016.

<sup>7</sup> For harsh portrayals of Callicles, see e.g., esp., Doyle 2010, 5-7; McCabe 2006, 47. For considerations of Callicles as a non-sophist, see e.g., esp., Thesleff 2007, 80.

<sup>8</sup> For Callicles' systematic absence in ancient sources, see e.g., esp., Paus. 6.17.8; Aristophanes, *Birds*. 1700-1705; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Demosthenes* 1.63-4, 5-6; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1405b34.

departs from, the elitism of the former.<sup>9</sup> As such, my reading tones down the conventional antagonistic interpretation of the relationship between these two important characters.

### §1. Chaerephon the Synthetic and Callicles the Unsophistic

As one of Plato's most famous literary characters, Callicles joins the dialogue with Gorgias, Socrates, and Polus only thrice. The first appearance he makes occurs in the first few opening lines, where he and Socrates are busy wrapping up a conversation *in medias res* (447a1-6). His second entrance happens at 458 c-e, where he urges Gorgias and Socrates to carry on with their conversation, rather than breaking it off. His final appearance occurs much later in the dialogue at 481b6. Up to that point, Callicles has been listening to the conversations first staged between Socrates and the famous Sicilian sophist Gorgias of Leontini (449c-461b), then to the conversation between Socrates and Gorgias' very own pupil, Polus (461b-481b), also known as the young and impulsive "colt" (πῶλος).<sup>10</sup> This moment at 481b6 marks the entrance of Callicles for the final time, coming forth to speak with Socrates in front of a big audience about his strong feelings and frustrations regarding philosophy and politics.

What do these three notable entrances share in common? The answer, it seems, resides with Chaerephon, a character who barely speaks — in fact, throughout the entire dialogue of the *Gorgias*, he speaks for about ten lines only.<sup>11</sup> Correlatedly, whenever Callicles speaks in these three instances, Chaerephon's literary presence is strongly felt. For example, half way through the dialogue, at 481b6, Callicles intrudes again and joins the unsettling discussion between Polus and Socrates as to whether doing injustice is better than suffering injustice. He does so not by directly addressing Socrates, but rather through Chaerephon: "Tell me, my Chaerephon, is Socrates serious about these things or is he screwing around?" (481 b6-7: Εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Χαιρέφῶν, σπουδάζει ταῦτα Σωκράτης ἢ παίζει;). Callicles' intimate connection with Chaerephon is telling for two reasons. First, it informs us about Socrates' and Callicles' relationship with the sophists. Second, it tells us about what the relationship is between Socrates and Callicles.

In the opening section of the *Gorgias*, the dialogue records that Chaerephon is not only a friend of Socrates, but also a "friend" of the eloquent Gorgias (447b2-3; φίλος γάρ μοι Γοργίας).<sup>12</sup> Since Socrates does not begin the conversation with Gorgias and Polus, he needs the introduction of Chaerephon to open up discussions with the two. In virtue of being a friend of both, Chaerephon fulfills the literary function of bridging the vocationally incommensurable gap between Socrates and Gorgias.

<sup>9</sup> For the portrayal of Plato as a dramatist, see e.g., esp., Demetrios' treatise *On Style*, who saw Platonic texts and their general lack of authorial voices as a drama with literary characters (προσώπων): "he does not speak in his own persona... And this makes the dialogue much more vivid and cleverer regarding other characters, or better, it really becomes a drama" (after Charalabopoulos 2012, 117, translation modified: καὶ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ ἰδίου προσώπου λέγει... πολὺ γὰρ ἐναργέστερα καὶ δεινότερα φαίνεται ὑπὸ τῶν προσώπων, μᾶλλον δὲ δράματα ἀτεχνῶς γίνονται).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Socrates' play on Polus' name and his portrayal of him as young and impulsive: "Indeed, I am somehow not saying anything clear, but this POLUS here is young and impulsive" (463 e1-2, my emphasis: οὐδὲν γὰρ πω σαφὲς λέγω, Πῶλος δὲ ὄδε νέος ἐστὶ καὶ ὀξύς).

<sup>11</sup> For a different account of the literary function of Chaerephon, see Finkelberg 2019, 66-68.

<sup>12</sup> My emphasis. For ancient references of Gorgias' eloquence, see e.g., esp., Paus. 6.17.8.

Likewise, Chaerephon plays a similar role with respect to Callicles. Just as Socrates distances himself from the sophists at the initial stages of the dialogue, so too does Callicles separate himself from the sophistic crowd and reenter the Sophistic realm of conversation through Chaerephon. The beginning of the *Gorgias* illustrates this well: after Socrates blames Chaerephon for causing them to miss Gorgias' rhetorical display, Callicles is shown to learn for the first time where Socrates, coming from the marketplace, is going, and he does so by engaging not with Socrates but with Chaerephon: "What is this, Chaerephon? Does Socrates long to hear Gorgias?" (447 b4-5: Τί δέ, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν; ἐπιθυμεῖ Σωκράτης ἀκοῦσαι Γοργίου;). Through his engagement with Chaerephon, Callicles is brought back again to the gymnasium to reengage with Gorgias and the other sophist, Polus. Note, also, the instance when Callicles urges Socrates and Gorgias to continue the *elenchus*. Chaerephon speaks first to urge the two not to break off the conversation, and Callicles, only then, joins in. Callicles' indirect engagement with Gorgias through Chaerephon only amplifies his distance from the sophist. Finally, Chaerephon's sparse engagement (448) with Polus also coincides with Callicles' minimal engagement with this pupil of Gorgias. Without Chaerephon, it seems, Callicles does not initiate contact with any sophists in the dialogue.

Callicles' dissociation from the sophists is perhaps surprising given the common misconception that he is Gorgias' advocate and is himself considered a sophist by many scholars. Ivan Jordović, for example, writes that "Callicles is a disciple of the sophists" (Jordović 2019, 131). This is understandable, since in the dialogue Callicles also openly praises Gorgias for his spectacular speech: "A few moments ago, **our** Gorgias just delivered a varied and gorgeous speech" (447a5-6, my emphasis: πολλὰ γὰρ καὶ καλὰ Γοργίας ἡμῖν ὀλίγον πρότερον ἐπεδείξατο). But it is important, first of all, to consider a different way of translating this line. Four different translations by Terence Irwin, Donald Zeyl, Walter Hamilton, and Chris Emlyn-Jones all interpret the first-person plural pronoun (ἡμῖν) as a dative of the compound verb to ἐπεδείξατο, thus translating the line as Gorgias gave a splendid speech "to us."<sup>13</sup> Though grammatically valid, this translation of the dative makes little contextual sense. Recall that, as Callicles delivers this line, he, Socrates, and Chaerephon have yet to enter the gymnasium where Gorgias delivered his speech. In other words, Callicles was not there when Gorgias gave this allegedly gorgeous speech. But the problem goes away if we treat this dative as a dative of possession, rendering the line as "our Gorgias" just gave a splendid speech. Given that Gorgias is a friend of Chaerephon and a guest of Callicles, taking this dative possessively aptly maps onto Gorgias' cordial relation to the two characters. Further, Callicles' remarks should be considered in the context of the prologue. The dialogue begins informally. Chaerephon speaks with utter casualness (447 b1: Οὐδὲν πρᾶγμα); Callicles uses many colloquial phrases, such as remarking casually that "there is nothing like asking him" (447 c5: οὐδὲν οἶον τὸ αὐτὸν ἐρωτᾶν; see also Dodds 1959, 190). The dialogue, moreover, opens with a lighthearted conversation between Socrates and Callicles about coming late to festivities, and it is in the context of their informal banter about festivities that praise of Gorgias is introduced. Finally, note the ironic word used by Callicles in praise of both the festivity and of Gorgias' speech: "ἄστείας" (447a5) — which can be translated as "popular" or "charming" and is understood in a patronizing way. The ironic tone of Callicles' words undermines the actual content of his praise: Callicles does not hear the speech, so his praise of Gorgias' grand display sounds especially patronizing. Plato, thus, hints at a separation between Callicles and the sophists already at the very beginning of the text.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton 1960; Irwin 1979, 13; Zeyl 1987, 1; Emlyn-Jone 2004, 4.

Callicles is no great friend of Gorgias. He sees Gorgias as but a temporary guest who lodges (καταλύει) at his place; “Gorgias” as he labels, “is my *guest*” (447b7-8: παρ’ ἐμοί γὰρ Γοργίας καταλύει; my emphasis). Callicles suggests asking Gorgias to perform a speech for Socrates and Chaerephon, “and he will give a display for you all” (477b8: καὶ ἐπιδείξεται ὑμῖν). It is crucial to note that Callicles’ gesture of asking Gorgias to give another speech to Socrates and Chaerephon mirrors exactly Chaerephon’s previous offer to Socrates about letting Gorgias do another presentation for them whenever they desire. But it is also important to note that Callicles does not describe Gorgias as his friend (φίλος). His relationship with the famed sophist can best be characterized as a cordial guest-host relationship and nothing more.

When we compare Plato’s fiction, the *Gorgias*, to Gorgias’ own writing, *Encomium of Helen*, Callicles’ critical attitude towards Gorgias is even clearer. The goal of the *Encomium* is to redeem Helen from infamy: the text is an exercise in praising the praiseworthy, and blaming the blameworthy; “it is necessary” as the actual Gorgias declares in his own writing, “for one to honor with praise for anything worthy of being praised, and for one to attribute blame to the unworthy. For it is an equal failure and stupidity to blame the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy” (*Helen* 1: χρῆ τὸ μὲν ἄξιον ἐπαίνου ἐπαίνῳ τιμᾶν, τῷ δὲ ἀναξίῳ μῶμον ἐπιθεῖναι. ἴση γὰρ ἀμαρτία καὶ ἀμαθία μέμφεσθαι τε τὰ ἐπαινετὰ καὶ ἐπαινεῖν τὰ μωμητὰ). However, this praise-blame formula is treated very differently by Plato’s Callicles, where he attributes such a tendency to praise the praiseworthy and to blame the blameworthy to the weak and inferior people, that is, the *demos*. As he puts it, “they institute laws, **they praise the praiseworthy**, and **they blame the blameworthy** for their own sake and for their own advantage” (*Gorg.* 483b6-c1: πρὸς αὐτοὺς οὖν καὶ τὸ αὐτοῖς συμφέρον τούς τε νόμους τίθενται καὶ **τοὺς ἐπαίνοὺς ἐπαινοῦσιν** καὶ **τοὺς ψόγους ψέγουσιν**). In terms of intellectual convictions, Callicles disagrees quite vehemently with Gorgias; this serves as a strong indication of Callicles’ un-sophistic standpoint.

## §2. Callicles as the Replacement of Chaerephon: Socrates’ Intellectual Peer

Callicles’ un-sophistic standpoint draws him closer to Socrates to anyone else in the dialogue. Chaerephon, once again, is the vehicle that makes such a connection evident. It is important to underscore his close relationship with Socrates. In the *Apology*, we learn from Socrates that Chaerephon was “a companion from his youthful days” (*Ap.* 20e8-9: οὗτος ἐμός τε ἐταῖρος ἦν ἐκ νέου) and that he was a passionate person (*Ap.* ὡς σφοδρὸς).<sup>14</sup> But as a companion, he fails to understand Socrates twice. The first time is in his quest to Delphi to ask the question of who is possibly wiser than Socrates, which Socrates never called for and remained utterly baffled as to what Chaerephon might mean when he asked such a question to the gods (*Ap.* 21b-c).<sup>15</sup> The second time is his inability to understand Socrates’ question, “Chaerephon, ask him [Gorgias]...what sort of [professional] is he” (447c9: ὃ Χαιρεφῶν, ἐροῦ αὐτόν... Ὅστις ἐστίν).<sup>16</sup> This question confounded Chaerephon: “What” says the character “do you mean?” (*Gorg.* 447d2: Πῶς λέγεις;). Finally, in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, he is even likened to the farmer

<sup>14</sup> Leo Strauss, too, has an answer. As explained in his 1963 lecture on the *Gorgias* at the University of Chicago, Chaerephon is a loyal friend of Socrates, who goes to Delphi to ask the oracle who, if any, is wiser than Socrates (Strauss 1963, 19).

<sup>15</sup> See also Strauss’ discussion of this line by Chaerephon in his *Gorgias* lectures (1963, 19).

<sup>16</sup> In response to Chaerephon’s question, Socrates states that he does not understand why he could be the wisest of all. For this instance of Socrates’ disagreement with how Chaerephon frames his question to Delphi, see e.g., esp., *Ap.* 21b.

Strepsiades (Aristoph.*Cl.*503), portrayed by Socrates as an “ignorant and barbaric human” (Aristoph.*Cl.*491: ἀμαθῆς οὔτοςι καὶ βάρβαρος). So Chaerephon, in not asking a question correctly, cannot engage with Socrates intellectually. But Callicles, by virtue of his strong relationship to Chaerephon, is the more plausible candidate for functioning as an intellectual friend of Socrates.

If the literary context indirectly gives hints about Callicles as Socrates’ intellectual friend through his relation to Chaerephon, then the locutionary level of the dialogue — what Socrates and Callicles actually say to one another — explicitly substantiates this idea of friendship between them. Their common ground is evident through how both of them openly confess to each other that they share amicable feelings. Socrates receives Callicles’ entrance to the dialogue quite well, and marvels upfront that he believes that they share a “common ground.”

Callicles, if experience is in no way the same for humans, some experience something else, others experience other things, but some of us have **private feelings** different from the rest, it would not at all be easy to make a display for **another person** about your feelings. **But I think that you and I happen to share the same feeling**, even though the two of us are in love with different things, I with Alcibiades, son of Cleinos, and philosophy, and you with two things, the Athenian demos and Demos, son of Ppyrilampes. [481c5-d5]

ὦ Καλλίκλεις, εἰ μή τι ἦν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάθος, τοῖς μὲν ἄλλο τι, τοῖς δὲ ἄλλο τι τὸ αὐτό, ἀλλὰ τις ἡμῶν **ἰδιόν** τι ἐπασχεν πάθος ἢ οἱ ἄλλοι, οὐκ ἂν ἦν ῥάδιον ἐνδείξασθαι **τῷ ἑτέρῳ** τὸ ἑαυτοῦ πάθημα. λέγω δ’ ἐννοήσας ὅτι ἐγὼ τε καὶ σὺ νῦν τυγχάνομεν ταῦτόν τι πεπονθότες, **ἐρῶντε δύο ὄντε δυοῖν ἐκάτερος**, ἐγὼ μὲν Ἀλκιβιάδου τε τοῦ Κλεινίου καὶ φιλοσοφίας, σὺ δὲ δυοῖν, τοῦ τε Ἀθηναίων δήμου καὶ τοῦ Πυριλάμπους. [481c5-d5]

Socrates thinks that they share the kind of commensurate experience (πάθος) that in general is difficult to be shared, for experience is a private (ἰδιόν) matter and is not easy even to communicate to another person (τῷ ἑτέρῳ). However, as I will show, Socrates misunderstands this common ground by claiming that it consists in a parallel between Callicles’s affection for the people (*demos*) and the beautiful Demos (Aristoph. *Wasps* 98) and Socrates’ love of philosophy and Alcibiades. But this shared feeling between the two also points to a different way of conceiving the relationship between Callicles and Socrates: it emphasizes their commonness, rather than their dissimilarity. To be sure, this passage invites different readings. Dodds thinks that Socrates tries to communicate something more universal and less exclusively applicable to these two interlocutors. In particular, the passage is interpreted to show that “communication is possible only on the basis of some community of experience. Socrates is trying to find such common ground in order to make Callicles understand his passion for truth” (Dodds 1959, 261). However, I read this as a more exclusive interaction between Callicles and Socrates, and that Socrates does not intend this passage to apply to a wider audience. In stylistic terms, the way that Socrates talks to Callicles is personal and intimate: the sudden transition from plural to dual indicates that this is a conversation between two people: ἐρῶντε **δύο** ὄντε **δυοῖν** ἐκάτερος (But I think that **you and I** happen to share the same feeling). This means that Socrates intentionally narrows down the discourse targeted at a wider audience to a “private” conversation between Callicles and himself. This reading of commonness among two individuals is also supported by that of Olympiodoros, who parallels Socrates’ remark about the commensurability of experience

to the phenomenon of sick individuals and their capacity to relate to one another. Feverish individuals do not relate to those who experience no fever (*Olym* 25.3; Jackson, Lycon, Tarrant 1998, 183). This means that Socrates does not intend to use this passage to assert a general statement about the commensurability of human experiences. Instead, it is an intentional act of communicating to Callicles that the two of them alone have shared experience that enables them to relate to one another as individuals, and not merely as members of a group.

This interpretation of commonness among two individuals also finds its textual support through the verbal and mutual acknowledgments of amiability and feelings of friendship between Callicles and Socrates. Ever since 481b6, as Callicles participates in this dialogue at last, both address each other as their friends. Socrates initiates this cordiality by first calling him “my dear companion” (482a5: ὦ φίλε ἑταῖρε). After hearing Callicles’ first lengthy speech, Socrates relates to Callicles even more explicitly: “for you are **my friend**, as you yourself also declared. For this reason, your agreement and mine will lay hold of the truth in the end.” (487e5-7, my emphasis: **φίλος** γὰρ **μοι** εἶ, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς φήσ. τῷ ὄντι οὖν ἡ ἐμὴ καὶ ἡ σὴ ὁμολογία τέλος ἤδη ἔξει τῆς ἀληθείας). Upon admonishing Socrates not to go on philosophizing, as it will get him killed — and it surely did — Callicles confesses to the philosopher that he gives such advice only because he sees Socrates not only as a friend, but as a brother whom he cares about him: “I, at least, have fairly friendly feelings toward you, Socrates” (485e2-3: ἐγὼ δέ, ὦ Σώκρατες, πρὸς σὲ ἐπεικῶς ἔχω φιλικῶς), like Zethus towards Amphion, his brother, in Euripides’ play (485e3-6). Callicles and Socrates share more in common than they do with any other literary characters in the dialogue: while Chaerephon fails to be the type of intellectually talented companion suitable for Socrates, Callicles makes up for this. To this end, it seems apt for Socrates to acknowledge Callicles as a friend (φίλος), and Chaerephon as but a childhood companion (*Ap.* 20e8-9: οὗτος ἐμός τε ἑταῖρος ἦν ἐκ νέου).

Callicles’ intelligent engagement with Socrates indicates his intellectual capacity to be Socrates’ friend. This is established further in one important way: Callicles’ focused critique of philosophy and its perils. After a long discussion about the necessity of philosophy education for the young and the superfluity of such for the grown adults, Callicles turns to Socrates to warn him not to go on pursuing philosophy as a career. He prefaces it by reiterating his care towards Socrates: “(dear) Socrates my friend, please do not be annoyed by me, for I bear good will towards you” (486a4-5: ὦ φίλε Σώκρατες—καὶ μοι μηδὲν ἀχθεσθῆς· εὐνοία γὰρ ἐρῶ τῇ σῇ). Then, with a sense of foreboding, Callicles solemnly asks Socrates to abandon philosophy:

For now, if someone captures you or anyone else of a similar sort like you and carries you to prison, asserting that you did wrong, even if you did no wrong, know that you do not have any use for yourself to your advantage, but you will become dizzy, and your mouth would be wide open, and you are not able to say anything, and he will bring you up to the prison, and you will encounter **a poor and worthless accuser (φάυλου καὶ μοχθηροῦ)**, and you would be put to death, if his heart wills that you deserve to die. [486b3-d1]

νῦν γὰρ εἴ τις σοῦ λαβόμενος ἢ ἄλλου ὅτουοῦν τῶν τοιούτων εἰς τὸ δεσμοτήριον ἀπάγοι, φάσκων ἀδικεῖν μηδὲν ἀδικοῦντα, οἴσθ’ ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ἔχοις ὅτι χρήσαιο σαυτῷ, ἀλλ’ ἰλιγγιώης ἂν καὶ χασμῶ οὐκ ἔχων ὅτι εἴποις, καὶ εἰς τὸ δικαστήριον ἀναβάς, κατηγοροῦ τυχῶν πάνυ **φάυλου καὶ μοχθηροῦ**, ἀποθάνοις ἂν, εἰ βούλοιο θανάτου σοι τιμᾶσθαι. [486b3-d1; my emphasis]

Post-Socratic readers will identify this “poor and worthless accuser” that Callicles makes up with Socrates’ chief accuser and prosecutor, Meletus, in the *Apology*. Callicles paints a vivid depiction of the death of a philosopher caused by his avid pursuit of philosophy; for Callicles, even if a philosopher has done no wrong (μηδὲν ἀδικοῦντα), truth will be damned and the philosopher will be sentenced to death by the mass. From the deliberate beginning “of war and battle” foreshadowing the tension between philosophy and politics to cautioning Socrates not to pursue a life of philosophy, Callicles understands what is at stake more than anyone else — certainly much more than Chaerephon. Whereas Chaerephon fails to understand Socrates, Callicles and Socrates mutually recognize one another as equals. Dramatic subtexts and verbal gestures towards commonality aside, what then is the intellectual basis that substantiates what these characters share? I explore this line of thought in the next section.

### §3. Political Elitism and Calliclean Variation of καλὸς κάγαθός

A name often exemplifies the function of character in a literary text. This is clearly true of the *Gorgias*, where play on names abounds. Polus’ name, for instance, is thematically restricted by what his name represents: either as essential youth or as a Greek pun on “colt.” Thus, he is the brash and loyal pupil of Gorgias, eager to defend his teacher when he feels like Gorgias is being philosophically assaulted by Socrates (e.g., esp., 448-9; 464d1-2). As Dodds points out, Herodicus also ironizes this name: ἀεὶ σὺ πῶλος εἶ (Ar. *Rhet.* 1400<sup>b</sup>20).<sup>17</sup> Hence Socrates remarks, “Fair enough, Gorgias. Indeed, I am somehow not saying anything clear, but this **POLUS** here is **young** and **impulsive**” (463 e1-2: Εἰκότως γε, ὦ Γοργία· οὐδὲν γὰρ πω σαφές λέγω, **Πῶλος** δὲ ὅδε **νέος** ἐστὶ καὶ **ὀξύς**), thereby emphasizing the two adjectives: he is young (νέος) and impulsive (ὀξύς). Note that the name, “POLUS,” whose importance, emphasized by the postpositive δὲ and demonstrative ὅδε, cannot be distinguished. The capitalized letters that would appear in a manuscript inherit two meanings that readers or hearers of the text cannot differentiate: Polus the character, or πῶλος the colt.

Consider, then, the name Callicles. Thesleff argues that Callicles is a pun on Callias, the traditional host of sophists (Thesleff 2007, 80). Others have treated Callicles as a reference to Plato’s allegedly real name, Aristocles.<sup>18</sup> I would suggest, on the other hand, that we consider Callicles as a sedimented Homeric name. Calli-cles, or Καλλι-κλῆς, is composed of two words: καλὸς (noble) καὶ κλῆος (glory). For Callicles, καλὸς is no longer a word standardly understood as that which is conventionally beautiful or noble. His critique of convention shows this quite plainly: “They are not *kala* in accordance with nature, but are so with convention” (482e5: ἃ φύσει μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν καλά, νόμῳ δέ).<sup>19</sup> So what kind of non-conventional understanding of καλὸς does Callicles have? The meaning of this word is fixed by its neighboring word: κλῆος. Though used by many, such as Herodotus in the *Histories*, where he stated that he writes histories “so that the great and extraordinary deeds, some accomplished by the Greeks and others by the barbarians, may not go with fame (ἀκλεᾶ)” (*Hdt.* prologue: “μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησι, τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεᾶ γένηται), κλῆος is also an essentially Homeric diction. Whether it is used heroically in the *Iliad* (e.g., VII 91; IX 413) or in concert with Penelope’s suitors in the *Odyssey* (*Ody.* XIII.147-249), κλῆος is a decidedly elitist word. It

<sup>17</sup> See Dodds 1959, 226.

<sup>18</sup> For a further discussion on classifying the *Gorgias* as an anatreptic dialogue, see e.g., esp., Tarrant 1993, 58-72.

<sup>19</sup> See also 484a1; 484d1; 485a5.



is that which concerns all Homeric heroes who want to establish themselves through remarkable deeds and be forever remembered and sung by poets, and it is that which only the heroes and poets could really have. To remember the heroes and their eternal fame, thus sings Demodocus, in Book Eight of the *Odyssey*: “The Muse urged her bard (Demodocus) to sing the *klea* of men / part of the song, the *kleos* of which has then arrived at the wide heaven...” (*Ody.* 8.73-5: Μοῦσ’ ἄρ’ αἰοῖδὸν ἀνήκεν ἀειδέμεναι κλέα ἀνδρῶν, οἴμης, τῆς τὸτ’ ἄρα κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἴκανε). From the perspective of the heroes themselves, glory is the most important matter: the *Iliad* begins with Agamemnon’s and Achilles’ contention of what their proper due is. Without a prize worthy of high status, the hero goes without communal recognition — he becomes without fame (*Il.* 1-353). Hector, leader and defender of Troy (*Il.* 802-81), insists on possessing eternal glory: “That is what someone will say, and my *kleos* will never perish” (*Il.* VII.91: ὣς ποτέ τις ἐρέει· τὸ δ’ ἐμὸν κλέος οὐ ποτ’ ὀλεῖται). So, too, does Achilles, the best of all Achaeans (ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν; I 244, 412; XVI 271, 274) and the son of a goddess, crave it: “I have lost a safe homecoming, but I will have unfailing *kleos*” (*Il.* IX 413: ὄλετο μὲν μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται). In the shadow of κλέος, the “good,” the “noble,” the “beautiful” — καλὸς — finds its elitist articulation reminiscent of a bygone age reigned by pre-Solonian noblemen.<sup>20</sup>

The Homeric senses of elitism and excellence sculpt the literary constitution of Callicles. In the *Gorgias*, Callicles substantiates this elitism through his affiliations with and commendation of the strong, his demeaning portrayal of the weak, and his critique of the sophists and their model of education — all of which informs his view on the idea of καλὸς κάγαθός with a view toward the Homeric idea καλὸς καὶ κλέος. Consider, firstly, Callicles’ affiliation with the strong. In *Gorg.* 487, we learn from Socrates that Callicles is affiliated with three notable friends, all of whom are illustrious men of politics: “I know, Callicles, that there are four of you who are partners of practical philosophy, you, Teisandros of Aphidnae, Andron the son of Androtion, and Nausicydes of Cholargos” (487c1-4: οἶδα ὑμᾶς ἐγώ, ὃ Καλλίκλεις, τέτταρας ὄντας κοινωνοὺς γεγονότας σοφίας, σέ τε καὶ Τείσανδρον τὸν Ἀφιδναῖον καὶ Ἄνδρων τὸν Ἀνδροτίωνος καὶ Ναυσικύδην τὸν Χολαργέα). These associates of Callicles are wealthy. Nausicydes, mentioned by Aristophanes (*Eccl.* 426), was not only rich, but he also loved to gouge the poor to pay for the corn that they needed for an exorbitant amount of money (Dodds 1959, 282). Andron, son of Androtion, was the founder of the φύσις doctrine and a member of the Four Hundred (Dodds 1959, 282). Though little is known about Teisandros, he also appeared to have been wealthy (Dodds 1959, 282). Indeed, Callicles’ own beloved, Demos, is, as Dodds notes, from “one of the best families in Athens” (Dodds 1959, 13). In agreement with Dodds and his critique of Lamb, then, the circle to which Callicles belongs shows that he should not be thought of as “the typical Athenian democrat.”

Callicles’ political doctrine of strong and weak reflects his social status and his elitist commitments. Situating this in the *nomos-physis* discourse, Callicles proposes an essentialist account to delineate the constitution of these two classes of people. The democratic culture of Athens is ruled by a flock of the weak, amalgamating together to constitute a hegemonic force to oppress the strong (*Gorg.* 483c-484c); in Callicles’ own words, the weak “utterly terrify” (ἐκφοβοῦντες) the strong, and more “manly” humans (*Gorg.* 483c1-2: ἐκφοβοῦντες τοὺς ἑρρωμενεστέρους τῶν ἀνθρώπων). It is not only the physically meek that he detests. Callicles denigrates the lower class as a whole. Consider his choice of words. Conventional ideas of good and evil are nothing but “popular vulgarities” (*Gorg.* 482 e2-3: φορτικὰ καὶ δημηγορικά) that are not noble (*Gorg.* 482 e4: οὐκ ἔστιν καλά). And those who cherish these ideas are men who are, at

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of pre-Solonian elites, see e.g., esp., Ober 1989, 55-58.

once, terrifying (*Gorg.* 483c1: ἐκφοβοῦντες) and feeble (*Gorg.* 483b5: οἱ ἀσθενεῖς). They are, as Callicles calls them, the φαυλότεροι: the less educated, thoughtless, and poorer class of humans (*Gorg.* 483c6). Using Ober's words, they are quite literally the *kakoi* — the “nasty men” (Ober 1989, 58). A genuine male citizen cannot be abused nor suffer injustice; such is only what subhumans — a “slavish low-life” (ἀνδραπόδου) — do, who, accordingly, “are better off dead than alive” (*Gorg.* 483a8-b2: οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς τοῦτό γ' ἐστὶν τὸ πάθημα, τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι, ἀλλ' ἀνδραπόδου τινὸς ᾧ κρεῖττόν ἐστιν τεθνάναι ἢ ζῆν). The mass is the opposite of what is καλὸς (noble) — they are the inferior (*Gorg.* 483d5: τοῦ ἥττονος). When Socrates uses his favorite literary examples such as the cobbler, the cook, and the doctor to demand his interlocutor clarify what he means by the strong, Callicles immediately reacts to these examples, protesting to Socrates that their conversation about who the better and stronger ones are is never about these lowly craftsmen and producers: “By the gods, . . . , as if our conversation was really about these men” (*Gorg.* 491a1-3: Νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς, ἀτεχνῶς γε αἰεὶ σκυτέας τε καὶ κναφέας καὶ μαγείρους λέγων καὶ ἰατροὺς οὐδὲν παύη, ὡς περὶ τούτων ἡμῖν ὄντα τὸν λόγον).

So who were these “lowly” men? Examining Pseudo-Xenophon's *Athenaion Politeia* produced in the later half of the fifth century B.C. is particularly helpful in answering this question. To begin with, Callicles' classist language overlaps significantly with Ps.-Xenophon's unflattering portrayal of the democratic mass. The contrast between the aristocratic elites and ordinary citizens cannot be more well established: the former were worthy (*Xen.Ath.Pol.* 1.4: τοὺς χρηστοὺς), capable (*Xen.Ath.Pol.* 3.7: τοὺς δυνατωτάτους), and skillful citizens (*Xen.Ath.Pol.* 9.1: δεξιωτάτους), while the democratic mass itself stands as a shorthand for poor (*Xen.Ath.Pol.* 2.2: οἱ πένητες καὶ ὁ δῆμος),<sup>21</sup> maniacal (*Xen.Ath.Pol.* 9.4: μαινομένους), and ignorant men (*Xen.Ath.Pol.* 5.5: ἀμαθία). Along these lines, the Old Oligarch anticipates an argument familiar to readers of Callicles: because the democratic majority enjoyed more rights than the elites in Athens, they subsequently dominated these aristocratic men through this institutionalization of the ideology of democratic hegemony. The weak, in Calliclean diction, indeed “absolutely terrified” (483c1: ἐκφοβοῦντες) the strong. As Pseudo-Xenophon puts it:

But then some will be amazed that they everywhere distribute more to the worst persons, to the poor, and to the plebs than to the worthy men: at Athens, they will appear to safeguard their democracy. For the poor, the common, and the base, because they are doing so well and there are many like them, they will strengthen democracy. So if the wealthy, good men fare well, the democratic mass creates a strong opposition to these [elites]. And everywhere else the best constitution is opposed to democracy. For among the best people there is little intemperance and injustice but much care for what is serviceable, whereas among the people there is a lot of ignorance, disorder, and baseness; for poverty draws them rather to disgraceful actions, and because of a lack of money some men are uneducated and ignorant. [*Xen.Ath.Pol.* I.4.1-6.1]

ἔπειτα δὲ ὁ ἔνιοι θαυμάζουσιν ὅτι πανταχοῦ πλέον νέμουσι τοῖς πονηροῖς καὶ πένησι καὶ δημοτικοῖς ἢ τοῖς χρηστοῖς, ἐν αὐτῷ τούτῳ φανοῦνται τὴν δημοκρατίαν διασφύζοντες. οἱ μὲν γὰρ πένητες καὶ οἱ δημόται καὶ οἱ χείρους εὖ πράττοντες καὶ πολλοὶ οἱ τοιοῦτοι γιγνόμενοι τὴν δημοκρατίαν αὐξουσιν· ἐὰν δὲ εὖ πράττωσιν οἱ πλούσιοι καὶ οἱ χρηστοί, ἰσχυρὸν τὸ ἐναντίον σφίσι αὐτοῖς καθιστᾶσιν οἱ δημοτικοί. ἔστι δὲ πάση γῆ τὸ βέλτιστον ἐναντίον τῆ δημοκρατία· ἐν γὰρ τοῖς βελτίστοις ἐνὶ ἀκολασίᾳ τε ὀλιγίστη καὶ ἀδικία,

<sup>21</sup> See also *Xen.Ath.Pol.* 4.1: τοῖς πονηροῖς καὶ πένησι.

ἀκρίβεια δὲ πλείστη εἰς τὰ χρηστά, ἐν δὲ τῷ δήμῳ ἀμαθία τε πλείστη καὶ ἀταξία καὶ  
 πονηρία· ἢ τε γὰρ πενία αὐτοὺς μᾶλλον ἄγει ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἡ ἀπαιδευσία καὶ ἡ ἀμαθία  
 <ἢ> δι’ ἔνδειαν χρημάτων ἐνίοις τῶν ἀνθρώπων. [Xen.*Ath.Pol.*I.4.1-6.1]

Under democracy, the wealthy elites received less constitutional protection and privilege than the unworthy but numerous masses; thus, the Athenians are said to “distribute more to the worst person” (Xen.*Ath.Pol.*4.1). Solon’s constitutional reform of sixth century B.E. Athens was one of the decisive aspects that made the polis more democratic than other city states such as Corinth, Sicyon, and Sparta around the time. He changed the qualification for political office from birth to wealth. By dividing citizens into four census classes (*pentacosiomedimnoi*, *hippeis*, *zeugetai*, and *thetes*), Solon made property and wealth the two most important criteria for holding important political offices in Athens (*Ath.Pol.*7.3). This radically undermined the aristocratic power of the Eupatrid elites, who based their rule on their *gene* (clans) and *phratry* (brotherhood) organizations since the eighth century. Take participation in the Areopagus as a point of consideration. Before Solonian constitutional reforms, membership to participate in the council was reserved to the nobility only. After his constitutional reforms, however, the top three property classes were able to participate in major political offices such as archonship (*Ath.Pol.*8.1). Furthermore, by coding laws and rebranding the political function of the Areopagus as “law-guardians” (*Ath.Pol.*8.4), Solon brought in constitutional safeguards to ensure that no group could monopolize political power. During the reign of Eupatrids, with Draco’s homicide laws as an exception, the governing principles relied upon unwritten customary laws and statutes, which could be arbitrarily exercised by those in power. As Solon was said to “put down his laws” (*Ath.Pol.*6.3: καὶ νόμους ἔθηκε) by codifying them in written forms, this transition from unwritten statutes to written *nomoi* gave a constitutional shape to Athens and so effectively checked the use and abuse of customary laws. Finally, the lawgiver also afforded minimal political power to “the people” by including all adult male-citizens from all census classes, including the *thetes*, into a new political office, the Ekklesia (assembly). Alongside with the introduction of “ἰσομοιρίη” (equal lots), Solon’s constitutional reforms represents the first structural step to democratizing Athens.

In turn, what this constitutional reform resulted in was, through Ps.-Xenophon’s lens, the unleashing of unqualified and lower class men into politics, an arena that used to belong to ruling elites. Solon was responsible for the cancellation of debts (Plut. *Sol.* 15.2ff.; Arist.*Ath. Pol.* 6.1), the abolition of the status of *hektēmeros* (Arist.*Ath. Pol.* 12.4), the return of Athenian citizens sold abroad under the law (Arist.*Ath. Pol.* 12.4), and for granting freedom to those who were enslaved in Athens (Arist.*Ath. Pol.* 12.4). These new constitutional arrangements opened doors for freedmen (Xen.*Ath.Pol.*10.5: ἀπελεύθερον) and *nouvelle riches* to participate in political affairs. As Ps.-Xenophon’s text records, these men can sing and do anything for the rich, so that eventually these laborers (οἱ πενέστα) can become rich while the rich gets poorer (Xen.*Ath.Pol.*13.10: οἱ πλούσιοι πενέστεροι γίνωνται).

The blurring of the lines between mass and elite is also evident in the treatment of pure Athenian citizens, metics, and slaves. Pericles’ citizenship law of 451 mandated that citizenship would be given to the child only if both of his or her parents are Athenian citizens. Provided that the dramatic date of *Gorgias* is set at 427 BCE when Gorgias of Leontini sailed to Athens to persuade the Athenians to intervene in Sicily (Thuc.3.86), Pericles’ citizenship law would have

already been put into effect.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, according to Pseudo-Xenophon and Plato, these legal restrictions do not seem to make it any easier for citizens to recognize who is and is not a citizen on a day to day basis. According to the Old Oligarch, citizens, metics, and slaves all dress the same; what is more is the impossibility to hit them physically without accidentally striking a free citizen (Xen.*Ath.Pol.* 10). Thus, “among the slaves as well as the metics, there is the greatest intemperance: you cannot beat them right there on the spot, and a slave will not even make way for you” (Xen.*Ath.Pol.* 10.1-2: Τῶν δούλων δ’ αὖ καὶ τῶν μετοίκων πλείστη ἐστὶν Ἀθήνησιν ἀκολασία καὶ οὔτε πατάξαι ἔξεστιν αὐτόθι οὔτε ὑπεκστήσεται σοὶ ὁ δοῦλος). Because anyone can roam around freely on the streets, there is a possibility that an Athenian citizen might mistakenly beat (Xen.*Ath.Pol.* I.10.7: ἐπάταξεν ἄν) another Athenian citizen mistakenly “thinking that he is a slave” (Xen.*Ath.Pol.* I.10.7: ἄν οἰηθεὶς εἶναι τὸν Ἀθηναῖον δοῦλον). Furthermore, since the Athenian naval force and economy require mass participations of metics, freedmen, and the democratic body force at large — “the city needs metics because of the many professions and fleet” (Xen.*Ath.Pol.* I.12.2-4: διότι δεῖται ἡ πόλις μετοίκων διὰ τε τὸ πλῆθος τῶν τεχνῶν καὶ διὰ τὸ ναυτικόν), this practice blurring the masses and the elite becomes a financial and military necessity. Thus, when Callicles remarks that seeing someone philosophize — “when you hear a man speaking inarticulately or see him mess around” (485b7-c1: ὅταν δὲ ἀνδρὸς ἀκούσῃ τις ψελλιζομένου ἢ παίζοντα ὀρᾶ), this person is “ridiculous” (485c2: καταγέλαστον), “un-citizenlike” (485c2: ἄνανδρον), and that, most importantly of all, he “deserves a beating” (485c2: πληγῶν ἄξιον). The temptation to break the status quo that systematically disadvantages the elite and favors the masses is expressed through the violent yet unrealized wish of “beating:” to be able to beat someone requires the reinstatement of a large body of enslaved masses and a small number of wealthy elite *genes*. Callicles’ passing comment symbolizes the elite’s nostalgia for a distant past.

Callicles’ classist language and elitist ideological disposition sheds light onto the substantive difference between him and the two other sophists in the dialogue. Recall Callicles’ tacit critique of Gorgias in 483e4-484a2:

They mold the best and the mightiest among us, seizing them from their youth, like lion cubs, **and because [the weak] kept subduing [the best and the mightiest] with charms and bewitching them,** the former enslave the latter, telling the latter that one is supposed to get no more than his fair share, and that that’s what is *kalos* and just. [483e4-484a2]

πλάττοντες τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ ἔρρωμενεστάτους ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἐκ νέων λαμβάνοντες, ὥσπερ λέοντας, **κατεπάδοντές τε καὶ γοητεύοντες καταδουλούμεθα** λέγοντες ὡς τὸ ἴσον χρὴ ἔχειν καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ δίκαιον. [483e4-484a2]

The reference to using magical powers to mold a person is a strong allusion to Gorgias’ actual writing in the *Encomium of Helen* (*Helen.* 10), where Gorgias talks about the power of language to mold and transform an individual. To this extent, language is “magical,” as it bewitches the mind: “the power of language is that it enchants and bewitches and persuades and metamorphosizes [the mind’s conviction] through magic” (*Helen.* 10: σωγγιγνομένη γὰρ τῇ δόξῃ τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ δόναμις τῆς ἐπωδῆς ἔθελεξε καὶ ἐπεισε καὶ μετέστησεν αὐτὴν γοητεία). Helen, for

<sup>22</sup> For further discussions of dramatic dating at 427 BCE, see e.g., esp., Taylor 1960, 104; Saxonhouse 1983, 144; Yunis 1996, 119; Svoboda 2007, 286; Jordović 2019, 21.

Gorgias of Leontini, holds no guilt; rather, she was bewitched by the magical power of language itself. Plato's Callicles, on the other hand, clearly does not like this magical power of words, as it bewitches those who are strong by nature and subdues them into slaves for the inferior *demoi*.

Callicles' tacit critique of Gorgias uncovers a real ideological difference between him and Gorgias. Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* proposes a constructivist view of language, which undermines an essentialist understanding of human nature. It is not Helen's fault that the Trojan war happened. It is how she has been talked about through the magical charms of language that frames her as someone who is either completely unredeemable or blameless. When persuasion is combined with "words" or "language" (*Helen* 13: τῷ λόγῳ), it is able to "mold" (*Helen* 13: ἐτυπώσατο) the mind in whichever way it wills (*Helen* 13: ὅπως ἐβούλετο). The analogy Gorgias establishes with medicine also shows that language serves a more fundamental role in molding the essence of a person. Language alters the nature of the mind as medicine does to the physical constitution of bodies; "with respect to language, the power of language has the same relation to the constitution (τάξις) of the mind as the constitution (τάξις) of medicine has to the nature (φύσιν) of bodies" (*Helen* 14; τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον ἔχει ἢ τε τοῦ λόγου δύναμις πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς τάξις ἢ τε τῶν φαρμάκων τάξις πρὸς τὴν τῶν σωμάτων φύσιν). In short, power (*Helen* 10. ἡ δόναμις) comes not with that innate heroic excellence one receives from birth or by nature. There is simply no inherent distinction between the weak and the strong. Rather, through the transformative power of language, an individual can be persuaded or educated to become excellent and strong.

Gorgias' constructivist view of language corresponds well with the contemporary democratic norm regarding education in fifth-century Athens: for the sophists, anyone who can pay can attain this resource originally reserved for aristocrats. Gorgias' view of education stands in stark contrast to that of Callicles. As Peter Rose argues, the true opposition of *physis* is sophistic education (Rose 1995, 365). For Gorgias, as Douglas MacDowell puts it, "intellectual subjects [can be taught] to anyone willing to pay for it" (MacDowell 1982, 9). In contrast, for the aristocratic few such as Callicles and his friends, education should be reserved for the privileged minority, who are thought of as possessing the innate ability to philosophize and to participate in political affairs. Indeed, for aristocratic elites, it is simply not the case that "any males who could pay for [an education]" can be educated (Rose 1995, 338). As evident too in Pseudo-Xenophon, the masses can pretty much do anything for the rich, so that eventually they can "become" one of them (*Xen. Ath. Pol.* I.13.10: γίγνωνται).

The importance of Callicles' theory of natural disposition is that education in and of itself cannot turn an Athenian male citizen into a person of intellectual and civic virtue. In Callicles' view, mass education in Athens tends to be a matter of discipline and rote memorization. To distance himself from this educational practice, Callicles quotes Pindar yet notes that "I do not remember this ode" (484b9: τὸ γὰρ ᾄσμα οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι). Later on, Callicles also mentioned that it makes him upset to hear young boys articulating themselves well, and he believes that this kind of articulation is "fitting only for slaves" (485b7: δουλοπρεπές). This clearly seems to be a remarkable claim. Callicles explains as follows: "but when I hear a small child having a dialogue clearly, I think it is a jarring matter; it hurts my ears. I think it is something appropriate for a slave" (485b5-7: ὅταν δὲ σαφῶς διαλεγόμενου παιδαρίου ἀκούσω, πικρὸν τί μοι δοκεῖ χρῆμα εἶναι καὶ ἀνιᾶ μου τὰ ὅσα καὶ μοι δοκεῖ δουλοπρεπές τι εἶναι). Slavish discipline and rote memorization pair well with mass education. Thus, not remembering every line actually evinces a certain aristocratic resistance to contemporary democratic culture. When Callicles makes the effort to clarify that he does not remember his Pindar well, he consciously distances himself from

the sophistic way of education. The alternative is to teach boys philosophy — a noble and delightful matter; “When I see a child,” says Callicles, “for whom it is still quite appropriate to have a philosophical dialogue, speaking ever so inarticulately and playing around like a child, I am delighted. I find this to be a delightful thing, free and fitting for the child’s age” (485b2-5: ὅταν μὲν γὰρ παιδίον ἴδω, ᾧ ἔτι προσήκει διαλέγεσθαι οὕτω, ψελλιζόμενον καὶ παῖζον, χαίρω τε καὶ χαρίεν μοι φαίνεται καὶ ἐλευθέριον καὶ πρέπον τῇ τοῦ παιδίου ἡλικίᾳ). Teach them how to think and speak “ever so inarticulately” (485b3: ψελλιζόμενον), not how to recite slavishly. So when Callicles takes pride in the fact that he does not remember his Pindar quite well by heart and praises the child for his inarticulateness, he is in effect criticizing the sophistic approach to education.

Gorgias and other sophists revolutionized writing and education, and in so doing structurally compromised the aristocratic culture of fifth-century Athens. Their rejection of the older and more aristocratic — Homeric — literary model resonates well with the contention that, on a larger scale, such a transition maps well onto the widespread literary revolution that began as early as the sixth-century.<sup>23</sup> As Rose observes, this literary revolution fundamentally altered the modes of production and expanded them to a broader public (Rose 1995, 340). Education was no longer restricted to the privileged few. Massive public education that takes place in “the pnyx (assembly), the agora, the courts, the theater of Dionysus, and other festival locations” began to come into existence, which targeted a much wider audience including “women, slaves, and children” (Rose 1995, 338). Rose’s account is particularly apt; the sophists’ rhetorical revolution “forged a fundamental ideological assault on the philosophical foundations of the domination of society by an aristocracy of birth” (Rose 1995, 340). So while Gorgias’ actual writing in the *Helen* puts forth a constructivist theory of ideas and “assault(s)” contemporary aristocratic rule, Callicles’ naturalistic elitism defends it. As the next section will show, this elitist montage of Callicles is the Callicles whom Socrates unironically adores. What Socrates likes about Callicles is precisely his elitism, including and especially his philosophical capacities. As we will soon see, Socrates, when putting forth a theory of natural disposition, is quite Calliclean.

#### §4. Socrates’ Philosophical Elitism: Itchy Bodies, Cracked Jars, and Human Essence

Callicles’ substantive disagreement with the sophists and his political elitism clarify the ideological common ground that he shares with Socrates. To begin with, Socrates’ conversation with Callicles significantly reveals his discussion of what is noble and good (καλὸς κἀγαθός). Prior to their conversation, whenever Socrates brings up this idea it is always discussed in the abstract without specific classist associations. With Gorgias, Socrates manages to say what is not noble and good (καλὸς κἀγαθός), namely, rhetoric. At 459d2-4, Socrates questions whether the profession practiced by rhetors is the same as other vocations regarding what is noble and good (καλὸς κἀγαθός): “regarding what is just and unjust, shameful and noble, good and bad, is the rhetor in the same position as other professions, as he is about subjects regarding what is healthy, among others?” (459d2-4: ἄρα τυγχάνει περὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἄδικον καὶ τὸ αἰσχρὸν καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν οὕτως ἔχων ὁ ῥητορικὸς ὡς περὶ τὸ ὑγιεινὸν καὶ περὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὧν αἱ ἄλλαι τέχναι). But this does not tell us what Socrates’ positive notion of καλὸς κἀγαθός is. Of course, Polus jumps in and defends his teacher, saying that rhetoric fits the notion of καλὸς κἀγαθός (see e.g., esp., 461b2-c4; 462 c8). But through Polus’ conversation with Socrates, we

<sup>23</sup> Rose’s (1995), Havelock’s (1982), and Vernant’s (1982).

see the same negative outcome: again we learn only that rhetoric is the opposite of what is καλὸς κάγαθός, though this time we have a stronger articulation of it. In responding to Polus, Socrates says that “what I call rhetoric is part of some affair of no **noble** origins” (463 a4: ὁ δ’ ἐγὼ καλῶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν, πράγματός τινός ἐστι μόνιον οὐδενὸς **τῶν καλῶν**).<sup>24</sup> We also learn that notion of καλὸς κάγαθός is something abstract: it relates more to having the courage to endure injustice and suffer the consequences of one’s misdoings (480c), and that anyone, “man or woman,” who shares this quality also possesses happiness (470e).

But Socrates’ understanding of what is noble and good becomes more historical, ideological, and political after Callicles’ classist articulation of natural disposition. Note that, in the latter half of the dialogue, Socrates rejects many things said by Callicles, such as his theory of pleasure (see e.g., esp., 491d-e). But in a crucial yet often neglected sense, Socrates does not reject Callicles’ essentialist understanding of noble elites and base masses. I will label this as Callicles’ theory of natural disposition. Indeed, Socrates tacitly embraces that theory. This is evident through their common disdain for contemporary sophistic democracy. If part of Callicles’ theory offers an elitist critique of sophistic education, then in Socrates’ ensuing discussion of what is noble and good we see a more straightforward attack on rhetoric in relation to current democratic politicians and their ability to corrupt citizens.<sup>25</sup>

For if there are in fact two parts to this, then one part of it would be flattery and **shameful public oratory** (αἰσχρὰ δημηγορία), and the other part is what is noble (καλόν), preparing the souls of our male citizens to be as morally excellent (βέλτισται) as possible, and contending through arguments what moral excellence is, if the audience will find it more pleasant or unpleasant. But you have never seen this type of rhetoric. [503a5-b1]

εἰ γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ διπλοῦν, τὸ μὲν ἕτερον που τούτου κολακεία ἂν εἴη καὶ αἰσχρὰ δημηγορία, τὸ δ’ ἕτερον καλόν, τὸ παρασκευάζειν ὅπως ὡς βέλτισται ἔσονται τῶν πολιτῶν αἱ ψυχαί, καὶ διαμάχεσθαι λέγοντα τὰ βέλτιστα, εἴτε ἡδίω εἴτε ἀηδέστερα ἔσται τοῖς ἀκούουσιν. ἀλλ’ οὐ πώποτε σὺ ταύτην εἶδες τὴν ῥητορικὴν. [503a5-b1]

The anti-sophistic language is especially strong here: not only does Socrates use “public oratory” (δημηγορία) to characterize rhetoric, but he also attaches to it the adjective “shameful.”<sup>26</sup> It is emphasized that there is no “noble” (καλός) rhetoric existing at the current time. Rhetoric, as practiced by sophists and politicians, is base, in a similar way that the poor and marginalized humans are base for Callicles. Here is the common ground between Callicles and Socrates: their distaste for democracy and their shared anti-sophistic mindset. In fact, Socrates takes his disdain of democracy even further by characterizing Callicles as a democrat who loves the activity of impressing the demos (513b-c).<sup>27</sup> This is somehow ironic: as we have seen in the previous section, Callicles is perhaps the farthest person who could be understood as

<sup>24</sup> For more discussions on what καλὸς κάγαθός is not, see also 474 d1; 476; 477 a; 478.

<sup>25</sup> The association between rhetors and political actors goes hand in hand together in the *Gorgias*. See e.g., Pl. Grg. 515c-d, 517b-c, 518b; for a good discussion, see also Jordović 2019, 26.

<sup>26</sup> There are only three times where this language is used. For two other instances where Socrates uses the derogatory term, δημηγορία, see 502c12 and 502d2. For an excellent contextualist analysis of the term and its innovative usage in Plato, see e.g., esp., Lane 2012, 189-192.

<sup>27</sup> For a different interpretation of representing Callicles as the Athenian democrat, see e.g., esp., Jordović 2109, 45-49.

democratically-minded. Finally, recall that the conclusion of the *Gorgias* records Socrates lamenting about the status of Athenian education: “we have arrived at such **an utter dearth of education**” (527e1: εἰς τοσοῦτον ἤκομεν **ἀπαιδευσίας**). The term, “an utter dearth of education” (ἀπαιδευσίας), occurred only fifteen times throughout the Platonic corpus; it is a *hapax legomenon* in the *Gorgias*, in that it occurred only once in the dialogue. This is a strong word to convey Socrates’ view of sophistic education: there is, in other words, a limit to how far education or rhetoric can ameliorate someone’s intellectual convictions.

Socrates’ critique of rhetoric also has a citizenship dimension, and it further underscores the legal commonality that Socrates and Callicles share. Both are Athenian citizens *vis-à-vis* Gorgias and Polus, the foreign sophists from Sicily. These identities enrich the power dynamic embedded in Socrates’ critique of rhetoric. As Ober puts it, the intellectual conviction that only “native-born males were worthy of fulfilling political roles in the state” continues to be a dominant ideology in fifth- and fourth-century Athens (Ober 1989, 90). In Socrates’ own critique, this prejudice is brought out through an implicit contrast between what is foreign and what is autochthonous. The type of rhetoric that is under attack is an exotic type used by Gorgias to charm the masses. As Diodorus Siculus testifies, Gorgias’ rhetoric indeed astonished the Athenian masses (D.S.12.53.3.2: τὸν δῆμον) with “the foreignness of his speech” in the assembly open to all citizens (D.S.12.53.4.1: ξενίζοντι τῆς λέξεως) and the “exotic” rhetorical devices he used (D.S.12.53.4.5: τὸ ξένον).<sup>28</sup> Socrates contrasts this with a nobler kind that renders the “male citizens (πολιτῶν)...as morally excellent as possible” (*Gorg.*503a8-9). Note the deliberate use of “male citizens” (*polites*): noble education concerns only adult men who have legal membership in the Athenian *polis*.<sup>29</sup> With proper education, they will be able to resist the magical charms and spells of pleasure-inducing rhetorics. Callicles, in light of this citizenship dynamic, is dear to Socrates on the very grounds that both are Athenian male-citizens *propere*.

Through these anti-sophistic gestures, Socrates preserves Callicles’ theory of natural disposition, which allows him to put forth a philosophical defense of political elitism. Propositionally, Socrates thinks of καλὸς κἀγαθὸς as a matter of temperance. If we treat this account of self-control in isolation, then it is not at all evident why he has to go against an anti-sophistic model in order to articulate this account. If, however, we treat it in the context of Socrates’ literary story, its discriminatory undertone becomes evident. Recall that Socrates treats the discourse of self-control in relation to bodily woes, specifically, to itchiness:

SO. (c4-8) Very good, [Callicles] the best. Do continue where you began, and do not be ashamed. And, as it seems, neither should I be ashamed. So tell me first, if someone has an itch and scratches it, and because he is able to scratch it as much as he likes, he is wont to scratch it throughout his life — is it possible for him to live happily?... (e1-2) What if he scratches only his head... (e4-5) And is this not the main point of these people, **the life of lewd fellows**, he is not a skilful man, but shameful and **pitiful (ἄθλιος)**? [494 c4-8; e1-2; e4-5]

<sup>28</sup> See also Dion. Hal. Lys. 3; Philostr. Vitae soph. 1.9.3; Paus. 6.17.8–9 for portrayals of how Gorgias astonished the democratic masses and illustrious elites in Athens during his visit. See also Ober 1989, 54.

<sup>29</sup> See also Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 29.4 for a definition of Athenian citizenship. I take *polites* as referring to male citizens only, since *politiss* and *politides* are feminine iterations denoting female citizens (see e.g., esp., *Leg.* 814c4). See also Blok 2017, 172 for a further discussion of *polites* and *politiss* in Plato.



ΣΩ. (c4-8) Εὖγε, ὦ βέλτιστε· διατέλει γὰρ ὡσπερ ἤρξω, καὶ ὅπως μὴ ἀπαισχυνῆ. δεῖ δέ, ὡς ἔοικε, μὴδ' ἐμὲ ἀπαισχυθῆναι. καὶ πρῶτον μὲν εἰπέ εἰ καὶ ψωρῶντα καὶ κνησιῶντα, ἀφθόνως ἔχοντα τοῦ κνησθαι, κνώμενον διατελοῦντα τὸν βίον εὐδαιμόνως ἔστι ζῆν... (e1-2) Πότερον εἰ τὴν κεφαλὴν μόνον κνησιῶ... (e4-6) καὶ τούτων τοιούτων ὄντων κεφάλαιον, **ὁ τῶν κιναιδῶν βίος**, οὗτος **οὐ δεινός** καὶ **αἰσχρος** καὶ **ἄθλιος**; [494 c4-8; e1-2; e4-5]

Socrates' answer to this self-imposed question — “is he who scratches eternally happy?” — is “no:” these lewd, vulgar men do not possess happiness, and their lives are not worth living. Note the Calliclean use of language: pitiful (*Gorg.*492b8: ἄθλιος). Like Callicles, Socrates adopts the classist language of the “high” and the “low,” and depicts those who suffer bodily woes as a damning trait for their philosophical potential: they lack power or skill (οὐ δεινός) and they have a shameful existence (αἰσχρος). Socrates offers his essentialist view of human identity: those who have a bad body are doomed to be eternally unhappy, as they cannot live a self-controlled life, philosophizing about truth and justice. Those who have health, however, escape this miserable life. Socrates' division also thematizes, from the outset, two utterly distinct lifestyles. One is bound by bare necessity, compelled by itchy bodies and other physical woes, and is predisposed to a life of injustice. The other is a life of leisure — where anyone who is already καλὸς κάγαθός can engage in philosophical matters. This identifies a small and special subset of the population, a subset that is fit to engage in philosophy.

Socrates' essentialist view of human nature is further substantiated by his jar story at 493d5-494a1. As he tells it, there are two types of jars — a sound (ὕγιεις) one, and a cracked (σαθρά) one. As Socrates attributes the sound, healthy vessel to a life of temperateness, he imputes the latter to the unreliable and forgetful person:

(493 c6-7) And because they leak, he analogized the souls of fools to sieves on account of the fact that their **unreliability and forgetfulness (δι' ἀπιστίαν τε καὶ λήθην)** makes them unable to sustain anything ... (493d5-494a1) Come on, then. Let me relate to you another picture, one from the same gymnasium as the previous one. Consider what you're saying about each life, the life of the temperate and of the unbridled, and if it is like this. If there are two men, both of whom have many jars. The jars belonging to one of them are **sound (ὕγιεις)** and full: one with wine, the other with honey, and a third with milk, and many others things as parts of many other things. But the streams where each of these things come from are rare and difficult to come by, procurable only with much toil and trouble. Now, because the first man has filled up his jars, this man neither pours anything more into them nor thinks about it any further. Instead, **he would be able to be at ease (ἡσυχίαν ἔχει)**. But the other one also has spring waters, just like the previous man (ὡσπερ καὶ ἐκεῖνῳ), and they are possible to be procured, although with difficulty, **but his jars are perforated (τετρημένα) and cracked (σαθρά)**, and **he would be necessitated (ἀναγκάζοιτο)** to keep filling the same jars forever throughout the day and night, or else he suffers utmost pain (τὰς ἐσχάτας λυποῖτο λύπας). [493d5-494a1]

(493 c6-7) τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν κοσκίνῳ ἀπήκασεν τὴν τῶν ἀνοήτων ὡς τετρημένην, ἅτε οὐ δυναμένην στέγειν **δι' ἀπιστίαν τε καὶ λήθην**... (493d5-494a1) Φέρε δὴ, ἄλλην σοι εἰκόνα λέγω ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ γυμνασίου τῆ νῦν. σκόπει γὰρ εἰ τοιόνδε λέγεις περὶ τοῦ βίου

ἐκατέρω, τοῦ τε σώφρονος καὶ τοῦ ἀκολάστου, οἷον εἰ δυοῖν ἀνδροῖν ἐκατέρω πίθοι πολλοὶ εἶεν καὶ τῷ μὲν ἑτέρω ὕγιεις καὶ πλήρεις, ὁ μὲν οἴνου, ὁ δὲ μέλιτος, ὁ δὲ γάλακτος, καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ πολλῶν, νάματα δὲ σπάνια καὶ χαλεπὰ ἐκάστου τούτων εἶη καὶ μετὰ πολλῶν πόνων καὶ χαλεπῶν ἐκποριζόμενα· ὁ μὲν οὖν ἕτερος πληρωσάμενος μήτ' ἐποχρετεύοι μήτε τι φροντίζοι, ἀλλ' ἔνεκα τούτων ἡσυχίαν ἔχου· τῷ δ' ἑτέρω τὰ μὲν νάματα, ὡσπερ καὶ ἐκείνῳ, δυνατὰ μὲν πορίζεσθαι, χαλεπὰ δέ, τὰ δ' ἀγγεῖα τετρημένα καὶ σαθρά, ἀναγκάζοιτο δ' αἰεὶ καὶ νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν πιμπλάναι αὐτὰ, ἢ τὰς ἐσχάτας λυποῖτο λύπας. [493d5-494a1]

To characterize a jar as sound (ὕγιεις) is telling: this specific word has been used in the *Gorgias* and elsewhere to describe healthy bodies, healthy minds, and healthy cities (cf. *Res.*557e). In addition to meaning “a jar,” ἀγγεῖον can also refer to more corporeal things, like a human body.<sup>30</sup> So to describe a forgetful person who has an unsound “jar” or “vessel” is to essentialize the physical and natural essence of this person, denying, in turn, that they have the capacity to lead a happy and contemplative life. Similar to those who have itchy bodies are denied a happy life, those who possess these jars are destined to have a painful life. This life is filled with toil, repetition, and dullness, since these laborers are forced to keep using a leaky sieve to pour water into their already leaky jar.

Situated in contemporary Athenian socio-political life, this analogy holds grim implications for the masses, which, among others, include day-laborers and metics. Among fourth-century elite texts, the “masses” are unfavorably depicted as “the poor” (*Xen.Ath.Pol.*I.2.1-2: οἱ πένητες καὶ ὁ δῆμος). The “poor” (οἱ πένητες) differs from the beggars insofar as they are day-laborers who work for their daily breads. Associating the poor with the masses, Pseudo-Xenophon most clearly articulates the correlation between poverty and education: “for indeed poverty leads them rather to shameful things, and because of the lack of wealth, some of these humans possess the state of utter dearth of education and ignorance” (*Xen.Ath.Pol.*I.5.5-6.1: ἢ τε γὰρ πενία αὐτοὺς μᾶλλον ἄγει ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσχρά, καὶ ἡ ἀπαιδευσία καὶ ἡ ἀμαθία δι' ἔνδειαν χρημάτων <ἐν> ἐνίοις τῶν ἀνθρώπων). In the *Republic*, Plato criticizes the poor democratic masses (*Respublica* 552a2: οἱ πένητες) by holding them responsible for the creation of democracy, that is, a corrupt constitution. All of these stand in stark contrast to both Plato and Pseudo-Xenophon’s depiction of the wealthy class. Unlike the poor and the unskilled, the wealthy elites are capable, knowledgeable, and they alone should rule the Athenian political scene (*Xen.Ath.Pol.*3.7: τοὺς δυνατωτάτους; see also I.9.1-2: δεξιωτάτους). After all, as Socrates in the *Republic* contends, it is in fact truly “impossible” (ἀδύνατον) for the masses to be philosophical (*Res.*494a3). To this end, the knowledgeable elite should absolutely reign as sovereigns of the Kallipolis.

The leaky jars analogy applies similarly to metics — foreign residents — who work in Athens for a wage. The formal equality Pseudo-Xenophon harshly criticizes reveals an elite’s perspective on the relationship between metics and native citizens: out of economic needs, “we have created equality between slaves and freemen, and between metics and citizens” (*Xen.Ath.Pol.*I.12.1-2: διὰ τοῦτ' οὖν ἰσηγορίαν καὶ τοῖς δούλοις πρὸς τοὺς ἐλευθέρους ἐποιήσαμεν, καὶ τοῖς μετοίκους πρὸς τοὺς ἀστούς). In Book VIII of the *Republic*, Plato’s Socrates is equally negative with respect to the formal equality instituted between metics and native-borne Athenian citizens: “[in a democracy], metics are equal to native-borne Athenian citizens (*astoi*)

<sup>30</sup> Hippocrates in *De morbis popularibus*, analogizes it to the human body (*Hp.Morb.*4.37); Aristotle, similarly, uses it as an embodiment of the human body (*Arist.HA.*521b6).

and him to the metic, and this is the same for a foreigner as well” (*Res.*563 a1-2: μέτοικον δὲ ἀστῶ καὶ ἀστών μετοίκῳ ἐξισοῦσθαι, καὶ ξένον ὡσαύτως).<sup>31</sup> As a result, this formal equality that in theory indiscriminately grants freedom and right to participate in politics to every social actor (metics, slaves, and the masses) presents a serious threat to the well-being of a political constitution that accommodates the emergence of the corrupt institution of tyranny.

Thus, when Socrates and Callicles disagree on the type of life one should live, the question is never about what type of social actor living this best life is. In fact, Socrates accepts Callicles' view on the majority being much inferior, but disagrees with the ways in which they are inferior. For Callicles, it is a matter of political might that differentiates the elites from the masses — those who by nature are the best should rule, but the despicable and weak rabble have more physical force, thus could outrule the strong. For Socrates, as the jar analogy illustrates, it is a matter of philosophical predisposition. This is also evident in Book VI of the *Republic*, where only the talented youths are qualified to be educated philosophically (*Res.* 494b-496). One can modify one's appetites, as Socrates urges Callicles to do; but such an activity is quite pointless for someone who has a leaky jar by birth. Furthermore, if economic conditions compel a laborer or a metic to toil for life, then the person lacks the time and “leisure” (ἡσυχία) to contemplate philosophical matters: after all, this jar-carrying laborer is “compelled” (ἀναγκάζοιτο) to work day and night. Their constant labor fundamentally obstructs their ability to be educated in a rigorous philosophical program. The question about who can be educated to live the best life is never on Socrates' agenda: he never really cares for those who possess leaky jars “by birth;” the intellectually “inferior” ones will always remain intellectually “inferior,” hence “pitiful” (ἄθλιος). Confining the scope of his *elenchus* to those who already have a good jar — the elites — Socrates then moves on to say that a philosophical life is more worth living than a political life. To reformulate the question “how should one live one's life to the best” — “one” here refers to elites, and not to the masses.

Socrates' essentialist understanding of noble men with good jars and shameful men with bad jars thematically resonates with his naturalistic conception of human essence in the *Republic*. Rose argues that Plato in the *Republic* has a specific conception of professionalization, in that a man can possess only one *techne*. If someone tries to be versatile, it brings destruction to the well-ordered *polis* (after Rose 1982, 364; *Rep.* IV.434a2-b7). The connection between what one does and who one is on a definitional level is intimate. If one is born a moneymaker “by nature,” then he is not worthy to join higher classes (e.g., military class, guardian class). Rose concludes that Plato articulates the thesis that “each of us is born fit to do only one thing” (*ibid.*, 362). This essentialist conception of human nature is, I believe, already present in the *Gorgias*. In the very beginning, Socrates equates the question of “who one is” with the notion of “what one does for a living.” If someone makes shoes as a craftsman (447d4: δημιουργός), then he is, by nature, a “shoemaker” (447d5: σκυτοτόμος) and nothing more. There are, in other words, knack-less and knack-ful people who are the way they are given their professions: moneymakers and pastry bakers will, in other words, always be inferior to, say, doctors and gymnasts. This stands in drastic contrast to Gorgias' own conception of the power of education in molding someone's essence and transforming it in ways that transcend their natural dispositions. Indeed, Socrates does disagree vehemently with Callicles as the *Gorgias* concludes. However, there is an ideologically and politically structured common ground upon which the two characters can reasonably disagree with one other. The elitist language subfuses the words and thoughts of both Callicles and Socrates. Socrates builds his theory of the philosophically competent on Callicles'

<sup>31</sup> For Socrates' hostility towards foreigners, see also *Res.*500a.

theory of nature that discriminates between the superior and the inferior, twisting it with a philosophical note. In other words, the hierarchy established by Socrates becomes fully clear when viewed in tandem with Callicles' elitism.

### Conclusion

Callicles' political elitism and Socrates' philosophical elitism mutually enrich one another. Socrates' philosophy, in this light, does not exist independently in an "ideological vacuum," uprooted from its ideological environment.<sup>32</sup> That Socrates identifies with Callicles' elitist theory of natural disposition is further substantiated by the overall dramatic setting of the dialogue, which takes place in a gymnasium. As readers, we are forced into an anti-democratic space at the very beginning of the *Gorgias*. In the prologue, Socrates and Callicles are moving away from the agora to the inside of the gymnasium; It is all Chaerephon's fault — blames Socrates, for he "was forcing us to waste time in the *agora*" (447a8: "ἐν ἀγορᾷ ἀναγκάσας ἡμᾶς διατρίψαι); let's go inside to the gymnasium to hear Gorgias' speech — encourages Callicles (447 b7-8); thus they went inside. The setting changes from the marketplace, where elements of the lower class, foreigners, women, slaves, and children, are evident, to the gymnasium, which only adult male citizens could attend, including, as Doyle gestures towards, "very many of the Athenian political and culture elite" (Doyle 2010, 7). From the outset, the *Gorgias* marches into an elitist space that excludes a wide variety of audiences; it marches on as Callicles and Socrates consent to it, participate in it, and celebrate it.

Philosophical contemplation is intertwined with one's political status in Plato's literary world. Rose's analysis has brilliantly illustrated the intimate connection between natural disposition and Platonic elitism in the *Republic* (Rose 1995, 331-369). The guardians are well-bred, and they are constantly surveilled so as to ensure that their offspring do not produce inferior souls among the circle of the ruling elite (ibid., 356; *Rep.* 3.413c7-414a4). The transition from *Gorgias* to the *Republic* marks a marriage of two literary characters and two gradations of elitism that each represents: Socrates, in the *Republic*, has become fully Calliclean, as Plato recycles Callicles' theory of natural disposition and attributes this theory to no one other than Socrates himself in the *Republic*. Locally in the *Gorgias*, as we have seen, this elitist theory of natural capacities unified in the *Republic* is dialogically articulated through the collaborative efforts of Callicles and Socrates. Callicles and Socrates are typically viewed as polar opposites. Based on the analysis I have offered, I suggest that it is more productive to discuss what they share than to view them as complete dramatic foils. Even though Callicles and Socrates are committed to different types of elitism, their dialogue mutually substantiates one another's position: Callicles needs Socrates to offer an anti-sophistic theory of education and elucidate his political brand of elitism, and Socrates, similarly, leans on Callicles' theory of natural capacities to construct a philosophical brand of elitism that disqualifies the masses from living a philosophically content life. Against the backdrop of the contemporary sophistic movement, Plato renders explicit Callicles' and Socrates' shared commitments, undermining thereby, their supposed intellectual difference.

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<sup>32</sup> This is a paraphrase of Michael Freeden, from Freeden 2013, 74-5.

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