

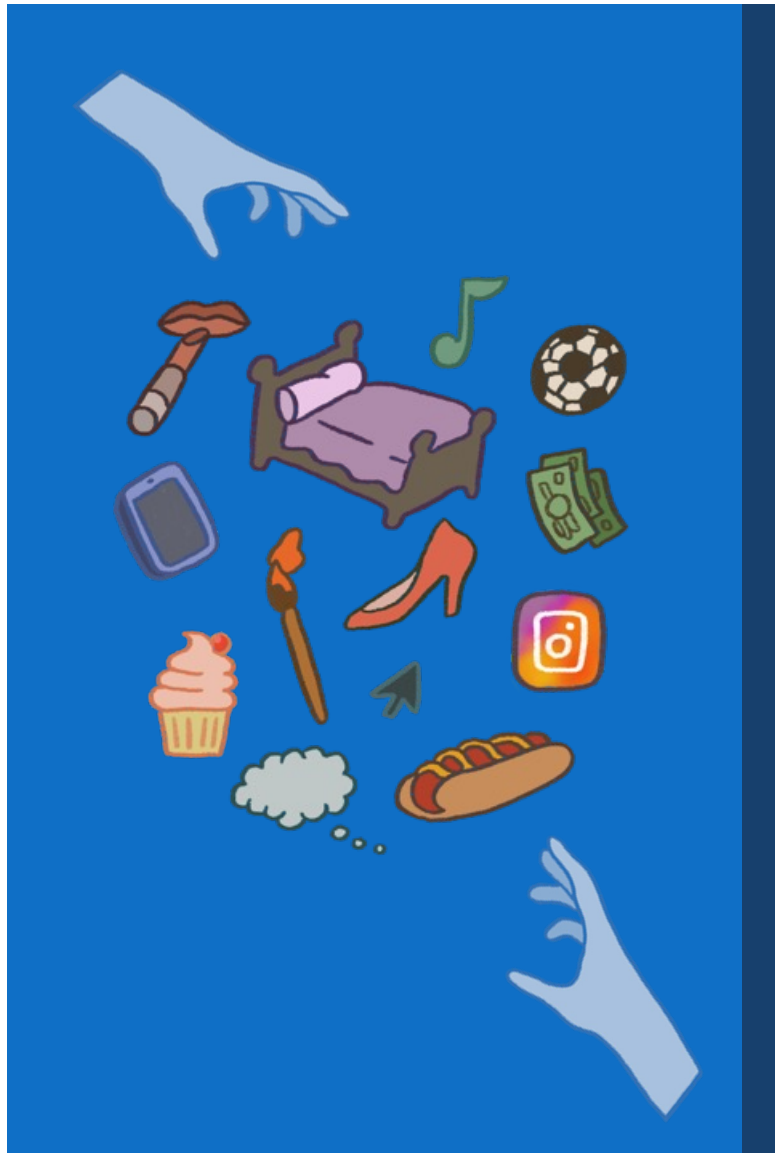
LIVING A GOOD LIFE

Introductory Unit – Lecture 2

The Challenge of Calicles

- a challenge to the philosophical life
- Calicles vs. Socrates in Plato's *Gorgias*
- Calicles' "great speech"
- the role of pleasure in the good life
- introduction to moral psychology





Review and Preview

- Last week
 - completed an inventory of desires (first exercise)
 - desire mapping (second exercise)
- Third exercise due Wednesday
- Today
 - what's the relation between our desires and living a good life?
 - Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*
 - what Socrates and Kongzi have to say in response to Callicles



RHETORIC

PHILOSOPHY



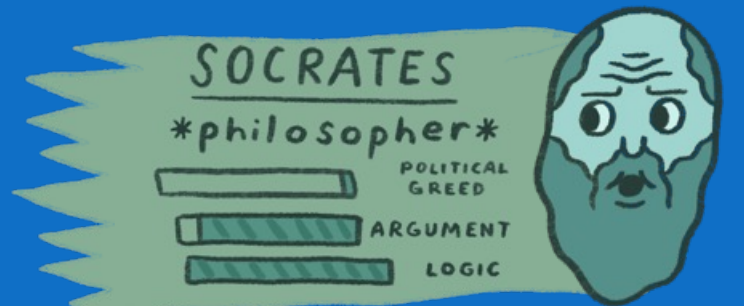
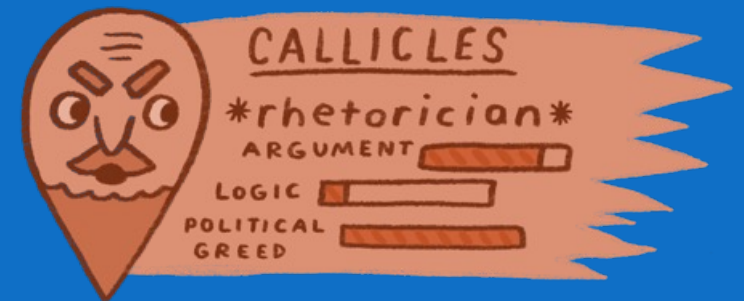
Plato's *Gorgias*



- Some background
 - a text dealing mainly with the nature of rhetoric
 - but also: the nature of power and justice
 - and: what it is we (really) want
 - and: the value of the philosophical life
 - dialogue falls into three parts
 - Gorgias vs. Socrates
 - Polus vs. Socrates
 - Callicles vs. Socrates (longest part of work)
- ? - key question: what's the difference between the life of philosophy and the life of rhetoric according to Plato?

Callicles vs. Socrates

- Final showdown between rhetorician (Callicles) and philosopher (Socrates)
- Callicles takes offence at Socrates' methods
- Argues strongly against Socrates' views
 - especially the value of being just
- Also argues against Socrates' way of life
 - especially its apolitical nature
- Note: Socrates lost his life for doing philosophy
 - was it worth it?

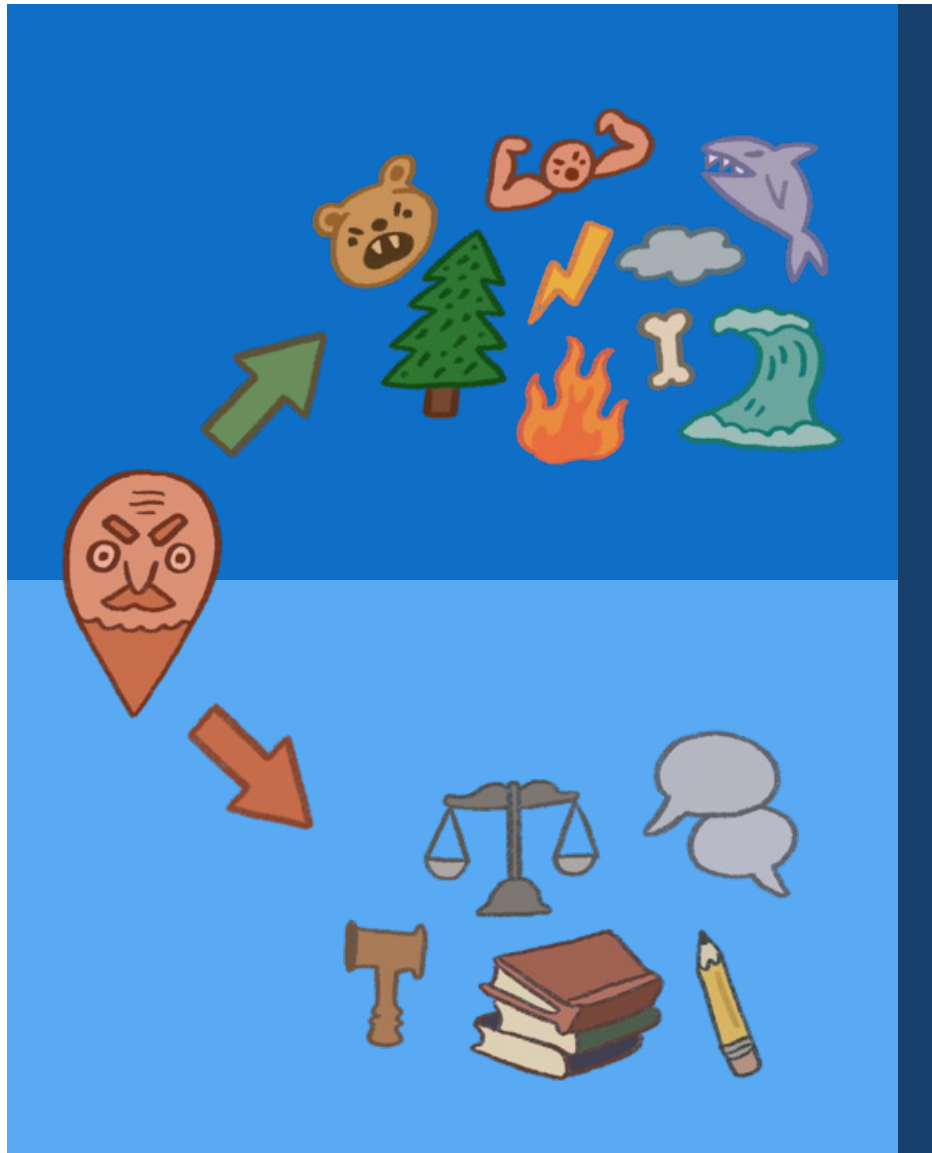


Callicles' Great Speech in the *Gorgias*

Falls into two parts:

1. **482c–484c:** argues against the dictates of conventional morality and develops an account of natural justice according to which the strong and superior few in society rule over and get more than the weak and inferior many;
2. **484c–486d:** criticizes the practice of philosophy as a frivolous and corrupting activity that leaves a person inexperienced in human affairs and incapable of succeeding in the world of democratic politics.





Part 1: A Theory of (Natural) Justice

- Callicles distinguishes between:
 - what's just by nature (*phusis*)
 - what's just by law/convention (*nomos*)
- Natural justice: more powerful should rule over and have more than the less powerful
 - those who get as much as possible for themselves follow the “law of nature” (*Gorgias* 483e)
- Conventional justice: conspiracy of the weak and inferior many against the strong and superior few
 - conventional morality (“get no more than your fair share”) is a sham devised by the weak to get power in society

Part 2: The Uselessness of Philosophy



“Philosophy is no doubt a delightful thing, Socrates, as long as one is exposed to it in moderation at the appropriate time of life. But if one spends more time with it than he should, it’s a man’s undoing. For even if one is naturally well favored but engages in philosophy far beyond that appropriate time of life, he can’t help but turn out to be inexperienced in everything a man who’s to be admirable and good and well thought of is supposed to be experienced in. [...] To partake of as much philosophy as your education requires is an admirable thing, and it’s not shameful to practice philosophy while you’re a boy, but when you still do it after you’ve grown older and become a man, the thing gets to be ridiculous, Socrates! [...] When I see philosophy in a young boy, I approve of it; I think it’s appropriate and consider such a person well-bred, whereas I consider one who doesn’t engage in philosophy ill-bred, one who’ll never count himself deserving of any admirable or noble thing. But when I see an older man still engaging in philosophy and not giving it up, I think such a man by this time really needs a beating.” (*Gorgias* 484c–485a)

The Contradictions of Callicles



Are the two parts of Callicles' speech consistent?

Part 1: Callicles rejects the dictates of convention and speaks contemptuously of popular opinion

“I believe that the people who institute our laws (*nomoi*) are the weak and the many. [...] I believe that nature itself (*phusis*) reveals that it's a just thing for the better man and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the less capable man.” (483b–d)

Part 2: Callicles seems less hostile to conventional values and more enamored with popular opinion

“Such people [philosophers] turn out to be inexperienced in the laws (*nomoi*) of their city or in the kind of speech one must use to deal with people on matters of business, whether in public or private, inexperienced also in human pleasures and appetites and, in short, inexperienced in the ways of humans altogether.” (484d)

The Contradictions of Callicles



Are the two parts of Callicles' speech consistent?

Part 1: Callicles rejects the dictates of convention and speaks contemptuously of popular opinion

Part 2: Callicles seems less hostile to conventional values and more enamored with popular opinion

The problem: to succeed in politics in the way that he recommends (in Part 2), Callicles must affirm the egalitarian values of the masses he despises (in Part 1).

A possible solution for Callicles:

- put on a performance publicly that you endorse conventional morality
- but privately seek your own advantage and as much as possible for yourself
- get others to think you're promoting their good, without really promoting their good

The Contradictions of Callicles



Are the two parts of Callicles' speech consistent?

A possible solution for Callicles:

- put on a performance publicly that you endorse conventional morality
- but privately seek your own advantage and as much as possible for yourself
- get others to think you're promoting their good, without really promoting their good

A new problem: isn't this an exhausting way of life?

- to succeed privately, Callicles seeks the promotion of his own status and the gratification of his personal desires through the exercise of power over others
- but to succeed publicly, he must seek to gratify the desires of the many
- the disharmony of the rhetorical way of life



Socrates in the *Apology*: “Throughout my life, in any public activity I may have engaged in, I am the same man as I am in private life” (33a).



Two Ways of Life



Socrates to Callicles:

“For you see, don’t you, that our arguments are about this — and what would a human being of even little intelligence take more seriously than this? — about the way we’re supposed to live. Is it the way you urge me toward, to engage in these manly activities, to make speeches among the people, practice rhetoric, and take part in the sort of politics you people engage in these days? Or is it the life spent in philosophy (*philosophia*)?”

– *Gorgias* 500c

Callicles vs. Socrates

Cross-examination of Callicles (*Gorgias* 488b–495c)

- Socrates questions the idea of “natural justice”

Socrates:

- who are the superior?
- and what good things do they deserve more of?

Callicles:

- the superior = the intelligent and the brave
- the good they deserve = the satisfaction of their most intense desires
 - anything impeding this (e.g., laws, norms, conventional virtues) = slavery
 - so the good life = life of maximal pleasure

The superior
= who?



The brave
&
intelligent!



Callicles vs. Socrates

Cross-examination of Callicles (*Gorgias* 488b–495c)

- Socrates questions the idea of “natural justice”

Socrates:

- but aren't there better and worse desires?
- if so, aren't there better and worse pleasures for a human being to experience?

Callicles:

- no such thing as good and bad pleasures
- all pleasures are equally good for a person
- the more intense the pleasure, the better
- what's good = what's most pleasant

Crucial question: are all pleasures equally good?



A Socratic Reply to Callicles

Two aspects of Callicles' theory of natural justice

- ┌ HUMAN NATURE (*phusis*) = pleasure-seeking
- └ HUMAN CONVENTION/CUSTOM (*nomos*) = slavery

Socrates on Human Nature

- what's important to living well is not:
experiencing as much pleasure as possible
- but: examining what's worth taking pleasure in
- this is also part of our nature
- and perhaps the most important part
- *Apology* 38a: "The unexamined life is not worth living."



A Confucian Reply to Callicles

Two aspects of Callicles' theory of natural justice

HUMAN NATURE (*phusis*) = pleasure-seeking

└ HUMAN CONVENTION/CUSTOM (*nomos*) = slavery

Kongzi on Human Conventions

- *Analects* 7:1: “Transmitting and not inventing; having confidence in and loving the ancients”
- *Analects* 2:11: “One who reanimates [warms up] the old in order to understand the new — such a person can be called a teacher.”
- tradition vs. traditionalism
- can we be fully human without conventions?



Moral Psychology

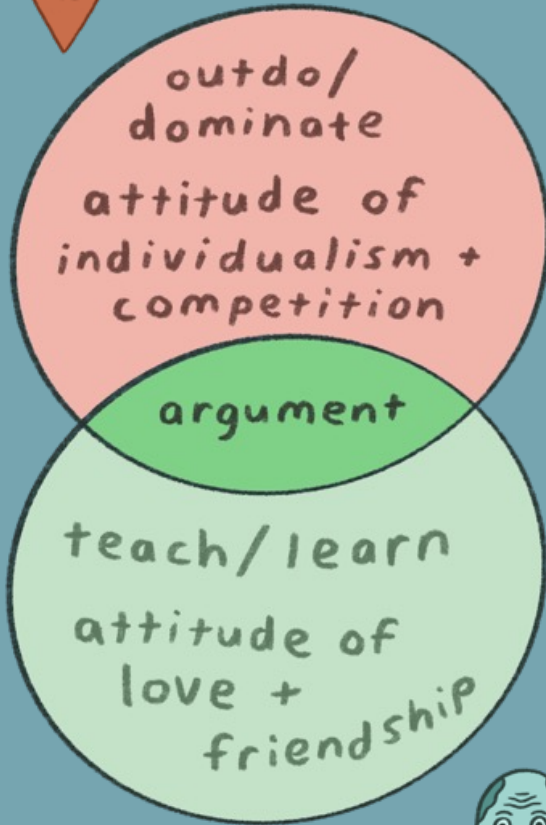


- **Psychology** (theories of self/soul/person)
- **Ethics** (theories about the good life)
- **Practices** (of cultivation, therapy, etc.)

Callicles' Moral Psychology



- **Psychology** (theories of self/soul/person)
 - desires of various intensities
 - pleasure, bravery, intelligence
- **Ethics** (theories about the good life)
 - good life = satisfaction of desires = pleasure
 - the more intense, the better
- **Practices** (of cultivation, therapy, etc.)
 - cultivate power = ability to get what you desire
 - rhetoric is a key skill because it confers power



The Rhetorical Ethos vs. the Philosophical Ethos

- Similarities between rhetorician and philosopher
 - both use arguments/speeches/words
 - discourse that has an effect on others
- Dissimilarities
 - life of rhetoric is accompanied by a certain ethos
 - particularly: desire to outdo/dominate others
 - compare this with a philosophical attitude toward argument
- Philosophy requires a different purpose to argument
 - teaching/learning
- Philosophy requires a different attitude to others
 - friendship/respect

Toward an Art of Argument

- Compare a rhetorical approach to argument with a philosophical approach to argument
- If you view others as adversaries ...
 - then argument becomes a tool of domination
- But if argument is a tool of learning ...
 - then you view others as partners
- A proper engagement in argument requires a proper engagement with others



Recap

- Callicles' challenge to the philosophical life
- Callicles' extreme hedonism
- Socrates' and Kongzi's responses
- rhetorical vs. philosophical ethos
- disharmoniousness of the rhetorical life
- harmoniousness of the philosophical life

