The Problem of Political Authority in the Philosophy of Plato and Hegel

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Political Science
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the problem of political authority in Plato and Hegel. It is animated by an interest in the disavowal of authority characteristic of political culture today, and serves to fill gaps in the existing literature on German and Greek political philosophy. Contemporary scholarship on German Idealism follows Hegel in comparing 19th century critical philosophy to Greek philosophy, which it claims to surpass on account of its emphasis on subjective freedom. At the same time, contemporary reappraisals of Greek political thought hold up Plato and the classical teachings on rhetoric as promising alternatives to philosophy from Kant to Hegel, which is found to be overly rationalistic and insufficient in its treatment of political passion. Due to the division of scholarly labor, an adequate confrontation between classical political thought and German idealism remains wanting. Through a rigorous textual analysis of the Philosophy of Right and Gorgias, the dissertation expounds the Platonic and Hegelian approaches to the problem of political authority, and supplies the grounds for a dialogue between the two thinkers. On the basis of this preparatory work, it proceeds to take up the consolidation of political authority, or the production of obedience by the regime, insofar as Plato and Hegel disagree profoundly on that subject and its significance to political right. The dissertation presents the political philosophy of Plato and Hegel as robust and contesting alternatives, and concludes by returning to the challenge of political authority as it faces us today.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my parents, whose support throughout the course of my studies permitted me to work in relative freedom from “external impediments.” Because parents are the most traditional authorities, let this work be dedicated to them. I have been blessed with many excellent mentors, starting with my later years as an undergraduate at Carleton University. I am grateful to Tom Darby, Waller R. Newell and the late Peter Emberly for turning my attention from lesser pursuits to the study of political philosophy. At the University of Toronto, I benefited immensely from the supervision and insight of Clifford Orwin. I thank him for approving an ambitious dissertation on Plato and Hegel, and forbidding one on Plato, Hobbes and Hegel. One could not hope to find a better teacher. Simone Chambers and Ryan Balot were ongoing sources of encouragement and moderation, and both were excellent committee members. Ronald Beiner’s tremendous generosity as an interlocutor has given me many occasions to be grateful, and I thank him for reading my manuscript and serving as my internal examiner. I am also thankful to the learned Mark Blitz, who acted as my external examiner and asked all the right questions. In different times, places and ways, Ed Andrew, Alan Brudner, Geoff Kellow, Heinrich Meier, Neil Nevitte, Martin Saar and Ludwig Siep made important contributions to my research or education. I have also benefited immensely from countless conversations with my many excellent colleagues and talented friends in the academy, some of whom commented on chapters of this manuscript. In this regard, I could not fail to thank Rob Ballingall, Kiran Banerjee, Scott Dodds, Tiago Lier, Christopher McClure, Alex Orwin, David Polansky, Dan Schillinger and Igor Shoikhedbrod. Special mention goes to Christopher LaRoche and his formidable appetite for dialectics. To Emma, who is my “better half” in more ways than one, I owe that my many years of study have proven most joyous. It remains for me to insist that the many imperfections of this dissertation are entirely my own.
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“The man of system, on the contrary, is apt to be very wise in his own conceit; and is often so enamoured with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government, that he cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it. He goes on to establish it completely and in all its parts, without any regard for either the great interests or to the strong prejudices which may oppose it. He seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board. He does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it. If those two principles coincide and act in the same direction, the game of human society will go on easily and harmoniously, and is very likely to be happy and successful. If they are opposite or different, the game will go on miserable, and the society must be at all times in the highest degree of disorder.”

-Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, P.VI, S.II, Ch. II
Introduction

authority (ə thôr′i tē, ə thor′), n., pl. –ties. 1. the power to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues or disputes; jurisdiction; the right to control, command, or determine. 2. a power or right delegated or given; authorization… 3. a person or body of persons in whom authority is vested, as a government agency. 4. Usually, authorities. Persons having the legal power to make and enforce the law; government… 5. an accepted source of information, advice, etc. 6. A quotation or citation from such a source. 7. an expert on a subject… 8. a persuasive force; conviction… 9. a statute, court rule, or judicial decision that establishes a rule or principle of law; a ruling. 10. Right to respect or acceptance of one’s word, command, thought, etc.; commanding influence… 11. mastery in execution or performance, as of a work of art or literature or piece of music. 12. warrant for action; justification. 13. Testimony; witness [1200-500; earlier auct(h)oritie < L auctōritās; r. ME autoritie < OF < L. See AUTHOR, -ITY] —Syn. 1. rule, power, sway. AUTHORITY, CONTROL, INFLUENCE denote a power or right to direct the actions or thoughts of others. AUTHORITY is a power or right, usually because of rank or office, to issue commands and to punish for violations… CONTROL is either power or influence applied to the complete and successful direction or manipulation of persons or things… INFLUENCE is a personal or unofficial power derived from deference of others to one’s character, ability, or station; it may be exerted unconsciously or may operate through persuasion… 2. Sovereign, arbiter.¹

I. What is Problematic about Political Authority?

This dissertation, like all projects, began with a set of preconceptions. Three stand out in particular. First, that political authority poses a distinct problem for the political culture of our time. Second, that Plato and Hegel can help us understand that problem. Third, that the political philosophies of Plato and Hegel, though seldom brought into relation, can be mutually illuminating. In the beginning, these were little more than “guiding intuitions” or “hunches.” They have since hardened into the form of conviction. Because this project presupposes that each is a sound and reasonable judgment to make, we shall begin by taking them up in turn.

That political authority has fallen into widespread cultural disfavor is both obvious and well documented. The period of years through which this project matured from a hazy proposal to the pages that follow was defined by the frequency of “mass” protest events. The G20 riots in Toronto set the stage for the project’s inception in 2009. Since then we have witnessed the “Kitchenware Revolution,” “Arab Spring,” the “Tea Party,” the “Indignados,” “Wikileaks,” the rise of “Hacktivism,” “Pussy Riot,” “Occupy Wall Street,” the “Umbrella Movement,” “Black

Lives Matter,” *et cetera*. Meanwhile, countless anti-austerity and anti-authoritarian protests or riots have taken place throughout Europe, the former Soviet Union and elsewhere. The “Protestor” was *Time* Magazine’s 2011 “Person of The Year.” In 2013, dubbed “the Year of Protest,” a report by the *Economist Intelligence Unit* recorded no less than 70 mass protests in the recent past.² Public protest against the perceived abuse of political authority, however real or dubious, grave or trifling, is thus an obvious fixture of 21st century life.

It was also a more or less obvious fixture of mid to late 20th century life. In the 1980s it became popular amongst political scientists and sociologists to refer to “New Social Movements.”³ For decades political scientists have told us that we live in a time of “Critical Citizens” and “Dissatisfied Democrats,” that the increasingly critical bearing of contemporary publics amounts to a “Crisis in Democracy,” a “Legitimation Crisis,” a “Democratic Deficit,” a “Decline in Deference,” or “Counter-Democracy.”⁴ At the same time, it has become common to refer to such things as “our Libertarian age,” “the age of distrust” and the “decline in civic spiritedness.”⁵ Polls by Gallup, the Pew Research Center, and the OECD continue to record declining trust in state institutions and widespread disappointment with government.⁶

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Governments everywhere, regardless of their democratic credentials, are falling short of the expectations of increasingly assertive citizens, who are more likely than ever to engage in “contentious politics.”

A massive research program built around the World Values Survey has shown more or less persuasively that contemporary publics and those of advanced industrial states especially have “post-modernized” or “post-materialized.” Less “valued” are the goods associated with the state in its classical formulation, viz., security, order and commodious well-being. Apparently more “valued” are matters of “subjective authenticity,” “life-style” choices, and a plethora of issues and agendas pursuant to human emancipation. In these ways political authority and the traditional representatives of state power are held in definitively lower esteem by contemporary publics. Because that is especially so in the case of advanced industrial – which is to say mostly, but not exclusively, “Western” – states, the disavowal of political authority would seem to be part and parcel of the life cycle or maturation process of the modern state as such.

The problem is readily reformulated in terms of the history of political philosophy. The more modest goals of the modern project in its initial formulation appear to have given way to the more ambitious goals of “late” and “post” modernity. The early architects of the modern state were concerned primarily with ensuring the basic conditions for political order. Their concerns were necessarily more prosaic than our own: security, private property, ensuring the performance of contracts, the institution of power, settling disputes and religious toleration – but

not yet universal humanity and “recognition.” Freedom and subjectivity, though certainly at issue, had not yet become the cynosure of political theory. But as the history of modern political thought unfolds, these only grow in philosophical and practical importance. From a seemingly peripheral concern in the philosophy Hobbes, freedom and subjectivity become absolutely central in the philosophies of Kant, Hegel and, Nietzsche. Thus the Hobbesian and Lockean politics of consent grounded in security and commodious living have been supplanted by Rousseauian appeals to authenticity and Kantian appeals to morality. For related reasons, early modern political thought seems narrow to contemporary audiences, insufficiently protective of our rights as human beings and cold to the diversity of the human experience. Nevertheless, and perhaps above all, it is the success of the modern project in realizing its original goals that has liberated modern man to take the comforts of modern life for granted and look beyond the deliberately narrow horizon of the *Leviathan*. Depending on how one views the matter, that success might be considered its greatest failure.

We are generally committed to the view that institutional power must be justified on the basis of popular consent. At the same time, our understanding of what deserves consent is conceived in increasingly rarefied ways that confound the justification of political authority. In seeking to render institutional power worthy of consent, we look increasingly beyond the bounded community that is the state. We tend more and more to look above the state to humanity as a whole, or below the state to matters of personal identity. We refer no longer to what a given community ought to consent to, but what merits consent from the perspective of humanity as whole. We think not only of our own security, but that of “others,” whether people on the other side of the globe, or marginalized groups at home. Thus Rousseauian and Kantian politics have for some given way to those of Marcuse, Foucault and Derrida. If the task of rendering institutional power justifiable is not regarded completely dubious – already a big “if”
– it demands at any rate the deconstruction of exclusionary accounts of mankind, wherever they are found to be overly rationalistic, naturalistic, western, statist, racist, gendered, ableist, et cetera. For nothing less is demanded by the effort to justify political authority to all possible “subjects.” Thus, as we move away from the early modern to the late and post-modern, the justification of institutional power becomes increasingly fraught.⁹

One might conclude on the basis of the foregoing that the modern state, and political authority with it, is in its dying throes. It would be exceedingly hasty to draw that conclusion. There can be no doubt that governments continue to exact obedience on a wide and decisive scale. The presence of “critical citizens,” the rise of diverse “social movements” and “issue groups” has not resulted in any overturning of the traditional representatives of state power, let alone “global” capitalism. The social movements of the past decade have proven mostly ephemeral and disappointing. There have been considerable achievements in some areas – gay and transgender rights come to mind – but, however that may be, “new social movements” have proven altogether incapable of altering the basic structure of political and institutional power relations. Most obviously, where the anti-authoritarian protests of yesteryear captivated attention and hopes, there has been a resurgence of authoritarian politics and nationalism over and against the aspirations of the globalization movement. The great enthusiasm which “Arab Spring” and “Occupy Wall Street” once engendered has since become a bad joke. Less than half a decade later, it would be preposterous to assert that “The Revolution” is “kicking off everywhere.”¹⁰ For


the same reason, those who once heralded the imminent implosion of democracy seem histrionic in hindsight. As even those most sympathetic agree, the anti-programmatic, anti-political, spontaneous and horizontal character of “internet age” mass protest movements all but dooms them to failure, since incompatible with the rigorous pursuit of political ends.\textsuperscript{11} The nature of organization, of mass society, continues to impose vertical limits on the will to realize a horizontal participatory politics.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, whatever might be said of the decline of deference and the post-modernization of political culture, the traditional representatives of state power continue to effectively hold sway over public decision making. In other words, the problem is not simply the devaluation of political authority. It is the consolidation of political authority in the midst of what appears to be its widespread disavowal.\textsuperscript{13}

How are we to make sense of this phenomenon? Many of the questions raised above are empirical ones, to be taken up in research of a corresponding nature. But they are not only empirical questions, for the empirical puzzle goes to the heart of a philosophical one. That question concerns the philosophical significance accorded to or denied to the \textit{actuality} of the modern state. Theoretically speaking, the tension between freedom and political authority would seem irresolvable. Practically speaking, if the two were simply irreconcilable, the modern state could not exist in the way that it does.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, as a composite of liberty and restraint, of “horizontal” equality and “vertical” hierarchy, the empirical existence of the modern state continues to baffle us, or at least those whose business it is to theorize about politics. That is


\textsuperscript{13} Rosanvallon, \textit{Counter-Democracy}, 1-27.

\textsuperscript{14} “The problem is insoluble theoretically. Yet it must be resolved if the city is to exist and it is in practice resolved since cities do exist. What does that mean?” Pierre Manent, \textit{The City of Man}, trans. Marc LePain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 165
discernible in the basic fact that we continue to waver between a morality too pure to be practical and practice too impure to be moral.

We are acutely aware that our commitment to democracy and emancipation are somehow at odds with the hierarchical distribution of power. At the same time, because most are aware that the goods which the modern state exists to realize on our behalves depend on vertical relations of power, exceedingly few regard the institution of political authority dispensable. Thus our opinions and intuitions about political authority are paradoxical or run crosswise. Moral commitments incline us to endorse the disavowal of authority, but practical sensibilities give us good reason to be thankful for deference to authority where it remains in force. Indeed, do we not find ourselves endorsing as beneficial what so much of contemporary morality regards regrettable? Is it not “good” that the new waves of protest have in large part failed? Or is “endorse” too strong? Are we reconciled or resigned to the vertical necessities of political power? In these ways political authority exists uncomfortably at the confluence of our morality and practice, from whence derives our intention to take it up as a problem in its own right.

II. Why Hegel?

We turn now to the second preconception that has animated this project from the outset, that Plato and Hegel have something to teach us about the problem of political authority. Because Hegel is closer to us, and Plato very remote, let us begin with the former. The previous section concluded with a question: how are we to understand the consolidation of political authority alongside its widespread disavowal? That question designates a phenomenon: “the consolidation of political authority.” We are concerned with the production of obedience by the regime, a capacity all the more remarkable when viewed in the context of postmodern, which is to say especially anti-authoritarian, political culture. If the justification of political authority has become fraught, what is it that effectively welds or reconciles subjects to the determinate
structure of modern regimes? Finally, can a positive significance be ascribed to the phenomenon, or is it only to be regretted? Again, are we reconciled or resigned to political authority? This study begins from questions such as these.

These are patently Hegelian questions. But they are not only Hegelian questions, and could easily be restated in the idioms of Rousseau or Marx. Without denying the worth of doing so, and at the risk of oversimplifying, the following answer may be supplied for favoring the study of Hegel. It is our horizontal and universalistic moral-theoretical bearing, as well as our emphasis on subjective freedom, that makes political authority problematic for us today. With respect to Rousseau, he is not yet concerned with universal moral claims or human freedom in the precise sense that we are. As for Marx, he no longer is. Other differences aside, our normative outlook is still overwhelmingly Kantian. To the possible objection that our morality may be mistaken, it may be replied that this would leave unchanged the fact that it is our morality, and confronts us with distinct challenges as such. Although a more adequate treatment of the relevant issues will be provided below in Part 1.B, it may be said that Hegel reflects a mixture of Kantianism and anti-Kantianism fit for the theoretical and political quarrels of our time. For, if the problem of political authority sits uncomfortably where our morality meets our practice, Hegel comes to sight as being neither too moralistic nor too narrowly “realistic,” sufficiently “critical” without being unduly “formal.” He is, of course, the thinker most famously concerned with the coincidence of opposites.

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15 The Kant-Hegel problem is therefore, at least for the time being, increasingly regarded as “our problem.” That the Kant-Hegel problem is of primary importance “for us” is argued most forcefully throughout the work of Robert Pippin. See especially *Idealism as Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and *Interanimations: Receiving Modern German Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Hegel sought to think human freedom through to its end, and political authority through to its end, and derive the latter from the former. To understand what that would entail, it is helpful to think for a moment longer in terms of Rousseau and Kant. According to Hegel’s glowing approval in the Philosophy of Right, Rousseau sought to root the state in the principle of the will.\textsuperscript{17} Kant, thereafter, refined Rousseau’s general will into the form of “free thought,” and reintroduced it as the principle of philosophy in its entirety. Hegel approves of Rousseau’s general will for Kantian reasons. He regards the will as a manifestation of reason as Rousseau himself did not.\textsuperscript{18} The implied shift is of first order importance. For, precisely because willing came to be conceived primarily in terms of reason, the justification of political authority to the highest demands of human willing came to mean a justification to the highest demands of reason.

Confronted by the French Revolution, and the upheavals in philosophy and politics unleashed by the new critical spirit, Hegel sought to comprehend to the deepest extent possible man’s effort to reshape the world entirely on the basis of free reflection. He therefore sought to comprehend how the subject could be reconciled to the modern state in terms of human freedom, rationally comprehended. That meant the generation of political authority from out of subjective freedom, \textit{viz.} the very principle in the name of which deference to traditional authority was being aggressively rooted out. In these ways, the specifically political problem confronted by Hegel is the direct spiritual ancestor to the problem of political authority as it confronts us today.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{17}All references to Hegel’s works are, unless noted, to the 1970 \textit{Suhrkamp Verlag Theorie Wekausgabe} edition of the complete works edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Section numbers, or part, chapter and division letters or numbers, will be provided in angular brackets where available; paragraph numbers will be provided for the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit} and Hegel’s prefaces, also in angular brackets. Translations are the author’s own, unless indicated. Translations consulted are listed in the Bibliography. \textit{Werke VII: Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts} (hereafter \textit{PhR}), 80-81, 399-400. [§29, §258R,].
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
If Hegel confronted a problem that continues to be our problem, it remains nevertheless to be seen whether his approach to that problem could be of any interest to us. There is at least one respect in which Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority differs radically from our own, and in ways that might be taken to override any possible interest we may have in reading him. We refer to Hegel’s “systematic” and “scientific” approach to philosophy. Hegel takes the problem of political authority in terms of its essential relation to other problems, which we no longer regard essential in the precise sense that he did. In particular, the entirety of Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority issues out of a more fundamental effort to understand man as a specifically historical or spiritual, as opposed to simply natural, being. As a result of that effort, Hegel comes to the conclusion that the modern state has in some decisive respect solved the problem of political authority. In other words, although political authority is “highly problematic” for us, one could argue with some justification that Hegel did not consider political authority problematic at all. It is characteristic of emphases on “problems” that difficulties are assumed to take precedence over solutions. To speak of problems is to assume that history has not “ended,” that political authority is a problem that has not been solved, “in principle” or otherwise. It will nevertheless be shown that some considerable further effort must be made to understand what it does and does not mean to speak of Hegelian “solutions.” This project therefore begins with an effort to “reactivate” the problems that motivated Hegel’s search for solutions, as the only viable basis for understanding his approach to the problem of political authority and the conclusions he arrived at.

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It suffices, for introductory purposes, to reflect for a moment on the fact that Hegel is widely known as the philosopher of reconciliation. In the case of political authority that may be taken to mean the following. The tension between (subjective) freedom and (substantial) authority is resolved, overcome or contained by the everyday workings of the modern state. To cite a passage of central importance to this study:

“The principle of modern states has monstrous [ungeheure] strength and depth because it lets the principle of subjectivity fulfill [complete – vollenden] itself in the independent [selbständigen] extreme of personal particularity, while at the same time leading it back to substantial unity, and so preserves this substantial unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.”21

At work in the sphere of modern civil society, speculative philosophy discerns a rationally intelligible process that effectively binds subjectivity to the institutions of modernity. Hegel discerns in the din and apparent chaos of civil society the graduated emergence of a hidden order, a “cunning of reason” by means of which the authority of the regime is embedded into the full range of subjectivity. On the basis of that process, comprehended according to its rational necessity, it is to be concluded that all may be reconciled to the state, that the state has effectively consolidated its authority on the basis of subjective freedom, and in such a manner that is to be regarded reasonable, just, and actual.

Claims such as these are not taken seriously today, and often for good reason. To be sure, the typical interpretation of Hegel – the rosy-glassed, end of history, reconciler – is not especially useful to us today. Thankfully, Hegel’s views are not what they are commonly taken to be. As we shall see in Part 1.A, the “philosopher of reconciliation” gives us little initial reason to regard the prospect of a fully reconciled politics all that promising. If Hegel was the thoughtless optimist he is easily taken to be, why does he always seem so worried about the forces of ethical dissolution? Similarly, why is “ethical life” shot through to the end with painful

21 Translations of the German are the author’s own, except where indicated. Translations listed in the Bibliography have been consulted. PhR, 406-407 [§260].
and necessary forms of alienation: crime and punishment, divorce and the dissolution of families, the intensification of poverty, and war without the prospect of perpetual peace? As for the reconciliation of citizens to the modern state, it is hardly monolithic or “absolute”. Some, if not most, will only “find themselves in the state” in ways that extend from the will to feed their families or acquire property. Others will be reconciled in loftier terms of patriotism, civic duty, and religion. Perhaps a minute few will be reconciled by Hegelian philosophy. As for the rest, some will not be reconciled at all. Indeed, in the Preface to the Philosophy of Right Hegel says that reconciliation is the preserve of philosophy alone. At the very least, “the State is no work of art; it stands in the world, and thus in the sphere of arbitrariness [Willkür], of chance and error; and bad behavior can disfigure it in many aspects.” Any satisfactory interpretation of “reconciliation,” or Hegelian “solutions,” to say nothing of the “rationality of the actual,” must be rendered consistent with the many imperfections of modern life that Hegel draws attention to and deems ineradicable.

In Part 1.B especially, we shall see that Hegel’s disposition toward the imperfection of actual political life is anchored in the deepest recesses of his speculative philosophy. The broader constellation of philosophical problems opened up by the (Kantian) critical project and the (post-Kantian) “pantheism controversy” convinced Hegel that political theory had yet to bring itself into proper relation to natural necessity and contingency insofar as these stand in relation to human freedom and its projects. Although recent scholarship tends to downplay the freedom-nature problem – a necessary corrective to the old “Neoplatonic” Hegel – that tendency

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23 PhR, 27 [14].
24 PhR, 404 [§258A].
can only be taken so far. The relation of freedom to nature, as Hegel understands it, provides the basis for his entire orientation toward the empirical fact that the modern state proves able to consolidate its authority in the often “hostile” medium of subjectivity.

In Part 3.A, the subjective will, and the “natural will” in particular, is shown to be at once emancipatory and ministerial to the ends of the modern state. It provides the means of emancipating modern man from products of spirit that have grown old (viz., “traditional authority”). At the same time, the dynamics of the subjective will lend themselves to the ends of the modern state, and in ways that anchor its authority, as never before, in the deepest recesses of human inwardness. Thus the “cunning of reason” works its ruse on nature’s two-fold “hostility” and “malleability,” which supplies the empirical context for the existence of political right. In the foregoing manner, and notwithstanding the “critical” impetus of Hegel’s philosophy insofar as it regards the category of “nature” inadequate for the philosophical study of political right, Hegel’s “idealism” rests on a more elementary conviction that the modern “spiritual” world is more robust than the natural (or “realistic”) dynamics that might otherwise threaten to unravel it. For reason would not need “cunning” if nature ceased simply to be a “problem.”

The interest and difficulty of Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority derives from his effort to bring worldly imperfection into the center of practical philosophy. More specifically, it derives from the fact that Hegel does so all the while denying that the apparent sacrifice in moral rigor or idealism is a sacrifice at all. Because Hegel is of the view

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25 “A recent commentator (Brandom) is right that for Hegel the ‘realm of das Geistige’ is the ‘normative order,’ and it is now well known and much appreciated that conceiving of the central modern dualism not as a metaphysical issue about nature and freedom, or materialism and immaterialism, but as a ‘logical’ or categorical issue about the natural and the normative, or as Sellars first formulated it, the space of causes and the space of reasons, has catapulted Hegel back onto the world, especially Anglophone, contemporary scene in an exciting way.” We regard the development in question a needed corrective. At the same time, that corrective is easily taken too far. The limited extent to which the philosophy of Hegel can be conceived independently of the nature-freedom relation is discernible, perhaps, insofar as the same author devotes the better half of his major and deepest work on Hegel to that very problem, which in the later context is regarded dispensable. Pippin, Hegel’s Practical Philosophy, 235-236; see also the first two parts of Hegel’s Idealism.
that alienation is coterminous with existence, the philosophy of Hegel is determined not simply by the effort to overcome alienation, but to domesticate and re-channel it. That alienation can be repurposed but not, strictly speaking, overcome, is reflected at every stage of Hegel’s philosophical enterprise. It is reflected in particular in the positive significance that Hegel accords to the modern state’s capacity to frustrate not only every day caprice or avarice, but the ambitions of the “moral world view” insofar as these may extend beyond the ends of the state and limits of the possible. Hegel is the thinker of “eating one’s cake and having it.” A seemingly full-blown realism is accorded the status of fully developed idealism. Extraordinary concessions are presented as if they met the highest demands of reason and political right. Hegel contends that we can be satisfied with the consolidation of political authority as he renders it, for the desire for more is based on a series of fundamental, insufficiently “critical,” misunderstandings. Accordingly, where we are most dissatisfied, Hegel confronts us with the satisfaction of self-consciousness. He claims not only that all sufficiently reasonable people can partake in that satisfaction, but that all or most to a considerable and decisive extent do.26

We are predisposed to find such claims shocking and insupportable. That does not make Hegel any less interesting, but only more so. It is for essential reasons that, after Hegel, older Rousseauian reservations were reinvigorated by thinkers as diverse as Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger. According to Hegel’s successors, the dynamics of alienation, to say nothing of the intolerableness of alienation, are decisive. For each, “reconciliation” would be conceived as a phenomenon derivative of a more fundamental relation of alienation that obscures its roots. Reconciliation is the illusion of those who cannot, or are insufficiently self-aware to, face reality. For that reason, the effort to overcome alienation took the well-known form of an effort to overcome bourgeois civil society, whether in the direction of a post-

26 Let it be noted that “reconciliation” and “satisfaction” are not simply the same, or that the demands of the latter may be lesser than the former.
bourgeois order, the ecstatic experience of the faithful, the creative will of the artist, heeding the
dispensations of being, *et cetera*. Less obvious, however, than the reason for this combined
assault is its practical soundness. For, although the theoretical authority of the modern state has
been assailed from all sides, all practical efforts to replace it have faltered, present day efforts
included. Hegel may well have been too sanguine in thinking that all could (in principle) find
satisfaction in the modern state. Nevertheless, his insistence on the “monstrous power” of the
modern state would seem well taken. For Nietzsche, Marx, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Foucault
and Derrida are only able to denounce the inauthenticity of the modern world on the basis of a
general agreement regarding its far reaching, if insidious, power. The philosophy of Hegel thus
provokes further reflection regarding the relation of satisfaction to that which is powerful or
effective in the world.

**III. Why Hegel and Plato?**

The history of political philosophy provides a surfeit of foils to the Hegelian
understanding of political authority. It therefore remains unclear why a study of Hegel on the
subject of political authority is to be combined with a study of Plato. Why should Plato be
favored as a foil to Hegel instead of the many alternatives that recommend themselves?

The preceding section concluded by drawing attention to “satisfaction” insofar as it
relates to that which is effective or powerful in the world. It did so in the context of the Hegelian
aftermath, which saw the rapid replacement of the philosophy of reconciliation by various
philosophies of alienation. One might therefore begin by arguing that Plato is *the* thinker of
irreconcilable opposites, thus the thinker whose far reaching influence is discernible in the
philosophies of “alienation” that oppose Hegel – from Rousseau up to Heidegger via Kant.27

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Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), 37-106; Alexandre
There is certainly a precedent for that view of Plato in the philosophy of Hegel, according to which the search for perfection beyond this world is symptomatic of a dissatisfied or “unhappy” consciousness.28 Thankfully, a simpler reason for favoring the comparison of Plato and Hegel avails itself. It is also more easily stated: over and over again, Hegel refers his readers to the ancient city and Plato’s *Republic* in order to make explicit the distinctiveness of the modern state. One is tempted to say that he does so scrupulously, as if the Platonic expression of the ancient city provided the most adequate basis for introducing the modern state as Hegel sees it.

Hegel’s praise of Plato could scarcely be grander. Plato, in his “greatness of spirit,” discerned the pivot of world history. He did so in such a manner that anticipated the world-historical revolution to come, which reached its completion in the modern state. As for Hegel’s general criticism of Plato, it points to the heart of his doctrine of reconciliation. The ancient city, the spirit of which holds sway over Plato’s *Republic*, is determined by the exclusion of subjectivity. By contrast, the modern state, which Hegel reconstructs in the element of thought, radically internalizes subjectivity in the form of civil society.29 Subjectivity can therefore find “satisfaction” in the state as never before. That difference accounts for the consummate power, justice and reasonability of the modern state over and against its predecessors. It has therefore become conventional for major works on Hegel’s practical philosophy to include glosses on Hegel’s understanding of the ancient city or Plato’s *Republic*.30

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We shall follow Hegel’s interpretation of Plato back to Plato himself. The following overview is intended to provide a provisional account of the basis for our effort to set up the Hegelian understanding of the problem of political authority in relief of the Platonic. For a more detailed version of the argument and evidence upon which it rests, the reader is directed to Part 1.B of the dissertation.

It is appropriate to begin with what is commonly understood of Hegel’s interpretation of Plato. According to Hegel, Plato’s Republic is intended to counteract the corrupting influence of subjective reflection, which, in his time and place, was steadily undermining and unraveling the hold of traditional Greek ethics and “religion.” The corrupting influence of subjectivism is associated with Plato’s “traditional” opponents, the sophists. Plato sought to combat the sophistic enlightenment, which in Hegel’s hands anticipates the Enlightenment. Thus, wherever an appeal might be made to subjectivity, the basis for it must be cut off at the roots. The Republic therefore unfolds an ethical program that works toward the general suppression of subjectivity in all its forms. The family, the right to choose one’s own vocation, individual desire, subjective reflection, and private property must all be subordinated to the authority of the state and its ways. Thus Plato, on account of his world-historical circumstances, failed to see that the emancipation of subjectivity could form the basis for a society that is at once more just, rational and effectively embedded in the hearts and minds of men. Hegel interprets Plato from the standpoint of modern civil society.31 So much for what everyone knows about Hegel’s interpretation of Plato.

There is another side to the Hegelian interpretation of Plato and the Greeks. It is also less known, and for the simple reason that it remains for the most part unspoken, or only hinted at, in the context of Hegel’s political writings. It is readily brought into focus upon further reflection on the standpoint that proves to guide Hegel’s interpretation of Plato. The workings of modern civil society bring about the realization of the (substantial) ends of the state on the basis provided by the (subjective) aims of particular persons. For that very reason, the obverse of Hegel’s praise and criticism of Plato is his criticism and praise of the ancient sophists. Because, in Hegel’s estimation, the antistrophe to Plato is no less important for being an antistrophe, it commands our attention. Plato understands the substance of the city; the sophists understand that which is effective in the city, or the means as opposed to the ends of spirit; neither Plato nor the sophists understood how the two sides are to be held in unison. Although Aristotle lurches thereafter in the right direction, according to Hegel a standpoint had not yet been attained according to which the form and content of ethical life could be taken together. That is to say: philosophy had not yet arrived at the standpoint of Hegel, according to which “substance” must be taken also as “subject.” 32 Thus Hegel’s criticism of Plato was accompanied by a reevaluation of the sophists.

The substance of the Hegelian rehabilitation of sophistry may be seen as follows. The sophists sought, under the heading of the “art of rhetoric,” to understand the passions and opinions of particular audiences insofar as they might serve as means to the various ends of political life. Accordingly, although Plato’s Republic is taken to exclude any appeal to subjective desire, the classical orators represent a stillborn effort to comprehend how the substance of political life, or that which comes to pass in political life, might be anchored in, or brought about on the basis of, subjectivity. Thus Hegel’s criticisms of the “immediate” character

32 PhG, 22-23 [17].
of Greek ethical life, and the “reflective” character of Greek philosophy, did not prevent him from referring to the sophists as “speculative philosophers.” In doing so he employs his preferred term for the sort of philosophizing he claims to perfect. Plato, we are given to conclude, could have learned something from the sophists – had the limits of his time not prevented him from combining the form of justice and their understanding of the “springs of action” in the city.\textsuperscript{33}

The art of rhetoric, understood from the standpoint of modern civil society, is taken in these terms to anticipate the modern science of political economy. That quintessentially modern science, which works to comprehend the mechanics and dynamics of subjectivity as means to the ends of political right, guides Hegel’s interpretation of civil society. It proves to have served as the early model for what came to be the distinctively Hegelian approach to speculative philosophy. A subterranean connection therefore links Hegel’s interpretation of the ancient sophists, to his interpretation of the modern state via modern political economy, through to his doctrine of reconciliation, and all the way back to his “speculative” approach to the nature-freedom problem. The matter is only further complicated by the little-known fact that Hegel’s interpretation of the ancient sophists follows a precedent that had already been established by the early modern architects of the modern state. Thomas Hobbes (the translator of Aristotle’s \textit{Art of Rhetoric}) and Adam Smith (a Professor of Rhetoric) had already looked to the classical teachings on rhetoric. The former did so when he established the theoretical foundation of the modern state, as the latter did when he elaborated the psychological basis of modern political economy.\textsuperscript{34} What was first for Hobbes and Smith appears to have been second for Hegel, which does not change the fact that what is second for Hegel served as the initial basis for that which

\textsuperscript{33} As Sibree and Rauch translate \textit{Triebfedern. PhH}, 33-34.

\textsuperscript{34} It is hard to believe that Hegel was unaware of that connection, but nor is it explicitly stated in Hegel’s writings (so far as the author is aware). Yet another reason why Hegel’s lost commentary on James Steuart would be of much value to us.
became first for him. If the modern state and science of political economy can be seen as a modification of the classical teachings on rhetoric, the Hegelian interpretation of rhetoric comes to sight as a modification of that modification. An effort, corresponding to that relation, is made here in the direction of “deselecting” the significance of classical teachings on rhetoric for the study of political authority.\textsuperscript{35}

The art of rhetoric is taken to anticipate Hegel’s own “speculative” approach to political life, which works its way back from “the ends of spirit” to the dynamics of subjectivity, or the “means of spirit,” that account for the realization of those ends. The speculative philosophy of Hegel works to exhibit, as a product of subjectivity, the substance of ethical life. On the basis of that effort, Hegel comes to emphasize the educative dynamics of inter-subjectivity. That entails a synoptic view of the collective education of subjectivity brought about by “institutions,” “culture” and, especially, that wrought by the invisible, appearance defying, processes associated with the “market.” The shift to objective spirit and therefore history, according to which the community or culture of men takes precedence over the individual, is based on the view that the dynamics of consciousness or subjectivity lend themselves to the ends of the community and the processes of culture. That in turn may be traced back to Hegel’s distinct approach to the nature-freedom problem that Kant and the Pantheism controversy had made the central concern of philosophy at the time. Hegel’s philosophy of reconciliation is based on the view that the relation that obtains between the means and ends of spirit in the context of modern civil society does not hinder so much as further the rationality, justice and efficaciousness of the modern state. For, whatever might be improved on, in Hegel’s estimation the actuality of the modern state at the level of its fundamentals is to be regarded satisfactory according to the demands of sufficiently self-conscious reason.

\textsuperscript{35} To use the language of Husserl again. See note 20, above.
The foregoing serves to set in outline how Hegel’s interpretation of Plato provides the initial basis for a confrontation between the philosophy of Hegel and Plato in terms of the problem of political authority. Because our discussion of the Hegel-Plato question continues to be formulated “one-sidedly,” we turn now to consider Plato in his own right.

IV. Politics and Persuasion in the Philosophy of Plato

Let us begin our transition to Plato by means of a “historical” observation that may be detached from the philosophy of Hegel. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel remarks on the character of modern research insofar as it is carried out in awareness of the fact that our access to the world is mediated by tradition and history. Our effort to make sense of the phenomena must begin with an attempt to appropriate and master concepts and categories that have been passed down to us and are not of our own making. In order to make sense of the phenomena, one must master the historical influences that are taken to always already condition any possible effort to do so. For that reason, the collective or “objective” spirit of peoples, classes and world historical epochs come necessarily into prominence. By contrast, the ancients did not begin as it seems “we latecomers” must.36 Less burdened by history, the ancients are said to have proceeded immediately to philosophize about the things themselves. As the ancients did not begin with the need to master their conceptual inheritance quite like we do, nor did they necessarily begin by taking for granted the primacy of the collective understanding of things over the individual mind, as we tend to. The ancients therefore come to focus as being more rooted in the specificity of political life, which is never altogether transcended or left behind for the study of society, history and its general processes.37 We may keep this possible difference in mind without

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affirming the view that commonly accompanies it, namely, that the ancients were hopelessly naïve on account of it. We remain entirely open to the possibility that the disposition toward the specificity of political life that is said to distinguish classical political philosophy derives from a certain hardness of experience that is by no means naïve, or simply the product of a want of “reflection.”

The “historical” writings of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon come closest to Hegel in emphasizing the ways of entire cities or peoples. However that may be, the particularity of political circumstances, as faced by particular actors, is never lost sight of. The “polis” or “ethnos” are never given complete priority over the specificity and contingency of political life or the “first person” perspective through which we encounter it. Thus, whereas Hegel comes to take on a synoptic view that emphasize classes, cultures, institutions and processes, the classical writings on politics, albeit to varying degrees, bring everywhere into focus the living context of political deliberation and decision making as faced by particular actors. That entails, especially and crucially, a focus on the capabilities of particulars speakers insofar as they stand in relation to particular audiences, or what is known as “the rhetorical situation.” The ancient writings on politics therefore present us everywhere with accounts of speeches and their outcomes. They do so with the intention of soliciting reflection. By contrast, there are few if any speeches in the writings for Hegel. This seemingly trivial observation points to an essential difference. That distinction may only be adequately appreciated in terms of the specifically political bearing of the ancient citizen. With that in mind, we turn to Plato.

Plato did not, strictly speaking, write a history. Of the ancient writers considered above, he is easily the most “philosophic,” if not the only “philosopher” among them. Curiously, however, he is also the writer most exclusively steeped in the particulars of “speech.” In the writings of Plato, we only encounter this particular speaker, in relation to that particular person, group or crowd, in these particular circumstances. The closest approximation, Xenophon, another student of Socrates, was also a general. Plato did not concern himself exclusively with the city. Nevertheless, all of his writings are presented in relation to the city.

According to the Republic, Statesman and Laws there are two fundamental means of securing rule over others. The first is involuntary or based on force, and befits rule over animals and slaves. The second is voluntary or based on persuasion, and befits free men. The former is ill suited and the latter well suited to rule over others that are equal and free. The second is “political” and the first is “despotic.” Because the middle passive form of the Greek word for “to persuade” (peitho) means to obey (peithomai), being persuaded is indistinguishable from obeying. The art of persuasion, rhetoric, is therefore concerned with the production of obedience on the basis of non-violent means. It is therefore in the nature of political society, as the society of self-governing free citizens, to be concerned with the production of obedience on the basis of persuasion. For that very reason Plato’s approach to the problem of political authority comes to sight as an inversion of Hegel’s own. With the same necessity that Hegel’s political writings all lead eventually to “objective spirit,” Plato’s dialogues, without exception,
may be shown to arrive at the question concerning the nature and power of persuasion. That may be seen as follows.

In the Republic, Plato is concerned to have Socrates draw out the highest ambitions of political life conceivable. That takes the form of a city ostensibly perfect in justice and goodness, ruled by perfectly wise philosophers. But since the many cannot be wise, and therefore cannot be expected to simply heed rational persuasion, the authority of the guardians must be cemented on the basis of a myth. That myth aims to firmly subordinate the desirous or appetitive elements of city to the martial and calculative. Because the “noble lie” cannot be expected to suffice to persuade the rulers or guardians of the city, in their particular case the teachings of the city must be reinforced through additional measures. The objects of desire that render the human soul inhospitable to the ends of the regime must be denied to the guardians or held in common. The perfectly just city thus requires a strictly observed division of labor and class system, a rigorous educational regime, the regulation of music, poetry, gymnastics and play, the communism of women, children and property, an ambitious eugenics program, et cetera – the obvious basis for Hegel’s interpretation of Plato. Those whose natural attachments and commitments might stand in the way of implementing the ideal regime’s educative program, and therefore its realization, must be “rusticated.” That means the forced banishment, if not murder, of everyone over ten years of age. Thus the argument of the Republic assumes a great

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44 Republic, 427e-428b. 441d-444a, 473c-473e, 474b-c, 478e-480a, 484b-487a, 490a-b, 517b-c, 533b-534c, 487d-489a, 501b-d, 521a, 532a-532d.
45 Republic, 375d-383c, 413c-415c, 428b-429a, 439e-442a, 456d-e, 459c-d, 494a-495b, 496a-e, 503a, 505a-505b, 514a-517c, 535a-536a.
46 Hegel does not care to make note that the communism of the city in speech is restricted to the guardians. Either he did not regard that relevant or harmful to his thesis, or he simply blew past that detail on the way to making the broader argument that his interpretation of the Republic serves to further.
47 Republic, 370b-c, 386a-406c, 410a-412b, 412e-414a, 415d-417b, 420a-425a, 429d-433d, 434a-c, 442a-444b, 451b-453e, 455d-464d, 466c-468c, 495e-496a, 497e-498c, 501a, 502d-503a, 525d-528a, 536d-537d, 540e-541a, 543a-c, 553b-555a, 557b-563c, 565a-c, 571-a-575a.
deal regarding the capacity of a few wise men to persuade the rest to obey them.\textsuperscript{48} The entire dialogue points to the problem of persuasion without taking it up in a manner commensurate to the challenge it is emphatically presented to pose.\textsuperscript{49} There is no reason to assume that the \textit{Republic} does not do so intentionally.

In the \textit{Statesman}, the power of persuasion comes to sight in another aspect. The \textit{Statesman} is the dialogue about rule insofar as it can come to be conceived as the object of a science. The problem of political authority is therefore approached in terms of rule by all knowing and all competent possessors of the “kingly art” or “political science.” The decisive consideration, on which basis the goodness or badness of a regime is to be decided, is the ruler’s possession or ignorance of that science.\textsuperscript{50} In relation to that criterion, that which befits rule over consenting free equals, or man understood as a specifically “political animal,” is unimportant or derivative.\textsuperscript{51} The \textit{Statesman} begins with an outright denial of the difference between politics, slave mastery, and household management.\textsuperscript{52} It pays special attention to mastery over animals, calls into question the distinction between barbarians and Greeks, and subsequently that between man and beast. Man is defined as a featherless, hornless, tame, two-footed herd animal. The kingly art is the art of tending to herds of that sort.\textsuperscript{53} When that definition is later revised to make room for politics, by including the distinction between rule over voluntary and involuntary subjects, it makes little difference to the kingly art’s disposition toward subjects, or a difference only at the level of \textit{means}.


\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Republic}, 419a-420a, 427c-e, 429a, 430a-431a, 449c-451a, 452e-453a, 471c-472a, 472e-473a, 473e-474a, 487a-d, 492a-494a, 495b, 497b-d, 498d-500e, 501e-502a, 520a-521c, 525b-c, 532d-533a, 545d-547c, 592a-d.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Statesman}, 258b, 284c, 292c-d, 293c-e, 294a-b, 297e-300d, 301e-302b, 303b-305e, 308c-e.


\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Statesman}, 258c-259d, 289c-290c.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Statesman}, 261c-e, 262c-267c, 289a, 291a-b.
The significance of the foregoing may be understood as follows. In relation to the “optimizing” activity of the “political scientist,” it matters not whether those ruled are persuaded to obey voluntarily, or are ruled on the basis of force.\textsuperscript{54} Rule of law is similarly no more than an inconvenience.\textsuperscript{55} The possessor of the kingly art weaves together the souls constitutive of the regime to realize the best that can be achieved on the basis of the quality of those souls. He relates to human beings as the loom-operator does to the warp and woof.\textsuperscript{56} As such he has perfect control over his “materials”, \textit{viz.} he is perfectly competent in his capacity to remove undesirables, select the best human specimens and manipulate each. Where the \textit{Statesman} does not abstract from the power of persuasion, it abstracts from the resistance and recalcitrance, to say nothing of the dignity, of citizens to rule by science. Where rule by all knowing and all competent possessors of science does not entail the thoroughgoing malleability of man, it entails the dehumanization of man. The former is untenable and the latter unacceptable according to the political view of things. It goes almost without saying that the attainability of science so understood must be doubted from the standpoint of any sufficiently skeptical mode of philosophizing. It is again unthinkable that Plato would have been unaware of the problems posed by his Eleatic Stranger.

In the \textit{Laws} the power of persuasion is at issue in yet another aspect. In the \textit{Republic} the discussion about the best regime was prompted by an effort to come to an understanding of justice and, subsequently, the desire to see the goodness of justice defended.\textsuperscript{57} The Athenian Stranger of the \textit{Laws}, like Socrates in the \textit{Republic}, elaborates a “city in speech,” but the discussion unfolds in relation to the fact that his interlocutors have been tasked with the

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Statesman}, 274e-276e, 291c-293e, 296b-297b.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Statesman}, 294a-295b.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Statesman}, 279a-283b, 287b, 305e-311c.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Republic}, 331c-d, 336a-337c, 357a-b, 362c-d, 368b-c-369a.
founding of a real city. For that reason the Laws concerns itself more directly with the persuasiveness of the regime from the standpoint of citizens as a condition for the regime’s possibility. Looking back on the Republic, one readily sees that in the Laws the authority of the regime is to be secured in a manner more befitting free men, for the ways of the regime are to be justified in part on the basis of persuasive appeals to reason. In being the recipients of appeals that incorporate a greater degree of rational argumentation, the citizens of Magnesia, held in contrast to the citizens of the Kallipolis, are to be treated comparatively less like children, slaves or, for that matter, hornless animals.

It naturally follows from the more practical standpoint of the Laws that the political program unfolded therein accommodates itself to the imperfection, contingency, and heterogeneity that all actual founders must face. The discussion of foundations therefore begins by raising elementary questions concerning geography, food supply, the stock of the colonists, as well as the number of rulers and their character. Whatever is to be hoped for, “wiping the slate clean” is out of the question. The significance of this difference, which separates the Laws from the Republic and Statesman, is most readily appreciated from the more radical standpoint of the Timaeus. In that dialogue an effort is made to place the Kallipolis in the actual world of space and time. That effort requires an extraordinary account of the production of men in such terms that make man thoroughly amenable to reason. The Laws, by contrast, begins with men as they are given, independent of how we would have them made.

58 Laws, 702b-702d.
60 Laws, 719e-720e, 722a-723b.
61 Laws, 709a.
62 Laws, 704a-712b.
63 Timaeus, 17c, 19b-20c, 26e-29d, 37e ff.
64 Timaeus, 69b-92c.
As part of that difference, the interlocutors of the *Laws* must face head on and from the very outset that legislators will have to persuade *pre-existing* colonists, which is to say, colonists who have been educated by another, pre-existing, and presumably defective, regime. For that reason, but not only for that reason, the justificatory preludes set out in the *Laws* are also in part “theological.” Pre-existing colonists require an appeal to pre-existing tradition. Whatever novelties the Athenian manages to impose on his Dorian interlocutors, in the *Laws* there are no breaks with ordinary opinion commensurate with those featured in the *Republic*. That corresponds to the fact that the “city and speech” of the laws is said to be “second best.” Where that is claimed, the second order goodness of the regime is posited in relation to a “best regime,” in which women, children and property are held in common – as recalls the more ambitious political program set out in the *Republic*. There is no communism or overt philosophical rule in the *Laws*. The *Republic* is more ambitious in terms of justice, and less ambitious in terms of freedom, or the demand that citizens be persuaded on the basis of relatively sound reasoning. The effort to justify political authority to the many on the basis of rational persuasion demands lower standards better suited to the capacities of all men. As Aristotle remarks in his discussion of the *Laws*, “it is difficult to deal with everything beautifully.”

By Book X of the *Laws* it becomes clear that the authoritative opinions of Magnesia cannot withstand scrutiny, and must be sheltered from the criticisms of rival theologians and “motion men.” The course of the *Republic* is determined from the very outset by the fact that Socrates must face powerful and outspoken objections to justice – those of Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus. By contrast, the conversation set out in the *Laws* only faces challenges of a commensurate sort toward its very end. Because neither the citizens of

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65 The first address made to the colonists begins with the gods according to tradition. *Laws*, 715e.
66 *Laws*, 739a-e, 807b
Magnesia, nor Megillus or Kleinias can be expected to wade through the torrent of objections unleashed, that which precedes the introduction of those challenges is, as a matter of course, unsettled and derailed. Accordingly, although the *Laws* concerns itself more explicitly with the power of rational persuasion as a means of consolidating the authority of the regime, the sub-philosophical character of reason in its practical-political mode comes into focus as a matter of course. Those who openly dissent from the ways of the city must be killed or imprisoned, and a nocturnal council of quasi-philosophers must be introduced to provide the city with the means of defending the opinions that are to be regarded as sacred therein. Thus, to quote Aristotle once more, does Plato bring the *Laws* back around to problems of the *Republic*.

In each case, without rendering the question concerning the power of persuasion thematic, Plato’s political dialogues point to the necessity of raising that question. There is, fortunately, a dialogue devoted to that very theme: Plato’s *Gorgias*. The *Gorgias* takes up the power of persuasion insofar as an art, rhetoric, might hope to master the passions and opinions that effectively hold sway in the city. We point to this distinction recalling what has been said above regarding the modern disposition toward the classical science of rhetoric. The occasion for Socrates’ inquiry is, apparently, Socratic wonder at the “demonic” influence of Pericles over

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69 *Laws*, 907d- 910d.
70 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1265a1-5.
71 Many are convinced that the *Gorgias* was written earlier than the other dialogues we have referred to. Supposing that were so, there is no reason to assume that Plato could not have had the problems taken up in those dialogues, or even the plan of those dialogues, in view long before he composed them. Nor is there any reason to assume that he could not have kept the problem of persuasion, which appears to have been a lifelong interest of his, in mind when he wrote later dialogues. Indeed, it remains entirely possible, and would be exceedingly difficult to rule out, that the dialogues in question are in certain respects written within the confines of that problem, and in such ways that the *Gorgias* may be taken to have provided the basis for doing so. We would have to know a great deal more than we do know, or could ever come to know, in order to establish the impossibility of the foregoing. Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Platons Werke*, T.2.B.1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1856), 5-18; Werner Jaeger, trans. Gilbert Highet, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), II.152-159; Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 125-128, 142-147; John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 74-75; Terence Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 114-116, 131; Christina Tarnopolsky, *Perverts, Prudes, and Tyrants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 35-38. The preceding list is more representative than exhaustive.
Athens. It is the Platonic dialogue about that which is “effective,” “actual” or powerful in the city, or what Hegel calls “the springs of action.” It happens, moreover, to be the dialogue in which the persuasiveness of Socrates, to say nothing of the master orator Gorgias, is most called into question by the intransigence of his interlocutors. It is a dialogue about persuasion carried out in circumstances that put persuasion most to the test. That too cannot plausibly be regarded to have fallen outside of the compass of Plato’s intentions.

Let us therefore return to the politically efficacious as viewed from the standpoint of philosophy, looking forward to the “satisfaction of self-conscious reason” in the philosophy of Hegel. In the Platonic presentation that which is effective or powerful in the city always comes to sight in relation to the skepticism or dissatisfaction of philosophy in relation to political life. In the philosophy of Plato, it is the persuasive capacity of the most self-aware citizen in particular, the philosopher Socrates, whose efforts unfold in the context of the Athenian regime via conversations with Athenian citizens. Whereas, in the philosophy of Hegel, the general spirit of a community is shown to hold sway over, and by means of, the personal particularity of individual subjects, in the philosophy of Plato the regime’s hold on the souls of Athenian citizens emerges primarily in opposition to the educative efforts of Socrates. Whereas in the philosophy of Hegel that which is effective in the city proves ministerial to justice comprehended from the perspective of philosophy, in the Platonic presentation the actuality of political life proves decisively at odds with the ends of philosophy, and justice as conceived

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72 Gorgias, 447b-c, 455e-456a.
73 We refer to Hegel at the risk of distorting Plato’s meaning, and for the simple fact that the phrase in question presupposes a mechanistic view of man, and therefore modern physics. At the same time, it could be said that the Gorgias is not without features that encourage distortions of a related sort. Thus E.R. Dodds deems the work “the most ‘modern’ of Plato’s dialogues,” and dwells at some length on the relation between the Gorgias and Nietzsche’s “will to power.” Similarly, Terence Irwin does not consider it out of place to make mention of the economic theory of Marx. Both are made to think of propaganda, modern techniques of advertising, market research, the promotion of “image” through the mass media, and other means of “exploiting and manipulating the masses.” To be sure, “the will to power” and “masses” presuppose modern physics no less than the “springs of action.” E.R. Dodds, Gorgias (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 387-391; Terence Irwin, Plato: Gorgias (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 131-132.
from the standpoint of philosophy in particular. The essential difference between the
philosophies of Hegel and Plato is therefore adumbrated in the execution of Socrates. To state
the Platonic in Hegelian terms, self-aware subjectivity points beyond any putative reconciliation
with the city. “Reconciliation,” as the product of what is held to be “noble” in the city, is the
stuff of mere opinion. Accordingly, as Hegel did not fail to observe, Socratic philosophy can
scarcely get beyond comporting itself ironically toward the “general principles” that are
authoritative in the city.\textsuperscript{74}

Our comparison of the problem of political authority in the philosophy of Plato and
Hegel therefore turns from an effort to uncover the presuppositions of Hegel’s \textit{Philosophy of
Right}, to Plato’s dialogue on political rhetoric, the dialogue on the production of obedience
through non-violent means. The speculative relation that obtains for Hegel between the ends and
means of spirit, the cunning of reason on the basis of which the political reconciliation of subject
and substance is brought about, has an ancient counterpart in that which obtains between the
sophists, who sought to comprehend the “springs of action,” and justice as clarified by
philosophical dialectics on the other. Al Farabi put it as follows. Plato understood that

“the method of Thrasymachus was more able than Socrates to form the character of the youth and instruct
the multitude; Socrates possessed only the ability to conduct a scientific investigation of justice and the
virtues, and a power of love, but did not possess the ability to form the character of the youth and the
multitude; and the philosopher, the prince, and the legislator ought to be able to use both methods: the
Socratic method with the elect, and Thrasymachus’ method with the youth and the multitude.”\textsuperscript{75}

In a similar regard the Hegelian approach to the problem of political authority, \textit{via} the “springs
of action” in the city, comes to sight as a modification of the classical emphasis on rhetoric and
the problem concerning the power of persuasion.

Hegel’s interpretation of the mechanism of civil society, taken together with his critique of
Plato and rehabilitation of the sophists, viewed from the standpoint of the problem of

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{PhR}, 277-280 [§140R(f)].

persuasion, forces upon us the following question. Can the mechanism of desire be scientifically comprehended and mobilized to realize the ends of political right? An affirmative answer to that question is presupposed in Hegel’s synoptic interpretation of the dynamics of civil society, or the cunning of reason in its political aspect. The ancient cognate to the question implied is: can the method of Thrasymachus be mobilized to realize the ends of Socrates? If that question is there to be taken up anywhere in the classical literature, it is again taken up in Plato’s *Gorgias*.

**V. Plan of Study**

Three matters remain to be discussed: the definition of political authority, the relation of this study to other works on Plato and Hegel, and the plan of the study itself. Because all three bear on the approach to be taken in what follows, they shall be treated together.

No effort will be made in these pages to provide an exhaustive definition of political authority, or to offer a new definition of political authority before which all others ought to be swept away. That may be left to the analysts of terms. Some words regarding what is designated by “the problem of political authority” in these pages are nevertheless in order.

As a problem, political authority concerns the regime. Regimes have an interest in inculcating a particular way of life, taken as the right way to live, defined according to determinate practices and perceptions. Political authority refers to the effective internalization of those practices and perception in the hearts and minds of citizens. It concerns especially the capacity of regimes to produce and exact obedience. A regime that cannot make orders with the expectation that they will be obeyed does not have authority. Political authority is therefore fundamentally relational, and inheres in the disposition of citizens to regimes. In the absence of that relation it makes no sense to speak of political authority. We emphasize this bare relation despite, or indeed because of, the differences that separate the ancient city from the modern state.
To borrow Machiavelli’s formulation, all regimes rest on a complex of “spiritual” and “temporal power.” Political authority is reducible neither to force nor to morality. To have to exercise force is to be nevertheless deficient in authority. It does not follow, however, that a regime deficient in authority no longer has authority. Political authority needn’t be perfectly consolidated or unanimously recognized. Insofar as it confronts us in the real world, political authority is everywhere realized imperfectly. It is to be doubted that a regime could come into existence for which the application of force is altogether dispensable. Accordingly, as political authority may not rely solely on brute force, nor may it rely solely on spiritual power or “moral” authority. That a regime may have authority for the wrong reasons, or not be deserving of authority from the standpoint of reason or morality, does not necessarily entail that it is altogether lacking in authority. Should one fail to realize that, one might find oneself in the insupportable situation of being unable to recognize authoritarian regimes as regimes capable of wielding authority. It is therefore preferable to leave intact the full range of means by which regimes might consolidate their hold on hearts and minds.

No moral theory of political authority is therefore intended. Our moral intuitions about political authority have been elaborated ad nauseam. It is left almost entirely to others to pursue questions concerning that which is deserving of political authority, and it is doubted that such an approach could be adequate for the purposes of understanding the phenomenon of political authority. The only exception to the foregoing is when questions of a related sort are material to the elucidation of Hegel and Plato. Morality is of otherwise subordinate interest to this study.

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or interesting only insofar as it might consist in a possible means or obstacle to the consolidation of political authority. The focus of this study is betrayed by the frequency of words such as “consolidation,” “effective,” “actualize,” “realize,” and the like. We are concerned with political authority as an actual phenomenon, the actual production of obedience to the practices and perceptions that constitute the regime.

The “definition” of political authority just offered makes no claim to being exhaustive or impervious to objection. It is intended to indicate the understanding of political authority that informs this study, and the range of phenomena with which we are concerned. To the possible objection that the Greeks had no concept of “authority,” it may be replied that we are concerned with elementary phenomena that cannot be denied to the classical world on that basis. There can be no doubt that the ancient writers concerned themselves with the production of obedience. It may be added that the aim of this project is narrower than that which a full blown or direct “phenomenology” of political authority would entail. The phenomenology of political authority undertaken here is limited by the fact that it operates on the basis of a comparative hermeneutic of Plato and Hegel. We seek simply to clarify a basic problem with recourse to texts written by Plato and Hegel. The worth of such an approach rests on the view that Plato and Hegel are competent political thinkers, each of whom have approached the problem of political authority with some considerable depth and subtlety. An effort has been made to provide evidence to support the view that reading Plato and Hegel with regard to such problems may be worthwhile. Should further proof be found wanting, the reader is directed to the interpretations of Plato and Hegel that follow. With that in mind, we turn to say something in general regarding the relation of this study to scholarship on Plato and Hegel.

80 For an indication or outline of what such an effort would demand and have to encompass, see Alexandre Kojève, La Notion de l’autorité (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).
It must be admitted that the division of labor among Plato and Hegel scholars poses distinct problems for any effort to compare the two. Most obviously, although the philosophy of Hegel leads naturally to the comparison of Plato and Hegel, the Plato-Hegel relation tends to be taken up in Hegelian terms. It has become common for scholars to bristle at Karl Popper’s claim that Hegel is an enemy of “the open society.” They do so with good reason, for Hegel had already said of Plato what Popper says of Hegel.81 Be that as it may, the occasion to reflect on the possibility that Popper was as incompetent a reader of Plato as he was of Hegel is rarely pursued. The efforts to rehabilitate the philosophy of Hegel in the past century have, for the most part, been carried out independently of any parallel effort to understand Plato on his own terms. The literature on Hegel is therefore rife with lackadaisical and misguided interpretations of Plato.

“Progress” in Hegel studies can be said to have left this state of affairs more or less unchanged. Hegel scholarship has benefitted immensely from the fact that analytical philosophers – Robert Brandom, John McDowell, Terry Pinkard and Robert Pippin are the exemplars – have decided in the past three decades to take philosophy after Kant seriously. However that may be, whatever analytic philosophers may have learned from “continental” philosophy in the recent past, those lessons have not yet carried over to the interpretation of Plato.82 To mention only the most important consideration, it is increasingly taken for granted in

82 The presentations of the problems of phenomenology by the late Husserl, and the intense researches carried out by the early Heidegger thereafter, led to a general reevaluation of the significance of classical philosophy in light of the multifarious “crises” of modernity. These studies, in addition to certain others, served as the impetus for the revolution in classical exegesis to follow. That revolution was defined above all by an effort to emancipate classical exegesis from the influence of scholasticism and Neo-Platonism that stood as sediment between modern readers and the ancient texts. Reading the late Husserl and the early Heidegger one easily gets a sense of the significance that the reevaluation of classical philosophy underway at the time must have had for the upcoming generation. It was, to be sure, felt with great urgency by writers as otherwise diverse as Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Karl Löwith, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacob Klein, Gerhard Krüger, Alexandre Koyré, Alexandre Kojève, Hans Jonas, Werner Marx, Eugen Fink, to say nothing of others. No parallel researches have been carried out in the tradition of “analytical” philosophy, the recent rapprochement with continental philosophy notwithstanding. See especially: Husserl, Die Krisis Der Europäischen Wissenschaften und Die Transzendentale Phänomenologie, 314-348; Martin Heidegger,
Plato studies that the reader must pay very close attention to the political significance of the dramatic action. It cannot be said that scholarship on “German Idealism” – which remains traditionally “scholastic” or “Anglo-American” in its orientation toward Plato – has benefited from that development. Hegel scholars tend to be sufficiently committed to the problems that guide Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy to pay no mind to the prospect that they might have something to learn from Plato. As many have recently benefited from discovering that the philosophies of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel are not quite what they expected, so do they stand to benefit from the realization that the traditional interpretations of Plato tend to be mistaken ones.

The opposite tendency applies to the study of Plato and classical philosophy. Understandably, the demands of classical exegesis leave little time for the study of German philosophy and its many forbidding treatises. Where that is not the case, those immersed in the study of classical philosophy are often sufficiently convinced of the superiority of Plato or Aristotle to pay Kant and Hegel, to say nothing of their collaborators and successors, no mind. As for those inclined to take the literary form of Platonic dialogue most seriously – by which the students of Leo Strauss are intended – they rarely turn their attention to German philosophy before Nietzsche and Heidegger. Two major exceptions may be supplied to the observations just made: Hans-Georg Gadamer and Stanley Rosen, for whom the Plato-Hegel question is in each case central. The debate carried out in *On Tyranny* between Strauss and Alexandre

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83 “Straussians” who turn their attention to German philosophy before Nietzsche include Steven B. Smith, Paul Franco, Susan Shell, Richard Velkley, Mark Blitz and Waller Newell.

84 Both of whom, it bears mentioning, considered themselves beyond the Analytical-Continental divide, and indeed posited a convergence point between the two sides, long before it became fashionable to do so. Now that the rapprochement they both foresaw is underway with respect to German Idealism, perhaps one has reason to expect a similar development in the area of classical exegesis.

It must be added that most scholarship that takes Plato in relation to Hegel tends to do so without regard to the political bearing of their two philosophies. It is far more common for the comparison of Plato and Hegel to focus on such things as their respective understandings of “the idea” or their different views on epistemology or skepticism, than to find a comparison of their respective views on the relationship of philosophy to politics or understandings of justice. That is not without good reason, for metaphysical problems are taken up with urgency in the context of German Idealism and in such a manner that is altogether foreign to the dialogues of Plato.

The notable efforts of Heidegger and Kojève, whatever else might be said of them, fall into the denoted class. The former sets up a confrontation of Plato and Hegel on the basis of fundamental ontology. As for the latter, he concentrates on their respective understandings of the “concept,” from which all further distinctions may be derived. It may be added that there is an older British tradition of interpreting Hegel in the context of Platonic metaphysics and “idealism,” which formed the immediate backdrop for the efforts of Bertrand Russell, Karl Popper, Sidney Hook,
Edgar Caritt, and likeminded critics. With regard to that interpretive tradition, it must be said
that the understanding of Hegel is so thoroughly uncritical, as if Hegel never read the philosophy
of Kant, and the understanding of Plato so thoroughly wrongheaded, as if he never dwelled on
the execution of Socrates, so as to be almost entirely useless for the purposes of this study.
There is therefore ample reason to doubt that the depths of the Plato-Hegel question have been
exhausted, or that our understanding of that question leaves no room for improvement.

Readers aware of both literatures will note that this study has been able to benefit from
more of the secondary literature on Hegel than it has been able to in the case of Plato. We have
already anticipated the reason for this being the case. Foremost among these concerns is the
already mentioned significance of the dramatic action for the interpretation of Plato. At the risk
of exaggeration, this study is written from the perspective that the dramatic action cannot be
taken seriously enough. To take the dramatic action seriously demands more than occasionally
noting that so-and-so blushed or was grabbed by his cloak. It is necessary to take every opinion
voiced in terms of the specificity of the interlocutor, and every stage of the argument in terms of
the unfolding and living context of the discussion. The reader must, moreover, take on the
standpoint of an active participant, and weigh the argument at every turn, with particular
attention to what the argument at a given stage, and the dialogue as a whole, render thematic or
abstract from. Nothing less is demanded by Plato of his readers. The necessity of heeding these
basic principles of interpretation is regarded sufficiently important that all studies that neglect to
do so have proven, as a matter of course, to be of limited or lesser use.87

87 On the problem of interpreting Platonic dialogues, see especially: Friedrich Schleiermacher, Platons Werke,
T.1.B.1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1856), 1-35; Paul Friedländer, Plato, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York: Pantheon
1965), 3-31; Jacob Klein, Plato’s Trilogy (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1977), 1-3; Alexandre Koyré,
Introduction à la lecture de Platon (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 14-21; Leo Strauss, On a New Interpretation of Plato’s
Political Philosophy, Social Research 13 (1946), 326-67; Strauss, The City and Man, 50-62; John Sallis, Being and
Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 1-22; David Grene, Greek
Pangle, The Roots of Political Philosophy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 1-18; Mark Blitz, Plato’s
For related reasons, although Hegel’s writings on Plato are essential to the construction of a dialogue between the two, other writings that begin from the premise that Plato is altogether determined by his place and time have been of limited use. The same may be said of writings that study Plato’s *Gorgias* with the sole intent of demonstrating its place within the order that Plato is thought to have composed his dialogues. Because this dissertation seeks to take Plato’s *Gorgias* as a unified whole, book-length commentaries have proven the most useful.

Regarding the literature on Hegel, it may be said that the approach taken here combines the insights of the Kantian or so-called non-metaphysical Hegel, best known from the many writings of Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, with a more political reading of Hegel that has benefited from the work of scholars as diverse as Schlomo Avineri, Emil Fackenheim, Joachim Ritter, and others. The approach to Hegel is nevertheless controlled from a perspective that has learned much from Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger, Strauss, Klein, Gadamer, Löwith, and others of that philosophical generation besides. Any further discussion of the secondary literature will be taken up in the footnotes.

The overriding difficulty of this study may be stated provisionally as follows. *We shall try to make as concerted an effort as possible to understand Hegel on his own terms, and Plato on his own terms, and to set up a confrontation between the two as far as the problem of political authority is concerned.* That effort poses distinct challenges on account of the fact that Plato and Hegel are very different writers. The reader of Plato must take his bearings primarily from the literary form of Socratic dialogue, whereas the interpreter of Hegel must proceed on the basis of what it means to write an “Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Science” or, at the very

*Political Philosophy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 2-11, 34-36; Catherine Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1-48; Diskin Clay, *Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), ix-xiii, 3-176. Although other works might be mentioned, the foregoing list is representative of the major hermeneutic difficulties posed by the dialogue form and related considerations.
least, a “Philosophical Doctrine of Right.” As for the possibility of a “dialogue” between Hegel and Plato, the basis for doing so must be taken from the texts themselves. The scope and manner of this project derives above all from these difficulties and an effort to meet them head on.

There are three parts to this study. Part 1 concerns Hegel, Part 2, Plato, and Part 3, both Hegel and Plato. The relation between the three parts is easily stated. Parts 1 and 2 are both concerned to articulate the problem of political authority, as Hegel and Plato each understood that problem, and on their own terms as far as is possible within the confines of a study that is comparative in intention. On the basis of these preparations, Part 3 takes up the consolidation of political authority as the two thinkers understand it. One is tempted to say that as Parts I and II are devoted to an understanding of problems or obstacles, and Part 3 is devoted to solutions or the effective overcoming of obstacles. That would be adequate were it not for the fact that the language of “solutions” is more applicable to Hegel than Plato, and imperfectly at that.

The intentions of Part 1 are three-fold. (1) As we have anticipated, we begin with an effort to reactivate Hegel’s understanding of the problems, which motivates his effort to “overcome” or “solve” the problem of political authority. We accomplish that task through a commentary on the Preface to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (in Part 1.A). That commentary issues in a set of problems, which are subsequently taken up in the context of Hegel’s “systematic” writings (in Part 1.B). (2) Part 1 also serves to draw out organically from the text the basis for a confrontation with the philosophy of Plato. Hegel’s interpretation of Plato and the sophists will serve as the starting point for our encounter with Plato. (3) The unity of Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority and critique of Plato will be exhibited in relation to the problems of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy that were most pressing for him. We will show that Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority and interpretation of the
ancients are held together by more fundamental views about human freedom insofar as its projects stand in relation to the natural and spiritual determinants of subjectivity.

The intention of Part 2 is also threefold. (1) It serves again to “enter” Plato’s philosophical and political world, a very different world form Hegel’s. Like Part 1.A, Part 2 takes the form of a commentary. It is divided into three sections, which correspond to Socrates’ conversations with Gorgias, Polus, and the first half of that with Callicles. We have anticipated above that the commentary carried out in Part 2 must differ considerably from the research carried out in Part 1, and for the simple fact that Platonic dialogue, as a literary form, differs greatly from the Hegelian treatise, compendium, encyclopedia, or lecture. Plato’s Gorgias does not introduce the whole qua whole, but rather the whole as illuminated by a particular subject-matter, that of political rhetoric. (2) Our reading of the first three quarters of Plato’s Gorgias will serve to clarify Plato’s understanding of the problem of political authority, and to demonstrate the centrality of the question concerning the power of persuasion to that problem. (3) At the same time, we provide the Platonic basis for setting up a confrontation with the philosophy of Hegel on the problem of political authority. As we have already indicated, an independent effort to meet Plato on his own terms is a sine qua non for any possible “dialogue” between the two. To exaggerate for the purpose of clarity, Parts I and II can be said to work in the direction of demonstrating that the presuppositions of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right may be understood as the problems of Plato’s Gorgias.

Having undertaken the extensive preparatory work of Parts 1 and 2, Part 3 proceeds to hold Plato and Hegel closer together. It is divided into two Sections. Part 3.A concerns Hegel, and turns to the determinate structure of subjectivity, which is exhibited as a means to the end of political right. We examine the mechanics of the modern state in terms of its capacity to embed its authority in the element of subjectivity, and with attention to the lower determinations of
subjectivity. In civil society, the ends of spirit are “engrafted” onto those of the “natural will.” Subjectivity is emancipated and subsequently, by means of its own motions and through the institutional structure of modern life, contained and rechanneled. Thus Section 3.A concerns the “cunning of reason” in the ambit of practical life, or the power of the modern state over subjectivity via the motions of civil society. Part 3.B focuses on Callicles’ relation to Athens insofar as it contrasts with Socrates’ own. We focus primarily on the psychological power of the regime, or how it effectively holds sway over Callicles, who is perhaps the most outspoken critic of justice and convention in the classical literature.\footnote{Famously referred to as “the most eloquent statement of the immoralist’s case in European literature” in Paul Shorey, \textit{What Plato Said} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 154.} Callicles’ relation to the regime comes into focus essentially in terms of his opposition to Socrates’ critique of political life and conventional opinion. If our treatment of the consolidation of political authority in the philosophy of Hegel can be said to focus on the “cunning of reason,” the Platonic counterpart that commands our attention might be referred to as the “cunning of opinion (\textit{doxa}).”

All further discussion of Parts 1, 2 and 3, and what is to be concluded on the basis provided by them, is reserved for the dissertation itself.
Part 1

The Problem of Political Authority in the Philosophy of Hegel

“However this genus is probably hardly much easier to differentiate than that of the god: for these men – not those who are counterfeits but those who, in their being, are philosophers – altogether appear in all sorts of ways through the ignorance of the others and visit cities, looking down from aloft on the life of those below; and to some they seem to be worthless and to others worth everything; and sometimes they appear as statesmen, and other times as sophists, and at yet other times they might give some the impression that they are altogether mad.”

– Plato, Sophist, 216c-d

Section A

Sophists, Statesmen and the Philosopher:

Political Authority and the Form and Content of the Preface to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right

I. The Problems

The purpose of this commentary on the Preface to the Philosophy of Right¹ is two-fold. We seek to draw out from the text the problem of political authority as Hegel understood it, and to establish on Hegel’s own terms the grounds for a broader confrontation with the philosophy of Plato. Since it shall be argued that Hegel regarded political authority as more problematic than conventional accounts tend to admit, it is appropriate for us to begin with the issue of Hegel’s “certitude.” For as Socrates is known as the philosopher of doubt, Hegel is widely seen as the philosopher who took himself to have solved all the problems. An awareness of this basic difference between Hegelian science and the pursuit (as opposed to possession) of wisdom, conditions almost all efforts to understand his thought. But, however well taken, this same feature of Hegelian science easily misleads. For the philosophy of Hegel is at the same time one

¹ Hereafter the Preface to the Philosophy of Right shall be referred to simply as “the Preface.”
of the most perplexing philosophies, a “system” full of *aporiai* and “remainders.” Hegel’s emphasis on certitude, together with his grand style, easily obscures the fact that he continues to grapple with difficulties that he considered to be anything but trifling. For this reason, we begin with an effort to reactivate Hegel’s understanding of the problems.

The pursuit of certitude derives initially from uncertainty. There is no pursuit of solutions without first being confronted by problems. Descartes, the thinker most responsible for making certitude a motivating ambition of modern philosophy, begins not with dogma but with radical doubt. There can be no doubt that Hegel admired him for it. Similarly, Hegel’s effort at presuppositionless science begins with the dissolution of all possible determinations: it begins by wiping the slate clean. More to the point, according to Hegel, central to the spirit of modernity is a project of radical ground clearing, a spirit that brings the old edifices to totter.

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2 Were it otherwise, it would be hard to understand how philosophy after Hegel has so often opposed the greater synthesis on the basis of tensions and impasses perceived within it. By way of two examples, emphasized by opposed epigones: it is often said to Hegel’s great credit that he diagnosed the problem of industrial poverty, or brought the relationship of *Logique et Existence* to its necessarily unsatisfactory terminus. It is said that he left these as lacunae for posterity. If so, it has not been unproductive: out of the former and latter issued “Marxism” and “Deconstructionism.” That the most famous efforts to pull apart the Hegelian synthesis are in large part derivative of the synthesis they oppose has been robustly demonstrated by Karl Löwith. See n. 57 below. Georg Lukács, *Der Junge Hegel* (Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1948), 420-430; Jean Hyppolite, *Logique et Existence* (Paris: Presses Universitaires De France, 1953), 71-75; Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1978).

3 As anticipated in the introduction, the work of Terry Pinkard is a strong and welcome corrective to the tendency to read Hegel as if he were utterly lacking in critical rigor or skepticism. However that may be, he may well go too far in the opposite direction. See especially: Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Dialectic: The Exploration of a Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism*.


6 With respect to Descartes, looking back on the history of philosophy prior, Hegel writes: “Here, we may say, that we are at home and, like a sailor after a long roundabout journey on the tempestuous sea, may cry out “Land!”... With him the culture, the thought of modern times, comes forth.” *HPh III*, 120-136 [P3.S2.I-C1].


8 As Miller translates: “Besides, it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and the labour of its own transformation... just as the first breath of drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth – there is a qualitative leap and the child is born – so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms.” *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 6-7; *PhG*, 19-19 [¶11].
Alongside the ground clearing of first philosophy, which culminated in the anti-dogmatism of Kantian critical philosophy, we have the uprooting of traditional authority, which culminated in the French Revolution. The entire Philosophy of Right consists in an effort to settle accounts with the ground-clearing impetus of modernity so understood. But the upheavals in the human spirit, which Hegel and his generation sought to make sense of, were by no means approached with the sanguine self-assuredness for which he is best known. Thus, on the very surface of the Preface, we encounter a less familiar Hegel, one whose prose is shot through with cadences of danger, urgency and uncertainty. To understand Hegel’s many claims to have attained knowledge regarding the spirit of his time, and on that basis knowledge of the whole, one must therefore begin in the beginning, with what seemed, far from being certain, most problematic.

The practical theoretical problems discernible in the background of the Preface can be stated provisionally as follows. The modern state must justify its authority to the new creed of freedom and submit itself to the rigors of criticism. The intellectualization of politics is underway: philosophy is expected to facilitate the purgation of dogmatism – whether political, theological or metaphysical – while contributing to the general elevation, or enlightenment, of citizens and statesmen. The state must rationally justify its claim to authority. Philosophy must circumscribe the boundaries of practical reason and therefore the politically justifiable. Practical reason must be sufficiently intelligible to the ordinary man so that he may give free and informed sanction to the new “normative” order. We have, in other words, the difficulties commonly associated with “public reason” from a Kantian perspective. Superimposed upon these problems of “public reason” are, however, several further difficulties that must complicate any effort to understand Hegel’s approach to the task of grounding political authority in the stuff of human freedom. Three problems will occupy our attention in this first part of the dissertation.
The first can be summarized in terms of what is broadly understood as the “Pantheism Controversy.” The effort to ground philosophy and politics in rational freedom was called into question on the basis of nature and the supposed primacy of faith or immediate feeling. It was doubted that philosophy and politics could be rational and free all the way down. Certain parties therefore sought to pull the rug on Kantian political rationalism. We shall see that the Preface speaks gnomically of the relation of nature to freedom. Although it leaves little doubt that the nature-freedom relation is of some importance to the Philosophy of Right, the character of that relation remains highly ambiguous and allusive.

Connected to the first problem is a second, related to Hegel’s apparently conservative diatribe against “sophistry,” “the philosophy of feeling,” and the intellectualization of politics. Here we brush up against the old debate over Hegel’s “Prussianism.”9 In short, the Preface’s portrayal of public reason is hardly uplifting, and does little to instill confidence in the abilities of its protagonists, all of whom are found wanting from the perspective of speculative philosophy. These difficulties come to sight as a direct challenge to currently popular interpretations of Hegel that regard him as a thoroughly “social” thinker who affirms the “reasonability” of political life.10 For, rather than presenting us with a rosy picture of a reconciled and rational social order, Hegel exposes us to the corruption of civic mores by

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10 Works that tend in this direction, though not all in the same regard, include: Axel Honneth, Kampf um Anerkennung; Axel Honneth, The Pathologies of Individual Freedom; Terry Pinkard, Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason; Robert Brandom, Tales of the Mighty Dead (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 210-226; Robert Brandom, Reason in Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 52-77; Pippin, Idealism as Modernism; Pippin, Hegel’s Practical Philosophy.
“sophists,” and the ill repute of philosophy among ingenuous citizens and statesmen. As for the latter, commonly seen as the heroes of the Philosophy of Right, they come to sight as innocently thoughtless and naive about their commitments to political right. Finally, when it comes to “reconciliation,” which Hegel does indeed encourage at the end of the Preface, it appears reserved for philosophy alone. We are given no assurance that anyone besides the Hegelian philosopher is a fit candidate for the satisfaction of self-consciousness rightly understood.

The third issue concerns Hegel’s highly ambiguous portrayal of sophistry and pertains to Hegel’s critique of Plato, as anticipated in the Introduction. At first, Hegel seems to reserve no quarter for sophistry and those he is concerned to call “sophists.” The “sophists” are the stated adversaries of Hegel, who makes common cause with ingenuous citizens and state officials (to say nothing of Plato). By the end of the Preface, however, sophistry and the philosophy of feeling are associated with the very superiority of modern politics over ancient politics – and with the dignity of man insofar as the ancients failed to recognize it. Indeed, in relentlessly seeking to root political authority in free thought, Hegel’s sophists share in the highest ambitions of Hegelian philosophy. In other words, Hegel does not stop at critiquing the sophists and the “capricious” philosophy of feeling. He proceeds to associate the two with the superiority of modernity to antiquity, and the concern for subjective freedom therewith.

The same paradox may be discerned in Hegel’s critique of Plato’s Republic. Plato is said to have worked to counteract the budding emphasis on subjectivity, which is taken to define both the modern enlightenment and the much earlier “sophistic” one. The superiority of the modern state to the ancient polis, and therefore the superiority of the Philosophy of Right to the Republic, derives from the former’s incorporation of that which the latter is taken to exclude. Thus the relation of philosophy and sophistry to ordinary citizens and state officials is presented in a highly perplexing form, and in ways that enjoin more reflection than it has hitherto received.
We reserve any further discussion of these matters for later, when our examination of the text provides us with an occasion to return to them. Let us only anticipate that the Preface leaves each under-explained and problematic. Hegel provides the reader with the means of discerning the drift of the argument to follow, but in a manner that is inexplicit at best. Least of all evident is how the three sets of issues highlighted above relate to one another, or to the guiding intentions of the Philosophy of Right. These difficulties will be taken up programmatically in Part 1.B, which will explain their underlying unity and significance in terms of Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority. For now, we seek to establish in as textured a way as possible that the difficulties mentioned are problems for Hegel.

II. Prefaces: ¶¶1-2, 17

Hegel made his conflicted position on the writing of prefaces well known. The problem, made famous by the Phenomenology, can be stated with relative ease: “philosophical truth” must be regarded essentially as a “result.” For this reason Hegel repeatedly found himself in the awkward rhetorical situation of having to articulate “the end” in the “beginning.” Since it is a peculiarity of Hegel’s writings that he is acutely aware of this problem, it is necessary for us to consider what it means for Hegel to write a preface.

It is fitting to begin by recalling what Hegel writes at the outset of the Phenomenology. Here a preface is said to be strictly “formal.” It presents the results of science, but in such a way that abstracts from the process, and therefore the experiential content, on the basis of which those results came to be known. For Hegel “form and content” must be taken together: the

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12 Consider, for example, the candid and highly amusing discussion of this predicament in the Introduction to Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of History. Hegel assures his audience that the idea that “reason rules the world” needn’t be taken merely as a “presupposition of science,” since it is in fact the “result” of science “familiar to me because I already know the whole” [“das mir bekannt ist, weil ich bereits das Ganze kenne”]. PhH, 20-22 [I.A.c].
problem with prefaces is that they are “merely” formal. To describe the Preface to the
*Philosophy of Right* in such terms, however, would be wholly inadequate. Of Hegel’s prefaces it
is perhaps the least formal. Accordingly, more helpful for our purposes is that which is said of
prefaces in the Preface to the Second Edition of *The Encyclopedia*:

“There could be only too many occasions and instigations before us that would seem to require that I should
clarify the disposition of my philosophizing regarding the spiritual and spiritless [geistig und geistlosigkeit]
cultural preoccupations of our time [Betrieben der Zeitbildung], as can only be achieved exoterically
[exoterische Weise] as in a preface; for these concerns, whether or not they claim for themselves some
relation to philosophy, do not allow of scientific treatment, and therefore do not enter into philosophy at all,
but carry on their chatter outside, remaining outside.”

Like the second Preface to the *Encyclopedia*, the Preface addresses itself explicitly to the
“cultural concerns” of its time. More so than anywhere else, Hegel weighs in aggressively on
“chatter” ostensibly “external” to the serious business of philosophy.

But what does it mean here for Hegel to speak of discussions “external to philosophy”?

The following observation is instructive: in the programmatic sections of the *Encyclopedia* and
*Philosophy of Right* – which is to say the “formal” part of the text, as opposed to its elaboration
in the remarks and additions – Hegel does not refer to “mere contemporaries,” or does so with
exceeding rarity at best. In the formal sections of the entire first volume of the *Encyclopedia*
Hegel only deigns to mention Luther, Kant, Hume, Plato and Descartes by name; in the entire
*Philosophy of Right*, only Kant. The activity of Kant, we surmise, is of sufficient import that
science must take account of it. As for professors and commentators of the day, they carry out
their activities outside the realm of “science” proper, and only merit informal treatment. In
speaking dismissively of “chatter,” Hegel suggests that derivative or merely contemporary
reflections and concerns needn’t be accounted for. As for the Preface, it expends much energy

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13 *EL*, 14, [2].
15 Only, however, in the form of adjectival nouns. Thus when Wallace or Geraets translate with “Kant” it is,
however sensible on the basis of Hegel’s unambiguous focus on “Critical Philosophy,” absent in the German text. It
may not be the most important consideration, but it does obscure Hegel’s curious aversion toward the naming of
names. *EL*, 49, 93, 124, 157, 165 [§7, §27, §47, §67, §76]. *Werke VII: Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*
(hereafter *PhR*), 165 [§80].
on a thinker that Hegel certainly saw as a derivative chatterer: Jacob Friedrich Fries. How then are we to make sense of the philosophical import of the Preface? Are we to infer that the “cultural concerns of the time” expressed by the Preface are simply “inessential”?  

Further reflection on the form and content of the Philosophy of Right indicates that such a judgment would be hasty. Comparing the subject matter of the Preface to the body of the work, we find that it corresponds on innumerable occasions to the implicit content of the “formal” text as worked out explicitly in the remarks and additions corresponding to it. The remarks and additions serve the same “exoteric” function as a preface might in addressing itself to the “cultural concerns” of its time. The exoteric presentation is necessary, Hegel says, because at first “science lacks general intelligibility, and has the appearance of being the esoteric possession of a few individuals.” The formal or scientific text articulates the essence that holds sway over the more generally intelligible “concerns” taken up by the exoteric text. Thus the “cultural concerns of the day” have a substantial ground that consists in the first order subject-matter of the philosophical oeuvre. We might say, in a more Herodotean idiom, that there are the logoi of a given epoch and the epoch’s logos. The formal text concerns itself with the latter; the “exoteric” text appeals to the former.

On this basis, we see immediately why the Preface ends as it does. While it is common for Hegel to speak of “formal” introductions as “lifeless generalities [unlebendige Allgemeine]”

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16 Cf. EL, §§112-122 and context; and Werke VI: Wissenschaft der Logik II (Hereafter SL), 17-123 [BII.P1.C1.A-B].
17 As in PhR, 46ff [§4ff].
18 One hardly needs to mention that Hegel’s understanding of “esotericism” is highly idiosyncratic and not to be confused with others. To say the least, it is not that put forth in Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952). Provisionally, we can say that Hegel’s association of esotericism with scientific progress is an indication of the fact that his understanding of esotericism does not depend on anything quite like a natural aristocracy separating philosophers from non-philosophers, so much as by the fact that philosophy, as he indicates elsewhere, requires a great deal of work or labor. However that may be, the following must be kept in mind: although labor is a less exclusive, and therefore more democratic, category than “nature,” Hegel is clear that the labors of philosophy are only ever taken up by a small few. Cf. PhG, 19-20 [§13]. See also the new landmark study by Arthur Melzer, Philosophy Between the Lines, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Stanley Rosen, The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 13.
“a mere table of contents” without chapters\(^1\) – the Preface ends with a dismissal of its own contents for their want of “form.”\(^2\) In the Phenomenology, Hegel draws attention to the Preface’s abstraction from the process of which it purports to be the result; conversely, here he draws attention to the Preface’s inordinate pre-occupation with “current events,” as well as its “subjective” and “historically contingent” character. Hegel’s prefaces thus bear the unmistakable air of paradox typical of his properly “scientific” writings. In each case Hegel complains of “one-sidedness” but there it is a one sidedness of “form” and here it is a one sidedness of “content.” As for Hegel’s “encyclopedic” works, that they place a formal text next to an informal one (remarks and additions) serves the following didactic purpose: to force his readers into the activity of the “idea,” into the work of holding form and content together. We are compelled to hold fast to the living unity of concept and existence sundered between formal and informal treatments of Recht, the cultural concerns of the time and their “ground.” For that same reason it would be “one-sided” to simply dismiss the “cultural concerns of the time,” and the ostensibly “unscientific” contents of the Preface with it. At the very least, the contents of the Preface are no less important than what is so often left to remarks and additions.

As for why the Preface differs so much from others in its focus on current events, the following recommends itself. The Philosophy of Right is the only work that takes up “politics” as its chief concern. The Philosophy of Right is the most “practical” of Hegel’s major published works and lectures. Like the Encyclopedia, the Philosophy of Right serves “the need” to provide his lecture audience with a “guide.”\(^3\) The “textbook is a broader, more systematic exposition of the same fundamental concepts” already contained in the third volume of the Encyclopedia. As the elaboration of a distillation, it is the only work written with such an end in mind. Hegel

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\(^1\) “… an index, a skeleton with labels stuck to it, or like the rows of locked and labeled boxes in a grocer’s stall…,” PhG, 49-52 [§§50-53].

\(^2\) PhR, 28, [16].

\(^3\) EL, 11. [P1.1]; PhR, 11 [1].
never undertook a *Philosophical Outline of Mechanics or Physics*, and never took measures to publish or provide textbooks for his extremely popular lectures on religion, art, history, and the history of philosophy. Moreover, the text goes well beyond what is expected from “compendia.” Destined to “come before a greater public,” Hegel welcomed the opportunity to “amplify” remarks pertaining to current “ideas related to or divergent” from his own. Not only does the political subject matter of the *Philosophy of Right* seem to have enjoyed a priority of sorts, as a practical work it required more extensive appeal to the concerns of the day. For that very reason, however, the task of prefacing that work was subject to a further set of challenges related to matters of philosophical “prudence” or politics on behalf of philosophy.

In writing of the “immediate occasion” for the publication of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel makes passing mention of his “official duties,” a subject he will return to at a crucial moment in the text. Hegel, *qua* Professor in Berlin circa 1820, was a *civil servant* whose office as such was bound up with obligations to the state. However committed to civic *Bildung*, Hegel was at any rate obliged to teach “ethics” or “right” in a time of intense political agitation. It is “timely” concerns of this sort that Hegel will address in the *Preface*. But as scholars of Hegel’s practical writings have often noted, the conditions under which the text was published were far from “liberal.” The sensational events of the time – the assassination of the poet August von Kotzebue by Karl Ludwig Sand, and its aftermath – provoked an already nervous regime to take drastic measures – the Karlsbad Decrees, set in motion by Metternich – in an effort to crack down on political “subversives,” “demagogues” and “Jacobins.” That included a number of

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23 PhR, 11 [2].

24 PhR, 11 [1].
Hegel’s friends, colleagues, and students.\textsuperscript{25} It is therefore unsurprising that a major theme of the Preface happens to be philosophy’s increasingly uneasy relationship to political life. Though the influence of these conditions on Hegel’s “art of writing” are debatable, one is not in the least surprised to find that Hegel’s willingness to publish the Philosophy of Right was somehow conditional on knowing how he stood with respect to censorship. In penning the Preface, Hegel appears to have “had his eye on the censor.”\textsuperscript{26} The tension between philosophy and politics is the unifying theme of the Preface and, as we shall see, that theme is taken up with great delicacy.


\textsuperscript{26}Cf. Hegel, Brief an Friedrich Creuzer (30. Okt. 1819), in Briefe von und an Hegel B.II (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1961), 217-220. As a number have noted, Knox’s arguments are somewhat tenuous, resting as they do on evidence which can hardly be regarded complete. Nevertheless, Knox goes so far as to argue that Hegel rewrote the Preface and edited the Philosophy of Right in response to the Karlsbad decrees and the assassination of Kotzebue: “The reason why publication was delayed for eighteen months after the book was ready can hardly have been anything except fear of the censor. But if it had been written to gratify the Prussian Government, how could he have had such fears? Their very existence implied that his book contained matter which might be unpalatable to the authorities on the score of its liberalism. How did Hegel overcome any difficulty that might have been expected from the censor? Two courses were open to him. He might have revised the book and accepted Prussian conservatism; or he might have written a preface explaining that, while his ideas were more liberal than those of his Government, he shared its opposition to revolutionary ideas and the dangerous excesses to which they might lead their advocates. It was the latter course which he actually chose.” T.M. Knox, Hegel and Prussianism, in Hegel’s Political Philosophy, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Atherton Press, 1970), 15-17. Cf. Terry Pinkard, Hegel: A Biography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 457, n.87; Franco, Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom, 123, n7; Smith, Hegel’s Critique of Liberalism, 140. The most thorough account of the problems involved is Christian Lucas and Udo Rameil, Furcht vor der Zensur? Zur Entstehungs und Druckgeschichte von Hegels Grundlinien Des Philosophie des Rechts, Hegel-Studien, 15 (1980), 63-93. See also the controversial and likely unsupportable claim by K.H Ilting that, faced by the political upheavals of the time, Hegel thoroughly if not completely dissimulated his view of the state in the Philosophy of Right, the authentic version of which can only be found in his lectures. K.H. Ilting, Die Struktur der Rechtspolitik, in Materialien zu Hegel B.2, ed. Manfred Riedel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 52-81.
To summarize: our consideration of what it means for Hegel to write prefaces enjoints us to look for the “speculative” relation that obtains between the “merely historical” concerns of the time, and the essence of the time that Hegel is concerned to reconstruct, as he says, in the “element of thought.” Moreover, it is especially necessary in this work to attend to the prudential side of Hegel’s intentions as an author. A failure to do so will render inaccessible what the Preface obscures. More importantly, it will render obscure Hegel’s disposition toward the political upheavals of his time, and the general task of anchoring political authority in human freedom therewith. For, to anticipate a possible objection, it would be hasty and unwarranted to assume that the prudential side of the Preface makes it less worthy of attention. The Preface is neither the first, nor the last, philosophical work to be written under the threat of persecution. Should this fact be taken to render philosophical works unworthy of our attention, we would have considerably fewer left to read. Nor should it be assumed that prudential intentions are necessarily the least interesting ones. Indeed, precisely because Hegel is so committed to “public reason” and “reconciliation,” it cannot fail to be of interest that he begins his major work on political theory by rendering thematic the apparently enduring conflict between philosophy and politics. How is philosophy to assist in the task of rendering political authority justifiable to free thought, if political authority and free thought remain at loggerheads?

III. Kant’s Legacy: §§ 3-4

We are now better poised to appraise the manner in which Hegel addresses himself to the “concerns of his time.” Hegel does not mince words: our theme is the “disgraceful decline” [schmählichen Verfall] of philosophy in “our times.” He refers vaguely to the fraught legacy of Kantianism and, more specifically, the “Pantheism Controversy.” The inadequacy of “the forms and rules of the old logic… have not been recognized so much as merely felt.” For want of a thoroughgoing comprehension of their inadequacy, the “old rules” have been uncritically cast
away like “fetters.” Philosophy has therefore given way to “the arbitrary [willkürlich] assertions of the heart, imagination [Phantasie] and contingent perspective.”27 Moreover, because the break with tradition was philosophically shallow, it had to be abortive: reflection and discursive thought [Gedankenverhältnis] inevitably reemerge and the “despised methods of ever so customary deduction and reasoning” are “unconsciously” [bewußtlos] reemployed.28 The new philosophy thus falls into what we may call, following Kant, a “paralogism”: eschewing reason, it cannot help but reason.29 The point of these obscure remarks is as follows. The defining event of German Idealism – Kant’s violent break with “dogmatism” – was incomplete at the level of its foundations. As a consequence, the German spirit was left vulnerable to a new form of dogmatism, a dogmatism of feeling, faith and enthusiasm.30

In Hegel’s presentation, the present state of philosophy yields a great deal of restless chatter about “the truth” – its discovery, dissemination and proper formulation – which philosophy cannot fail to remain interested in. Dripping with contempt, he treats his readers to a culinary metaphor. “Form” is rejected as ”external” and “indifferent” to the matter studied, and yet “the same old stew [Kohl – literally “cabbage”] is re-cooked again and again,” and served to all. Different parties dispense their overcooked truths, but whatever is dispensed by one party is quickly supplanted and cleaned away by others dishing out more of the same.31 The metaphor of a pseudo-philosophical soup kitchen is used advisedly. In the absence of formal reflection, the dialogue over political right has become little more than “catering” to whim, taste and feeling.

27 PhR, 12 [3].
28 PhR, 12 [3].
29 This passage points to Hegel’s conviction that we are radically “reasoning” beings, however aware of it. Cf. Robert Pippin, Hegel’s Idealism, 116-171; Adriaan Peperzak, Philosophy and Politics: A Commentary on the Preface to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 47.
31 PhR, 12-13 [4].
At the same time, the metaphor serves to introduce a perennial problem coterminous with the beginning of philosophizing as such. If “in this throng [Gedränge] of truths, there is something neither old nor new but enduring [Bleibendes],” how can it be distinguished in the shuffle? The clash of opinion [Betrachtungen] solicits the task of replacing opinion with knowledge. Without some form of “dialectical” rigor that task can never get off the ground. In this way the decline into “formlessness” has cut off philosophy from philosophizing. Thus form and content must be taken together – whatever that may mean.

Because Hegel leaves it unclear how the sophistic soup kitchen relates to philosophy of right, the following may be supplied. The activity of Hegel’s “zealous truth disseminators” [eifrigen Verbreitern von Warheiten], and their “busybody excesses” [vielgeschäftiger Überfluß], spill over into the public realm. Our subject is not merely the “truth,” but efforts to discern that concerning political right in the absence of formal reflection. The challenge to “public reason” therefore boils down to the following: if Kantianism derives necessarily from a form of intuition, faith or feeling – if Kantianism is not free and rational “all the way down” – then political right, no less than any other doctrine, must be grounded on a form of “unreason.”

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32 *PhR*, 13 [4].
33 *PhR*, 13 [3].
34 Because this dissertation concerns Plato’s *Gorgias*, we cannot help but draw attention to Plato’s association of rhetoric and sophistry with cookery and the flattery of mere appetite and fancy. In this connection one might make mention of the following historical curiosity from after the time the Preface was published. As part of the general historical context is the fact that Hegel’s student and friend Victor Cousin – who published a famous 13 volume translation of Plato – had been deprived of his post and later arrested by Prussian authorities under suspicion of subverting the regime. Hegel went out of his way to visit Cousin in prison and wrote a letter in support of his release. That letter, combined with the efforts of others, succeeding in bringing about the release of Cousin. As an expression of his gratitude, Cousin found no better work of his to dedicate to Hegel than his translation of Plato’s *Gorgias*. It should be added that Hegel’s efforts, together with the political rhetoric of Cousin’s dedication, did little to further endear Hegel to the regime. The dedication commends Hegel for his “courageous” and “noble conduct on behalf of philosophy.” Perhaps no higher compliment could be paid from the standpoint of Socratic philosophy, as presented by Xenophon and Plato. We take note of this connection knowing well that it would be impossible to discern whether Hegel had Plato’s *Gorgias* in mind when he wrote the Preface. Cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 463b-464e, 504c-505a, 521d-522a; Victor Cousin, *Oeuvres de Platon, Tomme 3* (Paris: Bossanges frères, 1826), dédicace. See also Pinkard, *Hegel*, 524-527.
35 *PhR*, 13 [4].
Thus the philosophy of right threatens to become pseudo-philosophical, a form of demagoguery, false prophecy and sophistry in place of ethical philosophy in the Aristotelian tradition.\textsuperscript{38}

Hegel is concerned in particular to counteract what he takes to be the pernicious, specifically political, influence of pseudo-philosophy. It is nevertheless worth remarking on the following easily overlooked admission. In the midst of describing the sophistic soup kitchen Hegel remarks, dryly and seemingly in passing, that such activity may “in other circumstances” be meritorious “\textit{in educating and stirring up the passions}.” With these remarks we encounter one of the paradoxes about the \textit{Preface} anticipated earlier. Hegel will proceed to mount a notoriously scathing attack on “sophistry” and the “philosophy of feeling.” These are taken to threaten the decency of citizens and public officials, who lack the means of resisting corruption. It is difficult to discern what merit Hegel could possibly reserve for that which is otherwise berated to the point of infamy.

Hegel quotes in the present context a passage from the New Testament: “for they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”\textsuperscript{39} The Biblical passage, taken on its own terms, serves to encourage faith and, in particular, the sufficiency of faith for matters of human conduct. Those for whom faith is unpersuasive are beyond saving – that is the point. As for the context supplied by Hegel, we see that he is concerned to stress not only the insufficiency of faith from the perspective of philosophy, but the rejection of reason by the newly faithful. Here, as elsewhere, Hegel does not disappoint in using older traditions for newer ends. For Hegel’s evocation of the bible in the present context must be taken to suggest that faith and feeling might


\textsuperscript{38} Ritter, \textit{Moralität und Sittlichkeit}, in \textit{Metaphysik und Politik}, 289-300.

\textsuperscript{39} PhR, 13 [4]; Cf. Luke, 16.
be employed as means to the ends of reason. Perhaps the feeling and mere belief are to be relied upon where direct appeals to reason can only be expected to prove impotent or unpersuasive.  

IV. Beyond Revolution and Reaction: ¶ 5-7

We turn from a philosophical concern for the “truth” to a political philosophical concern for “the truth concerning right, ethics, and the state.” The relation of philosophical decline to philosophy of right, and therefore to political authority, is accordingly brought into focus. Hegel provides, in abbreviated form, a critique of political philosophy. The truth about political right, says Hegel, is “as old as” its having been set forth and made familiar [dargelegt und bekannt] “in public law, and in public morality and religion.”²¹ He does not say that the “the truth concerning right et cetera” is what is set forth in public law et cetera,” but only that it is as old as law, morality and religion. For should political right be simply identified with these, “the thinking mind” [Geist] would not be “content to possess” it.²² It is necessary that these be

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²⁰ In the bible Jesus enjoins money-loving Pharisees to change their ways with a parable. A rich man goes to hell and a poor man, who was left to feed himself with crumbs from the rich man’s table, is brought by angels to the bosom of Father Abraham. The rich man, crying out for mercy, asks Abraham to send Lazarus to succor him and, that failing, to go warn his five brothers lest they receive the same fate. Abraham declines to do so, and Hegel quotes his response. In what follows, the rich man pleads. His brothers will repent if Abraham sends a messenger from the dead. Abraham responds as follows: if they do not heed Moses and the Prophets, nor would they be persuaded by someone rising from the dead (read=Christ). In the Bible, the prophets should suffice to persuade but do not in the case of evil men. For Hegel, the prophets do not suffice to persuade Hegel or in general, but might prove useful “in other circumstances.” Taken together with what has been said about the collapse of Kantianism into irrationalism, a kind of post-Kantian fideism, we are given to wonder how post-Kantian irrationalism might be of service to the resurrection of reason. One is tempted to wonder whether Hegel’s Moses refers to Moses Mendelssohn. That Moses was faithful to reason (and defended the compatibility of faith and Kantian rationalism) until the end, but on the losing side of the Pantheism controversy (as its initiating moment, Mendelssohn’s debate with Jacobi, convinced almost everyone). Like the Pharisees, the anti-rationalist faith in feeling initiated by Jacobi (and followed by Fries, Schleiermacher, Novalis and others) deviated radically from traditional accounts of faith, and called into question Kantian morality. In Hegel’s view faith was perverted to serve unreason and subjective caprice. Perhaps we are to infer the following: those who find Moses (Mendelssohn) unpersuasive (Jacobi, Fries, Schleiermacher, Novalis) won’t find the resurrection of reason (by Hegel=Jesus/God) any more so. As in the parable itself, the rich man’s brothers will heed neither Moses (as the Pharisees will heed neither Jesus) nor miracle. They will, however, heed their desire for lucre. Civil society, as we shall see far below, puts the love of lucre into good service. More fundamentally, where reason does not suffice, the ends of reason must be effectively realized on the basis of such things as belief, feeling and desire. From the standpoint of Hegel, belief, feeling and natural desire must be dialectically exhibited to point beyond themselves to reason, and indeed shown to be surreptitiously in the service of reason, however hidden its work and “cunning” may be. Hegel does not banish his Pharisees to hell. He re-interprets them as steps on the way to Hegel, as well perhaps as means to the ends of the modern state.

²¹ PHR, 13-14 [5].

²² PHR, 14 [5].
“comprehended”: “right” must be justified to the new spirit of “free thinking,” which does not simply defer to the “given,” supported as it may be by the authorities, common opinion, or the affects.\(^{43}\) Hegel signals his baseline agreement with the newly ascendant principles of the French Revolution. For Hegel *freedom is and must necessarily be the principle of modern philosophy and politics*.\(^{44}\) Thus, however convinced of the inadequacy of Kantianism, Hegel censures the alternatives implied on typically Kantian grounds: both the thoughtless deference to state, tradition or religion and the appeal to desire and feeling are insufficiently “free.”\(^{45}\)

The distinctively Hegelian aspect is the marriage of freedom and history. But what does it mean to say (i) that the “truth” concerning political right is as old as the history of law, public morality, and religion; and simultaneously (ii) that these must be somehow comprehended and justified by “free thinking”? Hegel does little to clarify this question on the present occasion. What he does instead is easily missed: he situates the freedom-tradition question as a problem experienced in the historically unfolding world. We are presented with the following, easily overlooked, “dialectical” procession: beginning from an abstract statement of the reconciliation of freedom and tradition, we turn to the spirit of reaction, then to philosophical Jacobinism, and back to an elaboration of the philosophical problems. That may be seen as follows.

No sooner than Hegel states his commitment to freedom, he turns to those who would find that commitment most unsettling. Vaguely evoking the basic sentiment and orientation of the “restorative” counter-revolutionary movement, Hegel begins with “the simple reaction

\(^{43}\) Cf. Hegel’s discussion of “comprehension” insofar as it relates to justification by historical “circumstance.” *PhR*, 14, 36-37 [§5, §3R].


\(^{45}\) Immanuel Kant, Beantwortung der Frage : Was ist Aufklärung?, in Gesammelte Schriften von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (hereafter Ak.), B. VIII (Berlin: Georg Reimer Verlag, 1912), 35-42. Patten, Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom, 63-73.
Verhalten of ingenuous temperament [unbefangenem Gemüt],” which “is to confidently trust what is officially held as true and to build its mode of conduct and firm situation in life on this solid foundation.” The problem is that “now” the foundations are anything but firm. The supposed consensus over ethical life has long become muddled. To his own “perplexity” the patriot finds no stable consensus to adhere to, only an unmanageable flux of ideas and commitments. Turning away from the generally willed to the more parochial, the uncritical patriot seeks to pass off the latter for the former. Pride, vanity and private interest vested in the old ways displace the “universally acknowledged and valid.” However that may be, the object appealed to – tradition – has been swallowed up by the vicissitudes of time. Politics can return or hold on to previous times no more than men can “leap over Rhodes.”

Lest Hegel appear overly “progressive” in his outlook, he proceeds immediately to castigate the antistrope to the reactionary, those who “think and look for their freedom and the basis of ethics in thought.” The problem here is that,

“This right, however high, however godly it is, will reverse itself into wrong when only this passes for thinking and thought only knows itself to be free insofar as it deviates from the generally recognized and binding [Gültigen] and knows how to invent something particular for itself.”

Previously we encounter a thoughtless or naive commitment to the traditional; now, an appeal to free thought that “demonstrates” its freedom by intransigently opposing the existing order.

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46 As Wood translates. Literally: keeping or holding back, checking or stopping, even repressing, restraining or suppressing. Wood’s translation takes a certain liberty with the word “Verhalten” – presumably a holdover from the “Prussianism” controversy – but it does faithfully capture what Hegel has in mind.

47 PhR, 14 [6].

48 As we shall note later, it is precisely periods of dissolution that provoke a turn to the ideas on the part of “nobler souls”; in the present instance perplexity is not out of philosophical wonder so much as hypocrisy. But might there be a connection between the two, at least according to Hegel? Cf. PhH, 93-94 [I.C.c].


50 Thus the reaction “misses the forest for the trees.” PhR, 14 [6].

51 PhR, 15 [6].

52 PhR, 15 [7].
There it was a preference for the old as old; here, it is an insistence on the new as new, especially “in relation to the state.”

“One might even suppose that no state or constitution had ever existed in the world or was presently before us, but that now – and this now is of ever ongoing duration – we must start from the very beginning, and that the ethical world had just been waiting for solutions [Ausdenken], investigations [Ergründen] and grounds [Begründen] as are only now available.”

In thought and deed the pursuit of political right has been thoroughly uprooted from the world it refers to, such that the real world of political right, as expressed in actual states and constitutions, is scarcely recognized. Hegel is not confident that these developments are benign. Robespierre and the Terror echo noticeably in the background.

Hegel has turned seamlessly and obliquely from an abstract presentation of the unity of freedom and tradition, to those who take tradition independently of freedom, followed by those who take freedom independently of tradition. Hegel’s well-known commitment to the philosophy of freedom may well have drawn the suspicion of those in power. Although he makes that commitment, the Preface is written in such a way that allows the reader to easily overlook it. Hegel’s critique of the reactionary-restorative tendency is thoroughly muted in comparison to his critique of would be revolutionaries. That can only be regarded deliberate. As we shall see below, the chaotic debate over freedom afforded Hegel the opportunity to obscure the degree to which his own philosophy was not simply the “philosophy of Prussia.” He was able to make clever use of the fact that the “philosophy of freedom” had become a big and unruly tent. In the Preface, Hegel assimilates and exploits different sides of the debate over

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53 PhR, 15 [7].
54 Cf. PhG, 431-441 [§§582-595]; PhR, 49-52 [§5, Z]. Paul Franco has also drawn attention to this connection in Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom, 125-127.
freedom, and advances his own position as above the fray of dangerous and inadequate alternatives. Thus downplaying the paradoxical blend of traditionalism and progressivism integral to Hegel’s own state theory, both the adherence to tradition and the fervor for newness are upbraided for their irrationalism and imprudence. This feature of Hegel’s “art of writing” has always enabled “one-sided” readers to derive the “Hegels” they most wish to find, that is, “Hegels” that are one-sidedly censorious of reactionaries or revolutionaries.

Hegel’s position on the two dispositions towards political authority is, of course, a neither/nor and not the either/or with which political life is more familiar. It is important therefore to grasp the following point, which returns us to the restless shuffle of “truths” portrayed earlier. Hegel really means, as he said before, that the “truths” advanced by the opposed viewpoints “are of precisely the same kind.” The parties in question represent the essentially Janus-faced character of philosophy after Kant and politics after the revolution. Romantic longing and resolute commitment to tradition as tradition form the obverse of the practical and theoretical dissolution of the old world.57 The Preface appeals to a hard and fast opposition of the “natural” and “reflective” understandings of things, but it is written from the perspective of a “speculative” philosophy that regards that opposition as merely “apparent.”

57 “The romantic restorative negation [Verneinung] of the new time and its revolution belong together with the revolutionary emancipation from its historical antecedents [Herkunftsgesichte]; they have the same ground… the revolutionary negation of the past and the restorative negation of the present are therefore, in their presupposition of historical discontinuity between past origins and future [Herkunft und Zukunft], identical; and this discontinuity thus becomes for Hegel the decisive problem of the time – it operates unresolved in all of the tensions and oppositions of the time.” Ritter, Hegel und die Französische Revolution, 201-212, 248-250. Cf. Kelly, Hegel’s Retreat from Eleusis, 127-136. The great merit of Löwith’s book is his sustained focus on Hegel’s synthesis insofar as it lent itself to the uses and abuses of those who came after him. For Löwith, Hegel’s synthesis enabled a stream of “one sided” appropriations – those of Stirner, Ruge, Bauer, Feuerbach and the like – which re-read the whole through the parts, giving parts of the system a significance that Hegel denied to them. What allows Kierkegaard and Marx to pull apart Hegel’s synthesis, as in the case of “Left and Right Hegelians,” is the fact that Hegel undertook it in the first place. There is a very noticeable echo of Heidegger’s Hegel in Löwith’s account; as he once remarked, “Marx and Kierkegaard are the greatest of Hegelians. They are such against their wills.” Karl Löwith, Von Hegel zu Nietzsche, 83-84, 113-161. Cf. Martin Heidegger, Wegmarken, 260-261. See also: Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought, 75-84, 223-242.
If the dialectic of reactionaries and revolutionaries fails to clarify the relation of freedom to tradition, Hegel threatens to completely drown the matter in complexities by turning to the relation of nature to spirit. Since the connections are easily missed, it is helpful to begin by remarking on the unity of the discussion so far. We began with the decline of formal reflection and the rise of philosophical “arbitrariness.” We turned, subsequently, to the appropriation of tradition by “free thought.” Related to that task are the two forms of confusion that Hegel took up in sequence thereafter: the thoughtless conservatism of “patriots” and the abstract criticism of “revolutionaries.” Now, we turn to man’s disposition toward the natural and spiritual orders. Hegel leaves it entirely to the reader to connect these themes. The following may be supplied as a provisional indication of the relation that obtains between them. Confusion regarding the appropriation of tradition by man is related back to the appropriation of nature by spirit, which, in the broadest sense, may be taken to define the thought and activity of man as such. The confusion of patriots and revolutionaries are modifications of a more fundamental relation and self-misunderstanding.

Hegel writes the following in order to clarify what he takes to be our confused disposition towards nature and spirit or freedom.

“Of nature one grants that philosophy must recognize it how it is, that the philosopher’s stone lies hidden, somewhere in nature itself, that it [nature] is reasonable in itself [in sich vernünftig] and that it is this that knowledge has to investigate and grasp conceptually, this actual reason [wirkliche Vernunft] present in it – not the shapes and accidents manifest on the surface so much as its [nature’s] eternal harmony, though taken as the immanent law and essence within it.”

In studying nature, we are ever mindful of the fact that we are the ones who may be mistaken. We do not attempt to “dissolve” the laws of nature on the basis of pure thought, as if gravity could be “critiqued” into oblivion. But although we are inclined to regard the natural world as

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58 *PhR*, 15 [7]. We shall return to this relation in Part 1.B.IV, below.

59 *Werke IX: Die Naturephilosophie* (hereafter *PhN*), 15-23 [§246, Z].
elusively orderly – law governed – the spiritual world is held to be “god-forsaken” or
“abandoned to contingency and arbitrariness.” In other words, the world created by man is
regarded as less orderly than that given to him. In making these observations, Hegel brings us to
raise the following question. Given that the ethical world and its “course” is one that man
is conscious of as a product of human striving and thinking, shouldn’t he feel more at home in the
spiritual world than the natural? Why may we not consider the ethical world more “fortunate”
than that given to us by nature? Hegel’s discussion implies a radical break with nature
reminiscent of that already achieved by Bacon, Hobbes and Locke. Nature is incomplete and
cannot provide us with what we need – worse, it is a threat to what we have, want and need.

Although it has fallen into fashion among revisionist Kantians and Hegelians to regard
the nature-freedom problem as dispensable, for Kant and the generation that came afterwards it
was of primary significance. Like the relation of freedom to tradition, however, that of nature to
spirit will not be resolved in the Preface. Hegel downplays the obvious: the spiritual world is
regarded as arbitrary and capricious because man can act as nature cannot. It is the violence of
specifically human history, and the uses and abuses of political authority with it, that leads man
to turn (romantically) away from the (inauthentic) world produced by human reason to that
given “immediately” by nature or tradition. It is left entirely to Hegel’s student Eduard Gans to
supply, in the form of a lengthy footnote, one of Hegel’s central theses. The element of spirit is
freedom and that of nature is necessity. It is in man’s nature to be fundamentally “not at home”

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60 PhR, 15-16 [7].
61 PhR, 15-16 [7]. Cf. Francis Bacon, The New Organon, Book I-I, CXXIX; Hobbes, Leviathan, 76-78; XIII,8-
14; John Locke, Second Treatise on Government (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 18-30 [V.25-51]; Fichte,
Wissenschaftslehre, I.247-291. See also: Manfred Riedel, Nature and Freedom in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right in
Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’ in Hegel’s Political Philosophy, 136-150.
64 In doing so, one wonders if Gans misunderstood Hegel’s intention, for it is characteristic of the Preface that it
tends to leave matters such as these unclear. The Preface is not intended to be “scientific.”
in nature. All thought of anything whatsoever – the return to natural immediacy included – is a product of human freedom. The proper domain for thought about nature and tradition is therefore not nature but spirit. For that very reason, neither law, nor compulsion exercised on behalf of law, should be seen in naturalistic terms. Indeed, according to Hegel, as a product of human freedom, the chaos and violence discernible on the surface of human history is, in principle, always already more hospitable to human freedom than nature.

Hegel refers in this context to the hidden reason discernible beneath the accidents of human history. In doing so, he puts obliquely into words a more troublesome view of his. The spiritual world, and more fundamentally, the free historical activity that accounts for the creation and sustenance of that world, is itself to be understood as “law governed,” however elusively or surreptitiously. But how might such “laws of spirit” be understood? Neither law in the sense of legal statute, nor the understanding of law employed in the natural sciences, could suffice. The latter is unfit to account for human freedom, and the former, in referring to particular acts of legislation (positive law), must fall short of that which is sought, namely, laws that antecede and account for the genesis of particular law bound communities as such.

It is easily missed that, in this context, Hegel already makes in passing his vexing claim, later indented into the text, that the rational must be taken as real (“wirklich”) and vice versa. The state is identified with “reason as it actualizes [verwirklicht] itself in the element of self-consciousness.” The word “actuality” or wirklichkeit derives from the word “work” or wirken.” Hegel’s appeal to commonsensical views about nature and spirit conceals a bold “Fichtean” innovation, which brings “activity” and “production” into the very center of thought and philosophy. On that basis, Hegel already enjoins us to look for laws that govern human activity on the broadest scale, laws with the universality of nature that apply to concrete expression of

65 Cf. PhR, 24 [P.12].
human freedom or “willing.” We have, in nuce, the cunning of reason – but Hegel does little to make that explicit in the present context.

Hegel is concerned instead to advance the more modest claim that his philosophical rivals fail to take the real world of human relations sufficiently seriously.

Practical life is thought to lead us to pursue “truths” that cannot possibly be seized hold of within the boundaries of mere reason (the Kantian view).\(^6^6\) We are treated to a typically virtuosic dialectical reversal. The view that regards the truth problematic culminates in the opposite: it approaches the problems as if they required no exertion at all.\(^6^7\) Philosophy and philosophy of right have become lazy. Rather than serving as an incitement to the active pursuit of wisdom, we are referred to the subjectivity of the self. As a result, all are certain that they know philosophy and have within themselves the capacity to judge it.\(^6^8\) Philosophy is no longer the exclusive preserve of those who labor at thinking: thus “no other art or science is shown this ultimate contempt, the assumption being that one can take possession of it directly from the start.” Although all other arts, even the lowliest, are assumed to require work, philosophy is exempted from this demand. Intellectual decline is accompanied by a democratization of wisdom in the popular imagination.\(^6^9\)

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\(^{66}\) Immanuel Kant, *Kritisch der reinen Vernunft*, in Ak., B.3, 310-311.

\(^{67}\) The activity of the idea, the work of human freedom, and the labor of the negative, is that which, in the hands of Hegel, bridges the irresolvable oppositions of Kantian philosophy. In other words, Hegel implies that the “laziness” of Kantianism, it unwillingness to work beyond the view that matters are simply “problematic,” derives from Kant’s abstraction from the labor or work of the negative, viz., that which the philosophy of Hegel will make central.

\(^{68}\) “Herein lies the authorization, indeed the obligation, for each thinker to take his own run, though not in search of the philosopher’s stone, for he has been spared of this search by the philosophizing of our time, and everyone is assumed, however he stands or goes [Wood: whatever his condition], that this stone has been seized into his control.” PhR, 16-17 [7].

\(^{69}\) PhR, 17 [7]. As the Phenomenology tells us, philosophy has been demoted to a “sub-banausic” level. Wisdom being a human birthright or fantasy, is no longer to be pursued in earnest. As Baillie translates: “In all spheres of science, art, skill, and handicraft it is never doubted that, in order to master, a considerable amount of trouble must be spent in learning and in being trained. As regards philosophy, on the contrary, there seems still an assumption prevalent that, though everyone with eyes and fingers is not on that account in a position to make shoes if he only has leather and last, yet everybody understands how to philosophize straight away, and pass judgment on philosophy, simply because he possesses the criterion for doing so in his natural reason – as if he did not in the same way possess the standard for shoemaking too in his own foot.” PhG, 62-63 [67]; Cf. Vorrede zu Hinrichs’ Religionsphilosophie, in Werke XI: Berliner Schriften, 60-61; Plato, *Republic*, 560a-561e.
The same judgment is then applied to politics. “This self-styled philosophy has expressly stated that the truth… about ethical things, particularly with respect to the state, government and constitution, is what each allows to well up out of his heart, feeling and enthusiasm.”

Hegel refers in this context to Psalms 127:2 ‘He gives to His own in their sleep’ has been made use of with respect to science, such that each sleeper numbers himself amongst His [God’s] own, but those concepts received in sleep are to be sure also wares of the same.”

Turning to the biblical passage itself, we are not surprised to find that it is not written in defense of labor. Rather, we have the futility of labor before God, and therefore the primacy of faith:

“If the Lord does not build a House,
In vain do its builders labor on it.
If the Lord does not watch over a town,
In vain does the Watchman look out.
In vain you who rise early, sit late,
eaters of misery’s bread.”

Hegel’s intentions are easily discerned in the architectural metaphor that he provides as a substitute for the Bible’s: “the architectonic of its [the state’s] rationality [Vernünftigkeit]…produces the strength of the whole and the harmony of its parts” through its diversification into various components and the precise measure by which they relate as “pillars, arches and buttresses.”

In other words, the state, and political authority with it, is above all a product of human labor – a “refined structure” which cannot, as Hegel accuses his rivals of doing, be reduced “to a purée of ‘heart, friendship and enthusiasm.’”

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70 PhR, 18 [8]. Hegel’s Italics.
71 PhR, 18 [8]. Hegel’s omissions and modifications of passages quoted – often from memory – are notorious. In this case, as Knox notes, “own” is substituted for “beloved.” It is perhaps impossible to discern the extent to which Hegel’s misquotations are intentional or accidental. However that may be, given Hegel’s adversary, that substitution might be fitting. Philosophy of Right, trans. Knox, 299 n.11.
74 PhR, 19 [8].
The emphasis on the activity or work, as opposed to immediacy, of human freedom prepares the stage for Hegel’s opening salvo against Jacob Friedrich Fries. Having assembled the youth movement, the *Burschenschaften*, Fries appeals to the grassroots:

“‘In the people [Volke] in which a real communal spirit rules, the life of each business of official affairs would issue from below, each individual project of national education [Volksbildung] and of national service [volkstümlichen Dienstes] would be sanctified by the living society through the holy bond of friendship inviolably united.’”

As is all too well known, Hegel does not oppose “real communal spirit.” Rather, he objects to the pretension that the spirit of a community, and with it “all business of official affairs,” could well up spontaneously in the way described. The ethical world is not spontaneously given but a product or achievement. Similarly, the point is not that Fries professes to give politics to the people, but that the political is dangerously trivialized in the manner of his so doing.

To anticipate, in speaking of the *Wirklichkeit* of reason in the element of self-consciousness, Hegel means to indicate the everyday work of ethical life, the coordinated and diversified hustle and bustle of organized human interaction, and the “reflective” institutions that hold it together. Similarly, if the elusive bridge between nature and freedom is there to be found, it is to be found in the activity of the “idea,” the labor of the negative, the “bootstrapping” work of the human spirit that lifts itself out of nature. The foregoing claims are borne out by the discussion of “actuality” in the *Science of Logic*, to which Hegel directed readers of his that were scandalized by the “Doppelsatz.”

According to the implied standpoint, the consolidation of political authority is to be approached neither in terms of natural law, nor in terms of positive law, but by rendering rationally intelligible the pulse of human activity.

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75 *PhR*, 18 [8].
VI. The Faustian Turn: ¶¶ 8-9

With Hegel’s criticism of Fries and the philosophy of feeling the Preface comes to focus on the tension between philosophy and politics. Although Hegel is known as the great reconciler of thought and action, in the Preface the rift between philosophy and politics only widens. At first the problem concerns merely the philosophy of immediacy, and what Hegel will call sophistry. As the discussion progresses, however, all parties are dragged into the conflict: sophists, ordinary citizens, politicians, and philosophers.

Hegel does little to conceal his views on the matter. Renouncing reason and exalting that which comes “naturally” or “immediately” to the subject, the new philosophy, once politicized, threatens to dissolve the ethical order into a miasma of German feeling. Hegel is clearly harboring premonitions of ruin. That is confirmed by his turn to the “good authority” of Goethe’s Mephistopheles:

“Do but despise understanding and science,
The highest of all gifts of man –
So you will have delivered yourself over to the devil
And must perish.”

Evoking this authority, Hegel claims to have done so “elsewhere.” Should we follow that indication, we find that “elsewhere” refers to a section of the Phenomenology entitled “Pleasure and Necessity.” It is the first in a sequence of spiritual forms treated under the heading of

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79 Some thoroughly misguided readers have presented Fries and the student fraternities as progressive liberals. They were not. In fact, there may be a further layer to Hegel’s reference to the book of Psalms in association with Fries’ activities at Wartburg. For while the biblical passage would seem to refer to God’s chosen, Fries’ speech was given “to his own” in the further sense that it flattered the Burschenschaften’s German chauvinism. The Burschenschaften were known to be a hotbed of xenophobia and romantic “Urvolk” nationalism, reflecting the very spiritual undercurrents that would bubble up catastrophically within a hundred years’ time. Amidst the burning of “un-German” books, Fries’ speech flattened not only the irrationalism of his audience, but their sense of superiority and autochthony. It appealed to the clamoring for a politics of German self-assertion in vogue at the time and, as a number have argued, popular anti-Semitism as well. It is therefore in a double sense that Fries’ “sleepers” might have counted themselves amongst the chosen as befits the origin of their claims: first as naturally enlightened by sentiment, second as participating within the spirit and historical destiny of the German Volk. Terry Pinkard, Hegel: A Biography, 395-398. Avineri, Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State, 119-122. Avineri, Hook’s Hegel, in Hegel’s Political Philosophy, 76. Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1941),178-180; Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought, 220-221. Cf. Jakob Friedrich Fries, Feierrede an die teutschen Burschen, Oppositionsblatt oder Weimarsche Zeitung, October 30, 1818.
80 PhR, 19 [8].
“Reason,” whose course features the increasingly intense confrontation between “subjectivity” and the “real” world. Here too we are dealing with the actualization [verwirklichung] of self-conscious reason. Comparing the context of the Faustian turn with its cognates in the Encyclopedia, it occurs to us that the subject matter of the Preface may be more “scientifically” appropriate to the task of introducing the Philosophy of Right than Hegel lets off. Once more on our way to “Objective Spirit,” Hegel is describing a form of “subjective idealism.”

“Faustian” idealism is alienated and seeks satisfaction. Because reason seems to promise only greater alienation, the Faustian turns his back on reason and, in a fit of passion, seeks satisfaction by throwing himself ruinously against the course of the world. Similarly, it is the marriage of pseudo-theory and “activism,” or political intensity combined with moral fanaticism, that worries Hegel in the Preface. Roughly in keeping with the overall arcs of the Phenomenology and Encyclopedia, “what immediately ensues for such a perspective is for it to adopt the form of piety…for what won’t this busyness [agitation - Getrieb] fail to make use of in its pursuit of authority!” In a romantic mélange of feeling and faith, the simple motions of the human soul are opposed to the harsh inauthenticity of the world. Opposed to the divinized heart therefore “stands an actuality [eine Wirklichkeit]…by which the particular individuality is oppressed, a violent ordinance of the world which contradicts the law of the heart.” Thus the world appears irreducibly sinister, or can only be regarded as a “dead, cold letter and chain.”

Be that as it may, it is merely the reflection of a perversion. For the Faustian turn is crypto-theoretical, or the product of reason as opposed to feeling. Thus Fries’ ostensible return to

82 Cf. PhG, 271 [§360] and context; EM, 288-299, [§§469-478].
83 PhR, 19 [8].
84 PhG, 275 [369].
85 PhR, 20 [9].

Stated differently, unbounded idealism is nihilism.\footnote{As Jacobi once said of Fichte, “Truly, my dear Fichte, it would not annoy me if you, or whoever, should call Chimerism what I set against Idealism, which I rebuke as Nihilism.” F.H. Jacobi, \textit{Briefe an Fichte}, in \textit{Werke 2.1}, 200-215. Cf. Rosen, \textit{G.W.F. Hegel}, 20-22, 104-115, 193-211; Charles Taylor, \textit{Hegel} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 402-421; Frederick Beiser, \textit{Hegel}, 27-29, 174-178.} To borrow a formulation from Nietzsche at his most Hegelian, the new philosophy reflects the “remarkable opposition of an inside to which no outside, and an outside to which no inside, can correspond.” Precisely what Nietzsche will say of Germany’s “cultureless” fixation on culture, Hegel says here of his rivals: most spiritless when they speak of spirit, most lifeless when they appeal to life.\footnote{Cf. \textit{PhR}, 20 [9] with the discussion of “form and content” insofar as it relates to the problem of German “inwardness,” particularly (as in Hegel) in terms of the abandonment of form for content, in Nietzsche, \textit{Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben}, 267-274, [§4].} The new philosophy cannot issue in anything sufficiently fixed, for all real expressions of human freedom will invariably fall short.\footnote{In some respects, Hegel’s critique of abstract idealism is not far from that of his critic Eric Voegelin. Would it be inaccurate to say that Hegel is of the view that the permutations of spirit treated above live in a “second order reality,” or consist in “pneumopathological” disorders, or seek to “immanentize the eschaton”? Despite Voegelin’s scathing critique of Hegel, the two have more in common than Voegelin would care to admit. In each case the search for order in history is provoked by an acute sense of spiritual crisis. Cf. Eric Voegelin, \textit{The Eclipse of Reality}, in \textit{What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings}, eds. Thomas Hollweck and Paul Caringella (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 111-162.} Thus Hegel firmly denies that political right could be derived from how men might be or feel could they be purified from worldly imperfection.\footnote{Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, \textit{Il Principe} (Milano: Ugo Mursia, 1976), 94 [XV].} Neither spirit, nor life, law or “feeling,” are, in the strict sense, abstract. Human freedom and desire only manifest themselves in “determinate” form, which is to say, in a “living” world “dashed asunder [auseinandergeschlagene] into an organic realm” of human relations.\footnote{\textit{PhR}, 19 [8].}

We may conclude this section by noting that the position Hegel takes here is not essentially different from that set forth in the \textit{Phenomenology}, where he takes up the
revolutionary pursuit of “absolute freedom” and its culmination in the “terror.” Hegel’s longstanding commitment to the ideals of the French revolution is balanced by worries about the continued “aggravation” of spiritual malaise. Thus the chaotic flux of opinion, depicted earlier, parallels the restless destruction of the post-revolutionary period. For related reasons, the public teaching of the Preface promotes the reconsolidation of order within the context of great political and theoretical upheaval.

VII. “Official Duties”: ¶¶ 10-11

Precisely because Hegel comes out in defense of political authority, he encourages readers to conclude that he is an authoritarian. Hegel follows his criticism of Fries with the following: “the law is… the chief shibboleth by which the false brethren and friends of the so-called ‘people’ may be distinguished.” Like the Ephraimites interrogated by the Gileadites, the enemies of the state give themselves up for the slaughter. It is unsurprising that passages such as these have been taken as indications of political servility, or worse. However, as anticipated, Hegel’s remarks in this context cannot be adequately grasped outside of the prudential considerations that conditioned the self-presentation of philosophy in the Preface.

Hegel was said earlier to have been deeply critical of reactionaries and revolutionaries alike. Both were seen as one-sided responses to the problem of freedom, which had come into prominence as the foremost concern of Kantian philosophy on the one hand and the politics of the French Revolution on the other. It was implied earlier that Hegel rhetorically exploited this “identity-in-difference” to suit his purposes. The Preface was not written in such a way that

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93 Cf. Brief an Friedrich Creuzer (30. Okt. 1819), in Briefe B.II.
95 PhR, 20 [9].
96 Judges, 12.5-6.
97 This claim is in fact not all that controversial, though perhaps more so for an English readership. Consider the following claim at the outset of an influential French work by a known and respected Hegel scholar: “We perceive now that Hegel has systematically dissimulated, more or less effectively depending on the case, many aspects of his existence, his activity, his intimate thoughts. And this in different domains: familial, religious,
clearly conveys where he stands, for none could deny that one side is the recipient of more abuse than the other. Nevertheless, given the political insecurities of the time, we cannot fail to conclude that it was indeed prudent for Hegel to emphasize his censure of the state’s especially thoughtless and noisy opponents, while downplaying his condemnation of those who uncritically endorsed it. Not only was Hegel’s denunciation of the recently deposed Fries opportunistic, but perhaps opportunistic to such an extent that even Hegel’s most hostile detractors have underestimated it. Hegel’s motives for lashing out at Fries are well known to have been over-determined – personal, philosophical, professional, political and timely – but the worst one can say of Hegel’s rhetorical strategy is that it was overkill. Few, at least in the immediate term, were going to call Hegel’s loyalty to the Prussian state into question. It is for related reasons that “esoteric” readings of Hegel are mostly a left-Hegelian tradition. In the Preface Hegel almost completely conceals his own “progressivism.”

As a few circumspect readers have noted, when Hegel speaks of the law as “shibboleth” he prefakes that once more with a reference to something he has said “elsewhere.” Should we follow that indication, we are lead to Hegel’s critique of a leading “reactionary,” thus to that which remains all but unmentioned in the Preface. In §258 the same phrase is employed with reference to Karl Ludwig von Haller, a leading theorist of the Prussian Restoration, whose books were burned at the very festival where Fries delivered his harangue. Here, however, the “shibboleth” is evoked as part of a broader denunciation of those who exalt the state in utter

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98 “Engels demonstrates this revolutionary character on Hegel’s sentence that the actual is also rational. It is in appearance reactionary, but in truth revolutionary, because Hegel does not straightforwardly mean by ‘actual’ that which by chance endures [Bestehende], so much as ‘true’ and ‘necessary’ being. Thus the apparently state preserving [staatserhaltende] thesis of the Rechtsphilosophie can, according to ‘all the rules’ of the Hegelian way of thinking, be transformed into its opposite: ‘all that endures deserves to perish.’ Hegel himself to be sure did not draw such a strong conclusion from his dialectics, so much as contradict it through the conclusion of his system and masked its critical-revolutionary side with a dogmatic-conservative one... Both sides of the split in the Hegelian school rests thereupon one metaphysical point.” Löwith, Von Hegel zu Nietzsche, 83. See context.

99 Cf. Rosenzweig, Hegel und Der Staat, 352-353.
neglect of human freedom. Fries and Haller represent two sides of the same coin, united in their “hatred of the law.” Haller’s opposition to the codification of law and the imposition of constitutional restraints on government stems from the same source as, and is no less misguided than, Fries’ appeal to the heart and its ebullitions of revolutionary feeling. But Hegel has every reason to downplay his critique of Restoration statism and so he does, with Fries standing in for something much larger than Fries. To be sure, Hegel is almost entirely responsible for the polarized character of his reception.

As we turn to paragraphs 10 and 11, the following should be stressed with respect to the form and content of the text at this stage. Hegel sets into motion the two sides that he has presented us with – let us call them, following Plato, sophists and statesmen – and concludes with the collateral damage visited upon philosophy. Hegel’s rhetoric is acerbic and gusty, and easily obscures the precision of its underlying plan. The conflict is governed by “necessity.”

The new philosophy, as we have anticipated, is pseudo-philosophy. “Now that the chicanery of arbitrariness [Rabulisterei der Willkür] has seized for itself the name of philosophy and has been able to give a large public the impression that such silliness is philosophy, it has almost become disgraceful to still speak philosophically about the nature of the state.” Sophistry has once more brought political philosophy into disrepute. Further, it is understandable that it has. “Right-minded men [rechtlichen Männern] are not to be blamed should they prove impatient as soon as they hear talk of a philosophical science of the state.” Gentlemen can hardly be expected to have time for abstract and frivolous teachings. That some

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100 PhR, 401-402 [§258].
101 As Allen Wood has noted in his edition of the Philosophy of Right, “there is something craftier than even handedness going on here.” Allen Wood, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, 388.
102 PhR, 20 [10].
103 PhR, 21 [10]. Hegel mentions earlier that the inclination of upstanding citizens is to disregard the philosophy of feeling as childish, and simply go about their business. There, as here, it is nevertheless suggested that the philosophy of feeling, which is said to flatter the young, is not so much harmless as dangerous.
teachings may have attracted the unwanted attention of the state should be no occasion for surprise.\textsuperscript{104} To account for that claim, Hegel presents us for the first time with an argument that is strictly “historical” in nature. “Philosophy with us is not, as in the case of the Greeks, exercised as a private art, but has an open existence, bordering on the public, particularly or alone in service of the state.”\textsuperscript{105} The persecution of sophists and philosophers by the state occasions the introduction of “history,” which will only become more prominent as the Preface progresses.

Hegel has at last raised the delicate subject of his “official duties.” Although Socrates carried out his activity in private, Hegel appears to have no choice but to do so in public. Hegel was expected to “spiritually” reinforce the ethics of a state, which had arrogated to itself considerable leverage to promote that end. However that may be, the alleged “Philosopher of the Prussian State” gives ample reason for us to question the state’s capacity to oversee matters of philosophy. Hegel’s presentation of state officials, all the more striking given his apparent elevation of the “universal class,” is nothing if not ambivalent.\textsuperscript{106} The old refrain “When God grants an office, so does he grant understanding” is no longer to be taken seriously.\textsuperscript{107} Rechtlichen Männern seem to have little patience or time for “intellectual labor.” The “philosopher’s stone” is not to be taken for granted as the possession of civil servants or princes for “it takes time to think.”\textsuperscript{108} Moreover, it was precisely under the watch of government officials that pseudo-philosophy is taken to have come into prominence. Thus Hegel speaks repeatedly of the ill repaid “confidence” governments have had in philosophy, but not their

\textsuperscript{104} PhR, 21 [10]. Hegel does not, it should be noted, mention censorship, or explicitly defend censorship. He does no more than imply that the fact of government “attention” is understandable. The issue of censorship is taken up in §319. Hegel’s position on the matter is complicated and cannot be taken up here.

\textsuperscript{105} PhR, 21 [10]. Author’s italics.

\textsuperscript{106} Cf. PhR, 357 [§205].

\textsuperscript{107} PhR, 22 [10].

\textsuperscript{108} As Kojève once put it. Tyranny and Wisdom, in On Tyranny, 150-152, 163-166.
“knowledge” of philosophy.\textsuperscript{109} Finally, Hegel fails to mention that the private character of ancient philosophy failed to protect it from the Athenian demos. By no means could Hegel be expected to have overlooked that.\textsuperscript{110} We are given to suspect the following: even if Hegel or others did deserve the confidence of the state, it is at least questionable that the state and its officials would know it.

There can be no doubt that Hegel considers his Rechtlichen Männern naïve. At the same time, nor does he call their competence entirely into question. For, and this ambiguity is of no small interest to the overall character of Hegelian philosophy, nor do state officials prove fully wanting when it comes to distinguishing Recht from wrong. For, as Hegel goes on to say, it is only for a short while that sophistry “appears” innocuous and needn’t fear state intervention. The “appearance” that sophistry is “innocuous” would prevail were it not for the fact that, locked up [schlössen] in the nature of the state is “a need for deeper education [Bildung] and insight,” a “need that must obtain great significance for governments.”\textsuperscript{111} Regimes qua regimes must articulate a way of life taken as the “right” way to live and manage affairs. That need comes invariably into conflict with the activity of sophists. One needn’t be a philosopher to sense this. Rather, and regardless of whether deeper understanding may be wanting, statesmen as statesmen feel this need acutely. As Hegel remarks later, “public opinion” is to be as much “respected as despised.”\textsuperscript{112} That philosophy and sophistry have earned the ire of statesmen and upstanding citizens is an indication of a necessity governing their place within the whole – a necessity which they are not altogether unaware of.

\textsuperscript{109} PhR, 21-22 [10].
\textsuperscript{110} See Part I.B.VI-VII, below.
\textsuperscript{111} PhR, 21-22 [10].
\textsuperscript{112} PhR, 485-486 [§318].
The practical sensibilities of ingenuous citizens and state officials engender an awareness of the educative needs of the regime and the corrupting influence of sophistry. Thus Hegel appeals to the practical sensibilities of practical men so understood.

“This shallowness leads of itself, in regard to the ethical, right, and duty overall, to those fundamentals [Grundsätze] which constitute superficiality in this sphere, to the principles of the sophists [Prinzipien der Sophisten], that we are so definitely familiar with from Plato – the principles which place what right is in subjective aims and opinions, in subjective feeling and particular convictions – principles, from which follows alike the destruction of inner ethics and upright conscience, of love and right amongst private persons, as well as the destruction of public order and state law.”

Most remarkable, besides the great bluster, is the extent to which ancient and modern sophistry are assimilated, the only distinction being the previously mentioned “sociological” one. Indeed, one might wonder why Hegel does not mention the rather different distinction between ancients and moderns noted in the Phenomenology, which refers to the “immediate” as opposed to “reflective” character of the former. That may be clarified in part, but only in part, by the fact that Hegel refers again to the ill-fated confidence of governments in philosophy. Although Socrates could vie over the education of particular youths in the isolated setting of Cephalus’ home, the Prussian regime has enabled the possibility that entire generations might sit at the feet of Thrasymachus. The politicization of philosophy threatens the general corruption of citizens.

Hegel’s presentation of the intellectualization of politics is puzzling, for Hegel is well known to have also smiled on the institutionalization of ethical education. Nevertheless, in the Preface we see that Hegel clearly laments the consequent exacerbation of the tension between philosophy and politics. Popular contempt for philosophy and law – we are reminded of Fries and Haller, of the “left” and “right” – is flattered. In the harshest terms yet, like slaves witnessing the leveling of the Roman despots, common prejudice is all too happy to see “all

113 PhR, 21-22 [10].
114 Cf. PhG, 36-37 [33].
distinctions removed” and mere opinion accorded the same status as law.\footnote{PhR, 23 [10]. As others have noted, the reference to criminality would seem to refer to Wilhelm de Wette’s consoling letter to Karl Sand’s mother, which defended the assassination of Kotzebue on the basis of his profound feelings and the like.} As a matter of course, philosophy takes collateral damage. Philosophy becomes suspect with false philosophy, for they prove indistinguishable to the many. At the very least, philosophy cannot limit itself to what is in keeping with the interests of the regime.\footnote{That the teaching of world history reveals the “particular wisdom” of states in their irreducible “particularity” is a case in point. PhR, 501-507 [§§336-344].} The Preface is therefore written in defense of philosophy as much if not more than in defense of public order. “One cannot fail to recognize that the study of philosophy seems to have become in need of an element of protection and assistance in many different aspects”; it has become questionable that “tolerance and a public existence for the study of philosophy can be secured.”\footnote{PhR, 22-23 [11].} Although philosophy may have been granted a public role in the modern world, the modern world does not appear especially more hospitable to philosophy. Hegel is known to have said that the death of Socrates “was necessary.” Does the conflict we have been tracing appear any less necessary? If the Preface speaks to the differences between ancients and moderns, the persecution of philosophy is not one of them.

Hegel has presented us with the following procession: sophistry corrodets ethical life, statesmen take measures to defend public ethics, and philosophy, which for many is indistinguishable from sophistry, is put in jeopardy. This procession is “necessary” or “logical.” That judgment is confirmed by the final episode, the bitter irony of which is hard to overstate.

“It is therefore to be regarded a good fortune for science – in fact, as I have said, it is the necessity of the matter [Notwendigkeit der Sache] – that this philosophizing, which would have spun itself into a scholastic wisdom, has been set into closer relation with actuality [Wirklichkeit], in which the principles of right and duty are a serious matter and which lives in light of its consciousness of these, and has therefore broken publicly with it.”\footnote{PhR, 23-24 [11].}
Hegel finds silver linings everywhere, and popular contempt for intellectuals proves to be no exception. The political tensions of the time, which Hegel’s audience would have been well aware of, are somehow educative if not surreptitiously in the service of science and political right. It is the very “situation of philosophy in relation to actuality [Wirklichkeit]” that is misunderstood. As it would appear, those misunderstandings are being corrected as a matter of historical course.120

A final word regarding the self-presentation of philosophy in the Preface. Regarding the relationship of philosophy to actuality, Hegel makes the following famous remark: “because philosophy is the investigation of the rational [Vernünftigen], for that very reason it is the comprehension of the present and actual [Wirklichen], not the setting up of a beyond [Jenseitigen], supposed to exist God knows where.”121 If philosophy looks back on the world – and not beyond that world – and comprehends it in the realm of thought, then that world must suffice somehow to furnish philosophy with its content. Philosophy must therefore be free from “petty hatred” of the existing world. It seeks neither to pedantically manage nor revenge itself against the imperfections of the real. Hegel always insisted that contingency must have its due, or that political life is everywhere imperfect.122

“The State is no work of art; it stands in the world, and thus in the sphere of arbitrariness [Willkür], of chance and error; and bad behavior can disfigure it in many aspects. But the ugliest man, the criminal, the invalid and cripple, is ever still a living man; the affirmative, life, endures despite the defects, and it is this affirmative aspect that is here at issue.”123

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122 PhR, 26 [13].
123 PhR, 404 [§258A].
Philosophy must accept and even accommodate imperfection.\textsuperscript{124} The \textit{logos} of the state will therefore be articulated in the medium of everyday activity, and with specific attention to the drives, motivations and opinions of average persons.

Hegel’s reinterpretation of philosophy’s disposition toward worldly imperfection renders philosophy increasingly innocuous to politics. To put the matter crudely, the “critical” spirit of theory has dropped out of the equation. That there is a critical spirit to philosophy, however, cannot be denied. As Hegel claimed, some time ago, tradition must be justified to the reflection of free subjects. But he has said very little indeed about the demand that political authority be justified to the spirit of free thinking. Hegel will only return to that demand once philosophy has been rendered completely harmless and “liberal [\textit{liberalsten}].”\textsuperscript{125} Let us therefore conclude by remarking on the fact that Hegel, in discussing the differences between ancient and modern philosophy, neglects to mention that put forth in the \textit{Phenomenology}. In the \textit{Phenomenology}, the difference between modern and ancient philosophy is that the former is reflective, whereas the latter is natural or immediate in character. Could the substitution of philosophy’s public character for its reflective character be any more revealing? Hegel assimilates the philosopher to the un-reflective politician or upstanding citizen. He is careful to pronounce correctly the modern-day equivalent of the biblical “shibboleth.” In what follows he calls the “rationality of the real” the shared conviction of philosophers and ingenuous citizens.

\textbf{VIII. Sophists, Statesmen and the Speculative Philosopher: §§ 12-13}

Hegel’s remarks concerning the relation of thought to action provides the occasion for a critique of Plato’s \textit{Republic}. It is again unclear, given Hegel’s emphasis on the “present and actual,” how recourse to the historically remote Plato could be all that helpful to his readers. It is


\textsuperscript{125} \textit{PhR}, 25 [14].
a curiosity of the *Preface* that Hegel superimposes a classical frame of reference on a post-Kantian and post-Revolutionary horizon of concern. That frame of reference supplies the basis for Hegel’s confrontation with Plato.

Let us summarize the critique of Plato’s *Republic* offered in the *Preface*. Commonly mistaken as a byword for “empty ideals,” it actually embodies the ethics of its time.\(^{126}\) It articulates what might be called the “substantial emptiness” of Greek life. To whatever extent that Hegel admired the beautiful “form” of the ancient polis, it is fatally lacking in its disposition toward *subjective freedom*, which distinguishes the everyday workings of modern society.\(^{127}\)

“In his consciousness of Greek ethics, into which a deeper principle was breaking, which could only seem as a yet unfulfilled longing and therefore as ruinous, Plato, in return, must needs have sought the very help of that longing itself; but this could only come from the high, at first could only be sought in a particular *external* form of the same [Greek] ethics, through which he himself thought to overpower this ruinous influence, and whereby he directly injured gravely the deeper drive underlying it, free infinite personality.”\(^{128}\)

For Hegel, the *Republic* is Plato’s response to spiritual decline. The sophists and Socratic philosophy consist in the budding of subjective reflection within the human spirit, which could only be regarded as a force of ethical dissolution.\(^{129}\) The *Republic* therefore features the progressive elimination of the private realm. At the same time, Plato “sought the help of the same longing” in order to shore up the “substantial unity” of classical ethics. Hegel’s interpretation of Plato may be taken to stem from the paradoxical treatment of *eros* in the *Republic*, the suppression of *eros* by the quintessentially erotic – or, in terms closer to Hegel’s own, the suppression of freedom by its highest expression, philosophy.

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\(^{126}\) *PhR*, 24 [12].


\(^{128}\) *PhR*, 24 [12].

Hegel’s interpretation of Plato is paradoxical and, after his long diatribe against sophistry, it comes as somewhat of a surprise. On the one hand, he places himself unabashedly in the shoes of Plato. Plato “proved his greatness of spirit by the fact that the very principle, on which the distinctness of his idea turns, is the axis on which the impending world revolution itself has turned.” Plato, from the standpoint of Hegel’s philosophy of history, comes to sight a world-historical proto-Hegel. Also, like Hegel according to his self-presentation in the Preface, the arch philosopher is averse to the corrupting influence of sophistry and a defender of common decency, thus a “conservative” ally of patriots and practical men. But, at the same time, Hegel is also a critic of Plato, for Plato failed to do justice to subjective freedom. To clarify that which is implied, it is helpful to restate Hegel’s criticism of Plato in the idiom of Kantian philosophy. In adhering to a “merely external and ideal” form of the old ethics, and failing to do justice to subjectivity, Plato was a dogmatist. Hegel’s criticism of Plato, in other words, forces us to reevaluate his critique of sophistry and subjectivism. For Plato’s great failure was a failure to accommodate the principle of subjectivity appealed to by the sophists.

How then does the pivot of history identified by Plato relate to the pivot of history as understood by Hegel? Plato’s banishment of eros anticipates Hegel’s incorporation of subjectivity. He too will seek the help of “free infinite personality” – however, not “externally from above” but “internally” from within. The substantial unity of the modern state will be articulated in terms of its every day production on the basis of subjectivity itself. What that entails is indicated by the fact that Hegel’s evocation of Plato refers us once more to “elsewhere” in the text. “Elsewhere” directs our attention to a pivotal moment in the chapter on

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130 As everyone knows, Hegel seems to imply Christianity. But the phrase is somewhat ambiguous due to his usage of the imperfect. It is not implausible to suspect that Hegel meant to evoke the French revolution in addition to Christianity and the reformation. Can we help but think of Nietzsche, who later called Socrates the “turning point and vortex of so-called world history”? PhR, 24 [12], Cf. Die Geburt der Tragodie, in Nietzsche Werke A3.B1, 96.
“Civil Society.” Civil society, as we shall see, is the quintessentially modern sphere of “social” life in which the twofold emancipation and domestication of subjectivity is brought about. Plato’s presentation of political authority required the banishment of subjectivity; Hegel’s requires its radical internalization. The former reflects the essence of Plato’s time as the latter does Hegel’s. Thus the critique of Plato’s Republic presents in outline the task of rendering intelligible the consolidation of political authority on the basis of subjectivity. So much is entailed by Hegel’s effort to “comprehend and represent the state as rational in itself.”

Hegel’s critique of Plato provides the context for the Doppelsatz, his claim regarding “the rationality of the actual and the actuality of the rational. We have anticipated that it is said to consist not only in the shared conviction of philosophy but that of “every ingenuous consciousness.” How are we to make sense of this claim? Does the common man strive to “recognize, in the appearance of the temporal and transitory, the substance which is imminent, and the eternal that is present”? That would entail a seemingly outrageous attribution of the philosophy of Hegel to the un-philosophical man. The patriot, statesman and the philosopher each take their bearings from the practical present. But while the former two attempt to restore or maintain order in the realm of action, even against the stream of time, only the latter claims to reconstruct the essence of the world that confronts it in the realm of thought. As for Plato, if he is said to have upheld the rationality of the actual, it must be added that he cleaved to an actuality relegated by Hegel to the dustbin of history. The political disposition of Plato, according to this view, is essentially no different from that of the patriot or reactionary. In each case, a full comprehension of the rationality of the actual would require a different disposition toward subjectivity. It is therefore especially Hegel, and not Plato, who discerns the rationality

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131 Cf. PhR, 341-342 [§185R] and context.
132 PhR, 26 [13].
133 PhR, 25 [12].
134 PhR, 25 [12].
of a “deeper drive for freedom” in the classical turn to subjectivism. For that same reason, we must call into question what Hegel claims to have in common with the ingenuous citizen and statesman. For, although each individual is “the child of his time,” it does not follow that he understands it.\textsuperscript{135}

As Hegel has less in common with his “ingenuous” citizens and statesman than he lets on, so does he have a bit more in keeping with his sophists. Hegel writes as follows: “it is a great obstinacy, the obstinacy which does honor to man, that does not will to recognize in their convictions what is not justified \textit{[gerechtfertigt]} by thought – and this obstinacy is the character of the new time \textit{[das neuren Zeit]}, moreover the principle of Protestantism.”\textsuperscript{136} The philosophy of feeling, previously noted to present itself as ersatz piety, shares in the essential principle of Protestantism, which shares in turn in the Hegelian idea. The philosophy of feeling and Protestantism are, nevertheless, more juvenile versions of that which the philosophy of Hegel accomplishes more fully.\textsuperscript{137} “What Luther started as faith in feeling and in testimony of the spirit is the same as that which the further matured spirit strives to grasp in the concept, and thus to free itself in the present and find itself thereby in it.”\textsuperscript{138} Thus Hegel brings to completion what feeling and faith attempt incompletely. The pursuit of freedom at half measure renders others at war with reality. As for Hegel, who pursues freedom to completion, it puts him at peace with the same.\textsuperscript{139} We are presented, as it were, with Hegel’s version of the old Socratic dictum that vice is ignorance and virtue knowledge. More to the point, the antagonists of Hegel’s drama, and the hidden truths betrayed by their misunderstandings of the whole, are taken up into the core of

\textsuperscript{135} PhR, 26-27 [13-14].
\textsuperscript{136} PhR, 27 [15].
\textsuperscript{137} The complexity of this issue – the relationship of the philosophy of Hegel to religious consciousness – cannot be addressed in the present context. For a powerful statement of the problem, and its twists and turns, see Fackenheim, \textit{The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought}. PhR, 27 [15].
\textsuperscript{138} PhR, 27 [15].
\textsuperscript{139} The Hegelian version of the dictum that vice is ignorance. PhR, 27 [15].
Hegel’s philosophy. Behind the “identity in difference” of statesmen and sophists – of law and
critique, of tradition and revolution, of substance and subject – hides the speculative
philosopher.

The following may be concluded regarding Hegel’s presentation of “sophistry.”

Although the Preface inclines the reader to see only a condemnation of “sophistry,” ambiguities
already detailed suffice to render that interpretation untenable. We take confirmation from the
fact that Hegel, in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, condemns the sense in which
“sophistry’ is a byword [Schlagwort] of the ordinary human understanding [gemeinen
Menschenverstandes] used against cultivated reason [gebildete Vernunft], as the phrase
‘visionary dreaming’ [traumerei] once and for all sums up what philosophy means to the
ignorant.”140 Regarding Hegel’s rhetorical strategy, he may be said to have appealed to the
“ordinary common sense” view of philosophy so described, a view that he did not himself share.

Hegel’s critique of Plato promises the philosophical reconstruction of actual ethical life.
That is to be undertaken on the basis of a philosophical comprehension of subjectivity. The
Preface, however, leaves entirely ambiguous the relation that obtains between the critique of
Plato and Hegel’s presentation of “sophistry.” For, does it not follow on the basis of that
critique, that Hegel’s improvement on the Republic will make considerable room for the sophists
and their appeal to subjectivity? We shall take up this line of inquiry in the second division of
Part 1. For now, it suffices to make note of the following. As Hegel is known amongst political
theorists for his anti-sophistic rancor, he is known amongst classicists – not least as a result of
the contributions of his student Eduard Zeller – as the rehabilitator of ancient sophistry contra
the traditional Platonic-Socratic condemnations of the same. In this connection, we can do no

better than to evoke the authority of Werner Jaeger, perhaps the most famous and influential 20th Century classicist: “the rehabilitation of the sophists started with Hegel.” 141

**IX. History, Philosophy and the Problem of Reconciliation: ¶¶14-16**

It remains, for us to remark on the themes of history and reconciliation. We continue to be concerned with the relation of philosophy to political actuality. Earlier versions of that problem included the following: the relation of freedom to tradition and, more specifically, the justification of political authority to freedom; the tendency to view the spiritual, as opposed to the natural world, as “god forsaken” or abandoned to contingency, arbitrariness and caprice; and the implacable bearing of subjective idealism, which tends to regard the law as “a cold, dead, letter.” We arrive, on the basis of the foregoing, at the claim that philosophy must reconcile itself to the radical “imperfection” of the world. But precisely because Hegel so often stresses the imperfection of the world, we are tempted to regard reconciliation as a form of resignation. What is so difficult to make sense of is that Hegel emphatically denies the sufficiency of mere resignation. Hegel recognizes the moral world view, which despairs of the horrors of history, but the moral world view is not the view taken by philosophy. The question that arises, as a matter of course, is whether “reconciliation” could ever become the standard disposition? Philosophy, says Hegel, enjoins us not to despair in contingency and finitude, but to rejoice – to recognize the “rose in the cross of the present” and “dance.” 142 How many can be expected to follow in the jubilations of philosophy?

It must be admitted that reconciliation, as presented in the context of the Preface, is offered specifically to those who comprehend and hold fast to the enduring in the everyday – or

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142 *PhR*, 26 [14].
what is called more abstractly the unity of form and content. “Those called to philosophy” are
offered in thought what cannot be had in practice, that is, “reconciliation to actuality.” Our
subject is not reconciliation simply but “the reconciliation which philosophy affords to those in
whom there has once arisen an inner voice bidding them to comprehend.” What of those not
called to comprehend? Although the standard view of Hegel holds up “reconciliation” as if it
were possible for all in principle, the treatment of reconciliation in the Preface does more to
separate philosophers from non-philosophers than anything else.

Lest there be any residual doubt that Hegel would “issue” the world “instructions,”
philosophy is, in any case, invariably too late to do so.

“As the thought of the world, it appears only in a time after which the formative process [Bildungsprozeß] of
actuality [Wirklichkeit] has been brought to a close and completed itself. This, what the concept teaches,
which is necessarily shown also by history, is that it is only in the ripeness of actuality that the ideal appears
over and opposed to the real and constructs that [real] world for itself, grasped in terms of its substance, in
the shape of an intellectual realm.”

Hegel will not look beyond the here and now with a false sense of superior wisdom, or seek to
“construct a state as it ought to be.” For that reason, the tension between philosophy and
politics may be put to rest. Or can it? Is there any reason to believe that all or even many can be
expected to relinquish the conceits of abstract moralism, or the hope for a better world?

Hegel says the following regarding the historical relation of philosophy to politics.

“In the development of the state itself periods must occur through which spirits of a nobler nature are driven
to flee from the present into ideal regions, in order to find in the same the reconciliation [Versöhnung] which
they can no longer enjoy in a divided reality [Wirklichkeit], in which the reflective understanding assaults
and levels and dissolves in abstract godless generalities everything holy and deep, which has been situated in
an ingenuous [unbefangene] way in the religion, laws and ethics of a people, such that thought is compelled
to become thinking reason in order to seek, out of the ruin to which it has been brought, the restoration in its
own element.

Periods of spiritual unraveling provoke the turn to philosophy. What Hegel says of the ancients
at the end of the classical world is applied, so it seems, to the spirit of his own time. But must we
not then conclude or revise our impression of the “peace” that philosophy attains with the world? For is that peace, since coterminous with the end of a world, not necessarily at odds with the ordinary and reflective experiences of the world?” When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy.”

How then would philosophy relate to those have not yet grown old or matured in their thoughts? Or are we to infer, as Nietzsche said, that human beings will henceforth be born with grey hair? Will there be a new world breaking in on the old, as Hegel sometimes suggests, or are we at the “end of history”? To say the least, however philosophy might comport itself to a world grown old, it cannot be expected to deter those of a more practical disposition, who might work to hasten or delay the demise of that world.

Hegel, again, enjoins us not to despair at the grey in grey. Though “reconciliation” has all the markings of compromise and resignation, we are urged to think otherwise. “Knowledge [Erkenntnis] supplies a warmer peace” than the “cold despair which concedes that in this time things go very poorly [wohl schlect] or at best average” and cannot be improved. Hegel surely recognizes that it may prove difficult to fathom warmth in history. To be sure, those beholden to the old world can only experience the death of that world as violent and cold. The peaks of Hegel’s philosophy are somewhat inhumane: philosophy reconciles itself to the “slaughter bench of history,” on which the happiness and hopes of particular peoples are dashed. Thus, at the margins of the Preface, like those of the Philosophy of Right as a whole, we find Hegel’s first order concern with the universal upsetting the tranquility of our effort to comprehend the particular. Eduard Gans perhaps put it best: we are made privy at long last to the “awesome

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147 PhR, 28 [16].
148 Nietzsche, Vom Nutzen un Nachteil der Historie für das Leben, 302-305. [§8].
149 PhR, 27 [15].
150 PhH, 35 [I.B.b].
spectacle” by which states take a plunge “as just so many rivers into the sea of world history.”

By the same stroke, we are also made privy to Hegel’s deeper preoccupation with the whole and the logic that guides it. We encounter history in its grand and lofty indifference to the fate of particular states, peoples and people, an indifference Hegel does not necessarily share, but which remains a source of great perplexity.

The tension between philosophy and politics reasserts itself insofar as the philosopher—or the “historical” philosopher—articulates the exhaustion, or heralds the demise, of the world in which he finds himself. The owl of Minerva at dusk leaves sufficient ambiguity as to whether she will give way to a cock’s crow at dawn or perpetual night.\textsuperscript{152} The \textit{Preface} does not provide us with the means to judge whether that characterization could be applied to Hegel himself.

\textit{Nowhere has Hegel given us any indication that the “peace” attainable by philosophy is attainable in general.} Though rechtlichen Männern would seem to enjoy some form of reconciliation to reality, they do so in a manner qualitatively distinct from philosophy, and not necessarily in keeping with the “spirit of the time.” Further, philosophy’s reconciliation to the practical world, as the full-blown self-consciousness of that world, is not itself practical or practical only insofar as it comprehends from on high the principles that govern its unfolding. In the \textit{Preface} Hegel comprehends the fact of dissatisfaction with the world, and seems to suggest that a degree of greater satisfaction is possible for all in principle, but nowhere have we been given any decisive assurance that sophists will cease “issuing instructions” to the world, or that statesmen and ingenuous citizens will be anything but indifferent or hostile in response. What


\textsuperscript{152} Concerns such as these are already voiced by Gans who wonders, at the end of the \textit{Forward} he penned to the second edition of the \textit{Philosophy of Right}, whether Hegel’s own philosophy must necessary die with its time, and give way to something new. Karl Marx attended Gans’ lectures. The alternatives have each spawned entire traditions of historical inquiry—philosophies of history that stress decline (Spengler), others that stress progress (Marx), and yet others that encourage contentment with the eternal now. Eduard Gans, \textit{Vortwort zur 2. Ausgabe der Rechtphilosophie}, 248. Cf. Riedel, \textit{Zwischen Tradition und Revolution}, 170-173.
renders qualitatively distinct the reconciliation attained by philosophy calls each into doubt. At most, it is vaguely suggested that the course of the modern world will frustrate the efforts of sophists and bring about the spread of increasingly practical orientations among its denizens. No adequate interpretation of Hegel’s dark utterances, should we take them at face value, can fall altogether on the side of despair or resignation, quietism or revolution. The world is grey, never to be rejuvenated in the decisive sense. For all that, the rights based state is here to stay, and so much the better.\textsuperscript{153}

We therefore offer to correct a popular conception about Hegel, namely, that he considered himself to have neatly solved all the problems. Provisionally, Hegel’s philosophical comprehension of the tensions of political life is characterized by a sober recognition of the necessity of contradictions and blemishes that others would rather see removed once and for all. Somehow that is to be achieved without resentment, as if one could “will” these imperfections “warmly.” As in the case of not dissimilar suggestions in Nietzsche, it is most difficult to fathom what that would mean, or if such a godly disposition could be that of ordinary men or even man as such. One cannot say that Hegel’s “solutions” are solutions in the ordinary sense, for apparent loose ends or “remainders” are accepted as irreducible, the desire to do away with them being based on a misunderstanding of the idea. The relation between sophistry, statesmanship and philosophy that we have been tracing would seem to be of a similar sort. We have been given no assurance that tension between the three will end. It is left entirely open for us to consider it a fundamental aspect of ethical life in its historical unfolding, even one that cannot be expected to subside. At best, it has been suggested that the tension between thought and action may be relaxed.

\textsuperscript{153} Kojève overcomes the question concerning the practicality of Hegel’s philosophy by alleging that there is nothing fundamentally “new” to do in the sense of “world historical action.” Philosophy is not practical in the sense that “world-historical individuals” are practical, but it suffices for the “ongoing activity” of a merely bureaucratic age and politics. Hence the “end of History.” Kojève, \textit{Introduction à la lecture de Hegel}, 427-443.
Section B

Nature, Sophistry and the Science of Right

I. The “Monstrous Power” of the Modern State

The foregoing commentary on the Preface to the Philosophy of Right has begun to sketch in outline the problem of political authority as Hegel understood it. At the same time, it has been shown that the Preface points in the direction of a confrontation with the philosophy of Plato, one defined by a broader reflection on the importance of subjectivity to modern life. Though the account offered in the Preface can be taken to illuminate the contours of Hegel’s approach to political authority, it must nevertheless be supplemented with a more programmatic account. As we have indicated, subjects as diverse and expansive as Kantianism and post-Kantianism, nature and freedom, ancients and moderns, are woven together without a clear presentation of their coherence. It is the task of Part 1.B to take up the unity of these threads.

Since philosophy is said to reconstruct the essence of its time in thought, it is helpful to begin by restating the spirit of Hegel’s time as he understood it. The horizon of the Preface is defined by two world-historical events: the French Revolution in deed and the philosophy of Kant in thought. For Hegel, the period in which he writes is defined by the ever-so fraught coming together of thought and action. Like Edmund Burke, Hegel emphasized the theoretical or abstract-intellectual character of the revolution and its practical unfolding.\(^1\) At the same time, following Fichte, he placed great emphasis on the increasing centrality of the activity of the human will for philosophy – the precise reason why he regarded Fichte an improvement over Kant.\(^2\) In other words, theory had become increasingly practical and practice increasingly

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theoretical. Theory and practice nevertheless remain in a state of heightened tension. Although
Hegel disparages those who considered the “truth” about political right irreducibly
“problematic,” there can be no doubt that the tensions set out in the Preface come to sight as
being more problematic than otherwise.

According to Hegel’s presentation of the “cultural concerns of the day,” the new world
of political right is plagued by “sophistry” and nagging doubts regarding the abilities of citizens
and state officials. It is at least questionable that the ordinary man or statesman can be
sufficiently thoughtful for the ambitions of “public reason” in the Kantian tradition. Moreover, it
was to be doubted that the new critical philosophy was sufficiently critical. For, when it came to
matters of political right, the primacy of reason could not to be taken for granted. It was
seriously contended by Hegel’s rivals that nature, feeling and faith were the decisive ethical
considerations, and that challenge had to be met. As for the intellectualization of politics, the
Preface gives us reason to wonder whether the state could meet the new, grossly abstract,
demands being made upon it. At the same time, philosophy, which might otherwise have
promised to rectify and redeem the science of right, found itself discredited and imperiled, since
indistinguishable from sophistry to all but a few. The intellectualization of politics, for all these
reasons and more, left the state and populace vulnerable to the corrupting influence of sophistry,
which threatened to become popular. Finally, reflecting on the intimations of the state as a
system of interlocking parts, Hegel provides cause for us to wonder about the overall economy
of “spiritual” ends and means. There is little reason to expect that all will be “reconciled” to, or
“satisfied” with, the modern state in the same way or to the same extent, and very good reasons
to expect that many will not be in the least. As we concluded, we are given no concrete

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4 We have drawn attention to this problem in the Introduction. Whatever the modern state may be said to have
accomplished, Hegel’s doctrine of the rationality of the modern state is perfectly compatible with such things as the
assurances, and at best vague reason to expect, that the modern state will prove able to contain these and related challenges.

The difficulty we must face now, however, is that Hegel most definitely did consider the state to have demonstrated, in its everyday activity, a vigorous capacity to consolidate its authority in the midst of great tension and adversity. Although the Preface presents us with a few scanty intimations of Hegel’s confidence in the power of the modern state so understood, it hardly sets out to defend them. It is therefore fitting to direct the reader’s attention once more to a passage that captures with unusual clarity Hegel’s distinct approach to political authority, and his confidence in the capabilities of the modern state therewith.

“The principle of modern states has monstrous [ungeheure] strength and depth because it lets the principle of subjectivity fulfill [complete – vollenden] itself in the independent [selbändigen] extreme of personal particularity, while at the same time leading it back to substantial unity, and so preserves this substantial unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.5

As we have anticipated, Hegel’s philosophical reconstruction of the modern state is defined by the internalization of that which Plato is said to have excluded. In stressing subjectivity, the passage forms a negative image to Hegel’s critique of the Republic. The great “strength and depth” of the modern state reveals itself in the tension between “substantial unity” and the “extreme of independent personal particularity.” Far from excluding the latter, the modern state allows it great range and maintains itself therein. Indeed, the power of the modern state would not be what it is, were it not for its incorporation of subjectivity. Thus, for Hegel, the authority of the modern state is best understood in terms of the utter fragmentation and particularization of wills that it sits astride and contains.

5 PhR, 406-407 [§260].
But the *Preface* has not even explained *why* subjectivity poses the political problem. Nor has it explained how modernity contains or overcomes that problem. Least of all has it explained how the authority of the modern state could be constituted by subjectivity. That subjectivity does pose the problem is, nevertheless, clear. Hegel’s diatribe against post-Kantian “sophistry” is couched everywhere in terms of the “subjective,” “abstract,” “natural,” “capricious” or “arbitrary” character of its appeals. In the Introduction, where Hegel elaborates the “idea of the will” – which determines the structure of the *Philosophy of Right* in its entirety – it is precisely permutations of the will such as these that occupy his attention. In fact, the major themes of the *Preface* all tend to converge on problems associated with subjectivity, the “extreme of personal particularity,” and what Hegel refers to as the “natural” will. For related reasons, our approach shall emphasize subjectivity at its most problematic for political authority, that is, subjectivity at its most “natural,” “immediate” and “arbitrary” self-absorption.

Let us therefore attempt to work our way from the informal discussion of political authority in the *Preface* toward the “scientific” standpoint of the *Philosophy of Right*. Taking our bearings from the *Preface*, three sets of issues recommend themselves for further study. The first is the nature-freedom-history complex, and the problems brought to the fore by the Pantheism Controversy. The second is made up of questions concerning the authority of the modern state as it relates to subjectivity. The third pertains to the classical frame of reference that sits all too easily on top of a post-Kantian context: sophistry and the corruption of the city, the persecution of philosophy, and the critique of Plato. We shall attempt to exhibit the relation that holds these three sets of difficulties in unison, and to sharpen our approach to Hegel’s understanding of political authority. On that same basis we shall begin to provide the grounds for the broader confrontation with the philosophy of Plato that we are concerned to undertake.

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6 The subject of Part 3.A.II-III, below.
7 *EM*, 32-34, 38-42 [§385, §387].
II. “Natural Dialectic”

That nature posed a problem for the ambitions of enlightenment rationalism is most readily discerned in the writings of Kant. In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant fears the emergence of what he calls a “natural dialectic.” Defining a form of “anti-realism” that continues to exert extraordinary influence today, Kant meant by “natural dialectic” the effort to “rationalize against those strict laws of duty and to cast doubt on their validity” on the basis provided by the empirical world.\(^8\) Other differences aside, Hegel’s polemics in the *Preface* and *Philosophy of Right* in general make common cause with Kant’s opposition to natural dialectic.

In the backdrop of Kant’s opposition to “natural dialectic” was a crisis of first principles in the tradition of scholastic Aristotelian science. Up until Kant’s time, that tradition had continued to exercise considerable influence through the teachings of the Wolffian school. More recently, however, Newtonian physics and Humean skepticism rendered it no longer plausible to approach the problems in the traditional way. The incommensurability of the new physics and the old ethics had been exposed for all who had the eyes to see it. The new physics posed a particularly vexing challenge to the *Aufklärer*, who had hoped until then that progress in understanding would yield progress in morality and politics. Progress in understanding had yielded instead grave doubts about the plausibility of morality as such, for it had demonstrated the impossibility of certain basic presuppositions that many continued to regard as the ground of morality. It was no longer plausible to derive the principles of ethics and physics from the concept of “substance,” and nor could one speak any longer of a naturally sustained hierarchy of human ends, as the matter had hitherto been approached.

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As we have learned from reading the Preface, the increasingly public role of philosophy amplified worries about the publication of subversive doctrines. In this way Kant’s opposition to “natural dialectic” has a family resemblance to Hegel’s attack on “sophistry.” Both are concerned to protect ordinary innocence and common decency, which are thought less than capable of doing so themselves. Suffice it to say that Wolffian metaphysics was as attractive for its unity – the parsimony of a single teaching on all things, fit for public consumption – as its collapse was troubling. And while the effort to preserve that unity was all too understandable, the desire to maintain monistic scientia after Newton helped little. The collapse of dogmatism left the vexing choice between an empirically based ethics shorn of freedom and god, and idealism without any plausible relation to the real.

Kant’s well-known solution was to leave behind classical monism for a dualism regulated by the needs of practical reason. On the basis of Kant’s division of the faculties, “natural dialectic” could be ruled out as based on a misunderstanding: a confusion of the categories applicable to the phenomenal world with those applicable to questions of human conduct. Thus arguments derived from the content of natural experience were distinguished from those fit for the will.9 One cannot refute the “apodictic” or logically necessary by means of an (“assertoric”) appeal to what “empirically” is. As claims of moral necessity, or what ought to be done, are apodictic, empirical claims cannot be, and never the twain shall meet.10 Thus Kant insulated morality from matter in motion.

It is characteristic of the gigantomachia of Hegel’s time – the “Pantheism Controversy” – that tremendous sympathy for Kantian criticism was matched by serious doubts concerning its

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10 Cf. Kant, Kritisch der reinen Vernunft, A70-83/B.95-109, A712-A782B740-810
foundations.\textsuperscript{11} Perhaps the mood was best captured by Schelling in a letter to Hegel:

“Philosophy is not yet at an end. Kant has given results; the premises are still missing. And who can understand results without premises?”\textsuperscript{12} It was agreed upon that political right must be justified to human subjectivity, but it remained very much controversial whether subjectivity was to be regarded more rational and free than rooted in feeling and necessity. We can say, moreover, and without excessive oversimplification, that the perceived inadequacy of Kant’s response to the crisis of classical metaphysics provoked a reinvigoration of the natural dialectics he so feared. The terms of the debate had been effectively set by Jacobi, who had cast rationalism as such into the abyss he called Spinozism, and argued in defense of what he took to be the primacy of natural feeling or “faith.”\textsuperscript{13} Though the terms of the debate had changed, Hegel’s worries in the \textit{Preface} are of a related sort. In \textit{opposing the derivation of right from nature}, \textit{Hegel and Kant make up a common front}. That being said, Hegel’s debt to Kant should not prevent us from recognizing his great debt to Kant’s adversaries.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}Scholarship on Kant’s reception is voluminous, and the “from Kant to Hegel study” has now become a distinct genre of academic writing. The “potted history” of German idealism to follow has benefited from many such studies. We make no claim to do justice to the question concerning the fairness or adequacy of Kant’s reception, but only to sketch in outline that reception insofar as it is useful to the clarification of Hegel’s approach to the problems. The following works are to be recommended in particular. Pippin, \textit{Hegel’s Idealism}; Pinkard, \textit{German Philosophy}; Eckhart Förster, \textit{The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction}, trans. Brady Bowman, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Beiser, \textit{The Fate of Reason}; Beiser, \textit{German Idealism}; Dieter Henrich, \textit{Between Kant and Hegel}; Emil Fackenheim, \textit{The God Within} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); See also Karl Ameriks, \textit{The Fate of Autonomy}.

\textsuperscript{12}Quoted and much emphasized in Eckhart Förster, \textit{The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy}, 154.


\textsuperscript{14}It is characteristic of the recent turn in Hegel studies that it emphasizes Hegel’s Kantianism. It has been indicated in the Introduction that the “Kantian turn” is to be much welcomed, especially insofar as its aggressive epistemological bent has left the old Neo-Platonic interpretation of Hegel demolished. There is, nevertheless, considerable reason to suspect that the “new” Hegel tends in the direction of being too Kantian, as well as too well suited to the theoretical commitments of American pragmatism. Hegel makes many claims that are not so easily squared with either. Nor can there be any doubt that Hegel learned things from Fichte, Schelling, and the Pantheism Controversy that go beyond what good Kantians could bring themselves to accept. We cannot take up these difficulties here. But some of the major problems may be gleaned from a debate carried out between Pinkard and Pippin in the \textit{Review of Metaphysics}. Despite being part of the same tradition of interpretation, Pinkard and Pippin each accuse each other of being unable to explain or render plausible crucial aspects of Hegel’s philosophy. They do so in such ways that are directly tied to the specificity of the “revisionist” readings they respectively offer. Terry Pinkard, \textit{How Kantian Was Hegel}, \textit{The Review of Metaphysics}, Vol. 34, No. 4 (June 1990), 831-838; Robert Pippin, \textit{Hegel and Category Theory}, Vol. 34, No. 4 (June 1990), 839-848.
Like others before him, Hegel saw that Kant, despite his emphasis on deduction and critique, offered no derivation of the categories – the concepts according to which all experience was thought to be determined – worthy of the name “critical.” It was suspected that Kant merely inherited the traditional categories or, worse given the conceits of critical philosophy, read them without further ado (as Aristotle had long before him) “immediately” off of the phenomena, or how men speak of the phenomena according to the ordinary understanding of things. So obvious to Hegel was this inadequacy that he could baldly pronounce from the beginning of his career to its end on the “superficiality of the deduction of the categories”: “that the Kantian philosophy has made finding the categories all too easy for itself is well known.” But again, Hegel’s effort was only the latest in a series of others, which sought to supply the missing “premises” of critical philosophy. Following Reinhold’s attempt to provide a first principle on the basis of which critical philosophy could be made (for the first time) into a unified science, Fichte sought to reconstitute Kantianism from the ground up by means of an irreducible and primordial “fact of consciousness.” That fact of consciousness was the self-constituting activity and striving of the ego. The “sophist” made famous by the Preface may be understood in relation to these better-known attempts. Taking his bearings from “faith” in natural feeling, Fries sought to “improve” the Critique of Pure Reason by recasting the

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15 See the emphasis on what things are named or called, as well as how they are generally spoken of, and in relation to the apparent things or facts, which defines the entirety of Aristotle’s Categories. See especially, Categories, 1a1-4b19. Cf. Rosen, The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic, 76-77, 415.
16 Werke II, Glaube und Wissen, 304 [A.]; EL, 116-117 [§42].
17 “It seems to me that contemporary philosophy should be reminded over and over again of the following: Hegel, Fichte, and the young Schelling… were convinced that in finite consciousness there is a dimension that, like creation from nothing, is an original, self-generating dimension not limited by objects, and in this sense a free dimension. They held this dimension to be the principle on the basis of which one could fulfill Kant’s expectation of ‘philosophy as science.’” Werner Marx, The Philosophy of F.W.J Schelling, trans. Thomas Nenon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 33-36.
18 Fichte, Wissenschaftslehre, I.91-92.
categories themselves as “facts of consciousness.” For Hegel, that came at the cost of sacrificing political right to the contingency of nature and the arbitrariness of subjective whim.19

The “Pantheism Controversy” can be said to have convinced Hegel that at the core of Kant’s “subjective idealism” was a fundamental instability, one integral to abstract universalism as such. In Kant, we have an account of ends and an account of means, with no account ordering means in relation to ends. All application of the moral law requires, however, a matching of means to ends. Thus the application of the universal must pass through the contingent medium of the concrete particular, from whence the need for an account of the “concrete universal.” For the same reason, neither a universalistic abstraction from contingency nor the principle of non-contradiction could have traction in the here and now. The upshot, for Hegel, is as follows: either (i) it falls to the pliable will of the subject to navigate the contradictions and aporias of practical life, and therefore to arbitrariness, caprice or circumstance; or (ii), cleaving to the universal, it falls to the subject to be a “pedant” (who thoughtlessly applies a principle with no concern for the differences between cases); or (iii) a “nihilist” (who restlessly negates the real precisely because it is real and therefore imperfect). The same difficulties form the immediate background for Hegel’s remarks on the categorical imperative – where Hegel says of Kant what he says of Jacobi, remarks long regarded unfair by Kant and Hegel scholars. The point, however, is that Hegel had no interest in being fair. In a word, what Hegel learned from the Pantheism Controversy is to understand Kant “better than he understood himself.” It was necessary for Hegel that Kantianism collapse into particularism in the precise way it did. Hence, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Kant’s categorical morality turns to the conscience, which collapses into Jacobi’s “beautiful soul,” the arbitrary will, and “evil” thereafter. Having understood that

necessity, fidelity to Kant was less important than it might otherwise have been. But here, as elsewhere, the history of philosophical errors becomes integral to philosophizing as such. It is the logic which underlies the implosion of Kantianism, a necessity governing abstract universalism as such, that serves everywhere as the basis for Hegel’s effort to reconstitute the whole.20

We begin to see why Hegel insisted on “the unity of form and content.” Kant’s aversion to “natural dialectic,” which Hegel shares, did not in Hegel’s estimation serve Kant well. It is Hegel’s contention that Kant’s effort to stave off natural dialectic went too far and, for that very reason, played right into the hands of what it opposed. To deepen our understanding of the difficulties involved it is helpful for us to examine the role Kant reserved for knowledge of empirical man.

III. Ethical Anthropology and the Engrafting of Moral Dispositions

At the outset of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant distinguishes rational from empirical ethics: morality and what he calls “practical anthropology.”21 We have already noted Kant’s intention of protecting innocence and common decency against “natural dialectic.” As part of that effort, ethical anthropology was deemed ill-suited to the provision of a categorical morality. The reason for this is well known: according to experience, man is subject to the necessities of nature.22 If we take our bearings from historical man, and attempt to infer how man ought to act, we fall as a matter of course into “natural dialectic.” What then proves to be the use of ethical anthropology? Knowledge of historical man facilitates the task of “applying” the moral law to human beings “to bring about pure moral dispositions and engraft

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20 A version of this thesis is advanced by Rosen throughout *Hegel’s Science of Logic*.
21 Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, in Ak., B4, 388-389.
22 Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 389-390, 410-413.
“engrafting” reveals all: the employment of nature to bring about what nature itself does not, viz., a world hospitable to morality.

Without making Kant less of a moralist than he is, we see that attention to the sub-moral is put in service of the moral. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to discern the extent to which the use of nature as a means for moral ends is itself morally bound. Our moral commitments are to free and rational beings. What, then, is owed to the irrational and un-free? Should we be aware of what Kant wrote of Africans or women, for instance, we might wonder how his empirical understanding of them would inform the “engrafting” of categorical morality as a real worldly activity. Kantian morality oscillates between being impractical when pure and impure when practical. The extreme case provided by Fichte’s effort to improve on Kant is instructive.

It is necessary to begin with some preliminaries. According to Kant, prior to any possible thought, the manifold of experience has always already been synthesized and ordered “spontaneously” by the “transcendental” ego. Kant calls this primordial synthetic act the “transcendental synthesis of apperception.” The intelligibility of experience, its basic structure, derives from that source. That includes notions of space and time, the forms of judgment that condition all instances of understanding, and the “categories” corresponding to these, which form the basis for all interpretations of experience as such, and circumscribe the boundaries of thought. Seemingly refined abstractions like “causality,” “possibility,” “negation” and “totality” are always already schematized onto the stuff of experience. It remains only for philosophy to

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23 *Einzupfropfen* can also mean to implant or to cram or stuff inside. It’s meaning, as far as nature is concerned, is necessarily “invasive.” Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 412.


protect man against his natural tendency toward confusion in the act of applying the categories.\textsuperscript{28} As we have already seen, to proceed from the relations operative in the world (the effective) to the categorical (the imperative or what ought to be) was considered a mistake of that very sort.

The comparison with Plato is instructive: Plato writes of ideas that precede all experience, and he writes of the limited character of human knowledge, but nowhere does he tell us the precise limit of what we can know. It is quite otherwise with Kant. The entirety of the critical project is based on purported knowledge about the limits of knowledge.\textsuperscript{29} The question then arose, as a matter of course, how Kant could \textit{know} the limits of knowledge from within those limits. Since the “transcendental synthesis of apperception” was thought to precede experience, Kant’s critics asked how it was that he could have known this to be the case. Moreover, the matter was greatly complicated by Kant himself, who had formulated, as the only possible means of escaping this problem, a version of the Platonic mind’s eye as an alternative faculty of cognition – a non-experiential (\textit{viz.} non-spatiotemporal) and constitutive “intellectual intuition” of the categories – which he then rejected as an impossibility for man, an artifice of thought useful only for the purposes of revealing those respects in which man’s knowledge was decisively limited.\textsuperscript{30} For that reason, according to Kant, we can do no better than deem the \textit{Ur-synthesis} a “fact of consciousness,” an answer that many took to be a non-answer.

Fichte, as is well known, rejected Kant’s rejection of intellectual intuition. For he found, or thought he had found, in the productive activity of the human subject, a fact of consciousness that not only accompanies all experience, but provides the basis according to which the constitution of experience could alone be understood. We refer to the simultaneously productive

\textsuperscript{28} Kant, \textit{Kritisch der Reinen Vernunft} Avii-viii.
\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Richard Velkley, \textit{Being after Rousseau}, 68-69, 83-86.
and intuitive activity of the “I,” which according to Fichte always posits itself as an ego and opposes itself to a non-ego. On the basis provided by that primordial “fact-activity” [Tathandlung], Fichte sought to refound the critical project, or to supply it with premises adequate to its conclusions. The productive activity of the ego is found constantly at work synthesizing the manifold, deriving and applying the categories, and striving for satisfaction.\textsuperscript{31} Accordingly, as Kant left the “transcendental synthesis of apperception” ambiguously outside of experience, Fichte tried to put it back into experience.

The consequences are far reaching. Thought becomes fundamentally productive, a practical matter, a process, willed by increasingly self-aware man. The keystone of thought therefore becomes action, as the condition for the possibility of theoretical reflection.\textsuperscript{32} The significance of this development looking forward to Hegel is obvious: philosophy begins to look back on the achievements of consciousness as the key to itself. The Wissenschaftslehre therefore culminates in a “pragmatic history of the human mind,”\textsuperscript{33} a development on the Kantian “ethical anthropology” in which feelings, inclinations, and drives are exhibited as means to the (epistemological and moral) ends of critical philosophy.

According to Fichte, the striving of the ego always opposes itself, \textit{qua} striving, to a non-ego. It therefore works toward the \textit{infinite} task of totally subordinating the posited non-ego to itself, or a state of affairs that “ought to be.” The self is awakened to this task by a primordial check or resistance from without, which solicits a naive or vague awareness of its own limits, which feeling, inclination and drive impel it to overcome. As the ego works toward the satisfaction of its aims or projects (which is to say also toward the overcoming of alienation), the

\textsuperscript{32} Wissenschaftslehre, I.122, 126-127,244-246
\textsuperscript{33} Wissenschaftslehre, I.222.
ego’s understanding of self and world develops, or is subject to a process of education. And because the striving of the ego, as striving, is necessarily oriented toward a posited non-ego that limits or resists it, or stands as an obstacle to its satisfaction, the ego demands a modification of the non-ego or the existing state of affairs. However, the ego can only bring about its projects on the basis of a connection between the ego and the posited non-ego. For, although posited by the ego, the object of striving, and that which opposes the ego therewith, is not simply of the ego’s own making. The ego must therefore heed the laws, or its understanding of the laws, according to which the non-ego lends itself to being modified in the manner sought. It must therefore master causality or what Fichte calls the relation of “efficacy.”

To subordinate the non-ego to the logic of the ego, the ego must come to an understanding of its possible satisfaction by means of the non-ego, and it must heed that understanding. Thus, to realize its projects, the ego must allow itself to be determined by the not-self in the form of a posited negation of the not-self. As a result, the ego loses itself in its striving. It comes to relate to the posited non-ego in such ways that completely obscure the original positing of the non-ego by the self. In other words, it entails the thoroughgoing determination of the ego by its “effective” relation to the non-ego, or what amounts to the enslavement of the ego to its understanding of causal relations. Thus the ego loses sight of its positivity and freedom – which is not to say that the transcendental philosopher, Fichte, does.

35 As we remarked earlier, Fichte was the first thinker to ever be called a “nihilist.” In drawing attention to this fact, we do not necessarily take for granted that this was justified. Wissenschaftslehre, I.125-127, 132-143, 152, 157, 166-182, 212-215, 228-234, 249-255, 258-259, 262-265, 270-272, 276-277, 286-289, 291-298, 300-309, 314-317, 322-328.
Let it be noted, then, that the ego falls into oblivion because of its fundamentally intentional relation to objects, the relation that is the key to Fichte’s entire philosophical enterprise. In concentrating its efforts on the outer world, the ego conceals itself from itself, or forgets its own most essential freedom. That self-forgetting tendency, which is part and parcel of the ego’s productivity or capacity to reshape the world, is the origin of dogmatism. For the same reason, there is a necessary distance between the philosophical observer of the Wissenschaftslehre and its subject. That distance corresponds to that between the critical philosopher and the dogmatism he strives everywhere to correct, thus to the difference between metaphysicians of morals and ordinary men. It will correspond as well to the relation of Schelling to the natural or pre-conscious in man, as it will in another aspect to the relation of the philosopher Hegel to the subject of his Phenomenology and the denizens of his ideal state.

37 Although Fichte’s thoughts on these and related points can be extremely difficult to make sense of, there is a more accessible Heideggerian version of what amounts to essentially the same problem. We refer to the foreclosure of Dasein’s fundamental (or “authentic”) openness by the will to control being. The will to control being conceals from itself that which is revealed to the author of Being and Time. Similarly, in Fichte, the striving of the actual ego in relation to the non-ego is the origin of dogmatism. Striving obscures the activity of the transcendental ego that the critical philosopher renders thematic for, in concentrating on the non-ego, the ego ceases to concentrate on itself. There is a self-forgetting inherent to all striving. It is only a short step from here to the view that “authentic” freedom collapses back into “inauthentic” necessity, since determined singularly by the task of mastering the world and its contingencies, or the effort to subordinate the not-self to the self on the basis of the self’s understanding of that which is effective in relation to the not-self. The extreme Heideggerian version of this problem is, of course, the technological world night. Cf. Rosen, The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic, 228; Förster, The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy, 163.

38 We can take these reflections a step further by noting that Fichte, in effect, does with Kant what Heidegger later does with Husserl. According to Husserl, self-awareness demands a “phenomenological reduction.” However, everything about man’s place in the whole conspires against this. Hence the constant methodological injunctions: one must hold fast to the phenomenological reduction and reaffirm it at every step of the way, lest the ordinary experience of things reassert itself. Heidegger turns this methodological issue into a fundamental ontology, which holds together the openness of “authentic” Dasein and the foreclosure of its horizon, or the “fall” into “inauthenticity,” which is part and parcel with man’s practical bearing and the “ready-to-handness” of the world as it faces him. Fichte had already accomplished something similar with the philosophy of Kant. For he saw that, according to Kant, self-awareness, or an adequately critical approach to the problems, demands a great effort to hold fast to the transcendental I, for everything about man’s natural disposition toward the world seduces him into dogmatic metaphysics. Fichte creates a transcendental idealism and pragmatic history out of that relation. Hence the positing of the non-ego by the ego, and the practical or intentional bearing that determines it, is always held in relation to a self-forgetting of the ego. Cf. Stanley Rosen, The Elusiveness of the Ordinary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 54-134.

39 Wissenschaftslehre, I.454.
We are now prepared to understand why knowledge of empirical man, insofar as it is ministerial to the task of engrafting moral dispositions, poses a distinct problem for philosophy after Kant. The political problem is hinted at by Hegel in the *Preface*, where he remarks on the fact that Fichte’s had provided a deduction for regulatory minutiae related to the production of passports. These, quips Hegel disparagingly, are matters with respect to which philosophy can afford to and should be more “liberal.” Fichte’s *Foundations of Natural Right*, a book which seeks to derive everything from freedom, and applies itself scrupulously toward the task of realizing political right on the basis of freedom, culminates in what could reasonably be regarded a complete loss of freedom. For, wherever the hydra of contingency raises its many heads – that is, everywhere – efficacious means must be found to guarantee the preservation of orderly conduct, and a world hospitable to morality therewith, from whence comes Hegel’s censure of Fichte’s *Notstaat*. The result is a kind of soulless bureaucratic despotism: all freedom and universalism on paper, but complete enslavement to the endless task of mastering contingency in practice. Can freedom “find itself” in circumstances such as these? That provisions of the foregoing sort, and the duty to uphold them, can be derived from the productive activity of the ego can perhaps only be taken so far.

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40 Hegel refers, in a similar regard, to Plato, who might have omitted from his *Laws* stipulations for the rocking of babies. *PhR*, 25 [¶14].
41 To take only the most important example, in relation to which the philosophy of Fichte bends back into that of Hobbes, the effort to ensure the realization of freedom must face the fact that human beings regularly interfere with the freedom of others. For that reason, natural right cannot count on good intentions alone. It therefore asks “if an arrangement could be found that would operate with mechanical necessity to guarantee that any action contrary to right would result in the opposite of its intended end” in order to “re-establish security, after honesty and trust have been lost.” There is, in general, a right to institute arrangements of that sort, a law of coercion, which works to guarantee the satisfaction of all on the basis its “efficacious” understanding of the conditions under which egos may be compelled to oblige and on the basis of their possible dissatisfaction, that is, in this particular case, the dissatisfaction of being under the threat of harm or punishment. See Fichte, *Grundlage des Naturrechts*, in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Veit und Comp., 1845), B.3: 139-149 [§14]; as translated by Frederick Neuhouser in *Foundations of Natural Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
Our discussion of Fichte allows us to see why it would not do for Kant to leave “empirical knowledge” as a means for the application of morality. For without a more determinate account of that relation, morality would be taken over by the necessities that govern the web of means. According to Hegel, the purity of morality is impossible the second one steps into the world and acts. In fact, Kant does not clearly or sufficiently explain how his moral agent can step into the world. The problem is therefore not simply with the impurity of means, but also and especially with the purity of morality. More fundamentally, the problem derives from the “critical” divisions by means of which Kant sought to inoculate morality from modern physics. Accordingly, should “philosophy” be brought into proper relation to actuality – a relation which Kant failed to secure and Hegel sought to establish – there would be no need to inoculate ethics against the empirical study man.

Hegel therefore favored an approach to the philosophy of spirit that maintained a sort of continuity between nature and human freedom. The Philosophy of Mind does not therefore exclude so much as begin with “anthropology”: the study of the natural and pre-conscious in man, or the “merely human.” Here too, however, the departure from Kant has far reaching consequences. Hegel does not provide, and does not seem terribly interested in providing, a metaphysics of morals. Part of Hegel’s critique of moral idealism, as we have already seen, is that it fails to give sufficient weight to the contingency and imperfection of actual life. Insofar as Hegel is concerned to “posit” what is categorically determinate in human affairs, he does so with regard to actuality, or how things stand and unfold in the world as we know it. That is not to say that Hegel was uninterested in morality. But if morality is to be subordinated to the task of understanding the world, and morality is to be conceived as part of that world, it follows necessarily that Hegel must try to consider moral phenomena extra-morally. The moral world view will be derived from an underlying unity, much as Kant and Fichte had approached the
genesis of dogmatism and illusion more generally. Nietzsche’s claim that there are “no moral phenomena” but only “moral interpretations of the phenomena” is prepared by Hegel, for whom the moral world view turns on a fundamental misunderstanding of actuality. As consequence of these differences, the reasonable is not the moral. And nor is the reasonability of the actual world to be decided in terms of morality. Morality therefore occupies, and must occupy, a subordinate status in the Philosophy of Right. Indeed, the morally objectionable and undesirable, ceases to be regarded decisive for the judgment of history. Rather, what becomes decisive for Hegel is the effective “engrafting” of freedom onto the natural, where “effective” refers to things intelligibly operative as means to the ends of spirit.

Now Hegel’s anthropological writings, like Kant’s, are replete with unfavorable references to the irrationality, slavishness or childishness of given peoples as opposed to more “developed” ones. There is no basis for explaining that fact away. Nevertheless, for Hegel, as for Kant, human beings are considered essentially free and rational – in a fundamental sense, “the same.” In the philosophy of Kant, however, the contingent fact that some may prove lacking in freedom or reason poses no great threat to the integrity of his moral philosophy, for only the universally applicable can be categorically determining. In Hegelian terminology, for Kant a being needn’t be rational and free “for-itself” for it to be susceptible to, and deserving of respect under, the moral law. It suffices for that being to be rational and free “in-itself.” For Hegel, Kant’s scrupulous maintenance of that critical distinction cannot suffice. And although it cannot be denied that the empirical differences between men posed a problem for the question concerning the “application” of the moral teaching according to Kant, there can be no doubt that Hegel takes that problem more seriously or makes it more central to his philosophizing about political right. For related reasons, Hegel’s approach to the empirical existence of moral or

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ethical dispositions, which must take its bearings, however critically, from relations found operative in the actual world, accords a philosophical significance to the relative self-consciousness of actual men that knows no parallel in the philosophy of Kant.

As we have anticipated, the reasonable comprehension of politics, according to Hegel, is characterized by a sort of sobriety, if not a certain hardness or coldness, regarding the limits of the practical world as inhabited by finite and imperfect men.46 A mark of that sobriety is Hegel’s unflinching and repeated articulation of the employment of men, and indeed entire peoples and classes, as productive means to higher and more universal ends. For, following Fichte, the range of self-consciousnesses, as expressed for instance in the form of differences between world-historical peoples and classes, is itself a productive means to the ends of spirit, and a necessity rooted in the idea. In this way, Hegel’s relative coolness to morality liberates him to consider the

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46 We are directed, again, to the thorny issue of theodicy, an issue that is perhaps impossible to dispense with. There is no way, in Hegel, to put the moral and the reasonable back together again. To do so one must either deny reason to the world or, affirming the reasonability of the world, justify the existence of evil. From Hegel’s standpoint, the existence of injustice is, at any rate, regarded as insufficient for the purpose of refuting his claims about the reasonability of world history or the actuality of right. Whatever Hegel understands by the “actualization of right” and the “reasonability of the world,” it is more modestly accustomed to the presence of imperfection, injustice and evil than the grandeur of his claims are easily taken to suggest. And, for related reasons, Hegel’s position cannot be accepted by any perspective that regards the moral worldview primary. One might remark, in this connection, of a recent book by Sara MacDonald and Barry Craig, who attempt to do away with interpretations of Hegel that emphasizes the “theodicy” problem so understood. Tellingly, they attempt this on the basis of Hegel’s supposed Christianity. But since they admittedly steer clear of addressing the issue of Hegel’s heterodoxy, their efforts must inevitably fall short. At the very least, Hegel’s disposition toward Christianity is irreducibly bound up with his view of religion as a step on the way to his own speculative philosophy, a view that no orthodox understanding of the Christian faith can accept. For related reasons, Fackenheim’s more sober confrontation with Hegel is superior, even if or perhaps because that confrontation led him away from Hegel to holocaust theology. What Hegel’s philosophy of history implied, he could not accept. We might say that while Fackenheim is unwilling to accept the consequences of “reconciliation,” MacDonald and Craig are unwilling to face what is entailed by it. That Hegel’s treatment of reconciliation is accompanied everywhere by references to those who are not reconciled, and can find little reason to be, signals Hegel’s awareness of the problem. Hegel knows that reconciliation is a bitter pill to swallow, one not to be overcome by desultory appeals to Christianity. It should be noted that while MacDonald and Craig associate the interpretation they oppose with Leo Strauss, and partly on the basis of his lectures on Hegel, there is nothing uniquely “Straussian” about it. Strauss is hardly the first to attend to this most dark aspect of Hegel’s philosophy. It unsettled the entire philosophical generation that came after Hegel, and continues to do so today. Cf. Sara MacDonald and Barry Craig, Recovering Hegel from the Critique of Leo Strauss (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought. For Hegel’s many heresies, see: Glenn Alexander Magee, Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Cyril O’Regan, The Heterodox Hegel (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994); Eric Voegelin, On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery, in Published Essays 1966-1985, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Tom Darby, The Feast (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).
relative rationality or freedom of men “for themselves” as a consideration relevant and significant to the actualization of political right. Should that be denied, it becomes unthinkable how Hegel could have made the progressive history of spirit central to his philosophizing in the precise manner that he did.

To conclude the present section, we see why it was a nonstarter for Hegel to leave the relation between universal morality and the concrete particularity of ethical life as a “fundamental problem” of application or infinite striving. Ethics, morality – but more fundamentally the will, subjectivity and freedom – had to be placed “back into nature.” Nor would it suffice to unite the sensible and the supersensible exclusively on the side of the subject, as Fichte has been shown to do. The overcoming of Kantian dualism was therefore taken to depend on the philosophical re-appropriation of nature, as well as an effort to render tolerably intelligible the occurrence of freedom within nature. As a result, however, Hegel places himself in the difficult position of maintaining, alongside Kant, that human beings are essentially “free” and should be recognized as such, but also contra Kant, that freedom is the basis on which political right is and forever has been determined in the empirical world (and not merely by conjecture). Hegel is concerned to systematically lay bare, without lapsing back into pre-critical dogmatism, how “freedom” is intelligibly furthered and sustained by the actual (natural and spiritual) world. We shall see below how the matter in question is of crucial importance to Hegel’s interpretation of history on the one hand, and of Plato and the sophists on the other. In the meantime, we turn to consider the problem that we have just arrived at, viz., the effort to put freedom back into nature.

**IV. Philosophy of Nature**

The alternative that recommended itself to the Kantian and Fichtean focus on the *difference* between freedom and nature was what Schelling called the *identity* of freedom and
Although we cannot hope to do justice to the brilliant and nebulous philosophy of Schelling, a few remarks are in order for the purpose of clarifying Hegel’s approach to the “embodiment of freedom.”

If Fichte went beyond Kant in uniting the “phenomenal” and “noumenal” on the basis of the productive activity of the ego, Schelling can be said to have gone beyond Fichte in trying to achieve the same with respect to nature in general. The key to understanding Schelling, as well as the rejection of Schelling by Hegel, proves to be a version of Fichte’s I. For Schelling, as for Fichte, human self-consciousness is the product of an unconscious law-governed process or “pragmatic history.” But what is that unconscious generative activity in man that raises him up to the point of self-awareness? The answer is “nature,” or at least the specifically organic nature of the being “man.” Like Fichte’s I, Schelling conceives of nature as both producer and product, both active and passive. Thus the unconscious or self-forgetting activity of the productive ego (as set forth by Fichte) is linked back to the dull stirrings of nature, which provides freedom with its (“effective”) means and shapes its purposive horizon. Accordingly, freedom, insofar as it is driven toward self-consciousness in the form of transcendental idealism, tends toward the appropriation or recollection of the unconscious in man, as the natural heritage of self-conscious reason. The speculative philosopher therefore works to comprehend the obscure contents of the human subconsciousness, or nature as the hidden and spontaneous ground of human freedom and its projects.48

Schelling’s system therefore takes the form of a “chiastic” unity of processes, the peaks of which converge on an “indifference point” where freedom and nature, the conscious and

47 A slight albeit common oversimplification, for all parties took into consideration both sides.
48 For a more thorough account of this relation, and the philosophy of Schelling in general, the reader is directed especially to: Werner Marx, The Philosophy of F.W.J Schelling, 33-57; Eckhart Förster, The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy, 230-249; Richard Velkley, Being after Rousseau, 110-122; Robert Pippin, Hegel’s Idealism, 42-88. See also the very extensive account offered in Beiser, German Idealism.
unconscious, meet. As Hegel put it, for Schelling “nature itself is impelled [urged – treibt] to spirit, and spirit itself to nature.”

Nature in its highest expression is human freedom and freedom in its highest expression is somehow natural. Through the peaks of human freedom the activity of nature may be discerned; and in the workings of nature, the drive to freedom uncovered. That is reflected in the very relation of natural science to transcendental idealism.

“As natural science brings forward idealism out of realism, inasmuch as it spiritualizes [vergeistigt] natural laws [Naturgesetz] into laws of the intelligence, or adds the formal to the material, so does transcendental idealism bring realism out of idealism insofar is it materializes the laws of the intelligence into natural laws, or brings the material into connection with the formal.”

Spirit, turning its gaze on nature, spiritualizes nature in making sense of it, for all making sense of things is a spiritual activity. At the same time, however, “making sense of nature” is a possibility that opens up, and could only open up, within the context of nature. Schelling could therefore introduce the first book of his Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature as follows:

“That man spontaneously works [selbstthätigt wirkt] on nature, determining her according to purpose and design [Zweck und Absicht], lets her perform [act – handeln] before his eyes as if spying on her at work, is nothing other than the exercise of his rightful dominion [mastery, sovereign authority – rechtmäsigen Herrschaft] over dead matter, which was assigned to him together with reason and freedom [Vernunft und Freiheit]. But that this exercise of dominion is possible is with thanks yet again to nature, with respect to whom he would strive in futility to dominate, were it not for the fact that he can put her into conflict with herself and set her forces in motion against herself.”

The being who can consciously set nature against itself – or, what amounts in the present context to the same thing, the being who can understand nature – issues out of nature. Moreover, because the being who can understand nature can himself be understood in terms of his origination from out of nature, it was no longer inconceivable that man could find himself at home in nature. Thus, Schelling worked to reconstruct the dual process according to which

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49 HPh III, 423-426ff.
51 Again, the presuppositions of critical philosophy, which in however easily overlooked a manner were also and to a far reaching extent the presuppositions of Schelling, meant that philosophy of nature could no longer hope to take on a simply “immediate” relation to nature. Thus Schelling’s effort to articulate the identity of freedom and nature, despite its Spinozist aspects, is again Kantian and Fichtean in pedigree. Cf. the passage just quoted with its parallels in Fichte, Wissenschaftslehre, 426-430.
subjective freedom not only originates from out of nature, but also finds satisfaction therein.\textsuperscript{53}

On the basis of the foregoing we can come to understand why the \textit{System of Transcendental Idealism} culminates with a reflection on art. At the end of that work Schelling focuses on the productive activity of the artist insofar as he stands in relation to the unconscious generative activity of nature. Schelling found, in aesthetic experience, and representative art in particular, the state of being at once a subject and an object, or a state of productive freedom that is also according to necessity. The “genius” reproduces the necessary and unconscious productivity of nature in the element of human freedom.\textsuperscript{54} Transcendental philosophy is therefore able to satisfy its longing for self-awareness in the contemplation of artistic works, in which the conscious productivity of human freedom and the unconscious activity of nature may be shown to coincide. Thus the speculative philosopher, who discerns the reconciliation of freedom and necessity in the equipoise of the artist, is able to reconcile the hitherto contradictory aims of realism and idealism. For related reasons, the appropriation of nature by the subject does not amount, as it does in the case of Fichte, to an infinite struggle against nature.

Hegel’s disagreement with Schelling may be related back to his denial that man could be satisfied or identify with nature. He rejects Fichte’s infinite struggle and Schelling’s satisfaction. He affirms that satisfaction is attainable by man, but holds that it must be sought elsewhere. He therefore proposes his own alternative to the Kantian-Fichtean emphasis on “difference” and the Schellingian emphasis on “identity”: the “identity and difference” of freedom and nature. With that in mind, let us turn to Hegel’s \textit{Philosophy of Nature}. In writing this work, Hegel works toward the general aim, shared by Fichte and Schelling, of supplying critical philosophy with its “missing premises.” The organization of nature, according to Hegel, therefore culminates in the

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emergence of inwardness, that is, *subjectivity*, within nature. Thus philosophy of nature, as an activity, takes the form of spirit working to supply the conditions for its own existence, its freedom from nature, which means crucially and especially man’s capacity to think of nature. The organic being “man” is the site of nature’s openness to itself – that part of nature distinguished by its capacity to reflect on nature, to take nature as a problem, and to consciously turn nature against itself.\(^{55}\) This is *spirit*: nature in-and-for itself, where nature becomes self-aware and self-interpreting. That is not to say that nature is, strictly speaking, purposive. Nature has no purposes and only man can impute purpose to nature. But Hegel’s “critically” constrained empiricism does convince him that nature is *implicitly* (“in-itself”) self-conscious and free. Hence Hegel’s gnomic claim that the “truth of nature is spirit” or “nature is spirit asleep.” We hear in these remarks the residue of Fichte and Schelling. Nature dumbly, passively and unselfconsciously, unfolds that which only man can become conscious of, including the organic existence of “man” himself. Indeed, in tracing these developments, the “spiritual” being “man,” as the natural being that can think about nature, “wills to free itself by developing nature out of itself; this deed of spirit is philosophy.”\(^{56}\) Thus the bare capacity to reflect on nature, and philosophy therewith, is tied hard and fast to the emancipation of man from nature.

For related reasons, the *Philosophy of Nature* sets forth not merely the coincidence of human freedom and natural necessity, but the necessary, actual, and projected ascendancy of man, *viz.*, spirit, over nature. The stated aim of Hegel’s lectures on the *Philosophy of Nature* is as follows: “to give a picture of nature in order to conquer [bezwingen] this Proteus.”\(^{57}\) The entire arc of the *Philosophy of Nature* follows a sort of hyper-Baconian logic. Nature does not

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\(^{55}\) “Nature ‘as a whole’ is present only to such self-conscious creatures in thought, which is to say ‘nature as a whole’ is ‘ideal.’ Nature does not deal with itself as a whole. Nature has no problems with itself. It is we who have problems with nature.” Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism*, 23; Cf. Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, 172-190. Cf. *EL*, 86-7ff [§24 A.3] ; *EM*, 17-25 [§381]

\(^{56}\) *EM*, 17-25 [§381].

\(^{57}\) *PhN*, 539 [§376].
merely provide man with the means of setting nature against itself. For, as the ladder of sophistication into which nature “organizes” itself may be conceived along the same lines, or in terms of deepening relations of “self” opposition, the gradations of inwardness within the natural order come to sight as the self-subversion of nature. At the risk of hyperbole, nature can be said not only to enable the “relief of man’s estate,” but also to destroy itself for man. Hegel, to be sure, indulges in such hyperbole, and at the risk of misleading his readers. “The aim [Ziel] of nature is to kill itself and break through its husk of immediate, sensuous existence, to consume itself like the phoenix in order to come forth from this externality rejuvenated as spirit.”

In the overall economy of the *Philosophy of Nature*, subjectivity comes to sight as the product of a long series of qualitative breaks, or suspensions of necessity, which allow for the generation of increasingly higher forms of inwardness within the natural order. The whole of nature is therefore taken from the standpoint of spirit to progressively free itself from itself, culminating in that being whose nature is to be free and self-conscious (radically “for-himself”). Man is therefore taken to straddle the natural – mechanical, chemical and organic – world on the one hand and, on the other, the world of human freedom and creativity that opens up within it. But the occurrence of subjectivity within nature does not serve to demonstrate how man might be satisfied with nature. Rather, reminding us of the *Phenomenology* – in which the encounter of man and nature makes man aware of nature’s indifferent to his fate – it shows that specifically human inwardness is defined by a fundamental awareness of man’s alienation from nature. It reveals that nature is fundamentally dissatisfying, and makes the subordination of nature to spirit only more necessary for man. Indeed, because man’s alienation from nature is the product of

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60 Cf. *PhG*, 137-145 [166-177].
man’s distinct awareness of nature – viz., not simply our drives, desires and impulses, but especially our capacity to think about our drives, impulses and desires – man cannot find satisfaction in the unthinking productivity of nature.

Schelling, according to Hegel, therefore deceives himself in thinking that transcendental philosophy could satisfy itself with the contemplation of artistic works or the unconscious productivity of nature. It is only within the context of a radical break with nature that questions concerning freedom, nature, political right (and in fact, questions as such) are at issue. To be aware of nature is to already to be reflective and therefore spiritual; however, the state of being reflective and spiritual makes it impossible for man to find himself at home in nature.

Accordingly, in the absence of a more “critical” disposition toward nature, “the indifference point of subjectivity and objectivity,” or Schelling’s emphasis on the identity of freedom and nature, leads to the famed “night in which all cows are black.” Speculative philosophy must not only pass through or “negate” “reflection” or “alienation from nature,” but also preserve it.

Hegel employs a curious adjective for that which man finds most alienating about nature. Nature, Hegel likes to say, is “hostile.” The hostility of nature is, however, a blessing in disguise, for it liberates man to find himself at home in the products of human freedom. The indifference and resistance of nature, that it exists in the form of an obstacle for man, solicits innovation or the effort to circumvent or overcome the obstinacy of nature. There is, in fact, a

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61 Thus, as Manfred Riedel has pointed out, the “double title” Hegel gave to the Philosophy of Right – a title pointing to “natural law” on the one hand, and “political science” on the other – is misleading. For Hegel denies that political right can be derived from nature in the traditional sense that the title may be taken to suggest. See Riedel, Zwischen Tradition und Revolution, 84-115, 174ff. Cf. EM, 311-312 [§502].

62 Thus the anti-reflective or “irrationalist” commitments of Hegel’s (post-Kantian) “sophists” were seen to be crypto reflective. It takes a reflective being to commit himself to “natural” authenticity, feeling, artistic communion with nature, or the like. It never occurs to the being that merely feels to do such a thing.

63 HPh III, 435. Thus, as we saw earlier, the effort to derive the content of political right from the unity of natural feeling dissolves everything into a formless “broth,” one in which the stuff of freedom is indistinguishable from that of nature. Hegel encourages the association of Schelling and Jacobi in his Lectures. Cf. HPh III, 420-422, 427-428.

64 Cf. Werner Marx, Vernunft und Welt, 9-17.

65 As Miller translates “feindlich.”
natural, unselfconscious, antecedent to man’s struggle against the hostility of nature. “Life,” which bears the title of the antepenultimate section of the *Science of Logic*, is defined in terms of active self-preservation in and through opposition.\textsuperscript{66} For the same reason, life is said to depend fundamentally on a sort of “craftiness.” Thus “organic life” is shown in the *Philosophy of Nature* to preserve itself in space and time against, but also by means of, “hostile” mechanical forces, chemical processes, and other forms of organic life, all of which variously demarcate the boundaries of material existence.\textsuperscript{67} As for the essential character of specifically human life, it can be said to take the form of a “project.” That project is freedom, understood as the effort (and eventual achievement) of man, who strives to lift himself out from his immersion in, and dependence on, nature. Accordingly, we already find the “cunning of reason in nature.”\textsuperscript{68} The “hostility” of nature necessitates the subversion of nature by man. To see the broader political and philosophical import of this view it is helpful to consider some of the various ways in which nature is taken to be hostile to life in the broadest sense.

We may begin with the elementary, if not altogether trite, fact that because of the spatio-temporal, matter bound, nature of existence, nothing abstractly universal can take on a concrete existence. As Hegel says of the “good” and the “good will,” “it has no place whatsoever in living actuality [*lebendigen Wirklichkeit*].”\textsuperscript{69} Insofar as anything like the “good” can partake of existence, it exists in a medium opposed to itself. In a related sense, the mechanical force to which all material existence is subject – gravity – ensures that nothing is “free from external

\textsuperscript{66} *SL*, 469-487; *EL*, 373-377 [§§216-222]. See especially, “the life process,” in the *Science of Logic* and §219 in the *Encyclopedia Logic*.

\textsuperscript{67} *PhN*, 112, 137, 215-216, 460, 490, 494, 500, 516 [§275, §282, §314, §356, §365, §368, §369].


\textsuperscript{69} *PhH*, 44.
impediments.” Nothing in the world can overcome gravity indefinitely. Material existence involves the pull of an external center, which exerts itself within an ever so broad range of influence (the solar system).\(^70\) Hegel therefore favored introducing the tension between nature and spirit in terms of gravity versus freedom. Gravity is an irreducible source of friction that delimits human freedom.\(^71\) Thus freedom always already opposes itself to intransigent forces.

At the same time, the hold of gravity on the mechanism of nature is not total. Accompanying the “hostility of nature,” we find Hegel employing another curious adjective for nature. Hegel likes to speak of the “impotence” of nature. If elementary determinations of nature like “gravity” had “total” power, all higher gradations of freedom would be impossible.\(^72\) All mass, says Hegel, would be reduced to a point and even the most rudimentary forms of locomotion would be unthinkable. In these ways gravity is of limited potency: the “externality” of gravity, the directedness of objects to a center, has a limited hold on objects within the world.\(^73\) Thus the hold of gravity on the mechanism of nature does not preempt so much as leave open the possibility of “levity” and higher gradations of freedom.\(^74\) Freedom is thus conditioned by necessity and yet, in a certain decisive respect, enabled or unobstructed by it. Accordingly, the possibility for less “externally” directed permutations of nature’s mechanism opens up within the world of gravitation. Force, for instance, can be locally generated in the form of chemical and organic processes.\(^75\) When water boils or freezes it does so for reasons \textit{internal} to the composition of water, though initiated by external circumstances such as heat or cold.

\(^70\) \textit{PhH}, 109-292 [§272-324]
\(^73\) Thus the organization of nature involves the increasingly sophisticated and diversified mobilization of force against itself. \textit{PhN}, 41-111 [§253-274].
\(^75\) \textit{PhN}, 287-336 [§§326-336].
The layers upon layers of dynamics unfolded by Hegel, however, only contribute further to the hostility of nature. Chemical processes, such as oxidation, wear down, corrode and dissolve material objects, despite also allowing for localized reactive processes – explosion for instance.76 Like “mechanism,” however, “chemism” is of limited power and gives way to the developments of organic life. Plant and animal life are subject to mechanical and chemical processes that limit and conspire to annihilate them, but reflect at once the local “organization” of chemistry in the form of a particular being with its own distinct inwardness, excitable states, and higher order capabilities. Organic life therefore comes to sight as the internalization or “sublimation” of “mechanism and chemism.” Thus beings with inwardly felt needs, rooted in a digestive tract or pulmonary system, are supplied with limbs and organs that can be set into motion to satisfy those needs. The range of excitable inner states that condition animal life, despite their continued enslavement to “externality,” reflect a “deepening” of nature’s complexity or a gradation of freedom from external impediments.77 In like manner, an endless diversity of means by which organisms may adapt to the environing world for the sake of self-preservation, including rudimentary forms of “calculation,” open up within the confines of the mechanical and chemical world.78 Thus organisms prove able to preserve themselves in a hostile world, and not only as individuals that expend themselves in the life process, but also as a species over and against the finitude of the individuals constitutive of it.

The hostility of nature gradually succumbs to the impotence of nature, but the former is never left altogether behind. Although few before Hegel would dare to speak in terms of “the impotence of nature,” every satisfactory interpretation of what that means must take into account the intransigence of nature, which remains forever at play. The example of running oneself to

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76 *PhN*, 136-142 [§§281-284]
77 *PhG*, 140-144 [§§169-175].
exhaustion has been used. Sooner or later gravity and chemistry reassert themselves: limbs get heavy, one gets thirsty and must catch one’s breath. “Where in nature the higher, namely the organic functions, in their normal efficacy [wirksamkeit] undergo [sustain, suffer – erleiden] a disturbance [interruption – Störung] or suppression in one or another way, the otherwise subordinated mechanism immediately comes forward as dominant.”\textsuperscript{79} For that very reason the lower order determinations of nature, like mechanism or chemism, must receive their due as “universal logical categories,” indeed as actualities that exert constant force. For when the processes on the basis of which lower order determinations of nature are overcome break down, the lower reasserts itself as a matter of course.\textsuperscript{80} Death, disease and madness thus reflect the reassertion of mechanism and chemism against existence of organic life.

We shall see later that there are spiritual corollaries to phenomena such as these. For now, the hostility of nature impels man, as the being who is aware of nature, and alienated on the basis of that awareness, to comprehensively reorder nature for his own ends, or to innovate for the sake of self-preservation against nature. Specifically human inwardness, however, does not stop at passive impulsion in response to the external world. For the being that can pose nature as a question can do the same with regards to its own nature. More fundamentally, as the self-interpreting being, man’s mode of being in the world is mediated by his understanding of his place within the whole.\textsuperscript{81} He is the natural being whose inwardness is defined by a self-conscious awareness of his not-being-at-home in nature, but in such a fashion that is itself subject to change. Thus man is not distinguished simply by his heightened capacity to reorder the world, but also by his capacity to reorder his own relation to the world. For related reasons,
the most mediocre man is to be regarded unequivocally superior to even the greatest marvels of nature. More to the point, subjectivity, so understood, is the condition for the possibility of “history.” And because it will not do to reinterpret the higher in terms of the lower, or to interpret spirit through the categories of nature, the process carried out in the Philosophy of Nature will have to be repeated at the deeper level that it opens up, viz., in Philosophy of Spirit and Philosophy of History. On the basis of the manifest inadequacy of the unchanging order of nature for the purposes of man, the changing order of man comes into prominence.

A great deal could be said regarding the different layers of spirit insofar as they relate to nature, but it will suffice for us to conclude by stressing the following. Although “spirit” always already presupposes its embodiment in the form of animal life, human subjectivity is to be understood as releasing itself from nature. Freedom is therefore only put back into nature by Hegel to better cure man of naturalism. Although all further discussions of spirit presuppose the embodiment of freedom, in higher determinations of spirit nature is increasingly less influential and determinant. The Philosophy of Spirit therefore begins from the merely natural in man – what Hegel calls the “soul” – but reveals how human inwardness gradually frees itself, cognitively and otherwise, from its dependency on the immediacy of nature. We move from more passive forms of relating to the world (e.g., feeling, perception and desire), via the increasingly active assimilation and reproduction of objects in the world by subjectivity (e.g., recollection, imagination, memory and urge), toward ways of relating to the world on the basis of “concepts,” including the concept of “right.”

The same may be said of “history” writ large. In less developed forms of human society “anthropological” considerations – those pertaining to the merely natural side of man – are of primary importance. The influence upon man of geography, climate, changes of season and

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82 Cf. n.22 to §381 in Michael Inwood, Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind, 297-298.
periods of the day; race, temperament and physiognomy; “natural alterations” such as age and sexual coming of age; as well as “mere” sensation (e.g., desire, urge and passion) – all wane, though never to be eradicated in their basic significance, with the advance of human freedom.\textsuperscript{83}

Thus, in a synthesis of Herder and Kant, it is in the nature of human beings to have culture in manners progressively freer from nature. History involves not only the mastery of external nature, but the mastery of man’s internal nature, including especially his natural inclination to interpret himself and the world in terms of nature. The empirical and historical existence of ethical life will therefore provide the basis for Hegel’s effort – which aims to surpass the boundaries of Kantianism\textsuperscript{84} – to articulate the “identity” of spirit and nature without losing sight of “differences” that separate them. As nature can be said to lift itself up to the standpoint of spirit, spirit will be shown to gradually lift itself up to the standpoint of Hegel.

\textbf{V. Nature, Spirit and the Architectonics of the Modern State}

The \textit{Philosophy of Mind} is intended to cure us of our inclination to interpret ourselves in terms of nature. The \textit{Philosophy of Right}, as a work that takes up a part of what is set forth in the third volume of the \textit{Encyclopedia}, in fact presupposes that its reader has already been brought into proper relation to nature. It therefore claims to \textit{begin} with the human mind insofar as it takes itself as its subject matter, makes itself explicitly its own, and determines itself in the form of an effort to articulate the determination of itself. There remains, however, the following interpretive difficulty. The Introduction to the \textit{Philosophy of Right} is nothing if not saturated with references to nature, whether nature simply, natural circumstance, the nature of spirit, second nature, and, of greatest interest to this study, the determination of the will by nature and/or freedom. Given the “critical” bearing of Hegel’s philosophy toward nature, how are we to

\textsuperscript{83} We make no assumption that Hegel is right on all of these points. Would it be correct to say that climate has waned in its significance? We might say that it is only the basis of its having done so inordinately that it has come back into significance. \textit{EM}, 32-33, 38-42, 43-49, 52-95, 100-160 [§385, §387, §389, §§392-§398, §§401-406].

\textsuperscript{84} Cf. \textit{EL}, 143-147, 203-205 [§60, 96].
make sense of the fact that nature seems everywhere at issue? Although we shall only be able to
do justice to this question in Part III.A, our study of the nature-freedom problem allows us to
clarify, even if only provisionally, the bearing of the Philosophy of Right on nature and
empirical man.

For reasons that should be absolutely clear on the basis of our treatment of the
Philosophy of Nature, Hegel emphatically denies that the Philosophy of Spirit takes place simply
“outside of nature.” Although philosophy of right in particular must take its bearings primarily
from thought and its products, these cannot reasonably be thought to exist simply “outside of
sensation” or “experience.”\textsuperscript{85} The immediate preparation for the Philosophy of Right is therefore
said to be “psychology,” the science of the “soul” or the pre-reflective and “merely natural in
man.”\textsuperscript{86} For, whatever might be said of the conceits of critical philosophy, the natural orientation
to the world does not cease to provide the human will with its most immediate contents, as the
will to feed oneself or one’s family suffices to indicate. More to the point, the realization of the
ends of freedom or political right could only conceivably be carried out by the ensouled being
“man.” In other words, the internalization of the ends of freedom by man, and the drive to
actualize those ends, can only be carried out on the basis of dynamics internal to man, or the
sources of human motivation. Accordingly, to exclude nature from the philosophy of spirit
would entail excluding the only conceivable means on the basis of which the productions of
spirit could secure a concrete existence for themselves.

\textsuperscript{85} “Everything is in sensation and, if you will, everything which comes forward in spiritual consciousness [geistigen Bewusstsein] and in reason [Vernunft] has its source [Quelle] and origin [Ursprung] in the same.”Hegel’s Italics. PhG, 76-81 [§§83-89]; EM, 16-25, 38-42, 43-49, 95-100 [§§830-381, §387, §389, §§399-400].

\textsuperscript{86} As Hegel makes abundantly clear in the opening sections of the Introduction, the Philosophy of Right begins
“before” the Philosophy of Right. Thus while §1 tells us that the “philosophical science of right has the idea of right,
the concept of right and its actualization as its subject matter,” §2 reminds us that the “science of right” is no more
than a “part of philosophy,” such that the “concept” to be “immanently developed [immanen Entwicklung]” or
“actualized… falls outside [voraus gestellt] the science of right.” The “method” and “starting point” of the
Philosophy of Right are thus “proven” elsewhere and here “presupposed.” We shall return to this later. PhR, 29-34
[§§1-2]
The “soul,” in other words, provides freedom and the ends of political right with the means, and perhaps even a hard push in the direction, of realizing themselves. Hegel therefore writes, in the Philosophy of History, and with particular reference to the passions and appetites of men, of the means and ends of spirit. The natural in man is to be subordinated to the projects of human freedom, but those can have no traction in the world without the activity of the former. Hence Hegel’s claim that “nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion [nichts Großes in der Welt ohne Leidenschaft vollbracht wordend ist].”\(^87\) It bears mentioning, moreover, that although Hegel gives the appearance that he is concerned with something like “soul craft,” that appearance is misleading. The classical emphasis on the perfection of the soul could no longer be a serious concern of Hegel’s for, again, the “soul,” according to Hegel, refers to the merely natural in man, and nature is inadequate for the purposes of philosophy of right. The soul was to be understood, rather and at best, as a vehicle for human freedom. Even the “greatest” souls – those of world historical thinkers and actors – therefore come to sight in the economy of Hegel’s historical writings as means to the ends of spirit.

We are now able to carry forward our understanding of what it means for Hegel to speak of the “monstrous power” of the modern state in terms of its distinct relation to subjectivity and the “extreme of personal particularity.” The presupposition of Hegel’s entire approach to political authority is an understanding of the human soul that lends itself as a means to the ends of human freedom, taken together with a vision of political right that can be realized on that basis without compromising itself. Let us sketch in outline the implications of this position for the problem of political authority, before returning to the paradox that remains unresolved from our study of the Preface – Hegel’s critique of Plato and interpretation of the sophists.

\(^87\) Hegel’s italics. PhH, 33-41.
Hegel writes in the Introduction to the Philosophy of Right that the “determination, differentiation” and provision of content for the will can be “given by nature or engendered by the concept of mind.”88 What does it mean for Hegel to speak in this context of the natural and spiritual determination of the will”? Again, we shall only do justice to this question in Part 3. For now, let us consider what the Science of Logic says about “determination.” The second chapter of the first section (“Being”) of the first book of that work is entitled “Dasein” – existence or “being there.” The discussion of determination occurs in the second subsection of that section, which bears the name Endlichkeit – “finitude.” We may summarize what is relevant from the argument of the Science of Logic up to this point as follows. To think is necessarily to think of something; to think of something and not something else is to distinguish qualitatively. To distinguish qualitatively is to think of a part and not the whole; and it is to distinguish not simply an undefined “this” from an undefined “that,” but to distinguish in terms of a particular such and such with features, relations and bounded limits. The second “moment” of the subsection on “finitude” therefore bears the name Bestimmung, Beschaffenheit und Grenze – determination, constitution and limit or boundary. These are basic categories of thinking as such, and thinking of the human will is no exception. As the Introduction to the Philosophy of Right stresses, the will always takes particular form, is constituted by such and such circumstances and relations, and limited in such and such ways. There is a boundary beyond which it no longer makes sense to speak of willing. The will exists within a certain situation, e.g., it exists within the (mechanical, chemical, organic, anthropological, historical) parameters of nature and spirit in particular. The contents of the will may be appropriated from man’s encounter with nature or derived from the abstractions of thought.

88 Author’s italics. Knox’s translation. PhR, 52-54 [§6].
So far we have provided a strictly logical account of certain points that are presupposed by any coherent speech of the will as “being there” (Dasein) in the world. There is, however, a specifically practical signification of the word Bestimmung less obvious in the comparatively bloodless English word “determination,” but one albeit retained when we speak of a “determined” individual. Fichte’s famous and rather politically charged work Die Bestimmung des Menschen is better translated “The Vocation of Man” than the “Determination of Man,” but really either would do.\(^89\) Indeed, although Hegel objected to Fichte’s “ought” and “infinite striving” for “unconditional control of the mechanism of nature,” he can be seen to have found no better example to clarify the meaning of “Bestimmung.”

“The vocation/determination of man [Bestimmung des Menschen] is thinking reason; thought above all is his simple determinateness, by which same thing he is distinguished from the animal; he is thinking in himself, insofar as this same thing distinguishes him from his being-for-others, his natural and sensuous existence through which he is immediately connected [associated – zuzammenhang] with his other. But thinking is also in him; man himself is thinking, he is there as thinking, it is his existences and actuality [Existenz und Wirklichkeit]; and further, inasmuch as it is in his being-their [Dasein] and his being-there in thinking, it is to be taken as concrete, with content and filling. It is thinking reason, and so therefore the vocation/determination of man [Bestimmung des Menschen]. But even this determination is only in itself as an ought [Sollen], that is, with the filling which is embodied in its in-itself, in the form an in it-itself in general as against the being-there that is not-embodied in it which, all the same, stands over and against it as external, immediate sensibility and nature [unmittelbare Sinnlichkeit und Nature].”\(^90\)

To speak of the will as determined in the “form of freedom” or “thinking” is not yet to say that the will necessarily fulfills itself as such.

The vocation of man, the determination of the human will by freedom, may remain in some cases no more than a task. That task is to be taken up in earnest, but it may fail to be taken up, or fail in execution. Freedom is a task that one can fail to pursue with sufficient rigor, can be pursued by one unfit to do so, can be obstructed by external circumstances, can run up on the limits of the possible, and so on. Man may distinguish himself from animals in terms of such

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\(^89\) As noted in Giovanni’s Science of Logic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95.

things as freedom and thinking, but he may do so in ways that remain merely potential; *dunamis* without the *entelechia*, as an Aristotelian might say. Thus a man may be lazy and thoughtless, despite being capable of more; and the will may be free in principle, despite being constituted by the external conditions of a society that condones slavery. The determination of the will by “nature” and “freedom” may therefore be taken to remain at the level of mere potentiality. One would be tempted, indeed, to conclude that the determination of the human will by freedom or nature could go simply either way – where it not for what Hegel takes the modern state to have achieved. For in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel emphasizes not only the potential for freedom, but the ongoing achievement, realization and constitution of freedom through the institutional structure of the modern state and the forms of collective willing that sustain it.

The denoted aspect of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* is well known, uncontroversial and much liked. But, as we have anticipated, Hegel does not stop at advancing the visionary ideal of a state built from the stuff of freedom, but proceeds to the philosophical reconstruction of an existent state that is taken to have demonstrated its capacity to realize freedom in the empirical world. To clarify what this entails, it is helpful to recall Hegel’s procedure in the *Philosophy of Nature*. The higher determinations of nature, which peak with the spiritual animal “man,” depend on the satisfaction or containment of lower order determinations, which continue to exert force, and may reassert themselves over and against the higher. The spiritual cognate to the reassertion of the lower against the higher is the failure or decline of societies and civilizations, which few thinkers took greater interest in than Hegel. Hegel’s history is not only the history of freedom lifting itself out of nature, but also the history of failed attempts at doing so. Thus world historical peoples rise and fall with the progress of freedom.

On this basis, we may shed some light on a paradox encountered toward the end of the *Preface*. The gradations of freedom actualized in the ethical world depend on the overcoming or
suspension of certain natural and spiritual forces of dissolution. When states or cultures fail to supply the conditions for their continued existence, that is, the containment or “satisfaction” of those forces, they give way to the spiritual cognates of death, disease and madness. The same dynamic grounds Hegel’s well-known fears regarding the formation of an industrial rabble and also, as it would appear, his concern in the *Preface* and *Introduction* for such things like “arbitrariness,” “caprice” and the like. The connections to Aristotle and Karl Marx, but also to Hobbes, should be clear. A free society requires the constant ongoing satisfaction or suppression of “nature.” Failure in that regard entails crises in political authority, the prospect of continuing or “permanent” revolution, and perhaps even the “dissolution of commonwealths.”91 We might note, in this regard, that “cunning” is a modification of the experience of adversity, the product of prior friction between the ends of man and the motions of nature. In other words, reason would not need “cunning” if nature ceased to be a problem for it.92

We therefore begin to see why the “natural” determinants of subjectivity haunt the entirety of the *Philosophy of Right* and the problem of political authority especially. The modern state consists in the realization of a condition in which man proves able to organize himself principally in terms of freedom, that is, “conceptually” in terms of “rights,” as opposed to distinctions derived from nature. However, because freedom and nature converge on subjectivity, the nature-freedom problem resurfaces at nearly every state of the *Philosophy of Right* and in terms of the natural and spiritual determinants of the will. For the same reasons, we begin to see what it means for Hegel to present the “monstrous power” of the modern state in

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92 For related reasons, one can only go so far in carrying over the Baconian-Fichtean notion of an “infinite” struggle against nature. The intransigence, hostility, and contingency of nature will never subside; and it would remain, at any rate, impossible for man to find satisfaction within nature. To seek the absolute subordination of nature to freedom, or to take one’s bearings fundamentally from that task, is the folly of those who seek satisfaction where it cannot be found. There is no “infinite struggle” because satisfaction is possible for man. It must, however, be sought in nature. To exaggerate, the struggles of spirit admit of resolution even if the struggles of nature do not.
relation to subjectivity and “the extreme of personal particularity.” The power of the modern state rests on its capacity to subordinate the natural determinants of subjectivity to itself.

Hegel, as we noted at the outset, seems confident in the modern state’s capacity to subordinate, and continue to subordinate, the “realm of necessity” to the “realm of freedom.” What is it, then, that forestalls, in the case of the modern state, the forces of dissolution that all prior world historical peoples have succumbed to? What stands in the way of a “decline of the west” or the overturning of the bourgeois state as Hegel’s respectively more pessimistic (Spengler) and optimistic (Marx) successors expected? We may answer this question by turning to examine a last implication of Hegel’s treatment of the natural will, which our discussion has left open and anticipated, but left unexamined. *For the will may also resolve itself in terms of nature or the lower determinations of spirit, despite being constituted in ways that further the ends of freedom, or fail to render the world decisively inhospitable to freedom.* Hegel’s confidence in the power of the modern state relates to his view that the modern state successfully co-opts the natural determinations of subjectivity to realize the purposes of freedom, or what came to sight previously mentioned as the “cunning of reason.”

In contrast to the more benign side of Hegel’s teaching, the “cunning of reason” does not meet the approval of our time. It is for that reason, perhaps, less discussed in contemporary scholarship. Since adverse to the very idea of ranking and ordering the various permutations of human willing, we are reluctant to endorse the employment of certain “lower” forms of willing as means to other “higher” ones. That the natural will might be able to find itself in the state remains attractive to us; that the state might use or manipulate the natural will for purposes divergent from its own is, conversely, odious. However that may be, Hegel’s confidence in the power of the modern state is unintelligible should we, cleaving to a purely moral perspective, fail to consider the usage of man as a means to the ends of freedom. For, in Hegel’s view at
least, it makes no sense to speak of “organized life” and the state as an “organic realm” outside of that unappealing relation. Hegel denies, in effect, that we can endorse the institutional realization of freedom without also endorsing, or at least accepting in some manner or another, the effective relation or means by which “objective spirit” is able, and could only be able, to secure itself against the natural and spiritual forces of dissolution.

Let us therefore conclude our treatment of the nature-freedom problem by reminding the reader of the architectural metaphor employed by Hegel in the Preface. In the Preface Hegel was seen to write vaguely of the various interlocking spheres of society, and how the good of the whole is produced from out of them. In the version of that image supplied in the Preface Hegel suppresses the aspect of his understanding of the problem of political authority just related. That aspect comes to the fore in the Philosophy of History:

“Building a house is, to begin with, an inner goal and purpose [Zweck und Absicht]. As the means [Mitte] to that end, there are particular materials – iron, wood, stone. The elements are applied, in order to work up these materials: fire to melt the iron; air to blow up the fire; water to turn the wheels for cutting the wood, etc. The result is that the air, which helped in building the house, is now shut out by the house, since it excludes the wind; similarly, the house keeps out streams of water because it excludes the rain; and insofar as the house is made fire proof it excludes the destructiveness of fire. The stones and beams are obedient to earth’s gravity, and because they press downward high walls are set up. Thus the elements are utilized according to their nature, and yet they cooperate toward a product by which they themselves are being limited. In a similar way the human passions [Leidenschaften] satisfy themselves; they fulfill their goals according to their natural determination [Naturebestimmung] and they bring forth the edifice of human society [menschlichen Gesellschaft], in which they have provided for law [Rechte] and order as forces Ordnung die Gewalt against themselves (i.e., restraining those passions).”

If there is anything quintessentially “modern” about the philosophy of Hegel, here it is on full display. As the Philosophy of Nature serves the end of subordinating protean nature, the Hegelian philosophy of mind serves the end of subordinating protean human nature or, better, rendering intelligible the accomplishment of that very aim in the form of the modern state.

Although easily overstated, Hegel’s understanding of man’s place within the whole is no doubt characterized by a certain triumphalism. Any theory of history that posits decisive

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historical progress – progress that cannot or is very unlikely to be reversed – presupposes that
the developments of history have staying power. That view presupposes in turn that man’s
capacity to improve on his condition is more robust than those aspects of him or nature that
threaten to unravel them. A conviction of that sort underlies Hegel’s remarks regarding the
“monstrous power of the modern state” on the one hand and the “impotence of nature” on the
other. That is especially if we do not take the view that Hegel’s state must invariably give way
to decline. Some remarks to the contrary, Hegel does not seem to seriously entertain the
prospect of losing the gains brought about by the modern project, a prospect very seriously
entertained by his successors. The root of Hegel’s conviction in the progress of history is the
power of the higher determinations of nature or spirit relative to the lower. The question that
raises itself as a matter of course is whether Hegel may be mistaken on this count.
Developments in history and philosophy since Hegel give us good reason to believe that the
higher determinations of nature and spirit are rather the more fragile ones.94 We shall not yet be
able to take up that possibility, but it can be stated provisionally that the classical view of man
insofar as he relates to nature is far closer to the alternative suggested.

VI. Philosophy of History and the Ancients

Having dwelled at some length on the nature-freedom problem, and its relation to the
aims of philosophy of right, we may now turn to the second set of ambiguities carried over from
our consideration of the Preface, Hegel’s interpretation of Plato and the sophists. But what
connection could possibly obtain between these two, apparently disparate, sets of issues? As the
sections to follow will exhibit, the two are in fact one. The key to Hegel’s critique of Plato and
rehabilitation of the sophists is the nature-freedom problem, or his bearing on the problems of
the post-Kantian period, as established in the foregoing.

94 Cf. Max Scheler, Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1947),
52-65.
It is necessary to begin by confronting the fact that Hegel’s writings about the ancients seem thoroughly and irredeemably anachronistic. No sufficiently aware reader of Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* can fail to notice that Hegel’s treatment of the sophists is saturated with the trappings of philosophy after Kant. It might be noted in this connection that Hegel translates *paideia* and *polis* as *das Bildung* and *der Staat*. No fewer than six times does Hegel explicitly identify the pathologies of his own time with those of the ancient sophists in the section where he treats of them.\(^95\) We have already approached this problem from another angle, having noted the unmistakably classical staging of the *Preface*.\(^96\) Should the reader be familiar with the not uncommon claim that Germany undertook in thought what France had achieved in practice in the form of the French Revolution, one is struck by the world-historical parallel of parallels.\(^97\) The sophists were to the disintegration of Greece as Kantian philosophy was to the destruction of the *Ancien Régime* and the spread of the revolutionary creed.\(^98\) Thus the reader may be startled to find, right at the outset of Hegel’s presentation of the sophists and Socrates, the following pronouncement on the legacy of Anaxagoras: “so enters an age of subjective reflection, since the absolute is posited as subject. The principle of modern times begins in this period – with the dissolution of Greece in the Peloponnesian war.”\(^99\) How are we to make sense

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\(^{96}\) Readers familiar with the *Preface* and its historical background who turn their attention to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* will note that the two contexts are assimilated more often than Hegel cares to make explicit. To mention only one example, Hegel complains as follows: “so it is in recent times that the greatest crimes, assassination, treason and so on, have been justified because in the intention there lay a deliberate determination which was for itself essential, for example, that man must oppose evil and promote the good.” The famous, all too public, excusal of that crime on the basis of pure feelings and personal convictions was the letter penned by Wilhelm de Wette to Karl Sand’s mother. Cf. *PhR*, 23, 270-271 [10, §140], *HPh I*, 424.

\(^{97}\) Cf. Ritter, *Moralität und Sittlichkeit*, 286 n.4

\(^{98}\) Cf. *PhH*, 326-328, 525-529.

\(^{99}\) Author’s italics. Heidegger’s tendenc to associate the most recent with the earliest is already a tendency of Hegel’s. See the final chapter in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik: Fünf Hermeneutische Studien*. *HPh I*, 404.
of formulations such as these, which leap across history to assimilate the most recent and remote?

A “hard” or “radical” interpretation of Hegel’s historicism renders completely unintelligible the various ways in which Hegel relates ancient and modern sophistry via “subjective reflection.” The claim that “each thinker is a child of his own time” cannot be taken in the unqualified sense that absolutely relativizes thought to its respective historical epoch. Bluntly stated, if Hegel considered the “will,” “reflection” or “subjectivity” strictly modern problems, he would have left the sophists and Plato’s Republic out of it. The latter would have nothing to teach us about the former and vice versa. Similarly, Hegel’s many and various remarks on the deficiency of the ancients in their disposition toward subjectivity can cause a great deal of confusion. For again, if we take a “hard” reading of Hegel’s historicism, one might come to the conclusion, certainly not shared by Hegel, that “subjectivity,” “will” and “reflection” can have no possible application to the pre-Christian world. The extent to which such a view is mistaken is evident in that “subjectivity” and “inwardness,” as defining features of specifically animal, that is natural-organic, life, are by no means simply historical phenomena. Accordingly, no interpretation of Hegel’s historicism can prove incompatible with the post-Kantian frame of reference that he not only superimposes on the ancient world, but considers crucial to its elucidation. How then are we to make sense of the fact that Hegel, in spite of his historicism, believed that we can learn from antiquity about modernity and from modernity about antiquity?

The essential point to grasp is the following. To whatever extent that the philosophy of Hegel concerns itself with the multiplicity of the human spirit, that multiplicity is held together by the idea of “freedom.”¹⁰⁰ Subjectivity or the will are trans-historical dimensions of the

human, which, so far as Hegel is concerned, ancient Hellenes struggled to make sense of as humanity forever has. Should one fail to approach the philosophy of Hegel in such terms, it becomes altogether unintelligible how he could write a “logic” that purports to govern the structure of intelligibility as such, as opposed to merely the intelligibility of his particular time and place. The tendency to impute to Hegel a “decapitated Hegelianism” that he himself did not share is therefore a great obstacle to the understanding of Hegel.

Sustainable or not, it remains a distinct advantage of Hegel’s historicism over and against later permutations of the same that the differentiation of epochs or perspectives occurs within an overarching unity or identity. Shorn of that unity, the philosophy of history dissolves into mere “différance” and the unintelligibility that goes with it. We may add, for those who might object on the basis of historical “narratives” omitted, that Hegel would be the first to wish that our knowledge of “non-Western” peoples should deepen. But he would doubt in the strongest terms possible that our knowledge of such things could make “freedom” any less absolute. He would deny that any category could be more fundamental when it comes to making sense of the human experience, collective or otherwise. He would similarly deny that the inclusion of new narratives would change anything in this most decisive respect. The conviction in question affords Hegel the startling, if not most unappealing, confidence most characteristic of him: the systematic effort of a first rate mind who seeks to bend the entirety of the human experience to his own will. It is the root of Hegel’s claim to understand all previous thinkers better than they understood themselves. It accounts, moreover, for the curious fact that Hegel’s

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102 This felicitous turn of phrase is employed by Victor Gourevitch and Michael Roth in their Introduction to On Tyranny, where the rejection of “decapitated historicism” is attributed to Strauss and Kojève in common.
103 Cf. Plato, Parmenides, 135b-c.
approach to philosophizing entails the assimilation of other thinkers, and indeed entire peoples and “classes,” to moments within his own exposition of the “idea.”

With these remarks on the subject of Hegel’s historicism behind us, we may turn to Hegel’s interpretation of the classical world in general. This detour is necessary because Hegel’s interpretation of the sophists and Platonic Republic cannot be understood outside of his scrupulous application of post-Kantian categories to the ancient world. Let us therefore return to Hegel’s cryptic remark about Anaxagoras.

With Anaxagoras thought begins to lift itself out of its hazy absorption in nature and begins to recognize itself in its own primacy, just short of opposing itself to the natural and spiritual world by which it remains beholden. Hegel associates Anaxagoras’ arrival in Athens with the “age of Pericles,” the “peak” of Athenian greatness, where the immediacy of the traditional ways is injected with new vitality and vigor by the experiment in free self-governance. In this way the great flowering of creative expression and civic spiritedness for which the period is known is unleashed. Anaxagoras and Pericles, Socrates and Aristophanes, Sophocles and Phideas, isagoria and the opposition to oriental despotism, all go in tandem as part of a broader “bootstrapping” of Geist, which begins to release itself from the tyranny of nature and custom. Thus spirit begins to seize hold of its essential freedom, an aim and achievement within a broader narrative of world historical efforts determined as a whole by the same form. Accordingly, “here a light (to be sure it is still a faint one) first begins to dawn: the

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104 “The history of philosophy shows, regarding philosophies which seem diverse [verschieden erscheinenden], partly that there is only one philosophy at various stages of development [verschiedenen Ausbildungsstufen] and partly that the particular principles upon which each system lies grounded one by one, are but branches of one and the same whole. The philosophy latest in time is the result of all previous philosophies and must accordingly contain the principles of all of them; it is therefore, if for other reasons actually philosophy, the most unfolded, richest and concrete.” Hegel’s italics. EL, 58-59 [§13]. Cf. Stanley Rosen, The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic, 11-12.

105 HPh 370-378; Cf. PhH, 313-330; Werke XVII: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, 93-154; Werke XIV: Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, 117-120; Cf. Terry Pinkard, Hegel’s Naturalism, 126-134. In this respect Pippin’s language of “achievement” is apt, so long as one keeps in mind that for Hegel the Greeks lacked “the full picture.” See Pippin, Hegel’s Practical Philosophy, 36-64, 134-135, 166-167.
understanding comes to be recognized as the principle.”

As for the ancient sophists, they serve as a world historical paradigm for the reflective self-assertion of thought. But precisely as world-historical, sophistry is not merely historical.

As Anaxagoras arrives in Athens, philosophy begins to pass from Ionia and Italy to mainland Greece. It passes from total abstraction on the one hand, and total absorption in nature on the other, to the more “concrete.” Abstraction is thereby connected to worldliness; Parmenides meets Heraclitus. The activity of self-determining thought is formally taken to be the essence holding sway over the coming to be and passing away of all things – but the identification remains abstract, the immediate and vague impression of a “world soul” or “macrocosm.”

Although the whole is identified with reason, reason is still mired hazily in the “externality” of nature. The “big” nous of the cosmos intimated is not firmly grasped by, let alone as, the “small” nous of man. There is something of Hegel’s Spinoza in Hegel’s Anaxagoras: the substance is not yet posited as subject in the sense that man is a subject. As in the case of Spinoza’s God according to Hegel, Anaxagoras supplies no account of how he can think the nous of the whole, or how nous relates to psyche. Hegel therefore cites the approval of Aristotle and the reprobation of Plato’s Socrates: the former for saying that Anaxagoras made all those who came before him look like drunkards; the latter for his disappointment, expressed in the Phaedo, that Anaxagoras had failed to connect nous to the world in any sufficiently “determinate” manner.

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106 “Socrates had offended [or harmed, even injured – verletzt] and attacked [angegriffen] Athenian life in two fundamental points; the Athenians felt it and it came into their consciousness. Is it any wonder that Socrates was found guilty? We can say that it had to come to pass.” HPh I, 194, 369, 376-378, 452, 496-508.


108 HPh I 189, 392-393; PhH 23-26; EM, 43-51[§388-391].


111 HPh I, 369, 393-399.
The greatness of Anaxagoras, like the greatness of Periclean Athens, derives from his being a halfway house between the immediacy of tradition or nature and reflective freedom. As with all such transitions, the “peaks” (as opposed to the peak) in the philosophy of Hegel, they are episodic, succumbing almost immediately to the forces the unleashing of which is their distinct achievement. As Athens has its way with the old modes and orders, the sophists and Socratics make nous their own and extend its reach to the spiritual substance of the time, that is, to traditional opinion, religion, custom and law. The “peak of Athenian greatness” lies in a “beautiful” consonance of new freedom and old ways, but it is in the nature of that peak to prove fleeting. For freedom is like the proverbial cat out of the bag. Once unleashed, it will be turned against the old ways that share responsibility for the exuberance of Greek form.

The effort to bring first philosophy down to earth – to “apply it to the world” – has a familiar range of consequences. Philosophy is once more a herald of decline. As in the case of Hegel’s post-Kantians, we have the collapse of abstract universalism into particularism. The activity of thought is its application to the real by worldly agents and that activity is at first purely negative. Parmenides, Zeno, Heraclitus and Anaxagoras oppose the simplicity of thought to the ceaseless and contingent churning and overturning of the real. In Anaxagoras, however, the simplicity of thought is for the first time held responsible for multiplicity and change. But since purely formal, thought is no more than the “nullity” or negation of all things real – it teaches that “nothing is.”

“The concept [Begriff], which reason has found in Anaxagoras as the essence [substance, reality – Wesen], is the simple negative into which all determination [Bestimmtheit], all that is existent and individual [Seiende und Einzelne] itself sinks…The concept is precisely the flowing change [fließende Übergehen] of Heraclitus, the motion, the causticity, which nothing can withstand. Thus the concept which finds itself, finds itself as the absolute power before which everything passes away; and so all things, all that endures, all that is taken to be secure, becomes fluid [flüssig]. The secure [Feste] – whether the security [Festigkeit] of being or the security of determinate concepts [bestimmte Begriffen], fundamental rules [Grundsätzen], morals [Sitte], laws [Gesetzen] – comes to shake and loses its hold.”¹¹²

¹¹² _HPh I_, 406.
Thus Hegel’s sophists begin to make good on Socrates’ doubts about Anaxagoras. They connect the negativity of thought to the positivity of law and custom. The *Science of Logic* pulsates noticeably in the background: the sophists apply the concept to the world but the vacuity of the “immediate” concept dissolves the contents of the world in question.

The sophists are therefore “as much decried by the healthy understanding [*gesunden Menschenverstande*] as by morality.” Although it dawns on consciousness that it falls to itself to apply thought, the basis for doing so can no longer be the “objective” spiritual world and its traditional moorings. Moreover, thought, “having become conscious of itself as the absolute and only substance [*Wesen*],” is “jealous of all others” and “permeates all human relations.” In other words, the application of thought to the real is immoderate and overzealous, and has little interest in “saving the phenomena.” It “directs its negative powers against the manifold determination of the theoretical and the practical.” It undermines the “the truths of the natural consciousness [*naturlichen Bewußtseins*] and the immediately accepted laws and fundamental principles.”¹¹³ Thus (recalling the *Preface*) the seemingly fixed truths adhered to by the average citizen are revealed in terms of their mutability, relativity and “nothingness.”¹¹⁴ The “general outcry against the sophists” is therefore “the outcry of the healthy human understanding [*gesunden Menschenverstandes*], which knows not how to help itself.” “When the concept [*Begriff*] turns itself against the wealth which it [consciousness] thinks itself to possess in the form of truth, and [consciousness] senses the danger to its truth (for it knows it cannot be without having this truth) and its substantiality is confused [*verwirrt*] it therefore becomes enraged.”¹¹⁵ It is a matter of course that Anaxagoras is exiled, the sophists are decried and

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¹¹³ *HPh I*, 409.
¹¹⁴ *HPh I*, 407.
¹¹⁵ *HPh I*, 408.
Socrates executed. For the “reflective understanding” of philosophy is inimical to the ordinary understanding, and therefore to tradition, piety, and civic virtue.\textsuperscript{116}

Once the “immediately recognized laws and principles” are “dissolved” by thought, “it is left to ‘particular subjectivity’ to make itself first and fixed, and to relate everything to itself.”\textsuperscript{117} Accordingly, the sophists, “the teachers of Greece” take the place of the “poets and rhapsodes,” the “general teachers” of earlier times.\textsuperscript{118} Religion has begun to lose its hold. Awakened was the need of men “to be cultured [gebildet] in their ideas [Vorstellungen]… the need to determine their relations through thought and no longer merely through oracles or through custom [Sitte], passion and the feelings of the moment.”\textsuperscript{119} The sophists took education so understood to be “their calling, business, or profession, as an office.” Here we begin to see the basis for Hegel’s “rehabilitation” of the sophists. For, “in short,” says Hegel, “it is the so-called enlightenment of recent times” the desire that free thought [freie Gedanke] might determine its own convictions by itself, and no longer in the form of mere belief or unexamined opinion. “They taught men to be thoughtful regarding what should have authority amongst them.”\textsuperscript{120}

Hegel cannot be taken to have looked upon these developments with complete disfavor, but nor could he have looked upon them without some disquiet. The Terror was a product of men learning to be thoughtful about “what should have authority for them.” We see again that the Platonic staging of the \textit{Preface} is more than a rhetorical flourish. In the “drama of history” there is an argument to the action. The logic of history bridges the ancient and the modern.

It remains to be mentioned that there are clear limits to Hegel’s assimilation of ancients and moderns. In the first case, we have the general inadequacy of the ancients as viewed from

\textsuperscript{116} HPh I, 376, 40; Cf. EL, 71 [§19 A.3].
\textsuperscript{117} HPh I, 409.
\textsuperscript{118} HPh I, 409-410.
\textsuperscript{119} HPh I, 410.
\textsuperscript{120} HPh I, 410-411.
the perspective of “critical philosophy.” Taking our bearings from the structure of the *History of Philosophy*, we can say that just as the “first period” of Greek philosophy stretching from Thales to Anaxagoras ends with the “immediate objectification” of a “world soul,” so does the second – comprised of the sophists, Socrates and the Socratics – begin with an “immediate objectification” of the human soul, or the natural in man.\(^{121}\) In other words, *nous* had yet to make nature fully its own and, to the extent that it had, it remained determined by natural considerations. As Hegel says, for Greek culture “the need for subjective freedom to exist was only to leave valid what man himself perceives and finds in his own reason [*Vernunft*] – laws and religious ideas, only insofar as I recognize them in my thought.”\(^{122}\) Ethics was “external” rather than self-consciously derived from human inwardness.

Second, and more fundamentally, the Greeks (according to Hegel) had yet to find a “final fundamental principle” of the sort that moderns presuppose as a result of Christianity. The Hellenes have no “spiritual religion… of the eternal nature of Spirit” which holds man in unity with the absolute.\(^{123}\) Thus, although it begins to dawn on consciousness that it is the “I” that thinks, there is no Christian spirit or transcendental I to link the content of the individual to the universal. Accordingly, although “a chief part of sophistic culture was the generalization of the Eleatic mode of thought and its extension to the whole content of knowledge and of action,” that content could only come from “utility.”\(^{124}\) Hegel’s sophists are therefore thought to partake in the initial stages of “spirit’s” subordination of the natural soul to the free will, albeit a free will without unity, restraint and higher direction, *viz.*, a will still mired in the immediacy and contingency of nature.\(^{125}\) As Hegel says at the outset, “among the sophists the content is only

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\(^{122}\) *HPh I*, 420-421, 426-427.

\(^{123}\) *HPh I*, 421-422.

\(^{124}\) *HPh I*, 394-395, 422, 427.

\(^{125}\) Cf. *HPh I*, 405-406, 411-412; *PhR*, 57-63 [§§8-11]; *EM*, 295-299 [§§473-476]; *PhN*, 472-478 [§§360-362].
In other words, unlike the moderns, the ancients lack any conception of a “universal content” that is at once subjective. This difference aside, “our culture, the enlightenment, has entirely the same standpoint as that of the sophists.”

VII. Speculative Philosophy and the Art of Rhetoric

We are now ready to take a closer look at Hegel’s reinterpretation of the sophists, which is by no means limited to their role as the “educators of Greece.” Rather, Hegel’s interest in the sophists stems especially, if not primarily, from their effort to understand the manifold of opinions and passions insofar as these relate to the ends of political life. In this regard, Hegel follows a precedent already set by earlier thinkers like Hobbes and Smith, for whom the classical teachings on rhetoric and especially Aristotle’s work on rhetoric – which remained unrivaled as far as offering an account of the “springs of action” was concerned – had already taken on great importance. For Hegel in particular, the “speculative” connection that obtains between the substantial authority of the modern state and the determinants of subjectivity is to be discerned already in the classical teachings on rhetoric.

To begin, the sophists are to be credited for understanding the fundamental mutability of all arguments, and especially those about justice, which are always subject to contradiction. Their penchant for finding contradictory perspectives, and contradicting common sense on that basis, is therefore not to be decried. The traditional Platonic-Socratic presentation of the sophists, as refuting truths or proving falsehoods by dubious reasoning, is to be set aside and

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126 The dissolution of the old ways could therefore only resolve itself into the formlessness of self-willing. Hence Hegel’s insistence that the “subjective reflection” unleashed in Athens tends to take the form of caprice, arbitrariness, and the like. The similar set of observations links ancient sophistry to the pleonexia of imperial Athens, a connection that Hegel is not alone in making. The formulation quoted is not to be found in the first edition of the Lectures on the History of Philosophy compiled by Michelet, upon which the Suhrkamp edition is based, but only in the second expanded edition. Hegel, Vorlesungen Über die Geschichte der Philosophie, v.2, 4-5. Cf. HPh I, 42, 168-169, 407-410.

127 Thus the difference between ancient and post Kantian “sophistry”: Jacob Fries and the philosophy of feeling presuppose a unity of spirit, however vague and abstract, from which all further matters are to be derived. HPh I, 422.

128 Author’s italics. HPh I, 422.
The sophists know that all arguments can be contradicted, and can find a principle to justify any action whatsoever. Moreover, that is not so much a failure but an indication of their deeper understanding. “Grounds can be found to prove everything” and “grounds and counterarguments can be found for everything.” “In the worst deeds lies a point of view [Gesichtpunkt] that is essential”; “everything evil that has come to pass in the world since Adam has been justified with good grounds.”

For related reasons, the sophists are more self-aware with respect to what human beings actually do, whatever they may assert to the contrary. “In its deeds overall, and not merely its bad deeds, the ordinary understanding [gemeine Verstand] breaks its maxims and its fundamental principles; should it conduct a rational life [vernünftiges Leben], it is really only a standing inconsistency [beständige Inkonsequenz].” Thus all ethical principles are subject to contradiction through the course of actual day to day life, and those of Hellas not least.

The sophists therefore seek to master the manifold of contradictory perspectives and the range of arguments that can be made for and against any given position. Again, that is not so much the manifestation of folly or caprice, but rather a mark of their higher culture.

“A cultured [gebildeter] man knows something to say about every subject matter [Gegenstand], to find points of view in each… to turn the subject matter around and consider it from many sides. Such is what is first striking about a cultured man or people – the art of speaking well… the uncultivated [ungebildete] man finds it unpleasant to have intercourse with such men who know how to comprehend and articulate all points of view… what man is to attain from the sophists is this skill of having the great multitude of points of view by which a subject may be considered at his disposal.”

Moreover, the sophists undertook the task denoted with admirable rigor. Like good Kantians, they sought “general principles” and “categories” to “criticize everything.” They “split up the

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129 HPh I, 408-409.
130 HPh I, 424-425.
131 HPh I, 407.
132 Thus the “arbitrary” will already disrupts the fleeting beauty of Sophocles’ Antigone, where the protagonist must choose resolutely between irreconcilable and absolute claims on her will. Cf. PhG, 342-354. [464-476]; EM, 315-317 [§§508-511]. See also Terry Pinkard, Hegel’s Naturalism, 127-129; Terry Pinkard, Hegel’s Phenomenology, 140-146; Ludwig Siep, Der Weg der Phänomenologie des Geistes, 181-186; Judith Shklar, Freedom and Independence, 79-88, 140-141; Jean Hyppolite, Genèse et Structure de la Phénoménologie de l’Eprit, 323-352.
133 HPh I., 410-413.
content” and “isolated the various points of view and sides” to better “secure them for themselves.” As a result, the various “aspects” of the whole can be elevated into universality or diminished into nothingness – manipulated “one-sidedly” as the situation demands.\(^{134}\) Gorgias can prove that “being is not,” as Parmenides proved that “it is”; Euthydemus and Dionysodorus can confute the most commonsensical notions, as Zeno does with belief in motion.\(^{135}\)

Although “one-sidedness” is Hegel’s go-to criticism for all standpoints besides his own, it must be kept in mind that the sophists could only approach arguments as they did on the basis of a prior understanding of things that comprehended the manifold of perspectives as parts of a unified whole. One can bring a part of the whole forward into prominence or hide it in the shade only because it is in the nature or “method” of experience and thought to do the same, or to reveal itself in the form of abstraction and contradiction.\(^{136}\) Accordingly, as can only be in keeping with Hegel’s own dialectical reversals, the sophists are to be praised in the basic sense that Hegel praised Kant for his antinomies of reason, namely, for being a more “universal philosophy.” Tellingly, Hegel ascribes to the sophists that which he himself claims to perfect: the sophists practiced a “speculative philosophy.”\(^ {137}\) That he did not slip in this regard is evident in the explanation he offers for what it means to refer to the sophists as “cultured”: “the concept [Begriff] as applied to reality [Wirklichkeit] insofar as it appears not purely in its abstraction, but

\(^{134}\) HPh I, 410-411.

\(^{135}\) Cf. HPh I, 295ff, 426, 434ff.

\(^{136}\) The point in question is perhaps most readily discerned by comparing the Introduction of the Phenomenology of Spirit with the introductory moments of “Sense Certainty.” Should one understand what Hegel is doing, nearly any section of the text will do. The matter is initially no more complex than Hegel’s simple example of what is present and not present “for us” should we gaze at a tree and then look away from it. In this way Hegel may be said to anticipate the interplay of “revealing” and “concealing” in Heidegger. Cf. PhG, 68-81, 84-87 [§73-89, §95-102].

\(^{137}\) That Hegel did not shy from making such claims is particularly evident in his treatment of Zeno: “This is the dialectic of Zeno. He has comprehended the determinations which our ideas [Vorstellung] of space and time contain... Kant’s antinomies achieve nothing beyond what Zeno already had...the disposition of Zeno’s dialectic has greater objectivity than the modern dialectic. Zeno’s dialectic is concerned itself strictly with metaphysics; later with the sophists it became general.” Hegel of course qualifies this statement with a reference to Kant’s subjectivism insofar as the “ideas” are applied through the act of thinking. Cf. HPh I, 317
in unity with the manifold contents of all conceptions [Vorstellens].” Hegel praises the sophists on the basis of his own effort to provide a systematic science of human experience.\textsuperscript{138}

As for the explicitly political aspect of the sophist teaching, we have anticipated that it is of some considerable relevance to what Hegel seeks to comprehend in the \textit{Philosophy of Right}.

“One considers wisdom [Weisheit] to know what power is amongst men and in the state, and what I have to recognize as such. Thus the admiration [Bewunderung] which Pericles and other statesmen had the benefit of, for they knew their own standpoint and how to put others in their rightful place. That man is powerful [mächtig] who knows how to trace what men do back to the absolute purposes [absoluten Zweck] which move them. The subject matter of the teaching of the sophists is this: what the power of the world is [was die Macht in die Welt ist] – the universal, thought which unravels all that is particular – and because this knowledge is that of philosophy alone, the sophists were also speculative philosophers.”\textsuperscript{139}

The sophists provided technical instruction regarding worldly power or force. They sought to “give knowledge of what prevails in the ethical world, and about that which gives man satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{140} For in the absence of traditional religion and on account of reflection “it no longer satisfies men to obey laws as an authority and external necessity [Gesetzen als einer Autorität und äusserlichen Notwendigkeit], for he wishes to satisfy himself, to convince himself through his reflection of that which is binding for him.”\textsuperscript{141} As a result, the “impulses and inclinations [Tribe und Neigungen]” are elevated in their significance; only as much as they are satisfied does man become satisfied.” The power of the sophists therefore lies in knowledge of “how these powers [or forces - Macht] could be moved in empirical man,” the conscious manipulation of the satisfaction of self-consciousness through the medium of speech.\textsuperscript{142} Thus the sophists are connected to the “power of the world” via the “art of rhetoric,” which concerns itself with that which is powerful or effective in the human soul.

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\item \textsuperscript{138} \textit{HPH I}, 409.
\item \textsuperscript{139} \textit{HPH I.}, 411-12. Author’s italics.
\item \textsuperscript{140} \textit{HPH I}, 412.
\item \textsuperscript{141} \textit{HPH I}, 412.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Curiously, many of the most striking claims about the sophists are absent in the first Michelet edition, upon which the Suhrkamp editions are based. The first edition is certainly tamer than the second. Hegel, \textit{Vorlesungen Über die Geschichte der Philosophie}, v.2, 11. Author’s italics.
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\end{footnotesize}
In the foregoing manner Hegel’s rehabilitation of the sophists proves to stem from his concern for actuality, and the actualization of right especially. Rhetoric “teaches how circumstances [situations, states of affairs – Umstänide] can be traced back to these powers [Machte] – it even employs the anger [Zorn] and passions [Leidenschaften] of the audience addressed in order to bring about a state of affairs.” Thus Hegel’s rehabilitation of the sophist stands in relation to his understanding of the modern state. Indeed, “sophistry is not so far from us as we think,” says Hegel, for at present “men are called upon to do all that is good for reasons which are the same reasons as those of the sophists.”

Hegel knows all too well that the education of the human will in the modern world involves the manipulation and off-setting of perspectives, the redirection of natural inclination in structures of interest and incentive, and the protection of order by means of consequences feared as opposed to lofty ends desired. A disembodied version of the sophistic rhetoric is, as it were, effectively administered by the “institutions” of the modern state, which work on the passions and perspectives of burghers.

Finally, the esteem in which such knowledge was held in the classical world befits “a democratic constitution, where citizens have the final decision.” In democracy eloquence – the ability to take the manifold sides of a subject and give force to those which harmonize with the perspectives and passions of those spoken to – is king. The teacher of rhetoric teaches the means of instilling obedience and consent through the medium of persuasion, the medium suited to self-rule. In that same spirit, Hegel turns to the Protagoras and Gorgias to exhibit the allure of a sophistic education. It was said “that the art of the Sophists is a greater good than all other arts” for they “could persuade the people, the senate, the judges, of what they liked.” That Hegel’s remarks here are far from pejorative is evidenced by his commentary on the Protagoras.

143 HPh I, 423.
144 HPh I, 412.
145 HPh I, 412.
146 HPh I, 413-415, 425.
In that context, he indicates more than once that Protagoras’ reasons for believing that virtue is teachable are more persuasive than the reasons that led Socrates to argue otherwise.147

There is, again, a limit to Hegel’s rehabilitation of the sophists, and that limit is part and parcel of his praise of Socrates and Plato. It may be related back to what we have already observed in the Preface, and more recently in our discussion of “decapitated Hegelianism.” For, according to Hegel, Socrates and Plato improve upon the sophistic perspectivalism by reinterpret the manifold of human inclination and perspective as fundamentally oriented towards the “the good.” In decrying perspectivalism without unity, Hegel takes the side of Socrates and Plato as he understands them.148 For Hegel, no less than for Plato, a notion of the whole, or the sort of unity reflected in the Platonic good, is a presupposition for coherent thinking as such.149

The sophists were found wanting in that regard. However that may be, Hegel finds Plato no less wanting in his approach to the effective truth of things, or that which is powerful in the actual world. Although Hegel preferred the instilment of obedience on the basis of “good reasons,” he is entirely willing to see the ideal at work in the prosaic. As we shall see much later, the “sophistic” effort to connect the ends of political life back to the passions and ordinary opinions of men is repeated at a higher level in Hegel’s effort to discern the hidden hand of reason in the “system of needs.”150

147 HPh I, 414-420; Cf. Plato, Protagoras, 311c-312d, 319a-328d, 334a-334d, 352d-359a.
148 “Together with this hangs the question which the nature of thought [Nature des Denkens] brings with it: should the field of argument, which consciousness holds as fixed, be made unsteady through reflection [Reflexion wankend gemacht], what should man make his ultimate purpose? For man must indeed have a something fixed. This is either the good, the universal; or individuality, the arbitrariness of the subject; and both can be combined, as it will be shown later in the case of Socrates.” Author’s italics. Hegel, Vorlesungen Über die Geschichte der Philosophie, v.2, 24-25; HPh I., 400-401, 422-423, 442-446, 467ff.
149 In the Preface, it is for want of formal unity that the possibility of knowledge and knowledge of political right in particular become dubious. “Men likewise make good use of the same arguments against philosophy. There are various philosophies, various opinions, which speak against there being one truth; the weakness of human reason [menschlichen Vernunft] permits no knowledge. What is philosophy to feeling, mood, heart – it is an abstruse thing, which, for the practical things of man philosophy is no help” – the point of view of the practical. These are good arguments, and the way for the sophists. Men no longer call it sophistry, but it is the way of the sophists to deduce arguments from man’s feeling, mood and so on.” HPh I, 423-424.
150 Cf. PhR, 346-351 [§§189-195]; PhG, 294ff. [§397ff.]. See also Ritter Hegel und die Französische Revolution, 219-233;
To summarize: the political philosophy of Hegel, according to its own principles, can be said to share the following in common with the sophists insofar as they sought to master perspective and passion under the rubric of “rhetoric.” Hegel will explain how the natural and spiritual determinants of subjectivity can be, and in fact have been, mobilized for the sake of substantial freedom. In the *Philosophy of Right*, the actualization of freedom can and will be traced back to more elementary determinations, such as those of the natural will, on the basis of which the internalization of political right is effectively, even if incompletely, carried out.

Hegel’s appreciation of the sophists derives from the interconnectedness of what Kant called the “culture of skill” and the “technique of nature.” More to the point, not only is the subject matter of rhetoric somehow fit for democratic constitutions, it is fitted to the whole of human history, *the whole that uses the passions and perspectives of men as means to more universal ends, ends which diverge from those internal to the passions and perspectives employed.*

Hegel’s “cunning of reason” and the cunning of Hegel’s sophists share that much in common.

We return now to the critique of Plato, before concluding with a provisional account of the consolidation of political authority in Hegel insofar as it remains to be taken up in Part III.

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151 The tendency of Strauss and his students to point to similarities between Hobbes and Hegel has been objected to by Pippin, apparently in agreement with, but not exclusively on the basis of, an important article written by Siep. Siep’s article makes the not altogether implausible claim, repeated by Pippin elsewhere, that Strauss’ Hegel is overly dependent on Kojève. According to Siep, that entails a “paganization” of “recognition,” one that neglects the Christian contribution to Hegel’s teaching. Pippin and Siep each overestimate the extent to which Strauss’ understanding of Hegel pivots around the Master-Slave dialectic, as Strauss’s Lectures on Hegel suffice to show. The relation of the modern state to human nature – the passions – which connects Hegel to Hobbes is not so easily dispensed with. That there are “a number of other links of great importance between Hegel and Hobbes” is affirmed by Pippin in his more recent writings on Hegel. Cf. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 30-43, 104-170; Riedel, *Nature and Freedom*, 136-150; Siep, *Der Kampf um Anerkennung. Zu Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit Hobbes in den Jenaer Schriften*, Hegel-Studien 9, 155-207; Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 290; Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, 233-261; Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, 126 n.7.


Hegel’s opinion that the argument of Plato’s *Republic* is determined by the suppression of subjectivity is a familiar one. But that world history has turned on the same pivot that Plato “in his greatness of spirit identified” is perhaps less familiar in terms of its implications. For Hegel did not stop at identifying the emergence of subjective reflection with the sophistic enlightenment. He went on, as we have seen, to identify that which the sophists worked to master under the heading of “rhetoric” – passion and perspective in its particularity – with “power in the world.” If nothing great in world history has ever happened without passion in all of its particularity, then to know passion is to know the engine of history. In this way Plato’s *Republic* is defined by an abstraction from that which is effective in the world.\textsuperscript{154}

Despite his criticism of Plato, Hegel does not demur from claiming to seek the same “substantial unity” sought by Plato. In the *Preface*, he only distinguished himself from Plato on in terms of the claim that he will seek substantial unity from *within*, as opposed to above or without, the world. Hegel implies that Plato, should his control over such matters not be in question, could have better “reconciled” himself to the sophistic enlightenment. That is, Plato might have further availed himself of what the sophists had learned regarding the springs of action in the city. It follows that the pursuit of substantial unity might have been better served by the internalization and mobilization of subjectivity, or that the *Republic* should be supplemented with a deeper appreciation of passion and perspective.\textsuperscript{155} Thus the “sophistic” concern for the “springs of action” is tied to Hegel’s concern for actuality or the effective truth of things.

\textsuperscript{154} Hegel would insist that Plato did not fully understand what he was doing. It has been shown (by Strauss, Benardete, Bloom, Rosen and others) that the *Republic* is defined by the intentional suppression of *eros*. It is almost unthinkable that Plato might have been unaware of this aspect, which defines the work from top to bottom. Our commentary on Plato’s *Gorgias* will give us further reason to doubt Hegel’s doubts about Plato’s self-awareness.

\textsuperscript{155} Indeed, according to Hegel, Aristotle surpassed his predecessors by proceeding in the implied direction. The commonplace that Hegel is the “modern Aristotle,” though easily taken too far, derives its justification from their mutual emphasis on that which is at work in the world – *energeia*. 
Hegel’s objection to Plato’s beautiful city does not object to the domination of human nature, but rather to the dubious efficacy of suppressing or purging subjectivity as a means of realizing the ends of the city. To put the matter somewhat glibly, human nature can be more effectively managed once the natural determinants of subjectivity are emancipated. To oppress the lower aspects of man prevents the realization of a more just social order. But it also and no less crucially denies the state a more effective means of consolidating its authority. The victory of the high over the low in man is secured by way of an emancipation of the low administered by the high. The high must learn to be low in order to secure the overcoming of the low, for otherwise the low will not submit to the high. Otherwise put: the modern state must lower itself to accommodate the low, so that the low does not buck off the high. Only on the basis of the power afforded to the high by means of the low can the high consolidate its authority. The locus of the two-fold emancipation and subordination of the low in man to the high is civil society, that with respect to which Plato’s beautiful city, and the ancients therewith, was found wanting. A study of civil society along these lines will be carried out in Part III.A, after we have familiarized ourselves with the Platonic approach to the problem of political authority.

IX. Plato, the Modern State, and the Structure of the Philosophy of Right

The hypothesis just set forth takes provisional confirmation from the structure of the Philosophy of Right. §1 indicates that the text forms a systematic unity, while §2 indicates that the same unity points beyond itself to the greater whole that is philosophy. Its “starting place” is proven in the larger unity of which it is a part. In an effort to elucidate the place of the Philosophy of Right within the whole that is philosophy, Hegel points to the famous “circularity of the system.” “Philosophy is a circle” and, indeed, as he says elsewhere, “a circle of circles.” Is it to be regarded accidental, then, that the Philosophy of Right is presented in precisely 360
sections or “moments,” the number of degrees in a circle? That §1 and §360 deal explicitly with the unity of the Idea suggests that Hegel took his language of circles with some seriousness.

With each section we “revolve” one degree closer to the beginning.

Plato “proved his greatness of spirit by the fact that the very principle, on which the distinctness of his idea turns, is the axis on which the impending world revolution itself has turned.”\textsuperscript{158} To speak of “revolution” is to speak, from the Latin \textit{revolutio}, of “turning around,” whether with reference to the rotation of the heavenly bodies, the cycles apparent in the natural world, or with respect to political upheavals. To speak of axes is to speak the language of geometry. Descartes teaches us to systematically orient ourselves in relation to figures by means of a numbered line; hence the globe may be understood to pivot around an invisible line.\textsuperscript{159} In speaking the language of revolution and axes Hegel indicates his judgment that “subjectivity,” as the principle around which the idea of Plato’s \textit{Republic} turns, is the axis around which the whole of human history has turned. “The right of the subject’s particularity, his right to be satisfied, or in other words the right of subjective freedom, is the \textit{pivot} and \textit{center} of the difference between antiquity and modern times.”\textsuperscript{160} Where is that pivot to be discerned in the \textit{Philosophy of Right}?

Should we proceed to split the \textit{Philosophy of Right} in half – in search, as it were, of its axis – we land between §180 and §181. Between §180 and §181, but subsumed under neither heading, are the words “the Transition of the Family into Civil Society.” §180 brings Hegel’s account of the family towards a close by focusing on the stage during which its younger members become “self-subsistent persons,” a stage “which lets into the circle of the family” a

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{PhR}, 24 [11].
\textsuperscript{160} Knox’s translation. Author’s italics. \textit{PhR}, 233 [§124R].
form of “arbitrariness.” As for Section §181, its first words speak of the family’s disintegration into separate parts, a disintegration coterminous with the introduction of civil society. Not unlike §1 and §360, the transition from the family to civil society refers to the idea and its systematic unity in difference. The state is a unity in difference and exists in the medium of contingency and differentiation. As for the Republic, it amounts to an uncompromising projection of the Eleatic “One” onto the city. It entails the dissolution of difference and multiplicity. The transition from the family to civil society, a transition defined by the introduction of contingency and subjectivity into ethical life, suggests itself as the axis around which the Philosophy of Right pivots. It is there, above all, that we can expect to find Hegel’s “corrective” to Plato on the basis provided by the pivot of world history, subjectivity.

Recalling that subjective freedom is taken to define the difference between the ancient and modern world, our emphasis on the importance of civil society takes further confirmation from the following. The chapter on civil society is perhaps the only part of the Philosophy of Right that is presented as being distinctively and thoroughly modern. In the entire subsection of the Philosophy of Right that deals with the family the examples are overwhelmingly ancient, focusing as they do on the absurdities and contradictions of Roman law. Those absurdities may be related back to Hegel’s view that the ancients had a state but lacked a civil society. He therefore focuses on the absurdity of treating family members as if they were property or objects. Thereafter, viz. after Christianity and the advent of modern civil society, they shall be treated as subjects. Similarly, the chapter on the state begins by referring to “immediate substance” (that which Plato allegedly sought to defend against the corrupting influence of sophistry) and the Penates (the household gods of the pagans). Nor, moreover, are the chapters devoted to Abstract Right and Morality, according to Hegel’s presentation, specifically or

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161 We recall, in this connection, Aristotle’s remark that one is mistaken to conceive of the state as a family, that the excessive pursuit of unity renders Plato’s city no city at all. Cf. Aristotle, Politics, 1261a10-1262a24.
exclusively “modern.” Abstract right, despite its Hobbesian, Lockean and Fichtean overtones, is determined by the crudest natural or external modes of “personhood,” such as the rudimentary seizure of objects in the world. As for morality, though famously Kantian, it is said to have been invented by Socrates. Socrates, according to Hegel, reflects a radical and unceasing effort to “reflect” on how one ought to live or act in the world. *It may be noted, in this connection, that it is not subjective reflection or subjectivity, so much as the official recognition of subjectivity within the state, that is regarded decisively modern.*

But how then do we make sense of the fact that the subsection devoted to the state, like §2 and §182 (which marks the introduction of civil society), is said to have been *proven* in the moment that precedes it? In other words, how can the state precede civil society historically, and at the same time presuppose civil society in the economy of Hegel’s system? Simply put, what has been implicit all along in the lower determinations of spirit has now (in the context of the modern state) become fully explicit. The ancients did not understand the state, because they did not understand its foundation in subjectivity, or the development of its substantive unity out of the extreme of “personal particularity.” The absence of civil society in antiquity thus manifests their misunderstanding of subjectivity. We are therefore reminded of what has already been noted in terms of Hegel’s historicism. The fully elaborated state, rationally comprehended in the philosophy of Hegel, comprehends everything prior and best expresses the essence of all prior failed attempts. Although Plato’s *Republic,* according to Hegel, seeks to shore up the substantive unity of the state by suppressing subjectivity and privacy, the elimination of the private reflects the missing middle term that allows Hegel to tie the family to the state, and to articulate the concrete realization of freedom on the basis of subjectivity.\(^{162}\) The essence holding sway over Plato’s *Republic* is precisely that which is missing from it, *viz.* “civil society.”

\(^{162}\) It remains nevertheless striking that, for Hegel, the introduction of civil society recalls the Platonic *Republic* insofar as it marks the dissolution of the family. He would seem less concerned with the dissolution of the family...
From the perspective of philosophical world history subjectivity is the rock against which the ancient world breaks asunder, only to be reconstituted *qua* modern. We might think in terms of Schelling’s genius, historicized. What the Greeks where unconscious of propelled history onto its next stage. Hegel makes explicit the productive activity of that which was merely implicit, or abstracted from, in the Greek understanding of things. There is nevertheless a residue of the classical standpoint (as presented by Hegel), insofar as subjectivity comes to sight as a potentially destabilizing force within modern state. In these ways Hegel’s remarks on Plato and the sophists have not failed to lead us right into the heart of things. The claim that Plato “identified in his greatness of spirit” the axis of history is meant in the strongest sense possible. The Platonic disposition towards subjective freedom lays bare the relation under which the entirety of human history may be subsumed. Subjectivity is the cynosure of the problem of political authority, and civil society is where subjectivity is made ministerial to the substantial ends of the state.

Our commentary on the *Preface* to the *Philosophy of Right* brought to the fore two paradoxes that presented themselves suggestively in relation to Hegel’s broader presentation of the problem of political authority. The first related to the nature-freedom problem and the second to Hegel’s interpretation of Plato and sophistry. We have since shown that the two problems are one, or that Hegel’s bearing toward the ancients may be related back to his bearing toward the nature-freedom problem. Moreover, our elucidation of the two sets of difficulties has allowed us to clarify Hegel’s understanding of political authority in the following way. Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority presupposes that the natural and spiritual determinants of subjectivity may be systematically laid bare as means to the end of political

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than its necessity and hidden meaning. While Hegel opposes himself to the suppression of the private that he discerns in the *Republic*, the need to subordinate private interest and the conscience to the ends of ethical life remains a foremost concern of the *Philosophy of Right*. Cf. *PhR*, 338 [§181]; *PhG*, 327-362 [444-483].
right. That entails not only a hierarchy that distinguishes the higher determinations of subjectivity from the lower, but also the power of the higher over the lower. It also presupposes that the actualization of political right can be actualized in such terms without being unduly compromised.
Part 2

The Problem of Political Authority in the Philosophy of Plato

“Nearly all the sciences we have come from the Greeks. Additions by Roman, Arabic or more recent writers are few and of no great significance; such as they are, they rest on a foundation of Greek discovery. However, the wisdom of the Greeks was rhetorical and prone to disputation, a genus inimical to the search for truth. And so the term ‘Sophists,’ which was rejected by those who wanted to be regarded as philosophers and applied with contempt to the orators – Gorgias, Protagoras, Hippias, Polus – is also applicable to the whole tribe – Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Epicurus, Theophrastus and their successors, Chrysippus, Carneades and the rest. The only difference was that the former were itinerant and mercenary, travelling around the cities, making a display of their wisdom and requiring fees; the others were more dignified and more liberal, in that they had fixed abodes, opened schools and taught philosophy without charge. But (though different in other ways) both were rhetoric, and made it a matter of disputations, and set up philosophical sects and schools, and fought for them. Consequently, their teachings were more or less what Dionysius aptly said against Plato – ‘the words of idle old men to callow youths.’”

-Francis Bacon, The New Organon, Book I, LXXI.

Section A

Socrates’ Conversation with Gorgias:

Persuasion and its Practical Horizon

I. From Hegel Back to Plato

Hegel’s rehabilitation of the ancient sophists provides the initial basis for our effort to arrange a confrontation with the philosophy of Plato. Let us begin our transition by recalling that Hegel praised the “culture” of the sophists. “We call culture,” says Hegel, “the concept [Begriff] as applied to reality [Wirklichkeit] insofar as it appears not purely in its abstraction, but in unity with the manifold contents of all conceptions [Vorstellens].”1 The cultured grasp the manifold of perspectives, are able to view matters from all sides and therefore know how to “speak well.” To

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1 Cf. Nietzsche’s praise of Thucydides, his “cure” against Platonism. Nietzsche regards Thucydides as the culmination of “sophist culture,” by which he means “realist culture.” Platonists are “cowards in the face of reality.” Because Thucydides could control himself in the face of reality, he could maintain control over things. Other differences aside, the parallels with Hegel’s interpretation of Plato and the sophists are obvious. The sophists are Hegel’s cure for Platonism as well. Of course, Nietzsche would have denied that Hegel went nearly far enough. Götzen-Dammerung, in Nietzsche Werke B6: 155-156].
speak well in this context means: applying the right “categories” and “thought-determinations,” and “bringing” parts of the whole “forward into prominence” “casting others in the shade,” as befits the intentions of the speaker. Considerations such as these led Hegel to speak of the Socratic dialogues written by Xenophon and Plato as the “highest type of this fine social culture.”  

Socrates could not converse as he did, nor Plato and Xenophon write dialogues, without a profound understanding of the multiplicity of perspectives through which man encounters the whole. In this way, Hegel saw a reflection of himself in the ancient world. Hegel could not write a “Science of the Experience of Consciousness” without laying claim to knowledge of a related sort, knowledge of the manifold of perspectives in their relative openness and closedness to the whole. But Hegel’s emphasis on the “speculative” aspect of classical “culture” should not obscure the great gulf that separates him from the ancients.

Hegel claims to write a systematic science of experience, which is another way of saying that he proposes to put together (systema, synistemi) the sum totality of perspectives in the form of an ordered whole. No comparable effort to create a “system” is there to be found in the classical world, though it could be said that the presuppositions for such an effort are supplied by thinkers like Herodotus, Plato and Aristotle.  

In Herodotus we have an account of different peoples and the opinions that animate them, set in relief of an implicitly broader vision of the whole. We do not have an account that systematically connects the partial views of the whole to lay bare the whole as such, nor an account of the necessity that caused those perspectives to arise from out of nature.  

In Plato we have particular opinions presented in relation to particular

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2 HPh I, 409, 411, 412-413, 456; Cf. 124, 381-384, 393-399, 422-424, 430-434, 441-444, 455-474.

3 Heidegger, Schelling: Vom Wesen Der Menschlichen Freiheit, in Gesamtausgabe B.42, ed. Ingrid Schüßler(Frankfurt: Vittorio Klosterman, 1988), 44-47. See also Stanley Rosen, G.W.F Hegel, 68-88 and Ancients and Moderns, 84: “What is for Plato an aporia provides Hegel with the ingredients essential for the transformation of Christian subjectivity into Absolute Spirit.” See also: Hegel und die Antike Dialektik, in Gadamer, Hegels Dialektic.

problems, dramatized across particular dialogues that render thematic, or neglect to take up, various parts of the whole. We are given reason to believe that these particularities are suited to the particularities of the problems, but no effort is made to assemble a single whole or unified dogmatic teaching out of the many parts provided. At best, we have efforts to understand the ideas across different conversations, held between different interlocutors, but certainly no account of the idea, dialectically unfolded into the totality of its parts, let alone posited according to the logic of an absolute standpoint. In Aristotle, we have several treatises devoted to the components of a possibly exhaustive “organon,” but no single account that explains their unity in terms of first principles.\(^5\) Hegel, in each case, puts together what the ancients kept separate.

It is well beyond the scope of this project to explain why the ancients refrained in general from assembling what German philosophy put together, though it may be said that the latter did so largely under the impetus of modern science and the residual influence of scholasticism. Concerning the problem of political authority, it is sufficient and fitting for us to note from the outset that here too Hegel assembles what the ancients kept separate. In an infamous formulation, Hegel writes that the modern state is the “march of God in the world” and “its ground is the power [or violence – *Gewalt*] of reason actualizing itself as will.”\(^6\) Hegel claims to articulate the genesis of political authority out of subjectivity, and in such a way that must be regarded *reasonable, actual, and right*. No such unity is there to be found in the classical world as Hegel presents it – or otherwise. Hence Hegel’s favored examples. Plato’s *Republic* concerns itself with justice, but is said to exclude subjectivity and therefore freedom. The sophists are said to appeal to subjectivity, but are dubiously just and oblivious to the truth. As for reason and the

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\(^6\) *PhR*, 403 [§258a].
so-called ideas, they are anything but effective or actual, since accessible only in the realm of thought. Moreover, the reorientation toward subjectivity that was underway in the classical world, as Hegel understood it, effectively brought that world to an end. By contrast, the modern state exerts its “monstrous” power on the basis of its novel relation to subjectivity, a relation in terms of which Hegel claims to exhibit the actual reconciliation of power, wisdom and justice.

It has been shown in the preceding that Hegel’s understanding of the modern state presupposes a vision of the natural and spiritual in man, according to which (1) the lower order determinations of man lend themselves as means to the ends of the higher, and in such a manner (2) that allows for the effective realization of the “idea of right.” Hegel’s account of the reasonability and rectitude of the modern state rests on a root and branch account of human nature and spirit that exhibits these in their multiplicity as actual, as opposed to merely potential, means to the end of political right. As the lower order determinations of nature and spirit must be brought into alignment with political right on their own terms – appetite by means of appetite, vanity by means of vanity, duty by means of duty – “psychology,” and what might be called “pneumatology,” come necessarily into prominence. Hegel’s psychology and pneumatology, which lay bare the “relation of efficacy,” allow him to anchor the ends of political right in the dynamism of subjectivity and willing. In no other way was it possible for Hegel to speak of the “power of reason actualizing itself as will,” for as he knew, there is much in the lower registers of the will that stands potentially in the way of the reasonable and just. Again, we study Proteus to understand the subversion of Proteus.

Whether he was aware of it or not, Hegel follows a tradition in modern political thought that takes inspiration from the classical teachings on rhetoric, which held out to others before him the prospect of mastering the mechanism of human nature for the purposes of civilization. That he does so is evident in his rehabilitation of the sophists qua speculative philosophers. As
we have seen, the rhetoricians, according to Hegel, sought to understand the springs of human action, or the manifold of passions and perspectives, to effectively bring about the ends of man in the city. In concerning themselves with subjectivity, the sophists concerned themselves with that which is effective or “powerful in the world.” By contrast, Socrates and Plato – who improved on their predecessors by seeking to understand the orientation of all perspectives and passions toward the “good” – cut themselves off from actuality. Hegel’s critique of the Republic taken together with his rehabilitation of the sophists implies the realization of Platonic ends by sophistic means. The unity of Hegel’s rehabilitation of rhetoric, and understanding of the effective realization of right by means of civil society, is evident in his attraction to the science of economics, for which the study of rhetoric and psychology had already come into focus as a resource for the new science of politics. The springs of human action, insofar as they are taken to lend themselves as means to the end of political right, supply the basis for Hegel’s effort to assemble what the ancients kept separate. The justice, reasonability, and freedom of the modern state rest on Hegel’s view that the dynamics of subjectivity can be rechanneled in such ways that make justice, reason and freedom powerful.

Hegel would have us believe that the ancients misunderstood the relation of reason to actuality and that of justice to subjectivity. He was of the view that, given their world-historical situation, it was beyond their capacity to have understood these. In order for Plato to receive a fair hearing, we must remain open to the possibility that Hegel is mistaken in this crucial respect. Indeed, we shall show that the political philosophy of Plato is informed profoundly by an underlying concern for the questionable power of reason and justice in the world and, as such, presents a compelling alternative to Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority.
II. Thematizing the Power of Persuasion

The theme of rhetoric has come to sight as the basis for us to take up the classical alternative to Hegel’s understanding of the problem of political authority, and it has done so in relation to Hegel’s emphasis on “actuality.” We therefore return to the place occupied by rhetoric in the world that Plato’s dialogues constitute. In doing so, we shall keep in view for a moment longer what distinguishes Hegel’s disposition toward rhetoric from Plato’s, knowing that the Hegelianization of Plato along these lines may prove tempting to certain readers.

As we noted in the Introduction, the Republic and Laws present us with cities “coming into being in speech” (gigomen polin logoi) and “constructed in speech.”7 In speaking of cities in speech, Plato intends something entirely different from Hegel, who claims to reconstruct the modern state as a logical progression.8 That both refer us to the logos (“Logic”) conceals first order differences. For in the Republic and Laws that which is possible or uncontroversial in speech is said to be likely impossible and certainly controversial in deed.9 By contrast, the logic of the Philosophy of Right refers not only to concepts but actuality. Whereas Plato’s cities in speech are of dubious possibility and controversial in all practical respects, the state set forth in the Philosophy of Right is intended to be possible, actual, and incontrovertible. Let us dwell on this difference for a moment further, before taking leave of Hegel.

Hegel’s logic, from which the logic of the Philosophy of Right is said to derive, is posited from the standpoint of an absolute subject. It is held to be constitutive of the possibility of experience, as well as the possible meaning of experience for man, which includes all possible errors about experience. As for the Platonic Republic or Laws, by no means could one ascribe to them any sort of “constitutive” role in relation to the actuality of political life, let

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7 Republic, 369a; Laws, 702d.
8 PhR, 12 [3].
9 Republic, 472e-473a; Laws, 636a-b.
alone claim that they are written with the intention of fulfilling such a role. Although the related problems are far more difficult than we could hope to take up in the present context, it suffices to say that Plato did not seek to systematically determine for his readers the relation of possibility to actuality. It is reasonable to think that he did not regard that possible. Thus, in contrast to Hegel’s affirmation of the all-powerful nature of human reason, we have Platonic reservations about man’s capacity to give accounts (didonai logos).

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10 It is common to say that a crucial difference between ancients and moderns is that the latter emphasize the production of concepts or ideas by subjectivity. According to the same view, it is taken for granted that Plato and Aristotle are more or less naïve or “uncritical” in positing such things as ideas and kinds – as if they were “out there” in nature rather than productions of the human mind, as we late moderns know better. That the matter is not so simple has been shown by Stanley Rosen, Seth Benardete and Jacob Klein, each of whom have emphasized in many works the relation that obtains between the ideas and poeisis or “production” and mathematical construction. If the ideas or the beautiful presuppose eikasia and phantasia the human mind cannot be regarded simply “passive” insofar as it stands in relation to such things as the beautiful, the kinds, or the ideas. To put the matter more simply, Rosen, Benardete and Klein demonstrate how, according to Plato, the eternal or general things are only accessible to man on the basis of presupposed artifacts, abstractions or deliberate constructions carried out by the human mind. Rosen goes astonishingly far in this direction: “once we immerse ourselves in the details of the Platonic account, it will become evident that the situation in Plato is essentially the same as that to be found in Fichte, who is the most important of Hegel’s predecessors on this issue [!].” To be sure, such things can only come as a shock to readers who take their bearings from the traditional scholarship about the ideas, forms, and related matters. Despite the far-reaching interest of these matters, the reader will note that no parallel interpretation of Platonic epistemology or metaphysics has been offered in these pages to complement that supplied in the context of our study of Hegel. The reason for this is straightforward. Plato’s Gorgias does not address such matters, and it is out of the question to offer, in the present context, an interpretation of the relevant dialogues, of which there are many. Plato does not seem to have been of the view that such considerations were essential to the problems of Plato’s Gorgias. Epistemology, and therefore the critique of subjectivity, is simply essential to the political philosophy of Hegel and in such ways that have no parallel in Plato. But again, even that must be said with some caution, for the problems are too complex to be dispensed with in such short shrift. We are, in any case, not of the view that Plato’s teaching in the Gorgias can be or ought to be traced back to or derived from an underlying metaphysic or epistemology from who knows where else. At the same time, we are of the view that it is safer to assume ignorance on the part of certain Plato and Aristotle scholars than it is to assume the ignorance of Plato or Aristotle. Nor is it safe to assume from the outset that the Gorgias does not reveal a metaphysic or epistemology because Plato had yet to develop one or to conclude that Plato’s “earlier” writings rest on missing presuppositions that he could only provide later. See especially Stanley Rosen, Platonic Productions (South Bend: St. Augustines Press, 2014), as a whole; The Quarrel of Philosophy and Poetry (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-26. Cf. with the interpretations of eikasia and phantasia offered in Benardete, The Being of the Beautiful (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and Jacob Klein, Plato’s Trilozy, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), in addition to the interpretation of eidetic monads in Jacob Klein, Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra (Dover: New York, 1968), 61-99. For a more accessible account see Michael Davis, The Soul of the Greeks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 21-74 and the introduction to Aristotle, On Poetics, trans. Seth Benardete and Michael Davis (South Bend: St. Augustines Press, 2002), according to which human thought and action is essentially poetic (viz., productive). For the significance of such matters to the relation of ancients and moderns, see Stanley Rosen, Ancients and Moderns, 37-106. Note also: David Leibowitz, The Ironic Defense of Socrates: Plato’s Apology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 97 n. 70; Zuckert, Plato’s Philosophers, 185-186 and context; as well as the discussion of related themes in Dustin Sebell, The Socratic Turn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 61-71, 105-143; and Seth Benardete, Socrates’ Second Sailing, 1-5. The foregoing list does not claim to be exhaustive.
Hegel claims to know not only the limits of thought, but apparently also the limits of practice. He tells us without equivocation that the proposals engendered by the “moral world view” are based on an impossible misunderstanding and impossible to realize. As for Socrates, he backs away from trying to demonstrate the possibility in deed of what is said in speech. If Plato provides the reader with many reasons to doubt the possibility of his cities in speech, he leaves it to the reader himself to assemble all the pieces, and refuses to put them together (systemi) for us. It would be unimaginable for Hegel to say, as Socrates does in the Republic, that it does not matter if his “city in speech” could ever come into being or ever has.\textsuperscript{11} Thus the relation of philosophy to actuality comes to sight more ambiguously in Plato than in the philosophy of Hegel. It does not, however, follow that Plato left that relation uninvestigated.

As we have argued in the Introduction, and will demonstrate in the commentary to follow, in the philosophy of Plato the question concerning the relation of philosophy to actuality is taken up primarily in terms of an apparently unrelated or only casually related question, the question concerning the power of persuasion. The essential significance of that question for Plato comes to sight upon further consideration of its marginal significance for Hegel.

According to a judgment that is repeated everywhere in Hegel’s writings, the Philosophy of Right will be controversial according to the ordinary and reflective – that is to say non-speculative – understandings of things. The philosophy of Hegel does not conceal that it takes flight from the opinions common to his time. He therefore remarks that the individual has the right to demand a “ladder” by which he might climb from his own understandings of things to Hegel’s.\textsuperscript{12} Whether actual citizens are persuaded to adopt the standpoint of speculative

\textsuperscript{11} Republic, 592a-b.

\textsuperscript{12} Hegel therefore works everywhere to show that the ordinary understanding points to and presupposes the reflective, which in turn points to and presupposes the speculative. It is nevertheless according to the nature of the reflective understanding of things that it views the speculative understanding “absurd.” The language of reflection – its propositional structure – had to be transcended in the form of a new “speculative” language that had not yet come into existence, or only in an incomplete manner (as for instance in the writings of Fichte and Schelling). Thus
philosophy is, however, immaterial to the rational-actuality of the state. For the ordinary and reflective understandings of things are shown to be incomplete versions of the speculative understanding of things, and prove – however surreptitiously – ministerial to, or fail to decisively obstruct, the ends of the modern state. By contrast, although the proposals set out in the *Republic* and *Laws* take flight from ordinary opinion, the unlikelihood that ordinary citizens could be persuaded to adopt such measures is a first order concern. The difference between philosophers and non-philosophers is, in other words, a far more important consideration for Plato than it is for Hegel who, nevertheless, does not deny that difference. Thus for Hegel it does not make a difference whether the farmer or businessman is self-conscious in the decisive sense. Rather, it suffices that he is a farmer or businessman, with the worldview of farmers or businessmen, who carries out his role as member of the agricultural or merchant “estate” within the context of civil society.¹³ Hegel’s farmers do not need, like the farmers of the *Republic*, a “myth of the metals.” For, as we shall see later, the production of obedience is carried out by the impersonal workings of invisible processes and institutions. Strictly speaking, the power of persuasion and rhetoric is therefore irrelevant.

What then do we make of Hegel’s claim that rhetoric is well suited to the constitution of democratic and free peoples? As we have seen, that claim proves to be a variant of the classical view, according to which it is speech or persuasion, as opposed to force and compulsion, that is

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¹³ PhR, 353-359 [§§200-206]. The tripartite class structure of the *Philosophy of Right* of course follows a Platonic precedent, the tripartite class structure of the *Republic*. There is helpful discussion of that relation, which will not be taken up in any detail in the context of this study – for it would require a reading of the *Republic* as a whole – in Foster, *The Political Philosophy of Plato and Hegel*. 


taken to rule among free peoples. But again, we affirm this agreement between Hegel and the Greeks at the risk of obscuring major differences. We have already seen that Hegel’s understanding of freedom presupposes a post-Cartesian view of man’s difference from objective “nature.” That rhetoric befits the constitution of a free people refers not merely to the relative absence of compulsion, but to spirit insofar as it works to lift itself out from its immersion in nature and self-determine. As for the classical opposition of rule by force and rule through speeches, it does not yet mean rule by nature as opposed to rule by spirit or freedom. There is baggage in Hegel’s praise of rhetoric and freedom that is altogether foreign to the ancient world.

At the risk of oversimplifying: according to the classical view, freedom (eleutheros) is to be understood primarily in terms of political life as specifically non-despotic life, and therefore in terms of the citizen who is equal in freedom of speech (isagoria) and can thereby participate in the self-determination of the regime.14 The claim to rule by possessors of science, as a claim that derives its authority from knowledge that is altogether independent of the opinions of citizens, is for that very reason incompatible with freedom as the Greeks understood it. The possibility of a free regime based on knowledge requires, as a matter of course, that citizens be made obedient to knowledge or knowledgeable themselves. For that reason, the question concerning the power of persuasion is of crucial importance to classical efforts to understand the limits and possibilities of political life. Plato does not seem to entertain the prospect of a political science that neutralizes the differences between the wise and unwise, and thus reconciles rule by wisdom with republican rule or self-government by free citizens. Indeed, for

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14 Herodotus, The History, V.78; Cf. David Grene, Greek Political Theory, 4-6, 51-52: “Freedom meant… just the right of his own community to manage its own affairs, irrespective of the form of government which his community favored. And, in order to make even the temporary surrender of autonomy acceptable, the entire conflict between the Greek world and the Persian had to be represented as a community issue of freedom against slavery…thus the idea of justice or injustice in international procedure resolved itself into the issue of freedom or slavery, and this was very simply understood as the sole right of a given community to live as it pleased in terms of its legislative, administrative, and judicial procedures.”
reasons related to the limits of persuasion, the effort to realize a perfect politics tends invariably in the direction of tyranny and theocracy. The question concerning a possible bridge between wisdom and republican rule or democracy is therefore the question concerning the power of rhetoric.

Although Hegel and Plato each in their own way agree that persuasion, as opposed to violence, is the medium fit for rule over free as opposed to slavish peoples, they disagree on the practical significance of the difference between pre-philosophical and philosophical or scientific logoi. Socratic dialogue tends everywhere to reveal the ingenuousness, ambivalence, and confusion of citizens with respect to virtue, civic or otherwise. One is treated everywhere to the obstacles that frustrate justice as understood from the perspective of philosophy. Hegel, too, reveals everywhere the confusions to which the natural and reflective understandings of things are beholden. Nevertheless, he denies their adequacy as obstacles to the realization of the state as understood by the “philosophical doctrine of right.” Indeed, because the natural and reflective understanding of things are shown to necessitate, and indeed presuppose, the speculative understanding of things, the Rechtstaat shares in the persuasiveness of philosophy. By contrast, in Plato, philosophy tends to find the city unpersuasive and vice-versa.

The two questions that we have arrived at – the power of persuasion and the persuasiveness of contesting claims to superiority advanced by philosophy and politics – are those that define above all the argument and dramatic arc of Plato’s Gorgias, Plato’s dialogue on political rhetoric. We have already remarked in the introduction that the Gorgias renders thematic the power of persuasion, a problem to which the Republic, Statesman and Laws each point to without making that problem their central concern. For essentially related reasons, the Gorgias is also the most dysfunctional and strife ridden dialogue, and the dialogue behind which
the threat of force, the specter of war, and the power of ignorance, most loom. It is therefore also the dialogue that calls most into question the viability of consolidating political authority in such a manner that is at once wise, just, and peaceful. For the foregoing reasons, a commentary on Plato’s Gorgias directed towards the problem of political authority via the power of persuasion will serve as the basis of our effort to articulate a confrontation between the political philosophies of Plato and Hegel.

III. The Problem of Socrates’ Conversation with Gorgias

The title of the Gorgias refers to a famous teacher of rhetoric and perhaps “sophist.” The subtitle designates it as the dialogue about “rhetoric.” We shall see in what follows that Socrates is interested in the “power of rhetoric” and therefore Gorgias. At a crucial moment in the conversation, Socrates relates to his audience the grounds of that interest. Having heard the things said of Themistocles, and once witnessed Pericles deliver a speech, Socrates has long “wondered” about the power of rhetoric, “for it manifestly appears [to him] as a power demonic in greatness.” Because wonder [thaumazōn] is the beginning of philosophizing, and Socrates seeks out Gorgias, the conversation with Gorgias would seem to originate from the fact that Socrates has had occasion to marvel at the power of great speakers over their audiences, if not their power over the city in its entirety. The Gorgias thus raises the question concerning the relation of philosophy to rhetoric, and on the basis provided by the ostensible power of rhetoric in the city. Whatever one might make of the intentions that motivate Socrates’ interest in

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15 Arlene Saxonhouse, An Unspoken Theme in Plato’s Gorgias, Interpretation, V. II (May 1983), 139-169.
16 It has become customary for us to refer to a large number pre-Platonic thinkers and writers as “sophists.” That tendency derives from Plato’s ostensible opposition to the sophists. Hegel’s approach to the sophists, as a general category in the history of philosophy, is partly to blame as well. It is not necessarily fair to the diversity of figures subsumed under that much-maligned heading. In the Gorgias, however, Socrates denies that rhetoricians are any different from sophists. Gorgias, 465c-d, 520a.
17 Gorgias, 455d-456a. We shall make use of the translation by James H. Nichols Jr., which is occasionally amended.
18 Theaetetus, 155d; Aristotle, Metaphysics, 982b11.
rhetoric, there can be no doubt that these questions are important to Plato’s political philosophy.19

The beginning of the Gorgias has received the least attention, and is for that reason perhaps also least understood. That the beginning of the Gorgias has received less attention is understandable, for it differs exceedingly from the rest of the dialogue. Most obviously, the passionate outbursts, shocking pronouncements, and expressions of hostility that draw so many readers to the Gorgias are absent from the urbane conversation with which it begins. Similarly, the problem of justice that provokes the outbursts of Polus and Callicles is introduced only toward the end of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias. As for the myriad subjects taken up later on, it remains unclear how they issue from the dialogues’ ostensibly simpler and certainly less technical beginnings. The dramatic prologue and initial efforts to determine the subject matter of rhetoric are especially obscure despite recent efforts. In reading Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias, we propose to resolve these difficulties, and in such a way that is directly relevant to the problem of political authority.

19 The following should be noted regarding how the approach taken here differs in its basic intent from the rehabilitation of rhetoric that is currently underway and of some popular appeal. An attempt has been made in recent times to rehabilitate rhetoric by emphasizing how classical teachings about character formation, frank speech, and shaming might offer salutary lessons for liberal democracy. We do not dispute that possibility or even likelihood. At the same time, there is a crucial and, at times conveniently overlooked, respect in which the classical teachings on rhetoric are far less sanguine. For the classical writings stress not only how speakers might influence and shape their audiences, but also how speakers might be effectively constrained by their circumstances. Although recent efforts are by no means oblivious to the pathological, pandering and strategic dimensions of rhetoric, rarely is there any effort made to connect the necessities that govern political rhetoric so understood to the intentions of Plato and Aristotle. In other words, that the practical circumstances of persuasion are shown everywhere to exert a profound influence on politicians and citizens is not brought into proper relation with other fundamental questions concerning the limits and possibilities of political life. That failure derives from the understandable aim of working towards a morally or ethically doctrinal interpretation of the Gorgias and other classical works on rhetoric. In the Gorgias especially, the question concerning the power of persuasion, and the apparent efforts of Socrates to craft persuasion in defense of justice, stand throughout in relation to the imperfections of political life. It is a commonplace to say that the Gorgias does not sanction optimism about political life or democracy. Nevertheless, the pessimism of the Gorgias is often treated as if it were inessential to Plato’s understanding of things. Quite the contrary, it may prove no less essential than the ostensible optimism of the Republic, Laws, and Statesman. That suspicion, and an effort to meet the challenges it poses head on, distinguishes the approach taken here from others. Eugene Garver, Aristotle’s Rhetoric (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3-17; Bryan Garsten, Saving Persuasion (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 115-141; Peter Euben, Corrupting Youth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 206-209; Tarnopolsky, Perverts, Prudes, and Tyrants, 16-55; Marina, McCoy, Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists (Cambridge: Cambridge University, Press, 2008), 1-22.
IV. The Prologue

The dramatic prologue is easily dismissed as a frivolous, merely “decorative,” addition of no philosophical import. Far from this being the case, it serves throughout to draw the reader’s attention to the highly contingent reality of conversation. It is highly dysfunctional in character, and has for good reason been referred to as a “skirmish.”20 The dysfunction of the prologue is, however, purposive. The reader is alerted to the sorts of difficulties that rhetoricians may face on account of their interlocutors and practical situation.

It is necessary to begin by taking note of two well documented curiosities regarding the setting, dramatic action, and historical dating of the *Gorgias*. First, the dialogue, which is performed rather than narrated, glides silently from the relatively private to the increasingly public. The literary form of the dialogue abstracts from a context and action we can only be aware of from indications provided *en passant* in the conversation.21 That Callicles refers at 447c to “those inside,” that Socrates and Chaerephon at 447c-d speak of Gorgias in the third person, and that Chaerephon finally addresses his question to Gorgias in the vocative at 447d, indicates how the interlocutors have been, since meeting Callicles, moving from an outside location to an indoor one, and subsequently within earshot of Gorgias. By 455c and 458c it becomes apparent from remarks made by Socrates and Chaerephon that a large audience has gathered or been present all along.22 That audience has been implied all along by the fact that Gorgias has just delivered a *display* speech (an *epideixis*). But that the *Gorgias* is carried on before that same audience, or a part of it, is not made explicitly known to the reader until later.23

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The public setting of the dialogue, obliquely in the background, will in due time come to the fore, and effectively determine the conversation’s outcome.

Second, “no ingenuity can reconcile the various chronological data which [Plato] has obligingly provided.” 24 The dialogue is “saturated” with historical references to the Peloponnesian war, but in such a way that renders it a temporal impossibility. It spans the entirety of the war. It takes place shortly after the death of Pericles (in 429), yet a year after the generals who commanded at Arginousae were put on trial (in 406), and yet again sometime after Archelaus had come to power in Macedon (in 413). Although the literary form and dramatic dating have been taken as indications of Plato’s “indifference” to matters of historical dating, or reasons to doubt the coherence of the Gorgias, they might more promisingly be regarded deliberate. 25 For, just as the literary form elides the dramatic action, the happening of the conversation hovers above historical events. Imperial Athens, though never explicitly mentioned, looms large in the background. That regime will prove to hold sway over the soul of Socrates’ most formidable opponent, Callicles. If Plato intended to draw attention to the relation between speech and deed, as we shall conclude, the literary form and dramatic dating would be well suited to that end. In each case the obscured and unspoken (the public setting of the conversation and Imperial Athens) will prove to exercise a profound and decisive influence over what is said in the dialogue, while also revealing the limits of speech.

It is characteristic of the very beginning of the Gorgias that matters related to conflict, however prominent in the action, are eclipsed at the level of the argument. As many have

24 Dodds, Gorgias, 17-18.
emphasized, the dialogue begins with the words “war and battle.” Socrates has arrived late for Gorgias’ demonstration at the house of Callicles. Callicles addresses him like a coward who delayed joining the fray. When Socrates responds by substituting the language of feasts for the language of war, we are given two contrasting ways of disposing oneself to speech. For Callicles, speech is war continued by other means, a struggle for victory if not rule over others. For Socrates, speech is a feast, to be enjoyed in the company of friends.\footnote{Gorgias, 447a. Cf. Phaedrus, 227b; Republic, 352b, 354a; Lysis, 211c; Timaeus, 17a, 27b.} At a pivotal moment in the dialogue Socrates will contrast those who love victory and those who, regardless of whether they prove victorious in argument, are genuinely pleased to pursue the truth.\footnote{Gorgias, 457c-458b.} Like Gorgias later, Callicles takes up the alternative preferred by Socrates. Socrates has arrived late for a feast that was asteias, denoting not only its elegance or extravagance, but also its being “of the city.” The pleasures of common life thus displace the bitterness of conflict. As is well known, however, the friendliness with which the dialogue begins will give way to the hostility for which it is most famous. In this way Plato indicates the fragility of friendly discussion in pursuit of truth and common understanding.

Let us turn to consider how the details of the prologue draw attention to the highly contingent circumstances of dialogue. To begin, in the background of Socrates’ late arrival far more serious considerations are at play. To be sure, on more momentous occasions, like a trial or political deliberation, the failure of certain parties to attend may well decide the outcome. More importantly, the Gorgias is obviously linked to the grave circumstances of Socrates’ trial.\footnote{Cf. Saxonhouse, An Unspoken Theme in Plato’s Gorgias, 140-142.} Like a forensic rhetorician, Socrates deflects Callicles’ accusation of tardiness through a denial of agency. Chaerephon “forced [anankasa] us to waste our time in the market place.” In the Apology, Socrates’ transgressions in the agora are likewise blamed on Chaerephon. From the
very outset, we are made to think of Socrates under duress before the Athenian public. As for Socrates’ excuse, we can surmise that it is probably disingenuous. It is hard to imagine anyone but Socrates responsible for his doings in the agora.  

As Callicles argues later, Socrates should spend less time philosophizing and more time participating in politics. The dramatic opening subtly distinguishes Socrates from his fellow citizens. Chaerephon is an enthusiastic democrat, and Callicles is said to be the lover of Demos and the Athenian demos. It is understandable that democrats would seek the company of Gorgias, the craftsman of persuasion, for long speeches of the sort favored by him are said to be specifically suited to the task of addressing large groups. We shall learn more than once, however, that Socrates is not interested in display speech. Rather, he wishes to have a conversation (dialegesthai). Since it is remarked later that Socrates refuses to speak to the many, we conclude that his interest in Gorgias is distinct from that of those surrounding him (473e-474b). Chaerephon, however, assumes that Socrates would like to hear a display speech. Like Callicles, he is eager to have Socrates listen to Gorgias (447b). In other words, Socrates is hemmed in on both sides by citizens who fail to understand him or perhaps do not care to. We are reminded of Crito who, like Callicles, purports to know what is best for Socrates. The case of Callicles is especially revealing. He is “friendly” to Socrates, as he will claim later, but there is something oppressive about his friendliness. Callicles wants Socrates to love and fear what the city loves and fears. He will be adamant in his instance that Socrates should come around to his view of things – “or else.”

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29 Cf. Gorgias, 447c, 448d, 449b-c, 461d; Protagoras, 335b-c; Xenophon, Memorabilia, 1.1.10.
30 Gorgias, 484c-486d.
31 Gorgias, 481d.
32 Gorgias, 447b-c, 448d, 449b.
33 Crito, 44b-46a.
34 Cf. Gorgias, 482c-487c, 511b-c; Republic, 462a-d, 492a-493d.
Chaerephon and Callicles are indifferent to, or oblivious of, the concerns of Socrates. Moreover, they each fail to take Socrates and Gorgias into proper consideration. Wanting to have Socrates listen to a display speech by Gorgias, they each offer to make use of their friendship with Gorgias toward this end, and without consulting either of them.\(^{35}\) The opening action therefore hints at the following difficulty. The intentions of the interlocutor or audience may prove very different from those of the speaker. Knowingly or not, audiences and interlocutors may impose their wills on the speaker or willfully disregard him. It is of some importance, then, that Socrates is the first to ask if Gorgias would be willing (\textit{etheleseien}) to do something, that is, engage in a conversation. He does not accept what Chaerephon and Callicles offer presumptuously on behalf of Gorgias. Rather, Socrates would like to learn from Gorgias about the power or capability (\textit{dunamis}) of rhetoric as an art (\textit{techne}) and what he teaches.

In the background of Socrates’ query regarding whether Gorgias would consent to converse is again a more serious matter. There could be any number of reasons why the aged sophist might not wish to converse with Socrates, but the \textit{Gorgias} brings three repeatedly to our attention. Gorgias might prefer to deliver lengthy speeches, he might be tired from having just spoken at length, and he might be reluctant to reveal what rhetoric is really about.\(^{36}\) Nevertheless, there are at least two respects in which Gorgias’ will might prove negligible. First, Gorgias is a foreigner without political rights. While this does not oblige him to speak with Socrates or Chaerephon, his relationship to his host, Callicles, might prove more delicate. Freedom of expression is in fact a recurring theme in the dialogue. As Socrates is forced to speak at length before a jury in the \textit{Apology}, Gorgias will be compelled to speak with great brevity in the dialogue that puts rhetoric on trial. Polus will complain later of being denied the

\(^{35}\) \textit{Gorgias}, 447b-447c.

\(^{36}\) \textit{Cf. Gorgias}, 448a, 449b-c, 456e-457c, 458b-458e, 461b-462a, 482c-d.
right to lengthy speech in Athens, the city most known for it.\textsuperscript{37} Similarly, in the background of Callicles’ later professions of “outspokenness” is that he, in contrast to the Sicilians, can afford greater license on account of being a citizen. Second, Gorgias’ will is constrained by a further difficulty of his own making. He has pressed the audience for questions, claiming that he has not heard any new ones for years. As he admits later, it would be shameful not to indulge Socrates in his request to continue questioning him.\textsuperscript{38} That Gorgias’ freedom might be constrained in the ways mentioned is certainly relevant to the question concerning the power of rhetoric. As we shall see, Gorgias’ undoing will turn precisely on the coincidence of imprudent claims and political vulnerability.

In what follows the expected confrontation between Socrates and Gorgias is forestalled by one between their proxies, Chaerephon and Polus. Rather than posing his questions to Gorgias himself, as Callicles had suggested, Socrates all but orders Chaerephon to ask the teacher of rhetoric for him. He seems to have done so out of good manners, for Socrates, unlike Chaerephon and Callicles, is not Gorgias’ friend. As for Gorgias’ disciple Polus, he prevents Chaerephon from meeting Gorgias head on.\textsuperscript{39} Uttering the first oath of the dialogue, an indication of the earnestness that guides his intervention, he offers to take the aged and possibly fatigued Gorgias’ questions for him – to protect him, as it were.\textsuperscript{40} Whatever good intentions prompt the exchange between the two proxies, it is not especially helpful to the clarification of Socrates’ questions. The exchange that ensues dramatizes how fruitful discussion is easily frustrated or derailed.

The brief conversation between Chaerephon and Polus is defined by nothing so much as the imperfection of the two interlocutors. Chaerephon has lost sight of the issue. Despite the fact

\textsuperscript{37} Gorgias, 461e-462a.
\textsuperscript{38} Gorgias, 447c.
\textsuperscript{39} Gorgias, 447d.
\textsuperscript{40} Gorgias, 448a.
that Socrates’ question was clearly stated but a moment ago, he has no idea what to ask Gorgias.\footnote{Gorgias, 447c.} As for Polus, once he intervenes, and Chaerephon asks him if he supposes he might answer more beautifully (kallion) than Gorgias, we learn that he identifies the quality of his response with the satisfaction of his audience. Polus’ interest in the truth proves lackluster but this does not prevent Chaerephon from proceeding to question him instead of Gorgias.

Chaerephon is indeed too easily satisfied. Moreover, Chaerephon departs from Socrates’ question in ways less than useful,\footnote{Most curiously, Chaerephon’s question departs from Socrates’ in that he introduces pairs of brothers into his craft examples: Gorgias’ brother Herodicus and the brothers Aristophon and Polygnotus. It is difficult if not impossible to discern why he does this. We learn from Xenophon that Chaerephon was once estranged from his younger brother Chaereocrates, a fact which we might connect to Chaerephon’s failure to pay attention. It is possible that Chaerephon has family matters on his mind. As Strauss remarks in his 1957 (pp. 23-24) and 1963 (p. 26) lectures on the Gorgias, Chaerephon appears to have had a “brother complex.” Cf. Xenophon, Memorabilia, I.2.48, II.3.6. See also: Leo Strauss, Plato’s Gorgias (lecture, University of Chicago, winter 1957), 23-24; Plato’s Gorgias (lecture, University of Chicago, autumn 1963), 23-24. Transcripts are available at https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/.) and Polus fails to answer the questions asked of him. Polus, says Socrates, has “equipped” (pareskeuasthai) himself finely for rhetoric but is poorly prepared for dialectic.\footnote{Gorgias, 448b-d.} The inadequacy of Chaerephon is discernible in that Gorgias proceeds to ask Socrates to question Polus himself. The inadequacy of Polus is evident in that Socrates prefers to speak with Gorgias. The opening skirmish thus continues with Socrates’ effort to push past Polus and meet Gorgias head-on.\footnote{Polus, says Socrates, has “equipped” (pareskeuasthai) himself finely for rhetoric but is poorly prepared for dialectic.\footnote{Cf. Gorgias, 450b-c, 450e, 451d-e, 453a, 453b-c, 454b-c, 455a-b, 457c-d, 458e, 460a, 461a, 461d, 462c-d, 463a, 463d-e, 466a-c, 466e, 467b, 469a-b, 473a, 473b, 481b, 486d-e, 490d-e, 491d, 495e, 497a-b, 498d, 505c, 511a, 513c.}}

The entire episode is indicative of three obstacles to dialogue. First, whatever we might make of Chaerephon’s failure to understand Socrates, the latter’s question is less than clear. Speakers, and Socrates not least amongst them, are not always clear – a major obstacle to reaching an understanding. In fact, throughout the Gorgias, Socrates and his interlocutors express difficulty in making sense of what is being said to them.\footnote{Polus, says Socrates, has “equipped” (pareskeuasthai) himself finely for rhetoric but is poorly prepared for dialectic.\footnote{Cf. Gorgias, 450b-c, 450e, 451d-e, 453a, 453b-c, 454b-c, 455a-b, 457c-d, 458e, 460a, 461a, 461d, 462c-d, 463a, 463d-e, 466a-c, 466e, 467b, 469a-b, 473a, 473b, 481b, 486d-e, 490d-e, 491d, 495e, 497a-b, 498d, 505c, 511a, 513c.}} Second, persuasion requires
listeners. Chaerephon and Polus pay little heed to what is being asked of them. Third, throughout the corpus, all of Socrates’ interlocutors and students, to say nothing of Gorgias’, are imperfect. A speaker has no choice but to work within the parameters of his audience, the character of which is neither altogether predictable nor necessarily well suited to his intentions.

Finally, the prologue brings to our attention that speech is often employed strategically. Polus is said to have spoken in praise of rhetoric as if it was being blamed and he was delivering an encomium in defense of it. To embellish as Gorgias does is to distort the truth. It is suggested that Polus’ presentation of rhetoric derives from his desire to defend Gorgias and his vocation. As for Socrates, when the conversation turns to Gorgias, we learn that he is not content to let Gorgias play by his own rules. Gorgias, who prefers lengthy display speech (macrologia), is maneuvered into adopting brief speech (brachylogia), a mode of discourse rightly identified by the teacher of rhetoric as potentially inadequate to the task at hand. Plato thus reveals how different modes of speaking may be suited to different ends. After Polus’ rhetorical equipment is put in the service of defending rhetoric, Gorgias is compelled to forgo the usage of his preferred mode of speech, and in circumstances where it may very well be called for. He is effectively disarmed. Accordingly, looking back to the beginning of the dialogue, we may note that the conversation so far has more in common with war – with equipment, defending, maneuvering and disarming – than with friendship and the pleasures of feasting.

46 Cf. Republic, 327c.
48 448e.
49 Cf. Gorgias, 480-481b.
50 Gorgias, 449b-449c.
That the conversation about rhetoric has not yet gotten off the ground has everything to do with the idiosyncrasies, imperfections and motives of those involved. But if we have reason to believe that only a discussion between Socrates and Gorgias could hope to clarify the questions raised by the former, it is hard to understand why Plato would bother including a hopeless dialogue between their inadequate disciples. Why did Plato fail to prune away this apparent excrescence? Why did he not begin with the “main event” instead?

The prologue of the Gorgias, which announces the question concerning the power of rhetoric, refers throughout to the contingent, pathological and strategic aspects of communication. From the very outset we are confronted with the contrast between speech and what follows when speech breaks down, namely, war. The literary form and dramatic dating draw our attention to the elusive relationship between speech and deed, as well as the practical context of the discussion. In reminding us of Socrates’ trial, we are made aware of the duress speakers may be under. Further, the shuffle of interlocutors featured in the prologue is deliberately dysfunctional. The obstacles to fruitful discussion that we have touched upon may be listed as follows: compulsion, tardiness, dissimulation, misunderstanding, failure to consider the will of others, want of political rights, human frailty, fatigue, short attention spans, propriety, protectiveness, superfluous participants, and the strategic manipulation of speech. The dysfunction of the prologue, like so much of the Gorgias, is, however, precisely the point. Were the matters related not serious considerations, relevant especially to the subject matter of rhetoric and the power of persuasion, the dramatic opening may well be regarded as mere window dressing. Rather, in crafting the prologue, Plato intends throughout to alert his readers to the highly contingent circumstances of conversation, and the limited power of speech.
V. The Techne Analogy

It has been said that one understands a Platonic dialogue only if one understands how every development in the dialogue is necessary as opposed to accidental. Socrates’ craft (techne) analogies are no exception. The principle of logographic necessity, as stated in the Phaedrus, implies that a shoemaker is never just a shoemaker. To quote Callicles, however, it is hard to see what Socrates’ “incessant talk of cobbler’s, clothiers, cooks, and doctors” has to do with rhetoric. The difficulty of interpreting the beginning of the Gorgias derives largely from the fact that it features an unusually long chain of craft analogies. Moreover, like the earlier exchange between Polus and Chaerephon, the initial efforts to define rhetoric in terms of the techne analogy are for the most part unfruitful. Here too, however, the inadequacy of the argument is precisely the point. If the prologue is intended to draw the reader’s attention to the contingent character of dialogue, the argument that follows is defined by an abstraction from the practical circumstances of persuasion. It serves not only to solicit reflection about the nature of rhetoric, but to lay bare an error to which rhetoricians are prone, as well as the origins of that error in the communal life of man.

Let us begin by raising the following question, which the beginning of the Gorgias makes unavoidable: what purpose does the techne analogy serve in the economy of Plato’s writing? The craft analogy is indicative of our ordinary or pre-philosophical awareness of knowledge. Socrates prefers to begin with what is common and agreed upon. The crafts are a demonstrable and familiar form of know-how, often but not always practical, commonly

52 Gorgias, 491a.
recognized in the city. We tend to trust craftsmen in matters related to their expertise, and expect them to perform with greater skill than ourselves. Technical expertise therefore grounds an elementary form of authority. Finally, the crafts exemplify what we expect from instruction and study. Technical knowledge can be imparted and improved through repeated practice; success and failure can be proven empirically. Thus, in a most general respect, the *techne* analogy serves to clarify what it would mean for someone, like Gorgias, to claim expertise or knowledge over a particular range of phenomena, and the capacity to teach that skill to others.

The foregoing reflections can only take us so far, however, for Socrates does not just speak of art in general, but specific arts and their products. The arts are particular to their subject matter, and therefore emphasize or neglect different objects and modes of activity.54 Because the *technai* employed as examples differ from one another, they can be taken to illuminate or obscure rhetoric in different ways. In this way the *techne* analogy reveals the situation of rhetoric within the broader order of human activity. But because rhetoricians, like all artisans, concern themselves with a more or less particular sphere of activity, their orientation towards the whole may be similarly constrained. As we learn in the *Apology*, the craftsmen tend to overestimate their own importance, mistaking what they do know or practice for knowledge of the “greatest things.”55 But why do rhetoricians in particular consider themselves superior to other craftsmen? Like Thrasymachus, who called rhetoric the great art (*megale techne*), Gorgias and Polus believe that rhetoric is concerned with the “greatest of human affairs.”56 They believe,

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54 When the arts serve as *paradeigmata* it behooves readers to parse the ways in which they obscure or clarify the original or that which is sought. The arts, as *paradeigmata*, fall under the rubric of *phantasia* and not *eikasia*: they do not mimic the original with mathematical exactitude, and so we must remain mindful of the distortions necessarily involved. Plato, *Sophist*, 235c-236c. Cf. Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful*, II.109-112, 158-160, III.119-124; Jacob Klein, *Plato’s Trilogy*, 27-32, 161-166, 174-177.
55 *Apology*, 22c-e.
moreover, that rhetoric promises great power to those who master it.\textsuperscript{57} The \textit{techne} analogy can be expected to illuminate not only the character of rhetoric, but the self-understanding of rhetoricians.

Since Polus’ short speech to Chaerephon consists in a first effort to define rhetoric, and discusses the crafts, it deserves careful attention. Polus, who has written a treatise on rhetoric, begins by attributing the discovery of \textit{technai} to experiment through experience (\textit{ek ton empeirion empeiros}), and distinguishes life directed by experience (\textit{empeiria}) from that directed by inexperience (\textit{apeiria}). Unlike the artful or technical life, the artless life is delivered over to chance or contingency (\textit{tuche}). There are, moreover, higher and lower arts corresponding to better or baser men. Gorgias, of course, practices the finest (\textit{kallistes}) art of all.\textsuperscript{58} The extant testimonials of the historical Polus preserved in the ancient writings capture the essential character of his speech. It smacks of salesmanship and showmanship, despite remaining somehow correct.\textsuperscript{59} Rhetoric, as Socrates will later affirm, is based on experience (\textit{empeiria}).\textsuperscript{60}

Moreover, as one might conclude from the \textit{Protagoras}, the arts do involve the attempt to control or influence chance.\textsuperscript{61} Aristotle, quoting Agathon, writes that \textit{techne} loves \textit{tuche}, and \textit{tuche techne}. “Fortune smiles” on the technically competent, for they may weather contingency better than others who lack their know-how.\textsuperscript{62} But what of the last claim, that Gorgias’ art is finer than all others? Polus fixes on the experiential element of rhetoric and aggrandizes it. Rhetoric is said

\begin{footnotes}
\item[58] \textit{Gorgias}, 448c, 462b-c.
\item[59] In the \textit{Theages}, Polus is listed alongside Prodicus, Gorgias and many others who travel from city to city and persuade the wealthy and aristocratic to associate with them and pay them great sums of money. In the \textit{Phaedrus}, Polus is lumped in once more with Prodicus and Gorgias, in addition to others, and is censured for his \textit{diplasiology} or double speaking. Of Polus’ musical devices, it is concluded that they are not worth uttering. As Dodds puts it, Polus’ speech is “Gorgian to the point of grotesqueness.” In book one of Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics}, referring precisely to the passage of the \textit{Gorgias} in question, it is said that Polus “speaks correctly.” \textit{Theages}, 127e-128b; \textit{Phaedrus}, 267b-d; Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics}, 981a5; Dodds, \textit{Gorgias} 192.
\item[60] Cf. \textit{Gorgias}, 448c, 452d-e, 462b-c.
\item[61] \textit{Protagoras}, 321a-322d.
\item[62] \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 1140a1-23.
\end{footnotes}
to originate with, and exercise mastery over, the greatest experiences and chance circumstances. What those experiences and contingencies are, Polus leaves completely vague. In fact, it will be some time before the subject-matter of rhetoric is more determinately specified.

Polus leaves Socrates wanting to know, “of the things that are,” (peri ti ton onton) what rhetoric is a science (episteme) of. How useful is the techne analogy to the clarification of this question? Omitting repetitions, between 447c (where the question concerning Gorgias’ art is first raised) and 450b (where that question must be forcefully restated) we count 13 technai: shoemaking, medicine, painting, rhetoric, weaving, music, gymnastic, sculpting, arithmetic, calculation, geometry, draughts playing and astronomy. That shoemaking is the first art mentioned, and astronomy the last in the sequence discussed, is definitive of the initial efforts to define rhetoric in the Gorgias. The argument ascends gradually into matters stratospheric, and obscures completely the practical concerns of rhetoric. For the foregoing reasons, the craft analogy seems intended for purposes besides the explicit definition of rhetoric’s subject matter.

Socrates introduces the prosaic analogy of shoemaking to remind Chaerephon of the question. It is Chaerephon who, questioning Polus, proceeds to introduce medicine and painting. Once the conversation turns to Gorgias, he is prompted to define rhetoric with a new dyad of technai: weaving and the crafting of cloaks, and music and the making of melodies. How useful are these examples to the task of determining rhetoric’s subject matter?

Shoemaking, unlike rhetoric, is a particularly ignoble art. By no means could it be thought to share in the prestige ascribed to rhetoric by Polus. But if rhetoric derives from the greatest experiences, where does shoemaking come from? We wear shoes to prevent our feet from being damaged by our natural environment, for greater ease in an active life, and perhaps

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63 Gorgias, 449d.
to look good.\textsuperscript{64} However removed from shoemaking, the prologue has made us dimly aware of the fact that rhetoric might serve ends of a not altogether different nature. If Polus is in any way representative of rhetoric, rhetoric is concerned with protection and embellishment or the improvement of appearances. Of the arts mentioned so far, painting and music are definitively oriented toward the beautiful, and therefore recall embellishment. Music is closer to rhetoric than painting inasmuch as it addresses itself to the ears and not the eyes. The primary addressee of music, like rhetoric, is the soul of its audience, which it propels to motion for better or for worse.\textsuperscript{65} Music and painting, however, have nothing to do with protection. Conversely, medicine, the most repeated craft in the dialogue, does. Whether or not rhetoric can take on a character analogous to medicine is a question entertained later on in the dialogue. Though we shall return to that question later, it suffices for now to make two points. Though rhetoric may be protective, it is not necessarily therapeutic. Although medicine is undoubtedly protective, it is not in the least “cosmetic.”\textsuperscript{66} What distinguishes arts like medicine from arts like rhetoric is an orientation to the beautiful or seemly. Of the arts mentioned, it is perhaps weaving that best exemplifies the two-fold nature of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{67} Beautification and protection consist, as it were, in the warp and woof of that type of rhetoric exemplified by the deeds and words of Polus.

Up until now, what little we know of rhetoric has been gleaned from the dramatic action and reflection on what the crafts featured in the dialogue may or may not have in common with rhetoric. The first explicitly stated indication of rhetoric’s subject matter is provided by Gorgias, after a great deal of Socratic prodding, who says that rhetoric is “about speeches.”\textsuperscript{68} On this

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Gorgias}, 447d. Shoemaking is an art whose products Socrates – who walked around barefoot, apparently even during winter military expeditions – makes little use of. Socrates’ failure to take appropriate measures to protect himself will turn out to be a major theme in the Gorgias. Cf. \textit{Symposium}, 174a; 219e-221c; Aristophanes, \textit{Clouds}, 95-105. See also Strauss, \textit{Plato’s Gorgias} (1963), 23-24.

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Republic}, 410a-412a; \textit{Phaedrus}, 267c-d, 271c.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Gorgias}, 464b-466a.

\textsuperscript{67} Stauffer makes a similar observation about weaving and rhetoric in \textit{The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias}, 20-21; Cf. \textit{Statesman}, 282d-283b, 308a-311c.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Gorgias}, 449d-e.
basis the argument will proceed to suppress altogether the practical aspects of rhetoric hinted at by the prologue in general and the deeds of Polus in particular. That the argument leaves behind the practical concerns of rhetoric is captured in the sequence of craft analogies employed.

Medicine, now accompanied by gymnastics, returns to assist in the clarification of what rhetoric is not. That these crafts serve this purpose is understandable: medicine and gymnastics deal with the protection and improvement of bodies, whereas rhetoric is said to deal with speeches. But Socrates has something else in mind. Since craftsmen are generally able to speak about their expertise, rhetoric has no monopoly on speech. All arts “are about those speeches that happen to be about the business of which each is the art.”

Gorgias is nevertheless undeterred. Not only is rhetoric concerned with speech, “but its whole activity (praxis) and decisive effect [or influence (kurosis)]” is carried out through speech. Medicine is repeated once more alongside gymnastics, as is painting shortly thereafter, followed by statue making, again to clarify what rhetoric is not. All arts mentioned so far pertain to the protection or enhancement of the body, or what we call the “fine arts,” and therefore the beautiful. All subsequent arts have nothing to do with the bodily. The seventh and middle art is andriantopoiia: statue-making. It combines the hard work of shaping a human body out of stone, with an orientation to the beautiful. Of all the examples mentioned it would seem to capture best that aspect of rhetoric concerned with soul craft or character formation. However this may be, statue-making serves here to distinguish rhetoric as far as possible from manual work (cheirourgia) and labor (ergasia), if not work or deed (ergon) altogether.

In this way the conversation about speech carries us increasingly far from the lowly art of shoemaking with

69 Gorgias, 450a.
70 Gorgias, 450a-450b.
71 Gorgias, 450b-c.
72 Gorgias, 450d.
73 Gorgias, 450b-d.
which we began. At the same time, the practical concerns of rhetoric have been completely obscured.

The crafts introduced next render absolutely clear the inadequacy of the argument, and therefore the character of rhetoric as distinct from its presentation in the argument. At 450d Socrates introduces arithmetic, calculation, geometry and draughts playing; at 451b-d arithmetic and calculation are repeated, with the addition of astronomy. On the one hand, the mathematical urges Gorgias toward greater precision in answering the “with respect to what” (*peri ti*) question. On the other hand, the mathematical arts indicate what rhetoric is not, for it is neither so exact in its dealings, nor so otherworldly and disinterested. For related reasons, it is all too fitting that geometry and draughts playing are not repeated. Geometry is the most practical of the mathematical arts: it is most readily applied in architecture or carpentry, for instance.74 Draughts playing – a common Platonic metaphor for conversation – is notably dissonant precisely because it presupposes interest. Though a form of play, draughts players want to win.75

The subject matter of rhetoric is nevertheless indicated when Socrates, speaking of calculation, claims to speak “like those who write proposals in the people’s assembly.”76 Our attention is drawn to the spurious assimilation of rhetoric to the mathematical arts. It has therefore been claimed that the sequence of technai takes the form of an ascent into matters stratospheric. The last arts introduced ring truer of a Theodorus or Thales than any orator.77

That Socrates must reiterate yet again his question concerning the subject matter of rhetoric indicates how little progress has been made. The same is suggested by the fact that

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74 If the technai are bound strictly by the standards of mathematics, then rhetoric is surely no techne. Although it is denied in the Philebus that medicine is an exact science, it is still considered an art. Cf. Philebus, 56a-56c.
76 Gorgias, 451b-c.
77 Compare the mathematically minded interlocutors of the Theaetetus, Sophist and Statesmen with the politically minded interlocutors of the Gorgias in terms of what they care about and dismiss. Cf. Theaetetus, 143e, 144d-148b, 162a-b, 168e-169d, 172a-176a, 183c, 210d; Statesman, 257a-b, 266a; 458b-461d, 482e-487d, 508a-c, 509c-509d, 511b-d, 515b-516b, 521b-521c; *Meno*, 82b-85c.
Gorgias responds to Socrates as Polus did previously to Chaerephon: he beautifies and aggrandizes rhetoric as though it were being blamed. Rhetoric, Gorgias says, corresponds to the greatest and best of human affairs (ta megista kai ta arista). What then is the purpose of this part of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias? If the prologue draws the reader’s attention to the pathological, contingent and strategic aspects of speech, the argument we have just traced suppresses the practical circumstances of persuasion. It does not follow, however, that nothing has been achieved in the meantime. Besides the reflections solicited by the craft analogy, Gorgias will be unable to forestall for much longer the provision of a more determinate definition of rhetoric. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the conversation has revealed a great deal about the self-understanding of rhetoricians.

It is without doubt the emphasis on speech that causes great mischief in the argument. It is, of course, not entirely uncommon for Plato to intentionally send the logos down a path that is mistaken from the very outset. As the Republic and Laws develop “cities in speech” unrestricted by deed, Socrates’ dialogue with Gorgias unfolds the development of “speech according to rhetoric” without consideration for politics. Although it has been pointed out that Gorgias’ emphasis on speech stems from the brevity imposed on him by Socrates, behind the rather straightforward observation that rhetoric is “about speeches” and “exerts its influence” primarily by means of speech is a matter of far reaching importance. To be sure, one-word answers besides “speech” could have been supplied. Why is it that all arts must concern themselves with speeches in the sense specified? The crafts operate necessarily within a linguistic community of understanding. The arts would suffer greatly were it not possible to communicate what has been learned to others and preserve for subsequent generations that

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78 Gorgias, 451d.
79 Cf. Statesman, 262a-265b.
which has been learned. Moreover, artisans must find ways to communicate to non- artisans. The community of understanding in which all crafts operate is not constituted by knowledge of art so much as opinion and trust. Popular deference to optometrists or cardiologists is not rooted in knowledge of eyes or hearts. As Gorgias himself will emphasize, craftsmen need speeches in order to persuade non- craftsmen to accept and follow the courses of action they recommend. 81

In indicating how all of the arts require the usage of speech, Plato reveals the origin of rhetoric’s self-estimation as the greatest art. Let us therefore recall what Polus left unexplained, namely, the experiences and chance circumstances that rhetoric originates with and comes to master. We may reconstruct the self- understanding of the rhetorician as follows. All in the city experience speech and the need for speech. Particularly in a free city, it is not force but persuasion, and therefore speeches, that rule. 82 The rhetorician, however, works primarily with speech, and learns how to wield speech most effectively. He is therefore excellent in something that all men need and depend on. Though all citizens have the right to speak in the assembly and law courts, the rhetorician is most capable of doing so. Rhetoric therefore promises a great deal to those who have mastered it. A similar logic will lead Gorgias and Polus to claim not only that speech is the greatest art, but also a most powerful one.

In what follows the argument will gradually be brought back down to earth. Gorgias will supply the political concerns of rhetoric, but his argument will continue to abstract from the limits imposed on rhetoric by its practical circumstances. Gorgias’ fundamental error stems from an ordinary awareness of the fact that political life and the arts need speech. But does the dependency of the two on speech necessarily mean that speech is the most important consideration, or that rhetoric is the art that corresponds to the greatest and best of human affairs? It does not follow, at any rate, that rhetoric is most powerful. Tellingly, Gorgias’

81 Gorgias, 456b.
82 Laws, 722b-723a.
rhetorical situation will prove decisive in correcting the errors committed at the level of the argument. The dramatic action of the Gorgias consists in a negative image of the argument so far. The remainder of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias is defined above all by the fact that Plato gradually brings into focus the practical-political situation of rhetoric.  

VI. The Practical Horizon of Persuasion

Plato will reveal that Gorgias is more than capable of defining rhetoric with greater precision than he has thus far. What, then, accounts for his failure to do so? In the Phaedrus and Aristotle’s Art of Rhetoric we learn that rhetoric is concerned with the dynamics of the human soul and the modes of argumentation best fitted to different soul types, purposes and situations. Although we learn nothing of the sort from Gorgias, and some have argued that rhetoric had not been so formalized until later, there is no good reason to deny him such an understanding of speechcraft. It is more defensible, especially if we take the writings of Gorgias into consideration, to conclude that his wares are not fully on display. Gorgias’ disciple Polus would not be able to accuse Socrates later of manipulating shame had he lacked altogether an understanding of rhetoric in which speeches are fitted to the passions of those spoken to. To be sure, the practitioner of “flattery” (kolakeutike), with whom the rhetorician is later associated, understands something of the relation between pleasure or pain and the crafting of speeches. The public setting of the Gorgias is, however, ill suited to the foreigner’s admission to being in the business of psychic manipulation. The teaching of rhetoric, as we learn from Aristophanes’
Clouds, had already become a matter of opprobrium in Athens, something of which Gorgias and Socrates were certainly mindful.89

On the foregoing basis we may come to understand how Socrates’ contrives to bring the conversation of rhetoric back down to earth. Socrates exploits Gorgias’ “business model” qua itinerant teacher of rhetoric and, subsequently, the blameworthiness of rhetoric. He begins by evoking a popular drinking song, which gives voice to that which the city esteems. It serves to introduce a fictional audience – a doctor, gymnast and money-maker, each exalting their own works as *ta megista kai arista* – before whom Gorgias must justify his art, and against whom he must compete for prestige.90 The practical challenge implied elicits a response that speaks for the first time to the practical concerns of rhetoric. Rhetoric crafts what is truly the greatest good and “the cause of both freedom [eleutheria] for human beings themselves and at the same time of rule over others in each man’s own city.”91 Gorgias professes to teach a skill most coveted by the politically ambitious: “being able to persuade by speeches judges in the law court, councilors in the council, assemblymen in the assembly, and in every other gathering whatsoever, when there is a political gathering.”92 That Socrates’ appeal to popular opinion effectively cajoles Gorgias into supplying the political concerns of rhetoric is a first indication of the great extent to which the city holds sway over the craftsman of persuasion.

Socrates’ reintroduction of the *techne* analogy indicates, nevertheless, that Gorgias, besides having supplied the political aspect of rhetoric, has made little progress over his previous definition that emphasized “speech.” He must remind him that “rhetoric is not the only

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89 Cf. Protagoras, 316c-317c; Meno, 91c-92b.
90 It is well known that a fourth good is omitted from Socrates’ version of the drinking song, namely, that of “friendship.” Dodds claims that the last verse is omitted because it does not point to a *techne*. If this is so, it would fit nicely with Socrates’ later denial that rhetoric is an art. It is possible, however, that the replacement of friendship by Gorgias’ art serves to indicate how rhetoric may build consensus and agreement. 452a-452d. Dodds, Gorgias, 200-201.
91 Gorgias, 451e, 452e; Cf. Irwin, Gorgias, 116-118.
92 Gorgias, 452e. Cf. Meno, 73c-d, Theages, 126a-b, Alcibiades I, 104e ff, Protagoras, 312d ff. See also Dodds, Gorgias, 202; Jacob Klein, Commentary on Plato’s Meno, 54-55.
craftsman of persuasion.” We shall learn, moreover, that Gorgias’ exaltation of persuasion leads him to commit a number of more serious errors.

Gorgias claims that those who possess the power (dunamis) of persuasion will have the craftsmen from the drinking song as slaves (doulai). The craftsmen will produce not for themselves but for those “who can speak and persuade multitudes.” He implies that persuasion can be used to enslave others, as if slavery were not more obviously a product of force. The same error is repeated later by Polus who employs, as evidence for the power of rhetoricians, the example of an unscrupulous tyrant, whose rise to power had little to do with persuasion. In each case the dispensability of force in politics is suggested. Moreover, in speaking as he does, Gorgias betrays his ambivalence regarding both the ends of persuasion and the knowledge of rhetoricians. When Socrates asks whether “the whole occupation and chief point [of rhetoric] ends [teleuta] in [persuasion],” the reader is alerted to the fact that rhetoric is a means to further ends. But how can rhetoric be both the greatest good and a means to further ends? Gorgias does not say, like Diodotus, that “freedom and rule over others are the greatest things” but that the greatest good causes “freedom and rule over others.” Finally, in agreeing to limit rhetoric to the “crafting of persuasion in the souls of listeners,” Gorgias calls into question his vocation as a teacher, viz., someone who imparts knowledge.

Gorgias’ reticence derives from his ambivalent disposition toward the ends and knowledge of rhetoric. For what does it mean to craft persuasion “about those things that are just and unjust” in order to secure freedom and rule over others? Socrates introduces two forms

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93 Gorgias, 453e-454a.
94 Gorgias, 452e. In the Philebus, Protarchus claims that Gorgias considered the art of persuasion superior to all others arts because of its ability to enslave others by means of consent as opposed to force. Cf. Philebus, 58a-b. See also Benardete, The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy, 17.
95 Gorgias, 471a-471d.
96 Cf. Xenophon, Anabasis, 2.6.16.
97 Gorgias, 453a.
98 Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 3.45.6.
(duo eide) of persuasion, one that supplies belief without knowledge, and the other some form of knowledge.\textsuperscript{99} “Both those who have learned and those who have believed are those who have been persuaded.”\textsuperscript{100} Rhetoric produces “non didactic” or “belief inspiring” persuasion regarding justice and injustice “in law courts and other mobs [ochlois].” But since “mobs” are ignorant (me eidousin), rhetoric requires no more than the effective manipulation of confidence.\textsuperscript{101} Gorgias all too readily admits that rhetoric contrives to appear to know more than those who do know before those who do not know. He fails to realize that, unlike our mostly disinterested disposition toward merely technical questions, opinions regarding justice and the public weal are irreducibly interest laden. The attractiveness of rhetoric lies in its alleged power over opinion, an imperfect element of political life in which the public interest is at stake and vulnerable to corruption. The allure of rhetoric is therefore complicit with its possible injustice. Thus Gorgias’ sales pitch to prospective students will bring him into conflict with concerned citizens.

Plato could not therefore have found a better moment (at 455c) to disclose the multitude of potential student-customers present. Claiming to act as Gorgias’ promoter, Socrates makes known the eagerness of some in the audience to discover more precisely what they might hope to gain from associating with Gorgias.\textsuperscript{102} In a last effort to properly define the subject matter of rhetoric, Socrates urges Gorgias to better specify for prospective students the true breadth with regard to which rhetoricians may craft persuasion. He alludes to the marriage of technique and politics typical of Athenian imperialism: the crafting of walls, harbors and dockyards, as well as the appointment of generals, the management and fielding of troops, and the seizing of

\textsuperscript{99} Since the middle perfect participle pepeismenoi can also mean “having obeyed”, the two types of persuasion set out bring to mind the alternative means by which the regimes set out in Republic and Laws cement their authority: noble lies and educative preludes.

\textsuperscript{100} Gorgias, 454e.

\textsuperscript{101} Gorgias, 459b-c.

\textsuperscript{102} Gorgias, 455c-d.
territories. The language of war, dropped in the opening lines of the dialogue, thus returns to the stage. Simultaneously, and by no coincidence, short speech gives way to lengthy display speech of the sort favored by Gorgias and best suited to addressing large groups. Gorgias is eager to concur that the “whole power of rhetoric” is hardly exhausted by the just and unjust things, for no better examples of rhetoric’s influence could be found than those supplied. The hallmarks of Athenian imperial power originated not with the advice of craftsmen, but with the counsel of Themistocles and Pericles. In this way Gorgias collapses the capabilities of great statesmen into the power to persuade. Rhetoric, an emboldened Gorgias continues, “gathers together and holds under itself all powers.” Should a rhetorician enter “any city you please” to contend publicly for an appointment against any profession, the rhetorician would prove victorious. We learn, in effect, precisely why rhetoric is held in high esteem: the deliberative element in the city gives the good speaker a disproportionate sphere of influence.

It is in the present context that Socrates makes known to the audience that his question has been motivated all along by wonder (thaumazon) at the “demonically great” power of rhetoricians. That he does so provides the occasion for us to reflect on why the question that brought him to Gorgias may be of interest. The open-endedness of rhetoric as presented by Gorgias indicates that rhetoric may be responsible for both great good and great evil. For if persuasion were as powerful as Gorgias claims, not only could Socrates have guaranteed his acquittal, the political project set out in the Republic would be possible. But with every

103 Gorgias, 455b-c. For the connection between Athenian imperialism, power, techne and rhetoric, see Grene, Greek Political Theory, 27-34, 49-61, 65-69, 80-92.
105 Gorgias, 456a.
106 Gorgias, 449a-449b. Gorgias seems unaware that persuasion might be more or less constrained in different regimes. Cf. Greater Hippias, 283b-286a.
further specification of the nature of rhetoric, rhetoric becomes only more likely to offend. For unlike what is set forth in the Republic, Laws or Statesman, Gorgias has made no explicit claim to know justice, teach justice, or even to be just.\(^{108}\) He has admitted, however tacitly, to instructing others in persuasion about justice but without any particular commitment to justice. Rhetoric therefore offers a most insidious means of exploiting democracy by means of the very freedom that distinguishes it. If persuasion appeals to the “free” as opposed to “slavish” or “savage” side of man, which hears only force\(^{109}\), then the rhetorician can make free men slaves by way of their own freedom.\(^{110}\) The long suppressed combative element of rhetoric is therefore finally on display. The three crafts introduced by Gorgias are all martial (boxing, wrestling, and fighting in armor); the paradigm for the rhetoric-school is the boxing and wrestling school (palaistra)\(^{111}\). Thus Rhetoric’s supposed power and value neutrality impose on the visiting rhetorician the necessity of justifying his trade to the Athenian public\(^{112}\).

Like Thrasymachus in the Republic, it is the wolf-like quality of Gorgias’ art that makes him act sheepish\.\(^{113}\) Halfway through his speech, Gorgias breaks off mid-sentence to pay lip service to classical Greek ethics. Reminding us of Aristophanes’ Clouds, rhetoric’s combatative quality must not be used to flog one’s own parents, friends and the like\(^{114}\). Gorgias has come to realize, however belatedly, that the power of rhetoric as he presents it – the ability to outdo all craftsmen (technitai) before non-knowers – openly threatens to subvert the bonds of friendship that hold the city together. He learns that making manifest his ambivalence about knowledge

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\(^{109}\) Cf. Republic, 375d-376c, 493a-493c; Laws, 719e-720e; Sophist, 222b-223b, 229d-231b; Statesman 262a-268c.

\(^{110}\) Cf. Gorgias, 482c-484c, 491e-492c; Philebus, 58a-b.

\(^{111}\) Gorgias, 457d-458c.

\(^{112}\) Cf. Romilly, The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens, 60-70.

\(^{113}\) Cf. Republic, 343a-350d.

\(^{114}\) Gorgias, 460a; Cf. Meno, 95c. For the second time in the dialogue an oath to Zeus is uttered. In the Clouds Pheidippides and Strepsiades each utter oaths to Zeus when the latter is being flogged by the former. Aristophanes, Clouds, 1321, 1330, 1405.
and justice is not only bad business, but also bad politics.\textsuperscript{115} The Leontine therefore claims knowledge of justice, the ability to teach justice and, above all, his justice.\textsuperscript{116}

Had Gorgias made more reasonable claims about the power of rhetoric, he would not have to make claims so unreasonable regarding its justice. Having so exaggerated about rhetoric, Gorgias is left no choice but to avail himself of the full force of criminal justice against errant orators. It is just “to hate, expel, and kill the one who uses it not correctly, but not the one who taught it.”\textsuperscript{117} Gorgias can save his hide only by riding on the waves of popular resentment of injustice, which in turn requires that he adopt a more conventional posture regarding justice and the teachability of virtue.\textsuperscript{118} The necessities imposed on rhetoric by its practical situation are revealed in the abrupt turn that Gorgias’ speech takes. We learn, in effect, that the power of rhetoric is at odds with its justice, while the need to appear just calls into question its power. The power of rhetoric is therefore delimited by its publicity. Thus the power of the regime begins to emerge on the margins of the dialogue. The power of persuasion is constrained by the city and the opinions authoritative therein. The injustice of rhetoric should not, however, be taken to mean that it is any less necessary. Despite calling into question the power of rhetoricians, the \textit{Gorgias} gives us little reason to hope for a politics without rhetoric, let alone a didactic politics, for the city as such is presented throughout as the realm of mere opinion.

To conclude our commentary on this part of the dialogue, it is fitting to take note of the crowd and its great clamor (\textit{thorubos}). Socrates offers Gorgias a way out of the conversation,


\textsuperscript{116} Gorgias, according to the \textit{Meno}, is said to have denied the teachability of virtue. We have every reason to believe that his claim to teach justice in the \textit{Gorgias} is motivated by the need to justify himself. Catherine Zuckert argues, however, that he had learned from the conversation presented in the \textit{Gorgias} not to make such claims. See Nichols, \textit{Gorgias}, 39 n. 31; Zuckert, \textit{Plato’s Philosophers}, 561-562.

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Gorgias}, 457b-c, 480a-481b.

one that Gorgias, invoking the supposed fatigue of the audience, proves eager to accept. As Socrates probably realizes, however, not only will the crowd prove hungry for more talk of justice, Gorgias will be moved to appease those present. Gorgias therefore falls prey to his desire to appease the crowd, a fate not uncommon for sophists in the Platonic corpus.\(^{119}\) By contrast, Socrates’ professed ignorance and indifference to the many sit more comfortably alongside the fact that he makes no claim to authority.\(^{120}\) Socrates’ apparent power over the rhetorician is rooted in Gorgias’ relationship to the audience, which Plato has brought into focus. Accordingly, as Socrates’ access to Gorgias was mediated by Chaerephon and Callicles in the beginning of the dialogue, the two now reemerge as mediators whose democratic appeal to the crowd prevents the dialogue from ending by preventing Gorgias from leaving.\(^{121}\) The episode bears the markings of a new beginning, one distinguished above all by our heightened awareness of the public character of conversation. In these ways Plato sought to portray the necessities imposed on public speech by its practical horizon.

**VII. Socrates’ Conversation with Gorgias and the Psychology of Political Authority**

Since the title of the *Gorgias* is the only part of the dialogue stated in Plato’s own name, it behooves us to conclude by asking, however provisionally, why it is not called the *Polus* or *Callicles* instead. For that Plato chose to name the *Gorgias* as he did suggests that Gorgias is the most important character in the dialogue. Does it follow that Gorgias somehow expresses what is essentially at stake in the dialogue as the characters Polus and Callicles do not? Might Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias, for related reasons, provide the key to the remainder of the *Gorgias*?

\(^{119}\) *Gorgias*, 464b-466a; *Republic*, 350b-d, 491e-493d; *Protagoras*, 312a-313e, 316b-3120c, 334e-338e, 348c; *Lesser Hippias*, 363a-364d. *Cf.* Strauss, *The City and Man*, 78.

\(^{120}\) *Gorgias*, 471e-474b.

\(^{121}\) *Gorgias*, 458c-d; *Protagoras*, 335b-338a.
Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias is certainly less exciting than the heated conversations with Polus and Callicles that follow. That the first quarter of the *Gorgias* is so distinguished from the remaining three cannot, however, be considered accidental. For it is the problem of justice that makes the later arguments so heated, and the beginning of *Gorgias* reveals why that problem had to be taken up. We are given to regard Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias as the mild and easily forgotten propaedeutic to the later more heated arguments over justice. As an introduction, however, the opening conversation is peculiar in that the theme of justice emerges as though it were incidental to the clarification of the power of rhetoric. The opening conversation is therefore no “mere” propaedeutic.

The unity of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias may be summarized as follows. The dysfunctional prologue draws the reader’s attention to the highly contingent circumstances of dialogue. When the conversation turns to Gorgias, and the *techne* analogy, the argument proceeds to lift rhetoric out of its practical context. Plato intends to solicit reflection on the nature of rhetoric and the self-understanding of rhetoricians. Gorgias’ overestimation of the power and importance of rhetoric is shown to derive from the dependency of the city on speech and opinion, and therefore persuasion. In the final stage of the conversation, the argument is corrected by the action of the dialogue, which brings the specifically political context of the conversation to the fore. The public bearing of political rhetoric requires the instilment of confidence, which requires in turn that speakers contrive to appear both knowledgeable and just. The opinions authoritative in the city and the contingent circumstances of the conversation thus hold sway over persuasion. Is the problem of justice, then, incidental to the clarification of rhetoric as it main theme?

As a whole, the *Gorgias* renders thematic the power of persuasion and reveals the practical necessities that govern political rhetoric. Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias is
intended to gradually reveal the political context that makes claims to justice and knowledge a necessary part of public speech. The necessity that such claims be made is independent of any real commitment to justice or the possession of knowledge. We must therefore be open to the possibility that the remainder of the *Gorgias* is concerned not primarily with justice, but with the rhetoric of justice and the extent of its power. In this way, the clamor (*thorubos*) of the crowd, and the outbursts of Polus and Callicles, instruct the reader in the desiderata of rhetoric, or that which it must seek to master. Polus and Callicles, who have traditionally been viewed as simple exponents of immorality, are more fruitfully regarded as case studies in the psychology of political authority or conformism. They reveal much about the tensions, commitments, and therefore limits inherent in ordinary opinion.\(^{122}\) What does the foregoing entail?

It cannot be taken for granted that the *Gorgias* serves to provide a foolproof defence of justice. The dialogue’s opening makes it more plausible to think that it is intended to reveal what efforts to gain the public’s trust must attend to. At the same time, the dramatic unfolding of Socrates’ less than successful efforts to persuade Polus and Callicles pre-empts unwarranted optimism regarding the power of persuasion in defense of justice. It calls especially into question the prospect of putting rhetoric in the service of “dialectically” refined conceptions of justice, such as those that issue out of Socrates’ later cross-examination of Polus. The foregoing reasons begin to explain not only why the *Gorgias* begins as it does, but why Plato named the dialogue as he did. Knowing that the interpretation being proposed is a controversial one, we dwell for a moment longer on the evidence that recommends it.

Although the *Gorgias* has often drawn the attention of moral theorists, we are given to suspect that its relationship to morality diverges considerably from their own.\(^ {123}\) That there is a

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\(^{122}\) As Nichols, Benardete, Stauffer and Tarnopolsky have each shown, albeit in different ways.

Platonic moral theory or theory of justice in the *Gorgias* is open to doubt. For although Gorgias gets into hot water on account of his disposition toward knowledge and justice, the *Gorgias* never takes up the task of defining either.\(^{124}\) The analytically or discursively minded must explain that limitation, particularly should they be of the view that a philosophically adequate discussion of a problem must define its terms, as Socrates himself insists.\(^{125}\) It is safer to assume that, where the dialogue signals a problem but fails to take it up thematically, it continues to operate according to the ordinary or pre-philosophical understanding of that problem, or the part of that problem that goes unexamined.

In fact, Socrates has exercised great restraint in sheltering Gorgias from a direct confrontation with the questions implied by the conversation. Socrates offers the following reason for why the rhetorician is “merely” persuasive regarding justice: he would be unable “to teach so large a crowd [or mob – *ochlon*] such great matters in a short time.”\(^{126}\) As for Gorgias’ claim to knowledge of justice and the capacity to teach justice, nowhere does Socrates ask him to demonstrate either. Though Socrates is not known for leaving such claims unexamined, the *Gorgias* has astonishingly little to say regarding what justice is. Indeed, if the *Gorgias* begins in relative abstraction from the political, the problem of justice taken up thereafter tends to be distorted by the needs and conventions of the city that have since come into prominence.

Socrates can be said to exercise justice in the precise sense that justice is presented later as

\(^{124}\) *Cf. Meno*, 100b.

\(^{125}\) It is generally known that Socrates’ arguments in the *Gorgias* are less than satisfactory. Nor is it uncommon to suspect that Socrates’ “cheats” in this dialogue. In this regard Irwin’s commentary, which is scrupulously in drawing the reader’s attention to the ways in which the arguments may be dubious, is helpful. Irwin does not, however, seek to explain why Plato would have Socrates argue on the basis of faulty premises so often, and is content, like Cooper and Kahn (cited above), to explain such difficulties away on the basis of conjectures regarding Plato’s “development.” Vlastos attempts to meet this difficulty head on, however, in proposing a view of Socratic irony that is more or less completely shorn of dissimulation, he fails to persuade. Cf. Irwin, *Gorgias*, as a whole; Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 132-156; 21-44.

\(^{126}\) *Gorgias*, 455a. James Nichols writes: “Could one imaging a more tactful way of bringing up the rhetor’s lack of concern for conveying knowledge about issues of justice?” *Gorgias*, 37, n. 28.
incompatible with retribution. Unlike Gorgias, who jumps to wield popular resentment of injustice, Socrates holds back from fully exposing the teacher of rhetoric to the same.¹²⁷ Justice, in that case, requires that justice be left to some considerable extent unexamined.

On this basis, we may come to understand why medicine, which serves as a model for Socrates’ later rehabilitation of rhetoric, is the most repeated craft in the dialogue. Although medicine is a rather poor analogy for rhetoric, Gorgias’ only plausible claim to being a public benefactor turns out to be the assistance he has provided to doctors in persuading patients to accept treatment. Though Gorgias failed to avail himself sufficiently of this claim to justice, Socrates shows him later what it would require.¹²⁸ As an extension of the question concerning the power of persuasion, the Gorgias proceeds to disclose what it would require for a speaker to present himself as perfectly just, and what must be studied should one seek to do so. As the Gorgias will make all too clear, however, most are terribly unlikely to find compelling the suggestion of a perfectly just art of rhetoric reformed on the model of medicine. That, of course, has not deterred commentators from embracing it. Be that as it may, setting aside Polus’ manifest reluctance to accept the argument, and the not altogether unreasonable objections of Callicles, one could sooner expect mere talk of boxing to end fistfights. Although the Gorgias holds out the prospect of a therapeutic rhetoric, it casts doubt on the practicality of such proposals.

The rehabilitation of rhetoric as therapeutic in the service of justice holds out the questionable prospect of an alliance between philosophy and rhetoric.¹²⁹ But it does more than

¹²⁷ Cf. Lorraine Smith Pangle, Virtue is Knowledge, 44-80.
¹²⁸ Gorgias, 456b; Cf. Laws, 720b-e, 722b-723b.
¹²⁹ It has been argued that Socrates’ interest in Gorgias derives primarily, or in large part, from a desire to ameliorate the conditions of philosophy in the city. On that basis, Stauffer and Nichols interpret the last three quarters of the Gorgias as a hidden dialogue with Gorgias that works toward the end of educating him as well as establishing a common enterprise between philosophy and rhetoric. The author has learned much from readings such as these. At the same time, it is possible that the emphasis on “politics on behalf of philosophy” occasionally overshadows other aspects of the Gorgias that are of great interest to political theory. It may be added that Benardete’s commentary, which is part of the same “hermeneutic tradition,” may be thought to do greater justice to
just that. After all, Gorgias does not present himself merely as a teacher of rhetoric, but a teacher of political excellence. Not only teachers of rhetoricians, but public figures as such must often present themselves as expert preventers or curers of ills. They must do so regardless of whether there are ills to be cured or avoided, or whether they have the knowledge requisite to identify those ills and provide solutions for them. Indeed, the pretension that rhetoricians might outdo all craftsmen is an indication of the breadth of issues about which public figures must claim competence, regardless of their actual competence. As the Gorgias shows us, it is not necessarily generals, architects or doctors who come before the public to speak about pressing matters related to war, public works or health. Successful public figures come forward with all the trappings of certitude and present themselves as preeminently competent “managers.” Especially when the public is faced by pressing challenges, Socratic professions of doubt are unlikely to carry the day. In other words, the Gorgias reveals that political authority can only rest dubiously on claims to knowledge. According to necessity, it is at least in part a confidence game.

As a final consideration, however desirable the friendly pursuit of truth or common understanding may be, the two are ever so fragile – as the rest of the Gorgias amply reveals. There can be no doubt that Plato considered Socratic discourse more just than the alternatives embodied by Gorgias and his disciples. Nevertheless, Plato never sought to reform politics by taking the demands of healthy discourse as his model. At the very least, Plato’s Syracusan

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the dialogue’s breadth than the account offered by Stauffer. Of course, as Stauffer remarks, Benardete writes in a cryptic fashion, and in such a way that risks the appearance of being tangential and, at any rate, far less welcoming to the reader. He is certainly less concerned than Stauffer is to provide an accessible and parsimonious reading of the Gorgias’ “unity.” Cf. Stauffer, The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias, 5.

130 “The problems Plato depicts concerning Socrates’ inability to prevent discussions from breaking down are not logical problems. The very breakdown of the dialectical relationship, which is the problem logic must overcome, renders its use ineffective. They are political problems. The philosopher cannot force people to listen unless he has the means to force them. The slender hold of the dialectical relationship must be replaced by the might of the state.” George Klosko, The Insufficiency of Reason in Plato’s Gorgias, The Western Political Quarterly, V. 36, I. 4 (Dec 1983), 594; Cf. Terence Irwin, Plato’s Moral Theory, 130-131.
experiment was not an exercise in “deliberative democracy.” The practical horizon of persuasion, as Plato presents it in the Gorgias, precludes applying the standards of Socratic conversation to politics. On the one hand, the political necessities imposed on public speech are shown to force speech in directions incompatible with justice. On the other, rhetoric is no less necessary for that fact. Thankfully, however, the Gorgias begins to reveal the great unlikelihood that a rhetorician could prove so competent as to effectively and indefinitely pull the wool over the eyes of all, as Gorgias, Polus and Callicles each suggest one might. The necessities imposed on political persuasion by practical circumstance limit not only the justice posited by philosophers, but also the tyranny sought by sophists.

In the foregoing ways, the beginning of the Gorgias gives us reason to suspect that “moral doctrinal” readings of the dialogue are based on a series of fundamental misunderstandings. These derive primarily from a failure to grasp the dialogue’s relation to the theme of justice, which would seem subordinated to the question concerning the power of persuasion. The Gorgias tempts us to treat the subject of rhetoric as though it were ancillary to the aims of moral philosophy, where in fact it is justice that is here ancillary or accidental to a philosophical inquiry into the power and nature of persuasion. That question has been shown to determine the entirety of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias, and in such a way that recommends a reading of the dialogue that focuses specifically on the (natural, conventional, and circumstantial) limits to political persuasion.

In what follows, the problem of political authority will be taken up in terms of the power of persuasion in defense of justice, as delimited by the practical circumstances of persuasion and especially the opinions and passions that bind citizens to the regime. It may be added that our approach to the Gorgias will depart often from the expectations of mainstream Platonic exegesis. On many occasions, we shall emphasize not the “analytical” content of the argument
or the truth of propositions, but rather the effect of the argument, or lack thereof, on the
interlocutor. We shall concern ourselves especially with the reasons why Socrates’ arguments
are effective or ineffective. Although such an approach can only be justified by an interpretation
of the entire Gorgias, what has been gleaned about Plato’s intentions from the opening
conversation will be regarded sufficient for the time being. We turn now to Socrates’
conversation with Polus.
Section B

Socrates’ Conversation with Polus: Persuasion in Defense of Justice

I. Rhetoric, the City and Philosophy

It has been said in the preceding that the *Gorgias* puts Gorgias’ misunderstanding of the power of persuasion to the test. Because it is the practical horizon of persuasion that Gorgias misunderstands, it is the relation of Gorgias to the city that Plato has brought into focus. But the *Gorgias* does not stop at putting rhetoricians or political men to the test. For it is not impossible that the misunderstandings of Gorgias could also be the misunderstandings of a philosopher. Indeed, for most of the *Gorgias* it is the power of Socratic persuasion, and the power of philosophy therewith, that is brought especially into question. Socrates has replaced Gorgias as the main figure of interest and it follows as a matter of course that the practical circumstances of philosophizing come into focus. The *Gorgias* will continue to test persuasion by pitting Socrates against Gorgias’ disciple Polus and Callicles, who stand in relation to Socrates as the crowd does to Gorgias. As Gorgias’ relation to the city gradually came into focus in the preceding, so will Socrates’ relation to Athens become prominent in what follows.

For related reasons, it is helpful to begin by reminding the reader of the most obvious difference between Plato and Socrates. Socrates talks to people in the city; Plato shows Socrates talking to people in the city. Socrates did not write; the *Gorgias* is written from the perspective of a third person. We see Socrates trying to persuade Polus and Callicles, and we see Polus and Callicles resisting or unable to follow those efforts. We therefore see Socrates succeeding and failing to be persuasive, and for reasons that Plato provides us with the means of identifying. We must bear in mind that Plato’s intention in revealing Socrates’ efforts in the foregoing manner may differ from the intentions of Socrates. To come to understand Socrates’ intentions is not necessarily to understand Plato’s. The theme “Socrates in the city” appears to have been Plato’s
abiding theme. Could it possibly have been Socrates’ as well? Socrates’ interest in Gorgias suggests that he, too, was concerned about his relation to the city. The concerns of Plato and the concerns of Socrates undoubtedly overlap. And yet the death of Socrates must have meant something different for Plato than it did for Socrates. That difference is suggested by the very fact that Plato, in writing the Gorgias, depicts Socrates in a state of adversity. It is essential to Plato’s intentions that Polus laughs at, and Callicles gets angry with, Socrates.¹

Although we shall argue that the remainder of the Gorgias unfolds in relation to tensions fundamental to the opening conversation, for the foregoing reasons there is at least one crucial respect in which the later discussions are broader in scope. For we are no longer concerned only with the power of persuasion wielded by rhetoricians and political men, but the persuasive power of the philosopher Socrates. Gorgias’ bold proposals give way to those of Socrates, which are certainly not less bold. The introduction of “dialectically” purified conceptions of justice will lead to the intensification of those tensions that were shown to define the opening conversation. Socrates’ incredible claims, and the reluctance of Polus and Callicles to accept them, will bring justice, power and knowledge into heightened opposition. The dialogue with Polus will culminate in a vision of rhetoric that reflects the highest ambitions of political authority and justice thereafter. From Polus’ conventional and contradictory opinions about justice, Socrates will glean the notion of a perfectly just art of rhetoric. That notion will be met with considerable intransigence. That dialectic might render the opinions of the city non-contradictory does not mean that the products of dialectic could ever become first for the city. The openness of the city to dialectic does not therefore entail the traction of dialectic. Provisionally, as the power of persuasion becomes increasingly more dubious, the power of the regime over the souls of

¹ To what extent could the same intention be ascribed to Socrates? The answer to that question is not obvious. An enigma at the core of the Platonic and Xenophontic Socrates is the harm he brought knowingly upon himself and the means of averting harm he neglected to employ. Cf. Apology, 17a-18a, 20e, 28a-30d, 33d-39b; Crito, 43b-46a, 54d-e; Xenophon, Apology of Socrates to the Jury, 1-9, 22-23, 27-28, 32; Memorabilia, IV.5-10.
Socrates’ interlocutors comes increasingly into focus. Nevertheless, or precisely for that reason, although Polus and Callicles are outspokenly attracted to power and dominion, and claim to be proponents of injustice, they will prove less threatening to justice and democracy than first meets the eye. Their conventional aspirations, fears and longings reveal a profound psychology of political authority that will in due time become the focus of this study. The regime circumscribes not only persuasion in defense of justice, but also the will to reject justice and convention.

The relation of Polus and Callicles to philosophy and the city can be taken to exhibit the three-fold incommensurability of power, wisdom and justice. In the preceding, Gorgias could only bring rhetoric into harmony with justice at the expense of its power to do injustice. That could only be achieved in a way that proved completely disharmonious with ordinary opinion and, as we shall see in a moment, the opinions of Polus. Throughout Socrates’ conversation with Polus arguments straying from the compass of ordinary opinion trigger reluctance and opposition, while arguments more within that compass yield assent. As Gorgian rhetoric is constrained by the crowd, the power of Socratic persuasion and cross-examination is revealed by the incredulity of Polus and Callicles. The relation between that which Polus can and cannot accept is the key to the entire discussion. As for Socrates’ conversation with Polus as a whole, it reveals that justice is powerless when pure and impure when powerful. The authoritative opinions about justice, through which the regime exercises its far-reaching influence, are necessarily less pure and more powerful than the more consistent and edifying opinions about justice arrived at on the basis of Socrates’ efforts to render them consistent. The opinions and desires that constitute the regime are, as we shall see, fundamentally contradictory or characterized by heterogeneity. In relation to that fact, the philosophical understanding of justice, or at least the philosophical pursuit of a selfsame or non-contradictory account of
justice, is necessarily circumscribed as to its influence. Thus the ordinary or pre-theoretical understanding of justice, despite not being the self-aware understanding of justice, is the politically decisive understanding of justice. Let that stand as the thesis for the interpretation of Socrates’ conversation with Polus to follow.

II. The Determination of Socrates’ Conversation with Polus by Socrates’ Conversation with Gorgias

There is overwhelming evidence to support the view that Socrates’ conversation with Polus is determined to a great extent by the conversation with Gorgias that precedes it. In the present section that evidence will be catalogued under three headings – dramatic, mimetic and matters pertaining to the presuppositions of the argument. We shall do so in part of a broader effort to defend the claim, advanced in the conclusion to Part 2.A, that the conversation with Gorgias is the key to those that follow. The implications will become clearer as we proceed.

(1) In terms of dramatic evidence, let us recall where we left off. Gorgias’ claims regarding the power of rhetoric (which called into question the justice of rhetoric) forced him to combine the power of rhetoric with justice and the teaching of justice (which obfuscated the question concerning knowledge of justice on the part of the teacher, and receptiveness to justice on the part of the student). 2 According to Socrates, the argument leaves much to be desired. A great deal remains to be discussed. 3 Although Socrates proposes to continue conversing with Gorgias, the conversation that might have taken place is replaced by one with Polus. 4 Polus cuts into the discussion “spluttering with indignation and anacolutha.” 5 He interrupts the progress of

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2 The last question is implied by Socrates at 459e, but never taken up. According to Bruell that question is one of the overriding themes of the Alcibiades I and Alcibiades II. Cf. Christopher Bruell, On the Socratic Education (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 19-48.
3 Gorgias, 460e-461b.
4 Plochmann and Robinson observe that Socrates, evidently, expects to hear an answer from Gorgias when Polus breaks overbearingly into the discussion. A Friendly Companion to Plato’s Gorgias, 54.
5 The quote is from Paul Shorey, quoted by Dodds in Gorgias, 221; Cf. Friedlander, Plato, V.II, 251.
the conversation with Gorgias, which is not to say the progress of Plato’s dialogue. The progress of Plato is not necessarily the progress of Socrates.

The continued participation of Gorgias in the dialogue testifies, nevertheless, to its ongoing relevance to the concerns that animate the beginning of the *Gorgias*. Moreover, Socrates’ apparently greater willingness on the present occasion to converse with Polus suggests that the disturbance is at least not entirely ungermane to his interests. Indeed, there is reason to believe that Polus’ break into the conversation is revealing in such ways that cannot fail to be of interest to Gorgias and Socrates alike. For, now that Gorgias has been outdone by Socrates, Polus is angry. He objects to the injustice of Socrates’ manipulation of Gorgias’ rhetorical situation and shame. Polus’ anger with Socrates and protectiveness over Gorgias betrays a commitment to the just use of rhetoric in the very act of denying rhetoric’s justice. He morally objects to Socrates’ rhetoric of justice. Thus Socrates’ response appeals to Polus’ “nobility [*kalliste*]” and “justice [dikaios],” and associates his objections with filial piety. Although Polus will deny the justice of rhetoric, he will fall shamefully, or so it appears, for the rhetoric of justice. Polus’ attachment to justice limits not only the power of persuasion, but also the power

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6 Friedlander writes as follows: “that Gorgias is drawn anew into the discussion is not only a device to show, all the more insistently, how helpless Polus is. It is also a structural symbol indicating that the level of the first conversation here penetrates into the second stage.” He does not explain why Gorgias was “drawn into the discussion.” Friedlander, *Plato*, V.II, 253.

7 As Stauffer suggests in *The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias*, 36-43.

8 Tarnopolsky’s study – *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants* – is devoted singularly to this theme. We shall not focus on shame to the same extent that she does, though it will invariably come up. Although her emphasis is helpful, her focus on that theme is inordinate and greatly distorts the overall bearing of the *Gorgias* on the problems of political life. The view taken here is that shame is possibly no more important to the overall economy of the *Gorgias* than, say, anger, fear, justice, punishment, knowledge, technique, moderation, desire, pleasure, *et cetera*. It is certainly subordinate to the dialogues concern with rhetoric and the power of persuasion.

9 Not only does he doubt Socrates’ claim, but he doubts that Socrates believes it himself. Evidencing some familiarity with Socrates’ character, he calls our attention to Socrates’ “very rude [polle agroike]” behavior, which is said to stem from his being fond of tripping up those who converse with him. The Socrates of the *Gorgias* is unusually rude.

10 *Gorgias*, 461c-d.
of Polus to live up to the tyrannical ambitions he espouses. The power of persuasion is both attenuated and sustained by the desire for justice.\textsuperscript{11}

Thus Gorgias might have something to learn from Socrates’ conversations with Polus and Callicles. Gorgias has been made aware that he does not take the desire for justice seriously enough. No one in his wits, says Polus, would publicly deny knowledge of justice and the ability to impart that knowledge. The casual character of Gorgias’ admissions and concessions regarding justice derive from a misunderstanding. The necessity of appealing to justice should not be Gorgias’ last thought, but his first. Without a deeper appreciation of the desire for justice in the human soul, and the character of ordinary opinions about justice, rhetoric will falter in its efforts to craft assent and obedience regarding the just and unjust things. Through the opinions and objections that Socrates elicits from Polus and Callicles, Plato will lay bare the speech defying power of the desire for justice, which is not to say the power of justice simply. Gorgias cannot not fail to find that interesting, as his active participation in the conversations with Polus and Callicles both indicate. That is the basis for interpretations of the \textit{Gorgias} that emphasize a “behind the scenes” conversation with Gorgias that extends throughout the remainder of the dialogue.\textsuperscript{12}

(2) Let us turn to the \textit{mimetic} evidence in support of the view that the conversation with Polus continues to be determined by the circumstances of the opening conversation. The conversation with Polus unfolds, as it were, on the model of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias. Polus’ break into the conversation recalls his earlier intervention, when he came to the defense of Gorgias and embellished or beautified rhetoric toward that end. As we have already noted, as Gorgias seems to have gotten into hot water with the crowd, Socrates gets into hot


water with Polus.\textsuperscript{13} Polus’ behavior mimics his earlier participation in the dialogue, as Socrates’
treatment of him also recalls. \textit{There} Polus sought to take over the discussion on the basis of
Gorgias’ fatigue and old age; \textit{here}, Socrates appeals to the benefaction of the young to the old
and Polus’ youthful swiftness if not impatience.\textsuperscript{14} \textit{There} Socrates had chastised Polus for his
dialectical insufficiency; \textit{here} Socrates schools Polus on questioning and answering.\textsuperscript{15} \textit{There}
Polus evidenced indifference to the truth; \textit{here} he identifies gratification with the fine [\textit{kalon}]
and is chided for doing so.

As the beginning of Socrates’ conversation with Polus recalls the prologue, so does the
order of the themes discussed thereafter mirror the conversation with Gorgias. Once Polus
takes over the conversation as Socrates’ main interlocutor, the dialogue returns to rhetoric’s
status as an art, and therefore to the \textit{techne} analogy. Similarly, after responding to Polus’
(Socratic) question “what is rhetoric?” by denying its status as a \textit{techne}, Socrates has recourse to
Polus’ prior emphasis on experience.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, in speaking to Polus, who is eager to please and
embellish, but poor at defining, rhetoric will be stripped of its technical status (since unable to
give a precise account), and identified with gratification and beautification. The conversation
shifts thereafter, as it had before, from the \textit{techne} analogy to the power of rhetoricians, and
culminates in the notion of a perfectly just art of rhetoric. Socrates will therefore seek to
persuade Polus of a version of the same thesis that concluded the conversation with Gorgias,
namely, that the only useful rhetoric is a form of rhetoric purely ministerial to justice, taken as
the highest good. The implausibility of Socrates’ argument will then solicit the intervention of
Callicles (as Polus was provoked to intervene before him). Finally, at the end of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] \textit{Gorgias}, 463e.
\item[15] \textit{Gorgias}, 462c, 463d, 466a, 466c.
\item[16] \textit{Gorgias}, 462c.
\end{footnotes}
conversation, the reintroduction of Chaerephon and Callicles marks a second new beginning to
the dialogue. Thus the conversation with Polus mimics that with Gorgias.

(3) Finally, we turn to consider how the conversation is conducted on the same terms as
the preceding one, and on the basis of premises that have been carried over from it or remain
unexamined. That is suggested at first by Socrates, who offers Polus (twice) the opportunity to
retract whatever he wishes from the previous speeches, which may not have been agreed to
“finely” [kalos]. Perhaps a great deal has been agreed to falsely. But heedless of Socrates’ offer,
Polus agrees to adopt micrology (previously imposed on Gorgias). He also affirms that he knows
all that Gorgias knows, and claims the same ability to answer any question asked of him.¹⁷ We
have no reason to expect that he will fare better than his teacher. Let us therefore consider how
the conversation “takes off.”

(i) Polus objects to being denied the freedom to speak at length. He recalls Gorgias’
objection that some matters cannot be dealt with in brief speech. Both objections are reasonable,
especially given Socrates’ assertion but a moment ago that the problems raised cannot be taken
up in short conversation [oligos sunousia].¹⁸ To say nothing of the fact that Socrates runs rough
shod over that which he demands of others, a lesson one might readily draw from the
conversation with Gorgias is precisely not to adopt brief speech.¹⁹ An obvious consequence of
short speech was its lack of nuance. Gorgias’ responses prior to flouting micrology were all too
general or too particular. As for Socrates’ questions, they were all too leading on account of
their piecemeal character.²⁰ Only when Gorgias spoke at length did the “whole” nature of

¹⁷ Gorgias, 461d-462a.
¹⁸ Gorgias, 461b.
¹⁹ In the other dialogue on rhetoric, the Phaedrus, Socrates is nothing if not grandiloquent.
²⁰ Socrates, speaking of the “Eleatic Palamades” (thought to be Zeno) writes the following: “passing over by little
steps you will go toward the opposite without being noticed more than by big steps.” Aristotle is said to have called
Zeno the inventor of “dialectic,” something he attributes also to Socrates. Is there not something that reminds us
Socrates’ dialectic in the Gorgias in Socrates’ characterization of Zeno in the Phaedrus? Socrates and Zeno each
defy the standards of common sense through dialectic and its “little steps.” It may be added that Zeno is the Eleatic
Palamades not only because he was an innovator and perhaps wise, but also because he died at the hands of a tyrant.
rhetoric (to use Gorgias’ words) come into focus and less abstractly. Short speech has
demonstrably simplified the complex by reducing the whole of rhetoric to partial aspects of
rhetoric. The demand for brevity and precision may be at odds with the complexity of rhetoric,
and better fitted to the mathematical things than the human ones.\textsuperscript{21} Toward the end of the
conversation, Socrates’ many leading questions culminate in a grand syllogism of syllogisms,
the premises and possible unity of which are not always examined.

(ii) Polus agrees at the very outset of his attempt to cross-examine Socrates, to consider
rhetoric by means of the \textit{techne} analogy. Almost the entirety of the previous conversation was
premised on the suitability of that analogy.\textsuperscript{22} Socrates, however, will go on to retract that very
premise – which he is responsible for having introduced in the very first place. Socrates’
nonchalant denial that rhetoric is a \textit{techne} at this stage of the argument suggests that Polus is
dead right in calling his sincerity into question.\textsuperscript{23} Gorgias might have done well to deny the
adequacy of the \textit{techne} analogy or qualified its application to the crafting of persuasion. The
foregoing sanctions little confidence in the view that what follows consists in a straightforward
“phenomenology” of art or rhetoric.\textsuperscript{24}

(iii) Although Polus objects to the assimilation of rhetoric and justice, the grounds for
that assimilation are left mostly unexamined. The \textit{elenchus}, in which rhetoric is presented as
incapable of doing injustice, rests on the assumption that rhetoricians know justice. Socrates has
allowed the question concerning knowledge of justice to slip into background of the discussion.
If not the power of rhetoric (for it is admitted that teachers may be unsuccessful in teaching

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. \textit{Gorgias}, 465b-465c; \textit{Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics}, 1094b. See also Benardete, \textit{The Rhetoric of Morality

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Gorgias}, 462a-462c.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Gorgias}, 462b. Cf. 447c.

\textsuperscript{24} Pace Roochnik, \textit{Of Art and Wisdom}, 21.
justice), at the very least Gorgias’ knowledge of justice is assumed at the level of the argument. In fact, the meaning or nature of justice, as we have had occasion to note before, will never be programatically raised in the Gorgias.

It is characteristic of the Gorgias that the discussions about justice featured therein do not meet the standards imposed by Socrates on others, or the demand that terms be defined prior to taking up further questions related to them. The Gorgias takes up the goodness of justice without ever questioning the meaning of justice. In other circumstances, but for similar reasons, Socrates calls into doubt his entire conversation with Meno. Socrates’ procedure is less than fully dialectical, but also more than merely rhetorical. It does not get to the bottom of its own premises, and in large part appeals to the opinions taken for granted by his interlocutors. In these ways, the conversation about justice will be shown to proceed within the ambit of ordinary opinions about justice, however much it may lurch out of them.

(iv) Lastly, as Socrates reminds us before Polus breaks into the discussion, rhetoric remains inadequately defined. Can Polus be expected to clarify the power and nature of rhetoric beyond what was achieved in conversation with Gorgias?

Let us conclude this section by offering a provisional answer to the question just raised. Throughout his participation in the dialogue, Polus tends to make explicit aspects of rhetoric neglected by the argument thus far or left merely implicit in the beginning of the dialogue. As we have anticipated, he points out, more or less astutely, that the major contradiction elicited from Gorgias was brought about through the manipulation of shame.

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25 Gorgias, 462c-d, 463b-c, 466a-b; Cf. Irwin, 112-113, 132, 167; McCoy, Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists, 87.
26 Meno, 100b.
27 We shall nevertheless continue to refer to Socrates’ “dialectic” in the Gorgias. It should be understood, in these cases, that the “hard” interpretation of dialectic demanded by Socrates – which, to say nothing of other scruples, would have to proceed at every stage on the basis of a prior effort to clearly define its terms – is not intended.
28 Gorgias, 460a.
admissions to shame, he expresses a “textbook” example of “what rhetoricians know.” Callicles, who observes the conversation silently in the background, will follow him in claiming to know the psychological forces that drive it. Would he have been able to do so without the precedent established by Polus? Without Polus' participation in the dialogue it would go unmentioned that rhetoric works on the passions to bring about ends sought by the speaker. Similarly, we have already noted Polus’ proclivity toward embellishment and his employment of “Gorgianic” sentence structure and verbiage. In conversation with Socrates, Polus will employ several other tricks from the rhetorician’s handbook that would go otherwise unmentioned: appealing to witnesses and consensus, setting up “bogeymen,” ridicule, among others. Indeed, as we learn, Polus has written a treatise on rhetoric, and Socrates’ definition of rhetoric draws inspiration from a claim Polus is alleged to have made therein. He has made a doctrine of persuasion explicit for public consumption. The reader is not made privy to Gorgias’ epidemic, but only to Polus’ techniques. As the interlocutor who puts his rhetorical training most on display, he is perhaps the “flesh and blood” rhetorician of the Gorgias. As Gorgias pupil, he also exhibits the consequences of an education with Gorgias, and perhaps a rhetorical education gone wrong.

Polus also deepens our understanding of the standards that rhetoric would have to meet in order for it to be worthy of praise. At the conclusion of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias, the power and justice of rhetoric come into question. For Gorgias to defend himself he would

30 Gorgias, 482c-483c.
31 A claim Polus, as Dodds notes, does not necessarily recognize as his own. The ambiguity lies in that Socrates’ remarks can be taken to indicate either that for Polus rhetoric is a “matter [he] claims to have made an art of in his treatise” or “a matter which he claims in his treatise makes art.” While the former is more straightforward, the latter is the traditional interpretation. There is no reason to deny that Plato might have intended this ambiguity, but let us note, with Dodds, that it may be impossible for us to be certain. Dodds, Gorgias, 223.
32 Gorgias, 462b-c, 465d.
33 Friedländer writes: “The portrait of oratory presented by Gorgias was inconsistent… this inconsistency was due to an adherence to traditional commitments, which interfered with a pure statement of the view both in life and in thought. Polos, who is a younger man and does not feel bound by the traditional ties of the older generation, now proposes a more radical formulation. By giving up the claim that oratory needs knowledge of right and wrong, Polus puts the emphasis all the more strongly upon the moral problem at stake in the conversation.” Modifying Friedländer’s presentation, we might insist that Polus is also and especially less careful than Gorgias. Friedlander, Plato, V.II, 251.
have to present himself as all powerful and all just. In other words, he would have to exaggerate or embellish the nobility and goodness of rhetoric, as Polus did at the very beginning of the dialogue. Polus is concerned, perhaps above all, to attain Socrates’ agreement that rhetoric is fine or beautiful. Socrates’ conversation with Polus will culminate in a beautification of rhetoric that, for the first time in the dialogue, renders rhetoric a defensible enterprise. He therefore exhibits what rhetoric would have to be in order for it to be deemed a noble and worthy pursuit, a desire that Polus and Gorgias each exhibit in their own way.

We have shown that the conversation with Gorgias extends deep into the conversation with Polus. We turn now to Socrates famous “definition” of rhetoric, which is no exception.

**III. The Practical-Experiential Basis of Socrates’ “Definition” of Rhetoric**

Socrates reference to Polus’ treatise is intended to reorient the discussion around “experience,” apparently a key theme in Polus’ “doctrine.” Earlier, Polus associated rhetoric with the greatest experiences, but left those experiences vague. Socrates never denied the empirical origin and activity of rhetoric, a consideration more or less suppressed by the argument until now. The empirical aspect of rhetoric is, however, only reintroduced to serve in the overall demotion of rhetoric. Although the earlier argument that followed the *techne* analogy focused on speech, in the present context we are supplied with a “definition” of rhetoric that leaves speech almost altogether behind. In Socrates’ schema there is scarcely any mention of speech or persuasion. Besides what is implied by the word *rhetor*, the denial that rhetoric can *account* for itself and reflexive utterances about his own *argument*, Socrates assiduously avoids the language of language. He refers instead to matters, businesses, pursuits and experiences. In fact, if one theme does not quite carry over from the preceding conversation, that theme is “speech.” The silence on speech corresponds to the earlier silence on experience. We shall have to ask: “why?”
If the *techne* analogy served earlier to lift rhetoric out of its practical situation, on the present occasion rhetoric is collapsed altogether back into “experience,” and the sundry experience of rhetoricians in the city in particular. We shall argue that the emphasis on experience cannot be understood outside of the practical situation of rhetoric in the city, as exemplified by the silencing of Gorgias in conversation with Socrates before the crowd. Gorgias is indeed not far from Socrates’ mind. In comparison to his rude handling of Polus and later Callicles, he “shrinks from speaking” lest Gorgias be insulted.\(^{34}\) Socrates’ “definition” of rhetoric may prove insulting not only because it demeans rhetoric, but because it reproduces all too playfully what Gorgias has just experienced according to the speech of Polus. We therefore proceed to examine Socrates’ schema, before exhibiting its connection to the experience of rhetoric in the city as dramatized by the beginning of the *Gorgias*.\(^{35}\)

It is necessary to face head on that Socrates’ procedure is anything but straightforward. Rhetoric seems “to be a certain pursuit [*ti epideuma*] which is not artful but of a soul skilled at guessing [*stochastikes*],\(^{36}\) courageous [*andreias*]\(^{37}\) and, according to nature terribly clever at

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\(^{34}\) *Gorgias*, 462e.

\(^{35}\) Robinson and Plochmann call Socrates’ “definition” of rhetoric from 461b-466a the “divided oblong,” being of the view that Plato expects us to chart out Socrates’ schema much in the manner of the “divided line” in the *Republic*. They tend to argue that the most important aspects of the *Gorgias* can be derived from it, or amount to variations of what is set forth in it. In doing so, they overlook many problems in the presentation of rhetoric (that we shall take up below). They greatly exaggerate the reach of “the divided oblong,” and at the risk of oversimplifying other aspects of the dialogue that are not so readily fitted into it. We doubt especially that the beginning of the *Gorgias* is a mere “antecedent” to the “divided oblong’s” “main show.” Socrates’ presentation of rhetoric is sooner traced back to the conversation with Gorgias than the other way around. *A Friendly Companion to Plato’s Gorgias*, 53-72, 296-317.

\(^{36}\) The emphasis on guesswork is not altogether unusual. The fifth century featured a sustained debate on the arts in which a major point of contention was whether “pursuits” less precise, exact and demonstrable could qualify as *technai*. The *Gorgias* may even parody such debates. It is worth mentioning in this connection that some doubted that the Platonic *techne* par-excellence, medicine, deserved to be called a *techne*. Symptomatology, like rhetoric, is an inexact science. Diagnoses and the outcomes of curative measures, especially back then, were less than certain. Some argued that *stochastic* pursuits capable of skillfully navigating the uncertain deserved to be called *technai*. We might suspect, for related reasons, that Socrates’ schema and employment of the *techne* analogy is forced. In the *Philebus*, medicine is said to be imprecise, but that does not prevent it from being considered a *techne*. In the *Statesman*, sophist is said to be a *techne*. As we shall stress below, moreover, *Kolakeutike* seems to understand the causes of pleasure and pain. One is tempted to translate it as the art of flattery. *Philebus*, 56a-56b; *Sophist*, 221c-226a; Nichols, *Gorgias*, 47 n.43-44. See Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom*, 42-88.

\(^{37}\) One could very well ask, following Socrates’ example, whether he considers courage shameful, wondering how rhetoric could be both noble and not-noble at the same time. To be sure, the experience of Gorgias before the crowd
dealing with human beings [phusei deines prosomilein tois anthropois] 38; and I call its chief point flattery [kolakeian].” As a part of that pursuit whose point is flattery, rhetoric is accompanied by cookery, cosmetics and sophistry. Although all three appear to be arts, they are distinguished rather by experience in addition to knack or routine. 39 Polus is told subsequently that Socrates means to say that rhetoric is an “image” or “phantom” of a branch of politics. Were that not bad enough, having been asked for a second time whether rhetoric is fine or shameful, Socrates answers at last by identifying the shameful with the bad, thus bringing to mind his famous identification of the noble and the good. 40 Is there any wonder that Polus and Gorgias (who swears to the God in frustration) have trouble following him?

Socrates chides Polus twice more for asking if rhetoric is fine before knowing what rhetoric is, or what it means to speak of rhetoric as a branch of a greater whole called flattery. To proceed in such a way, says Socrates, is not only un-dialectical but also “unjust.” 41 But is Socrates’ own procedure all that dialectical or just, let alone well suited to reaching an understanding with Polus? Not only is Socrates’ procedure less than congenial to reaching common ground, he is dubiously just in his rough-handling of Polus. Despite his insistence on brief speech and definition, Socrates speaks at length and introduces a flurry of concepts without further clarification: the part and the whole, the image and the original, the good and the bad, the fine and the shameful. Whatever might be said of Socrates’ understanding of the latter two pairs,

38 As Isocrates emphasizes, the teacher of rhetoric cannot be expected to succeed, or at least not fully, if his students do no possess the right nature. Prolonged exposure and experience may be in order, and some might prove altogether unfit for learning. The emphasis on guesswork and nature both serve to correct the over-estimation of the power of persuasion that the dialogue renders thematic. What is demoted to the uncertain realm of guess work, however capably handled, is not omnipotent. What requires the right nature cannot be imparted to those who lack it. For related reasons, it is to be doubted that rhetoric could be taught “in all places.” Cf. Isocrates, Against the Sophists, 14-19; Xenophon, The Education of Cyrus, 3.3.50-55.


40 Gorgias, 463d-e.

41 Gorgias, 463c.
the former two are among the most torturous concepts in Platonic “first philosophy.”
Understandably, Gorgias would like to know what in the world Socrates means “in saying that
rhetoric is an image [or phantom] of a part of politics.”42 Without extending a ladder to his
interlocutors, Socrates departs from the ordinary understanding of things. Again, we doubt the
dialectical “rigor” of Socrates’ procedure. For much less, Polus, who has been scolded thrice for
asking about the beauty or nobility of rhetoric (which were deemed extraneous to the meaning
of rhetoric), was said to have been merely “rhetorical.” Mustn’t the same be said of Socrates?
He is certainly concerned to show that rhetoric is ugly and shameful and justice good.43

Promising to clarify rhetoric without scruples for Gorgias, Socrates exhorts Polus to
refute him should he be mistaken. What follows is directed to Gorgias and Polus alike, though
perhaps in different ways. Socrates proceeds as follows. (i) He elicits from Gorgias the
distinction between body and soul; (ii) that there is a good condition for each; and, (iii)
conditions (of body and soul) that may seem to be good without being good.44 Thereafter, two
businesses (pragmatoi) are distinguished45 from two arts, one nameless and dealing with the
body, one named politics dealing with the soul.46 The two components of the art that services the
body correspond to those of politics. The legislative art is comparable to gymnastic, and justice
to medicine. Ever so vaguely, the pairs are said to be similar to and different from their
counterparts.47 The relation of justice to medicine in the schema suggests that their concerns
somehow overlap. Is the same true of the opposition of techne to mere practice?

42 Gorgias, 463e.
44 Gorgias, 464a-b.
45 The division and collection of arts carried out in the Gorgias is often taken to anticipate the diacritical procedure
of the Sophist and Statesmen. The same may be said of the emphasis on the image and the original. The Gorgias is
therefore taken by some to represent a pivotal stage in Plato’s methodological “development.” Gorgias, 464b-466a;
Cf. Phaedrus, 265e; Sophist, 218ff; Statesman, 258bff. See also Dodds, Gorgias, 226-227; Irwin, Gorgias, 133.
46 Gorgias, 464b-c.
47 Gorgias, 464c.
To define as Socrates defines is to implicate in the defined that which it is defined against. As cosmetic is to gymnastic, so is cookery to medicine; or rather thus: as cosmetic is to gymnastic, so is sophistry to the legislative art; and as cookery is to medicine, so is rhetoric to justice.” To what extent is this procedure useful to the clarification of rhetoric? A great deal is jumbled together. To define by analogy, without prior definition, leaves vague that which is to be defined. Analogy, so wielded, must derive its contents from ordinary opinion, or what is already understood. The content of rhetoric is therefore supplied only on the basis of what is already understood or taken for granted with respect to the analogous terms. Similarly, the meaning of justice is only elucidated in terms of what can be gleaned from what is already understood about medicine. That justice is comparable to medicine implies, for instance, that it serves to rectify an imperfect condition. Thus Socrates proceeds to distinguish the two arts from the two businesses on the basis of their “therapeutic” orientation to what is “best” as opposed to seemingly good. Although only the technician, as distinct from the mere “practitioner,” would know for certain what is best, the competence of cooks and cosmeticians to please and endear is not denied. The competence of mere practice, its capacity to bring about the circumstances aimed at, is left entirely intact. That will prove decisive for the ensuing conversation about power.

Socrates’ schema proceeds in a manner that recalls Gorgias’ incapacity or unwillingness to give an account of rhetoric’s subject matter and Polus’ emphasis on the gratification of his audience. It does not define its terms. It recalls the previously stated orientation of rhetoric toward mere belief or non-knowledge. For it depends entirely on the pre-existing agreement of the interlocutor and his acceptance of the procedure. Acceptance of the procedure, moreover, entails curious results. For is it possible to speak of legislation as comparable to gymnastic

49 Gorgias, 465c
without associating legislation somehow with the body? Is it reasonable to claim that politics has nothing to do with the body? In the Republic, the “true city” might as well be the city exclusively concerned with the body. And does politics have a monopoly on the soul? Tellingly, the division of arts from practices rules out the possibility, of some fundamental importance to Socratic philosophy, that what is best for the soul might also be the most pleasant. Socrates’ effort to put rhetoric in its place threatens to obscure a great deal.

To make better sense of Socrates’ schema, let us turn to “Flattery.” Here too Socrates’ procedure is curious. In quasi-mythical form, Flattery is personified. Having perceived (not by knowing but by guessing) that the arts aim for the best, Flattery has divided herself into four, slipped under each of the genuine four. Giving no heed to the best, she “hunts after folly with what is ever most pleasant.” Flattery deceives “so as to seem to be worth very much.” Cookery pretends to “know the best foods for the body.” Cosmetic, lying beneath gymnastic, is “evildoing, deceitful, ignoble and unfree, deceiving with shapes, colors, smoothness, and garments, so as to make them, as they take upon themselves, an alien beauty, and neglect their own beauty that comes through gymnastic.” To associate rhetoric with flattery in these terms would surely be insulting to those who take pride in it. But does it stand to reason? There is no reason to assume that cooks present themselves as doctors, let alone cosmeticians as gymnasts. Nor, again, is there any reason to deny them the ability to provide a reasoned account for what they do. Here too Socrates shoehorns the arts and practices into a schema defined by rhetoric’s orientation to opinion and gratification, as exemplified by Gorgias and Polus.

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50 Republic, 372e.
51 Symposium, 210a-212a.
52 Gorgias, 475a.
53 Like a personified abstraction in Hesiod or Anaxagoras, or perhaps like a phantom (eidolon) in Homer or Aeschylus. We are reminded, perhaps, of Socrates’ strange question at the beginning of the dialogue: “who is Gorgias?” Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 228.
54 Gorgias, 464c-d.
55 Gorgias, 465b-c.
56 We might recall that butchery is a paradigm for dialectic in the Phaedrus, 265e-266a.
The personification of flattery indicates the *ad hominem* character of the schema. The definition of rhetoric is so perfectly fitted to his interlocutors that its sufficiency or comprehensiveness must be called accordingly into question.\(^{57}\) Does Socrates, in defining rhetoric, define Gorgias and Polus instead? We have already seen Gorgias – having perceived that others aim for the just, but without knowing the just – “slip” deceptively under the cover of justice and contrive to appear of great worth. Like the cook, he has claimed to be more persuasive than his doctor-brother. Moreover, turning to address Polus, Socrates calls flattery *shameful* because it “guesses” at the best without caring to know the best. We are reminded of Polus’ concern for the nobility or beauty of rhetoric. Perhaps he is the “cosmetician” of the *Gorgias*. More to the point, Socrates’ schema combines the behavior of Gorgias and Polus’ judgment of that behavior. Thus Socrates’ schema follows the precedent set by Polus’ disrobing of Gorgias. Did Socrates’ therefore have good reason to worry about insulting Gorgias? Let us return on the basis of the foregoing to elaborate the connection that obtains between Socrates’ schema and Gorgias’ experience in Athens.

The experience of rhetoric in relation to the city is certainly demeaning. If rhetoric might be considered all powerful when viewed exclusively in terms of speech, on the basis of experience it proves comparably weaker. The weakness of speech in relation to its practical horizon is the shameful secret of rhetoric, the ground of Socrates’ famous association of rhetoric with pandering. The rhetorician must pander to the city because the desires and opinions of the city overpower his effort to instill obedience. Parallel and related to the gradual return from speech to deeds, is Socrates’ firm and uncompromising association of rhetoric with the merely

\(^{57}\) The same is suggested by the dialogue’s eventual focus on forensic rhetoric and punishment, which may each be related back to what we have called the practical circumstances of persuasion. Tarnopolsky disputes the claim (made in Benardete and Stauffer) that Socrates’ definition of rhetoric is *ad hominem* and deficient for related reasons. She does not, however, face up to the evidence supporting that claim. Cf. Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*, 32-36; Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias*, 43-50; Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 46-47.
bodily. We have noted the connection between the bodily and the protective in the first installment of the *techne* analogy. Rhetoric, without being cookery, is said to take part in the same pursuit as cookery.\(^{58}\) It conducts its activity somehow with a view to the soul, but it does not set soul over the body. It therefore takes its bearings primarily from the body. Socrates claims that rhetoric is a “certain experience… of the production of a certain grace and pleasure.”\(^{59}\) Rhetoric imitates the soul’s concern for justice, but panders to the desires of the body, or fails to set soul over body. The body is that with respect to which “mere” speakers are vulnerable, but is also that which rhetoricians aim to gratify. That the rhetorician must gratify is, however, a sign of his fundamental deficiency in power, and therefore ignobility. The vulnerability of rhetoric requires the gratification of those who threaten bodily harm. Thus rhetoric gratifies those who do not set the soul over the body and in order to defend the body.

To say that gratification originates with a want of power is not yet to say that gratification cannot produce power. Considerations of a similarly “defensive” nature will be shown to underpin Polus’ praise of rhetoric, which derives from the power it is taken to promise. It is perfectly understandable that Polus wishes to know, in the present context, whether rhetoric is “fine.” That gratification may be a source of influence over others and, to that extent, protective as well as powerful, is never denied and later affirmed in the *Gorgias*. The conversation with Callicles will reveal that only too clearly. For now, Socrates does not deny power to the cook. “If the cook and the doctor had to contest among children or among men as thoughtless as children which of the two, the doctor or the cook, has understanding about useful and bad foods, the doctor would die of hunger.”\(^{60}\) In fact, Socrates’ upcoming denial that

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59 *Gorgias*, 462a.
60 The cook and doctor are contending for their own sustenance. We are reminded of the money-makers art (*chrematistike*) in the *Republic*, which Socrates separates from other arts because it is directed toward the benefit of the practitioner. Here the craftsmen are self-interested in the absurd sense of contending for more of that which they craft. This oddity anticipates Socrates’ later (and highly amusing question) to Callicles, who is asked if the
rhetoric is powerful will base itself on reasons quite extraneous to power ordinarily understood. He will deny the power of rhetoric while leaving the ordinary understanding of the phenomena, that rhetorical prowess can be a source of power, undisturbed. In such terms the rift that separates Callicles from Socrates already opens up between Socrates and Polus.

The way has been prepared for us to understand the conversation’s transition to the subject of power, which we proceed to take up in the next section. Before continuing, however, it is worth remarking on Socrates’ reference to Anaxagoras on the relation of body to soul, and all the more so because it links up to our consideration of “Hegel and the Greeks.” Although sophistry and rhetoric are said to be distinguished “according to nature,” since they are closely related they are jumbled together, having no knowledge what to make of themselves, or human beings in general. Rhetoric and sophistry blur into each other. They do so because of their orientation to the body. Only the soul distinguishes. Were the soul not set over the body, there follows the Platonic equivalent of the “night in which all cows are black.” But could there not be a form of rhetoric that sets the soul over the body, and serves the ends of art or dialectic? That question implies a thesis set forth in the Phaedrus. It is commonly taken to guide Socrates’ effort at an ostensibly “noble” or “true” “rhetoric” in the Gorgias.

We have already noticed that Socrates’ approach is neither altogether rhetorical nor altogether dialectical. Despite claiming to consider “not fine” the business that rhetoric

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shoemaker should possess the biggest and most shoes. At issue throughout the Gorgias is the self-interestedness of rhetoric and philosophy, particularly, but not exclusively, insofar as they might put themselves in danger. Cf. Gorgias, 464d, 490b-491a; Republic, 346b-347a.

61 Cf. Grote, Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 93, 96, 110; Irwin, Gorgias, 114, 131, 140, 230; Marina McCoy, Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists, 86, 92.

62 Gorgias, 465c; Cf. Phaedo 66d, 65de, 72b-d.

63 “For indeed if the soul were not set over the body, but the body were set over itself, and if cookery and medicine were not contemplated and distinguished by the soul, but the body itself decided, measuring by the gratifications of itself, the saying of Anaxagoras would be much to the point, Polus my friend – for you are experienced in these things – all matters would be mixed up together in the same place, with the things of medicine, health, and cookery indistinguishable.” Gorgias, 465d. Cf. Stauffer, The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias, 49.

64 Phaedrus, 259e ff.
participates in, Socrates claims non-knowledge regarding the sort of rhetoric that Gorgias
pursues, and therefore leaves open the possibility that his schema is not exhaustive. There might be another art of rhetoric besides that spoken of.\(^{65}\) Perhaps there might also be another politics, legislation, cookery, and so forth. At any rate, the other “true” rhetoric would employ the body to bring about the ends of the soul. In what follows Plato, through Socrates’ conversations with Polus and Callicles, will put to the test a form of rhetoric ministerial to justice, and perhaps also philosophy. It will be on the basis of an uncompromising focus on the soul, and subordination of body to soul, that Socrates will deny the power of rhetoric and, thereafter, rehabilitate rhetoric qua art therapeutic to the soul.

Setting aside Hegel’s opposition to nature, and assimilation of soul to “mere” nature, Plato’s “setting of soul over body” is the obvious ancestor to Hegel’s “spirit over nature.” Plato and Hegel agree in setting one over the other. There is every reason to believe that they agree that the intelligibility of the world depends on doing so, or that pleasure is an inadequate basis on which to understand the world. Socrates will, indeed, try to persuade Polus and Callicles to set the soul over the body, and to accept the consequences entailed by that relation. The following crucial difference, anticipated in Part 1, is, however gradually, becoming clear. The unfolding of the *Gorgias* indicates the unlikelihood and at any rate fragility of a common “spirit” in which soul is effectively set over body. The majority, it would seem, will all but certainly orient themselves in terms of the body, or understand themselves in such terms. Plato and Hegel agree in setting the higher over the lower. They disagree over the power of the higher over lower. The *Gorgias* will reveal the incapacity of rhetoric or dialectic to secure the primacy of the higher over the lower, or at least in the case of politics. The difference is exemplified in Socrates’ bewildering claim to practice “the true political art.” The true or reasonable political

\(^{65}\) Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias*, 44; Dodds, *Gorgias*, 224.
art is not the actual one. Socrates’ conversation with Polus will show why a dialectically purified understanding of justice could not easily take root in the everyday understanding of things.

**IV. Justice from the Standpoints of Wisdom and Power**

Socrates’ definition of rhetoric solicits a return to the subject of power. That subject will, in turn, bring the discussion back around to justice. We have already been provided with a first indication of the relation of power to justice, viz. that the political context of persuasion imposes the necessity of appealing to considerations of justice. Previously, the rhetoric of justice emerged in relation to the power of persuasion. It emerged, indeed, as a limit to the power of persuasion, which would not need to appeal to justice were it omnipotent. As we return to the power and justice of rhetoric, it is important to keep in mind that Plato’s interlocutors are not necessarily aware of that which Plato’s readers have been made aware of. As a basic principle of Platonic exegesis, the two may or may not coincide, and in ways that may be subject to change as the dialogue progresses. Although the reader’s understanding of the problems may have progressed, it does not follow that Polus operates with the same understanding of things.

That rhetoric must pander or flatter has come to sight as a deficiency in power, and amounts to a refutation of the claim that rhetoric is *all-powerful*. Nevertheless, that flattery and pandering can provide a means of realizing what *seems* good, has never been denied in the preceding. Polus is dimly aware of Gorgias’ situation *qua* shameful, but he has not connected the shamefulness of rhetoric back to the power of rhetoric. Although indignant at the demotion of rhetoric, he does not deign to take up Socrates’ presentation of rhetoric, and must be asked several times to refute it.\(^6^6\) In fact, he pays little attention to Socrates’ elaborate schema and must be reminded almost immediately of its contents. For Socrates’ emphasis on the priority of knowledge to opinion and soul to body has little traction with Polus. It is of little interest to

\(^{66}\) *Gorgias*, 461d-462a, 466e-467b, 468c. 470c.
Polus that rhetoric may be a part of such and such a whole, in relation to another whole that merits the name techne. He remains on the surface of things. Rather, he cleaves to the fact that rhetoric qua flattery can be a source of power in the ordinary sense, is esteemed in the city for that reason, and is therefore not simply lowly. Thus, he asks incredulously: “what do you mean not esteemed? Do they [rhetoricians] not have the greatest power in the cities?”

Socrates responds in the negative. If power is good for he who has it, then rhetoric is not powerful. Only goods higher than power make power desirable. By contrast, Polus appears to consider power simply and self-evidently good, a conviction that will not easily be shaken. The rift between Polus and Socrates will only widen as a result of their differing estimations of power or, more precisely, the differing standpoints from which they assess the worth of power.

Polus’ emphasis on power suggests two distortions to Gorgias’ teaching that may have accrued in transmission from master to pupil. First, Polus replaces the power of speech to yield power with power simply. He associates the power of rhetoricians with the power of tyrants. But it is obvious that tyrannical power derives not from persuasion but force. Polus takes up in earnest Gorgias’ praise of rhetoric qua power, but collapses the power of speech into brute power, and excludes rhetoric’s concern for justice. If justice emerged previously in relation to the limited power of persuasion, now it disappears appropriately alongside the need to persuade.

We have already had occasion to note that the conversation with Polus is relatively silent on the subject of “speech.” Provisionally, we suggest that this silence relates to the prominence now accorded to the subject of “power.” Polus’ interest in power engenders forgetfulness about speech. At the same time, Polus praises rhetoric, and therefore speech, for reasons related to power. Thus Polus’ desire for power, which draws him to rhetoric, causes him to forget the

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67 Gorgias, 466b.
69 Cf. McCoy, Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists, 94-100.
limits of speech to the point of identifying rhetorical power with tyrannical power. But what, then, is the origin of Polus’ desire for power? We will return to this question later.

For now, Socrates denies that rhetoric is powerful. He does so on the same basis that he previously denied rhetoric’s justice, namely on the basis of rhetoric’s non-knowledge of what is best. Thus “rhetors and tyrants have the smallest power in cities” because, although they do what seems best to them, they do not do what they wish.” Unless Polus can demonstrate that rhetors have wisdom and techne, their power is disadvantageous since not guided by what is truly in their interest. It is fitting to draw attention in this connection to the “refutative” character of Socrates’ rhetoric. If a proposition goes un-refuted by Socrates’ interlocutor, it does not follow that it is true. In order for that to follow, Polus would have to be the perfect interlocutor – but that has already been ruled out. In fact, Polus does not in the least care to refute the premises from which Socrates argues. Thus Socrates already has no choice but to attempt to produce a form of non-didactic persuasion regarding justice in the soul of Polus. The philosophical interpretation of power on the basis of knowledge versus opinion promises no hold on the soul of Polus, as his exasperation and disbelief at 467b-c testifies. For Polus understands power in the ordinary sense of a capacity to realize one’s projects in the city, independent of any further consideration of ends or their genuine goodness. The foregoing, in addition to Socrates’ less than “dialectical” procedure, conditions the discussion throughout its course. The epistemological status of the conversation is accordingly compromised. Thankfully, the point lies elsewhere.

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70 It is characteristic of Irwin’s commentary throughout that he takes note of the many inadequacies of Socrates’ arguments and procedure. Socrates’ arguments are often found to be “weak,” “illegitimate,” “invalid,” “not helpful,” “oversimplifying,” “careless,” “implausible,” “unexplained,” “unjustified,” “inconsistent,” and “unproven.” Socrates is “not entitled” to take so much for granted, he does not defend or prove his case, his arguments don’t necessitate his conclusions, he “strains his thesis” and “falls short of a full vindication of justice.” He is said to “violate” the principle of definition that he imposes on his interlocutors, “contradict [his] profession of ignorance,” “avoid difficulties” and take for granted unwarranted presuppositions. At times, his arguments operate on the basis of an understanding that differs from the “ordinary” understanding of his interlocutors, and at other times he “presses ordinary language too far.” On other occasions, he relies on his “interlocutors prejudices, and
The conversation cannot be understood outside of the fact that Polus and Socrates speak past each other and from different standpoints. Socrates does not deny the efficacy of rhetoric but rhetoric’s knowledge of what is genuinely good. In other words, he denies that the ends aimed at by rhetoric, whatever they may be, are worth bringing about. His argument pivots around the famous “Socratic Paradox.” All people want the good. To whatever extent that it may seem otherwise, those who do bad things do not intentionally will the bad so much as misunderstand the good. Thus Socrates’ attack on the power of rhetoric leaves necessarily intact the power of rhetoric to realize its various ends. The powerlessness of rhetoric in terms of knowledge of the good presupposes that rhetoric can realize its ill-conceived projects. Conversely, Polus emphasizes the efficacy of rhetoric, which Socrates does not confront on its own terms. Thus Socrates argues in terms of knowledge of the good and Polus on the basis of power or efficacy.

The discussion is therefore comical, with each interlocutor claiming, on the basis provided by their differing perspectives, to know the other better than they know themselves. Socrates tells Polus what he is saying, despite the fact that Polus clearly and adamantly says the even on views that he does not really accept.” He “conceals… serious questions” and “solid grounds,” omits important considerations,” and is “mislaid.” His interlocutors make objections that are occasionally “legitimate” and “fair,” and they could have “avoided” Socrates’ conclusions. On one occasion, Irwin wonders whether Plato is aware of the difficulties indicated, and on another he notes in passing that Plato is not necessarily unaware of an argument’s insufficiency. Although Irwin’s careful attention to the inadequacy of Socrates’ arguments and procedure is extremely helpful, he does not sufficiently attend to the possibility that the many inadequacies of the argument and Socrates’ procedure may be intended by the author. The view taken here is that Plato does not intentionally make errors that the average person could easily pick up on. When Socrates makes blatant logical errors, glaring sophisms, omits obvious counterfactuals or possible objections, and abstracts from crucial considerations, it behooves the reader to at least ask if there might be a good reason for his having done so. There is no good reason to think that the intentional presentation of bad arguments would be outside of the repertoire of a dramatic and dialectical genius of Plato’s stature. To be sure, if Irwin is right about the inadequacies of the argument, and those inadequacies were not intended by Plato, the philosophical worth of the work would be much diminished. Irwin, Gorgias, 118, 119, 124, 126-127, 128, 129, 132, 140-141, 146-147, 152, 155, 155-163, 166-167, 170, 185, 203, 206, 209, 215, 216, 217, 219, 223-228, 235, 237-8, 246, 248-250; on Plato’s awareness, see 129 and 202. Cf., in a similar spirit, Grote, Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 94, 103-113, 122-130; Kahn, Plato and the Socratic Dialogue, 128, 143-147.

opposite, and Polus returns the favor. The two may be seen to each take up one side of Gorgias’ big speech, the great power of rhetoric and the justice of rhetoric. The unjust speech and the just speech, as it were. Toward the conversation’s end, Socrates will bring the two tenuously back together. He will try to out-Gorgias Gorgias in putting together the knowledge, power and justice of rhetoric. Like Gorgias to his brother Herodicus, Socrates will attempt to administer medicine to a sick soul. He will attempt to do so by means of both dialectic and rhetoric, but the doctor Socrates will prove necessarily less successful than Socrates the pastry chef, for chastising the pleasures and pains of young Polus will prove less successful than pandering to them. Socrates’ efforts will therefore be met with a mix of success and failure. The ground of those successes and failures in the soul of Polus points to what is arguably the deepest teaching of Socrates’ conversation with Polus: the limits imposed on persuasion by the passions, interests and ordinary opinions of Polus, or those like him. In bringing these limits into focus we hope to clarify Plato’s “psychology of political authority.”

The most interesting and important aspect of Polus is also the most peculiar. According to Polus, the esteem conferred by power is associated with the specifically violent exercise of power: arbitrariness backed by a preponderance of force. Hence, as evidence for the power and esteem of rhetoricians, Polus asks if they do not “just like tyrants, kill whomever they wish, and confiscate possessions, and expel from the cities whomever it seems good to them?” What is the connection between Polus’ praise of rhetoric and desire for esteem on the one hand and the specifically violent exercise of power on the other?

The discussion about power returns to the issue of value-neutrality – what is called here the neither-good-nor-badness or “in betweenness” (metaxu) of certain pursuits and things –

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72 Gorgias, 466e-467a.
73 Cf. Aristophanes, Clouds, 885-1100.
previously confronted by Gorgias. In all “in between” cases – which includes not only such activities as “sitting, walking, running and sailing” but also mere objects like “stones, wood and other such things” – the action or object is only sought for the sake of a further good. The craft examples employed are medicine, sailing and moneymaking. Medicine is sought for health and moneymaking for wealth. The significance of the second and middle art appeals specifically to Polus, who has travelled by ship from Sicily to ply his craft in Athens. It serves to amplify the adversity and danger that the pursuit of power may bring. As the patient suffers pain at drinking foul tasting drugs, the sailor’s pursuit of wealth is accompanied by “danger” and “troubles.”

We have already noted the 

The value-neutrality of the “in between” things serves to clarify Polus’ ostensible attraction to killing. As Gorgias’ took for granted the possibility of rhetoric’s unjust use, Socrates argument presupposes the possibility of just killing, expelling and confiscating. When “slaughter” or “expelling from the cities” or “confiscating possessions” are beneficial, that is, good, we wish to do them – and when harmful, we do not. Polus has little trouble agreeing. With power in focus, and “the good” left indeterminate, justice and knowledge have receded into the background. As a consequence, rhetoric and tyranny are not categorically vicious. It is precisely the activities of tyrants that are cleansed in terms of their possible orientation to the good. If there is a moral teaching here it is, to be sure, not weak kneed. More importantly, the argument does little to wean Polus from his ostensible attraction to tyranny. There is a purpose to Polus’ praise of tyrannical power and violence. Is that purpose “protection”? The defensiveness of

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74 Socrates returns to the techne analogy, which is apparently no longer applicable to rhetoric. Perhaps the following interpretation could be supplied: at the present stage, Socrates can return to the value neutrality issue without drawing further ire upon Gorgias. Since the claim that rhetoric is not techne has not been refuted, Socrates can draw conclusions on the basis of the techne analogy without them being applied directly to rhetoric. Gorgias, 467e-468b.

75 Gorgias, 468a.

76 Gorgias, 467d-468c.

77 Gorgias, 468c.

78 Cf. Grote, Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 98.
Polus, and therefore Polus’ interest in bodily security, is in fact the key to the psychology of Polus.

Polus accepts the dependency of actions like killing on the actual as opposed to seemingly good. Polus is only able, however, to accept the “dependency thesis” in a qualified sense. Socrates claims to have demonstrated that those with the capacity to do whatever seems good to them “in the city” do not necessarily have “great power” nor necessarily do what they wish. As we have anticipated, the limited traction of Socrates’ thesis is revealed by Polus’ disbelief that Socrates believes what he claims to believe. “As if indeed you, Socrates, would not welcome the possibility of your doing what seemed good to you in the city, rather than not, and would not feel envy when you see someone killing whomever it seemed good to him or confiscating possessions or putting him in fetters.” The Socratic emphasis on knowledge of the good, as distinct from the seemingly good, is clearly insufficient to disabuse Polus of the view that arbitrary power is good in itself. Should Socrates’ wish to craft persuasion in defense of justice, he would need to adopt a different strategy. The philosophical distinction between being and seeming is the first casualty in Socrates’ efforts to craft persuasion in defense of justice. On what basis, then, does Polus agree to Socrates’ thesis? For, he does agree on some basis.

Polus finds most compelling that the deeds of tyrants may prove harmful to themselves in the long run. Thus Socrates abruptly switches gear. He introduces, in place of knowledge of the good or bad, justice and injustice, which is not to say knowledge of justice and injustice. The argument continues to pivot around the goodness as opposed to badness of “in-between” deeds or things, provided that it is understood that justice has been introduced by Socrates as exhaustive of that distinction. The tyrant is enviable if just and unenviable if unjust. The

79 As Christopher Bobonich calls it in Plato’s Utopia Recast, 31-34, 38, 53-54, 75, 89-90, 119, 124-159, 179-215, 335-350, 80 Gorgias, 468e.
prospective goodness or badness of tyranny is no longer framed by the philosophical opposition of knowledge and opinion or being and seeming. In other words, Socrates turns away from questioning the self-evidence of the good, and proceeds to argue instead on the basis of what is self-evident to Polus about the good or the just.81 Polus is, however, especially unwilling to accept justice as the consideration that decides the goodness of power.82 Can we blame him?

What is so odd about Polus’ morbid fixation on the actions of tyrants is that he considers or claims to consider the actions of tyrants enviable in the first place. “Whichever he does [justice or injustice],” says Polus, “is it not enviable either way?” “Eu phemi,” says Socrates and rightly so.83 For, as Socrates makes all too clear, there is nothing especially enviable about killing in itself. Polus does not object to Socrates’ denial that killing is enviable. Accordingly, neither the opposition of good and bad, nor being and seeming, nor again any consideration of justice and injustice, get to the bottom of Polus’ estimation of rhetoric and tyranny via power. We must inquire yet a bit deeper should we wish to expose the hidden roots of Polus’ apparently perverse longing for “power after power.”

Tellingly, in response to Socrates’ denial, Polus focuses on the “condition,” whether wretched or unenviable, of those killing or being killed. In response to Socrates’ challenge, he jumps immediately to that which is evidently most certain for him. “Surely the one who is put to death unjustly, at any rate, is pitiable and wretched, I suppose?”84 Though Polus doubts that considerations of justice decide the wretchedness of killing, he takes for granted that dying unjustly is pitiable and wretched. In other words, at the heart of Polus’ insistence on the goodness of arbitrary power would appear to be the badness of dying unjustly, that is, at the arbitrary whim of another. The same is evident in Polus’ response to Socrates’ subsequent

81 Cf. McCoy, Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists, 92.
83 Gorgias, 469a.
84 Gorgias, 469a.
remarks, which, to his utter disbelief, affirm the lesser wretchedness of those who die unjustly in comparison to those who kill unjustly or are put to death justly. Though uncompelled by the goodness of a just death, the injustice of an unjust death would seem to amplify, for Polus, the fearfulness of death. Although death and a just death may be unenviable and wretched, according to Polus dying unjustly is wretched above all. Since it is clearly not the “pleasure of killing” that attracts Polus to power, we must conclude that it is the allure of the security afforded by power that attracts him to it, and therefore an aversion to adversity or bodily harm that grounds his professed desire for power. In keeping with what we have observed throughout, Polus’ praise of tyranny is fundamentally defensive in its origins. As his name would suggest, Polus is skittish.

Will Socrates be able to alter this fearful aspect of Polus, which appears to course through the entirety of his being – from his name, to his arguments, down to his deeds? After Polus expresses his utter disbelief, Socrates responds with an extreme claim. Although Polus believes that “suffering injustice is greater,” “doing injustice happens to be the greatest of evils.” Could persuasion hope to accomplish anything more ambitious in defense of justice? The badness of injustice would have to exhaust the bad, and the goodness of justice would have to be exhaustive of the good. The identification of the just with the good is suggestive of the highest ambition possible for the rhetoric of justice insofar as it could work to further the authority of the regime. It would argue that justice, as comprised by the laws of the city, is the good, or that there is no higher good than obedience to the city. There is little reason to believe that Polus could ever accept such a claim for, as will become only more and more clear, dying unjustly at the hands of others is far worse to him than justice could ever be good. The ordinary understanding of the good and bad vitiated against efforts to bring about the wholesale

85 Gorgias, 469b.
identification of the partial good “justice” and the partial bad “injustice” with the whole of goodness and badness.

V. Philosophy and the Desire for Power after Power

Socrates’ conversation with Polus tests the prospect and means of convincing Polus that justice is the greatest good and injustice the greatest evil. The thesis that justice is exhaustive of the good requires the suppression of rival goods and evils. More specifically, it requires the suppression of goods considered more comprehensive than justice by Socrates, and evils considered worse than injustice by Polus. Polus, in particular, must be convinced that dying unjustly is not the greatest evil, and at any rate a lesser evil than committing injustice.

Socrates certainly does not consider dying unjustly the greatest evil. The Apology, Crito and Phaedo suffice to demonstrate that. In those dialogues, however, it is not considerations related to justice that account for Socrates’ claim to be fearless of an unjust death. Rather, Socrates claims not to fear death out of ignorance regarding the necessary badness of death.86 We note in this connection that, in discussion with Gorgias, Socrates mentioned a “greatest evil” besides injustice. “For I think that nothing is so great an evil for a human being as false opinion about the things that our argument now happens to be about.” Injustice and ignorance cannot both be the greatest evil. It is not difficult to imagine a Socrates who is unjust – the majority of a jury came to this conclusion – but it is impossible to imagine Socrates without the pursuit of wisdom. Although Socrates works to persuade Polus that injustice is a great evil, he obscures his commitment to wisdom as a higher good and aversion to ignorance as a greater evil.

Socrates’ procedure takes into account that the distinction between being and seeming, or knowledge and opinion, offers no handle on Polus. Nevertheless, although Socrates tailors his arguments to the soul of Polus, he does not limit himself entirely to the constraints imposed by

86 Apology, 29a; Phaedo, 62a ff; Crito, 43c ff; Cf. Xenophon, Apology of Socrates to the Jury, 1.
Polus’ understanding of things. Socrates attempts to craft persuasion in defense of justice at its most ambitious, by appealing to Polus at his most prosaic. Socrates’ means are tailored to the limits of Polus, but the ends sought after are not similarly circumscribed. Socrates obscures the priority of wisdom over justice. At the same time, his argument tends steadily toward the suppression of self-interest, or the natural concern for one’s own well-being insofar as it is ordinarily understood. Early Socrates said that he considered “it a greater good, to the extent that it is a greater good to be released oneself from the greatest evil than to release another.”

Now he claims it is better to suffer evils than to do evils. Later, he claims that it is best to ensure in the case of oneself and friends that just penalties are paid, while in the case of enemies one should contrive to release them from punishment in order that they might reap the greater harm of greater injustice. Could he hope to succeed in persuading Polus of this given the latter’s aversion to bodily harm? To find out, we turn to Socrates’ dagger analogy and Polus’ praise of the tyrant Archelaus, both of which offer further insight into the grounds of Polus’ apparent desire for power.

Polus is provoked to ask whether Socrates “would welcome ruling as a tyrant.” For Polus this means the “possibility of doing in the city whatever seems good to oneself, killing and expelling and doing all things in accord with one’s opinion.” Polus has inadvertently introduced the prospect of absolute rule by a philosopher. In the Republic that prospect is dogged by three insuperable objections. The philosopher would not seek to rule, could not persuade others to let him rule, nor would he force others to obey him. In the present context, however, persuasion is not at issue. The argument’s focus on power, taken together with Polus’ rejection of justice as a basis for assessing the desirability of tyrannical power, accounts for the analogy’s peculiarity.

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87 Gorgias, 458a-b.
88 Gorgias, 469c.
89 Benardete, The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy, 40.
We are presented with the image of Socrates in a crowded market place with a dagger under his cloak, and a penchant for whimsical violence and property destruction, private and public.\textsuperscript{90} The analogy is perfectly tailored to the premises of the conversation. Socrates, plus tyrannical ambition, minus persuasion and philosophy, equals lone wolf with a dagger in the agora.

Is there any reason to expect that this latest effort will prove any more effective in crafting persuasion in defense of justice? In fact, yes. The analogy has the effect of underscoring not only the aimlessness, but more decisively the weakness of the individual. Socrates’ lone dagger is offset against a crowded marketplace and, subsequently, the entire Athenian navy. In doing so, the analogy democratizes power and obscures the exclusivity of tyrannical power that affords it its distinct grandeur. And, as we might expect, it is not power but weakness and vulnerability that strikes home. Polus would never endorse the arbitrary power of a dagger wielding madman because he knows that his actions will be met with great harm to his own person. Polus would not endorse tyranny so understood, because “it is necessary for someone who acts in this manner to pay a penalty,” which is “a bad thing.” We are able to state with greater clarity what motivates Polus’ desire for power. It is not that Polus harbors a perverse desire to kill, confiscate and expel. Rather, to use a Hobbesian turn of phrase, Polus’ desires are conditioned by a certain \textit{diffidence}\textsuperscript{91} – a fearful and anticipatory desire for security against the wills of others, and perhaps protection against killing, confiscation and expulsion in particular – which encourages him to exalt power in the precise way that he does. It is therefore the prospect of \textit{punishment} that prompts Polus to deny for the first time the goodness of tyranny. The threat of violence is both a source of and limit to Polus’ desire for power. For this reason, violent punishment will emerge as the limit case for the power of persuasion in defense of justice.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Gorgias}, 469d-e.  
\textsuperscript{91} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, XIII.3-7.
With these considerations in mind, we turn to Polus’ praise of Archelaus in search of confirmation of our hypothesis about the soul of Polus. The question that must be kept in mind is: how much can the rhetoric of justice hope to accomplish given the fearful basis of Polus’ desire for power? Polus’ admission that tyranny could be bad allows Socrates to return at 470a to the distinction between the seemingly good and actually good. However, the grounds of the argument have shifted from a philosophical consideration of the good to Polus’ ordinary understanding of the bad. Paying penalties is “certainly” bad.92 Thus at 470b-c Socrates tries, on no loftier a basis, to cajole Polus into admitting that the good, as distinct from the spuriously good, may be decided on the basis of its justice and injustice. Plato shows, however, that Polus is generally hesitant to grant claims so lofty on grounds so profane. Profane reasons, we might surmise, demand profane ends. Supposing that were so, it is in any case not the approach taken by Socrates. As we shall see, Socrates’ argument about justice will not cease to aim high.

The remainder of Socrates conversation with Polus is defined in its entirety by the following contrast. On the one hand, Polus repeatedly affirms Socrates’ premises in the mode of certitude or necessity – he finds a great deal of what is proposed self-evident. On the other, he repeatedly and firmly rejects the conclusions drawn. When he finally assents to Socrates’ thesis, he does so only with the utmost reluctance, and in the mode of seeming and appearing.93 Polus denies what is agreed to in speech, and therefore what the argument demand of him. He seems to do so “irrationally” but on grounds nevertheless more compelling for him. Although Polus’ opinions are contradictory, Socrates’ arguments have no traction. For related reasons, Socrates’ dialectical effort to make Polus’ opinions consistent or non-contradictory will not succeed.

92 Gorgias, 470a.
93 The Gorgias cannot be understood without attentiveness to the reluctance, doubtfulness or eagerness of Polus and Callicles to agree with Socrates. The majority of scholarly works fail to pay sufficient attention to this aspect of the dialogue. The commentaries by Benardete and Stauffer, and to a lesser extent Tarnopolsky’s study of shame, stand out in this regard. They learned this from Strauss, and perhaps from his lectures on the Gorgias in particular.
Despite acknowledging that Socrates is “hard to refute,” Polus claims that even a child could demonstrate that wretchedness or happiness are not to be decided in terms of justice and injustice. We might infer that man at his least reasonable is somehow more persuasive than man at his most. Polus’ examples are Archelaus, son of Perdiccas and ruler of Macedon, and the great king of Persia, who are both taken to be unjust and happy.\(^{94}\) Polus’ longest and most revealing speech is provoked by Socrates’ claim not to know Archelaus well enough to judge him.\(^{95}\) Polus emphatically does.\(^{96}\) Although not especially good at such things, Polus will attempt to show, like Adeimantus and Glaucon in the \textit{Republic}, that a man unjust with impunity could conceivably be most happy. Socrates, by contrast, will suggest that only a well-educated just man or woman\(^{97}\) can be blessed. Both, to borrow Socrates’ expression in \textit{Republic II}, try to “polish up statues.”\(^{98}\) In doing so, they continue to speak perfectly past each other.

A comparison of Polus’ speech with those of Plato’s brothers reveals what is off about his praise of tyranny. Although the crime of Glaucon’s Gyges is erotic, Polus’ Archelaus seems to lack a pulse. The only erotic elements in the speech are detached from the protagonist. The drunkenness he induces in his uncle and cousin before having their throats cut, and the pain of a mother at the loss of her son. It is difficult to see how the tyrant’s condition could possibly be regarded enviable. In contrast to Glaucon, who is highly sensitive to matters of pleasure, and

\(^{94}\) \textit{Gorgias}, 470c -471a.
\(^{95}\) Socrates refused to pass judgment on Archelaus without being familiar with his \textit{education}. He concerns himself primarily with the opinions of the individual before him, for only that could supply him with an adequately textured understanding of the human soul or the kinds of human souls. Socrates would have to speak with Archelaus, just as he speaks with Callicles now, in order to judge Archelaus or the type “Archelaus.”
\(^{97}\) Dodds notes how this is the only occurrence in the classical writings preserved in which the loaded phrase \textit{kalon kagathon} – the fine and good, often taken as a byword for the gentlemen – is applied to women as well as men. Dodds associates this peculiarity with Socrates’ “transvaluation of values,” his view that male excellence and female excellence are the same. It is fitting to recall, in this context, Socrates’ evocation of Hera. There is considerable reason to believe that Socrates was a critic of traditional male chauvinism and patriarchy. Dodds, \textit{Gorgias}, 242-243.
\(^{98}\) Cf. \textit{Republic}, 361d.
able to render attractive his perfectly unjust man, Polus’ speech reveals the tyrant’s wretchedness. His praise of the tyrant, eros incarnate, cannot fail to miss the mark.\footnote{\textit{Republic}, 358e-362c, 564c-580a; Cf. Benardete, \textit{The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy}, 38-44.} He is more like Polemarchus or Adeimantus than Glaucon. Perhaps Socrates is right to call him “noble.”\footnote{Cf. Stauffer, \textit{The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias}, 64-81; Tarnopolsky, \textit{Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants}, 73 ff.} The same may be said of Polus’ indifference to the distinction between knowledge and seeming. Philosophy and tyranny are daring and erotic; Polus, not so. For that very reason, we begin to see that Polus poses no real threat to the city – besides, perhaps, the corrupting influence of his words. His inhibitions make him an unlikely candidate for the life he praises, the unrestrained life of tyrants. It remains for Callicles to attempt to render the case for tyranny more compelling.

The inconsistency of the Archelaus speech reminds us of Gorgias’ earlier praise of rhetoric. Full throatedly praising tyranny in the beginning, Polus falters half-way, only to label tyranny wretched as can only be in keeping with ordinary propriety. On the one hand, Polus praises Archelaus for his achievements; on the other hand, he is indignant at his crimes.\footnote{Cf. Strauss, \textit{Plato’s Gorgias} (1963), 95-100, 114-117.} With respect to his many transgressions, the just and happy course would have been in each case to follow the law. Having done otherwise, and most brutally, he is not happy or enviable, but rather “the most wretched of all Macedonians.”\footnote{Gorgias, 471d.} That this fails to make Polus’ case is obvious.\footnote{Cf. Stauffer, \textit{The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias}, 60-62.}

Polus’ Archelaus speech reflects what many law abiding gentlemen might think or say of him.\footnote{Gorgias, 471d. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Socrates responds not only by indicating how the argument failed to achieve its purpose, but with the much stronger assertion that he “certainly” does not agree with “any one of the things” said. Should we take this literally, it means that Socrates doubts not only Polus’ argument, but also what is alleged regarding the injustice of Archelaus. It is possible that this would not be altogether out of place, for the only other testimonials of Archelaus speak of his not inconsiderable achievements, and remain altogether silent on the subject of his alleged unjust deeds. Should Aristophanes be trusted, Archelaus was a benefactor to poets and sophists. Should Thucydides be trusted, Archelaus’ construction projects and military efforts did more to strengthen}
follows. (i) Socrates associates Polus’ “self-evident” refutation with oratory in the law courts and its many appeals to witnesses and authorities. (ii) He then identifies Polus’ speech with what “all Athenians and foreigners, save a few” would assert, (iii) views that are held in common by what amounts to the entire Athenian political spectrum: Nicias, Aristocrates, the house of Pericles, or “any other family.” Polus is a “type”. In contrast to that type, stands Socrates, who (iv) is indifferent to what the many agree on, and cares only for the single witness before him. Since Polus is somehow representative of all, witnesses are perhaps superfluous. Socrates therefore affirms (v), regardless of what all others may hold, the superiority of suffering injustice to doing it. Socrates thus stands intransigently opposed to all Athenians, foreigners and Polus. As far as these matters are concerned, it is now Socrates who is beyond persuasion.

Not without justification, Polus says that Socrates is attempting to say “strange things.” He tries to refute Socrates twice more with appeals to the “self-evident.” Socrates’ responses reveal the gulf that separates Socrates from “all men,” and the considerations found compelling by the type “Polus.” Socrates dismisses as mere “frightening with bogey men” Polus’ contention that a man forced to submit to all sorts of horrors could not possibly be better off. The just man on the rack is happier than the unjust man in the palace. In response to Polus’ laughter and appeal to the audience, Socrates claims indifference to the experience of ridicule at the hands of

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Macedon than the combined efforts of eight generations of kings prior to him. Aristophanes, Frogs, 85; Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 2.100; Cf. Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1398a.

105 As Nichols observes. Gorgias, 57 n.51


107 Gorgias, 471e-472d. Nichols makes note of this point at Gorgias, 57 n.51; see also Dodds, Gorgias, 243-244.

108 Gorgias, 473b-473d. The horrors listed are the following: tortured on the rack, castrated, with his eyes burned out before witnessing the impaling or tarring and burning of his wife and children. Benardete makes the following highly amusing observation: “The tortures Polus imagines include both bodily and psychic pain: the would-be tyrant is put on the rack, castrated, and blinded, and then, after looking on at the outrages his wife and children experience, is crucified or covered with pitch. How he can see though blind Polus does not explain: either the tyrant or Polus has a lively imagination.” Benardete, The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy, 47.
political men.\textsuperscript{109} In contrast to the type “Polus,” Socrates is “not one of the political men.” He “bid[s] the many farewell” and “does not converse” them.\textsuperscript{110} “Many” must be taken in this context to mean not simply the demos, but the city as such. Although it not yet apparent what sort of man Socrates is, we shall learn that his “few” means the philosophers. The disagreement of the philosopher with all Athenians and all foreigners make the latter two more similar than their regimes otherwise differentiate them.\textsuperscript{111} The decisive distinction is not Athenian-Spartan but City-Philosopher. Whereas consensus, fear and ridicule are undeniably powerful forces in the city, according to the philosopher they are of little import. Socrates admits that his performance in council caused others to laugh at him, and proves unperturbed by the experience. Polus would have been mortified.

As the conventional and ordinary character of Polus’ views become manifest, Socrates is manifestly at pains to make himself most uncanny. The change in question coincides with the gradual emergence of philosophy, and anticipate the conflict between philosophy and politics for which the dialogue is best known. As the \textit{Gorgias} progresses common ground dwindles. The loss of common ground is bound up with the conventional ambitions and desires of Polus and Callicles on the one hand, and the introduction of philosophy on the other. What reconciles Polus and Callicles to the city is that which puts them at odds with Socrates. Although Socrates will seek to persuade Polus that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it, the two are in perfect

\textsuperscript{109} Polus’ “rhetorical” appeals to witnesses, bogeymen, and ridicule suggest the polarities of civic education captured by tragedy and comedy. As Ranasinghe notes, Gorgias is said to have recommended that comedy or levity be fought with tragedy or gravity, and vice versa. Cf. Ranasinghe, \textit{Socrates in the Underworld}, 62. See also Aristotle, \textit{Art of Rhetoric}, 1419b3.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Gorgias}, 473e-474b.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Gorgias}, 474a-b. We are tempted to paraphrase Heidegger’s quip about 20th century ideologies all being “metaphysically” the same, as if all regimes were, from the standpoint of philosophy, no different. But it would be at least partly misleading to do so. That Plato or his Socrates do not consider the differences between regimes simply irrelevant to philosophy is clear. Socrates would not have been allowed to live so long as he did outside of Athens. Some regimes are friendlier to philosophy than others. In the Platonic corpus, the visions of communal life put forth in the \textit{Republic}, \textit{Statesman} and \textit{Laws} are certainly less friendly to Socratic philosophy than Athens. Cf. \textit{Republic}, 557a-558c; \textit{Apology}, 37e-37f; \textit{Crito}, 52a-53e; \textit{Meno} 80b.
agreement regarding the ordinary view of things. Only on the basis of the fact that all men agree with Polus could it suffice for Socrates to “put the vote” to Polus alone.\textsuperscript{112} Does it follow, then, that the success of Socrates would entail a triumph of over what “all men agree” upon? The roots of Polus estimation of power, as exhibited in the foregoing, do not warrant optimism. That Polus’ opinions are contradictory, and Socrates consistent, does not make the latter more likely to prevail in the city than the former—quite the contrary.

\textbf{VI. Political Authority and the Beautification of Punishment and Justice}

The conversation about punishment (474d-479e) takes many surprising twists and turns.\textsuperscript{113} It does so because Socrates must attempt, against the very grain of Polus’ understanding of things, what we shall call the “beautification of punishment and justice.” As we have seen, Polus is fearful of bodily harm and for that reason desirous of power. The political necessity of punishment and the justification of punishment cut cross-wise against the will to preserve bodily existence and stave off suffering. In order to argue that injustice is the greatest evil, Socrates must take the sting out of specifically punitive justice. He will therefore attempt to effect the wholesale subordination of the concern for private bodily security to justice. In this way the passions and opinions of Polus, which are attributed to “all men,” emerge in the context of the 
\textit{Gorgias} as an obstacle and limit to the power of persuasion in defense of justice.

As Socrates’ schema involved the suppression of pleasure and the body, the present argument entails the complete suppression of pain as a consideration relevant to human well-being or benefit. Following the precedent set by Gorgias, Socrates will attempt to render beautiful or suppress the irreducible ugliness inherent in violent coercion and punishment. That

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Gorgias}, 475e-476a.

\textsuperscript{113} Socrates’ procedure has been summarized many times, but perhaps never adequately. This section has benefited a great deal from Strauss’ lectures and Benardete’s commentary. Their effort to make sense of the many twists and turns that the argument takes in this stretch of the dialogue is exceedingly rare. Here especially one must, as Klein and Koyrë say, place oneself in the dialogue as an \textit{active} participant and weigh every turn.
ugliness is indicated indirectly by the *Republic*, in which criminal law comes to sight as somewhat superfluous, and by Socrates here, who claims that the happiest life is that in need of no punishment at all.\footnote{The perfect education makes punishment redundant, just as perfect health makes medicine superfluous. The *Republic* abstracts to a great extent from the possibility, suggested by Polemarchus at the outset of the *Republic*, and raised early on in the *Gorgias* by its namesake, that “patients” might resist treatment and citizens reject justice. It is in keeping with the somewhat more practical bearing of the *Laws* that it takes this difficulty more seriously. *Cf.* *Republic*, 405a-410a, 442e-445e, 464c-466d, 470a-471e.} Like killing, punishment is neither enviable nor pleasant. As we learn in the *Laws*, it is at best a regrettable necessity.\footnote{*Laws*, 853b-853c.} Thus the very existence of violence and punishment – which no political order can exist without – attests to the insufficiency of persuasion and freedom for politics.

If Hobbes is sensible to identify capital punishment as the limit case in relation to which the state cannot expect the un-coerced compliance of the condemned,\footnote{Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV.29-30.} Socrates’ argument in the *Gorgias* is in that precise respect senseless. In having Socrates attempt the beautification of justice and punishment, Plato reveals a major obstacle to the consolidation of political authority. For however Polus’ failure to refute Socrates’ proposals might be interpreted, Plato will reveal that the latter’s arguments about justice are not of a sort that Polus or those like him could ever internalize. Socrates will unsuccessfully attempt to make punishment seemlier to Polus, and in the precise sense that therapy may be desirable for the sick. Because the city requires the justification of punishment, and punishment encounters resistance in human nature, Socrates’ efforts might be thought to point up to the highest ambitions of political authority insofar as it is concerned with the production of obedience through appeals to justice.

Let us begin by noting the different starting points of Socrates and Polus. Socrates thinks that all human beings hold or suppose (*hegeisthai*) that doing injustice and not paying the just penalty are worse (*kakion*) than suffering injustice and paying the penalty. Polus objects that
none would welcome or prefer (dexai) suffering injustice to doing it.\textsuperscript{117} Socrates refers to opinions about doing and suffering, whereas Polus refers to preferences or a basic aversion. Despite affirming and continuing to affirm that all agree with Polus, Socrates will nevertheless claim that “all” are somehow in agreement with himself and not Polus.\textsuperscript{118} Is that possible? The two sides are perfectly compatible, despite pointing in different directions. To consider the unjust criminal who gets off the hook bad does not prevent oneself from being more averse to suffering harm than inflicting it.\textsuperscript{119} The conventional disdain for criminals who evade justice is compatible with the natural aversion to suffering that all men feel, and in relation to which the justice of suffering is extraneous.\textsuperscript{120} Socrates stresses the former and Polus the latter. That is regardless of the fact that Socrates will eventually aim at something far more ambitious than the conventional view in question. In the immediate term, however, the argument tests the extent to which conventional opinions about justice could override man’s natural aversion to suffering.

Polus holds that it is worse (kakion) to suffer injustice but also, with some hesitation indicated by Socrates’ prompting (“Answer!”), that doing injustice is more shameful (aischron).\textsuperscript{121} He does not consider the shameful to be the same as the bad. Socrates will seek to map the shameful onto the bad, and the noble (kalon) onto the good (agathon), and define justice and injustice in these terms. Natural inclination and philosophy are, however, each in their own ways fundamentally opposed to the simple identification of the good with the noble and or just. From the perspective of nature, the shameful can be regarded as good and the just painful. From the perspective of philosophy, it is doubtful that the noble or the just are exhaustive of the good. The former prevents Polus from accepting Socrates’ argument; the latter

\textsuperscript{117} Gorgias, 474b.
\textsuperscript{118} Gorgias, 474b.
\textsuperscript{119} Cf. Strauss, Plato’s Gorgias (1963), 105-112.
\textsuperscript{120} Cf. Irwin, Gorgias, 146-147.
\textsuperscript{121} Gorgias, 474c.
suggests that Socrates is less than fully serious. The argument works in this way towards the suppression of private goods and harms that obstruct justice.

Socrates elicits Polus’ agreement that all fine things (ta panta kala) – beginning with bodies, colors, shapes, voices and practices, then voices and musical things, as well as things related to laws, practices, and finally sciences – are called (kaleis) beautiful or noble because of their usefulness (chresimon) or the pleasure (hedone) they induce. The argument depends on what things are called and therefore on what Polus, following the many, consents to calling them. The more philosophical discussion of the kalon in the Hippias Major, which involves a more thoroughgoing “eidetic analysis” of the noble or beautiful, gives us reason to doubt the sufficiency of the definition provided. The examples show that the categories “useful” and “pleasant” do not evenly apply. Chresimos refers especially to useful, serviceable or much needed things, for instance money. Could the beautiful ever be conceived in such terms? One needn’t have recourse to Kant’s Critique of Judgment to see why not. The austere songs and poems of the Republic are certainly “useful,” but Plato makes a point of showing that they are not beautiful. In the first repetition of the argument, which isolates shapes and colors,

122 It is characteristic of Socrates’ dialectic that all good things end in philosophy, or that philosophy is the end to all “what is” questions – a departure from the ordinary understanding of things to say the least. Perhaps the assimilation of justice and the good tends in the direction of reinterpreting justice as if it were a form of philosophizing, or justice as relentless “criticism” of injustice. The conversation is heading in that direction.

123 Part of the difficulty in interpreting this part of the Gorgias derives from the range of the Greek kalon, which, depending on the context, we are inclined to translate variously as “beautiful,” “noble” or “fine.” Eyes, clothes or a complexion of a certain color might make someone beautiful, but we would less readily, if at all, use the word “noble”; conversely to pay back one’s debts or face punish is more readily regarded “noble” than “beautiful.” We do, however, continue in certain circumstances to speak of great sacrifices as beautiful. Gorgias, 474e. Cf. Devin Stauffer, The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias, 69 n. 31, 74 n. 33; Tarnopolsky, Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants, 68-72.

124 Gorgias, 474d-475a.

125 “… and we are the more surprised, because the definition here admitted without a remark is, in substance, one of those shown to be untenable in the Hippias Major.” Grote, Sokrates, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 108; Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 248-252.


127 Kant’s view that our orientation toward the beautiful is characterized by an absence of interest, or at least that the beautiful becomes absurd when reinterpreted in terms of interest, is intended. Cf. Kant, Kritisch der Urteilskraft, in Ak., B.5, 204-211.

128 Republic, 393c-394a.
Socrates substitutes the perhaps less loaded *ophelimon*, the helpful, useful or serviceable simply, in place of *chresimon*. That substitution might be thought to derive from the fact that shapes and colors are not easily regarded as useful or beautiful in the same way that justice may be regarded useful or beautiful. Polus clearly meant to indicate that justice is useful, and therefore good, *for the community*, and on that basis regarded as noble, despite being potentially less profitable for the individual agent, who might nevertheless benefit or profit from injustice.\(^{129}\)

*The argument unfolds, from the very beginning, a slow and steady suppression of the self.* That Socrates, in the second repetition, continues to speak of laws and practices in terms of the *ophelimon* suggests the gradual assimilation of what is beneficial on the basis of necessity to what is beneficial simply. We take confirmation from the fact that the *chresimon* returns in the crucial case, where Socrates begins to elaborate a form of rhetoric purely ministerial to justice at all costs, at which point the good will have been completely collapsed into the just.\(^ {130}\) At the present stage of the argument the needs of the body are subordinated to justice; in what follows the needs of the city will be subordinated to justice *qua* simply good. The wholesale subordination of bodily and political necessity to justice obviates the need for rhetoric. That is because the usefulness of rhetoric is directly tied to necessities that are at odds with justice.

Socrates tries to render consistent a “standing inconsistency” that defines the ordinary understanding of things. The two sides – the shamefulness and usefulness of injustice – are by no means incompatible, but Socrates will proceed as if they were. One might say that the “eidetic” structure of the good as a unity of multiplicity and relations to other *eide* is replaced with an “Eleatic” monad that excludes multiplicity and relation.\(^ {131}\) The multiplicity through which the good is experienced is subordinated to the pure unity of the good regarded as a non-

\(^{129}\) Dodds, *Gorgias*, 249; Grote, *Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, V.2, 110.

\(^{130}\) *Gorgias*, 480b.

contradictory “one.” It is in the nature of Platonic dialogue to draw attention to the relation of multiplicity and indivisibility that defines our access to intelligible things as such. The reader must hold the poles together, resisting the lure of Heraclitus on the one hand and Parmenides on the other. The task is only complicated by the fact that Plato, unlike Hegel, does not believe we can systematically reconcile the two, or derive one from the other.

Let us take a closer look at the dialectic that unfolds. Polus enthusiastically agrees to the proposition that the sciences are beautiful either because of their usefulness or pleasantness. His respect for intellectual life carries the argument forward. Let us note, however, that Polus replaces Socrates’ “useful” with the good (agnoston) simply. That allows Socrates to proceed to define the shameful on the basis provided by that substitution. That is to say, the ugly or shameful (the opposite of the beautiful or noble) is what it is not on account of its disadvantageousness or harmfulness (viz., the opposite of the beneficial: anopheletos or blaberos), but on account of its badness (viz., the opposite of the good). The sleight of hand is discernible in that, on the other pole of the argument, the beautiful continues to be associated with the useful as opposed to the good. The badness of what men consider shameful is smuggled in via the utility of what men regard noble. The possibility that Socrates has brought to our attention previously, namely, that the many, like Polus, might be mistaken in their estimation of the bad, is no longer at issue. Socrates may therefore proceed to manipulate at once Polus’ aversion to suffering pain and his conventional views concerning the badness (kakoí) of injustice. “If” doing injustice is, “as the many hold,” more shameful than suffering injustice, it must surpass the latter in pain or in badness, where it “surely... is not at all the case” that it surpasses suffering injustice in pain. It therefore “looks” as though doing injustice is not simply

132 We are reminded of Gorgias’ earlier confusion of ends and means. Gorgias, 475a.
133 Gorgias, 475a.
more shameful but also worse.\textsuperscript{134} The emphasis on what the many hold and what appears to be the case on that basis is indicative of the shaky grounds on which the argument rests. Socrates gains Polus’ agreement on no loftier basis.

The argument points to the following political necessity. That which is regarded as shameful by the city must not be judged simply on the basis of its utility, for that would leave open the possibility of regarding as useful what the city disapproves of. The utility of the city is nevertheless the decisive and driving consideration that overrides, as in the present argument, that which is useful to the individual. Usefulness is suppressed as an important consideration to better subordinate the individually useful to the generally useful. \textit{The city must persuade citizens that what is useful for the city is good in itself}, as opposed to merely useful. The ordinary view of things is disposed to regard the goodness of justice as being in tension with the private good. \textit{The city therefore accords primacy to the perspective of a third person or spectator who connects the private desires and sufferings of individuals to the good of the regime}. The beautification of justice \textit{qua} simply good must inculcate the view that justice is exhaustive of the private good. Political authority seeks to persuade citizens that the ethics of the city can satisfy and fulfill their private longings for the good— or, as Hegel might put it, that the “subjective” good can only find satisfaction in the “objective” good. As for morality, it will seek to defend the view that only a vision of justice that transcends the city can truly satisfy.

Polus’ hesitation to accept the argument, and Socrates’ exhortation that he “submit” nobly as to a doctor’s curative measures, which will do no “harm” (\textit{blabesei}), reveal the basic problem that political persuasion in defense of justice must strive to contain or overcome.\textsuperscript{135} Can Socrates hope to convince Polus to submit fully— in body and soul as opposed to merely in speech— to the argument? Because the remainder of the argument consists in a dizzying

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Gorgias}, 475a-c.

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Gorgias}, 475d.
syllogism of syllogisms, it is necessary to keep in view its different parts. As Polus no longer attempts to refute Socrates, as requested, it is all the more necessary for us to subject his arguments to scrutiny.

The argument begins by assimilating the condition of the direct object or patient of an action to the character of the action performed by the actor (475e-476d).\textsuperscript{136} It then proceeds (476e-477a) to identify justice with the fine or beautiful (kalon), as distinct from the shameful, and therefore (on the basis of what was agreed to previously) the good (agathon), since the beautiful is beautiful on account of being pleasant (hede\emph{a}) or beneficial (ophelima).\textsuperscript{137} We recall that Polus is especially concerned with the “condition” of doers and sufferers of injustice. That Socrates’ examples all involve pain – beating, burning and cutting, violently, rapidly, deeply or painfully – is well suited to the challenge to justice that Polus embodies. To cut someone deeply is to say that another has been cut deeply. Likewise, to be punished justly is to have been “done justice” by the punisher. But good things are never intended when one speaks of giving someone their “just deserts.”

It is easy to see that on receipt of fifty “painful” lashes one has been pained or harmed by another. Conversely, it is difficult to see how the alleged “justice” of the same fifty lashes – which are presumably still “painful” – make them entirely beneficial and in no way harmful. That pain is a form of harm is obscured, and the argument depends on assuming the transference of the just intentions of the punisher to the punished. At the same time it suggests that the feeling of the “patient” is contained in that which acts upon the patient, as if pain at being burned made pain a property of fire. If the just punisher and the justly punished perform or suffer the noble or beautiful, they are either benefitted or pleased. Since it can hardly be said that the punished is pleased, it follows that he is benefitted. But it also follows that the punisher,

\textsuperscript{136} Gorgias, 476b-476e.
\textsuperscript{137} Gorgias, 476e-477a.
since neither benefited nor in need of benefit, since punishing justly, derives pleasure from justly punishing insofar as justly punishing is noble or beautiful.\(^{138}\) However useful practices like execution, whipping and incarceration may be, it is impossible to regard these pleasant or for that matter beautiful without greatly distorting the phenomena. The argument is indicative once more of a basic problem integral to the nature of political authority. Executioners and executions require the inculcation of a form of insensitivity, an overcoming or suppression of the “unenviable” character of violent acts. That may well take the form of making violence appear beautiful or pious. Punitive justice is in need of edification.\(^{139}\) But philosophy must be wary of edification.

In the next stage of the argument (477a-479a) justice is reinterpreted as therapeutic on the model of arts\(^{140}\) like money making and medicine, which can be taken to remedy adverse conditions like poverty and sickness.\(^{141}\) The example of medicine provides the basis for a separation of pleasure from benefit, so that pain can be thereafter combined with benefit and pleasure with harm.\(^{142}\) The priority of the soul over the body is then reaffirmed to elicit Polus’ enthusiastic agreement that baseness of soul, taken initially to include such things as injustice, ignorance, cowardice, and intemperance, are greater evils as well as more harmful than more


\(^{139}\) This may take the form of a duty to justice that makes the unenviable endurable or desirable, or anger at injustice that makes ugly deeds acceptable or praiseworthy. In these ways the punisher, and the community that bears witness to punishment, must internalize a view of punishment that beautifies or obfuscates its ugliness. We are reminded of Leontius in the *Republic*, and his attraction to the executioner’s grounds at the edge of the city walls. Gazing upon the corpses is a kind of “forbidden knowledge” – the executed are an irreducibly wretched political necessity. It is shameful to look at the executed, a taboo, and yet somehow attractive, of “theoretical” interest: Leontius desires to “look.” Leontius’ spiritedness counteracts his desire to look at the corpses of the executed. In the *Gorgias*, something similar is at work, however Polus’ spiritedness does not suffice to overcome his inclination to see execution for what it is. As in the case of we readers, he cannot accept Socrates’ argument without great hesitation. *Republic*, 439d-440a. Cf. Waller R. Newell, *Ruling Passion* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 129-139; Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 102.

\(^{140}\) Justice has not yet been substantiated as a techne. The assimilation of justice to the remedial or therapeutics arts is brought about by little more than an “outrageous pun.” The final three letters of *dike* are interpreted as though they designated the feminine singular suffix commonly denotative of *techne*. We are reminded again that no one has asked what justice is. Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*, 55-56; Cf. Irwin, *Gorgias*, 167-168.

\(^{141}\) *Gorgias*, 477a-479e.

\(^{142}\) *Gorgias*, 478b-478c, 479b-479c, 480a-480d.
prosaic ones like sickness and poverty, which may nevertheless prove more painful.\footnote{Gorgias, 478d-479d.} Although medicine can benefit despite inducing suffering, there is no reason to rule out that it can issue in the immediate relief of pain and therefore pleasure. Nor is it clear that the poor, in being released from poverty, would endure pain, and in no way experience pleasure. Perhaps it is intended to mean that “hard work” is painful. Finally, although baseness of soul may be associated with injustice, intemperance, cowardice and un-learnedness, it does not follow that these are all necessarily more harmful than painful, or for that matter that sickness and poverty (each related to the body) are necessarily more painful than harmful. The distinction between pleasure and benefit is forced. On that basis, Socrates effects in speech what Polus could never live by in practice, the wholesale subordination of bodily goods and ills to justice.

The arguments related to baseness of soul appear especially tailored to the overall task of beautifying punishment and identifying justice with the good. At 477b baseness in the soul is called [kaleis] “injustice, lack of learning, cowardice, and such things”; at 477d the list is extended to include “intemperance.” The argument proceeds thereafter to focus specifically on injustice and temperance (477e-478b), and then only justice (478b-480b). At the final stage of the argument (480c-d) temperance drops out and courage resurfaces in relation to the justly punished who are persuaded to undergo punishment. Temperance and courage pertain to virtuous conduct in the presence or anticipation of specifically bodily pleasures and pains. Justice in particular is said to release the soul from the evils of intemperance and injustice. It is unclear why there is no “art” of temperance matched to intemperance instead of that role being fulfilled by justice. Justice, we are given to conclude, relieves us of harms to the soul caused by our disposition towards the attainment of pleasures. Courage provides the fortitude required so that those for whom punishment is beneficial might willingly submit to it. Un-learnedness
figures least prominently in the discussion. That may be attributed to the fact that learnedness is least germane to the direction of the argument. Learning can prove pleasant in ways that undercut the opposition of justice to pleasure and pain on the one hand, and therapeutic in ways that rival or undermine the argument that holds punishment to be simply therapeutic.

The argument effectively separates justice from learnedness. One certainly does not become learned from receiving painful lashes. It is conceivable, but by no means necessary, that one might become less prone to injustice, or more hardened towards pain. Although becoming temperate may prove painful, there is no reason to rule out that learning might prove pleasant. In the argument, the types of baseness are treated as if they shared the same relation to pleasure and pain, but they do not. The possibility never arises that one might be relieved of baseness by means of learning, that is, in terms of the well-known Socratic “doctrine” that virtue is knowledge. To say so would only undermine the argument that justice can be attained through punishment. As the Republic abstracts from punishment and focuses on the consequences of a good education, the present argument abstracts from education. It must do so in order to render punishment therapeutic to the extent that it does. For education points to a good higher than justice, indeed one in relation to which justice may prove incidental, namely wisdom.

The argument shows that justice is experienced necessarily in the form of a contradiction, in which the public use of justice contradicts the private goods and ills that concern individuals. To use Hegel’s language, from the perspective of the city, the individual is of incidental importance, whereas, from the perspective of the individual or household, the individual is of universal importance. The goods and ills of the city, which are incidental from the standpoint of individuals, must be passed off as goods and harms with universal import to the individual. That requires, in turn, the suppression of goods and harms that rival those of the city. The argument therefore suppresses the private good of wisdom, and the private ills of pain.
and suffering, both of which render untenable the view that justice is exhaustive of the good, or punishment simply therapeutic. A problem arises, however, in that no ladder is offered to Polus by means of which he could internalize the views put forth by Socrates. Perhaps no such ladder could be provided on the basis of that which motivates Polus. No appeal to Polus’ sense of justice that ignores his aversion to pain could bring about his effective obedience. Thus Polus’ fear of bodily harm would limit any possible effort to completely suppress related evils to the goodness of justice. The remainder of the conversation may be shown to confirm and extend this thesis.

**VII. Political and Trans-Political Justice**

The key to the remainder of Socrates’ conversation with Polus is that the former’s arguments about justice ascend to a level higher than specifically “political” justice, and in a way that Polus is manifestly reluctant to accept. Viewed superficially, Socrates demolishes Polus’ views about justice, and attains Polus’ assent to the superior, since contradiction-free, alternatives proposed. Socrates’ might be viewed as exercising his “true political art,” a benefaction to the city insofar as its opinions about justice are made more consistent — *were it not for the fact that the understanding of justice to which the argument leads is indifferent to the interests of the city taken on its own terms*. On more careful consideration, Polus is not moved by Socrates’ “dialectic.” At best, he is outdone in speech or “gagged” as Callicles would have it. There is no reason to believe that Socrates’s arguments will effectively change Polus’ disposition. That Socrates has so little effect on Polus is of decisive importance. Efforts to interpret the discussion solely in terms of the arguments and their logical validity close

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144 Referring to the argument, Grote writes: “The whole tenor of its assumptions, as well as the conclusions in which it ends, are so repugnant to received opinions, that Polus, even while compelled to assent, treats it as a paradox: while Kallikles, who now takes up the argument, begins by asking from Chaerephon — ‘Is Socrates really in earnest, or is he only jesting? Socrates himself admits that he stands almost alone. He has nothing to rely upon, except the consistency of his dialectics – and the verdict of philosophy.” Grote, *Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, V.2, 103, 105-108.
themselves off entirely from the question concerning the power of persuasion, which the
dialogue is intended to take up. The argument concerning punishment, and the trans-political
understanding of justice that follows, reveal the limits beyond which persuasion in defense of
justice is least likely to prevail.

The reader must keep in view the contrast, which Plato scrupulously renders, between
Polus’ enthusiastic agreement to certain premises advanced by Socrates, and manifest reluctance
to accept others. The dialectic that closes off the conversation with Polus unfolds on the basis of
premises internalized by Polus, but toward conclusions altogether external to the horizon in
which he carries out his existence. That horizon is constituted by the heterogeneous passions and
opinions that Polus shares with “all men,” or all men besides Socrates.145 It suggests that certain
opinions about justice could never become the effectively prevailing opinion of “all men.”
Polus’ opinions are contradictory, but those contradictions hold sway over Polus as the
dialectically purified alternatives proposed by Socrates could not hope to do so. Polus agrees
that punishment is just, and justice good; at the same time, he believes that being punished is
painful or harmful, and therefore bad. He therefore believes that being punished is both good
and bad. The duality or apparently contradictory character of Polus’ views on punishment resists
reduction to a higher, non-contradictory, unity according to which just punishment is viewed as
simply good or bad. By contrast it is in the character of Socratic dialectic (as ordinarily
understood) to attempt to work from the contradictions of opinion to a higher order unity. The
power of persuasion, insofar as it works to persuade the many to adhere to dialectically refined
conceptions of justice, is accordingly limited.

Polus unhesitatingly agrees to, affirms, or asserts the following, often enthusiastically,
and sometimes without prompting. The unjust man with the dagger must be punished; Archelaus

145 Cf. Grote, Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 137.
is unjust and wretched; injustice is shameful; being punished is worse and painful; correct punishment is just; the suffering of the punished together with the act of punishment are just, fine and good; punishment releases the soul from badness; injustice is badness of soul and therefore the greatest evil; the man without badness is happiest; and it is a great benefaction to be released from evil in one’s soul. For all these premises that he takes evidently for granted, the edifying syllogisms and conclusions adduced from them elicit no more than reluctant or doubtful formulations: “it looks that way,” “it doesn’t seem so to me, at least according to this argument,” “so it appears,” “it may be,” “what indeed are we to say?,” and finally “[the things said] seem strange indeed; perhaps you make them agree with the things said before.” The contradictions in the midst of which Polus’ opinions stand are, however incoherent from the standpoint of dialectic, decisive. Whatever Polus has agreed or failed to object to, the conclusions drawn by Socrates are unlikely to influence him practically. At the same time, and with regard to the authority of justice in the soul of Polus, what inclines Polus towards justice will all but certainly prove more influential than the opinions he espouses that recommend injustice. In other words, Polus’ ordinary opinions about justice are a more likely guarantor of justice in the city than the non-contradictory opinions proposed by Socrates.

The thesis proposed takes confirmation from the fact that Polus expresses the greatest reluctance and hesitation when Socrates, driven on in pursuit of non-contradictory opinions about justice, transcends altogether the political view of justice. In doing so, Socrates abandons all, or almost all, common ground with Polus. Plato thereby exhibits the necessarily contradictory character of specifically political justice, as well as the tendency of justice, as a problem, toward transcending the limits of politics altogether. As for the purely moral

146 Gorgias, 475c-475e, 476b-476e, 477e, 478e-480e.
consideration of justice, which, it would appear, is less contradictory than political justice, it has no hope whatsoever of being effectively internalized by the type “Polus.”¹⁴⁷

Socrates draws a number of conclusions from the contradictory opinions that determine Polus and apparently all men like him. He takes himself to have demonstrated the inferiority of Archelaus’ way of life, the superiority of suffering injustice to doing it, and the superiority of submitting to punishment over fleeing it.¹⁴⁸ If these theses seem dubious to Polus, they are completely outdone by the moral teachings that follow. (i) One must not protect oneself against paying the just penalty, whether through possessions, rhetoric or allies; (ii) rather, one must guard oneself against doing injustice most of all. So far we are more or less in keeping with ordinary standards of law abiding decency, and Polus has little trouble accepting these.

However, (iii) should oneself, or loved ones, or comrades, or one’s fatherland be unjust, one mustn’t defend them. Indeed, without repeating the same with respect to the fatherland, (iv) one should contrive to ensure that he or they submit to justice as soon as possible, lest the greatest evil of injustice overtake them. Although the argument requires that the same be applied to the fatherland, to say so would have been utterly scandalous (even if not today).¹⁴⁹ Rhetoric should therefore only serve the following purpose:

“[t]o accuse himself, and whoever else of his relatives and friends happens at any time to do injustice, and not hide the unjust deed but bring it into the open, so as to pay the just penalty and become healthy, and compel both himself and others not to play the coward but grit his teeth and submit well and courageously as if to a doctor for cutting and burning – pursuing what’s good and fine, not taking account of what’s painful. And if he has done unjust deeds worthy of blows, submitting to beating; if worthy of bonds, submitting to being bound; if worthy of a fine, paying it; if worthy of banishment, going into exile; and if worthy of death, dying; – himself being the first accuser both of himself and of others that are relatives, and using rhetoric for this purpose, so that their unjust deeds having become manifest, they may be released from the greatest evil, injustice.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ One might take the case of Euthyphro, whose understanding of justice informs his will to punish his father, as the basis for a possible objection. Euthyphro is a halfway house between piety and theory. It is unlikely that the city will let him succeed in his admittedly unappealing pursuit of justice. Perhaps if Polus were more pious Socrates could have been more successful – but again that would not be in the interest of the city. We shall return to this subject briefly in the conclusion. Grote, Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 103.
¹⁴⁸ Gorgias, 479d-e.
¹⁴⁹ Dodds, Plato : Gorgias, 257-259.
¹⁵⁰ Gorgias, 480b-d.
As the previous, ostensibly, non-contradictory understanding of justice completely subordinated the badness of such things as bodily harm, the present argument abstracts completely from the bodily harm in addition to those that might be visited upon loved ones and one’s community. Politics is therefore transcended or effaced: first our commitment to ourselves, then our commitment to loved ones and, finally, our commitment to the fatherland are left behind. The commitment to the regime becomes injustice and justice becomes “cosmopolitan” justice. Indeed, not only should one seek to have one’s own punished should they prove unjust, one should seek to ensure that one’s unjust enemies get off the hook. Injustice being the worst one could wish upon another, one should ensure that enemies prove altogether effective in evading their just deserts.\textsuperscript{151} The absurdity of pure justice so conceived is evidenced by Socrates’ insistence that we must nevertheless fight against suffering injustice. We are to become partisans of justice, not our loved ones or people. We are to become enemies of injustice, not enemies ordinarily understood – but we will continue to have enemies in the ordinary sense, and should work to prevent ourselves, god knows how, against suffering at their hands. Such views are complete non-starters according to the standpoint of political life. Perhaps this is another reason why “speech” has in large part dropped out of the argument. Free citizens,

\textsuperscript{151} “The curious doctrine that the guilty enemies and foreigners should not be accused seems, in light of Socrates’ purgative theory of punishment and thus of deliberate self-incrimination, to be vindictive in the extreme. Perhaps it is, for it means that the evil man, in going free and deathless, is doomed to be a disgraceful, base, pained soul. It would mean too that the criminal courts could close down most of their functions but those of meting out punishments to persons tattling on themselves or their friends. It would mean moreover, that unless an unjust man had the rare opportunity of being persuaded by Socrates or someone like him to turn himself over to the authorities, or, less probably, had come to the same conclusion himself, he would be free to his way in his crimes. No one would accuse him because no one would wish to relieve him of the heavy burden of guilt he was carrying, unless he was a good friend or member of the family. Socrates implies that his statement of consequences follows from what was agreed to earlier. Follow it may, but it provokes Callicles into saying a few moments later that if Socrates is serious then human life is turned upside down. It separates the notion of good from benefit and pleasure, which had been described a little earlier as belonging together; and it shows as stern a devotion to duty and conscience as Immanuel Kant or even the New England divines argued for in their hardiest hours.” Plochmann and Robinson, A Friendly Companion to Plato’s Gorgias, 98.
equal in their right to speak in the assembly, are those least likely to take proposals such as these lying down.

The following conclusions might be drawn. The political rhetoric of justice would seem to require the beautification of punishment and the obfuscation of the non-comprehensiveness of justice insofar as it relates to the good. It works to produce the appearance that justice is altogether good, if not exhaustive of the good, and punishment altogether therapeutic in the service of justice. The problem of justice is, however, subject to a certain “eidetic” volatility, according to which it tends toward transcendence of the city or the subordination of the ends of the city to itself. For once justice is conceived as the good, the particular goods of the city come to be regarded in such a manner that necessitates their subordination to a more universal or “global” conception of justice. The notion of justice arrived at is therefore obviously pernicious to the city, and undermines the pre-theoretical supports of justice within the city. In drawing our attention to the heterogeneity of justice as simplified by the argument, and the drift of justice toward shedding the bounds of the city, Plato intends to illuminate the fundamental incompatibility that obtains between the horizon of opinion that defines the city, and the Socratic cross-examination of the contradictions that define that horizon.

Socrates’ argument, insofar as it rests on premises compelling to Polus, must eventually suppress those premises, as can only prove impossible for Polus to accept. The argument could only be pushed through on the basis of Polus’ natural or conventional predispositions or commitments, which are nevertheless completely undermined in the consummate moments of the argument. Socrates climbs a ladder and kicks it out from beneath himself. All goods and evils that rival the goodness or badness of justice and injustice must be suppressed if justice is to be made perfectly consistent. Thus the subordination of individual interest to the interest of the community seems to lead inexorably in the direction of subordinating the interests of the
community to those of humanity as a whole. According to the ordinary experience of things, however, justice is only encountered as a good alongside and in relation to a multiplicity of other goods. It is only on the basis of that heterogeneity of goods that Socrates could put together the pieces of his dialectic. Though such considerations would take us too far afield, the heterogeneity that characterizes opinions about justice would seem to derive from the heterogeneity of the ideas. The idea of justice is revealed in the relation that obtains between the problem of justice and related problems that are necessarily effaced or obscured when justice is pursued to the hilt.

The argument therefore shows how justice, as a problem, tends to undermine its own political foundations. The pursuit of pure or non-contradictory justice consists in a threat to political authority, and for the simple reason that political life must concern itself with goods and evils besides those of justice and injustice. Paradoxically, then, to protect the integrity of the city, the city’s own tendency toward the beautification of justice must be resisted or limited. The city must beautify justice to the point of subordinating the ends of the individual to itself, without itself being subordinated to justice. In other words, political authority requires that justice be circumscribed by the needs of the city. For that very reason, however, political authority has an interest in preserving the contradictions that define the ordinary understanding of justice. In other words, the private goods and harms that resist the interests of the regime also sustain the regime in its particularity. To retain a political view of things, or preserve the integrity of the city, it is necessary to hold fast to the interests that separate man from his community, or to resist the wholesale identification of the ends of man with the ends of the community.

More fundamentally, Socrates’ conversation with Polus demonstrates the incommensurability of power, justice and wisdom. It does so as Socrates’ conversation with
Gorgias had previously, however less determinately. The *Gorgias* combines attentiveness to desire and aversion without which philosophy is empty, and philosophizing without which desire is blind. We begin to learn, in effect, that justice is impotent when pure and impure when powerful. On account of his ordinary opinions and aversions, Polus is more reconciled to political justice than he lets on. That the opinions and aversions of Polus antecedent the efforts of Socrates, and are associated with those of all men in Athens or elsewhere, indicate how the power of persuasion is limited or circumscribed by a pre-theoretical horizon. Rhetoric is “hypoleptic”: it must always “link up” with what is already there.\(^{152}\) The practical necessities imposed on rhetoric thus impose a “conservative” check on the power of persuasion, best seen in the limited traction of justice as viewed from the trans-political standpoint arrived at by the argument. The effort to produce obedience in the type “Polus” must operate within the parameters set by heterogeneous and contradictory opinions about justice that are embedded in heteronomous fears and desires.

Let us close off this section by noting that the beautification of punishment and justice required us to *look away* or abstract from the indisputable ugliness of the former and the questionable completeness of the latter.\(^{153}\) Nature associates pleasure with benefit and pain with harm, while philosophy affirms in the pursuit of wisdom the unity of the most beneficial and most pleasant. The argument has turned on the separation of what nature and philosophy respectively bring together, and may be seen to abstract from each. That it does lends support to our suspicion that the beautification of justice, despite having been brought about by a philosopher, depends from the very outset on the suppression of nature and philosophy. Pure justice has been shown to require the suppression of nature or attentiveness to the real and

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\(^{152}\) To borrow a set of formulations from Odo Marquard. Cf. *Farewell to Matters of Principle*, 3-21, 64-82

effective on the one hand, and a simplification of Socratic wisdom in its attentiveness to “noetic heterogeneity”\textsuperscript{154} on the other. The conversation with Polus obscures missing peaks. It is nevertheless written from the vantage point afforded by those peaks. Thus Callicles breaks into the discussion with a speech about nature and philosophy.

\textsuperscript{154} Cf. Strauss, \textit{The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism}, 132-133, 142-143.
Section C

Socrates’ Conversation with Callicles:

Fear, Desire and the Political Way of Life

I. From Polus to Callicles

The effort to craft persuasion and the production of obedience unfold necessarily in relation to antecedent opinions and passions. Rhetoric and dialectic do not begin with a clean slate, but must appeal to a horizon of opinion and passion that is always already in play. The conversation with Polus has revealed that horizon, which in this case is defined by opinions and passions about justice that resist the rhetorical and dialectical efforts of Socrates. There is no evidence to support the view that Socrates succeeds in unsettling that horizon insofar as it holds sway over Polus. Moreover, the significance of Socrates’ failure or limited success extends well beyond Polus, who is said to stand in for “all men.” However unconventional his critique of justice or exclusive his rhetorical training may seem, Polus is not so much an outlier as the exemplar of something average. He is firmly rooted in the ordinary, if contradictory, dispositions of men toward justice, the noble, the shameful, the useful, the painful, and the harmful. In revealing this pre-theoretical horizon, Plato reveals how persuasion in defense of justice is circumscribed. As for the intervention of Callicles, it makes us even more acutely aware of the obstacles that render Socrates’ efforts unlikely to succeed.

Socrates’ apparent effort to make the opinions of Polus less contradictory has surely shifted the terms of the discussion. His rhetoric and dialectical efforts have only intensified the opposition between justice, power and knowledge inherited from the conversation with Gorgias. But it is especially Socrates’ indifference to the many and rejection of what “all men think” that is important to Callicles. He cannot believe that Socrates could be serious in opposing all men
to the extent that he claims to. Reminding us of Polus’ ridicule of Socrates, he enters the conversation by asking Chaerephon whether Socrates is serious or joking. As we have seen, the cross-examination of Polus culminates in a vision of justice that altogether departs from the perspective of the city. Socrates’ break with “all men” is the source of his ridiculousness. Like Gorgias before him, he must therefore justify his way of life before the city. Thus Chaerephon repeats word for word to Callicles what Callicles had said earlier to Socrates in relation to Gorgias: “there’s nothing like asking the man himself.” Of course, Socrates’ presentation of justice is not Gorgias’. If Gorgias’ position on justice fell short of the city’s standards, Socrates’ is up in the clouds by comparison. We have moved from the tension between rhetoric and the city to that between philosophy and the city.

We have anticipated that the reintroduction of Callicles and Chaerephon at 481b marks a second new beginning. Since the conversation with Gorgias, three considerations have gradually moved from the margins of the discussion toward the center. The problem of justice, once marginal to the conversation, has become the explicit theme of the conversation. Similarly, the conversation with Callicles brings the psychological power of the regime, and the tension between philosophy and politics in the form of Socrates’ opposition to “all men,” into the very center of the argument. As the problem of justice is essential to the question concerning the power of persuasion, so too are the psychological power of the regime and the opposition of philosophy to the authoritative practices and perceptions that define the regime. Persuasion in defense of justice is circumscribed by political authority, which derives its power from the passions and opinions to which “all men” besides Socrates are beholden.

That the power of the regime and the opposition of philosophy to politics are central to Socrates’ conversation with Callicles is surely connected to the fact that Callicles, unlike Polus

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1 Gorgias, 481b.
(a Sicilian far away from home), is an Athenian at home in his fatherland. He is evidently angrier with Socrates than Polus who, in the end, may be taken to think that Socrates is a merely strange, if impressive, interlocutor. Callicles objects to Socrates’ opposition to the city and, presumably, his upstaging of Gorgias and Polus. But Callicles’ anger would seem to derive especially from the fact that Socrates, in calling thoroughly into question the power of rhetoric, has called into question his political ambitions in Athens. In this way, the attachment of Callicles to the Athenian regime comes to the surface in relation to Socrates’ opposition to that regime.

Callicles, like Polus, is said to stand in for all men. But there is a crucial respect in which Callicles obviously differs from Polus. For, although Polus is manifestly fearful, we had occasion to note that he is not terribly desirous. Desire does not figure prominently in Socrates’ conversation with Polus. By contrast, in response to Callicles’ opening remarks, which suggest the utter absence of common ground, Socrates remarks that the two have in common that they are both lovers.² The *eros* of Callicles accounts for the fact that his defense of tyranny is more compelling than Polus’. It also accounts for the fact that Callicles appears to have benefited from a quasi-philosophical education, or what is commonly recognized as the influence of the “sophistic enlightenment.”³ Indeed, Socrates, who is ever on the lookout for talent in philosophy, appears to have taken sufficient interest in Callicles to have observed him with some care in the past. Thus *Eros* comes to sight as the lynchpin between the tyrannical ambitions of Callicles and the theorizing of Callicles. For the tyrant is *eros* incarnate and philosophy is a quintessentially erotic pursuit.⁴ Accordingly, as Polus must be encouraged to submit courageously to punishment and pain, Callicles is not only exhorted to submit to curative

² *Gorgias*, 481c-482c.
⁴ *Republic*, 573a-e, 574d-575a.
measures, but also toward moderation and the imposition of limits on desire.\(^5\) The conversation with Polus brings fear and therefore courage especially into focus. As for the conversation with Callicles, it highlights both fear and desire, and therefore courage and moderation. To this extent, the conversation with Callicles promises to bring more comprehensively into focus the obstacles to persuasion in defense of justice, for those obstacles consist not only in the aversions of human beings, but also their attractions or longings.\(^6\)

Does Callicles pose, on account of his apparent *eros*, a greater threat to the regime than Polus, who has proven an unlikely candidate for tyranny? The subject matter and adversity of Socrates’ conversation with Callicles certainly suggest that he poses challenges not yet encountered in the dialogue. Nevertheless, Callicles will be shown to partake in the same fearfulness as Polus. To anticipate, he combines the fear exemplified by Polus with the overweening ambitions of specifically imperial politics. But he is not obviously less fearful than erotic.\(^7\) The relation that obtains between the fears and desires of Callicles carries forward our understanding of dynamics already discerned in the case of Polus, that is, the relation between the desire for power and fear. However that may be, we cannot rule out the possibility that fear may prove more decisive than desire insofar as Callicles’ relation to the regime is concerned. As in the case of Polus before him, the passions and opinions of Callicles set him not only at odds with justice and the regime, but provide the most promising means of reconciling him to them. In these ways, the *Gorgias* will continue to illuminate the psychology of political authority.

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\(^6\) The significance of these psychological dynamics to the problems of politics as Plato understands them scarcely needs to be mentioned. In the *Statesmen*, the possessor of the kingly art weaves together courage and moderation.

II. Turned Upside Down?

The *Gorgias*, according to Thrasyllus, is not only designated as being about rhetoric, but also classed as an “*anatreptic*” or “refutative” dialogue. This is ordinarily taken to mean that Plato sets out to refute rival views, in this case those of pernicious rhetoricians or sophists. According to the traditional consensus, no perspective merits refutation perhaps so much as the “immoralism” of Callicles, who has often too hastily been called a nihilist or “Nietzschean.” Of course, it is a fact as striking as it is notorious that, in the “*anatreptic*” dialogue devoted to *rhetoric*, Callicles and Polus are neither persuaded nor refuted in any decisive sense of the term. It is, rather, maintained throughout that Socrates has everything “turned upside down” (*anatetramenos*). Indeed, if there is any point of agreement between Polus, Callicles, Socrates, and, by all reasonable estimations, Plato, it is that all men do in fact disagree with Socrates and are unlikely to find him persuasive. Whatever might be made of Socrates’ demand that Polus and Callicles refute him or let his arguments stand as truthful, it does not follow from their failure to refute the views put forth by him that those views are sound ones. In contrast to the traditional interpretation, the *Gorgias* is perhaps better approached as a dialogue that reveals the impasse between Socrates’ activity and the views of all men, an impasse that is never bridged for reasons essential to the intention of Plato’s *Gorgias*.

Evidently, Plato takes very seriously Callicles’ doubts about the seriousness of Socrates. Could Socrates be serious in opposing all men to the extent that he does? If Chaerephon is to be trusted, Socrates is perfectly serious. But is Chaerephon to be trusted? There are reasons to doubt that Chaerephon is qualified to judge the “*dialectic*” of Socrates, and

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10 *Gorgias*, 481c.
11 According to Dodds and Jaeger Callicles is a young Plato of sorts, someone Plato could have become, were it not for the fact that Socrates could reach him as he could not Callicles. Dodds, *Gorgias*, 13-14; Jaeger, *Paideia*, II.137-138.
therefore answer Callicles’ question about the seriousness of Socrates. In a previous exchange, when Chaerephon took for granted that Socrates wished to hear a display speech by Gorgias, Callicles’ doubts were undoubtedly closer to the truth. Is Callicles a better judge of Socrates than Chaerephon? We have reason to believe that Socrates is less serious than Chaerephon assumes, and more serious than Callicles takes him to be.

The seriousness of Socrates is itself a serious question. For if Socrates is right, Callicles says, the life of men would appear turned upside down [anatetramenos].12 What Socrates says ought to be done is the opposite of what men do, and Callicles does not believe that anyone could seriously oppose “ought” and “is” to the extent that Socrates does. Since Callicles seeks to refute Socrates, and refute shares the same root as turn upside down, we can say that he intends to defend or justify how things stand “right side up.” Thus Callicles erupts into the conversation as a self-styled “realist.” He believes that men should take their bearings primarily from how things are. Callicles’ incredulity raises, in other words, the following rather more serious question. Can one be perfectly serious and yet have everything upside down?

It is instructive to recall the alternatives set out by Kant and Hegel. For Hegel, the answer to the question just stated is clearly: no. The perfectly reasonable is reconciled to the actual. The reasonable is the actual, or the actual understood better than it understands itself. Thus the “inverted world” of past philosophers is a misunderstanding. As for the “moral” understanding of what ought to be, which is impossible to realize, these are deficient in “goodness” for that very reason. Provided that one has brought oneself into proper relation to actuality, power, wisdom and justice may be thought to coincide. By contrast, according to Kant, the moral law is good regardless of whether the natural opinions and passions of all men contradict it, and therefore regardless of the undeniable possibility that it could never be

12 Cf. Irwin, Gorgias, 169.
“actual.” Despite friction between the real and ideal, and the inclination toward “natural dialectic” that it sustains, the only coherent way for us to will, being the beings that we are, is to assume that that which ought to be could effectively be brought about. The Kantian therefore posits that the moral law, which is not less reasonable for being ineffective, could become a law of nature, whatever experience might suggest to the contrary. Power, wisdom and justice do not coincide here and now, but we posit, as a “regulative ideal,” that they could coincide.

In the Republic and Gorgias, Socrates is in certain obvious respects undeniably closer to Kant than Hegel. The best and most desirable would appear independent of that which all men think or do. Goodness is independent of possibility. Thus the impossibility or non-actuality of the highest is apparently irrelevant to the highness of the highest. By contrast, Callicles emerges as a “natural dialectician” of sorts. The question concerning possibility, as revealed by the actual, is an essential consideration, should one wish to determine the best, or that which ought to be done. That no men could be persuaded by Socrates is, for Callicles, a necessary strike against the goodness and seriousness of the views put forth by Socrates.

In the foregoing manner, Callicles’ question concerning the seriousness of Socrates must be taken in relation to the animating question of the Gorgias, that concerning the power of persuasion. The disagreement between Socrates and Callicles concerns specifically the significance of the power of persuasion as limited by the actual world, or the fact that the production of obedience is circumscribed by an intransigent pre-philosophical horizon. It would be a mistake, moreover, to conclude that Callicles is the only one who concerns himself with power and actuality. For the question concerning the power of persuasion was first raised by Socrates. How then does Socrates’ interest in this question relate to the position on that question taken for granted by Callicles? And, of course, what is the intention of Plato in presenting a showdown between the alternatives represented by Socrates and Callicles vis-a-vis that which
“all men” do and think? In these respects, the dialogue about political rhetoric comes to sight as the dialogue about the significance of actuality or the effective truth for political philosophy.

The significance of the effective or actual for political philosophy is approached via the power of rhetoric. That problem is approached in terms of the capacity of rhetoric insofar as it might seek to master the opinions and passions of “all men” to produce freedom and rule over others and, subsequently, persuasion in defense of justice. Moreover, the latter is taken up not only in terms of justice as seen from the perspective of politics, but also justice as seen from the standpoint of “theory.” For, should Socrates succeed in “turning” Callicles “upside down,” it would consist in the triumph of Socrates’ trans-political presentation of justice over and against the interpretation of justice set forth by Callicles. The conversation does not fail, however, to call that prospect thoroughly into question. The “political” horizon attributed to “all men” proves to be the decisive one, even if not the “true” one. Whatever might be said of the Socratic critique of political justice, it is not that to which men are given.

Let us return to the beloveds of Socrates and Callicles. Socrates loves Alcibiades, son of Cleinias, and philosophy; Callicles loves the Athenian demos, and Demos, son of Pyrilampes. Callicles loves the Athenian people, whereas Socrates loves philosophy; Callicles loves the stupid and frivolous Demos, whereas Socrates loves the formidable and unruly Alcibiades. Although the demos and Demos are capricious and inconsistent, of Socrates’s beloveds it is only Alcibiades that merits this characterization, for “philosophy always says what you now hear from me and is much less capricious.”13 Socrates loves the love of wisdom, which always says the same things. Unlike the private love of Callicles, the love of Socrates inoculates him against the inclination to flatter Alcibiades. Socrates, unlike Callicles, can subordinate his private interest in Alcibiades – whatever that may be – to his private interest in philosophy. By contrast,

13 Philosophy is personified as flattery was previously. Gorgias, 482a; Cf. Aristophanes, Wasps, 98.
there is apparently no difference between the private and public Callicles: he is, as it were, democratic all the way down. Socrates makes playfully explicit from the very outset that, whatever he might say to the contrary, the Athenian democratic regime holds sway over Callicles.

The words and deeds of Callicles are said to be determined by the desires that animate his beloveds. We are reminded of the earlier presentation of rhetoric as “flattery.” Callicles is enthralled by demoi on both ends and unable to oppose either. Socrates would sooner be discordant with the public and/or Alcibiades, than out of tune with himself and philosophy. By contrast, Gorgias and Polus are unwilling to be discordant with the public, and contradict themselves. Callicles hopes to oppose not only Socrates but the public as well. But the private desires of Callicles, Polus and Gorgias are, from the very outset, oriented outwards toward the public. The regime determines Callicles by tapping into the eros of Callicles. Socrates, by contrast, is a thoroughly private man. Should Socrates succeed in effecting an anatrepsis – literally a “turning upside down” – of Callicles, it would suggest the triumph of Socrates and or Socrates’ love of philosophy over Callicles’ love of Demos and or the demos. Philosophy would displace the ambition to rule or the ambition to rule would be subject to Socratic instruction. We shall learn, of course, that Callicles is no Alcibiades. The desires and fears of Callicles will come into focus not only as obstacles to the efforts of Socrates, but to the tyrannical longings espoused by Callicles himself. The opinions and passions of Callicles consist in a veiled

14 He therefore reminds us of the “lover” disguised as “non-lover” in the speech of Lysias at the beginning of the Phaedrus. His claim to despise the demos masks (ineffectively) his love of the demos. See Phaedrus, 230e-234c ff.
15 Gorgias, 481d-482a, 487b.
16 “Plato represents him as adapting himself, with accommodating subservience, to the Athenian public assembly, and saying or unsaying exactly as they manifested their opinion. Now the Athenian public assembly would repudiate indignantly all this pretended right of the strongest, if any orator thought fit to put it forward as overruling established right and law. Any aspiring or subservient orator, such as Kallikles is described, would know better than to address them in this strain. The language which Plato puts into the mouth of Kallikles is noway consistent with the attribute which he also ascribes to him – slavish deference to the judgments of the Athenian Demos.” Grote, Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 114.
blessing to the regime. That blessing derives from the fact that he partakes in the contradictory horizon of passion and opinion attributed to “all men” besides Socrates.

**III. Callicles’ Slavish Praise of Mastery**

Callicles’ long speech delivers on the claim that Socrates has everything backwards. At the same time, he complicates not only Socrates’ presentation of Callicles, but also Socrates’ presentation of himself. It is the spectacle of the *Gorgias*, and raises many questions as such.

According to Callicles, Socrates has everything backwards, starting with the charge that Callicles is a flatterer of the demos. Socrates is a “demagogue” and childish. Nor is Callicles simply un-philosophical. For his critique of Socratic demagoguery derives from a form of philosophizing. According to Callicles, to philosophize about justice as Socrates does is to fall for convention and pander to the many. Callicles therefore attacks Socrates on the basis of nature. He is not as un-philosophical as Socrates is apolitical, for he recommends a turn to politics after having completed a philosophical education in youth. He claims to be better rounded, and at any rate more mature and “developed” than Socrates, who has not yet graduated from philosophy to practice.\(^\text{17}\) He knows all there is to know or has learned all that needs to be learned about philosophizing, and he counsels a turn to politics on the basis of this more mature standpoint. The “true” or sufficiently developed philosophy of Callicles points beyond itself to practice or politics. The truth of Callicles’ philosophy does not, therefore, prevent him from proceeding to attack philosophy on the basis of what all men “actually” do. Callicles attacks the many on behalf of philosophy and then philosophy on behalf of the many.\(^\text{18}\) It appears as if the true politics is both the application and confirmation of the true philosophy, but the connection between the two sides of Callicles’ speech is not so clearly set out.

\(^{17}\) *Gorgias*, 482c-486d.
It is Socrates’ trademark move, says Callicles, to argue on the basis of nature against convention and convention against nature, a piece of “wisdom” used to “gag” Polus. Although Socrates made no mention of nature, the identification of the shameful and unjust was indeed brought about by means of opinions shared by “all men.” Callicles understands the wisdom of Socrates, but he will outspokenly “call a spade a spade.” For, according to Callicles’ philosophy of nature, Socrates’ argument turned on the false naturalization of the merely conventional. Injustice is not shameful but only shameful according to convention. It is therefore Callicles, and not Socrates, who genuinely opposes “all men.” He is the “true” outlier. But in what sense could Socrates’ speech about justice, which departed so markedly from the ordinary understanding of things, be consistent with flattering the demos? Is it consistent with the prejudices of the city to apply what holds true of friends to enemies?

As Polus revealed himself to have been a more or less perceptive observer of Gorgias and Socrates, Callicles had been observing the conversation up until now. Having silently listened for some time, in a state of gestation as it were, he can no longer contain himself. He claims to know the hidden forces that motivated the concessions of Polus and Gorgias. His approach to Socrates derives at least in part from a will not to submit to those forces. Polus was right to have laughed at Socrates, but Callicles does not “admire” him for having conceded that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. It was Polus’ deference to convention and Socrates’ manipulation of convention that allowed Socrates to “gag” Polus and entangle him in contradiction. Callicles will therefore cleave to nature and outspokenly oppose justice qua merely conventional as his predecessors each failed to, but as can only be more in keeping with truth and reality. He shares in common with Polus an aversion to being triumphed over in public.

19 Gorgias, 482e-483a.
20 See also Dodds, Gorgias, 265.
Does Callicles’ “doctrine” as a whole derive from that aversion? The weak in the first part of Callicles’ speech, and the ridiculous philosophers of the second part, share in common with Polus and Gorgias the fact that they are “shameful.” We suspect from the outset that Callicles’ aversions are no less potent than his desires. That suspicion takes confirmation from the contradictions inherent in Callicles’ speech, which we turn now to examine.

Despite attacking justice on the basis of nature, Callicles does not refrain from making appeals to justice. He does not merely say “this is how things are,” but “the way things are is just.” Suffering injustice does not befit a real man (aner) so “much as a slave for whom it is superior to die than to live, who, suffering injustice and being trampled in the mud, is unable to help himself or anyone else he cares for.”\(^{21}\) Law is a creation of the weak. Because they are weak, they praise, blame and legislate in terms that guarantee them an equal share they do not deserve.\(^{22}\) “Nature herself reveals,” in contrast to what is held by convention, “that this very thing is just, for the better to have more than the worse, and the more powerful than the less powerful.”\(^{23}\) The life of animals, cities and the races of human beings show that “the just has been decided thus, for the stronger to rule the weaker and have more.”\(^{24}\) Xerxes and Darius gave no thought to justice when they invaded Greece and Scythia. “These men do these things according to the nature of the just, and yes, by Zeus, according to the law of nature.” Does Callicles conventionalize nature, as his oath to Zeus might be taken to suggest?

Callicles justification of the way things are according to nature, his *physiodicy*, is itself a combination of theory and convention. It is called almost immediately into question by the fact that nature, as Callicles understands it, is perfectly compatible with injustice as Callicles understands it. Justice according to nature is violated by the course of the world, for real men

\(^{21}\) *Gorgias*, 483a-b.
\(^{22}\) *Gorgias*, 483b-c.
\(^{23}\) *Gorgias*, 483c-d.
\(^{24}\) *Gorgias*, 483d.
suffer injustice, slaves escape being trampled, and the weak often triumph in the form of law. The “weak” can “frighten away the more forceful human beings and those with power to have more, so they won’t have more than themselves.” Xerxes and Darius, their lack of scruples notwithstanding, each failed in the imperial ventures cited.\(^{25}\) And for the foregoing reasons Callicles’ tone becomes incrementally less certain. We are reminded of the reversals of Gorgias and Polus before him. It is now only “perhaps” the case that nature is in accordance with “what we have set down.”\(^{26}\)

Callicles does not, in fact, take for granted the triumph of the naturally superior.

“This by molding the best and most forceful of us, catching them young, like lions, subduing them by charms and bewitching them, we reduce them to slavery, saying that one must have an equal share and that this is noble and just. But, I think, if a man having a sufficient nature comes into being, he shakes off and breaks through all these things and gets away, trampling underfoot our writings, spells, charms and the laws that are all against nature, and the slave rises up to be reveals as our master; and there the justice of nature shines forth.”\(^{27}\)

Convention proves quite effective at enslaving the supposedly masterly.\(^ {28}\) Callicles’ opposition to convention thus derives from an underlying conviction regarding its considerable power. His speech pulls the curtain on illusions but testifies to the power of illusions. It is a rare occurrence, likely unknown to Callicles, but nevertheless anticipated – hopeful at the triumph of justice, as it were – that someone might prove sufficient to explode the shackles of convention.\(^{29}\) It is only in such cases that nature reveals her justice. The rarity of such cases, however, suggests that natural justice is not only feeble but perhaps also less violent than justice according to convention.

Hence Callicles’ paradoxical quotation of Pindar, whose ode he claims not to know, and which seems to go against his own purposes. For Pindar asserts that it is “law” and not nature that is “king of all mortals and immortals” leading by “making what is most violent just.”\(^{30}\) The

\(^{25}\) As Nichols notes. \textit{Gorgias}, 74 n. 74; Irwin, \textit{Gorgias}, 175.
\(^{26}\) \textit{Gorgias}, 483e.
\(^{27}\) \textit{Gorgias}, 483e-484b.
\(^{29}\) Stauffer, \textit{The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias}, 88.
great are born lions, but everywhere enchained. In this way, Callicles therefore begins with the Thucydidean thesis that the “strong do as they can, and the weak endure what they must,” only to end up with the opposite: the weak do as they can, and the strong endure what they must. At the root of Callicles opposition to convention is a certain optimism regarding the mutability of nature or the power of convention. The regime, according to Callicles, is formidable in its capacity to beguile or spellbind the many, or make men just in the conventional sense.

Tellingly, Callicles does not count himself among the naturally superior. Unlike Pindar’s example Heracles, Callicles does not expect to commit crimes without paying the price. He knows he is no hero, and no exception to the law that holds sway over “mortals and immortals.” Nor does he hesitate to identify himself with those who, wanting in power, have no choice but to beguile others with words. In fact, if there is a place for Callicles in the world, it is with the triumphant weak. Thus, according to his own admission, should a naturally superior type emerge, Callicles would be no obstacle to his lordship and likely receive a good trampling. In fact, Callicles’ understanding of justice, proves quite indifferent to the interests of Callicles. He enjoys the protection of law and convention, but regards that protection unjust and precarious. He would appear thoroughly demoralized. But what is the source of Callicles’ demoralization?

Callicles’ appeal to the Persian despots – the enemies of the Athenian demos par excellence – provides one of several keys to the psychology of Callicles. He applies the power-political relation of regimes on the international stage to domestic affairs between individuals in

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31 Thucydides, *History of The Peloponnesian War*, 5.89.
32 On the connection between magic and rhetoric as a powerful art that works to master the irrational in man, see de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, 3-43.
33 “The Nietzschean heroes extolled by Callicles and Thrasymachus reveal themselves as possessors of slavish souls.” Alexandre Koyré, *Introduction à la lecture de Platon*, 149 n.2.
34 Perhaps not entirely unlike Socrates’ earlier presentation of justice.
the city.\textsuperscript{35} The difference between the regimes of Darius and Xerxes, and the Athenian regime, is that the former two individuals \textit{are the regime}.\textsuperscript{36} Although the phrase “law of nature” is unique to the \textit{Gorgias}, the closest analogue in the classical literature is to be found in Thucydides, where \textit{the Athenians} (viz., envoys whose words represent \textit{the collective will of the regime}) famously address the Melians.\textsuperscript{37} Callicles “theory” views the world from a vantage point that transcends the individual. It operates at an order of magnitude that underscores the weakness of the individual. Callicles takes on the posture of Athens on the international stage, but he is self-conscious of the fact that he lacks the gumption or capacity to follow through with the sort of tyrannical overreaching recommended by him. The power of regimes, which becomes the decisive consideration, obliterates the power of Callicles in his own self-estimation. The perspective of Socrates’ lone wolf in the marketplace is perhaps better suited to the experience of Callicles than the perspective of tyrants and regimes.

Callicles may therefore be taken to simulate the experience of Athenian imperialism by the Athenian citizen.\textsuperscript{38} The interests of the imperial city infect the self-understanding of its citizens. The emphasis on brute relations of power renders dubious the understandings of justice that stabilizes everyday life in the city. The Athenian justifies the right of might according to which inter-poleis relations are decided, but for that very reason he chafes against conventional restraints on power seeking.\textsuperscript{39} For some, that may be a source of power, but not for Callicles.

\textsuperscript{35} Callicles might be thought to do the precise opposite of what Socrates had done previously in conversation to Polus when he applied the relation between ideally just citizens to relations abroad.
\textsuperscript{36} Later, to clarify what Callicles means by “just according to nature,” he replaces the invasions of Xerxes and Darius with “big cities advancing against small ones.” The difference between regimes and individuals is blurred more than once. The regime-tyrant would seem key to the clarification of Callicles’ meaning. In Thucydides Athens is referred to as the “tyrant city.” Cf. Thucydides, \textit{History of the Peloponnesian War}, 1.22, 1.24, 2.63, 3.37.
\textsuperscript{37} As Jacob Klein remarks, the utterance “law according to nature,” which in this precise form occurs nowhere else in the classical literature, was almost certainly intended by Plato as an oxymoron. Jacob Klein, \textit{Lectures and Essays}, 232-233; Dodds, \textit{Gorgias}, 268; Irwin, \textit{Gorgias}, 175-178. Cf. Thucydides, \textit{History of the Peloponnesian War}, 5.105.
\textsuperscript{38} Benardete, \textit{The Rhetoric of Philosophy and Morality}, 71-72.
\textsuperscript{39} Cf. David Grene, \textit{Greek Political Authority}, 27-34, 61-64: “The materialism of the Athenian empire linked with the political system of Athens has the consequence that there is virtually no division, finally, between political and personal morality…. It was inevitable that the morality of the empire should also be the morality of the individual citizen. As the empire in its purposeful extension first, and in its repressive measures later, becomes violent and
Callicles can think like a city, but he cannot act like one. The macro or “sociological” perspective of Callicles reminds Callicles of how small he is, and accounts for the indifference of Callicles’ theory to the fate of Callicles. It reveals why efforts to “see things like a state” or view man from the standpoint of “history” tend, in all but the rarest cases, to obliterate the significance of the individual and sap the will to greatness. Humanity, we might say, requires the retention or safeguarding of the perspective of the individual citizen. At the same time, we are reminded of Alcibiades. For, in another context, Socrates encourages Alcibiades to broaden his perspective, and judge himself not by the standards of private Greek citizens, but by those of Persian despots – viz., private individuals who are the regime. If Thucydides is to be trusted, Alcibiades appears to have conducted himself in a related manner. But here too, Callicles comes to sight as a mediocre Alcibiades. Unlike Callicles, Alcibiades would never associate himself with the weak or those who are justly trampled by the great according to nature. The macro perspective is a pernicious one, which is not yet to say that those better fitted to greatness than Callicles could not be propelled to greater heights because of it.

Let us turn, with these considerations in mind, to Callicles’ arguments in support of the superiority of politics to philosophy. There are two parts to Callicles’ argument and each part is twice repeated. Again, it is not that one should forgo philosophy entirely. Rather, one should only philosophize in one’s younger years. Philosophy is admirable, charming, liberal and fit for
children destined to be free men. At the same time, likeable as it is to play and babble, grown men who do not give it up are “ridiculous, unmanly, and deserving of a beating.” Children who do not philosophize “will never deem themselves worthy of any fine or noble affair.” Old men who refuse to give up philosophy, for a second time, “deserve a beating.” The reason, also twice repeated, is as follows: time is finite and, should that time be squandered on trivial philosophy, it leads to the corruption of human beings.

“For even if he is of an altogether good nature and philosophizes far along in age, he must of necessity become inexperienced in all those things that one who is to be a noble and good man, and well reputed, must have experience of. And indeed they become inexperienced in the laws of the city, in the speeches one must use to associate with human beings in dealings both privately and publicly, in human pleasures and desires, and in sum they become all in all inexperienced in customs and characters.”

The danger of excessive philosophizing derives not from anything intrinsic to philosophy, but rather from the fact that time spent philosophizing is not spent politicking. It is not that a good nature is ruined by or incompatible with philosophizing, but rather that the good natured philosopher will fail to attain prestige in the city. One with an “altogether good nature” could waste a lifetime on idle chatter, and cut himself off from that by means of which he might “become highly distinguished.” We are reminded of Pericles’ funeral oration, where it is said that Athenians philosophize without becoming soft. As Socrates indicates later, Athenians would say that Callicles “has been sufficiently educated.” Has he been over-educated?

The good-natured philosopher is directed to the agora, where instruction in higher matters will follow. “Real men” come to understand the “springs of human action” in the city. Callicles has shifted from power above the law, to praise those who exert power by working within the law. But he seems to have forgotten that the agora is where Socrates and

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43 *Gorgias*, 485c-485d.
44 *Gorgias*, 484c.
45 *Gorgias*, 485d-e.
Chaerephon tarried before coming to Callicles’ home. It is not for want of time in the market place that Socrates has prevailed over Gorgias and Polus. Callicles seems to have forgotten as well that the agora, in accordance with the first part of his speech, is where natural lions are tamed, beguiled and enslaved. It is, moreover, characteristic of Socratic philosophy to liberate oneself from convention by means of conversation. Socrates was therefore seen as a corrupter of the youth. That Alcibiades, who proved both more intrepid and capable than Callicles, spent time “talking in a corner” with Socrates would only be in keeping with the frustrations of Callicles.48 Perhaps too much philosophizing, or philosophizing of the sort taken up by Callicles, has made Callicles soft.

In between the two repetitions of Callicles’ two arguments against philosophy is a quotation of Euripides’ lost Antiope. It tells us that philosophers appear ridiculous to political men, as political men do when speaking to philosophers. Callicles reveals, in this context, what most bothers him about the philosophizing of Socrates. His remarks are more or less prophetic.

“If someone seized you or anybody else of that sort of people and carried you off to prison, claiming that you were doing an injustice when you were not, you know that you would not have anything of use to do for yourself, but you would be dizzy and gaping, without anything to say; and when you stood up in the law court, happening to face a very slowly and vicious accuser, you would die, if he wished to demand the death penalty for you.”49

Since Callicles postures himself as a friend giving friendly advice, and seems to have benefited from having played with philosophy, one might wonder if there is any connection between the advice and experience of Callicles. Callicles’ multiple quotations of poetry suggest that he is much more like the “talker” Amphion than the “actor” Zethus.50 Maybe Callicles should be in the Agora instead of listening to speeches and quoting poets. We note in this connection that, here too, Callicles’ praise of politics does not derive from the goodness of politics itself, but from the badness of the risks faced by philosophers in the city. By making the philosopher

49 Gorgias, 486a-b.
50 Plochmann and Robinson, A Friendly Companion to Plato’s Gorgias, 122-123.
unable to defend himself, philosophy makes him worse, and liable to suffer great harm and dishonor. “It is possible to strike such a man a crack on the jaw without paying the penalty.”

Without political skill the good things sought, whatever they may be, are insecure. We are given to the suspect, for related reasons, that Callicles is most afraid of being “trampled” or “cracked on the jaw.”

We have confirmed that the fears of Callicles are not obviously less forceful than his *eros*. The coherence of Callicles’ incoherence is discernible in the failure or sad fate of those he praises on the basis of nature. The interest of Callicles in rhetoric derives from the prospect that rhetoric might prove sufficiently powerful to overwhelm, or at least guard against, the natural contingencies to which man as man is exposed, especially according to the Athenian self-consciousness. But although he appeals to nature and tyranny, Callicles is unable to overlook his malignant fortune. Indeed, should the great according to nature be under the sway of justice according to convention, it would certainly be in the interest of Callicles. His praise of mastery is to that extent slavish. For related reasons, we are given to wonder whether the power of the regime exerts itself *through* the demoralization of Callicles.

**IV. Is Callicles a Touchstone?**

Callicles’ long speech provokes Socrates to compare him to a touchstone. Should the analogy prove fitting, agreement between Socrates and Callicles would render certain that the two had arrived at “*the true things themselves*.” A charming prospect in the midst of a dialogue so complex, but too much to hope for. For the analogy is also ironic, if not entirely misleading. Callicles is said to qualify as a touchstone on account of his knowledge, goodwill, and outspokenness. Since gold is always tested against comparatively worthless materials, it would

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51 *Gorgias*, 486c.
seem to follow that a “soul living correctly” does not possess these qualities. Gold is not assayed against gold, and has little in common with lydite (lithos lydia). Moreover, one needs to know gold, or possess gold, in order to verify the authenticity and quality of the traces left on the touchstone. It is not obvious that the Gorgias provides us with such means. The analogy charms the reader with the prospect of doctrinal truth, without bringing him a step closer to possessing it. Socrates wishes to test the quality of his own soul but falls in with many who lack the requisite qualities. Few are wise like Callicles; others are wise but lack sufficient care to instruct him in the true matters; yet others, like Polus and Gorgias, though wise and friendly, are so far bound by shame that “they dare to contradict themselves in front of many human beings, and this concerning the greatest things.”

Does Callicles possess these qualities?

Let us examine the evidence. Socrates says that many Athenians would say that Callicles has been sufficiently educated, and therefore presumably wise. Moreover, he once witnessed a conversation between Callicles and a group of ambitious young Athenians, who concluded that the political life is choice-worthy, and the excessive pursuit of wisdom ruinous. That he recommends the same to Socrates amounts to a demonstration of his good will. As for Callicles’ outspokenness, it rests on his claim not to feel shame, and the character of his long speech insofar as it accords with that claim. The evidence provided is obviously insufficient.

The conversation that follows calls Callicles’ possession of good will, wisdom and outspokenness successively into question. Socrates’ epithets are signals from Plato to the reader. At 489c and following, where Socrates addresses Callicles as most wise, the latter reveals his lack of knowledge. At 491b and following, where Socrates addresses Callicles as most superior and good, he confirms that Callicles regards the political life as best. Callicles is friendly to the

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54 Cf. Apology, 21b-22e.
55 Gorgias, 487a-b.
56 Gorgias, 487b-e.
57 Cf. Irwin, Gorgias, 182-183.
limited extent that he sincerely believes that Socrates should live the good life of politics, but he is otherwise hostile and becomes noticeably angry. Should Socrates fail to give up philosophizing for politicking, and be harmed for that reason, he would receive his just deserts. After 491c, where Socrates praises Callicles for his outspokenness, an argument is initiated that will make dramatically manifest the limit to Calliclean parrhesia. With the foregoing reservations in mind, let us turn to the defense of Callicles’ “justice of the strong man” thesis.

Socrates begins by restating the view supposedly held in common by Callicles and Pindar. It is just according to nature for the superior to forcefully take that which belongs to the inferior, for the better to rule the worse, and the noble to have more than the base. That view raises, naturally enough, questions about the sameness and difference of the superior, good and noble. But it also compels us to raise questions about the power of the superior, good, and noble over the inferior, bad and shameful. For Callicles’ thesis is an optimistic one in that it continues to posit the triumph of the higher over the lower. It is for this reason that Socrates becomes concerned to draw out the consequences of Callicles’ emphasis on power. Thus he asks whether the superior might prove anywise weaker than the inferior, which Callicles denies. Socrates fixes on the ambiguity that defined the great speech of Callicles, namely, that the good according to nature are by no means exempt from indignity at the hands of the many.

Callicles is aware and disturbed by the incidental power and worth of the individual from the perspective of the regime. The entire elenchus appeals to the diffidence or demoralization of Callicles. (i) The many are stronger than the individual in being more numerous; (ii) the many institute “slave morality”; (iii) therefore what the many regard just is stronger. For this reason,

(iv) injustice is more shameful than doing justice not merely according to convention, but nature as well.\(^{59}\) Apparently, the appeal to natural power is not incompatible with democracy and convention. The appeal to “people power,” the greater contribution of the people to the public weal, is in fact a conventional argument for democracy.\(^{60}\) Callicles’ praise of power is, however, impure. For we learn from the foregoing sophism, which does much to irritate Callicles, that his understanding of justice is both more nuanced and contradictory than any straightforward identification of might and right. “If a rabble of slaves and human beings of all sorts, worth nothing perhaps for the exertion of bodily might, was collected together” it would not suffice to render lawful whatever they assert.\(^{61}\)

We learn, in effect, that considerations besides strength – such as those implied by his emphasis on the “superior,” “just,” and “noble” – are crucial to Callicles’ understanding of things. He therefore claims not to have intended to exalt the mighty but rather “the better,”\(^ {62}\) which, upon further prompting, is taken to mean also the “the intelligent.” “Many times, therefore, one man who thinks intelligently is stronger according [Callicles’] argument than ten thousand who do not, and this man ought to rule, and those be ruled, and the ruler have more than the ruled.”\(^ {63}\) Callicles would appear torn between the impressive power of the demos, and his commitment to the superior, just and noble as he understands them. Moreover, his confusion is compounded by his “optimism,” which expects the higher to triumph over the lower. In contrast to his earlier depreciation of philosophy, or the view that the pursuit of wisdom is

\(^{59}\) Noting this blatant manipulation of nature and convention, we recall that Socrates has claimed innocence of all trickery of the sort. *Gorgias*, 488d-489b.

\(^{60}\) Aristotle, *Politics*, 1279bB40-1281b38.

\(^{61}\) *Gorgias*, 489c.

\(^{62}\) *Gorgias*, 489e.

\(^{63}\) *Gorgias*, 490a.
inversely related to the procurement of power, the wise are now the powerful. In proving able to secure their rule, they would bring about the rule of the superior, just and noble.\textsuperscript{64}

Callicles posits not only the identity of justice and power, but also wisdom, in the superior individual, the model of which is presumably the tyrant or rhetorician who acquires tyrannical power through persuasion. The thesis that rhetoricians are preeminent in power is still in play. But even here Callicles is ambiguous. He does not say that the wise rule, but that they ought to rule. Callicles is unable to decide between the subservience of the great to the city, and the capacity of a great individual who, seeing through the conventions of the city, and learning how to wield the opinions and passions of the city, comes to master the city. No more than Polus before him does Callicles prove able to work his way back to the limited power of rhetoric from the necessities that circumscribe political rhetoric, that is, the power of the demos over speakers.

More immediately, Callicles is confused about the relation that obtains between rule and self-interest. Socrates therefore recurs to the \textit{techne} analogy to clarify the meaning and consequence of “better and more intelligent.”\textsuperscript{65} Callicles does not mean that doctors, cloak makers, cobblers, or farmers, since better and more intelligent in their sphere of activity, deserve more food, bigger cloaks and many pairs of shoes.\textsuperscript{66} Rather, the qualified deserve to rule over that with respect to which they qualify. Those who deserve to rule are “intelligent in regard to the affairs of the city and in what way they may be well governed.”\textsuperscript{67} But they do not deserve, let alone need, more of that which is ruled over. Callicles’ muted acknowledgement of this point is reflected in the fact that “having more” drops out of his thesis. The source of Callicles’

\textsuperscript{64} Cf. \textit{Republic}, 473c-d; \textit{Statesman}, 305c-311c.
\textsuperscript{65} Cf. \textit{Republic}, 343b-347a.
\textsuperscript{66} In his Lecture Strauss notes that the middle example, weaving, implies in this context that women would in some sense deserve to rule. He takes this to imply the thesis of the \textit{Republic}. Strauss, \textit{Plato's Gorgias} (1963), 181-183.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Gorgias}, 491c-d.
confusion derives at least in part from his private orientation toward public life. Would Callicles still recommend the political life if that confusion were to be removed?

In turning to the life of politics, Callicles hopes to benefit himself. Rhetoric recommends itself as a promising way to further private ends through public means. Thus Socrates focuses on the apparent contradiction between the outward orientation of public service, and the inwardness of private desire. But does it follow that Callicles’ desires and opinions could be rendered more consistent through the efforts of a Socrates? And would that necessarily be beneficial to the regime?

We should not assume that the combination of private desire and public life is a threat to society for the simple fact that it is contradictory in the sense mentioned, or defies the traditional understanding of the ancient regime as defined by singular devotion to the common good. For, according to at least one account (Herodotus’), it is in the character of Athenian democracy to have freed private interest in ways that only redounded to its power. In other words, freeing citizens to pursue their own interests, and holding out the prospect of personal distinction through public service, Athens arranged public life in such ways that allowed the individual to “find himself” in the city.68 Apparently, this did not diminish, but only added to Athenian power, and deepened the regime’s hold on the hearts and minds of citizens. Without losing sight of the problems that self-interest might engender,69 we might well ask therefore whether the private desires of Callicles, not unlike the fears of Polus, promise to reconcile him to the regime he appears or claims to oppose.

The diffidence of Callicles could be taken to suggest that the private aversions and aims of Callicles are mere means from the perspective of the city. We shall confirm this in Part 3.B. To anticipate a later development, the authority of the regime in the eyes of the devoted citizen –

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68 Cf. Herodotus, The History, 3.80, 5.78; Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 2.38-2.44.
69 Cf. Aristotle, Politics, 1268b23.
and Callicles will prove devoted to Athenian democracy – comes to sight as a kind of “concrete universal.” Callicles is of the view that he is moving himself, when in fact he is being moved. He pursues his own ends, which are ends only at the level of “appearance.” In pursuing those “ends,” which are in fact means to further ends, Callicles realizes ends divergent from his own, those of the regime. The rhetorician believes he can rule the city, and is himself ruled by that belief. More specifically, he is ruled in and through the practical relations entailed by the effort to rule the city by means of speech. However: to say as much is not yet to say, as Hegel might, that the relation of Callicles to the regime is “reasonable.”

Callicles is aware that flattering the many is a source of great power. Simultaneously, he is dimly aware and confused by the servility or, to put it more charitably, stewardship that such a life would entail. The city attracts the aspirant to political office with promises of power and prestige, which Callicles or those like him find attractive. As Callicles has already indicated, however, the road to power demands experience: “in all those things that one who is to be a noble and good man, and well reputed”; “in the laws of the city, in the speeches one must use to associate with human beings in dealings both privately and publicly, in human pleasures and desires”; and “in customs and characters.” Thus the pursuit of power thrusts Callicles or those like him into the city. Callicles must operate in relation to, and therefore within the horizon of, law, endoxa, and the passions and conventions of the many. In this way, the regime draws power from Callicles through the very allure of power that he is beholden to, and effects the subordination of Callicles to itself. It is Callicles who, through his desire for power, is enslaved to the power of the many. He must attend to the desires and opinions of the many if he is to procure power in Athens. His pseudo-philosophical critique of convention as mere convention, and his contempt for the many on account of their ignorance, grates against his awareness of the

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necessity, no less pressing for him, of public service. He wishes to have it both ways, but cannot. He is therefore demoralized.

Let us return to Callicles as prospective “touchstone.” We are given ample reason to doubt that the analogy suits him, or suits him in the sense indicated. What then is the purpose of the analogy? To ask this question is to raise that concerning the significance of Socrates’ conversation with Callicles as a whole. What is “put to the test” in the persona of Callicles? The significance of Callicles in relation to the conversations with Polus and Gorgias has been set out, however provisionally, above. Since we are not yet prepared to pass judgment on Callicles, let us only make a few more provisional observations.

The qualities Socrates ascribed to Callicles are very good ones, those we might expect from a soul called “golden.” We would not expect them from a coarse soul analogous to lydite or graphite. Are the qualities of wisdom, good will and outspokenness more readily applied to Socrates? “If I happened to have a golden soul,” says Socrates. Socrates is known for doubting his own wisdom; his good will has been called into question; and he is an ironist. Perhaps then it is Socrates who plays the touchstone, and Callicles that is being tested. Were that so, it would only be more in keeping with his “obstetric” approach to philosophizing – an aspect of Socrates that is, admittedly, less pronounced in the Gorgias. Is the Gorgias crypto-maiutic? Many specialists would deny that possibility outright. It is not, for that reason, implausible.

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71 The entire analogy, despite being highly suggestive, seems designed to collapse on itself or induce paradox. Should we take the golden soul to be in any way the opposite of the touchstone (in the sense that touchstones are coarse and gold soft), it would suggest that a golden soul is ignorant, possessed of an ill will and reserved; should we deny to Callicles the features ascribed to him, but grant his status as a touchstone, we might conclude that Socrates is knowledgeable, outspoken and good willing. This would seem to indicate the Socrates of the Gorgias, who appears unusually dogmatic, rude, and moralistic. Of course, the Socrates we are more familiar with, in contrast to that of the Gorgias, is professedly ignorant, notoriously ironic and unconventional in his views. That Socrates denies that Polus or Gorgias were able to assay the quality of his soul suggests that touchstones are all or nothing. Either Callicles possess all of the qualities listed or he is no touchstone.

72 Apology, 20d-23b.

73 Theaetetus, 148d-151e.
As the analogy of rubbing gold against coarse stone might be taken to suggest, should the confrontation of Socrates and Callicles provide any stable indication of the truth it will take the quasi-empirical form of dramatic friction. Like Polus before him, Callicles will resist the efforts of Socrates. At the same time, we shall learn that Callicles has been thoroughly molded in accordance with the practices and perceptions that define the regime. The authenticity of gold is natural but its value is conventional. Callicles polishes up the ideal of greatness according to nature un tarnished by convention. He praises those who escape or defy, on account of their formidable natures, being molded by the city. The conventional value of gold derives not only from its beauty but also and especially its malleability. It is precisely the higher malleability or lower density of gold that causes it to rub off on the touchstone. Callicles will change his positions many times to suit the argument and the task of defending himself against Socrates’ efforts. Socrates, by contrast, will claim to always say the same things. Indeed, whatever Socrates might say about being open to changing his views, he is intransigent in his opposition to Callicles. Of the two, Callicles is certainly the protean one. We do not mean to suggest that Callicles is in fact golden. He is not that malleable. The regime, but not Socrates, will prove able to mold Callicles. Perhaps he is made of bronze, that less valuable, but still highly malleable, metal ascribed to the appetitive class in the Republic.74 The Gorgias must conclude with a myth.

V. Self-Rule and the Embodiment of Desire

Callicles’ praise of might or nature is a halfway house between convention and corruption by theory. He is neither sufficiently innocent to uphold justice as understood by the regime, nor sufficiently corrupted by theory to find persuasive that version of justice propounded by Socrates. The question remains, however, whether it would be anywise possible for Callicles to live up to the understanding of justice according to nature that he himself

74 Cf. Republic, 415a-c.
proposes. We have already been provided with ample reason to doubt Callicles in this respect, but it is necessary to examine in greater detail why Callicles’ thesis is especially untenable.

Callicles is nudged toward acknowledging the obstacles that stand between superiority as he understands it, and the procurement of power. He speaks no longer of the naturally superior as actually ruling but rather of the fact that they ought (prosekei) to rule.\(^{75}\) The procurement of power comes into focus as a problem in the following terms. The superior are “not only intelligent but also courageous, being sufficient to accomplish what they intend and not flinching through softness of soul.”\(^{76}\) He refers no longer to vagaries of power and superiority, but to intelligence combined with courage and capability. More specifically, excellence of the sort sought after demands prudence and diligence. To rule effectively over thousands or tens of thousands one must gain the confidence of the ruled, or at least the majority of those to be ruled. Is Callicles’ frankness likely to win him office?\(^{77}\) He might have learned otherwise from the example made of Gorgias.\(^{78}\) But more importantly, one cannot effectively rule without laying careful plans and following through with them, as can only be incompatible with the unrestrained life. Thus Socrates asks (at 491d) whether rule involves “self-rule.” The impracticality of Callicles’ understanding of rule comes into focus alongside his rejection of that very premise.

Socrates specifies that he means by “self-rule” something straightforwardly grasped by the many: “ruling the pleasures and desires that are in one self.”\(^{79}\) Callicles recoils at the very suggestion, which he finds innocent and naïve. He has inferred from the conventional character of justice the conventional character of moderation, and on that basis the folly of moderation.

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\(^{76}\) *Gorgias*, 491a-b.

\(^{77}\) Cf. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 3.36-3.49.

\(^{78}\) Cf. Catherine Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers*, 552.

\(^{79}\) *Gorgias*, 491d-e.
That he does would seem to derive from his theory about “the noble and just according to nature.” He therefore asks, rhetorically, whether one could be “happy” while remaining “a slave to anyone at all.” He identifies the very notion of self-rule with being ruled by others. 80

“The man who will live correctly must let his own desires be as great as possible and not chasten them, and he must be sufficient to serve them, when they are as great as possible, through courage and intelligence, and to fill them up with the things for which desire arises on each occasion. But this, I think, is not possible for the many; wherefore they blame such men because of shame, hiding their own incapacity, and they say that intemperance is surely a shameful thing (as I was saying earlier), enslaving the human beings who are superior in nature; unable themselves to supply satisfaction for their pleasures, they praise moderation and justice because of their own unmanliness.” 81

The argument concerning moderation takes the form of a “false-consciousness” thesis, which can be stated in the form of a syllogism. Moderation is asserted by the many; the many seek to enslave the strong; therefore belief in moderation amounts to enslavement by the many.

Callicles affirms, in negative form as it were, the implication of Gorgias’ arguments concerning the power of persuasion. Being persuaded by the many is being beguiled or enslaved by means of one’s openness to persuasion. To be persuaded is to be enslaved by means of one’s own freedom. Callicles therefore attempts to close himself off from persuasion as such, if not from everything held by the many. He tries very hard, even too hard, to extract himself from popular opinion.

The capacity to rule presupposes, as a basic condition for itself, the self-imposition of order on the soul. He who rules decides, and he who decides must order the options available to him. From the very outset, the desire to rule over others is itself one desire among many others. To pursue that desire with diligence is not to the pursue desire “in itself.” Callicles’ understanding of power and rule disposes him to reject, at least in speech, that elementary form

80 The association between self-rule and the many reminds us of democratic convention, which requires ruling and being ruled in turn. At the same time, we are reminded of Athens the imperial power. Should it relax its imperial ventures, it would all but surely suffer at the hands of others. Domestically, rule alternates; abroad, it must never be allowed to do so. Gorgias, 491-492a. Cf. Aristotle, Politics, 1277a21-31; Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 1.75-77.

81 Gorgias, 491e-492b.
self-rule without which nothing can be achieved. The connection that obtains between self-rule and the capacity to procure and effectively wield power would seem natural. Callicles appears to have confused the (pleonectic) lack of restraint characteristic of tyranny and empire with the individual will. But even, or rather especially, those working to realize tyrannical or imperial designs cannot realize their aims without self-rule. At the very least, should one wish to secure power by force and fraud one must be crafty. The many stratagems of Archelaus, his capacity to strike at the right time and his many dissimulations did not issue spontaneously out of “desire according to nature.” They are modifications, as opposed to the negation, of self-rule.

Callicles claims to desire the luxury afforded by tyranny, but he is oblivious to the toil, and therefore un-freedom, that dogs tyranny. Or better, he is only dimly aware of that toil, and does not grasp its significance. He denies the compatibility of happiness and slavery (douleuon). He is of the view that natural excellence requires that we allow our desires to bloom un-chastened. At the same time, however, he believes that we must prove sufficient to serve (hyperetein) those desires. But he does not see that, in order to prove sufficient to serve a given desire, to say nothing of a great desire, one must take on the bearing of a task master in relation to oneself. He believes that one must “distribute more” to friends than to strangers or enemies, and might even realize that a tyrant needs cronies. But he overlooks how these may entail self-rule, a concern for others, to say nothing of a hierarchy of ends. Thus moderation is shameful for “those for whom it is possible from the beginning to be either sons of kings or themselves by nature sufficient to supply themselves some rule or tyranny or dynasty.”

Callicles’ example is all too telling: a young heir – entitled by blood (read: nature) and law (read: convention) to rule – who needn’t lift a finger in order to become tyrant (save escaping being disposed of by an

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82 Cf. Xenophon, Heiro, 1-8.
83 Cf. Irwin, Gorgias, 203-208; Irwin, Plato’s Ethics, 107-110; Irwin, Plato’s Moral Theory, 124-125; Grote, Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates, V.2, 119; Cooper, Reason and Emotion, 51-75.
84 Gorgias, 492b.
Archelaus). Callicles has dissolved into the “black box of nature” the hard work that the projected seizure of political or tyrannical power necessitates in and of itself.

Accordingly: “this is how it is: luxury, intemperance, and freedom, when they have support – this is virtue and happiness.” All other considerations are but “fine pretenses” and “agreements” contra naturam. “When they have support” is the major lacuna in Callicles’ thesis. It reminds us that Callicles himself can furnish no such supports, and suggests that his understanding of greatness according to nature is a fantasy. We might indeed go further: it is a theoretical abstraction unsupported by reality, let alone the structure of desire.

With these considerations in mind, let us turn to the “myth” and “image” with which Socrates responds to Callicles’ praise of the absolutely intemperate life. The passage in question (492d-494b) is extremely complicated, and we do not propose to fully resolve it. Nevertheless, the following thesis will be advanced. In keeping with the foregoing, the myth and image serve to underscore the impossibility of Callicles’ doctrine of “indeterminate” desire for man qua embodied being. Socrates turns to the world of shades to show the incoherence of desire devoid of order, and to gradually reveal the order of desire that holds sway over Callicles. We might say, paraphrasing Hegel’s paraphrasing of Luther that “all half-philosophies lead to Hades.”

Callicles responds to the “simple” or “naïve” understanding of moderation with a fantastic portrayal of limitless desire. His thesis is reiterated by Socrates as follows: virtue requires that one’s desires be allowed to grow as great as possible and proves able to “prepare satisfaction for them from any place whatsoever.” It is the vague and extreme character of Callicles’ speech that prompts Socrates to ask whether “those who need nothing” are correctly said to be happy. The utter absence of desire is no more possible than the servicing of unlimited desire. Socrates does not, strictly speaking, oppose the temperate life to the intemperate life. The

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85 Gorgias, 492c.
86 Gorgias, 492d.
temperate man, as we learn from Aristotle, is not a man without desires.\(^{87}\) Thus Callicles is in a way correct to deny Socrates’ alternative. If Socrates were right, stones and corpses would prove happiest.\(^{88}\) In other words, life without desire is impossible for “animate” beings.\(^{89}\) No less impossible, however, is the life exalted by Callicles. Callicles’ “concept” of desire abstracts from the particularity of all actual desires and obscures the existential fact of satisfaction, however fleeting it may be. To desire is to desire such and such, and the servicing of a desire is followed by its temporary cessation. Socrates therefore intends to bring Callicles’ hedonism back down to earth. We take confirmation from the fact that Socrates will concentrate on getting Callicles to specify particular desires that he considers especially worthwhile or shameful. For Callicles cannot specify the content of desire “without ruining his case.”\(^{90}\)

Socrates responds with a sequence of two speeches. The first is called a myth (\textit{muthos}), but does not begin simply as such, and the second is called an image (\textit{eikones}).\(^{91}\) After each speech he asks if Callicles has been persuaded or could be persuaded that the orderly life is happier than the intemperate. Callicles responds negatively both times. Nevertheless, Callicles’ second denial involves his acknowledgement that the life in service of pleasure is not only pleasant but also painful. He therefore agrees with Socrates that the life he praises is “somehow terrible.” Although Callicles spoke at first of stones and corpses to refute the life of self-sufficiency, he comes to acknowledge the pain of desire and speaks of “living” like a stone. What he relegated to the dead is now ascribed to the living. He therefore acknowledges, as a result of Socrates’ efforts, the necessarily toilsome character of the life he recommends. To

\(^{87}\) Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 1117b24-1119b19.
\(^{88}\) Gorgias, 492e; Cf. \textit{Phaedo}, 65a-67b.
\(^{89}\) Dodds notes that the \textit{nekroillithoi} characterization of the ascetic life was not uncommon. Dodds, \textit{Gorgias}, 299.
\(^{90}\) Benardete goes so far to call Callicles’ hedonism a kind of “idealism” or “mystic doctrine,” as opposed to the “vulgar” hedonism with which we are more familiar. Benardete, \textit{The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy}, 74-77.
\(^{91}\) Gorgias, 493d.
bring Callicles’ hedonism down to earth, Socrates inculcates in Callicles an awareness of the persistence of pain and toil on the one hand, and the particularity of all experience on the other.

The first speech is messy. It begins with (i) an appeal to the authority of Euripides. It is followed by (ii) something Socrates heard “from some one of the wise.” It concludes with (iii) a myth from some wordplay loving Sicilian or Italian. In response to Callicles’ “stone-corpse” objection, Socrates says that he would not be amazed if Euripides was right to wonder “if living is being dead, and being dead is living.” Callicles denied life to Socrates’ living. Socrates’ appeal to Euripides responds in kind. We are reminded of Callicles’ earlier reference to Euripides’ *Antiope*. Callicles, and not Socrates, has everything upside down: those considered most alive by Callicles are in fact dead, and those considered dead by him are most alive.92

Socrates turns to the “life” of the dead in Hades and the “deathliness” of our living entombment in bodies to show the impossibility of the two lives – the life without desire and the life of bottomless desire – for actual or living human beings. The absence of desire, which Callicles attributed to death, is now associated with life; as for bottomless desire, which Callicles associated with tyranny and best life, it is now attributed to death. The first speech takes up Callicles’ challenge – *perhaps we are dead* – and situates his man of bottomless desire in Hades, in relation to whom our worldly existence is comparatively more “stone-like.” He then evokes “some wise man” who said famously “that we are now dead and our body is a tomb (*soma... sema*).”93 The saying of the wise man is a direct response to the “stone-corpse” objection. The word *sema* can be taken to mean not only “sign” but “tomb.” A tomb is a *sema* for a dead body; a *sema* can also mean the insignia of a person, as on a shield or seal. In both cases *sema* signifies the embodied, where the body signified individuates.94 But the wise man

92 *Gorgias*, 492e-493d.
also said that the “part of the soul in which desire exists happens to be such as to be persuaded and to change around up and down.” Previously, the capacity to distinguish between higher and lower pleasures was associated with the soul or at least the priority of soul over body. The randomness of desire associated with the body has been taken up into the soul. Is that despite or because the soul has been separated from the body?

It is implied that Callicles’ ideal life would only be possible for the disembodied. That suggestion is confirmed by the third part of the first speech, the pun filled myth of some Sicilian or Italian, ostensibly unknown to Socrates, but reminding us of Gorgias or Polus in his punning on persuasion. The myth associates Callicles’ ideal life with the “un-life” of the Danaids in Hades. The Danaids are disembodied shades who ceaselessly and insatiably go “up and down” in the service of desire without limit. They exemplify the abstractness of Callicles’ theory of desire.

The myth teller, playing on the words persuadable and persuaded (pithanon, peistikon, peiston) calls the part of the soul containing the desires a jar (pithos). Naming the thoughtless the uninitiated, and playing on that name, he says that their jar is leaky. The myth teller contradicts Callicles by placing those he praises in Hades. The Danaids, most wretchedly and stupidly, try to carry water to a leaky jar with a sieve, which is intended to represent the soul. The soul of the thoughtless is perforated and cannot hold anything on account of its disbelief and forgetfulness. The relation of the shades to their Sisyphean task parallels the passivity of Callicles’ great man in relation to the spontaneity of desire. Although it is difficult to see how the third segment of the first speech fits together, regarding the thoughtful it may be said that

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95 In the Cratylus the soma-sema relation is connected explicitly to the doctrine of Anaxagoras. Cf. Cratylus, 399d-400d.
96 Gorgias, 493a-493b.
97 Particularly since those carrying water relate to the soul and the part of the soul identified, which must be taken both part of the soul and somehow separate from it.
the soul and that part of the soul in which desire inheres would be neither leaky nor perforated, therefore not so liable to change, and more resilient to persuasion. Socrates “always says the same things.” By contrast, the desires of Callicles render him in certain respects pliable, even if not at the hands of Socrates. The myth drives a wedge between intelligence and hedonism as Callicles understands them, and suggests that Callicles himself is drawn senselessly hither and thither.

Socrates follows the myth with an image, and a comparison of the two reveals how the myth and Callicles’ thesis share something essential in common. Socrates brings an aspect of the Hades myth back to life. It is as if Socrates had to travel to and back from Hades to remind Callicles about what it means to be alive. The life of the immoderate and moderate are now set up as analogous to two men in possession of many jars, one whose jars are “healthy and full” and another whose jars are perforated and decayed. Filling the jars is difficult and toilsome because their contents are scarce. Thus the moderate man rests contented, while the other “is always compelled, night and day, to fill them, or he suffers the utmost pains.” Three differences are worth stressing. (i) In the image most of that which distinguishes the myth drops out: “there is no Hades, no soul, no body, no desires, no persuasion, and no pleasures; all there is are extreme pains.” 98 Further, (ii) the flavorlessness of water is replaced with more flavorful and covetable goods: wine, honey and milk. 99 Finally, (iii) the second speech is not divided between three different authorities. It is more coherent and less dependent on authorities. The move from the first speech, which is a movement from a myth to an image, is a movement from the extraordinary to the every day. That movement brings with it a more palpable, as well as more specific, rendering of desire, the objects of which are to be consumed rather than poured into a bucket through a sieve. From the first speech to the second we move from the disembodied back

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99 Cf. Strauss, Plato’s Gorgias (1963), 203
to the embodied. The necessity of doing so is supplied by the abstractness of Callicles’ thesis, which Socrates seeks to remedy. The problem with Callicles’ thesis is that it renders desire, as Hegel would say, too “indeterminate.”

A final matter remains to be mentioned before we conclude our treatment of the passage. Although the myth is traditionally held to be orphic or Pythagorean, we have noted that the myth-teller, like Gorgias, is a Sicilian prone to rhetorical flourishes. The word playing Sicilian draws from the words of a wise man, and spins them into a myth. That would seem to suggest the by now familiar prospect of an alliance between the wise and the rhetoricians or poets with a view to crafting persuasion in defense of virtue. Callicles, as we have seen, evokes the poets as authorities and bows to the authority of Gorgias. Could poetry and rhetoric therefore prove more successful than philosophy left to its own devices?

After the afterlife myth, Socrates asks Callicles if he has been persuaded. Callicles denies that he would “change anything” even if he were told “myths of many other such things.” Socrates’ question concerning the persuasiveness of myths follows an afterlife myth, and the Gorgias ends with an afterlife myth. We are meant to raise that question again at the end of the Gorgias. It is suggested, however, that Callicles would find the second myth no more persuasive than the first. Of course, Plato chose not to record Callicles response to the later myth as he does here. And Callicles was found responsive to the limited extent that he now admits or takes for granted that desire is accompanied by toil and pain. It may be that Callicles, or the city in relation to Callicles, is in need of afterlife myths, however fragile or open to doubt the se may be

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100 Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 296-299.
101 Christina Tarnopolsky expects the myth at the end of the Gorgias to have much greater traction than all of Socrates’ preceding efforts, and precisely due to its being more “Platonic” as opposed to strictly speaking Socratic. She does not marshal sufficient evidence for this claim. Although her suggestion that it may prove more “memorable” to Callicles is an intriguing one, it is not clear why it should prove more memorable than, say, “the day Socrates schooled Gorgias, Polus and I,” or being called a catamite (see below), or admitting before the crowd that he is more democratic than he let off (also below). Cf. Stauffer, The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias, 119; Tarnopolsky, Prudes, Perverts and Tyrants, 114 ff.
– though it remains too early for us to say. It is without doubt of some necessary importance to the dialogue, insofar as it takes up the power of persuasion, that the power of myth relative to dialectic emerges as a question on the margins of the dialogue. Although Plato never read the Bible, he was certainly impressed by the far reaching influence of Homer.

**VI. Higher and Lower Pleasures**

It has been argued in the preceding that Plato intends to reveal the impossibility of Callicles’ doctrine of desire. That intention is furthered by the argument that stretches from 494b to 499c, where it becomes increasingly clear that Callicles does not and cannot live up to the doctrines espoused by him. The movement from the abstract and disembodied to the concrete and bodily, which has been shown to define the transition from the “myth” to the “image” of the leaky jars, continues to define Socrates’ procedure.102

Callicles restates his position by maintaining that the moderate man with full jars experiences no pleasure, since he no longer rejoices or feels pain, and affirms that “living pleasantly” consists “in keeping as much as possible flowing in.” Socrates fixes on the latter, eliciting Callicles’ agreement to the following: “so if much flows in is it then necessary that what goes away also be much, and that there be big holes for the outflowing?”103 The flow of fluids in and out of the body completes the return from abstraction to the embodiment of desire. The turn to the profane effectively reveals the limits to Callicles’ praise of unrestrained hedonism.

The episode may well qualify as the most vulgar passage in the entire Platonic corpus.104 Socrates proceeds to liken Callicles’ ideal life to (i) that of a “stone-curlew” – a bird whose distinguishing quality is the simultaneity with which it eats and defecates, and indeed consumes

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103 *Gorgias*, 494a-494e.
104 One is tempted to account for the great popularity of the Callicles section to this fact, Plato’s artful wielding of vulgarity.
its own excrement; (ii) to one who devotes his entire life to the ceaseless scratching of itches – thus evoking the sexual pleasures in particular; and, by way of a “culmination,” (iii) to the “life of catamites” – boy prostitutes and the passive partners in male homosexual intercourse.

All three examples have much too much to do with “holes and outflowings” for Callicles to stomach. The limits to his professed shamelessness and aimlessness are thereby demonstrated. He calls the last example, in particular, “terrible, and shameful and base.” Male prostitution was illegal, and those found guilty of it could be deprived of their rights. Socrates, following the example of Polus, has effectively shocked Callicles with “witnesses” and “bogeymen.”

Callicles complains twice of Socrates’ disgraceful conduct. But he does not, despite his contempt, deny pleasure or happiness to those who devote their lives to the scratching of proverbial itches. Socrates is therefore able to associate Callicles’ thesis with the denial that there are higher and lower pleasures, and the identification of pleasure with the good. Callicles refuses to admit that there are higher and lower pleasures. As he admits, however, his refusal serves the aim of preventing Socrates from prevailing over him in argument. By expressing his aversion to being triumphed over in argument, and revealing his judgment that the lives of catamites – however pleasant or happy – are terrible, shameful and base, Callicles continues to reveal tacitly the hierarchy of desire and aversion that holds sway over him.

The argument unfolds across three stages. Of interest here is not so much the substance of the arguments, but their effect or lack thereof upon Callicles. (i) From 495b-496e, Socrates unfolds an argument, recalling his earlier discussion with Polus, in which he attempts to

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105 Cf. Philebus, 45a-48a and context; Phaedrus, 251c.
106 Gorgias, 494b-494e.
107 Plochmann and Robinson note, perhaps somewhat gratuitously, that Callicles offers no indication that he was above such sources of enjoyment. Were that so, he certainly could not admit it, for homosexual prostitution was forbidden by law, and a citizen accused of it risked atimia, or the dishonourable loss of citizen rights and therefore the protection afforded to citizens against harm by other citizens. A Friendly Companion to Plato’s Gorgias, 150-151; Tarnopolsky, Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants, 37-38, 84-84; Irwin, Gorgias, 180-181.
108 Gorgias, 495a.
decouple the pleasant from the good and the painful from the bad. He does so by considering various states of pleasure and pain, and the transitions between them. The basis for Socrates’ emphasis on the alternation of pleasure and pain is provided by Callicles’ acknowledgement that life in pursuit of pleasure is accompanied by pain and toil. (ii) From 497a-497b the dialogue breaks down, only to be saved by the intervention of Gorgias. (iii) From 497c-499a Socrates resumes the argument that preceded its disruption, appealing now to Callicles’ judgment of base and virtuous human types insofar as they experience pleasure and pain. Socrates’ opening gambit reveals the intentions that guide his strategy. Callicles’ understanding of natural excellence has made us aware of his commitment to courage and knowledge. That commitment is at odds with the abstract hedonism he espouses. A commitment to higher human types involves a commitment to higher and lower pleasures. He who valorizes courage and intelligence cannot fail to look down on the pains of cowards and the pleasures of fools. Thus Socrates appeals to the excellence of the courageous and intelligent over and against the cowardly and stupid.

Socrates’ arguments are eminently sensible. And, in some manner or another, Callicles accepts them. They are germane to Callicles’ understanding of human excellence, which valorizes courage and practical reason. Moreover, the exchange features the first two instances of properly Socratic conversation with Callicles. Socrates asks clear and briefly worded questions and Callicles provides brief answers. Everything prior is characterized by long speeches, obscure images, insults, and irony. Indeed, in contrast to the sensational and heated back and forth that characterizes the conversation up until now, the present argument is, since relatively free of dysfunction, comparatively boring. The “dialectic” seems to draw out, or even drags out, across five pages what everyone already knows, including or especially Callicles.109

109 A.E. Taylor writes: “Personally, I cannot help feeling that, with all its moral splendour, the dialogue is too long: it ‘drags.’” Cited in Plochmann and Robinson, A Friendly Companion to Plato’s Gorgias, 376-377 n.1, 379 n25.
We are tempted to say that the points agreed upon lead inexorably to the conclusions drawn by Socrates. Be that as it may, Socrates’ arguments are eventually rejected and dismissed as mere chatter.

Evidently, Callicles’ rejection of Socrates’ argument derives from elsewhere than sincere disagreement. His blithe dismissal, taken together with his eventual acknowledgement that some pleasures are higher than others, suggests the willful imperviousness of Callicles and those like him to Socratic dialectic.\(^{110}\) At the same time, however, it also suggests the utter superfluity of Socrates’ dialectic insofar as it is directed on the present occasion towards persuading Callicles that there are higher and lower pleasures. He is, as it were, trying to persuade Callicles of something he already believes. That is confirmed at 499b, where Callicles claims that, throughout the intervening exchange, he thought all along, like “any other human being” would, that “some pleasures are better and others worse.” There is no reason to doubt that admission, which comes to sight as one of the only successes attributable to Socrates’ dialectical and rhetorical efforts in conversation with Callicles. But again, by no means can Socrates be said to have succeeded in altering any of Callicles’ basic convictions. He has succeeded only to the extent that Callicles admits to believing what he believed all along. What, then, is the significance of the intervening argument and the trifling “success” it leads up to?

Callicles’ tacit and explicit admissions that there is a hierarchy of pleasures and pains, viewed in terms of the superfluity of Socrates’ arguments, compels us to raise the following question. Is it possible for a human being not to consider some pleasures and pains better and others worse? Plato would seem fully aware of the Kantian view that man is a fundamentally judging being, or a being oriented toward the whole on the basis of (innate or posited) ideas like the beautiful. Callicles cannot fail to subsume Socrates’ examples under universal headings like

the noble or base, which distinguish the desirable from the undesirable. The basis on which Callicles orders desire is produced by the soul of Callicles, which stands in necessary relation to the nature and education of Callicles. The order of aversion and desire to which Callicles is beholden is shown, moreover, to condition the power of persuasion or the production of obedience.

Socrates’ proves unable to persuade Callicles that the moderate and just life is best. It is notably when Socrates is most ordinarily Socratic that Callicles loses all will to participate. Callicles would rather make ridiculous claims about desire before a crowd than be shown to lose face. We note, moreover, that Callicles’ admission follows Gorgias’ intervention in the dialogue. Gorgias’ intervention recalls the earlier intervention of Callicles and Chaerephon, which compelled Gorgias, by force of the crowd, to continue the dialogue. Now Gorgias intervenes to compel Callicles to continue the conversation, and to not worry excessively about his honor. Why is Callicles heedless of Socrates and deferential to Gorgias? To answer this question we must look to the intimations Plato provides of a Calliclean ladder of desire, which accounts not only for his intransigence but also, and crucially, his compliance. It may be possible for base men to regard the pleasures of scratchers and catamites as second to none, but it is certainly not possible for Callicles. More importantly, Callicles’ desire for political prestige and excellence, the desire which made a sophistic education covetables for ambitious Athenian youth in general, accounts for his obedience to Gorgias. That this is so, however, can hardly be regarded the result of Gorgias’ efforts, let alone Socrates’. Gorgias did not produce Callicles’ desire for political prestige (though perhaps he inflamed it), and Socrates did not produce Callicles’ contempt for catamites or his fear of the many. What then is the origin of these hierarchies of desire and aversion, and to what extent are they malleable or subject to persuasion?
Callicles admission that there are higher and lower pleasures marks a turning point in the conversation, after which point the conversation makes Callicles’ relation to the Athenian regime thematic. We shall take up that relationship when we return to Callicles in Part 3.B. There we shall take up the malleability of Callicles, perhaps the key to the problem of political authority insofar as it is taken up by the Gorgias. In anticipation of Hegel’s claim that the truth of subjective spirit reveals itself in objective spirit, we can say, at the risk of distorting Plato’s meaning, that the truth of Callicles is Athens. Callicles’ ladder of desire, the hierarchy of goods that causes him to refute in deed what he claims in speech, derives in part from the education of Callicles by the Athenian regime, or what came to be known as “culture.”

VII. Political Authority and the Limits of Opinion and Embodied Passion

To bring Part 2 to a close it is appropriate to summarize the key points that have come into focus through the course of our study of the first three quarters of Plato’s Gorgias.

The Gorgias is about the power of a possible art whose business it is to craft persuasion, and therefore produce obedience through non-violent means. It therefore takes up a problem that all of Plato’s political writings point to, namely, that the internalization of obedience through speech may be circumscribed by definite limits. That may be traced in outline as follows.

Gorgias’ reversal before the crowd revealed the necessity with which specifically political speech must appeal to knowledge and justice. Political speakers must present themselves as knowledgeable and just, and in ways that delimit the power of persuasion. For the rhetorician must gain and maintain the confidence and trust of his audience, and certain admissions or claims about knowledge and justice – however true – can only serve to undermine that end. In conversation with Polus and Callicles, the limits to which the power of persuasion is subject are gradually disclosed. Each conversation begins in opposition to claims made by Socrates that depart from the compass of ordinary opinion, or go against the grain of elementary
aversions and attractions. Plato brings into focus the horizon that circumscribes the efforts of Socrates, who inherits from Gorgias the task of crafting persuasion in defense of justice. He does so by revealing the sorts of opinions, aversions and attractions – which are attributed to “all men” besides Socrates – that obstruct that task. Accordingly, alongside the opposition of Socrates to the city or “all men,” that between the ordinary understanding of justice and the vision of justice put forward by Socrates comes into view. Hence the Gorgias takes up not only the power of rhetoric insofar as it might craft persuasion in defense of justice in the political sense, but also its limited power to bring about the internalization of a trans-political understanding of justice.

In revealing the political horizon that circumscribes the power of persuasion in defense of justice, the Gorgias indirectly exhibits the “doxastic” and “psychological” basis of political authority, or the dynamics that underlay the “actual” or “effective” consolidation of political authority. Insofar as the doxology and psychology of political authority comes into focus in opposition to the efforts of Socrates and the philosophical life, the Gorgias takes up philosophy’s relation to the politically actual or decisive. It is the Platonic dialogue about the significance of “actuality” or the “effective truth” for philosophy.

The “actual” city, as disclosed by the Gorgias, inhabits a horizon of contradictory passions and opinions. As the contradictory opinions of Polus and Callicles are associated with “all men,” it is suggested that the city must forever be in contradiction with itself.111 Does this

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111 The contradictions of ordinary opinion and passion have been at issue since Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias. Gorgias contradicted himself about justice, and he did so to appease the crowd. Polus was beholden to a long list of contradictory opinions, which Socrates could partially silence, but certainly not loosen the hold of. Finally, in conversation with Callicles, Socrates suggests that Callicles is condemned to a life of endless self-contradiction. It is true, perhaps, if Callicles were to follow Socrates’ exhortation and “look at himself correctly” or pursue self-knowledge (viz., philosophize), that he could come to see why his opinions drive him restlessly hither and thither. But we have good reason to doubt that he would ever undertake the self-examination demanded of him, and no reason to expect that, should he become aware of the contradictions to which he is beholden, it would free him of those contradictions. Recalling the example of Alcibiades, the effort to release Polus and Callicles from a life of contradiction would seem to require constant Socratic attention and guidance – a most unlikely prospect. Gorgias, 495e; Xenophon, Memorabilia, 1.2.18.
pose a grave obstacle to the consolidation of political authority? Only if it is assumed from the outset that political authority must conform to the demands of theory or dialectic, or the view according to which contradiction must be replaced with logical coherence. It is a prejudice of the Enlightenment, and would-be enlighteners who have turned their attention to the *Gorgias*, that contradictory opinions about justice could be made consistent, or that Plato takes that task as his own. It is thought, perhaps, that upon the removal of such contradictions the problems of political life could be relaxed or brought to subside. In contrast to the theoretical drive for self-sameness, the political view of things accords a different significance to the contradictions that define the city. For, as Plato suggests, the existence of contradictory opinions about justice is not necessarily a strike against the power and stability of the regime. Indeed, if the authority of the city rests on a foundation of contradictory opinions about justice, the will to unravel all contradictions, or the “tribunalization” of all facets of communal life that characterizes the Enlightenment and its “moral worldview,” may prove pernicious. As we have seen in Part 2.B there are reasons to believe that political authority, and justice insofar as it is imperfectly realized by the city, requires that certain contradictory opinions be left intact.

To say that the city will never free itself from contradictory opinions and passions sounds like a counsel of despair. But is it? The Enlightenment tends to expect the triumph of the higher over the lower. The despair of enlighteners at the resiliency of the lower derives from the expectation or hope that the higher could or will triumph in the form of “progress,” the dialectics of history, the technical mastery of nature, the refinement of democratic procedure, *et cetera*. Although Hegel does not counsel despair so much as “dancing before the rose in the cross of the present,” he is no exception to the foregoing. Looking for the presence of the higher in the lower, he exhibits the triumph of the higher over the lower and by means of the lower. Hegel

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alleviates despair and encourages reconciliation by offering an account that proves, on the basis provided by the fundamental contradictions of political life, the reasonability and justice of the modern state.

By contrast, in the *Gorgias*, Plato reveals the fundamental incommensurability of wisdom, justice and power. In the philosophy of Plato, “the springs of action” in the city drive a wedge between the political understanding of justice and the philosophical examination of justice. It is characteristic of Hegel’s approach, and the frustrations it engendered for philosophy afterwards, that a *positive significance must be ascribed, or a negative significance denied, to the negation of abstract morality by the state via actuality or that which is effective in the world.* By contrast, Plato makes no effort to unburden the city of its limited justice, or vindicate the forms of alienation coterminous with public life. Nor does he attempt a political theodicy, or a rational justification of the world as it is. He appears to be of the view that it is unreasonable to despair of expectations that point beyond what can be expected of actual cities. At the same time, that Socrates’ presentation of justice is a political non-starter does not necessarily make it less just for the highness of the high does not depend on its actuality.\(^{113}\)

There is, nevertheless, a silver lining to Socrates’ failures. For we have seen that ordinary opinions, aversions and attractions obstruct not only the efforts of Socrates, but also the tyrannical fantasies of Polus and Callicles. For related reasons, we see why the limited power of persuasion, and the formidable power of ordinary opinion, is not only to be lamented. For the utter malleability of opinion or passion would lend itself not only to the ambitions of moral theoreticians or enlighteners, but the longings of tyrants as well. That quotidian opinions and passions might obstruct the realization of tyrannical aims is not unfortunate. But do the

\(^{113}\) Cf. Strauss, Letter to Karl Löwith, August 15\(^{th}\) 1946. Reprinted and translated in *Correspondence Concerning Modernity: Leo Strauss and Karl Löwith*, Independent Journal of Philosophy IV (1983), 105-108. Note the following “fantastic” claim and its context: “I really believe, although to you this apparently seems fantastic, that the perfect political order, as Plato and Aristotle have sketched it, *is* the perfect political order.”
contradictory passions and opinions of Polus and Callicles therefore come to sight as somehow beneficial or not altogether bad? That would come as a surprise, for ignorance, at least according to Socrates, is the greatest evil. In other words, we are made to raise basic questions about the positive or negative significance of the limited power of persuasion, and the correspondingly formidable power of mere opinion and passion, in the city. Although the Gorgias does seem to raise questions such as these, does it provide us with the means of resolving them? We shall have to return to these questions later.

We transition now from the problem of political authority to the actualization or consolidation of political authority. The preparatory work undertaken in Part 1 and Part 2 allow for greater parsimony in Part 3. We shall focus more narrowly on the problems that have been identified in the preceding, and we shall bring the consideration of Plato and Hegel closer together. Our chief concern is the regime’s power over opinion and passion and its ability to make these ministerial to itself. Part 3.A concerns the cunning of reason in Hegel’s account of the modern state. We refer especially to the capacity of civil society insofar as it works to bring about the triumph of right by means of the lower determinations of spirit and nature. Part 3.B concerns the Athenian regime insofar as it holds sway over the soul of Callicles, and the dynamics that account for that “effective” relation. In contrast to the Hegelian formulation, we shall refer to this as the cunning of doxa.
Part 3

The Consolidation of Political Authority in the Philosophy of Plato and Hegel

“Somewhere there are still peoples and herds, but not where we live, my brothers: here there are states. State? What is that? Well then, open your ears to me, for now I shall speak to you about the death of peoples.

State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies too; and this lie crawls out its mouth: ‘I, the state, am the people.’ That is a lie! It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life.

It is annihilators who set traps for the many and call them ‘state’: they hang a sword and a hundred appetites over them. Where there is still a people, it does not understand the state and hates it as the evil eye and the sin against customs and rights. This sign I give you: every people speaks its tongue of good and evil, which the neighbor does not understand. It has invented its own language of customs and rights. But the state tells lies in all the tongues of good and evil; and whatever it says it lies – and whatever it has it has stolen...

Behold, how it lures them, the all-too-many – and how it devours them, chews them, and ruminates! ‘On earth there is nothing greater than I: the ordering finger of God am I’ – thus roars the monster.”

— Nietzsche, On the New Idol, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Section A

The Cunning of Reason

I. The Problems of Plato and the Presuppositions of Hegel

Part 1 concerned the problems that motivated the Philosophy of Right, and ended with a provisional account of the presuppositions that guide Hegel’s approach to the consolidation of political authority. Part 2 concerned the problems of the Gorgias, and gradually brought into focus the Platonic approach to the “doxology” and “psychology” of political authority. Parts 1 and 2 converge on a single question. Can the lower aspects of man be sufficiently understood and set in motion to bring about the triumph of the higher in man as understood from the standpoint of philosophy? The presuppositions that guide Hegel’s approach to the consolidation of political authority may, along these lines, be understood as the problems of Plato’s Gorgias.
The “monstrous” power of the modern state is said to derive from its capacity to bring about the effective realization of “objective” or “substantial” right by means of, and in the element of, “subjectivity.” The lower determinations of subjectivity, insofar as subjectivity saddles the natural and spiritual world, pose obstacles to the realization of right. Hegel is confident, in the final analysis, that the modern state proves able to set these in service of right, or that the triumph of the higher determinations of spirit can be demonstrated in the everyday actualities of the modern world. The lowly in man can be systematically laid bare by philosophical science, and exhibited in its real worldly activity as means to the ends of spirit. Moreover, right is interpreted in such a way that its realization on the basis of such means is no strike against its rightness. In other words, the highness of the higher is not compromised by the fact that it must employ lowly means to secure itself. To expect any more from the higher in man is to make unreasonable demands on the human spirit.

Let us recall in this connection Hegel’s interpretation of Plato and rehabilitation of the sophists. In Hegel’s estimation, the sophistic appeal to subjectivity was regarded as a source of corruption by Plato. The ethics of the polis demanded the suppression of subjectivity, which could only be seen as a threat to the integrity of communal life. Hegel’s interpretation of the Gorgias would stray perhaps not far from standard or traditional interpretations of the Gorgias. According to the standard view Plato is concerned above all with the task of defending public decency and/or morality against the subjectivism or “nihilism” of the sophists. More to the point, however sympathetic toward the general task of demonstrating the incoherence of mere subjectivism, Hegel was of the view that Plato failed to see the deeper truth of subjectivity, which, far from being merely a source of corruption, is the soil out of which all higher determinations of spirit develop. Thus, according to Hegel, the emancipation of subjectivity typical of modern times allows for a regime that is built from the stuff of human freedom, and in
such ways and to such an extent that the Greeks could not have fathomed. Against all expectations to the contrary, it is only the emancipation of subjectivity that makes the coincidence of power, reason and rightfulness possible. The emancipation of subjectivity is articulated in the form of “abstract right” and “morality,” and brought about in “civil society,” the distinctly modern sphere of ethical life. What remains to be seen for the purposes of this study insofar as it concerns Hegel is the manner and extent to which the emancipation of subjectivity proves ministerial to the consolidation of political authority, or the process according to which substantial right is anchored in the subjective extreme of “personal particularity.”

We have seen in Part 1.B that Hegel discerned in the “speculative” art of rhetoric an effort to comprehend the diversified ways in which subjectivity could serve as a means to the various ends of life in the city. It is taken to ply its craft on human nature (the passions) and spirit (the opinions or conventions). In Part 2 we have seen that Plato, whatever Hegel may have thought, was well aware of such a prospect. That prospect is put to the test throughout Plato’s Gorgias insofar as it takes up the power of rhetoric, which, as the art of crafting persuasion or producing obedience, works to master the sources of human motivation in the city. Plato is, however, much less convinced than Hegel that the higher in man could secure its rule over the lower by availing itself of a putative art that works to comprehend and master the “springs of action.” The embodiment of passion and the contradictions that define the ordinary political attitude delimit the power of rhetoric, particularly insofar as it might work toward the production of obedience through speeches about justice, and trans-political justice especially.

There are, nevertheless, crucial respects in which Hegel and Plato are in agreement. It is appropriate to recall Hegel’s more or less apt characterization of that which set Socrates and Plato apart from the sophists, namely, that the manifold of perspectives and passions were held
to be fundamentally oriented toward the *agathon*. Other differences aside, for Plato, as for Hegel, the manifold perspectives and desires must be understood in terms of a higher order unity, which also determines the directionality of human striving and thinking. Hegel’s residual Platonism is discernible in that the contradictions which define the natural and reflective understandings of things “participate” in the coherence of the whole as understood from the standpoint of the speculative philosophy. But Hegel goes far beyond Plato in ascribing a positive significance *qua* reasonable and right to those contradictory passions and perspectives. Where Hegel provides a theodicy that seems to justify the entirety of human confusion, Plato holds back. For Socrates, the actual triumph of the higher over the lower is, if anything, immaterial to the highness of the higher. According to the Platonic-Socrates, the just is not less just for being less actual or impossible. For Hegel, the obverse is true.

The contradictory structure of passion and perspective, and the significance of the actuality of justice to the justice of justice, taken together, allows us to set up a confrontation between the Hegelian and Platonic understandings of political authority as follows. In Plato, as we shall see especially in Part 3.B, it is the ladder of desire and aversion, as well as the contradictions of ordinary opinion, that weld types like Callicles to the regime, but in such ways that by no means qualify as “reasonable” or “just” from the perspective of philosophy. As for Hegel, the ladder of spirit writ large, that is, the determinate structure of the will and the system of interlocking wills engendered by modern civil society, enables not only the consolidation of political authority but the realization of political right as understood from the standpoint of the speculative philosopher. The incoherence of subjective, and especially natural willing, far from delimiting the power of political authority, seeds the triumph of reason and spirit over ignorance and nature, and betrays the hidden hand of higher order processes that support the actualization
of right. With these general points in mind, we turn to Hegel’s discussion of the structure of human willing in the Introduction to the Philosophy of Right.

II. The Starting Point of the Philosophy of Right

Hegel’s exposition of the structure of the will in the Introduction is easily the most difficult part of the Philosophy of Right. It provides the basis for the entire system of right to follow. It is intended to bring the reader into proper relation to the problem of right, by bringing the reader into proper relation to human willing, which in turn presupposes that the reader has already been brought into proper relation to nature.¹

Let us begin by recalling the “critical” bearing of Hegel’s philosophy. As we have seen, the domain of right is not nature but freedom or spirit. Although Hegel used the term Naturrecht, his usage of that term consisted in little more than deference to tradition. He considered “natural right” oxymoronic, and denies that one can speak of “laws of nature” in any manner besides the value neutral and empirical one characteristic of the natural sciences. On two further occasions it is denied that one can speak of the “unjust” according to nature.² Thus, at the outset of his 1817-1818 Lectures, it is stated that the terms “natural right” and “natural law” ought to be left behind and replaced by “philosophical doctrine of right [philosophischer RechtsLehre]” or “doctrine of objective spirit [Lehre von dem objective Geiste].”³ However this may be, the Philosophy of Right is saturated with discussions of man’s relation to nature. It is therefore necessary to face head on the following question: how does the ubiquity of “nature” in the philosophical doctrine of right stand in relation to the critical intentions of the work?

¹ Thus Hegel begins the Introduction by continuing his attack against Fries and the philosophy of feeling. PhR, 29-30, 46-49 [§1R, §4R].
² PhR, 15-17, 113, 294-295, 390 [13Z, §49Z, §140, §244].
The reader of the Philosophy of Right must always keep in view what Hegel says regarding its proper starting point. Hegel is concerned from the very outset (in §1-2) to stress that “the science of right is a part [Teil] of philosophy,” that is, of a larger whole.\(^4\) The “normative” intention and import of the Philosophy of Right is circumscribed. There are questions that are no longer relevant within the sphere of philosophy of right – having been dispensed with earlier on in the “system” – as well as questions that are not relevant beyond the scope of philosophy of right. Most importantly, the starting point of the Philosophy of Right is said to have been “proven” before the Philosophy of Right, or earlier on in the system. The Philosophy of Right begins, as it were, before the Philosophy of Right.

The proper starting point of the Philosophy of Right is not provided until §4: “the will.”\(^5\) The intervening moment, §3, does not refer to the starting point of the philosophical science of right, which Hegel calls the “idea of right,” but rather to the “positivity of right.”\(^6\) We therefore ask: how does the positivity of right relate to the starting point of the philosophical science of right, the theme of §1-2 and §4? The positive form of right derives from the bare fact that a given understanding of right is regarded as valid and upheld within a given regime. The positive content of right consists in such things as national character, the historical development of a people, their manifold relations to natural necessity, the application of law to particular cases and contingent circumstances and, finally, the sorts of provisions that govern the passing of judgment in court.\(^7\) The remarks to §3, which criticize natural and merely historical (as opposed to natural-philosophical and philosophical-historical) approaches to right, are indicative of Hegel’s fundamental conviction that right cannot be straightforwardly derived from the

\(^4\) PhR, 29, 30-31 [§1, §2].  
\(^5\) PhR, 46 [§4].  
\(^6\) PhR, 34 [§3].  
\(^7\) PhR, 34 [§3].
empirical existence of right, that is, right as a historical or everyday factum brutum. To begin in such a way is to mistake the “starting point” of right. The positivity of right, which is to say also its empirical or historical existence, must be derived from the logically intelligible structure of human willing. It must be viewed as a product of willing and, more specifically, as “the highest peak of self-conscious reason, which gives itself actuality and engenders itself as an existing world.” Insofar as the positivity of right is to be taken up in the Philosophy of Right, its form and content will be produced out of the stuff of human freedom.

The immediate preparation for the Philosophy of Right is said to be found in the section of the Philosophy of Mind that deals with “Psychology.” Psychology is the first stage of spirit in which spirit, taking itself as its theme, turns to the task of understanding its own workings and, on that basis, proceeds to freely order itself. It is not obvious why the philosophy of right must receive its decisive preparation in the form of psychology. We shall return to that question later. For now, it is more important to emphasize that the Philosophy of Right begins with the activity of free thought insofar as it may take its practical relation to the world as its primary subject matter, but in such a way that presupposes that mind has already been liberated from the “externality” of nature. Insofar as psychology deals with the merely natural in man – the psuche, or soul as Hegel understands it – it does so from a standpoint that is already no longer natural. From the standpoint of the Philosophy of Right, the possibility and necessity of such an activity is presupposed as having already been demonstrated in correspondingly earlier sections of the Encyclopedia. To that extent the starting point of the Philosophy of Right corresponds to that of the Science of Logic. As the Science of Logic presupposes the end-point of the

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8 PhR, 34-42 [§3R].
9 PhR, 84-85 [§31].
10 PhR, 48-49 [§4R].
11 EM, 229-231 [§440].
12 Riedel, Zwischen Tradition und Revolution, 178.
Phenomenology, that thought has arrived at a stage of development where it can think itself in abstraction from everything besides thought, the Philosophy of Right presupposes that practical thought can think itself, in abstraction from all else. The Philosophy of Right begins from the standpoint of mind’s capacity for abstraction and, on that basis, and that basis alone, mind’s capacity for self-determination.

In the context of the Philosophy of Right man’s merely animal or “natural” relation to the world is therefore no longer in question. That relation is presupposed as having already been taken up and, so far as philosophy of right is concerned, dispensed with.\textsuperscript{13} To anticipate, we are no longer dealing with man’s relation to the natural world, but man insofar as it takes himself to relate to the natural world. Hegel, we recall, quipped that only the “animal” may be a thoroughgoing “physicist.”\textsuperscript{14} The reason for this does not lie in the mere fact that man is a “subject,” for we have already seen in Part 2 that Hegel ascribes subjectivity, and therefore estrangement from the “hostility” of nature, to animals. It is not subjectivity as such, but the specificity of human subjectivity that is at issue. The animal, as Hegel says in §4 of the Philosophy of Right, does not think and relates passively to the objects of desire. Conversely,

\textsuperscript{13} It is often argued, following Hegel, that the ancients were entirely unaware of what we call subjectivity and the will. As these are commonly thought to be post-Christian or modern notions, it is doubted that the ancients could have much to teach us about related matters, or that sufficient common ground exists to arrange a dialogue between them and moderns like Kant or Hegel. Hegel, whose views on the matter certainly did not prevent him from engaging in a dialogue with the ancients on related matters, did not agree. There is surely much in the classical understanding of things that provides the preliminary basis for a comparison with modern understandings of the will or subjectivity, and the disposition toward nature that informs these. There is also much in the classical literature that provides the basis for one to dispute the arguments that ground subjectivity and the will insofar as they come into prominence in modern political philosophy. We have drawn attention to many such points of contact in this study, and find no reason to affirm with certitude that the relevant understandings of the phenomena are entirely unavailable to the natural understanding of things. As of yet, certainly no account of ancient and modern “horizons” has decisively proven otherwise. One would have to show that the encounter with revealed religion or the development of modernity completely altered the fundamental structure of what was conceivable for man, and in the broadest possible sense. One would have to demonstrate the discontinuity between past and future in the relevant respects, and show in general that none – not even the most “reflective” – could escape the farreaching consequences of the historical developments thought responsible. One would also have to assume a great deal about the power of writings to reshape man. In this study we prefer not to take so much for granted. It may be added that, should one reject the interpretation of the phenomena that informs what is understood by “subjectivity and willing,” then the entire significance of the question concerning the will and subjectivity in Hellas is much diminished.

\textsuperscript{14} “Only animals are truly pure physicists... since they do not think.” \textit{EL}, 203-205, 207 [§96, §98 A1]. Cf. Robert Pippin, \textit{Hegel’s Practical Philosophy}, 15-64.
man, who is distinguished from animal life by means of thought, is possessed of a will. The will supervenes on the subjectivity that man shares with nature, such that natural subjectivity is inadequate for the purposes of philosophy of right, conceived as a distinct activity undertaken by man. Thus “the basis of right is mind [Geist]; its precise place and point of departure is the will.”15 The will, as a modification of subjectivity, prevents man from having a purely “physical” disposition toward the world.

But what is the will? To speak of the will is to presuppose always already the mediation of such things as desire, impulse and urge by thought and, more specifically, the capacity of man for abstraction. The will as such is conditioned by “representation,” the mental assimilation of experience, which is to say also the denaturalization of the content of experience. Representation involves the deprivation of, and detachment from, the immediately given natural or sensory form of the phenomena.16 Natural experience consists always in an orientation to particulars: this apple, that rabbit, and so on. By contrast, to think, according to Hegel, is necessarily to generalize: apples and rabbits as such – or better, “food” or “needs.” Hegel therefore begins from the fact that “anyone can find in himself [the] ability to abstract from everything whatsoever, and just as well to determine himself, to posit any content in himself and by himself.”17 The will presupposes in this way a radical or primordial capacity for abstraction – the capacity to abstract from anything and everything whatsoever. Because the activity of

15 PhR, 46 [§4].
16 Readers of the Philosophy of Nature will see that willing consists in a spiritual development of, or higher order analogue to, the dull assimilation and the mechanical seizure of objects in the world already carried out by animals. In the Philosophy of Nature Hegel writes of the “theoretical process” and the “practical relationship” in the context of animal life insofar as it relates to its environment and inner needs. Theoretical processes distinct to man allow him to take an active relation to his own practical dealings and feelings, or to detach himself from the immediacy of natural inclination and so forth. At a deeper level, an analogous relation obtains between philosophy and its assimilation of the content of religious feeling. That too consists in a process of liberation. The transformation effected by the appropriative activity of the subject is of decisive significance for Hegel. Natural feeling, to say nothing of religious feeling, is by no means left simply “intact” after its appropriation by self-conscious mind. PhR, 46-47 [§4Z]; Cf. EM, 238–298, [§§444–475]; PhN, 459-472 [§§356-359].
17 The precedent for Hegel’s concluding remark here is to be found in the introduction to Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre. PhR, 49 [§4R]; Cf. Fichte, Wissenschaftslehre, I.423-426.
thought supervenes on animal subjectivity in the form of the will, the bare externality of natural
man, the subject that finds itself merely “confronted by an external world” is not, strictly
speaking, the subject matter of the Philosophy of Right.18

III. The Natural and Spiritual Determination of Subjectivity

The will, according to Hegel in §5-7, is composed of three moments. The first pertains to
the “element of pure indeterminacy,” the ego’s capacity to abstract or dissipate in thought
“every restriction [or limitation – Beschränkung] and every content, whether immediately
present through nature, needs, desires, and impulses, or given and determined by any others
means whatsoever.”19 This is the “indeterminate will,” the merely “abstract general will” that
“wills nothing.”20 For that very reason, however, the indeterminate will is “not even a will.”
Rather, it itself is a thought-abstraction. For all real acts of willing always will such and such. “I
do not merely will, but rather I will something. [Ich will nicht Bloß, sondern Ich will etwas].”21
We have already encountered the logical counterpart and Platonic cognate to this formulation.22
“In order to be a will,” the will must “above all restrict [or limit – Beschränken] itself.”23 The
particular willed by the will is its “limitation [Beschränkung].” To say as much is to say that the
will, insofar as it always pursues something particular, always involves the exclusion of other
particulars. Indeed, insofar as the indeterminate will figures as part of the will, it is determinate
in precisely that respect: it is the determination of the will that excludes all determinacy. But
what then does it mean to say that part of the will is “not even a will”?

18 Hence the bewildering claim in §8 that considerations of the sort in question are “not separately considered any
further here.” Bewildering, because at first glance it seems to suggest that the Introduction and Philosophy of Right,
despite referring seemingly everywhere to man’s relation to nature, has nothing to do with it.
19 PhR, 49 [§5].
20 PhR, 49-50 [§5R].
21 PhR, 53-54 [§6]. Hegel’s italics.
22 See Part 1.B.V and Part 2.C.VI-VII.
23 “…That the will wills something, is the limit [Shranke], the negation. Therefore particularization is, as a rule,
called finitude [Endlichkeit].” PhR, 52-53 [§6].
The will combines a capacity to abstract from all limits, a capacity presupposed by all acts of willing, with a capacity to limit itself. Hegel remarks in this context that thought and will are not “to be kept in different pockets.”24 This is intended to mean that the will, whatever particular form it may take, always carries along with it a more or less dim awareness that the matters or pragmata in relation to which it and its projects stand could be otherwise than they are, are merely possibilities in relation to itself. The capacity to abstract from all particulars runs alongside the determination or resolution of the will, whatever form it may take. The second moment of the will therefore pertains to the “transition from indeterminacy to determinacy,” by which Hegel means “the differentiation, determination, and positing of a determinacy as a content and object.”25 For Hegel the two moments – the indeterminacy of the will and, if you will, the “determinate negation” of that indeterminacy – taken together, constitute the third moment, the “individuality” of the will. The individuality of the will is the decisive category of the Philosophy of Right. As a composite of the two moments just discussed, it is presupposed at every subsequent stage of the Philosophy of Right. The person of “Abstract Right” and the subject of “Morality” are each shapes of the will qua individual. They are composites of abstraction and determinacy in that their particular contents are always already conceived in relation to an abstraction from other possible contents. The same can be said, albeit in a different aspect, regarding members of the family, burghers, members of classes, citizens, and so forth. They are determined in such and such a form, in exclusion of other possible forms.

The individuality of the will derives its particular character from the second moment, “the differentiation, determination, and positing of a determinacy as a content and object” for the will. The content of willing, Hegel says, can be “given through nature, or engendered by the

24 PhR, 46 [§4A].
25 PhR, 52 [§6].
concept of spirit.” The difficulty of Hegel’s treatment of the will in the *Philosophy of Right*, and perhaps the difficulty of the *Philosophy of Right* as a whole, stems from this very distinction: that the “something” intended by the will, which is to say also the limit imposed on the will by itself, or the negation of its abstract open-endedness, can be “generated by the concept” or given by nature. The *individuality* of the will is differentiated according to the fact that its objects or contents may have been appropriated from man’s external relation to nature, or produced, more or less freely, by thought and on the basis of thought-constructions. Hegel is tellingly careful in refusing to employ, when referring to the “natural” will, the same terms that he employs when referring to the will that derives its content from the concept. On the basis of that scruple we may confirm that the “category” of willing encompasses the appropriation of content from the naturally given, but excludes the straightforwardly natural determination of man.

To say that the individual will might fix upon the naturally given is not yet to say that the will is determined by nature simply. The determination of man by “hunger” is not, strictly speaking, a determination of the will, despite being a determination of human subjectivity. Man, according to his animal nature, may be hungry; it is another matter altogether to posit a right to be fed or have basic needs met or protected in the form of a social right to “welfare.” Moreover, it is only within the context of a possible indifference to nature and the productions of spirit that it makes sense to speak of the will that determines, and therefore *limits itself*, to the pursuit of the naturally given. In such cases a determinate negation of everything higher in man is in play, and in such a way that is only possible for man, the being that can lift itself out of its merely natural externality or immediacy. As a modification of the will, the natural will refers to

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26 Cf. *PhR*, 52-54 [§6].
27 *PhR*, 54-59, 64-71 [§§7-8, §§13-19]; Cf. *EL*, 311-316 [§§163-165].
28 He does as well in the 1817-1818 lectures.
something that is more than merely natural, and is not to be discerned within the ambit of
“nature” strictly speaking. The animal cannot be encountered in such a form that restricts itself
to instinctual life, for it can only be encountered as so restricted. It makes no sense to speak of
“barbaric” animals: barbarism is a modification of that being that can be more than a brute.

What then is to be made of Hegel’s transition from the indeterminate aspect of the will to
the “natural will”? The will, despite its “indeterminacy” or capacity for abstraction, finds itself
determined on all sides by the course of nature and the contingency of its given circumstances. It
therefore takes its bearings from what appears within itself “as its immediately present content,”
viz., “the impulses [or drives – Triebe], desires, inclinations” and so forth. The natural will is
the will that would determine its content on the basis provided by its pre-existing relation to the
external world, and the web of relations that appear to govern that world. A problem arises,
however, insofar as the given is always presented in the form of a manifold of objects, and
therefore aims, the pursuit of which necessarily excludes the pursuit of others. As we have
seen in Part 1, according to Hegel, there is no measure to be found in the natural world or in the
element of animal subjectivity. “Instinct” is the only respect in which it makes sense to speak of
natural law, strictly speaking: it is the form in which the laws of nature rule over animals. Thus,
in speaking of the “natural will,” Hegel always already presupposes the weakness of specifically
human instinct. Precisely because man, in contrast to the animal, is not altogether beholden to

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29 PhR, 62-63 [§11].
30 The extreme case provided by Hegel’s conception of “evil” is a good example of the fine distinctions that are at
play. As for Schelling, for Hegel “evil” consists in a resolution of the higher in man on behalf of the lower, one that
resolves to set the higher in service of the lower. Evil is not rooted in nature, and does not derive from any original
sin: it occurs in the form of a later development. “Evil” is a modification of the higher in man not to be discerned
within the ambit of the merely natural. It makes no sense to speak of an “evil” animal. The animal cannot be evil,
for the animal does not will. “Will” always already refers to man insofar as he is free from the bare immediacy of
nature. He who resolves to live solely according to appetite and pleasure, at the expense of all else, does so on the
basis of willing, that is to say, on the basis of a primordial freedom from nature. PhR, 260-291 [§§139-140]; Cf.
Schelling, Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit
zusammenhängenden Gegenstände, in Sämtliche Werke B. VII, 366-404; Werner Marx, The Philosophy of
31 PhR, 62 [§11].
32 PhR, 63-65 [§§12-13].
instinct, and therefore stands in a relation of relative indifference to natural stimuli, the will is
thrown back upon itself as the centre that determines which objects or desires are to be pursued
or subordinated to others. The natural will is therefore the will that chooses between possible
contents, the will that takes on the determination of “contingency,” or what Hegel calls the
“arbitrary will.” Only man can be “arbitrary” or proceed randomly from thing to thing to thing
in relative independence from the commands of nature.

There is therefore no Platonic “ladder of desire” to be found in the philosophy of
Hegel. It makes no sense to make “a mere hierarchy of impulses… since no measure for
ordering them is given here.” Impulse “has no measure in itself.” Accordingly, seductive
appearances to the contrary, the ladder of desire is for Hegel always already the partial product
of human willing and thinking. Insofar as man has discerned a metron in nature, it has been put
there by man himself. Thus all talk of a “feeling” or a “desire for justice” is inadequate from the
standpoint of Hegelian philosophy. To experience a “feeling” or “desire” for justice is to
experience something higher, something spiritual, through a lower, viz., more natural, medium.
In such cases the origin of that with respect to which the subject “feels” derives from a source

33 \textit{PhR}, 65-68 [§14-15].
34 Interpreters like Rosen and Kalkavage are therefore a bit misleading, even if not altogether so, in imputing to
Hegel a ladder of eros in the spirit of Plato’s Diotima. If there is a ladder of desire in Hegel it is a ladder of desire
that works to subvert desire, that exhibits desire as ministerial to things higher than desire, that points to a
standpoint that is higher than desire strictly speaking, and that approaches desire from the very outset from that
higher standpoint that is not reducible to desire, despite opening up within the “natural” context of such things as
desire. We do not mean to suggest that the authors named are oblivious of that. Nor do we deny that there is a
textual basis for characterizations such as these. For there is no doubt a “ladder” of spirit and willing. The tendency
to emphasize eros in the context of Hegel’s chapter on self-consciousness stems in part from Kojève, who fixes on
Hegel’s obscure remark in the \textit{Phenomenology} that “self-consciousness is desire.” The identification of the two
derives from the fact that desire throws us back upon ourselves, as we have had occasion to note previously. There
is nevertheless an important difference between being thrown back upon oneself and the active mental
appropriation of the “self” in relation to the contents of experience. Pippin, taking his bearings from Aristotle’s
discussion (in the Nicomachean Ethics Book VI) of “choice (proaireis) as either ‘desiring intellect [orektikos nous]
or ‘minded desire’ [orexis dianoetike],” likes to stress that Hegel is more “orectic” than erotic. He is probably
correct to do so, however there are reasons to suspect that he goes farther than Hegel does in severing spirit from
35 \textit{PhR}, 69 [§17A].
36 \textit{PhR}, 68 [§17]
higher than feeling, and cannot be understood from the perspective of feeling. One cannot understand willing from the standpoint of desire; rather, one must understand desire, always already, from the standpoint of willing. It is in, in fact, impossible for us to do otherwise.

Decision and choice are, as activities unique to man, necessitated by man’s place in the whole. Man is necessarily thrown back upon on his own most capacity to decide or choose between the contents of experience. For that very reason, however, it comes necessarily into focus for man – as the being that can choose or make decisions – that man can take on a more or less active relation toward the determination of his own ends and, moreover, that decisions can be more or less good, bad, pleasant, harmful, risky, et cetera. Accordingly, man, who is thrown back on himself as the center of choice, is thrown back simultaneously upon the spiritual “resources” that separate him from animal life, but have yet to be necessarily developed. Herein lies the difference between what it means to speak of the will in-itself or merely implicit, and the will for itself, the will that explicitly takes the determination of itself as its subject matter. The will that derives its content from the concept is the will that renders thematic the basis on which choices or decisions, and therefore implicit judgments, found within the will, are to be made. The science of right, which traces the particularization of the will, therefore pertains also and especially, says Hegel, to the purification of drives.

Hegel has therefore derived the moral will from the natural will. The individual will that derives its content from the concept issues out of the natural will that would take its bearings from nature. Thus the “moral” will, the will that involves more or less principled reflection about the determination of itself, is anchored in an inadequacy essential to the natural will. The higher is therefore sustained by the contradictions that hold sway over the lower. But in this

37 *EM*, 290-292 [§471].
38 *PhR*, 69-73[§§18-21].
39 *PhR*, 70[§19].
context the purification of the will, conceived as a distinct process, means also the transition of
the will that tends towards the determination of itself on the basis of natural givens, towards the
will that tends to resolve itself on the basis of principle, and therefore free thinking. That process
of purification is called, by Hegel, education or culture.\textsuperscript{40} Hegel has not only anchored the moral
will in the natural will, but seeded the primacy of the specifically ethical will, the will insofar as
its purification or lack thereof derives from its participation in an objective world and historical
process. Let us stop there.

We may offer on the basis of the foregoing a preliminary answer to the question
concerning the bearing of the Philosophy of Right on the problem of nature. The will, as we
have seen, presupposes the “theoretical” assimilation of the world. Only thereafter, according to
Hegel, does it make sense to speak of the determination of the “content” for the will. Precisely
because willing presupposes a process of abstraction – and nature is anything but, strictly
speaking, abstract – the projects of the will always presuppose and entail the appropriation and
alteration of nature by spirit.\textsuperscript{41} The content of the will, regardless of whether it is the natural or
moral will that is being considered, takes the specific form of a posited difference between the
subject and the external world, as well as the projected negation of that difference: “action.” To
will is to necessarily project an altered state of affairs, thus the positing of a “new” world, or the
abstract negation and reworking (in principle) of the given world \textit{qua} intended “project.”\textsuperscript{42} At
the same time, the provision of content for the will, thus the determination of its projects, is
itself subject to a process of development or education – by which we are to understand, in the
first place, the movement away from natural or arbitrary willing to more or less reflective forms

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{PhR}, 71 [§20].
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{EM}, 236-238 [§443].
\textsuperscript{42} Kojève renders this aspect of the will most starkly – perhaps too Starkly – as follows: “this idea cannot transform
itself into truth except by means of negating action which, by destroying the world that does not correspond to the
idea, creates by this very destruction the world in conformity with the idea.” Kojève, \textit{Introduction à la lecture de
Hegel}, 290.
of willing. The will therefore entails not only the transformation of the external world, but also
the transformation of man himself insofar as he posits within himself a relation to the external
world – hence not only work, but the work of man on himself, *viz.*, education or culture. More
fundamentally, because willing always involves the positing of a difference between man and
world, the *Philosophy of Right* cannot be said to deal with man in his bare relation to the
external world, but rather man as he takes himself to relate to the external world in a specifically
practical bearing, a bearing that is itself subject to a process of development. The distinct respect
in which “nature” surfaces as a problem for the philosophical consideration of right cannot be
understood outside of the context provided by that, possibly egregious, act of hairsplitting.

**IV. Satisfaction and the Negativity of the Willing**

We have delayed up until now any consideration of “ethical life.” The negative aspect of
the will, the will insofar as its projects entail the “abstract” or “implicit” negation of the world
that confronts the will, is of course only a stop along the way. For Hegel is not satisfied with the
will insofar as it tends toward the restless reshaping of the world, or the pursuit of an infinite
(moral) ought that can never be. Rather, as far as he is concerned, willing looks toward the
production of a world in which man can find himself or be at home. That prospective world, in
contrast to the natural world, or the spiritual world in which the will finds itself alienated, is not
a hostile world, but a reasonably hospitable one. Thus, “the activity of the will [*tatigkei*it]
consists in suspending [canceling out and taking up, sublimating – *aufzuheben*] the contradiction
between subjectivity and objectivity and translating its aims from the former determination into
objectivity.” The subjective will aims at the production of an “objective” world in which
subjectivity can simultaneously be at home and yet “remain” with itself. To oversimplify, once
the ends of the objective world coincide with those of the subject there is no need to destroy and

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44 *PhR*, 79 [§28].
remake the *fundamentals* of that world. A state of affairs has been reached in which man may, and by all reasonable estimations should, find satisfaction.

According to Hegel there is only one conceivable way in which such a state of affairs can be brought about. The external world must be produced by human freedom, which is to serve as the explicit “measure” for the external world. Unlike the “uncritical” historicism or naturalism referred to in the remarks to §3, the empirically existent form of ethical life taken up in the *Philosophy of Right* – *Sittlichkeit* – will be derived from the concept, that is, from the ladder of subjectivity set out in the Introduction. The social order will be an order whose closure or limit is derived from the openness, which is to say also the abstract negativity, of human willing. That entails the cancellation of the difference between the individual will of the subject, the will that wills and acts because it is purely and exclusively invested in its own projects, and the subject that wills and acts because it is told to or forced to do so by the “authorities.” Thus the positivity of right – the externality of a social order that imposes itself on subjects – will be derived from the negativity of right, and, in the first instance, right insofar as it takes its bearings from the merely negative will that freely imposes itself on objects in the world without.

How do the chapters on abstract right and morality relate to the two individual forms of the will taken up in the Introduction? The difference between the arbitrary will and abstract right is that between the individual will whose projects are taken over from its given or natural relation to the world, and the explicit elaboration of an entire system of legal provisions whose contents derive from that relation. In other words, abstract right and morality detail the explicit or systematic elaboration of the contents implied, but not yet developed, in the two “individual” forms of the will put forth in the Introduction.⁴⁵ Hegel intends to unfold on that basis the entire range of respects in which man might regard himself and others as being prohibited or entitled to

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⁴⁵ *PhR*, 87-88 [§33].
pursue given courses of action, and therefore the various ways in which the actions of persons or subjects, as well as entire states of affairs, might be regarded rightful or wrongful, good or evil, *et cetera*. For the same reason, abstract right and morality begin to present in outline the multiplicity of respects in which man might find himself alienated or at home in the social world (*viz.*, may have reason to be reconciled to that world, or otherwise). Thus, as we have already mentioned, Hegel’s entire treatment of “subjective right” works toward the previously mentioned aim of reconciling the *openness of the human will with the closedness of social orders as such.*

Hegel’s discussion of the “individuality” of the will in the Introduction emphasizes the negative aspects of the natural will and the positive aspects of morality. Taken on its own, it would seem to encourage the view that Hegel, like Kant before him, was concerned primarily with the task of engrafting moral dispositions onto nature, or the replacement of natural dispositions with those purified by theory. As we proceed to the body of the text, however, we cannot fail to note that the relation of the natural to the moral will undergoes a certain modification or inversion after their contents are set forth in the form of abstract right and morality. As everyone knows, the positive appraisal of morality (prominent in the Introduction), as more or less free reflection on the purposive contents of willing, is balanced by a highly critical view of morality (in the chapter devoted to it), as feckless and potentially dangerous abstract idealism. Moreover, although the *Philosophy of Right* entails the *purification* or education of drives, and therefore the subordination of the natural will to the moral (suggested by the Introduction) it cannot be taken to entail simply the banishment of the natural or arbitrary will. Indeed, far from being dispensed with or left behind, the natural will is entrenched in the form of “abstract right” and granted a certain primacy in the everyday workings of civil society.

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The public existence of morality shall, in fact, be circumscribed by abstract right, or the rights associated with legal personality. That may come as a surprise to readers familiar with the Preface and Introduction. What then are we to make of the positive status accorded to the negativity of the natural will in the economy of the Philosophy of Right?

V. The Positive Significance of Abstract Right

Abstract right confines itself to the will that finds itself “completely determined and circumscribed [besstimmte und endliche] on every side” in the form of “inner arbitrary will [caprice – willkür], impulse, and desire, as well as by immediate externally existent beings [unmittelbaren äußerlichen Dasein].” At the same time, the will’s projects, which are always particular projects, are always and nevertheless taken up from the perspective of man’s primordial capacity for abstraction. Abstract right presupposes that man’s aims are thoroughly particular, but it takes up those aims from a standpoint that abstracts from their specific contents and motivations. The particular is made into a universal. That allows for the elaboration of a purely formal understanding of right that limits itself to the bare fact that man tries to express his will in a world of things or matters (Sache). “In formal right, therefore, there is no concern with particular interests, with my advantage or my welfare, any more than with the determinate ground [Knox: “particular motive” – Bestimmungsgrund] of my will, of insight and intention.”

Thus abstract right intentionally begins, and for the most part remains, in abstraction from all consideration of how one ought to relate to objects in the world.

The chapter devoted to abstract right begins with considerations as crude and “value neutral” as the physical seizure of objects in the world, and proceeds thereafter to such things as property, legal personhood, the transference of labor, the development of contractual relations

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47 *PhR*, 92-94 [§§34-35].
48 *PhR*, 95-96 [§§36-37].
between arbitrary persons, and therefore crime. It concludes with retributive justice. The entire argument pivots around the problems and contradictions engendered by the merely arbitrary relation between persons, which forms the context for the drawing up and execution of contracts. Because contractual relations derive from the dispositions of arbitrary wills toward mere things in the world, that disposition is shown to infect the relation of persons toward each other. So far as Hegel is concerned, contractual relations cannot be sustained on a basis as volatile and fickle as the arbitrary disposition of man toward things. For that disposition inclines man to regard others with the sort of indifference that befits things but not subjects.

As soon as the natural will shifts, the contract drawn up to satisfy it – viz., a given impulse, desire or urge – ceases to be compelling. The argument therefore draws out the dependency of formal right on intentions and moral purposes. It tends from a complete abstraction from the moral will, through the conflicts engendered by that abstraction, toward the introduction of elementary or nascent forms of moral reflection. At the same time, because contractual relations are shown to necessarily give rise to such things as stipulations, sanctions, incentives, and punishment, which must themselves be reasonable, the chapter demonstrates in principle the dependence of abstract right on the presence of an impartial judge who is not himself just another “person.” Formal right is to be practically administered by an impartial spectator who has taken on a moral standpoint in relation to abstract right, one that has internalized the totality of abstract right without being himself subject in that capacity to the specificity of the natural will that determines persons “on all sides.”

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51 Cf. Franco, Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom, 205-206.
the law must be more than “mere words on paper,” the state gradually comes into focus on the margins of the discussion as the guarantor and executor of specifically bourgeois right.\textsuperscript{52}

The long shadow cast by Marxism, and the reigning liberal-moral predilections of our time, require a special effort on our part to retrieve the positive appraisal of bourgeois right so understood. After all, if the march of freedom concerns itself especially with the triumph of spirit over nature, what good could possibly come from a sphere of right that limits itself to the merely acquisitive and arbitrary dispensations of the natural will? Would it not be preferable, since more “free” from the hostility and indifference of nature, to bring about the thoroughgoing replacement of economic rights, so understood, with moral or social ones? In other words, why is “abstract right” not merely another obstacle standing in the way of the realm of freedom? Let us recall once more the critique of Plato’s \textit{Republic}. The \textit{Republic} concerns itself especially with how one ought to live, and how a community ought to be ordered in order to be regarded just. The hyper-moralism of the \textit{Republic}, insofar as Hegel presents it, entails nothing so much as the ruthless denial of “abstract right,” that is, specifically economic rights. According to Hegel’s Plato, the household, property, the right to choose one’s own occupation, and so forth, are regarded as especially pernicious to the “substance” of Greek ethical life, thus to the “moral” intentions of the \textit{Republic} as well. The superiority of the modern state, insofar as it is taken to be more in keeping with human freedom, therefore derives from that very aspect which Hegel’s Plato finds most pernicious, namely, the indifference of the natural will, and abstract right therewith, to all higher determinations of spirit (to all notions, traditional or reflective, of higher purposes, moral intentions, human welfare, the good, \textit{et cetera}). \textit{Thus the negativity of abstract right is the positive significance of abstract right.}

The abstraction from morality, civic duty, and religious command that defines abstract right on the basis of the natural will enables the root and branch liberation of specifically modern man from traditional authority. Thus the decisively liberating element of the modern spirit proves to be that which resolves to determine itself in the form of the natural will and, in doing so, frees social life from the excrescences of traditional authority. Thus the modern “person,” conceived as a specifically arbitrary and economic “individual,” does not merely ground a disposition toward right. Rather, the rights of legal personality liberate human activity, at least initially, from all claims that derive from elsewhere than man’s merely natural disposition toward the world. The self limitation of spirit that determines itself in the form of the natural will – and therefore negates everything higher than the natural will – brings about the liberation of man from all higher order determinations of spirit that have grown old, and therefore only stand in the way of further progress in human freedom. For the same reason, the protection of abstract right within the modern state opens up an entire sphere of human activity that is to be henceforth unregulated by the higher determinations of spirit, or at least not regulated “externally from above.” As we have anticipated, that sphere is called “civil society,” the sphere lacking in the ancient world.

Hegel’s Plato is therefore correct: the natural will is pernicious to traditional authority – and so much the better. Modernity turns the hostility of nature against the tyranny of traditional authority and morality. Only on the basis of that break with tradition can man for the first time undertake, let alone understand, the task of generating political authority out of emancipated subjectivity. Thus the “natural will” attains the positivity of public recognition. But for that very reason morality must be denied the sort of institutional sway taken on by the natural will in the form of legal personality. Morality only attains to public recognition in the form of bourgeois

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morality and the rights of conscience, the morality that respects the rights of other persons to live as they would within the boundaries of the law, as well as the right of others to form their own judgments about morality and religion. According to Hegel, it is more important to protect legal personality against morality than it is to protect morality from legal personality. The moral world view, insofar as it tends to impose itself “one-sidedly” on the world and others, is more pernicious to human freedom than the natural will that minds its own business. As the moral will is a modification of the natural will, there can be no respect for moral subjects where there is no respect for legal persons.

A final word regarding the two forms of subjective right. Although it is common to say that abstract right is Hobbesian and Lockean, and morality is Kantian, the matter proves not so simple. We have already noted that abstract right and morality concern themselves with matters as old as Roman law and Socratic reflection. Further, we have seen that morality issues out of a consideration of abstract right and, at the same time, reveals the obscured, essentially spiritual character of the so called “natural will.” As others have noted, in writing about abstract right and morality Hegel presupposes from the very outset a Kantian and Fichtean understanding of purely legal right that distinguishes itself sharply from morality, and in such a way that cannot be ascribed to Hobbes and Locke.\textsuperscript{54} Plainly, it does not suffice, according to Hegel, to say that right may be realized by a community of clever devils, or a system that orders man in terms of mere force and incentive.\textsuperscript{55} For, at the very least, a social order tailored to the capabilities of clever devils proves to depend already from the very outset on a moral and ethical project.


\textsuperscript{55} As Franco notes in \textit{Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom}, 193-195.
Here as elsewhere, the popular opposition of “positive and negative liberty” has caused a great deal of mischief. Specifically modern “negative” liberty is, and has always been, motivated by a positive moral project. It takes a great deal of “education” to bring about the specifically bourgeois disposition toward such things like death, commodious living and, of course, religion. To that extent, Hegel comes closer to the position occupied by Hobbes and Locke, each of whom, despite the prosaic moorings of their approach to natural right, presuppose at every step of the way a project of moral re-education. Nevertheless, the Hobbesian and Lockean aspects of abstract right are mediated by Kantian and Fichtean “criticism.” At the same time, the Kantian aspects of morality have a Hobbesian, Lockean and Rousseauian twist, for they prove to derive from a social order that man himself has founded. Insofar as the foundations of bourgeois right are determined by an abstraction from moral intentionality, and therefore an opposition to traditional authority as such, they also come to sight as “Machiavellian.” The circumscription of morality and revealed religion clears the way for the effective truth of things, or that which may most readily be counted upon as a means to the end of “relieving man’s estate” or making the world hospitable to the ends of human freedom. Hence morality makes way for actuality as a condition for the possibility of the existence of right.

VI. The Synoptic View and the Springs of Action

It remains for us to examine the actual production of political authority out of the “extreme of personal particularity.” As we have anticipated, that account must be sought in Hegel’s discussion of civil society, “the achievement of the modern world.” Civil society intervenes between two older and more conservative institutions, the family and the state. On

57 Cf. Leo Strauss, What is Political Philosophy, 52-55.
account of that intervention, a social order is brought into being that, “for the first time, grants all determinations of the idea their rightful due.” 58 Because it is in civil society that objective spirit for the first time unfolds itself into the “extreme of personal particularity,” it will suffice if we are able to reconstruct the dynamics of civil society on account of which the natural will is taken to lend itself to the authority of the modern state. We shall pay less attention to those determinations of spirit that may be taken to more straightforwardly reaffirm the authority (e.g., patriotism) of the modern state, which are at any rate much older than the modern state. For most significant here is that aspect of modern society that enables and encourages man to take “himself as his own end” as though all else were “nothing to him.” 59 How do we move from the extreme indifference of modern individualism to “the cancelation of subjectivity and objectivity”? Hegel’s approach to that problem is anticipated in the title and argument of a notoriously obscure chapter in the Phenomenology of Spirit, which refers to the “Spiritual Animal Kingdom [Das geistige Tierreich].” We have already seen that man is the “spiritual animal.” More recently, we have seen that modern society, and bourgeois right therewith, involves a “spiritual” appeal to the animal in man in the form of abstract right. The natural will, which fixes upon and limits itself to man’s bare externality, comes to ground an entire sphere of activity, civil society, the character of which sees man freed from all higher order determinations of spirit, or at least those that have “grown old.” Likewise, the chapter on the spiritual animal kingdom directs us to the chaotic spectacle of emancipated human willing, the society of wills that refuse to will anything that is not taken to stem directly from their own, often idiosyncratic, purposes and interests. 60 It concerns man insofar as he is free to determine the content of his

58 PhR, 339 [§182A].
59 PhR, 339 [§182A].
60 PhG, 294-311 [397-418].
own will, to be wholly invested in his own projects, to refuse to will purposes that are not his own, and in such a way that is, from the very outset, liberated from any further (moral, religious or traditional) consideration of what ought to be done. The spiritual animal kingdom in this way refers most fundamentally to the society of individuals. ⁶¹

As in the plant and animal kingdoms, which unfold into an endless and chaotic array of forms, the spiritual animal kingdom appears to defy reason, and leads to the proliferation of increasingly diversified and rarefied ways of living. However, like the animal in the natural world, the ipsissimosity of modern man, and the tremendous and frivolous variety of personalities or identities he may come to take on, is only apparently fatal to the substance of ethical life. The “show” of modern individualism conceals how the manifold of isolated wills tend to derive their contents from, and participate in, a common species or, to shed the language of nature, a common project and spiritual horizon – hence a (Tier)Reich. That common project, the motions of which are carried out in the everyday activity of modern life, is, in turn and however self aware of the fact, effectively ministerial to the actualization of political right, and therefore reasonable. The foregoing is characteristic of Hegel’s approach to modern individualism and, indeed, human individuality as such.

It has already been anticipated that Hegel’s approach to the consolidation of “spiritual substance” by means of subjectivity derives much of its strength from his long and sustained

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⁶¹ The formulation “spiritual animal kingdom” has engendered a great deal of controversy. One of the obvious complications is that it seems to refer primarily to the projects of academics, intellectuals and artists. Some have therefore taken it to consist in little more than a depiction of the absurd lives led by modern intellectuals and artists. But here, as elsewhere, the examples are incidental to the fundamental shape of spirit being set forth. The “spiritual animal kingdom,” which relates to the “extreme of personal particularity,” is followed by two chapters entitled “Reason as Law Giver” (which corresponds to abstract right) and “Law testing Reason” (which corresponds to morality). For related reasons, Marxists interpret the “spiritual animal kingdom” in terms of individualism in the context of capitalism. It is safer to approach the chapter as if it concerned itself with the “fact” of individualism insofar as reason may come to take that as its object. Cf. Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure de la Phénoménologie de l’Esprit*, 286-308; Lukács, *Der Junge Hegel*, 590 ff; Ludwig Siep, *Der Weg der Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 161-169; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 112-134.
interest in economic theory.\textsuperscript{62} It is a well established view that Hegel took the economic theory of Steuart, and later those of Smith, Say and Ricardo, as an early model for what became his speculative philosophy.\textsuperscript{63} That his interest in economics has not subsided by the time of the \textit{Philosophy of Right}, that is, after the development of his “system,” is clear.

“Political economy is the science which starts from this view of needs and labor but then has the task of explaining mass-relationship and mass-movements in their complexity and their qualitative and quantitative character. This is one of the sciences which have arisen out of the conditions of the modern world. Its development affords the interesting spectacle (as in Smith, Say, and Ricardo) of thought working upon the endless mass of details which confront it at the outset and extracting therefore the simple principles of the thing, the understanding effective in the thing and directing it. It is to find reconciliation here to discover in the sphere of needs the rationality lying in the thing and effective there.”\textsuperscript{64}

But by the time he wrote the \textit{Philosophy of Right}, Hegel’s interest in political economy, which has long endeared Hegel to liberals, fascists and Marxists alike, has crystallized into the much more controversial “cunning of reason.” What is said about the mass relations of economics is extended to the mass relations of man in all respects and at the broadest possible scale. For present purposes it suffices to note that the offending phrase occurs in the \textit{Philosophy of History}, where Hegel takes up “the means of spirit,” which is to say especially the passions of individuals (and world historical individuals in particular). He intends to argue that these, however self-absorbed and indifferent to the ends of others, are in fact ministerial to universal ends divergent from their own. The natural will, whatever it takes itself to be, and indeed because it takes itself in a certain way, will carry out the work of the will insofar as its contents may be derived from the concept of freedom.

\textsuperscript{62} It is not inappropriate to mention here that the Greek word for substance, \textit{ousia}, refers customarily to such things as property and household good or “means” in the broadest sense, as for instance when we refer to a “man of substance” or “someone of means.” Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie}, 23-26.


In all three cases – the Spiritual Animal Kingdom, the cunning of reason, and civil society – Hegel is concerned to emphasize the individual insofar as he takes his purposes and works to be specifically his own purposes and works. Hegel does so, however, only to reveal that the purposes and works of individuals are not simply their own. Rather, individuals are set to work, assisted, and, in the final analysis, expended, within the context of a broader process.

“The particular interest of passion is thus inseparable from the activity of the universal [Betätigung des Allgemeinen]; for the universal results from the particular and determinate and from its negation. It is the particular that exhausts itself in conflict with others of its kind, and of which a part is brought to ruin [zugrunde gerichtet wird]. It is the not the universal idea itself that is involved in opposition and conflict, and is exposed to danger; it keeps itself in the background, secure and undamaged [unassailable and uninjured – unangegriffen und unbeschädigt]. This may be called the cunning of reason, that it sets the passions to work for itself, whereby that through which it sets itself into existence suffers loss and damage. For it is the phenomenal [apparent, manifest; Sibree/Rauch: the phenomenal world – Ercheinung], part of which is futile [transitory or null - nichtig], and part self-affirming [affirmative]. The particular is for the most part of little importance in comparison to the universal. The individual is sacrificed and abandoned. The idea pays the ransom of empirical existence [Tribut des Dasein] and perishability, not from itself, but from the passions of individuals.”

The connection that obtains between Hegel’s interest in political economy and the cunning of reason is emphasized to bring into focus Hegel’s approach to civil society. The society of individuals appears merely contingent and disorderly. However, viewed from a higher standpoint, it proves to carry out the work of a more universal “spiritual” project.

Like the “spiritual animal kingdom,” the “modern science of political economy,” and “philosophical world history,” Hegel’s approach to the “actualization” of right, and therefore the “means of spirit,” demands a “synoptic” approach. Here too the “show of rationality” that develops in the context of civil society is most important and “makes up the reconciling [versöhnende] element within this sphere.” At first, within the context of civil society, the “form of universality” takes on the character of a “means.” Persons in civil society come to regard one another as means to their own ends and, on that basis, come to regard the entire system of interlocking needs as a means to their own ends. Viewed from the higher vantage

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65 PhH, 49.
66 PhR, 346 [§189].
point of the Hegelian spectator, however, that relation of apparent means to ends turns out itself to be a mere means, one that works in favor of higher order determinations of spirit. The appearance that the state serves the natural will is itself ministerial to the ends of the state. For, that “particularity is given the right to develop and launch forth in all directions” allows “universality the right to prove itself not only in the ground and necessary form of particularity, but also the authority standing over it.”

The system of needs, insofar as its expediency as a means to the satisfaction of needs and wants depends on the institutionalization of need and satisfaction, proves the necessity of external authority to the arbitrariness or caprice of the natural will. The external becomes internal, the positive justified on the basis of the negative.

The subject-matter of civil society is therefore: “the concrete person, who, as a totality of wants and a mixture of natural necessity and caprice, is his own particular purpose.”

The chapter on civil society is intended to demonstrate, on the basis provided by that subject matter, the process according to which right attains a positive existence. A comparison with the chapter on abstract right is instructive. There, “subjective right” was taken up qua mere possibility; now, we are concerned with its actuality. There, the sphere of formal right was elaborated on the basis of personhood, but in such a way that abstracted from the particular aims of persons; now, the objects of desire toward which the activities of persons are directed are taken up in terms of their specificity. Finally, and of no less importance, there individuals were taken up in relative isolation; now they are taken up in terms of the interconnection of wills. Therefore, now the actualization of right will be exhibited as the result of the systematic interconnection of diversified desires, perspectives and ways of life that come to sight as the attributes of concrete persons. It may be added, on the basis of those attributes insofar as they determine the relations between men in the ambit of civil society, that persons come to sight in relation to the state as

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68 As Knox translates PhR, 340 [§184]. Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, 123.
69 PhR, 339 [§182].
accidents to the substance of ethical life, which is by no means to say exclusively as such.  

Thus Hegel attempts to demonstrate how right attains to actuality, or comes to be instituted, by means of the *relation* of arbitrary individuals at the “extreme of personal particularity.”

Before turning to a more detailed consideration of the process that brings about the consolidation of political authority on the basis of the extreme of personal particularity, it is fitting to recall yet again Hegel’s rehabilitation of the sophists. The state, as it were, comes to sight as a great disembodied sophist. It produces obedience to itself by means of institutions and processes that appeal to, rechannel and set in motion the emancipated natural will of modern individuals. It does so by means of the appearance or deception, which abstract right does nothing to discourage, and much perhaps to encourage, that the state is a mere means to the ends of individuals – thus on the basis of a productive ruse according to the synoptic view of the Hegelian speculative philosopher. It does not appear that the consolidation of political authority as set forth in the *Philosophy of Right* could come about in the absence of widespread confusion of means and ends in the manner just related. Individuals in civil society come to mistake the lower for the higher, with the higher being seen as a means to lower ends, but in such a manner that places the particular effectively in service of the universal. To be very clear: that X views the world in manner Y, seeking to achieve end A by means of Z, is itself a means to end Z.

It goes almost without saying, and for reasons already discussed, that it does not follow according to Hegel that civil society, as a “spiritual” form, may be adequately comprehended in in terms of man’s needful nature, or “nature” in the broadest sense. Nor is it being suggested that the standpoint to which civil society leads is Hegel’s last word on “ethics.” As is well known, it remains too “mechanistic” for the purposes of a philosophical doctrine of right. Hegel’s state is,

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70 To refer to a much decried passage that is no less essential for being decried. The key is not to lose sight of the fact that Hegel refuses to look at man as though he were only a means or accident. *PhR*, 294 [§145].

71 Cf. *Republic*, 492a-e.
in the final analysis, not simply the state based on necessity, the *Notstaat* and *Verstandesstaat*.\(^{72}\) The foregoing is nevertheless intended to show that the mechanism of civil society – as the sphere in which the the natural will is made ministerial to the higher determinations of willing – is a *conditio sine qua non* for the concrete existence of right.

**VII. The Cunning of Right and the System of Needs**

The consolidation of political authority on the basis of the natural will is demonstrated in §189-211. There, a pattern is unfolded that should be familiar to the reader by now. As the power of specifically human subjectivity over nature was seeded in nature itself, the triumph of spirit over nature has been seeded in the very structure of willing, and the natural will in particular. Hegel shows that the *positive* recognition and institution of abstract right, and therefore the existence of right in the form of an objective spiritual world, is sowed and nurtured in the soil of civil society by means of the needful nature of man. For, to anticipate, the tendency of man’s needful nature toward the organization of itself as a system of originally “asocial” needs effectively encourages a process of socialization, or moral and ethical education.

At the risk of oversimplifying, two processes are at work. The first is the interrelation of wills previously mentioned, and the second is the proliferation and sophistication of needs. The second is essential to the first. For it is the second that brings about a set of circumstances in which “particular persons are essentially *related* to other particular persons” such that “each asserts himself [Knox: establishes – *geltend macht*] and finds satisfaction by means of the others.”\(^{73}\) The systematic interconnection of wills, upon which the actualization of right depends, demands the widespread internalization of highly complex and diversified wants and needs, whose satisfaction, in turn, depend upon the activity and therefore satisfaction of countless others. Only on that basis do we arrive at a “system of all around interdependence

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\(^{72}\) *PhR* [§183].

\(^{73}\) *PhR*, 339 [§182]. Hegel’s italics.
[allseitiger Abhängigkeit], so that the subsistence and welfare of the individual and his rightful existence [Knox: legal status – rechtliches Dasein] are interwoven with the welfare and rights of all.”

For, in a society of simple needs, the satisfaction of need does not depend so critically on the activities, and therefore the satisfaction, of others. For this reason, the chapter on the “system of needs” proceeds rapidly from natural needs, to the proliferation of needs and wants that result from the contributions of spirit, including and especially the need to be valued by others.

As distinct from the needs and means of satisfaction available to animals, which are “restricted in scope [Knox - beschränkten Kreis],” the needs and means of man multiply ad infinitum, and become increasingly particularized, specialized, diversified, and refined. We are not surprised to find that specifically human wants will displace merely animal needs. Our subject is in fact no less “luxury” than need, for it is the pursuit of great comfort and convenience especially that intensifies the interdependence of men. Needs and means, “as empirically existent things [als reelles Dasein],” become objects for others who, working toward their attainment, will conduce to the satisfaction of all others. That man may come to covet the luxuries and comforts of others benignly furthers the general education of mankind. The rehabilitation of luxury as a social force derives from its usefulness insofar as it intensifies and tightens the systematic interconnectedness of arbitrary wills.

It is therefore not to be lamented that the proliferation and sophistication of needs engenders a spirit of conformism.

“The fact that I must adjust [set right; Wood: fit in –richten] myself in relation to others introduces the form of universality. I acquire from others the means of satisfaction and must accordingly accept their opinions. However, at the same time, I am forced [genötigt] to produce means for the satisfaction of others. The one therefore plays into the hands of the other, and hangs together therewith. To this extent everything particular [Knox – private] takes on a character of being social; in the style of dressing and the timing of meals, there are certain conventions that one must accept because in such matters it is not worth the trouble to make a point of

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74 PhR, 340 [$183].
75 PhR, 347-348 [$190].
77 PhR, 349 [$192].
displaying one’s own judgment [insight, discernment – Einsicht], and wisest course of action here is to do as others do.\textsuperscript{78}

The system of needs thereby produces out of itself not only the proliferation of non-natural needs, but also the preponderance of “mental needs.” The need to take on certain opinions and dispositions eventually displaces or obscures, says Hegel, the natural relation out of which they issue.\textsuperscript{79} Man is therefore liberated from the crudity of natural need: biological toil gives way, as it were, to social toil.\textsuperscript{80} On that basis the activities of other men, and meeting their approval, become more needed than need insofar as it opens up originally in nature. Moreover, as the interconnection of need and satisfaction encourages the adoption of common dispositions, so does it frustrate the aims of non-conformists. The latter is so much the better: recall the fate of Hegel’s sophists in the \textit{Preface}, who are “brought into closer contact with reality.”

There are three major respects in which the system of needs may be regarded “educative”: theoretically, technically, and ethically. The system of needs, which presupposes highly sophisticated and diversified needs and modes of satisfaction, “is the stage on which \textit{theoretical education} develops,” “the education of the understanding in general, and also of language therewith.”\textsuperscript{81} We are reminded of “culture” insofar as we encountered that theme in Hegel’s treatment of the sophists. It entails not only the “multiplicity of ideas [representations – \textit{Vorstellungen}] pieces of information [\textit{Kennisnen}], but also a versatility and rapidity in bringing things to mind [imagination or representation - \textit{Vorstellens}], passing from one representation to another to grasp complex and general relations, and so forth.” It is, however, the \textit{practical} education wrought by work within the system of needs that is of greatest interest to us here. The pursuit of satisfaction within the system inculcates the “self-perpetuating need [Wood –

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{PhR}, 349 [§192A]. Note the first person. It is tempting to recall Hegel’s rhetorical strategy in the preface. Also: observe the usage of \textit{Einsicht}. Hegel leaves open the possibility that one’s own discernment might be superior to that which is commonly held to be good. It is nevertheless still wiser to do as others do.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{PhR}, 350 [§194].

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{PhR}, 350-351 [§195].

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{PhR}, 352 [§197].
erzeugenden Bedürfnis] and habit of keeping busy,” “the restriction of one’s activity to suit the nature of the material being worked on and, especially, the desires [Willkür] of others,” and “a habit, born of this discipline, of objective activity and universally recognized aptitudes.”

In bringing about the interdependence of all men, in which the necessity of satisfying others becomes necessary to the satisfaction of oneself, the system of needs brings about the internalization of ethical dispositions toward society as a whole. Included here are, of course, the specifically “recognitive” dispositions that tend to occupy centre stage in Hegel studies today.

Thus desire may be said to give way to desire for the desire of others, or the desire to be desired. As Hegel makes clear, with Rousseau as his target, the foregoing “socializing” dynamic of civil society is not to be lamented, whatever problems it might give rise to.

It is good that man comes to view himself through the “eyes of others.” We have already anticipated that the will, insofar as it works to carry out its projects, carries out not only the transformation of nature, but the transformation of man himself. The best-known version of this thesis, in the Hegelian corpus at least, is the education of the slave (in the Phenomenology), whose labor inculcates discipline and therefore liberation from nature, and whose circumstances bring about the recognition of others denied to the master, but more in keeping with man’s place in the whole. Crucially, however, at the stage of civil society being considered the interests of others have yet to be internalized in anything but a merely “external” fashion. By means of a “dialectical movement,” a “mediation of the particular through the universal,” “subjective self-seeking turns into a contribution to the satisfaction of the needs of all others.” A state of affairs results in which each person, “in earning, producing, and enjoying for himself [für sich],” does,

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82 *PhR*, 352 [§197].
83 As Kojève puts it in the famous introduction to his *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 11-15.
84 *PhR*, [§195A].
as a matter of course, “produce and earn for the enjoyment of all the rest.” As a matter of course: the interests of others are only at work in principle or “in itself but not for itself,” which is to say, only “for us,” the reader of the *Philosophy of Right*. It is only from the synoptic view that the cunning of right is discernible at this stage. It remains to be shown how self-seeking individuals come to pursue the common good as an intention or purpose willed as their own.

**VIII. The Organization of Labor**

The bridge that leads from the implicit rationality effective in the system of needs, to the explicit internalization of the wills of others by those working within that sphere, is the organization of labor around needs that become common to specific “classes” of activity.

“The endless manifold of means and the equally endless, intertwining, processes of reciprocal production and exchange employed therein, are assembled through the universality inherent in their contents and differentiated into general masses [Massen]. Thus the entire complex [Zusammenhang] develops [ausbilden] itself into particular systems of need, with the corresponding means and types of work, modes and manners of satisfaction, and theoretical and practical education [Bildung] suited to them – systems to which individuals are separately assigned – thus into differentiated classes [estates – Stände].”

The organization of labor into strata of common activity and interest tightens and makes ever more explicit to individuals themselves the bond that unites their self-seeking interest to the interests of others, and thereafter to the good of the whole. As Hegel admits, here lies the “root” that connects self-seeking to the universal. From the perspective of the state, says Hegel, it is a first order concern to ensure that “this tie is a hard and fast one [gediegener und fester].”

Hegel is concerned to argue that participation in the class-system, in whatever specific form it may take, involves the inculcation of an “ethical way of thinking.” The general “ethical” achievement wrought by one’s identification with the interests of any particular class whatsoever is more significant than the divisions that separate given classes, or whatever might

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86 *PhR*, 353 [§199].
87 *PhR*, 354-355 [§201]. Hegel’s italics.
88 *PhR*, 354-355 [§201A].
be gleaned from them. For the class system as such disposes the members of given classes as such to:

“make oneself, by means of a self determination, a member of one of the segments [Momente] of civil society through one’s own activity [Tätigkeit], industry [Fleiß], and skill, as well as to support oneself as such, and, exclusively through this mediation with the universal, in order to take care to provide for oneself and gain recognition in one’s own eyes [literally: imaginations/representations – Vorstellungen] and in the eyes of others.”

The emancipatory significance of class membership derives from the fact that one’s investment in an “institution” originates with a choice of vocation that is, in principle, free. Thus the class system, which is erected in relation to matters of necessity, is mediated by human freedom. It is therefore held up against that set out in the Republic, where class membership has nothing to do with choice and everything to do with the endowment or quality of souls according to nature.

Thus the system of needs, which organizes itself in the form of particular sub-systems of needs and means, brings about within those spheres a certain disposition of rectitude [Rechstschaffenheit], however modest, as well as a particular “esprit de corps” local to itself. Soon thereafter, the impartial administration of justice, the protection of common welfare, and the institution of “external authorities” (viz., policing) are proven to the developing self-awareness of bourgeois man. Thus morality “has its proper place in this sphere, where reflection upon ones deeds, and the purpose of particular needs and welfare, are prominent, and where contingency [Zufälligkeit] in satisfying these transforms contingent and individual acts of assistance into a duty.” The implicit order and interdependence discerned by the political economist or, for that matter, the speculative philosopher, becomes for the first time explicit to workers within the system of needs, who come to reflect on their own purposes insofar as they

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89 PhR, 359 [§207].
90 Even if it were to be denied that a state of affairs had been attained in which all were practically free or unconstrained in the manner related (a not unreasonable objection), the distinction made would not be insignificant.
91 PhR 359 [§207]; Cf. Franco, Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom, 262-264.
92 PhR, 341-343[§185].
93 PhR, 359-360[§207]
relate to those of other persons and eventually classes. However that may be, Hegel does not believe that the differentiation of classes could be eliminated. It could be eliminated no more than the differentiation of human needs and wants could be eliminated.

Although the far-reaching influence of Marxism and the legacy of Fascism predispose us to recoil from the manner in which Hegel finds the diversification of classes salutary, it is absolutely essential to the consolidation of political authority (as he understands it), which must address the relevant shapes of spirit. The moral impetus toward equalizing the strata of social life is secondary to the contributions of those strata, as specifically differentiated strata, to the common good and ethical spirit. It is only where inequality threatens to disrupt the preconditions of healthy ethical life, as for instance where modern society tends toward the production of an industrial “rabble,” where it comes into focus as a concern in its own right.94 We have already discussed the fundamental reason for this in the context of the Philosophy of Nature. Here too Hegel is between the disposition of the revolutionary, who wishes to put labor entirely in the service of workers and their interests, and the reactionary, who wishes to put labor entirely in the service of the state at the expense of all else.

Hegel does not regard it irrelevant to the justice and reasonability of the state that some classes may prove less reflective than others. Rather, the gradation of self-consciousness in the modern state – that there are more and less natural, reflective and speculative classes, and that these occupy correspondingly different stations within the economy of human relations – is essential to the reasonability and justice of the state. There is no whole without an agricultural estate, and there is no agricultural estate without a narrower horizon that is in large part restricted in the compass of its activity and reflection to the rhythms of nature. Similarly, nor could it be said that the reflective understanding of businessmen, insofar as it limits itself to a

crude calculus of cost and gain, contributes any less to civil society for that reason. Here too it is the narrowness of vision characteristic of that class – its failure to grasp the whole of things – that contributes vigorously to the prosperity of the whole. Hence Hegel repeats, within the idiosyncratic context of his own system, the tripartite class structure of Plato’s *Republic*.

Even where modern civil society engenders the need for a particular class whose business is the business of society – for the emancipation of subjectivity gives rise to an unprecedented need for coordination, administration and regulation – it cannot be said that the members of that class simply reach the highest rungs of self-conscious spirit. To be sure, the concern for the whole is seen to demand a highly educated and professionalized civil service, which, as a matter of course, attains a degree of self-conscious awareness that is denied to farmers and business alike.95 Yet even here it essential that their patriotic commitment is that to a *particular* state, whose interests they work steadfastly to further, the interests of other states be what they may. The obverse of that commitment is, of course, a certain indifference and blindness to the whole of things, which includes necessarily the understanding of things sought by Hegel. We have already noted that Hegel maintains a certain distance between himself and his universal class.

Let us leave aside the many ways in which Hegel’s views on the class society might be called into question.96 More suited to our purposes is the fact that Hegel takes himself to have

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95 For a short while the idea of a “universal” class so understood was the hallmark or guiding aspiration of modern rule as specifically bureaucratic rule. It is presumably those who were destined to join that class who made up the attendees and part of the intended audience of Hegel’s lectures. Smith therefore compares the intention of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* vis-à-vis the production of enlightened civil servants and the intention of Aristotle’s political writings insofar as they are directed to “gentlemen.” *Hegel’s Critique of Liberalism*, 137-140.

96 Marxism and other developments besides tend to render dubious for us the stewardship of all ascribed to civil servants and the moral education of businessmen over and against that of farmers. It cannot be said, however, that Marxism has ever managed to overcome divisions such as these. Although the Marxist theory of class consciousness is derives from the section of Hegel’s system being considered, let it be noted that Hegel maintains a greater distance from the most self-aware of his classes than Marx does from his. That may be attributed to the fact that Hegel remains a philosopher, whereas Marx becomes a political economist. Marx is satisfied with the study of civil society, whereas Hegel is not. Economics, however important, remains a subordinate science.
articulated, on the basis of the foregoing, all that needs to be shown in order for him to transition to a demonstration of the concrete existence of right.

“The relativity of the reciprocal relation between needs and the corresponding work to satisfy these is first of all reflection into itself as infinite personality above all, as abstract right. But it is this sphere of relativity itself, as education [Bildung], that gives right its empirical existence [Dasein] as something universally recognized, known and willed and, on mediated on account of its being known and willed, has validity and objective actuality [Gelten un objective Wirklichkeit zu haben].”97

The individual in civil society is made profoundly aware of the fact that his satisfaction depends on the actions of others, or that his satisfaction is highly contingent due the arbitrariness of persons and the self-interestedness of classes. As a result, he develops an awareness of the dependency of his satisfaction on the public administration of justice. Moreover, the individual realizes that, if the administration of justice is not itself to be subject to the caprice of individuals, it must be instituted in a way that abstracts from the specificity of persons as such. Thus the system of needs leads up to the positive institution of abstract right. Precisely because it is in the nature of man to give himself actuality through the specificity of his industry, the “administration of justice,” as a product of man’s education by the system of needs, restricts itself to that fact. That is, despite its moral aspect, it restricts itself to the nature of man in abstraction from all further “moral” considerations.98 Thus “a man counts as a man because he is a man, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, and so forth.”99 Thus civil society, beginning from the exclusive particularity of concrete persons, has instituted a form of right that abstracts from the differences between persons, and therefore laws that are blind to everything besides one’s rights as a person. We have the moral internalization of abstract right in the form of ethical life.

97 *PhR*, 360-361 [§209]. Hegel’s italics.
98 *PhR*, 359-360 [§207].
99 *PhR*, 360-361 [§209R]. Hegel’s italics.
IX. The Consolidation of Political Authority and the Objectification of Man

Hegel takes himself to have generated the *positivity* of abstract right out of the subjectivity of persons in the context of civil society. At the outset of the chapter on abstract right, Hegel writes that “the command of right [Rechtsgebot] is therefore: be a person and respect other persons.”¹⁰⁰ Now, we have arrived at a standpoint according to which the recognition of legal personality has entered into the understanding of burghers as something necessitated by the pursuit of personal satisfaction, and eventually as something to be willed in its own right. In the first place, the necessity of formal law remains merely implicit, or takes the form of a task. However, the carrying out and maintenance of that task in the everyday workings of society comes to be seen, in varying degrees of awareness and commitment, as one upon which the welfare of persons as such depends.¹⁰¹ What is merely implicit in the system of needs has therefore become explicit for persons within that system. All further determination of right, insofar as they may take on a concrete existence – the administration of justice, policing, the state structure and procedural system required to ensure these – are modifications of the development in question. We reserve any further discussion of “remainders” for the conclusion.

For now, let us note that four spheres of inquiry have come into focus through the course of our study of Hegel: rhetoric, psychology, economics and history. All four involve the objectification of man – and the effort to see what makes man “tick” – at varying orders of magnitude and in different modes, as means to possible further ends. There is an obvious and essential connection between the four spheres of inquiry and their relative prominence in the philosophy of Hegel. Is there an essential connection between the four and their relative prominence in the history of modern philosophy in general? All four may be shown to have contributed essentially to the more general task of providing a theoretical justification of the

¹⁰⁰ *PhR*, 95 [§36]
¹⁰¹ *PhR*, 361-364 [§211].
modern project, or a defence of its plausibility insofar as it relates to the “springs of action.” At first the architects of the modern state turned to the classical teachings on rhetoric in order to develop the psychological mechanics of the modern state. That interest was continued or renewed by the founders of classical economic theory, which was in turn taken up by the founding philosopher of history and his Marxist epigones. Although interest in the four fields has waxed and waned through the course of the modern project, it is safe to say that at the present juncture they are each at the centre of philosophical and non-philosophical reflection about political life in particular and man in general.

Since Hegel’s time, rhetoric, psychology, economics and history have been turned against the bourgeois state and, at any rate, Hegelianism. It suffices in this connection to make note of such things as discourse analysis and deconstruction (in Foucault, Derrida and Said), the critique of psychosocial patholog (in Nietzsche, Freud, Marcuse and Lacan), the analysis of structure and the debunking of ideology (in Marx, Engels, and variants thereof), and the disclosure of inauthentic horizons that obscure the possibilities available to man (in Heidegger). But these could only be turned against the modern state on the basis of the prior fact that they had been enlisted in its service in a most fecund way. Sacred to each of the foregoing is the conviction that evils as vague and diverse as “discipline,” “hegemony,” “logocentrism,” “orientalism,” “resentiment,” “slave morality,” “the sublimation of eros,” “hetero-normativity,” “capitalism,” “das Man,” “technology,” *et cetera*, have insidiously marshaled the phenomena corresponding to them, and with far-reaching and devastating consequences. In other words, the critique of discourse, psychology, economic structure and historical horizons can only serve to liberate man on the basis of the presumed fact that they may serve as formidable tools of oppression and the like. Hegel’s followers in this regard share in common with Hegel a conviction that the modern state or tradition is “monstrously” powerful, even if not infallibly so.
They disagree profoundly, and in various ways, on its reasonability, justice, and especially the prospect that man might and ought to find himself at home therein. They tend, moreover, to doubt that human history has reached a terminus in the modern state, or that the modern state is here to stay. They do so, however, on the basis of a prior view that a sufficient understanding of discourse, psychology, economics and historicity must be taken to point beyond the modern state as Hegel understood it.

The philosophy of Hegel would not need to withstand such criticism as it has faced were it not for the fact that it sets out to defend the view according to which the ends of the individual are brought to coincide with the ends of the modern state. We turn now to the consolidation of political authority in the philosophy of Plato, being mindful that Plato felt no need to simply or fully reconcile the ends of the city with those of man as viewed from the highest perspective.
Section B

The Cunning of Doxa

I. Toward a Noble Science of Pleasure and Pain?

In the chapter on civil society Hegel accounts for the consolidation of political authority by means of the “extreme of personal particularity.” The determinate structure of the will, insofar as its particular contents may be appropriated from nature or derived from the “concept,” provides the basis for Hegel’s rational reconstruction of the modern state. He exhibits the contents of the natural will as means to the ends of spirit, or political right insofar as it attains concrete existence in the modern state. The springs of action and political right are thereby put together (systemi), and in such a manner that is taken to be indicative of, as well as no strike against, the power, justice and reasonability of the modern state.

We begin by emphasizing these points because, as we have seen in Part 2, Plato can be thought to have taken up the prospect of such a synthesis, or at any rate what is presupposed by it. For the Gorgias comes to ask whether a science (rhetoric) that works to master the passions and perspectives of men might lend itself to the aim of realizing justice, whether understood from the standpoint of the city or philosophy (the two not being one and the same). With that in mind, we return to Callicles’ admission that there are higher and lower pleasures, at 499b. For it is this admission that allows the conversation to elaborate in outline the possibility of a science of pleasure and pain that works to bring about the common good for man.

Since we have passed through the Philosophy of Right in the meantime, it is helpful to recall a few points. The conversation where we left it in Part 2.C concerns the contents of desire and the possibility that certain pleasures or pains are better and others worse. The occasion for raising that subject was supplied by Callicles’ “strong man” thesis and the abstract hedonism he put forth to defend it. That thesis, the reader will recall, was advanced in passionate response to
Socrates’ conversation with Polus, which culminated in the “beautification” of justice and punishment (Part 2.B). It responded explicitly to the fact that Socrates was able to elicit, and subsequently manipulate, Polus’ view that pleasures and pains may be considered harmful, shameful, bad or otherwise. To oppose that crucial premise, and to shore up his defense of the tyrannical life thereafter, Callicles sought to deny altogether that there are higher and lower pleasures. He proves unable to do so consistently, and that reveals the limit to his thesis.

Whatever might be made of Hegel’s “critical” reservations regarding the adequacy of “desire” (qua “natural”) for the purposes of philosophy of right, he and Plato may be said to agree that man cannot fail to consider certain pleasures and pains better or worse than others. Nor is it within the capacity of man to relate to the contents of desire in a way that is completely random or disorderly, purely passive, or even altogether thoughtless. For both, it is in the nature of man to have opinions about the objects of desire and aversion, and those opinions, received or examined, are of first order importance to the ends of political life and philosophy. Both are therefore concerned with “education.” Moreover, and despite the historical orientation that distinguishes Hegel from Plato, both view the manifold of perspectives in terms of their fundamental openness toward the whole, which is taken to reveal itself in the form of fundamental contradictions or problems. That, in turn, accounts for the importance that both accord to “dialectic.” The major disagreement between Plato and Hegel that comes to sight here derives again from the latter’s greater confidence regarding the malleability of man’s horizon, and therefore the power of “institutions,” and “education” or “culture.”¹ That confidence allows Hegel to replace the ladder of desire with ladders of “spirit” and “willing.”

Hegel’s position on the malleability of man leads him to take on a synoptic view of human affairs that, as a matter of course, comes to emphasize large scale “educative” processes

¹ We have already seen that Hegel sides with Plato’s Protagoras against Socrates regarding the teachability of virtue. Cf. David Leibowitz, The Ironic Defense of Socrates: Plato’s Apology, 123.
such as those associated with the market, culture and history. The speculative philosopher extracts the ladder of “spirit” and “willing” from the macro-processes of human activity, which are taken to reveal man in terms of his step-wise liberation from nature. As for Plato, for reasons that are not despite but because of his concern for education, he doubts the malleability of man, and therefore tends to emphasize the power and intransigence of ignorance, confusion and mere convention. Moreover, not being of the view that the ends of man and the ends of the city may be shown to coincide, he never loses sight of the first-person perspective of the free citizen insofar as he stands in relation to the ends of the regime, and has a right to address that relation in the assembly – or what we have called the “political” view of things. It is therefore principally through the medium of dialogical speech that the Platonic-Socratic approach seeks to comprehend the order of desire and aversion insofar as it relates to the ends of political life and philosophy. Particularly in the Gorgias, the reader is made to reflect on the specifically Calliclean ladder of desire and aversion insofar as it welds him (and others like him) to the regime, while also setting him (and others like him) at odds with Socrates. With the foregoing in mind we may place Plato’s disposition toward the ladder of “desire” and “opinion” into proper perspective, and in contrast to the approach taken by Hegel.

Callicles’ admission that there are higher and lower pleasures confirms that the abstract and indeterminate hedonism that he had outspokenly formulated and defended up until now is not a doctrine he could possibly live up to. In drawing out the implications of Calliclean hedonism, the conversation comes in certain respects close to Hegel’s much later discussion of the “indeterminate will” insofar as it is “not even a will.” For, as we have seen, Callicles’ doctrine of desire, to the extent that it abstracts from the embodiment of desire, is impossible for man. Desire is always expressed in relation to a particular object. As necessarily object oriented and mediated by opinions, the ladder of desire and aversion comes to sight as the classical
counterpart to Hegel’s ladder of willing. But can the ladder of desire and aversion, so understood, become the object of a science concerned to bring about the common good for man? That is the question that necessarily follows upon Callicles’ admission that there are higher and lower pleasures, as well as correspondingly higher and lower ways of life. The may be seen as follows.

The admission that there are higher and lower pleasures provides the occasion for a standard Socratic-Platonic argument, already encountered in the conversation with Polus, namely, that the end of all action is the good. The argument, however, emphasizes making or producing (poiesis). The goodness or badness of given pleasures and pains derives from the fact that some produce benefits or are useful whereas others are harmful and base. Although all things must be done for the sake of the good things, rather than the merely pleasant things, it belongs especially to the artful or technically competent man to identify the pleasures that are good and bad. Knowing the good and bad pleasures and pains is a matter of expertise, which is to say a capacity reserved for the few and denied to most.

Callicles is certain that the premises of the argument obtain. That certitude affords Socrates the opportunity to return, albeit at a higher level, to the difference between technai and non-technai. Certain practices work to procure pleasure irrespective of the hierarchy of pleasures, whereas others come to possess (technical) knowledge of that hierarchy. But Callicles’ earlier exhortation to politics and dehortation from philosophy allows Socrates to reframe the conversation as one that has, all along, been about the most serious matter, the “way one must live.” Thus Socrates maps knowledge of the hierarchy of pleasures and pains onto the

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2 Recall, in this connection, Polus view that Gorgias was experienced in the greatest activity, and therefore the greatest artist and man. Cf. Gorgias, 448c.
3 Gorgias, 499e-500a.
4 Gorgias, 499d-499e.
5 Gorgias, 500a.
6 Gorgias, 500a-b.
difference between the life of “speaking among the people and practicing rhetoric and acting in politics” (favored by Callicles) and the life of philosophy. At the same time, and for the same reason, the discussion is gradually being brought back around to the prospect of a perfectly just art of rhetoric. The argument tends from the very outset in the direction of a science of pleasure and pain that comprehends the goodness or badness of various pleasures and pains, and in terms of their relation to justice, including their relation as possible causes of justice and injustice.

It is not clear to Callicles how the “technician of pleasure and pain” relates to the “best way to live.” For that reason, Socrates must speak “more clearly” (saphesteron). He therefore returns to the examples of medicine and cookery to unpack what is implied by their agreement. Cookery does not “seem” to be an art, for an art “examines the nature [phusin] of him of whom it takes care and the cause of the things that it does, and it has a reasoned account to give of each of these things.” By contrast, cooking proceeds artlessly [atechnos] “without having examined to any degree the nature of pleasure or the cause, all in all irrationally [alogon], making virtually no distinct enumeration.” The art of pleasure and pain is “promethean,” and has knowledge of causes according to nature. Cooking, by contrast, proceeds on the basis of “routine or experience” and its “memory of what usually comes about.” In keeping with an ambiguity noted earlier, that does not prevent cookery from being able to anticipate the conditions for the production of pleasure. It appears only to diminish its reliability. The relation of art to knowledge of nature and nature itself is, in any case, best understood in terms of the argument’s previous emphasis on making. Art is necessary in order to bring about that which nature does

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7 Gorgias, 500c.
8 It is fruitful to compare the Gorgias with the Protagoras insofar as it takes up the teachability of virtue, techné, chance, hedonism, and the measurement of pleasure and pain. See also: Robert Bartlett, Sophistry and Political Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
9 Gorgias, 500d.
10 Gorgias, 500e-501a
12 Cf. Lysis, 209e-210a; See also Blitz, Plato’s Political Philosophy, 28-30.
not itself bring about. At the very best, nature only supplies the conditions or latent possibilities that allow art, or for that matter “knack,” to realize its ends by means of its acquired knowledge of natural causes or recollection of what usually comes to pass.

The political significance of the argument comes clearly into focus the moment it is extended beyond the care of individual souls to the care of “two or many” souls. In keeping with the previously noted emphasis on production or making, Socrates’ examples are all specifically poetic arts. But because Callicles sees the drift of the argument, and is only willing to set art over “knack” to “gratify Gorgias,” the conversation restricts itself to practices that are said to fall under the heading of “flattery.” Flute playing, cithara playing, dithyramb, and tragedy are each musical performances carried out with a view to the simultaneous gratification of multiple and presumably different souls in crowds or mobs of spectators and “without any consideration of the best.” These are said to be “poetic” forms of popular speaking. Thus rhetoric may be reintroduced as a specifically poetic activity much like these, with the

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13 Gorgias, 501d.

14 Notably, the examples ascend from one that involves no vocal component (flute playing), to one that may be accompanied by singing (cithara playing), to a highly impassioned form of singing (dithyramb), to a staged, and therefore carefully crafted, performance that involves song and especially speech (tragedy). It is to be doubted that all of the examples are equally directed toward the mere production of pleasure. For isn’t tragedy somehow an exception in that it incorporates elements that are painful? Or does the audience of a tragedy take a certain pleasure at the painful experiences of the protagonists in the drama? And doesn’t that mix of pleasure and pain contribute somehow to the education of the audience? The Gorgias too combines the pleasant and painful. We might recall, in this connection, the earlier discussion of punishment. The spectator observes the punishment of the criminal, and he may even derive pleasure from it. At the same time, or at least prospectively, he is made better, since more just, for having witnessed it. Socrates asserts that Callicles is unwilling to accept his punishment. Doesn’t the audience of the Gorgias derive a certain pleasure from seeing this big-talker receive his just deserts at the hands of Socrates? The reader of Plato’s Gorgias derives pleasure, and is perhaps made more just, for having witnessed Socrates’ rough handling of Callicles. At the same time, there are somber reminders of the fate of Socrates. The latter are painful, and yet pleasant in that Socrates went to his death nobly and did not compromise his way of life when he came under duress. The Phaedo, which takes place on the day of Socrates’ execution, constantly reminds the reader of the mixture of pleasure and pain that the execution of Socrates inspires in his associates, as well, presumably, as Plato and his readers. The painful is intermixed with the pleasant image of a good man, who performs a deed that lies outside the capabilities of most men. In doing so, the death of Socrates encourages our admiration and therefore imitation. Gorgias, 501d-502c; Cf. Phaedo, 58d-64b; 84c-85b, 88e-89a, 115c-118a. See also Benardete, The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy, 84.

15 Irwin notes that tragedies were not exclusively performed before the adult male population, but before all citizens (including women and children) and non-citizens in Athens. Strauss, who also makes note of this point in conjunction with the fact that poetry comes to sight as a form of rhetoric, takes it to suggest that rhetorical popular speaking, as distinct from poetic popular speaking, is according to Plato nobler or of a higher order. Cf. Irwin, Gorgias, 212; Cf Strauss, Plato’s Gorgias (1963), 212-213, 228-237.
distinction that it stripped of such things as “tune, meter and rhythm.”\(^{16}\) On the basis of that development, the poets are said to “speak rhetorically in the theaters.” Thus Socrates’ examples allow him to bind poetry, art, rhetoric and politics together.\(^{17}\) We recall in this connection that, whatever is said of tragedy in conversation with Callicles, it contributed importantly to the ethical education of Hellas.\(^{18}\) Although the conversation restricts itself for the time being to a form of rhetoric that is “not altogether admirable,”\(^{19}\) the prospect of a noble science of the soul, or a corresponding art that works toward the common good on the basis of clear and distinct knowledge of good and bad pleasures and pains, is coming dimly into focus.

It is helpful to dwell for a moment further on what is entailed by a possible art of the soul as set forth by the conversation. For there is no reason to believe that the art of pleasure and pain would be restricted to knowledge of simply good pleasures and pains. \textit{Qua} art, it would be able to distinguish both good and bad pleasures and pains, and it would do so on the basis of its knowledge of how various pleasures and pains are beneficial or harmful, that is, “productive” of subsequent good and bad things. In that case, however, the goodness or badness of pleasures and pains would not, at least according to the argument, derive from any quality internal to themselves. Would they therefore derive from the noble or ignoble intentions of the craftsman? Definitively, the artist of pleasure and pain would be able to use lowly pleasures for good ends. Would that make base pleasures and fears in some manner good? There is no reason to exclude the possibility that the expert of the soul would understand also and perhaps especially how to produce the beneficial or good by means of the lowly.

\(^{16}\) Jacqueline de Romilly traces the historical connection between the older poetry and the new art of rhetoric insofar as it was taken by some, including Gorgias, to have formidable power over the souls of men. \textit{Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece}, 3-43. \textit{Gorgias}, 502d.

\(^{17}\) Cf. Plochmann and Robinson, \textit{A Friendly Companion to Plato’s Gorgias}, 174-177.

\(^{18}\) \textit{Republic}, 377a-403c.

\(^{19}\) \textit{Gorgias}, 501c-d.
The technician of pleasure and pain would be able to provide a rational and distinct account that enumerates, root and branch, the natures of various human types and the corresponding (causal) means of stirring those types to bring about subsequent ends. For he would know which causes are suited to which natures to bring about further benefits and goods, as well, presumably, as harms and evils. Because, on the present occasion, Plato does not elaborate, and at best only intimates, what such a science would entail, it is helpful to supplement our discussion, as we have once before, with a passage from Plato’s other dialogue on rhetoric, the Phaedrus. For should rhetoric be reformed qua art of the soul, its knowledge would be comprised, amongst other things, by the following: that “there are so-and-so many [forms of souls], and of such and such a sort, from which such and such people come to be”; that “there are so-and-so many forms of speeches, each of such a sort”; and that “people of such a sort are easily persuadable to such things by such speeches on account of this cause,” whereas people of another sort are difficult to persuade on account of these things.” The expert of the soul would be able to reliably apply knowledge of that sort. If a technical understanding of the sources of human motivation could be developed and made ministerial to the ends of dialectic, as the Phaedrus might be taken to suggest, much besides would follow. For were that so the expert of the soul would be able to set in motion the noble and ignoble pleasures and pains of the many to bring about the rule of justice as understood from the standpoint of philosophy.

But Plato is not as sanguine as Hegel. His reservations about a possible art of pleasure and pain oriented toward the common good derive, if not simply from the determinate contents of “willing,” then from the particular contents of passion and opinion insofar as they are

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20 We might say that Plato’s approach to the manifold of soul types, and not only the “ideas,” is characterized by something like “noetic heterogeneity.” There are distinct kinds of men, and one cannot simply reduce those kinds without further ado to a common or universal understanding of “man” in the manner of Kant and, to a lesser extent, Hegel. There are, in other words, no simply universal “springs of action.” Socrates’ legendary endurance or temperance is a case in point.

ordinarily encountered in the city or given “pre-theoretically.” We have already indicated in Part 2 how the desires, fears and opinions of Polus and Callicles, which are somehow representative of “all men,” promise to vitiate any possible effort to employ them as means to the ends of justice, or at least the dialectically purified conception of justice put forth by Socrates prior to Callicles’ intervention. The last qualification is, however, an important one. For the *Gorgias* does not preclude that these same passions and opinions could provide powerful means of realizing justice as understood by the city. In fact, the *Gorgias* continues to reveal the hold of conventional opinions about justice on the soul of Callicles, as it has previously in the case of Polus.

In the foregoing ways, the *Gorgias* shows that a synthesis of power and political justice is effectively at work within the city, albeit at the considerable expense of reason – and therefore justice as understood from the standpoint of philosophy. That, of course, would preclude any possible reconciliation of philosophy to the city. To paraphrase Hegel’s cunning of reason, the price of existence is paid out of the pockets of reason. By revealing what is entailed by the pursuit of power, or that which is effective in the city, Plato’s treatment of the sources of motivation in the city will continue to disclose the three-fold incommensurability of power, justice and reason. At the same time, while this means that the Platonic disposition to the consolidation of political authority is closer to resignation than reconciliation, it does not for that reason terminate in a counsel of despair. For political justice, despite being less than cosmopolitan, is still justice.

**II. Noble Rhetoric and the City**

We noted in the preceding that the sort of rhetoric under consideration is still but a “flattering” or “not altogether admirable” one. At the same time, we have seen that Callicles, like Polus before him, objects to Socrates’ denigration of rhetoric. We are therefore not
unprepared to find that it is Callicles, and not on the present occasion Socrates, who provides the basis for entertaining the possibility of a noble science of rhetoric that works to ensure the goodness of citizens. At the very least, we have reason to pause before rushing to endorse the admittedly tempting, but perhaps all too edifying, form of rhetoric that is coming to light. For that it is especially Callicles who is committed to its possibility is already a cause for concern.

The discussion of poetry and popular speaking allows for a natural transition to rhetoric insofar as it is “directed toward the Athenian people and the other peoples of free men in the cities.” Socrates asks about the character of popular speaking amongst political peoples as such, and his questions are undoubtedly leading ones. There can be no doubt that he encourages Callicles to take everything he has said to the disparagement of rhetoric and flattery, as well as the concerns “all men,” and apply it to Athens in particular and the city in general. But when Socrates asks if actual rhetors are flatterers “who make light of the common interest” or aim toward benefitting citizens, Callicles insists that what is being asked of him is “no longer simple.” “There are some,” says Callicles, “who care about the citizens when they say what they say, and there are also such” who do not. Thus Callicles is responsible for explicitly introducing the possibility that rhetoric might also be “double,” or that, depending on the intentions of rhetoricians, it may be oriented toward “making preparations for the citizens’ souls to be as good as possible.” Is this not somewhat surprising, given Callicles’ earlier debunking of justice and defense of injustice, which took inspiration from the “way things are” “both among other animals and in whole cities and races of human beings?” A striking inversion has come to pass. It is now Socrates who leaps to put things into perspective, pointing out that the noble rhetoric coming into view has never been seen by Callicles, and is unlikely to have ever existed.

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22 Gorgias, 502d-e.
23 Gorgias, 503a.
24 Gorgias, 503b, 503d.
Evidently, Callicles’ view that some rhetors practice a nobler art of rhetoric not reducible to flattery stems from his reverence for statesman of yore.  

For while he agrees that no noble orators of the sort mentioned are there to be found, he restricts that judgment to “current rhetors.” According to Callicles, Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles (who Socrates has heard in person and recently passed away) turned out to be good men, whose efforts made Athenians better.  

Socrates, however, is quick to dismiss the goodness of all four. These men were only good if Callicles’ earlier definition of the good is to be upheld. According to Socrates’ stated view, the four esteemed statesmen are no more than base flatters, whose works only served to make Athenians worse. And again, although it is foreseeable that Plato’s readers could conclude that Socrates is fully earnest in turning to discuss a possibly “noble” science of rhetoric, because the conversation only takes this turn in response to the exhortation of Callicles – “but if you do a fine job of seeking, you will find” – there is at least some cause for concern.  

Or perhaps there is at least one other reason for Socrates to take up that search in earnest. Socrates would not need to embark on that search with the words “let’s examine it in this calm [atremata – literally, without trembling] manner” if Callicles had not ceased to be calm.  

Callicles swore an oath to Zeus when Socrates asked him about the quality of present day public rhetoric. He longs, as it were, for a rhetoric that could make Athens great again. The frustrations of Callicles, as well perhaps as his hostility to the softness of philosophizing, are borne of decline.

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26 Hence Socrates’ “Can you mention one of the ancients…” Socrates rules out from the outset that Pericles was a good man. Gorgias, 503b.

27 Gorgias, 503d. There is an ambiguity in the manuscript at this point in the text. We have followed the reading (also favored by Nichols and Irwin) offered by Burnet. Dodds offers a different reading. Were that reading to be followed our argument would be unaffected, for Callicles is obviously eager to hear that rhetoric is not simply shameful, and encourages the view that there have been “good” rhetoricians. John Burnet, Platonis Opera (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), v.3, ad loc. Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 327.

28 Gorgias, 503d.
We have already anticipated what a noble art of rhetoric that conforms to the standards imposed by the conversation would look like. Socrates’ “calm” (viz., dispassionate) examination carries forward our understanding of “right rhetoric” as follows. Like other craftsmen, in carrying out his work [ergon], the technically competent public speaker looks away [apoblepon] toward the production of a certain form [eidos]. Socrates’ examples each involve the production of works, and two are specifically architectonic: painters, house builders, and shipwrights. Each of these craftsmen [demiourgoi] assembles the parts into a coherent and orderly whole, and “compels each thing to fit and harmonize with another” in terms of an overarching structure [taxis] or order [kosmos]. As in the case of actual houses and ships, the presence and absence of order accounts for the usefulness or degeneracy of the product. That conclusion is then carried over to bodies, the arrangement and order of which is taken to account for strength and health. We are to infer on the basis of these examples that the expert orator, looking away to a certain form, assembles the parts of the soul into an orderly whole. Would he assemble the parts of the city, individual citizens, into an orderly whole as well? That is suggested as follows. As the craftsmen who concern themselves with the body look toward the “healthy,” those who concern themselves with arranging and ordering the soul look toward “the lawful” and the “law.” As the beams of a house are brought together by means of the

29 *Demiourgoi*: literally, those who work on behalf of the demos.


31 Dodds translates: “until he has composed the whole into a thing of order and system.” The Greek “kekosmemenon pragma” evokes the order of the cosmos. As we shall see, Socrates will speak of cosmological order in what follows. That he does might be taken to suggest that he is practicing a version of the noble rhetoric here expounded. But it may also suggest that he is forcing or “compelling” parts to fit into a whole that they might not otherwise fit into. Is Socrates carrying out this work on behalf of the demos – qua *demiourgos* – that is, for their benefit? *Gorgias*, 503-504a. Cf. Dodds, *Gorgias*, 329; Irwin, *Gorgias*, 214-215. See also *Timaeus*, 27d-29a.

32 *Gorgias*, 504b.

33 Irwin therefore draws attention to the philosophical rulers of the *Republic*. He notes, moreover, that Socrates appears to conflate “virtue from the point of view of other people’s expectations – e.g. the justice and temperance produced in the citizens for the benefit of the state” and “virtues measured by the agent’s own self interests and expectations.” That would be in keeping with the *Republic* and Socrates’ arguments about justice in the *Gorgias* alike. Stauffer also notes that the identification of order in the soul and law is inadequately defended. Irwin, *Gorgias*, 215-216; Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias*, 130-133; Cf. *Republic*, 500d.

34 *Gorgias*, 504b-d.
craftsman’s knowledge of form and causality, the order of the city would be brought together through the productive activity of the speaker. It is perhaps not out of place to recall, in light of the distinctively Platonic emphasis on speech, the architectural metaphors of Hegel.\textsuperscript{35}

The noble and expert orator’s concern for the soul levels off with the law, as if that were the highest good for the soul. The conversation with Callicles has therefore circled back around to the conversation with Polus insofar as that conversation featured what we called the “beautification of justice.” The noble orator comports himself to the task of arranging the soul as if the ends of the city as set forth by the law were the highest ends of the soul or exhaustive of the good. Similarly, here too the discussion of the activity of the noble rhetorician culminates in a discussion of punishment, and results in a not unpredictable resurgence of Calliclean intransigence. But why must the discussion turn back to punishment? Throughout Socrates’ discussion of the noble orator a major problem related to the problem of punishment is explicitly at issue. For the material worked upon may \textit{resist} the efforts of the craftsmen who would order it in terms of an abstract schema or the “form he looks away to.” The noble orator must \textit{fight} “to say the best things, whether they will be more pleasant or more unpleasant to the hearers.”\textsuperscript{36} The craftsmen must \textit{compel} the parts into harmony.\textsuperscript{37} Similarly, as the doctor must struggle against the desires of patients, and persuade them to adopt foul tasting medicines and unpleasant regimens, the noble rhetorician must work against the grain of citizens, who are not predisposed toward harmony, order or form. The noble rhetorician would work to make the crowd less thoughtless, intemperate and unjust, but the passions and opinions of “all men” would resist that

\textsuperscript{35} In this connection, we might remind ourselves once more of Victor Cousin’s edition of the \textit{Gorgias}, which was dedicated to Hegel. In the \textit{Preface} Hegel uses a culinary metaphor for sophists, and an architectural metaphor for the science of right. Did he get these analogies from his reading of the \textit{Gorgias}? Was his former student Cousin aware of that, or at least the resonance referred to, when he dedicated that specific volume of Plato’s works to Hegel? However tempting a possibility, it is impossible for us to say for certain. See Part 1, Note 35, above.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Gorgias}, 503a.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Gorgias}, 504a.
effort. There is no question here of simply “telling the people what to do” with rational arguments. The noble orator must therefore fight, compel, chastise – and punish.\textsuperscript{38} But would the “Athenian people and the other peoples of free men in cities” suffer that any more than Polus, or for that matter Callicles? Certainly Socrates does not have the power to compel the demos.

\textbf{III. The Dogmatic Monologue}

The foregoing indicates why Callicles’ reaction to the argument is according to logographic necessity. That Callicles is determined to end the discussion, and determined to end it at this particular point in the conversation, is essential to the intention of the \textit{Gorgias}. We take confirmation from the fact that \textit{Plato has Socrates link the behavior of Callicles directly to the argument}. Callicles “does not abide being benefited and suffering for himself this thing that the argument is about, being punished.”\textsuperscript{39} On the one hand, Callicles’ esteem for rhetoric and political life demands a rehabilitation of rhetoric of the sort put forth by Socrates – a rhetoric that is noble as opposed to slavish. On the other hand, because Callicles is powerless to impose his will on the demos, and powerless to resist the many, he wants nothing to do with it. Should he try to chastise the demos, he is the one who will suffer. At the very least, it will do little to further his career. Fittingly, when Socrates persists in his efforts against democratic Callicles he is called “violent.”\textsuperscript{40} In due time, he will be threatened. Moreover, Callicles claims once more to have humored Socrates only to gratify Gorgias, \textit{viz.}, the teacher of the ordinary rhetoric who promises to equip him for the realities of life within the city. The action therefore corrects the argument. The noble rhetoric, which works to introduce form into the matter of resistant souls, is

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Gorgias}, 505c.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Gorgias}, 505d.
overpowered by its object, as the behavior of Callicles exemplifies.\textsuperscript{41} If Socrates practices the true rhetoric, it does not work.

The action is once more indicative of the impotence of persuasion, and especially rational persuasion in defense of justice. The noble rhetoric rests on implausible premises. It takes for granted that the parts of specifically \textit{free} cities can be simultaneously set in motion to bring about a general education toward justice and moderation. The noble rhetoric rests on the view that the whole of human relations, and therefore man’s place within the whole, is ordered in such a way that makes the multiplicity of souls amenable to its activity and aims. It rests on the assumption that the power of justice and reason are supported by that which holds sway over the whole.

Is it for this reason, then, that Socrates appeals to an especially archaic understanding of justice in order to encourage Callicles to see the argument through? It is said that it is “not righteous (\textit{themis}) to abandon even myths in the middle, but one must put a head on, so that it does not go around without a head.”\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Themis} must be taken to refer here to specifically divine justice and the ways of life instituted by the gods. Custom, according to the understanding implied in \textit{themis}, is instituted independently, and to be followed regardless, of the wills and concerns of particular citizens, or as we might say, as a matter of public “religious” observance.\textsuperscript{43} Is the argument therefore necessarily mythical, as Socrates himself suggests? For the first time in the dialogue, Socrates introduces piety and the gods.\textsuperscript{44} He will provide a “cosmo-theological” account that vouchsafes the possibility of the noble science of rhetoric it

\textsuperscript{41} Thus Callicles seems to reject the noble rhetoric on similar grounds as those that caused Polus to hesitate before the beautification of punishment.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Gorgias}, 505c-d; Cf. \textit{Timaeus}, 69b.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Gorgias}, 507b-508a.
recommends. That he does, and the manner in which he does, are directly connected to Callicles’ unwillingness to heed the argument and participate in the conversation.

The supposed violence and *themis* of Socrates are essentially connected to his procedure. For although Socrates is enjoined to follow through with the remainder of the argument on his own, he proceeds to speak for Callicles. The argument becomes a monological dialogue or, what would amount perhaps to the same thing, a Socratic *epideixis*. It abstracts from, but also draws attention to, Callicles’ resistance to the argument. The resistance of Callicles is, however, crucial to the *Gorgias*’ entire bearing on the power of persuasion.

The saying of the comic poet Epicharmus (quoted by Socrates), according to whom that which “two men were saying beforehand” becomes sufficient for one, is indicative of Plato’s intention. Socrates wishes to complete the argument with the compliance and participation of Callicles, but the latter refuses to comply and participate. He will therefore speak for Callicles, as if the speeches of the two could become one. He therefore imposes a contrived form of agreement between himself and Callicles. According to the touchstone analogy, that contrivance would give the impression that they had attained the true things themselves. By no means is that impression intended to satisfy. The Socratic *epideixis* or monologue is crafted in such a way that incorporates within itself a spurious form of dialogue. Socrates’ procedure assumes that the dialectic could be reproduced, without “remainders”, by a single voice that sets out to display its findings. Socrates speaks for Callicles, who clearly does not regard Socrates as his

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45 Irwin’s suggestion that “the interlocutor’s role shrinks from now on in the dialogue…because [Plato] realizes he has not worked out adequate grounds for all his claims” is rejected in the strongest terms. Irwin, *Gorgias*, 219.
47 Irwin writes: “Callicles’ views are not meant to be constructed simply for Plato’s convenience, so that Socrates can easily refute them; they are a statement of views that Socrates’ and Plato’s contemporaries take seriously and that present serious objections to Socratic ethics. In his choice of interlocutors and the views they put forward, Plato wants to show that he is not leaving reasonable objections unheard.” He does not, however, go even remotely far enough in making the opposition of Callicles internal to the meaning of the *Gorgias*. Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics*, 122; Cf. Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory*, 115, 118-119.
48 *Gorgias*, 505e.
spokesperson. He therefore does violence to the will of Callicles in the very act of speaking for him or pretending to be dialogical. The comedy that ensues, and the affront to reality that it represents, is obvious. Plato, having Socrates scrupulously voice the assent of Callicles as he moves on, amply supplies his reader with the means of discerning the absurdity of the occasion. A world in which the speeches of Socrates and Callicles are one is the stuff of comedy.

It is safer to interpret the *Gorgias* as the Platonic tragedy of persuasion and reason, which is not to say that this would be simply adequate.49 Perhaps that is suggested insofar as the quotation of Epicharmus is followed by another reference to Euripides’ *Antiope.*50 Socrates will not cease until Callicles’ speech of Zethus has been repaid with his speech of Amphion, a speech Callicles does not care to hear. But in the *Antiope,* Amphion fails to persuade Zethus. Plato’s audience would have been aware of that failure, and the *Gorgias* encourages its readers to connect that failure to the efforts of Socrates, as well has his failure to persuade the Athenian demos.51 Moreover, in the play, Amphion yields to Zethus, and the brothers begin to set in motion a plan that promises to be ruinous. The *Antiope* is, however, prevented from being a thoroughgoing tragedy by the god, Hermes, whose intervention makes the brothers the founders of Thebes in common. When Socrates spoke of Callicles as a touchstone, he said it would be “godsend” or, literally, a gift from Hermes (*hermaion*).52 The monologue, which makes the speeches of Callicles and Socrates one, and subsequently the afterlife myth that concludes the *Gorgias,* might therefore be seen as the *deus ex machina* of the *Gorgias.*53 It relates to the drama of the *Gorgias* as the edifying speeches of the *Crito* and *Phaedo* do to the verdict of the

50 Clay, *Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher,* 36-37; Dodds, *Gorgias,* 275-276.
52 *Gorgias,* 486e.
Athenian jurors in the Apology. It is doubtful, however, that Plato’s intended readers were meant to forget the gloomy dramatic action of the Gorgias and the fate of Socrates, or to simply internalize the edifying dogmas that they lead up to. For that would be tantamount to forgetting what separates the Gorgias from a dogmatic treatise, an epideixis, or a mytho-poetic account of the whole. The monologue unfolds, and must unfold, in the absence of Callicles’ active participation. For a world in which the noble science of rhetoric is simply viable or cannot be opposed would be a world without Callicleses, viz., a world too good to be true.

It goes without saying, moreover, that a world in which the participation of Callicleses is indefinitely suppressed is not one in keeping with the demands of a free society. We have noted before that the argument emphasizes free men. We recall, in this connection, that Callicles praised the superiority of the eleutheroi, and that Polus had appealed previously to free speech in Athens. In the Platonic corpus the dialogical procedure of Socrates is associated with a certain justice, for it takes into account the will of the interlocutor. Participants in a dialogue seek to reach an understanding in common, which task imposes, or at least ought to impose, a certain order upon their conduct and good will. Conversely, elsewhere in the corpus, Plato associates monological speech with despotism and tyranny, and for the simple reason that it excludes the participation of its audience. 54 We might infer the following. Rhetoric addresses itself especially to free men. But it is limited by, and must remain within the compass of, the capacities of most men. 55 For that very reason, however, rhetoric might be taken to blur back into force and despotism. For rhetoric cannot simply rely on those qualities that make men worthy of freedom, namely, free reflection. Rather, rhetoric may come to rely especially on opinion or myth. As we have seen in Part 2.A, political persuasion requires that opinion be presented in the form of

55 Cf. Laws, 757a-758a.
certitude. Political rhetoric therefore tells the many that the views expounded are bound “with iron and adamantine arguments” and that all opposing views are “ridiculous.” Unlike Socrates on the present occasion, political rhetoric does not solicit the effort to “loosen” those arguments.  

At an earlier point in the conversation, when Socrates transitioned from the poetic arts to popular rhetoric, he spoke as follows: “if someone stripped off the tune, rhythm, and meter from every poetic composition, would what is left turn out to be anything other than speeches?” The ensuing monologue all but strips away that which prevents the Gorgias, as a poetic work, from being read as if it consisted in nothing other than a “speech.” The monologue obscures the drama that precedes itself, which is nevertheless the cause of itself. It removes or momentarily conceals the friction between Socrates and his interlocutors. The presence or absence of that friction is analogous to the difference between Plato and Platonism. By stripping away all dramatic friction between Socrates and Callicles – thus that which most calls into question the power of persuasion, reason and justice – the monologue takes on the appearance of being most straightforwardly dogmatic. It therefore serves benignly to encourage the life of reason and justice. However that may be, the appearance of a dogmatic teaching must be corrected by the presence of Callicles in the background, whose presence cannot be reduced to Callicles insofar as he figures in the monologue of Socrates. It is definitive of the Gorgias that it tends from the dialogical toward the monological. Without the dialogue, and especially the drama, of the Gorgias, the Gorgias is easily reinterpreted as a dogmatic work or a form of popular speaking. It

56 Gorgias, 508e-509c.
57 Dodd’s points out that Socrates’ reduction of poetry to speech, and therefore rhetoric, originates with the historical Gorgias. Gorgias, 502c. Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 324-325.
58 Cf. Irwin, Gorgias, 6-7, 228-229.
has been concluded, for related reasons, that the *Gorgias* reveals a Plato who becomes gradually less Socratic and more “Platonic.”\(^{59}\) In light of the foregoing, that view is unsustainable.

The need to correct the monologue in terms of the momentarily obscured dialogue is especially evident in that Socrates proceeds to summarize the whole argument “from the beginning.” He does so in a manner that ranges from the more or less faithful, to the completely unprecedented.\(^{60}\) The arguments that fall into the latter category are certainly not of such a sort that Callicles could be expected to endorse or find persuasive. Viewed from a purely theoretical perspective, which includes the perspective that sets about the *Gorgias* in search of a doctrine, one might easily conclude that the speech of Zethus has been repaid. The view according to which the dogmatic monologue conveys the teachings of Plato’s philosophy rests on the view that the participation of Callicles in the *Gorgias* is dispensable. From an adequately political perspective that conclusion must be rejected. For in politics it does not necessarily matter whether the right arguments or dogmas have been put forth. It matters also and especially whether such arguments, or those who make them, can be expected to prevail over those who disagree with them. The difference between political and merely theoretical-doctrinal readings of the *Gorgias* is again that between Platonic political philosophy and Platonism as a monological perversion of the multiplicity that characterizes Platonic dialogue as such.

Socrates certainly stops at nothing to assert the blessedness and happiness of the just and virtuous, and the wretchedness of the unjust and base. Rather than dwelling at great length on the moral content of the speech, let us concentrate on its dogmatic peak.\(^{61}\) Having laid down and asserted the truth of the virtuous life, Socrates proceeds to the superiority of enduring just

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punishment to escaping it. That is taken to follow necessarily, that is, “if” the preceding account is true.\textsuperscript{62} He proceeds to evoke the sayings of the wise, which is generally taken to refer to the teachings of the Pythagoreans.\textsuperscript{63} Socrates refers in this context to Callicles’ “wisdom” regarding such matters, thus to the sophisticated theoretical arguments that accompanied his praise of tyranny and critique of justice. The dogmatic peak of Socrates’ speech of Amphion corresponds to the dogmatic peak of Callicles’ speech of Zethus. “Heaven, earth, gods, and human beings are held together by community, friendship, orderliness, moderation and justice; and on account of these things, comrade, they call this whole an order, not disorder and intemperance.”\textsuperscript{64} We recall that Callicles opposed Socrates on the basis of how things are according to nature, which was taken to be just. We referred to that account as Callicles’ \textit{physiodicy}. Where Callicles spoke of nature and not the gods, Socrates speaks of the gods and not nature. But his response to Callicles’ \textit{physiodicy} is not so much a \textit{theodicy} as a \textit{cosmodicy}. The gods, too, are under the sway of a cosmic order, an order to which all beings are subordinate.

It is said to have escaped Callicles’ notice that “geometrical equality has great power among both gods and human beings.”\textsuperscript{65} The shift from \textit{physiodicy} to \textit{cosmodicy} turns away from the bare consideration of nature to the assertion, \textit{nowhere defended}, that a geometrical equality or order holds sway over the whole.\textsuperscript{66} The necessity of that shift is clear. Nature does not encourage faith in equality, though it may encourage some faith in geometry or mathematics.\textsuperscript{67} That Socrates does not try to meet Callicles’ challenge on the plane of nature suggests that Callicles’ challenge cannot be met on the plane of nature. The mature Socrates did not seem to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} \textit{Gorgias}, 507d.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Cf. Dodds, \textit{Gorgias}, 336-340; Jacob Klein, \textit{Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra}, 61-79.
\item \textsuperscript{64} \textit{Gorgias}, 508a.
\item \textsuperscript{65} \textit{Gorgias}, 508a.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Cf. Irwin, \textit{Gorgias}, 222-228; Stauffer, \textit{The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias}, 137-138.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Cf. \textit{Timaeus}, 36a-d, 51e, 53c-58a, 61e-63a.
\end{itemize}
believe that nature could tell us how to live. For that we must turn to “speeches.” Socrates’
departure from nature is evident in his incorporation of the gods, for natural philosophy tended
to entail atheism. Should a theoretical defense of the just life against the evidence supplied by
nature be demanded as a condition for living justly, one must look beyond nature and perhaps in
the direction of a certain combination of piety and mathematics. Thus it is said that geometrical
equality has “great power amongst gods or men,” or that no being can withstand the providence
of geometry or the proportionality that holds sway over the whole as an assembly of parts. But it
remains to be seen whether geometry actually does have great power in the sense claimed. Nor
could it be said that proportionality, and therefore geometry, is exhaustive of justice.

An exact science that comprehends the nature of man, and the means of making man
just, would seem to depend on a providentially ordered whole. More specifically, it would seem
to depend on the existence of a whole that reveals itself geometrically to theoretical man, and in
such ways that support man’s effort to reorder man to bring about just relations amongst men.69
Equipped with such an understanding of things, the noble rhetorician could anticipate in advance
the conditions according to which men might be brought into conformity with justice. Let us
recall, in this connection, that geometry, of all the mathematical sciences, is that which is most
readily employed for practical aims, such as those of carpentry and architecture. It is perfectly
tailored to the argument’s emphasis on public craftsmen. Be that as it may, we are not surprised
to find that the geometrical providence ascribed to the whole has escaped Callicles’ notice. We
have little reason to believe that the way of life put forth by Socrates could have any great
traction in the world of men. Callicles has already claimed that he is impervious to myths.

In repaying the speech of Zethus with the speech of Amphion, Socrates has
approximated the noble art of rhetoric. Be that as it may, we have every reason to doubt that he

has successfully worked his way back from the nature of Callicles to the causes of justice in the soul, or the means through which Callicles could be reliably made better through the medium of speech. Whatever Socrates may know about “erotics,” he does not have a geometrical account of the “springs of action.” Callicles is proof that geometrical equality does not hold sway.

Should the example of Callicles be found insufficient, Socrates’ many expressions of doubt confirm our doubts. The Gorgias calls into question the power of reason and justice, but it also encourages reason and justice, or provides an account that, although too hopeful, may serve to encourage the widely felt longing for a reasonable and just politics. Since Socrates’ cosmodicy remains unproven until the end, but seems intended to meet our doubts about the power of reason and justice in the world, it encourages Platonism for one sort of reader, and Platonic political philosophy for those of another caliber.

IV. Power and Conformity, Fear and Democracy

The Gorgias returns to the subject of power. The occasion for raising that subject is provided by Socrates who, at the end of his monologue, turns to examine Callicles’ earlier critique of Socrates. In doing so, Socrates blends dogmatism and doubt, or certitude and openness to being refuted. On the one hand, the views expounded are to be regarded, “somewhat rudely,” as “held down and bound… with iron and adamantine arguments.” On the other, it is left open that Callicles, or someone stronger or more youthful than Callicles, might loosen those bonds and refute him. Our acceptance of the dogmatic monologue depends on the presence of someone with the capacity or will to refute it. In Socrates’ words, it depends on those he happens to “fall in with.”

70 Cf. Symposium, 201a-212c; Theages, 127d128b.
71 Gorgias,508e-509a; Cf. Stauffer, The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias, 138-140.
72 Gorgias, 509a; Cf. 487a.
willing to engage in dialogue. The reader is intended to make up for Callicles’ incapacity and unwillingness to participate in the conversation.

The two parts of Socrates monologue correspond to the two parts of Callicles’ opening one: a view of nature or the cosmos taken in relation to justice, followed by a critique and defense of the philosophical and political ways of life. Callicles’ critique of Socrates focused on the uselessness of philosophy for politics, and culminated in his inability to protect himself against unjust accusers and physical harm. But here, Socrates only addresses the following: his inability to help himself, friends, or relatives; being at the mercy of whoever wants to harm him (as if he had no civic rights or was a stranger like Gorgias); and therefore his disgraceful vulnerability to being “cracked on the jaw” (Callicles’ formulation, twice quoted), deprived of his possessions, expelled from the city, or killed.\(^73\) That he makes no move to defend his usefulness to the city suggests that he concedes the related charge. Nor does Socrates deny his vulnerability to being harmed. He only doubts the shameful ness of being harmed by unjust men. He therefore reiterates his earlier claim that “whatsoever injustice” might be done to him and his possessions “is both worse and more shameful for him who does injustice than for me who suffers injustice.”\(^74\) \textit{Socrates does not deny his lack of power so much as the import of that lack.}\n
It is, nevertheless, considerations related to the exposedness or vulnerability of man that motivate the conversation’s turn to the procurement of power. We are not surprised by this development, having already seen that Polus and Callicles are interested in rhetoric for the sake of power, and interested in power because fearful.

Although Callicles doubts that doing injustice is a greater evil than suffering it, he does not object to the proposition that doing injustice is an evil.\(^75\) We are again made to recall

\(^73\) \textit{Gorgias}, 508c-508e.  
\(^74\) \textit{Gorgias}, 509b-509c.  
\(^75\) \textit{Gorgias}, 509c.
Socrates’ conversation with Polus. Violence is not desirable in its own right, but only as a means to further ends. Socrates’ therefore poses the following rather indirect question: “by preparing what, then, would a human being help himself, so as to have both of these benefits – that of not doing injustice and that of not suffering injustice? Is it power or wish?” It is clear to Callicles, at least with regard to suffering injustice, that power is needed, and that mere wishing does not suffice.\(^{76}\) As for not doing injustice, that an art or power is needed to avoid that evil, is only allowed to obtain “for Socrates” so that he might “bring the argument to a conclusion.”\(^{77}\) Although we might expect Socrates to provide us with an account that unites the two sides, that is, an art that is protective on the one hand and innocent of injustice on the other, we find that the argument takes the opposite turn. A wedge is driven between the procurement of power and innocence from injustice.\(^{78}\) Let us examine Socrates’ procedure more closely.

Since Callicles readily agrees that power is needed to avoid suffering injustice, Socrates directs his appeal to the procurement of power for the sake of not suffering injustice at the hands of others. Socrates introduces, as the means of protecting oneself against suffering injustice, political as well as despotic power. “One must either rule in the city oneself – or even rule as a tyrant – or else be a comrade of the existing regime.” He does so to Callicles’ enthusiastic agreement.\(^{79}\) Any surprise that Socrates’ focus might occasion is removed when we recall that the conversation has emphasized the great insecurity of those who might seek to avoid injustice, whether by keeping to themselves or refraining from doing injustice to others.\(^{80}\) From the standpoint of the *Gorgias*, it would be “wishful” thinking to believe that the latter could suffice.

\(^{76}\) *Gorgias*, 509d.  
\(^{77}\) *Gorgias*, 510a.  
\(^{79}\) *Gorgias*, 510a.  
Callicles is very much in agreement with each stage of Socrates’ argument – save the last. Someone much better than a “savage and uneducated” tyrant would be feared by the tyrant, and could never endear himself to the tyrant without debasing himself. Nor could someone lowlier than the tyrant gain his esteem. Accordingly, only those who, “being of the same character and praising and blaming the same things” as the ruler, and submit obsequiously to being ruled, will have great power in the city and protect themselves against injustice.\(^81\) It therefore behooves the young who are desirous of power and security to assimilate their way of living to that of the ruler, praising and blaming the same things and becoming most like him. For that very reason, however, it would also be wishful thinking to believe that power could be procured in the city without assimilating oneself to the city’s ways. From the standpoint of the philosopher, the road to power is necessarily accompanied by a form of debasement. The road to power necessitates conformity to the ways of the city, and those ways are necessarily unjust or ignoble from the perspective of the philosopher.\(^82\) Much the same would have to be admitted in the case of Callicles’ “strong man,” to say nothing of the law according to nature.

It is the next stage of the argument, which depends on the road to power so understood, that Callicles objects to. The wedge between the life that protects itself against injustice and the life that does no injustice is driven into place on the basis of the conditions that must pertain in order for one to acquire power in the city.\(^83\) For the procurement of power so understood necessitates becoming like the ruler regardless of that ruler’s injustice. Since Socrates claims to consider injustice a greater evil than suffering injustice, the conditions for securing oneself against the injustice of others throws oneself into the greater evil of doing injustice, a

\(^{81}\) *Gorgias*, 510b-510d; Cf. *Republic*, 492a-e.
\(^{82}\) In marked contrast to what we have observed in the analogous case in Hegel’s chapter on civil society. See Part 3.A.VI-VIII, above.
\(^{83}\) *Gorgias*, 510e-511a.
“degeneration and maiming of the soul.”

Although the elenchus turns on the example of the uneducated and unjust tyrant, we have learned enough about Socrates’ views concerning the many in Athens, or for that matter anywhere, to conclude that it applies to political life as such. Socrates gives us no reason to restrict the argument in such ways that would exclude the relation of Callicles to democratic Athens. But Callicles, as we have anticipated, rejects the argument. All that matters to Callicles, or so he claims, is that those who refuse to conform to the ways of the city will be harmed by those who do. That does not surprise.

It would be hasty to conclude that the degeneration of soul brought about on the basis provided by the conditions for security in the city – that one brings oneself into conformity with the ways of the regime – is of no concern to Callicles. After Socrates remarks that he is not deaf (is Callicles shouting?), having heard the objection many times (from Polus, himself, “and almost all others in the city”), he goes on to remark that it will nevertheless be a “base man killing a noble and good one.” Callicles responds with the following: “isn’t this exactly the infuriating thing?” Callicles, for all his critique of justice, is angry at the fate of the just and noble in the actual city.

It is Callicles, and not Socrates, who wishes for political circumstances in which the pursuit of security and power were simply compatible with nobility and justice. Thus the ends of physiodicy and cosmodicy are well tailored to his needs. Be that as it may, Callicles’ wish is an unreasonable one. That it is not taken seriously by Socrates himself, is clear. Only the unintelligent, says Socrates, would be infuriated by the incompatibility of power and justice.

The reasonable would not be surprised by the power of injustice in the city, and therefore the limits of realizing justice in the city or making it beautiful. We recall in this connection that

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84 Gorgias, 511a; Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 342-343.
85 Gorgias, 511a-b.
87 Gorgias, 511b-c.
the Calliclean *physiodicy*, which involved a justification of nature, could not fail to acknowledge that the world as it faces us is in numerous respects unjust. In other words, Callicles wishes for a world in which the attainment of power could be put together with the preservation of justice, as well, presumably, as the possession of wisdom. All of the problems that afflict Callicles’ position would seem to stem from that unreasonable longing. The theoretical peak of Callicles’ argument seems to derive from the willfulness of Callicles, or his desire to exist in a world that is just. The theoretical peak that Socrates opposes to the peak of Callicles’ thesis smacks similarly of wishful thinking and willfulness. The speeches of Zethus and Amphion would seem determined, as it were, by a “thumoeidetic” will to reshape the world in terms of what ought to be.  

Callicles, who utters two consecutive oaths to Zeus, passionately disagrees with Socrates.  

His disagreement provides the occasion for another long speech, though one less dogmatic, or at any rate less lofty than the last. The occasion for that speech is disagreement over whether human beings ought to live as Callicles recommends, namely, whether they ought to concern themselves above all “with making preparations for living as long a time as possible and to practice those arts that always save us from danger,” and therefore with rhetoric and the pursuit of political power. The speech weaves together two themes: the fear of death and the conceit or pride of rhetoricians in comparison to other craftsmen, who comport themselves more nobly or at least modestly. Although the connection that obtains between the two themes is at first less than obvious, it may be understood as follows.  

Piloting and engineering, insofar as they save lives, and therefore exercise a protective role, are employed throughout to deflate the pride of rhetoricians, or aspiring rhetoricians like

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89 *Gorgias*, 511c.  
90 *Gorgias*, 511b-c.
Callicles. The pilot accomplishes goods not lesser than the practitioner of forensic rhetoric, for he saves souls, bodies and possessions from the greatest dangers.\textsuperscript{91} Unlike the rhetorician, however, the pilot charges a small fee, comports himself modestly, and does not put on airs.\textsuperscript{92} As for the engineer, who may saves no fewer lives than pilots or even generals (“for there are times when he saves whole cities”) he could easily “bury Callicles in speeches” about why he and others should become engineers, other pursuits being “worth nothing.”\textsuperscript{93} The arguments, insofar as they connect the protective arts to the pride of rhetoricians, serve to separate Callicles’ aristocratic concern for the noble and just from his democratic concern for security. Death is the great equalizer, a common aversion that levels all other conceits. Callicles’ aristocratic bravado conceals a democratic fear, but he cannot have it both ways. That fear accounts for the high esteem in which he holds rhetoric, an art that would be unnecessary if he were strong according to the “law of nature.” True aristocracy holds the fear of death that “all men” share in contempt.

The relative modesty of piloting and engineering is taken to derive from insight into the fact that certain lives are not necessarily worth saving, or that saving one’s own life or that of others is of little worth as a claim to superiority. The pilot remains uncertain whether some are wretched not to have died, whether on account of the “sea, or from a law court, or any place whatsoever.”\textsuperscript{94} When it comes to the engineer, although Callicles would make much of his superiority and better ancestry, and would not regard the engineer equal to the rhetorician, nor let his own kin marry the engineer’s, all of these conceits must collapse if life and death have the importance accorded to them by Callicles.\textsuperscript{95} It is only if life and death are of lesser than first order importance that the living or dead can partake in the superiority or nobility that Callicles

\textsuperscript{91} Gorgias, 511c-d.
\textsuperscript{92} Gorgias, 511d-e, 512b.
\textsuperscript{93} Gorgias, 512b-c.
\textsuperscript{94} Gorgias, 511e-512b.
\textsuperscript{95} Gorgias, 512c-512e.
accords to some and wishes to possess for himself. Noble and base corpses are corpses nonetheless. Only if nobility and baseness supervene in importance over life and death can the lives or deaths of Themistocles, Pericles – or, for that matter, Socrates – be regarded as superior to those of others. The fear of death is democratic, but in ways that prove at odds with the noble aspirations of democracy. In order for democracies to have heroes those heroes must appear “larger than life.” Thus Socrates renders incompatible the pursuit of power in the city and the pursuit of the noble and the good. The pursuit of power in the city comes necessarily at the cost of what Socrates and Callicles each, in their own way, admire or aspire to.96

If the “true man” must abjure the love of life, he must also abjure the pursuit of power in the city. So strong is the compulsion to conform to the city’s ways, that no effort to attain power in the city can preserve itself against it and the debasement that accompanies it.97 We have anticipated that Socrates goes one step further. “For you must be not an imitator but like these men in your very own nature, if you are to achieve something genuine in friendship with the Athenian people – and yes, by Zeus, with the son of Pyrilampes to boot!”98 To believe that one could, mastering the art of rhetoric, contrive to make oneself merely appear in keeping with the city’s ways, without in fact doing so, is a form of wishful thinking. What is authoritative in the regime – endoxa – works its profound influence not only on the words of men, but on their very natures. For, groups of men “rejoice at speeches said in accord with their own character and are annoyed at those of an alien character.”99 They would seem to do so regardless of whether the alien character of the speaker is made obvious. Any possible effort to conceal one’s true nature by means of rhetoric to preserve oneself indefinitely against the city is apparently futile. We are

96 It goes almost without mentioning that Socrates’ pilot and engineer, to say nothing of the “true man,” are each quite the Platonist. They each take for granted a version of the Socratic “dependency thesis,” according to which the goodness of all goods are dependent on whether one lives the good life.
97 Gorgias, 512e-513a.
98 Gorgias, 513b.
99 Gorgias, 513b-c.
given to apply these conclusions to Socrates himself: whatever might be said about Socratic irony, few if any are fooled by Socrates’ claims to be just like them. To hold the city to higher standards than those authoritative in the city – whether those standards are Socratic or Calliclean – is pre-eminently dangerous and fruitless. It is impossible to ennoble the city without attaining power in the city; it is impossible to attain power in the city without becoming ignoble. Thus the “true man” refuses to be made ignoble, and therefore abjures the pursuit of power, whereas those who pursue power are dubiously noble according to necessity.

Although Callicles is provided the opportunity to object to Socrates’ argument, he concedes the point in a way that is both telling and moving. “In some way, I don’t know what, what you say seems good to me, Socrates; but I suffer the experience of the many – I am not altogether persuaded by you.” On the one hand, Callicles is stirred by Socrates’ excoriating critique of conformity and the road to power in the city. The tension that holds sway over Callicles is that discernible in the speech of Socrates. Callicles is moved by a commitment to political greatness and even the triumph of justice. At the same time, the conditions for the attainment of power in the city, taken together with the fears that appear to dog him, leave him demoralized. He realizes now all too clearly that his desire for power requires that he endear himself to the many, which demands a form of obsequious pandering that is, in turn, necessarily at odds with the masterly disposition he admires and longs for. Caught in the midst of these tensions, Callicles, who is fearful, demoralized, and even lazy, will undoubtedly take the slavish road of conformity. He is of the view that “it is wisest to do as others do.”

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100 The basic premise of Alexander Nehamas’ critique of Gregory Vlastos’ understanding of irony. Although that critique is sensible, neither Vlasto’s nor Nehamas’ interpretation of irony is quite correct. Much more faithful to the texts is the presentation of Socratic irony set forth by Leibowitz. Cf. Alexander Nehamas, The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998), 46-100; Cf. Gregory Vlastos, Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher, 21-44; Tarnopolsky, Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants, 131-140; Leibowitz, The Ironic Defense of Socrates, 21-38;

101 Gorgias, 513c.
We are therefore able to discern the meaning behind Callicles’ agreements and disagreements with Socrates. Callicles’ openness to justice, political greatness and the noble push him in the direction of Socrates. At the same time, Socrates’ effort to appeal to these noble desires within Callicles are frustrated by the latter’s quotidian fears, anxieties and longings. That which throws Callicles into conformity with the city is more powerful than Socrates’ capacity to turn that which opposes Callicles to the city against the opinions authoritative in the city. Callicles’ orientation toward justice and the noble is circumscribed by his fears and anxieties, and in ways that prove ministerial to the ends of the city. One might even say, paradoxically, that Callicles’ opposition to the city surreptitiously serves the city. Callicles’ opposition to the city is only at the level of “appearance.” It conceals the tremendous power of the Athenian regime, and the opinions authoritative in that regime, over his nature. His fearful desire for power provides the basis for the consolidation of political authority. Hence the teacher of rhetoric, who embodies the road to power and security as Callicles understands it, continues to exert influence over him.

It is not rhetoric, and least of all any supposedly noble art of rhetoric, that introduces form into matter, but the impetus toward conformity that operates according to the nature of the city, in this case independently of the intentions of any possible orator. The Platonic alternative to the Hegelian cunning of reason is therefore the cunning of doxa. It operates no less than the former on the basis of primordial desires, including that for prestige, and fears of harm. On that basis, the power of the regime is, according to Plato, no doubt “monstrous.” But its justice and reasonability are very much in question. The regime will all but certainly contain the fantasies of a Callicles, whose career will all but certainly be mediocre. Perhaps this is why we have never heard of him, whether he is a creation of Plato’s, or a person of whom no record has survived.102

102 Callicles is unattested to outside of the Gorgias, and many are of the view that he is probably a fictional character. Dodds suspects that he was a politician. Klosko conjectures that Callicles was probably murdered in “one
Either way, the reader of the *Gorgias* is intended to conclude that the inability of Callicles to realize his aims is so much the better. At the same time, the efficacy of the regime in containing the likes of Callicles is to be regarded salutary in only a most attenuated sense.

Although the demoralization of Callicles may well be according to necessity, there is nothing especially good, reasonable or just about it. The synoptic perspective, according to which Callicles might be viewed as a means to higher ends, is resisted. It is Callicles, and not Socrates, who takes his bearings primarily from the actions of regimes. Plato cleaves to the “first person perspective,” despite writing from the third. He never loses sight of the human significance of the psychology of political authority, which is not reducible or better comprehended according to the standpoint of “objective spirit.” That respect in which man, taken independently of the regime, might best live a life worth living is accorded absolute primacy, regardless of the plausibility of that particular man’s doing so, let alone all doing so. The former, according at least to the Platonic standpoint, is accorded primacy because clarity about the human things depends on it. The contradictions that afflict Callicles are a case in point.

**V. Public Goods and Private Harms**

Callicles finds Socrates’ critique of the pursuit of power somehow agreeable and yet unpersuasive. According to Socrates, “love of the people” has taken root in Callicles’ soul and opposes his efforts to persuade him. Apparently, “love of the people” encourages misunderstanding and inoculates Callicles against the efforts of Socrates.103 For Callicles’ “love of the people” is accompanied by a desire to be loved by the people, or a desire to be desired,
where the way of life recommended by Socrates promises to make the people hate him. The desire for desire therefore compels him to imitate or assimilate his ways to those of the people. But what is it, then, that makes Socrates’ arguments seem somehow “good” to him? That question is left to the reader, and Callicles’ attachment to the noble has come to sight as a possible answer. Callicles’ disposition toward Socrates is driven by a mixture of desires and aversions. Some of those are bodily or animal, and others are distinctively human, or derive from such things as thinking or opining.

Callicles’ responses to Socrates from 513c to 514b alternate between certitude and reluctant affirmation. He readily agrees that there are two ways of caring for the soul and the body, one that works toward the pleasure of each, and another that works toward making the two as good as possible. He is unwilling to agree that the former is no more than ignoble flattery – or, better, only willing to concede that to gratify Socrates, that is, to gratify Gorgias and bring the conversation to a timely conclusion. Similarly, he is unwilling to recommend care for the city that works toward making citizens as good as possible – or, again, only willing to affirm that for reasons of the sort just noted. Nevertheless, he is entirely willing to agree that, should one wish to serve the city, one ought to examine whether one is competent to do so. Socrates knows that he cannot proceed on the basis of Callicles’ pseudo-agreements. For that reason he proceeds on the basis of Callicles’ commitment to competence, which forms the basis of his commitment to Gorgias as a teacher of political excellence. Socrates therefore appeals to public service as Callicles understands it to argue in defense of public service as Socrates recommends

104 To borrow Kojève’s formulation, without carrying over his interpretation of the phenomena, in Introduction à la lecture de Hegel, 11-14. See also the dispute carried out between Strauss and Kojève over the significance of the desire to be desired in On Tyranny (in the latter’s critique and former’s “restatement”).
105 Gorgias, 513d-e.
106 Gorgias, 513e-514b.
it. But how powerful is Callicles’ commitment to the noble? Plato leaves that to the reader as well.

Socrates, employing the *techne* analogy, begins with public service insofar as it may be concerned to produce the greatest buildings. That proves to mean buildings of the sort that propelled Athens to greatness and splendor: “walls or dockyards or sacred temples.”¹⁰⁷ In such cases one ought to examine whether one’s own self or one’s teachers are competent in building, or possessors of the art of building. The city would be far less great if it were to be supplied with shoddily constructed walls, dockyards and sacred temples. It is therefore incumbent on those who would serve the city in that capacity to consider whether they or their teachers have constructed *beautiful* buildings or buildings that are *well spoken of*.¹⁰⁸ Those unable to do so shouldn’t offer their services to the city.¹⁰⁹ The argument emphasizes the act of demonstrating one’s competence to the city, and that takes the necessarily public form of visible works and reputation.¹¹⁰ In this way Socrates turns Callicles’ (public) commitment to Athenian greatness against his (private) will to attain prestige regardless of his desert or that of others. The argument recalls Gorgias’ claim to be able to outdo other craftsmen in competition for contracts. But it also shows Callicles’ disposition toward that conceit. As we have noted in Part 2.C, Callicles praises masters without counting himself among them. He does not merely want power, but esteem: he wants to be loved by the city, and he wants to deserve to be loved by the city. The ground of Callicles’ demoralization proves to be part moral or an inclination toward the noble. But if Callicles’ inclination to the noble were all powerful, would he be demoralized?

¹⁰⁷ *Gorgias*, 514a-b.
¹⁰⁸ *Gorgias*, 514b-d.
¹⁰⁹ The argument recalls Gorgias’ earlier claim that the skilled rhetorician could outdo the craftsmen in winning contracts, regardless of their actual competence.
Socrates proceeds to extend the argument to “all things.” As the example of architecture brings into focus the public, the example of medicine brings into focus the exceedingly private. Man’s dependence on health makes competence in caring for the body a must. None would entrust themselves or loved ones to those deficient in credentials. In unpacking the example, Socrates refers to the care of slaves and free men, and swears an oath to Zeus. The latter recalls Callicles’ two prior oaths to Zeus, and their context. As we have noted, Callicles holds the craftsmen, to say nothing of slaves, in contempt. At the same time, Callicles esteems the craftsmen for their utility, that is, for the same reasons that they are esteemed in the city. Medicine’s orientation toward the preservation of life is instructive. Callicles is like a hypochondriac who holds doctors in contempt. To truly and consistently look down on the craftsmen, or human beings in the broadest sense, Callicles would need to take on a higher perspective than his own. That perspective is implied by the name “Zeus.” It is no less implied by the name “Socrates.” We have already noted that the mortal fears of Callicles tend to overpower his nobler aspirations. They do not, however, eliminate them.

The drift of the argument is clear. If Callicles cannot demonstrate his capacity to improve slaves or citizens, having made them better in private practice, by what right does he offer to benefit the city as a whole? The argument cannot fail to have struck a nerve in Callicles, who responds by calling Socrates a lover of victory. Admittedly, Socrates’ procedure is somewhat cruel. Having uncovered Callicles’ respect for public service, he turns it against him, all to better expose that he fails to meet his own standards. Socrates humiliates Callicles in his own home before esteemed spectators, and perhaps a sizeable audience. In doing so, Socrates appears to have done the public, and at any rate Gorgias, a certain service. Of course, once

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111 Gorgias, 514d.
112 Gorgias, 514d-e.
113 Recall that Callicles expressed contempt for the arts and Socrates’ talk of arts at Gorgias, 490e-491b.
114 Gorgias, 515a-b.
Callicles’ head stops spinning, one can only expect him to harbor ill will against Socrates. The activity of Socrates in the *Gorgias* is entirely responsible for that. So is the pride of Callicles.

In discussing medicinal *bona fides*, Socrates refers not only to the care of other bodies but, curiously, to the health of the doctor himself, as though an unhealthy doctor would be any less capable of tending to others for that reason.\(^{115}\) This eccentricity may be explained in terms of the broader progression of the argument. Socrates begins with a relatively more public service of little direct private relevance (architecture), and proceeds to a relatively more private service that busies itself with matters also relevant to the practitioner’s own well being (medicine and health). He turns thereafter to explicitly political service, in which case one’s private well being and the well being of the public are irreducibly intertwined. In medicine the health of the patient and the health of the doctor are, in all but exceptional cases (e.g., contagion), irrelevant to each other. By contrast, the orderliness of the ruler is essentially relevant to the order of the city, while at the same time the disorderliness of the city may prove ruinous to the ruler.

Socrates suggests in the present context that one ought to try one’s hands at privately benefiting others before turning one’s hands to public service.\(^{116}\) Of course, Socrates himself never quite makes it to the latter. We recall that he has no interest in ruling, refuses to speak to the many, and cares only for the individual before him. Although he will claim to be the city’s true benefactor, he has certainly failed to bring about the moral improvement of Callicles.\(^{117}\) He has also done much to arouse his ire, and perhaps the ire of his friends as well. Socrates’ service is more public than that of doctors, yet more private than that of architects or politicians. He takes up public concerns in private, or at best in conversation with a few, and in ways that are of indeterminate relation to the good of the city. More importantly, the public subject matter of

\(^{115}\) *Gorgias*, 514d.

\(^{116}\) *Gorgias*, 514e-515a.

Socrates’ private practice puts his private existence in jeopardy. The foregoing points prepare us for the remainder of the argument, which turns to consider the public service and fate of esteemed statesmen, and concludes with the private service and prospective fate of Socrates. We hope to clarify, on the basis of that argument, the power of Callicles’ attachment to the noble insofar as it stands in relation to his fear of private harm. We do so being of the view, which the dialogue encourages, that something about Callicles’ confusion stands in for all, or at least most, men.

VI. The Rise and Fall of Eminent Statesmen

According to Callicles, Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles have been good and competent citizens. He agrees to consider whether the four improved citizens or made them worse, but we have reason to believe that he does so in terms other than Socrates’ own. Socrates must once again draw conclusions on behalf of Callicles, for whom it is only “perhaps” the case that Athenians were worse off at the beginning of Pericles’ career than when he made his final speeches. According to Socrates there can be no “perhaps” in the context of this question. Either Pericles brought about the moral improvement of citizens, or he is not a good man.118 As for Callicles, he does not connect the moral improvement of citizens to the goodness of Pericles qua improver of the Athenians. Hence his response: “so what of it?”119

Socrates calls the goodness of Pericles into question on the basis of hearsay that alleges that “Pericles made the Athenians lazy, cowardly, babbling, and money lovers.”120 Callicles dismisses that view as “oligarchic propaganda” with a euphemism for Laconophiles.121 Callicles’ partisanship is clear: only those who sympathize with the enemy, which is to say especially the enemies of the democracy, could make allegations of the sort introduced by

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118 Gorgias, 515d.
119 Gorgias, 515e.
120 Benardete, The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy, 95.
121 “Men with cauliflower ears,” that is, men who spend all their time boxing. Gorgias, 515e-516a.
Socrates. That Pericles worked to further the interests of the regime and the demos matters more to Callicles than any possible talk of moral debasement might. Socrates does not therefore pursue pro-Spartan hearsay any further. Rather, he proceeds to take his bearings from that which is “distinctly known” by Callicles and himself in common.

At the beginning of Pericles’ career the Athenians did not bring charges against him, whereas at the end of his career, after he had made the Athenians presumably “noble and good” (*kalos*-*kagathia*), they condemned him for theft and came close to sentencing him to death.\(^{122}\) Apparently, to take one’s bearings from what is “distinctly known” comes at the cost of severity. The issue is no longer the moral improvement or debasement of citizens, but the passivity or savagery of citizens. That the present exchange operates at the level of “lowered standards” is confirmed by the example Socrates elects to make use of: the caretaker of animals. As none would recommend a horse trainer who makes horses less tame and more inclined to kick, butt and bite, none would recommend statesmen who make citizens insolent and unruly.\(^{123}\) The prospect of a political art that works to make citizens less immoderate, unjust and ignorant is, for the moment, no longer at issue, or only at issue in a diminished sense. For the transition from arguments based on hearsay to arguments based on “distinctly known” facts is accompanied by a transition from the moral improvement of individuals to making society as a whole less savage. Virtue is not “distinctly known” and, as we have already heard, it is difficult to teach complex subjects to large mobs. Conversely, the animal existence of man is distinctly known and well within the compass of the ordinary understanding of things. In each case less exacting standards are demanded. Will they suffice?

\(^{122}\) Gorgias, 515e.<br>
\(^{123}\) Gorgias, 516a-b.
All of Callicles’ heroes have gotten into trouble with the Athenian citizenry. Cimon was ostracized, Themistocles exiled, and Miltiades under threat of being cast into a pit.\footnote{Gorgias, 516b-516e.} The danger of public service has come explicitly into focus. The Athenian regime in particular tends to consume its heroes, their service notwithstanding. That danger, which is “distinctly known” to Callicles, cannot fail to prove somewhat compelling to him. It was the basis for his opening critique of Socrates, who was disparaged for being unable to defend himself. Socrates therefore attempts, on the basis provided by Callicles’ awareness of the dangers of public service, to override Callicles’ doubt that the fate of Pericles sufficiently demonstrates that he was “not good in political affairs.” For, if the capacity to protect one’s own life is paramount, then the goodness of Pericles must invariably come into question. If the preservation of life is regarded as primary, the corpse of Pericles is just another corpse. Only Callicles’ commitment to the noble could hope to save the dignity of Pericles for Callicles.

But how strong is Callicles’ commitment to the noble? It is strong enough to prevent Socrates from diminishing the worth of Pericles in his eyes. So far as Callicles is concerned, the standards according to which Pericles is being judged are insufficient for the purposes of the argument. He therefore resists Socrates’ effort to return the argument, by means of the merely animal opposition tame/gentle-savage, to the moral opposition just-unjust, and makes it known that he is again only humoring Socrates.\footnote{Gorgias, 516c-d.} He objects, moreover, to the fact that Socrates adduces the fates of esteemed statesmen as evidence for the conclusion that “we know no one in this city who has become a good man in political affairs.”\footnote{Gorgias, 517a.} We learn, in effect, that Callicles’ esteem for Pericles is somewhat resilient, or that the animal desires and fears that Socrates appeals to are insufficient for the purposes of undermining it.\footnote{Gorgias, 516a.} Callicles, as Socrates will...
remind him once more, tends to waver between the soul and the body, and the noble and the base. Thus Plato links the present discussion back to the previously observed fact that Callicles opposes Socrates and at the same finds him agreeable. Socrates’ oath to Zeus reminds us accordingly of the preceding three oaths to Zeus, each which were uttered in a context determined by the same basic problem. The conversation continues to unfold on the basis of Callicles’ mortal fears insofar as they are in tension with his love of the noble. We conclude that his commitment to the noble is resilient but wanting.

According to Socrates, no present day statesmen have become good, and those of yore have proven no better in those respects made decisive by the argument. But is Socrates fair to assimilate Pericles, Cimon, Themistocles and Miltiades to the mediocrity of present day statesmen? As Callicles indicates, Socrates completely abstracts from the distinct achievements of the four, each of whom outstrip the accomplishments of any living successor of theirs. If nothing else, they certainly outfitted Athens with more beautiful buildings than their successors. His objection confirms what we have already observed regarding his soft spot for past Athenian greatness, and the inadequacy of Socrates’ appeal to mere life for the purposes of unsettling it. And, for that reason, Socrates concedes Callicles’ basic point. Pericles, Cimon, Themistocles and Miltiades, he now tells us, have indeed been exemplary public servants in comparison to others. For they have proven “more capable of supplying the city with the things it desired,” and “more terribly clever than these at supplying ships, walls, dockyards, and many other such things.” Moreover, that is now so regardless of whether they proved no better so far as the “one work of a good citizen” is concerned, viz., “leading desires in a different direction and not yielding, persuading and forcing them toward the condition in which the citizens were to

128 Gorgias, 517e-518b.
129 Gorgias, 517a-b.
be better.”¹³⁰ Although Socrates refers to more or less skilled statesmen, he does not refer to anyone skilled or more capable in the “one work of a good citizen.” He appears to agree that no such individual is there to be found.

The aforementioned concession does not, however, prevent Socrates from reverting to a version of his earlier critique of the political way of life.¹³¹ The skill of statesmen does not suffice to spare them criticism, for the most skilled statesmen are skillful on account of their being consummate flatterers. However that may be, Socrates’ concession does prevent him from stating that critique in quite the same way as he did before. For he is no longer concerned to argue, as he had with Polus, that those skilled in flattery have no power or fail to achieve their aims. Quite the contrary, those more skilled in flattery have proven more capable in ways that are far from negligible. The discussion might even be taken to suggest that the techne-knack distinction is being eroded or begins to collapse – and the opposition between knowledge of the best and the pursuit of pleasure on which it rests therewith.¹³² Previously, the orientation toward the merely bodily or pleasant served as the basis for a denial of power and competence. Now, it is the source of power, one not incompatible with superior capability in public service. The most skilled statesmen do not perform the work of good citizens, but that is no longer a strike against their skillfulness qua servants of the city. To acquire power one must flatter. The consequences of this shift in the argument are far reaching, for now flattery emerges as a source of power, even if not a practice limitless in power, let alone one that bodes especially well for its practitioners.

In making his case, Socrates refers to three “caretakers of bodies” – Thearion the baker, Mithaicus the Sicilian cook, and Sarambus the provisioner of wine – and three statesmen,

¹³⁰ Gorgias, 517b-c.
¹³¹ Gorgias, 517c-518b.
Themistocles, Cimon and Pericles. The omission of Miltiades suggests that Socrates has his sights on specifically maritime imperial Athens: Miltiades commanded at Marathon, that is, in the context of defensive land based, as opposed to imperial maritime, warfare. The other three besides Miltiades, like the caretakers of bodies who “fill up and fatten up” the body, “filled the city with harbors, dockyards, walls, tribute, and such drivel.” They did so without a view to moderation or justice, and therefore weakened the city at the same time as they inflamed its desires. The weakened capacity and inflamed desires of the city correspond to the incapacity and apparently bloated aspirations of Callicles. To that extent he is typically Athenian. It is as if Plato intended to produce the image of the Athenian citizen under the influence of Periclean rhetoric and the imperial expansion of Athens.

The success of Pericles, however, proved to be the eventual failure of Athens, and the end of Pericles himself. The success of flattery is therefore its greatest failure. The inflation of desire culminates in a deflation of power. Flattery can bring oneself into a position of power, but it cannot keep one there. For flattery yields citizens too accustomed to the satisfaction of their desires and whims, that is, easily unsatisfied citizens who are prone to revolt. The deflation of power derives from the citizenry insofar as it becomes too accustomed to satisfaction and lazy or unaccustomed to toil and discipline. When citizens become self-consciously aware of their loss of power, or the regime’s incapacity to satisfy their desires, they revenge themselves on those ostensibly responsible for that or those who rule. Themistocles, Cimon and Pericles proved to be exceptional flatters of the city, and for that reason, they were exceptional in acquiring political power.

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133 Socrates treats Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, differently from the others. Perhaps that is because he conducted land based warfare, and was not yet a democrat. At the same time, Socrates suggests that the Athenians were no less savage in his time than in Pericles’, thus denying the conservative perspective that holds otherwise. Socrates acknowledges that imperial Athens poses distinct difficulties and psychological pressures, but apparently he does not make that internal to his judgment of politics as such. The “historical” development of Athens is not the decisive consideration. Gorgias, 518b, 519a; Cf. Stauffer, The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias, 128-129, 152-154, 157-158; Strauss, Plato’s Gorgias (1963), 242, 258, 292, 301.

134 Cf. Gorgias, 518c-519a.

authority. But for the same reason that they were able to secure power, they proved incapable of maintaining it. Pericles knew how to flatter citizens, but he did not know how to tame them – and that he flattered them made taming them only more necessary. Thus the flattery of citizens, which means here the continued expansion and satisfaction of their desires, eventually threatens the preservation of political authority.

However that may be, the critique of eminent statesmen is in at least one crucial respect an exaggeration. For the necessity of flattery in the city has been shown to derive not so much from the intentions of speakers as from the conditions for success in politics as such. Socrates exaggerates the debasement brought about by Pericles, which is taken to account for the fate of Pericles, in order to discourage Callicles from following the way of Pericles. But to critique Pericles for having brought about the wholesale moral debasement of Athens is no more reasonable than to expect that he might have brought about its wholesale moral improvement. As for the mere taming of man, whose animal nature admits of great savagery, perhaps that would seem better suited to the capabilities of specifically political rhetoric, or at least the predicament of Athenian democracy as Socrates has presented it. Thus a “third” art of rhetoric, which is neither simply flattering, nor morally edifying, has come into focus. Precisely because the city tends to consume its own, a rhetoric that works to tame citizens emerges as a matter worthy of serious consideration. It may be noted, in light of this development, that Socrates is no longer so dismissive of rhetoric insofar as it may be protective.136

If the example of the animal caretaker continues to serve as Socrates’ model, the third art of rhetoric would restrict its appeal to that which is within the compass of man’s animal nature. Unlike the first art of rhetoric, which appeals to desire, the third is primarily corrective, as justice and punishment were found to be previously. But having already glutted the desires of

the demos, it could not hope to rely on the approach taken by the second art of rhetoric either, the morally chastising rhetoric. Would it therefore have to rely primarily on fear, or the threat of punishment? Toward the peak of his critique of the political life, Socrates tells Callicles that he may come to suffer the same fate as the statesmen he looks up to. The *Gorgias* ends, moreover, with tales of eternal damnation. Thus Socrates continues to scare Callicles with bogey men. And, for reasons that are essentially related, he does not lean heavily at all on Callicles’ attachment to the noble, an attachment which, as we have seen, is not simply negligible. Socrates seems to be of the view that Callicles’ attachment to the noble cannot hope to overpower his insolent desires on the one hand and cowardice on the other. He therefore appeals to the specter of punishment.

Callicles does not consider himself fitted for greatness. He has no chance of living up to the demands of his strong man thesis, and he knows it. But might there be others who could prove more capable than Callicles, or better able to break the shackles of the city and cut through the gloom of conventional opinion? Or might someone else be able to loosen the “iron and adamantine bonds” of the dogmatic monologue? And would that person be deserving of more encouragement than Callicles, and therefore worth emboldening with appeals to honor instead of cowing into submission with fears of harm? That Socrates mentions beloved Alcibiades in the present context provides the impetus for further reflection on fear and the desire for prestige insofar as these stand in relation to the consolidation of political authority. For doesn’t this last statesman, who was known for his tyrannical ambitions, impetuousness, and tremendous ability, reveal a certain limit to the power of the regime insofar as it exerts itself through Callicles’ attachment to the noble and fear of harm, one that he brushes up against without transcending?

Unlike Alcibiades, the political career of Callicles – whose fears and quotidian desires check and to a considerable extent overpower his attachment to the noble – will all but certainly fall within the horizon of “all men.” He is no tyrant-usurper. However outspoken a critic of the regime, he will be effectively cowed into submission by the regime. As for Alcibiades, insofar as we know him from other sources, his desire for honor and prestige, and his confidence that he was worthy of each, overpowered whatever fear of being harmed he may have harbored. It is unthinkable that Alcibiades could regard himself inferior to others as Callicles does. Callicles disparages grown men who philosophize and speak with a lisp; Alcibiades did both. Callicles speaks of a lion in the third person; Alcibiades was once referred to as a “lion.” These differences are reflected in the most obvious difference between their conversations with Socrates. In conversation with Callicles, Socrates appeals everywhere and especially to his fears; in conversation with Alcibiades, Socrates works to inflate his ambitions. In that conversation, Socrates encourages Alcibiades to judge himself in terms of the example set by the Great King, that is, the example employed by Callicles in his opening speech. By contrast, Callicles is compared to a catamite. Athenian imperialism has encouraged him to think like a state, but he proves unable to do so; as for Alcibiades, he comes to think and acts like a state. Unlike Callicles, who is hopelessly under the sway of Athens, Alcibiades suspends, and reactivates, his commitment to Athens as it suits his convenience. That difference, similarities aside, amounts to the difference between the former’s being a means to the ends of the regime, and the latter’s

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141 Cf. *Gorgias*, 470e, 483d-e; *Alcibiades I*, 105a-e, 121a-124b.
143 See especially Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 8.45.1-8.56.4; 8.81.1-8.8.89.4.
capacity to use multiple regimes as means to his ends. Although Socrates claims to be punishing Callicles, there can be no doubt that he flatters Alcibiades.¹⁴⁴

Callicles is a mediocre Alcibiades. In contrast to the former, the latter – were it not for the envy that he brought upon himself, or perhaps even regardless of that – might be considered the peak expression in the classical literature of political competence combined with the desire for honor. As such, Alcibiades poses threats to the city that Callicles could not hope to rival. That difference is reflected in the temerity of Alcibiades and the timorousness of Callicles, which, in addition to his esteem for public service, drives his conformity to the ways of Athens, and promises to keep his inflated longings in check. But the tremendous power of the regime, and the cunning of opinion with it, has its limits. Those limits are reflected in the tension between Callicles’ animal longings and fears on the one hand, and attachment to the noble on the other.

The soul of Callicles opens up in two directions, each of which correspond to the limits of the regime insofar the consolidation of political authority is concerned. The first direction corresponds to the life and death of Alcibiades; the second to the life and death of Socrates. Callicles’ attachment to the noble, which transcends the merely animal, requires that he be more like Alcibiades or more like Socrates. The demoralization and frustration of Callicles derives from the fact that he can be like neither, and feels the great weight of the city and its pressures upon him, while being dimly aware of the city’s inadequacy as source of satisfaction. Callicles, we might conclude, is an especially fraught variant of the type “all men.” Here, the tensions that hold sway over all men are at their sharpest opposition. But for Callicles or those like him there is no aufhebung. The tremendous psychological power of the regime obtains for all, or almost

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¹⁴⁴ Alcibiades I, 103a-b; See also Christopher Bruell, The Socratic Education, 19-48.
all, besides Socrates and Alcibiades. As for the dangers posed by individuals such as these, they are somewhat obviated by their exceeding rarity.

VII. The True Political Art and Politics as Usual

Socrates has referred to the “true man.” The “true man” stands opposed to all or most men, for he is not primarily concerned with prolonging his own existence or ensuring his comfort, and nor would he be satisfied with the noble insofar as it levels off with competence and public service.\(^{145}\) He is concerned above all with virtue. Socrates will speak in what follows of the “true political art.”\(^{146}\) As before, the political art stands opposed to political life as practiced in actual cities. The “true statesman” works singularly toward the improvement of the souls of citizens. As a direct consequence of this view, all actual statesmen, including the most famous statesmen, are mere “pretenders.” The only true statesman is Socrates, as well perhaps as one or two others. The overriding difficulty of this assertion is that no one in their right mind would regard Socrates a statesman.\(^{147}\) Is it therefore reasonable to measure actual cities according to the measure that he provides?

Socrates’ claim to practice the “true political art” is prepared by the conclusion of his critique of Athenian statesmen, which likens the fate of “self-styled” statesmen (Cimon, Themistocles and Pericles) to the fate of “self-styled” sophists. A similar fate is suffered by would-be statesmen (who claim to make citizens better, but end up making them more savage) as by would-be sophists (who claim to make their students more virtuous, only to suffer as a result of their augmented viciousness). In each case they complain bitterly, and Socrates regards that irrational. Their complaints derive from the mistaken conceit that they were improving their subjects or making them more virtuous in the first place. Had they succeeded they would have

\(^{145}\) Gorgias, 512d.  
\(^{146}\) Gorgias, 521d.  
\(^{147}\) Irwin calls it a “violent paradox.” Gorgias, 240-241; Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 341.
no need to complain of them. Socrates’ transition from statesmen to sophists is obviously forced, a fact indicated by Callicles’ suggestion that he is rambling.

Apparently, Socrates reintroduces the theme of “sophistry” to bring the conversation back around to the teachability of virtue. The entire *Gorgias*, insofar as it takes up the question concerning the power of persuasion, stands in relation to this question in its specifically political significance, the teaching of justice. If the power of persuasion were unlimited, virtue could be taught by anyone who masters the art of rhetoric. The capacity to flatter and tame audiences would be likewise forthcoming. The sophists claimed to teach virtue, whereas Gorgias, the rhetorician did not. According to base but politically ambitious men like Meno (and presumably Callicles) that difference was to Gorgias’ credit. The hard-boiled understanding of politics, they seem to suggest, needn’t concern itself with virtue. Gorgias’ orientation toward virtue has proved wanting. The same may be said of Callicles, who calls sophists, or those who “claim to educate human beings to virtue,” “worthless.” He has not learned or sufficiently internalized that the pursuit of political power and the need to protect oneself may require speeches about virtue or justice. Socrates has since made Gorgias aware of that need, a need they share in common and in ways that imply both a critique and rehabilitation of Gorgias’ art.

Callicles objects to Socrates’ turn to the theme of sophistry for he believes that sophistry and statesmanship are clear and distinct pursuits. That distinction is now denied. For, as Socrates was saying to Polus, the sophist and the rhetorician are for all practical purposes the same. That

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148 *Gorgias*, 519c-e.
149 We have already noted the great distance that separates virtue from tameness and viciousness from savagery. A beast can be tame or savage, but it cannot be virtuous or vicious in the strict sense. The preceding discussion of politics is conducted at a level that makes a return to virtue all but impossible, or at least not so straightforward.
150 Cf. *Meno*, 95c.
151 *Gorgias*, 520a. Again, we see that Callicles’ attraction to the noble is not drowned out by his other desires and fears. That Callicles looks down on sophistry and praises rhetoricians, irrespective of the possible superiority of the former to the latter is, however obscuring of the fact, the product of an orientation toward the noble.
premise is regarded as sufficient to warrant the conclusion that statesmen are, practically speaking, no different from sophists.\textsuperscript{153} Obviously, there is an unspoken premise to the implied syllogism: that the politician is no different from the rhetorician. Socrates tacitly assumes the Gorgian view according to which political skill is exhausted by rhetorical skill. Of course, all actual statesmen and educators are, as far as Socrates is concerned, pretenders. Actual statesmen are no different from sophists, who are no different from rhetors, who, since no different from pastry-chefs, end up being victims. The assimilation of actual statesmen to would-be teachers of virtue derives its immediate force from the fact that statesmen are generally known to have incurred the wrath of citizens. Previously, Gorgias claimed to teach justice to avoid the wrath of the crowd. Now, on the basis of the fate of statesmen, via the necessity of taming citizens, statesmen are assimilated, or nearly assimilated, to would-be teachers of virtue. The conclusion of Socrates’ conversation with Callicles reaches back in its significance to the conclusion of his conversation with Gorgias.

Socrates does not yet insist that, “in truth,” political skill is different from rhetorical and sophistical skill. That momentary oversight or omission derives from the fact that political men have been artificially deprived of any meaningful relation to the goods of the soul. In conversation with Polus, Socrates referred to Anaxagoras’ saying, according to which all things, and sophistry and rhetoric in particular, are mixed up. On that occasion, the distinctness or intelligibility of things was taken to depend on the priority of the soul over the body. When the body is set over the soul, flattery and politics, sophistry and rhetoric, are indistinguishable. We have since learned that because “all men” tend to set the body over the soul, actual politicians are effectively no different from sophists and orators, or at least appear no different. The distinction between politician, sophist and rhetorician implies a naïve or pre-theoretical

\textsuperscript{153} Gorgias, 520b.
orientation that sets the soul over the body. Socrates takes his theoretical bearings from that pre-theoretical awareness of things, or renders the naively held priority of soul over body thematic. In practice, however, the three collapse or blur into one another. In order to gain power, the politician must be a rhetorician, which in turn requires pandering to the bodily desires and fears of the demos. Anaxagoras’ saying, though false in theory, is true in practice.

If persuasion were omnipotent, the art of rhetoric could be relied up to make the city consistently prioritize the soul over the body. But persuasion and the art of rhetoric are not omnipotent. We might say that the city’s vague orientation toward the soul comes into conflict with the existential priority of the body. On the one hand, the body is “phenomenologically” prior to the soul: according to ordinary experience, the body is first for us, and our concerns radiate outward from that center toward the city (and sometimes beyond) via family and friends. On the other hand, the distinctions of reputation and honor, and conventional opinions about the noble and just, depend on a naïve orientation or vague awareness that elevates the soul above the body. Thus the “phenomenological priority of the body come into conflict with what might be called the “doxological priority” of the soul. The preservation of conventional opinions about the noble and just requires a vision of the whole that obscures or overlays the priority of the body according to ordinary experience, or does not allow the latter to uproot the former. The city and ordinary experience give the advantage to Heraclitus, but the coherence of speech about virtue requires, as it were, Parmenides.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Theaetetus}, 179c-184c; \textit{Sophist}, 244a-246c; \textit{Laws}, 890b-898d.} Whatever else might be said of Socrates’ claim to attempt the true political art, it preserves man’s aspiration toward the noble and just.

After some further discussion on the subject of sophistry Socrates asks, for the final time, which life Callicles urges him to live. The alternatives are that which struggles against the Athenians to ensure that they might become as good as possible, and that which merely serves
the Athenians with a view to their gratification. Callicles favors the latter, and Socrates, who calls Callicles “most nobly born,” speaks disparagingly of the fact that he recommends a life of flattery. The nobility of Callicles is at odds with the slavish disposition recommended by him.

As for Callicles, it does not matter if Socrates calls a spade a spade, or the life of public service a life of flattering: “because, if [Socrates] does not do these things...” harm will follow to his person. As for Socrates, he repeats the objections we are already familiar with. That objection is followed up by another threat: Socrates is foolish to think that his private way of life will suffice to protect him against being dragged into court by base and degenerate men. By no means can Socrates be said to have succeeded in unsettling Callicles’ conviction that the man who is unable to protect himself is a base man.

As for Socrates, he admits that should a base man drag him into court, he will all but surely die. The reason for this is that Socrates tries to practice “the true political art.” In practicing politics, Socrates’ speeches are not uttered “with a view to gratification...but with a view to the best, not the most pleasant.” Because Socrates does not care for the subtleties of the law courts, where flattery holds sway, should he be forced to defend himself in court he will all but certainly fail. Socrates in court is like a doctor competing with a confectioner before children. Socrates and Callicles therefore agree that the “true political life” is not the effective or politically decisive one. It goes without saying that the prognostications of Callicles, which are also the prognostications of Socrates, are confirmed by the trial and execution of Socrates.

Regarding the “true political art,” the following may be “clearly and distinctly known” by everyone. To practice the “true political art” one must consistently hold the goods of the soul

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155 Gorgias, 521a.
156 Or to call it “Mysian” as Callicles says, meaning to present the matter in the worst possible light. Gorgias, 521b; Cf. Dodds, Gorgias, 368-369; Irwin, Gorgias, 240; Nichols, Gorgias, 121 n.163.
157 Gorgias, 521c.
158 Gorgias, 521d.
159 Gorgias, 521d-e.
over the goods and evils of the body, irrespective of what is most pleasant or most fearful. That the highest good of the soul may coincide with the most pleasant is a possibility not taken up in the *Gorgias*, although something of the sort is essential to the specifically Socratic approach to the pursuit of wisdom. Only the philosophical life truly sets the soul over the body. At any rate, only Socrates, or Socrates and a few others, can be said to do so or be able to do so. Who those may be is left entirely unspecified. Although the concluding “myth” mentions Aristides, in the present context Plato and Xenophon might be more readily supplied.\(^{160}\)

The “true political art” is therefore attempted by exceedingly few. As the *Gorgias* as a whole demonstrates, those who do attempt the “true political art” are scarcely recognizable as political, and not without good reason. Should Socrates be taken to practice the true political art, the true political art is entirely compatible with the fact that he does not speak to the many, is poor, rude, an “idle chatterer,” practically inexperienced and, allegedly, unfamiliar with the assembly and its procedures. The only two students of Socrates mentioned in the *Gorgias* (Chaerephon and Alcibiades) confirm that Socrates’ efforts to make others virtuous were not simply successful. Moreover, Socrates’ ever so limited power over Polus and Callicles does little to encourage the view that the true political art could ever be the efficacious one. The successes of Socrates, insofar as he has proven able to silence and occasionally elicit the agreement of Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, are for the most part external. Socrates manages to compel them to provide, before the crowd, an external show that conforms to the demands of the city. That external show is, in the context of the *Gorgias*, least likely to become internal.

The quotidian therefore holds sway. That which is effective, or the rule, within in the city is at odds with the wise and the noble or just rightly understood. Callicles’ fears and commitment to the noble level off with the ordinary understanding of each and, moreover, check

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\(^{160}\) *Gorgias*, 526b.
one other. If Callicles was altogether ignoble or fearful, or altogether noble and fearless, Socrates would all but certainly have fared better. But it is not in the nature of all or most men to have fears or attachments to the noble that drown out all else. According to Callicles, the effectively secure and competent are especially noble and good. By contrast, according to Socrates, the efficacious, due to the exigencies of political life, are neither noble nor good, but shameful and base. It is efficacious and base to attend to the springs of action in the city, but no less effective for being base. The efficacious is therefore at odds with the noble and wise rightly understood, even if, and perhaps because, it is readily put in service of the noble and wise as the city understand them.\footnote{Grote writes: “Indeed there is nothing more remarkable in the Gorgias, than the manner in which Sokrates not only condemns the unmeasured, exorbitant, maleficient desires, but also depreciates and degrades all the actualities of life – all the recreative and elegant arts, including music and poetry, tragic as well as dithyrambic – all provision for the most essential wants, all protection against particular sufferings and dangers, even all service rendered to another person in the way of relief or of rescue – all the effective maintenance of public organise force, such as ships, docks walls are, &c. Immediate satisfaction or relief, and those who confer it, are treated with contempt, and presented as in hostility to the perfection of the mental structure.” See \textit{Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates}, V.2, 130-131, 139-151; Cf. Dodds, \textit{Gorgias}, 30-34.}

There are two obvious lines of interpretation that tempt Plato’s reader. The first is blinded by the edifying character of Socrates’ teaching, and takes a purely moral outlook: the real way to live is to set aside all other considerations, and work toward the moral improvement of one’s fellow citizens. The second is struck by the practical implausibility of Socrates’ teaching, and the grim view of political life that accompanies it. Since there is little reason to conclude that the \textit{Gorgias} recommends the way of Callicles, it is easily taken to recommend flight from politics altogether. Because the surface of the text lends itself readily to either view, it would seem to have been written from a perspective that is broader than either of the alternatives referred to. Although the philosophy of Plato is the source of Stoic service, Epicurean retreat, and Neoplatonic metaphysics, each of these take on a narrower perspective than that which gave rise to them. The concluding stretch of the \textit{Gorgias} challenges the reader to
hold together the morally edifying claims of Socrates with the dismal portrayal of actual politics that unfolds alongside those claims. Needless to say, to speak of “trying to hold together” is not to speak of “synthesizing.” That is reflected in the difference between the endpoints of the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Gorgias*, which ends with a “myth” conspicuously passed off as a “logos.”
Conclusion

I. The Problem of Political Authority in Plato and Hegel

There are essential reasons why the *Gorgias* ends with a myth or speech about the afterlife, and the *Philosophy of Right* with a rational reconstruction of an actual state. Because these may be adequately understood in terms of the researches carried out in the preceding, what remains of the two works has been reserved for the conclusion of this study.

Let us begin with that basic and most general difference, at issue throughout the preceding study, which most readily accounts for the distinct “endpoints” of the *Gorgias* and *Philosophy of Right*. That difference concerns the relation, and possible coincidence, of power, reason and justice. Plato is of the view that these could only be thought to coincide outside of the world as man knows it, and that no effort to bring the three together could do justice to the world as man experiences it.¹ That much is revealed long before the *Gorgias* is through, and by means of the question that it makes thematic, the question concerning the power of persuasion.² The limited power of persuasion, which the dialogue discloses throughout, entails that political power, wisdom, and justice may not come together this side of Hades. Nothing about the final speech, which Callicles does not respond to, gives us reason to doubt that.³ By contrast, Hegel is of the view that power, reason and justice have, in the form of the modern state, come together in a certain decisive respect. He is, moreover, convinced that no sufficiently reasonable person would demand an account that differs fundamentally from his own, nor demand a great deal

¹ Although we have reason to reject Kojève’s overly schematic interpretation of Plato, in a fundamental respect he is entirely correct to claim that, according to Plato, the “Concept,” despite only being accessible “in time” or “in relation to time,” is not simply or perfectly accessible “in time” (to employ his language). Cf. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 338-346.
² Other differences aside, we are in general agreement with Stauffer, who is of the view that the guiding question of the dialogue, that concerning Socrates’ interest in rhetoric, is answered before the final speech about the afterlife. *Stauffer, The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias*, 166-167.
³ There is no textual basis for the view that the concluding myth could more promisingly effect a “conversion of soul” in Callicles, or “democratic citizens” more generally. On this point Tarnopolsky is certainly mistaken. *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, 115-119,136-140
more than he deems possible. In this case as well, no further treatment of what Hegel says of the
determinate structure of the modern state is required in order for us to understand why. For the
actualization of political right in the form of the modern state, as understood from the standpoint
of the philosophical spectator, is only conceivable on the basis of a more fundamental view of
the “springs of action” qua effectively ministerial to the ends of political right.

We have focused in large part, and some might say inordinately, on the psychology of
political authority. We have tended to emphasize the lowlier aspects or passions of the human
soul insofar as these may or may not be taken to lend themselves to the ends of political right or
justice. We have done so because these have come to sight as the most powerful sources of
human motivation in the city. Other disagreements and differences aside, Plato and Hegel are
each concerned to face head on the fact that the passions and opinions of ordinary men do not
obviously point in the direction of justice, and cannot be assumed, without further reflection, to
lend support to justice. That problem is encountered in Hegel’s effort to lay bare the “monstrous
power” of the modern state on the basis of subjectivity, including and especially the “natural”
determinants of the will. The classical counterpart to that problem is taken up in the Gorgias,
which exhibits the passions and opinions of “all men” insofar as these condition and predispose
the ordinary understanding toward the problem of justice, and therefore circumscribe the
production of obedience through speech. Thus Hegel’s doctrine of political “reconciliation” and
Plato’s great trepidation about the possibility of a social order that philosophy could find
satisfactory may be taken to issue out of a common source or fundamental problem.

From the very outset, the “Platonic” question concerning the relation of philosophy to
politics has been at issue. At first, that problem came to sight in the context of the Preface to
Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Hegel remarked, in that context, that the relation of theory to
practice was the subject of misunderstanding, or the source of tension between “sophists” on the
one hand and “statesmen” as well as “ingenuous” citizens on the other. But the properly philosophical understanding of justice, according to Hegel, does not oppose itself to the concrete existence of the modern state, and for that reason the modern state needn’t fear philosophy. *Hegel’s defense of the modern state on the basis of a philosophical doctrine of right therefore amounts at the same time to a defense of philosophy.* In Plato’s *Gorgias*, in the background of which looms the trial and execution of Socrates, precisely the opposite obtains. Callicles’ critique of the philosophic life, and exaltation of the political life, is accompanied by a critique of philosophy that enjoins Socrates to come to its defense. That defense entails a thoroughgoing critique of the political way of life, and the opinions and passions of “all men” besides Socrates. *Thus, whereas Hegel vindicates philosophy by vindicating the modern state, for Plato the defense of philosophy necessarily takes the form of an indictment of politics and the city.*

Similarly, whereas Socrates’ examination of ordinary opinions about justice eventually leads him to transcend the bounds of the city, the Hegelian *Philosophy of Right* will stop necessarily short of cosmopolitan right, and denies that right can simply transcend the bounds of particular states. On the very surface of the two works, the ends of politics and philosophy come together and stand apart. They do so in relation to the practical possibility of a just and reasonable political order, which one subjects to grave doubts, and the other affirms. The aforementioned difference does not prevent each work from according a certain primacy to the philosophical understanding of justice. Only in the case of Hegel, however, could it be said that the philosophical understanding of justice is somehow the politically efficacious one. Is that because the world has been uplifted or the ambitions of philosophy downgraded? Hegel’s views on the irreducible fact of contingency, or what man cannot hope and shouldn’t

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4 *PhR*, 26 [13].
5 Strauss, *Plato’s Gorgias* (1963), 323-325
6 *PhR*, 491-494, 497-503 ([§323-324, §329-340]).
seek to control, suggests the latter. But his systematizing ambitions and effort to reconcile nature and spirit on the basis of a unified logic are indicative of the former. Let us therefore set the difference concerning the efficacy of justice as understood from the standpoint of philosophy in view of the fact that Plato and Hegel each concern themselves with the actual community of men and the forces at work therein.

We have seen, in our treatment of the *Gorgias*, that the road to political power and prestige is incompatible with the just or good life according to philosophy. The pursuit of political power in the city is necessarily accompanied by debasement or the mutilation of one’s soul via the necessity of flattering, and the pressure to conform or assimilate oneself to the authoritative desires, expectations and opinions of others in the city. Here too the Hegelian comes to sight as the precise opposite of the Socratic, or at least the Socratic insofar as it reveals itself in the *Gorgias*. For Hegel, the desires and fears of ordinary men crystallize into a system of interlocking needs, which in turn drives men to conform to the ways of the city. That pressure to conform, far from entailing debasement, engenders a process of education that is found to be in service of political right as understood by the “complete” philosophy. Here, the processes unleashed by the interconnection of wills cures the natural and moral wills of their potentially asocial, which is to say also unjust, character. Conversely, in Plato, those like Callicles, whose desires are most interconnected with the desires of others in the city, may as well be “incurable.”\(^7\) Thus whereas the Hegelian *Bildung* encourages assimilation to the common spirit, and discourages “solitary wanderers,” the Socratic *paideia* does not.

Perhaps no better indication of that difference in intention could be supplied than a story related by Aristotle, carried down to us by Themistius, of a Corinthian farmer. According to one of Aristotle’s lost dialogues that farmer, upon reading the *Gorgias*, “was smitten with such

\[^7\] As Socrates says in the speech that concludes the dialogue. *Gorgias*, 525c; Cf. *Phaedo*, 113e; *Republic*, 615e.
vehement admiration, that he abandoned his fields and his vines, came to Athens forthwith, and committed himself to the tuition of Plato.”

Whether or not it is Plato’s last word on the matter, the *Gorgias* encourages its reader to view the concerns of average men as if they were thoroughly at odds with everything noble or worth aspiring to, including justice. No less important than the Corinthian farmer’s enrollment in Plato’s academy is that he left the concerns of his former life entirely behind. By contrast Hegel, from a speculative vantage point that encompasses the entirety of the state and its needs, to say nothing of the entirety of the human spirit, simply encourages farmers to be farmers. There can be no doubt that Plato and his Socrates come closer to the “beautiful soul” much maligned by Hegel than to Hegel himself.

The reason for that difference is best understood as follows. The politically relevant desideratum for Hegel is that which all human beings (*anthropoi*) or “persons” can reasonably be expected to accomplish, as opposed to that which sets an excellent few apart from others. For it is the passions and perspectives that drive all men, and offer no adequate basis for discrimination between men, that prove, in the final analysis, effective in the world. That is not contradicted, so much as confirmed by the fact that Hegel, as if acknowledging the classical view of things, does not shy from noting that the word “person” carries a rather contemptuous meaning. The realization of the higher determinations of spirit depends upon spirit’s capacity to become lowly and, indeed, to embrace its lowliness, so as to better realize the aspirations of

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8 As George Grote writes, remarking that the “*Gorgias itself is well calculated to justify such warm admiration.*” *Plato, and the Other Companions of Socrates*, V.2, 90.

9 A reflection of that difference is that Hegel disparages those who believe that educators ought to address themselves to the specificity of their pupils, and insists that great works are outstanding due to the precise fact that nothing about them betrays the individuality of the artist and his situation. “The assertion that the teacher should carefully adjust himself to the individuality of each of his pupils, studying and developing it, must be proclaimed to be a piece of idle prattle that leads up the garden path” [Wallace and Miller translation]. “When great artists complete a masterpiece, we may speak of its inevitability, which means that the artist’s idiosyncrasy has completely disappeared and no mannerism is detectable in it. Pheidias has no mannerisms; his figures themselves live and declare themselves. But the worse the artist is, the more we see in his work the artist, his singularity, his arbitrariness” [Knox translation]. It would be a challenge to find doctrines on the subject of pedagogy and art more anti-Socratic in intent. See *EM*, 70-71 [§396A]; *PhR*, 67-68, 277-280, 343-345 [§15A; §140R (f), A; §187].

10 *PhR*, 95 [§35A].
human freedom. For those aspirations demand, after all, the same rights for all human beings (anthropoi).

The modern state is found to be superior in power, justice and reasonability precisely on account of its accommodation and internalization of the lowly in man. That much is presupposed by Hegel’s endorsement of the modern science of political economy. For the education of subjectivity up to the internalization of abstract right in the form of specifically bourgeois morality is and must be carried out especially on the basis of the lower or natural determinations of subjectivity, or the springs of action common to all “persons.” To that extent the entire edifice of right is anchored by the needful nature of man. All lesser – which is to say especially “past” and “traditional” shapes of ethical life that look down on the “merely human” – fail to give “all moments of the idea of right their due.” For related reasons, in Hegel’s view, the internalization of subjectivity wrought by the modern state ensures it a certain staying power that history has denied to the ancient city, to say nothing of the Ancien régime.

Setting aside his failure to do justice to Plato’s self-awareness as a writer, Hegel is perfectly correct to draw attention to the “suppression” of “subjectivity” in Plato’s Republic. For, according to Plato, and in that dialogue no less than the Gorgias, the passions and opinions common to all men are in tension with man’s highest aspirations. Because those aspirations are taken to make life worth living, and mankind worth admiring, the lower in man is suppressed, and for the simple reason that these dialogues are intentionally oriented toward the conditions for the possibility of a politics or statesmanship truly worthy of the names “noble,” “reasonable” and “just.”

11 Plato and Hegel are in near perfect agreement that all real social orders consolidate

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11 Communitarian readings aside, there is in fact no question in the philosophy of Hegel of trying to bring about a complete “ennobling” of society. Nor is it intended to bring about a “conversion of soul” in rare individuals. Rather, as Pippin is entirely correct to note, the “way of life” set forth in the Philosophy of Right is “pretty thin gruel.” By contrast, the philosophy of Plato, and the view of education that animates it, emphasizes and encourages rare and difficult to acquire qualities, such as those exemplified in the legendary discipline and endurance of Socrates. The Platonic view, which holds fast to man’s aspiration for excellence, although perhaps better equipped to understand
their hold in large part, if not primarily, by means of quotidian fears and desires, as well as naively held or contradictory opinions about justice. The major disagreement concerns, rather, Hegel’s conviction that these have been effectively set in motion to bring about the internalization of obedience to political right in such ways that philosophy could find “satisfactory.” Thus the major disagreement concerns Hegel’s conviction that the modern state has realized a set of conditions within which the lower in man may be relied upon to secure the rule of the higher.

It is therefore especially Hegel’s approach to the “springs of action,” and the comportment of philosophy toward the effective truth contained in them, that separates his approach to the consolidation of political authority from the Platonic. The phrase “springs of action,” as we have noted once before, could only be applied to Plato at the risk of misleading the reader, for that formulation betrays the influence of a specifically mechanistic view of man, and modern mathematical physics therewith. Although Hegel’s approach to the springs of action is not quite Kantian, what distinguishes that approach first came to sight in terms of Kant’s interest in “ethical anthropology” and “history,” which provided the basis for further inquiry into the possibility of “engrafting” pure moral dispositions onto actual (viz., physical, historical) men. Other differences aside, Hegel’s approach to nature and history in the broadest sense is intended to reveal the natural and spiritual supports that lend themselves to and sustain the ends of human freedom, including and especially insofar as these determine the raison d’être of the modern state. We have shown that the same fundamental concern holds Hegel’s interest in political economy and modern institutions in unison with his concern for anthropology, psychology and the rehabilitation of the ancient sophists.

man, is less readily squared with ends of a society whose fundamental conception of right abstracts, and must abstract, from qualitative distinctions between persons. Cf. Pippin, Hegel’s Practical Philosophy, 209 n. 33.
That concern demands from the very outset that the common ends of man take precedence over the ends of individuals insofar as their desires and aversions, education, natural endowment, or excellence, might differentiate them. The Baconian task of relieving man’s estate cannot hope to rely on the faculties of a rare few, or what are taken to be quixotic hopes of superlative virtue, a pure conscience, or heroic excellence. *Thus Hegel presupposes and aligns himself with developments in modern philosophy that see the elevation of what is practically possible for all men to heights of unprecedented philosophical importance.*

The synoptic view of specifically collective willing has therefore proven absolutely crucial to Hegel’s effort to account for the “monstrous power of the modern state.” The consolidation of political authority, as an account that exhibits the process according to which the concrete realization of political right is brought about by means of the “extreme of personal particularity,” demands a perspective that transcends the first person, for subjectivity cannot adequately, or reliably be counted on to, view itself as a means to higher ends. Conversely, the literary form favored by Plato never loses sight of the perspective of the individual and the particular desires and opinions that tend to condition his relation to the city. From the very outset we have traced this difference back to Plato’s specifically *political* approach. That approach, which has been treated as a counterpart and possible alternative to Hegel’s synoptic, proto-sociological, and historicist approach to the problem of political authority, emphasizes the capacity to persuade citizens, or what is likely to carry the day in public deliberations among “all men.” The same horizon of concern may be taken to motivate Socrates’ interest in rhetoric, the interest that initiates the *Gorgias* as a whole – but again in a way that never loses sight of the first-person perspective of the individual before him. Plato therefore restricts himself to the dramatic unfolding of a conversation, at a particular point in time, carried out between particular individuals, on particular subjects, and in a particular context. Indeed, because Plato’s approach
to the human things is a political approach, what individuals like Polus or Callicles can or cannot find persuasive is important to Plato as it is not to Hegel. Thus the Platonic counterpart to Hegel’s monological study of collective willing in the context of civil society is a dialogue between Socrates and the sophist Gorgias on the power of persuasion, followed by conversations with Polus and Callicles about justice, which takes up as a matter of course the practices and perceptions of average citizens regarding justice.

A consequence of the foregoing difference expresses itself in that Hegel comes to emphasize processes that are invisible, processes that operate on the basis of the wills of particular persons that bring about results that diverge from that which is intended by those wills, or the “cunning of reason.” Conversely, Plato’s Socrates restricts his efforts to the horizon of his interlocutors, and establishes the power of the regime over Callicles within and out of the awareness of Callicles himself. Indeed, we might begin to suspect that Hegel’s relatively more democratic bearing prevents him from doing justice to the aspirations of individuals, which point outside of what all men can accomplish, whereas Plato’s aristocratic bearing allows him to preserve the integrity of those aspirations, together with the humanity of Socrates’ interlocutors, however misguided they may be. And, for related reasons, we might come to ask whether the incommensurability that obtains between the ends of the city and those of the individual as Plato sees them is, somehow, better equipped to render the human things than the view, shared by Hegel, according to which the two are thought to coincide.

II. The Missing Peaks of the Gorgias and the Starting Point of the Philosophy of Right

It has been noted from early on in our study of the Gorgias that it never defines justice, never raises the question “what is justice?” and therefore falls radically short of the standards demanded by Socrates. The Gorgias points to this missing peak, and others besides, in such a way that again knows no parallel in the writings of Hegel. It is made perfectly clear to the reader
of the *Philosophy of Right* that the work points beyond itself to earlier moments in the
*Encyclopedia*, the *Philosophy of Nature*, the *Lectures* on world history, the *Science of Logic*, and
that these other works stand in a relation of systematic unity with the treatise before him. The
reader is made confident that, should he turn to these works, the lacunae of the *Philosophy of
Right* will be made perfectly perspicuous. That could not be said of any Platonic work, and it is
worth asking why in the context of the differences raised in the preceding section.

Let us consider only some of the peaks that Plato’s *Gorgias* draws attention to in
passing, and always through a gloom of opinion that is never altogether dispersed. For a
thematic treatment of the questions “what is justice” or “what is the noble,” questions that
undoubtedly bear on the *Gorgias*, one must turn to the *Republic* or the *Hippias Major*. For taken
for granted notions of courage and manly virtue, to the *Protagoras* and *Laches*. For the
notorious “forms,” which come dimly into sight for but a moment, and not even in the form of a
“doctrine,” the *Gorgias* has no answers and, once more, only points beyond itself. Similarly, the
idea of a geometric cosmology – one that reveals the power of justice and proportionate equality
over gods and men, the ostensible condition for the possibility of a science of pleasure and pain
oriented toward the good – is announced but nowhere defended, and only set forth in a most
question begging manner and context. Here too, one must look elsewhere, to the *Timaeus* for
instance. As for the coincidence of pleasure and the good in the form of the philosophical life,
which is certainly not without testimony in the Platonic corpus, it is almost completely obscured
by the *Gorgias* and by the identification of rhetoric and flattery especially. As for the much-
touted prospect of a veritable art of rhetoric made ministerial to dialectic, for that one must turn
to the *Phaedrus* – where, not incidentally, the pleasures of philosophy are on full display. In all
cases, by no means could it be said that the “dialectical” relation of the *Gorgias* to these other
works in the corpus is clearly or unambiguously set forth for the reader. At the same time, there
is no reason to deny, and very good reason to believe, that such relations are intimated. To anticipate a possible objection, certainly no theory of Plato’s development has been provided with sufficient supports to override that possibility, or silence the dialogues insofar as they suggest it.

Although we cannot hope to resolve the “dialectical” situation of the Gorgias in relation to other dialogues, the following may be supplied without hesitation. The relation between the peaks of philosophy and the concerns of politics in the philosophy of Plato are, according to even to the most optimistic reading, ambiguous. And, because no intellectually honest reading of the Gorgias can escape the impression that the concerns of politics and philosophy are mutually exclusive, or even pernicious to one another, we are given to ask whether the lacunae of the Gorgias are necessitated by its political subject matter. In other words, the defense of philosophy in Plato, as for instance in the Gorgias and Apology, seems to entail the concealment of Socratic wisdom, or the peaks of philosophy.12 Conversely, in the philosophy of Hegel, the defense of philosophy requires him to draw the attention of everyone under sun to the fact that he has brought to completion a system of philosophy. Hegel tells the reader, at every step of the way, that there is a speculative perspective of the highest order, which subsumes within itself the natural and reflective understandings of things.13 Plato shows us the views adopted by Socrates’ interlocutors, and the more or less dialectical cross-examination of those views carried out by Socrates, but he does not lay bare in a clear and distinct manner the unity that obtains between those two aspects. That does not prevent Plato from drawing the reader’s attention from the

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13 Although this study is much indebted to the work of Terry Pinkard, his effort to rehabilitate Hegel by debunking the view according to which Hegel is a thinker of the “whole” or “totality” falls short of explaining Hegel’s many claims to the contrary. Pinkard’s efforts are a welcome corrective to overly dogmatic interpretation of Hegel, and we are in large part sympathetic. But if Hegel is not the modern thinker who most ambitiously seeks to think through “the whole” of things or the “absolute,” who is? If Hegel was the less ambitious and more modest thinker that Pinkard is at pains to present him as, he would be a far less interesting thinker. That would be quite irrespective of whether a less ambitious Hegel would be a Hegel more in keeping with the prejudices of our time, philosophical and otherwise. Cf. Pinkard, Hegel’s Naturalism, 173-196.
argument and action to the intention that guides his own hand, the hand that has produced all of the dialogues. But we are never made straightforwardly privy to the Platonic teaching that sets forth the true meaning of philosophy insofar as its context is supplied by the city, let alone an account that explains the relation that obtains between the whole of his dialogues.\(^\text{14}\)

Plato certainly does not lay bare the manifold of relations that unite the parts of the whole, and we could not hope to even attempt such an explanation here. But we have brushed up on a distinct feature of the *Gorgias* that helps to explain why he wrote as he did. We refer to Plato’s preference for a view of the whole that stresses noetic heterogeneity, or a view of the whole that regards its intelligibility as irreducibly tied to its given separation into discrete, and perhaps irreducible and irreconcilable, kinds. That view of the whole is definitively opposed to a systematic science of the whole, or the monological reduction of parts into underlying unities. The *Gorgias* leaves the reader in relative ignorance about the whole, albeit with a thirst for more. By contrast, the *Philosophy of Right* presupposes a standpoint that has already been initiated into “the great things before the small,” or that the reader has already taken on a sufficiently critical disposition toward the relation of spirit to nature before turning to the subject matter of politics.\(^\text{15}\)

There is a certain advantage to the *Gorgias* in that it makes no such presupposition. Plato always “begins in the beginning,” or with the problems insofar as they emerge in the horizon of opinion. He therefore begins with the problems insofar as they are experienced in the first person, by distinct individuals. For that very reason, he approaches the problems in such ways that always entail an abstraction from other problems. At the same time, he remains more or less

\(^{14}\) For reasons that have already been stated, there has been a certain unavoidable asymmetry to our treatment of Hegel and Plato. We have been able to comment on almost all of Hegel’s major writings and, as it were, only one of Plato’s. The reason for this is simple: Hegel’s “system” lends itself to such a treatment as Plato’s corpus not. Nor would it have been appropriate for this already lengthy study to incorporate long discussions of Platonic dialogues besides the *Gorgias*.

\(^{15}\) As Socrates says of Callicles at *Gorgias*, 497c.
within, and never leaves altogether behind, the compass of those with whom Socrates speaks. There are certainly Hegelian analogues to the Platonic approach so understood, but Hegel is more willing to build upon, and therefore transcend or “sublimate” the beginning. That difference would certainly be in keeping with the non-coincidence of power, reason and justice in the philosophy of Plato as distinct from Hegel’s. Indeed, we are inclined to conclude that, according to Plato, the three could only be brought together at the risk of obscuring each.

For now, we may begin to understand why the Gorgias ends with a myth, whereas the Philosophy of Right proceeds to fill out the remaining moments of a scientific doctrine of right. Let us therefore turn from these generalities to consider some of the problems that separate the “endpoints” of the Gorgias and Philosophy of Right. We do so being mindful of the possibility that, on account of the aforementioned differences, the philosophy of Hegel must be called to account for certain problems that the philosophy of Plato remains entirely unburdened of.

III. Platonic Myths...

The “beautiful speech [kalos logos]” about the afterlife that concludes the Gorgias confronts the reader with a paradox, which Socrates draws attention to from the beginning. The speech comes to sight as a myth, which is how Callicles is certain to regard it. For all that, Socrates insists that it is a rational “account,” one he “believes to be true.”16 It is nevertheless customary for Plato scholars to call the speech a myth, and that is indicative of the basic difficulty. For the speech is deliberately fantastic, and goes well beyond the ken of what unassisted human reason could account for. Why, then, insist that it could be otherwise? How could any account of Hades be a “logos” in the same sense that Socrates’ other speeches are logos?17 And if it is so important that Callicles, or Plato’s readers, interpret the speech as a rational account, why draw their attention to the fact that it is all but certainly a work of fiction?

16 Gorgias, 524a-b.
The “truth” of the speech is vouchsafed by “belief” or “faith” \([\textit{pistis}]\), as opposed to knowledge. Moreover, because the speech is tied to the authority of the poet Homer, whose authority rests on divine inspiration, it seems doubtful that it is simply the views of the philosopher Socrates that are being expounded.\(^{18}\) On a previous occasion, Socrates spoke of the poets, and referred to the work of the poets as a type of popular speaking or rhetoric. Stripped of tune, meter and rhythm, the productions of the poets were said to be nothing other than “speeches,” that is, the same word that is here taken to be indicative of a “rational account.” Do the productions of Homer not, therefore, come to sight as a form of popular speaking, that is, rhetoric? Callicles encourages Socrates to finish his speech as he had finished the preceding ones, as recalls Socrates’ earlier claim that it was unjust \([\textit{athemis}]\) not to bring the argument to a close “by putting a head on the myth.” Does this final monologue, which evokes specifically divine justice, consist in a form of popular speaking in support of justice? In other words, does it somehow deliver on the promise of a noble rhetoric? Indeed, we might even ask: if Plato omitted the myth, and concluded with the dismal impasse that precedes it, would the \textit{Gorgias} be unjust?

By compelling his readers to ask whether this speech could in any way be regarded a “rational” account, and in view of the fact that it has all the trappings of what we would call “religion,” Plato points to the highest at which persuasion or the production of obedience could possibly aspire to. For, as Nietzsche might say, illusions known as such are not illusions. For Callicles to interpret the final speech as a “rational account” it could not even occur to him to think that it might be, as Socrates says, an “old wives’ tale.”\(^{19}\) Callicles already falls on the side of doubt, and Socrates does not posses the power to change that. We might therefore draw the following conclusion. On the one hand, (1) Callicles’ conceit of being “enlightened” – that

\(^{18}\) \textit{Gorgias}, 523a. \\
\(^{19}\) \textit{Gorgias}, 527a.
Callicles has been initiated into the greatest mysteries before the small ones – renders him impervious to “old wives’ tales.” On the other hand, (2) Callicles needs arguments in support of justice that, given the desires and fears of Callicles, could only take the form of “old wives tales.” He is too wise to accept “old wives’ tales” and too ignorant to be unneedful of them.

The following comparison deserves to be made, if for no other reason than to put the difficulties into perspective. In the Gorgias, endoxa regarding justice and punishment prevented Polus and Callicles from accepting a view of justice that shed the bounds of the city and traditional ethics therewith. In the Euthyphro, Socrates’ interlocutor is prepared to act on a view of piety that subordinates the city and traditional ethics to itself. Where Callicles cannot bear the thought of not being able to help his friends and harm his enemies, and believes slaves are undeserving of justice, Euthyphro takes his father to court for the accidental death of a servant, who himself murdered a slave. It does not matter to him whether the victim is a stranger or a relative. Euthyphro, perhaps more so than any other Platonic character, comes closest to internalizing a vision of justice like that expounded by Socrates to Polus, that is, a vision of justice that aspires to being non-contradictory, and thoroughly subordinates the concerns of ordinary men and the traditional bonds of communal life to itself. Plato leaves the prospect open that some might be persuaded by extreme views such as these but, at the same time, gives us reason to doubt that they could ever become the views of the “mainstream,” or internalized without hypocrisy. That too, we might say, is a part of what we called the “cunning of doxa.” Euthyphro, perhaps not entirely unlike Socrates, certainly won’t get away with the threat he poses to traditional authority. He nevertheless embodies a distinct, if rare and less than desirable, possibility for man. The subtitle of the Euthyphro is, of course: “On Piety.”

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20 Euthyphro, 3e-4e.
We may rest more or less assured that Callicles and Polus will not find Socrates’ myth-speech persuasive, and have reason to doubt that it could function to persuade others present either. Nor is there is any particularly good reason to think, as some do, that it could be rhetorically more effective than Socrates’ earlier efforts. But the myth does, for all that, raise several very important questions, which the *Gorgias* does not necessarily answer. For did not the fantastic and otherworldly speeches of Homer and Hesiod do much to shape Hellenic views about death and the noble, as well as ancestral piety and justice? Under what conditions could the production of a new theology prevail where Socratic persuasion fails? Illicit questions such as these are raised by the bare fact that the dialogue on political rhetoric ends with quasi-Homeric tales about the underworld. By concluding the dialogue on the power of persuasion with a Homeric myth, Plato points to the purest expression of authority in the form of unquestioning obedience or “religious observance.” Religion or theology and the authority of the regime and its laws would seem to converge on the view according to which speech is omnipotent or “the Word” all powerful.22 However mistaken, it is understandable that many, including Hegel, have interpreted Plato looking backwards from the advent and spread of Christianity.

To come back from these reflections, our study of the *Gorgias* may be taken to have shown that the ordinary understanding of things dies hard. The ordinary desires and aversions, which begin with the body and radiate outwards, do not easily lend themselves to being replaced by theoretically purified or more logically consistent conceptions of justice, such as that yielded by Socrates’ cross examination of Polus. That is certainly so in the case of Callicles, whose

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theoretical commitments are easily overpowered by his conventional desires and fears. And it is for related reasons that the concluding myth, perhaps as a kind of last ditch effort to persuade Callicles, and perhaps as part of a broader effort to educate Gorgias, but for the benefit of Plato’s readers throughout, is perfectly tailored to the psychology of Callicles and those aspects of political life that most unsettle it. It is the counterpart to Socrates’ cosmodicy, which, albeit unsubstantiated, asserted that justice was supported by the order of things, which no god or man can escape. The myth makes a point of ascribing the same laws, which are administered by Minos and Rhadymanthus, to east and west alike. There is, in other words, no escape for the much-admired Great King or the allegedly wily and unscrupulous Archelaus. That such an account must be provided answers directly to the needs of Callicles, who has expressed his frustration about the weakness of justice in the world.

The “dogmatic monologue” presented a vision of the whole according which a geometrically ordered cosmos ensures the rule of justice and proportionality. Since then, however, it has become apparent, and in no small part as a result of Socrates’ excoriating critique of life in actual cities, that justice is by no means supported by the world as we know it. Because Callicles’ attachment to justice is unsettled by the apparent fact that justice is not supported by the course of world, Socrates must turn to Hades, where infallible divine judges subject all unjust men to penalties perfectly commensurate to their crimes, and in ways that are perfectly inescapable. It may be recalled in this connection that Socrates turned to Hades once before, in response to Callicles’ doctrine of desire. In both cases the separation of soul from body is at issue, and for the simple reason that Callicles’ fears and desires cannot be satisfied by any real community of embodied men. Callicles’ frustration with justice derives from desires that are impossible to realize. For that reason, Socrates tells an impossible tale about an

\[23^Gorgias, 525c-526a,\]
impossible place. It is the speech that Callicles would have to believe in order for him to become convinced that the just life is the only life worth living.\textsuperscript{24} It is therefore not out of any mere “malice” that Plato has Socrates depict “the incompetence of the unjust… facing life after death.”\textsuperscript{25} Rather, it is because Callicles’ longings for the noble and the just are checked by powerful fears that easily countervail and overpower them. For that reason, above all, the concluding myth tells dreadful tales of eternal torment.\textsuperscript{26} In this way, the monologue that concludes the \textit{Gorgias} is tailored to the desires and aversions of Callicles, which stand in for the desires and aversions of all or most men in all cities. The myth flatters Callicles’ deepest desires, without acknowledging their possibility in the here and now. But nor does it simply quash Callicles’ desire for justice here and now, for it draws attention to one Aristides, a political man who is said to have lived a just life. The myth therefore sustains the desire for justice at the same time as it puts life in actual cities under the severest scrutiny. It illuminates the imperfections of the world without depriving those who despair of injustice of their aspirations for justice. Taken together with the whole of Socrates’ conversations with Polus and Callicles, it is the display speech that may or may not contribute to a common understanding between Socrates and Gorgias regarding the limits and possibilities of political persuasion in defense of justice, and the vocation of rhetorical instruction therewith.

We might therefore ask whether the view according to which justice, power and reason may not be brought to coincide is better equipped to deal with, let alone “evaluate,” the world as

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Benardete, \textit{The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy}, 98-100.
\textsuperscript{25} Cf. Irwin, \textit{Gorgias}, 247-248.
\textsuperscript{26} A comparison might be made with Plato’s other dialogue about rhetoric, which concerns not political but philosophical rhetoric, the \textit{Phaedrus}. As the \textit{Gorgias} emphasizes lowly desires and pleasures, which it downgrades and suppresses, the \textit{Phaedrus} emphasizes lofty desires and intense pleasures. These are taken, over and against the theses of the \textit{Gorgias}, to coincide in certain cases with the good and best life. The dialogue about rhetoric carried out with political men requires the suppression of desire through fear; the dialogue about rhetoric with a lover of speeches is carried out under a plane tree before the cicadas, in abstractions from the worries that define life in the city. In keeping with these differences, whereas Callicles is told harrowing stories about the underworld, Phaedrus is titillated with images of a perfect world inhabited by the gods. In the \textit{Phaedrus} no less than the \textit{Gorgias}, however, it is to be doubted that Socrates succeeds in persuading his interlocutor to lead the life of philosophy.
we experience it, and the problem of political authority in particular. Conversely, might the
effort to provide an account of the actual world that reconciles power, justice and reason – or,
indeed, the demand that these be reconciled in the very first place – make us somehow less
equipped to identify justice and injustice, reason and unreason, power and impotence, for what
they are? Plato preserves both our awareness of the imperfection of the world and the longing
for perfection without which that imperfection cannot be understood. Conversely, doesn’t the
Hegelian approach do injustice to the ordinary experience of the world, which may well prove to
be the politically decisive experience of the world? Well taken though his criticisms of abstract
idealism may be, does Hegel not do a certain necessary injustice to the aspirations that define
the moral world view, which still tends to be the default world view of many “reflective” people
today? The Platonic critique of Hegel would move in the implied direction, and it is worth
considering briefly whether it might not be well taken.

IV. …And Hegelian Remainders

Perhaps the greatest evidence for the shortcomings of the Hegelian synthesis is to be
discerned in the shortcomings of the Hegelian aftermath, the aftermath brought about by Hegel’s
more or less serious readers. Hegel’s synthesis of power, reason and justice placed an
extraordinary burden on the reception of his works. That burden was not lessened so much as
heightened by the fact, anticipated in the introduction and explained in the preceding, that he
was not simply “rosy glassed” in propounding his political philosophy of reconciliation. Hence
crime, the frustration of morality, divorce, alienation, the distinctions of class, poverty, war, the
state as the terminus of history (and therefore the impossibility of a universal state), and other
“remainders” besides, are each drawn attention to, as can only be to Hegel’s credit as an
observer of social life. That is nevertheless done in the context of a broader teaching that
invariably tests the credulity of his readers. According to his own presentation of the ordinary
and reflective understandings of things, phenomena such as these can only be regarded by most onlookers as indications of the impotence of reason and justice in the world, or as indications of a profound need to radically change the world. For that reason, Hegel sought to provide the ordinary and reflective understandings with a “ladder” that leads up to the standpoint of the “speculative” philosopher. That so few have been able to climb that ladder is the great disappointment of Hegelian science. For, as a science, it proposed at least in part to transform its once merely esoteric content into something more commonly possessed, even if not commonly possessed in the fully adequate manner that Hegel claims to set forth.

The intentions that guide the composition of the Philosophy of Right led Hegel to ascribe a positive status, or to deny a fundamentally negative import, to the radical imperfections that necessarily mar the modern state in its empirical existence. Thus, despite drawing attention to the imperfection and contingency coterminous with political life as such, Hegel cannot be said to make these sufficiently internal to his philosophizing that the rationality or justice of the modern state is placed accordingly into jeopardy. To be sure, Hegel makes a concerted effort to account for these and other problems. But by no means can the irreducible fact of alienation, the production of an industrial rabble, the horrors of war, or other such imperfections, be taken to decisively call into question the justice or reasonability of the modern state as he sees it. And it is for related reasons that Ruge, Stirner, Proudhon, Bauer, Feuerbach, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, et cetera, could level their sights on these or other such aspects of modern bourgeois life that seem to defy reason and justice. Different emphases aside, the aforementioned found the imperfections of bourgeois life both intolerable and unsatisfying from the standpoint of “self-consciousness” worthy of the name. And, in each case, it is precisely the claim that adequately self-aware man can find the actual world satisfying, or at
least not decisively unsatisfying, that engendered the countless efforts to pull apart the Hegelian synthesis that have occupied philosophy since then up until the present time.

In lieu of a thoroughgoing study of Hegelian “remainders,” let us direct our attention to a particular case of some necessary import to our study of Gorgias, but which we have neglected to take up until now: Hegel’s view of punishment. Punishment, the reader will recall from our study of Socrates’ conversation with Polus, came to sight as a limit case beyond which persuasion in defense of justice cannot hope to overcome. Even if we can offer only the most perfunctory treatment, it may be signalled as a natural test case for the view that Hegel’s philosophy does a certain violence to the problem of political authority, of which the problem of punishment is not only a part but, as Plato and Hobbes would agree, a very significant one.

The entirety of Hegel’s approach to punishment is determined, as we have reason to expect, by an effort to conceive of punishment on the basis of freedom.\(^27\) Like Hegel’s approach to the problem of political authority in general, punishment carried out by the state to ensure that its laws are being observed must be justified to the subject. That means not only the subjective awareness of the bourgeois citizen, who comes to realize that laws without force are but words on paper,\(^28\) or that of the onlooker or victim, who may take satisfaction from the punishment of those who transgress against the laws or themselves. *It means also and especially on the basis of the existent will, and therefore subjectivity, of the criminal himself who is set to undergo*

\(^27\) As Franco is entirely correct to emphasize. *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom*, 204.

\(^28\) According to one influential view, Hegel’s theory of punishment is essential to the existence of right, for rights do not exist where violations of right go unpunished. Crime implies the negation of rights; where rights do in fact exist, that negation is negated and an effort is made, within the limits of the possible, to make the damaged whole. Were that not so, one would have a reasonable basis to deny the existence of right. Right, as it were, is not at issue where the violation of right is not possible. It is the correction of an imperfection or, as Hegel says, the negation of a negation. There is something eminently sensible about this argument. The problem, however, is that Hegel nowhere says exactly as much, or in the manner that is taken to support the interpretation in question, and there can be no doubt that it would have been well within his abilities to do so. Cf. David E. Cooper, *Hegel’s Theory of Punishment*, in *Hegel’s Political Philosophy*, 151-167; Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, 110-112.
punishment.\textsuperscript{29} Thus Hegel must make the bolder, apparently Kantian,\textsuperscript{30} claim that the criminal must be taken to will his own punishment. Hegel wishes to regard punishment on the basis of freedom all the way down, or at least to a sufficient extent that punishment is not faced by the criminal in a merely external way.\textsuperscript{31} He therefore attempts to generate the necessity of punishment from the will of the subject, such that the state of being punished can be conceived in part as a freely willed product or extension of the criminal’s own will.\textsuperscript{32}

Without getting into the details, it is a teaching of Hegel’s that exceedingly few of his readers have been able to accept at face value, and for reasons that our study of Socrates’ conversation with Polus has already made completely perspicuous. For there is an overriding sense that the concerns of the individual, including and especially bodily concerns, will tend to supervene or take priority over and against whatever dialectic may teach us about what is implied in the criminal’s will to transgression. The perspective of the first person, the recipient of punishment in his natural orientation to the world, is not so easily overcome – or so Hegel’s interpreters who have struggled with this issue tend to agree.\textsuperscript{33} And because no amount of dialectics – which are, after all, merely for us and not necessarily for the criminal himself – is likely to change that, we are left unconvinced that the punishment of the criminal could be taken to extend from the subjective will of the criminal, or at least not in any manner that suffices to ground punishment in the subjective freedom of the criminal without leading to further problems.

\textsuperscript{29} PhR, 190-198, 374-375 [§100-103, §220-220].

\textsuperscript{30} Franco, Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom, 205, Cooper, Hegel’s Theory of Punishment, 151, 156

\textsuperscript{31} Hegel rejects merely deterrent theories of punishment for similar reasons, for they treat man as a “man treats a dog by raising a stick at it,” viz., as a passive object of natural fears as opposed to as befits the dignity of a man who, as a person and subject of the state, is presumed to have free will. PhR, 190 [§99A]

\textsuperscript{32} It is, of course, important to modern theories of punishment that the convicted understand and, perhaps even make a show of accepting, the reasons why they are being punished. But there can be no doubt that Hegel goes rather far in that direction. There is no reason to assume that any more than even the smallest minority of the condemned do or could accept their own punishment as an extension of their own will, or preferable to not being punished. Cf. Peter Stillman, Hegel’s Idea of Punishment, Journal of the History of Philosophy 14 (1976), 180-181.

\textsuperscript{33} See for, example, Wood, Hegel’s Ethical Theory, 112-124; Cooper, Hegel’s Theory of Punishment, 151, 166-167.
or “remainders.” And that may be quite regardless of the possibility that Hegel may be right to think that a thoroughgoing defense of political authority would demand it.

By contrast, the discussion of punishment in the *Gorgias* presents the fruits of a dialectical examination of punishment and its intentions according to the ordinary understanding, which most definitely transcends that understanding, but in such a manner that retains at every step of the way the human, all too human, trepidation of Polus, to say nothing of the contempt of Callicles. We might say that Plato thereby “saves the phenomena.” He shows what it would mean to have consistent views about punishment, and the paradoxes that necessarily follow from the effort to make punishment perfectly consistent with its highest aspirations. At the same time, he reveals those aspects of the ordinary understanding that must recoil from those views, or which cannot be expected to simply adopt or fall in line with them without further ado – however more consistent they may be.34

We might therefore recur to the example made of Plato’s Gorgias. Hegel would not have to withstand criticism of the sort that his views engendered had he not made such ambitious claims about the actualization of political right and reason in the form of the modern state. He sought to provide an account of justice and reason that met the highest standards of philosophy, which for him meant not only an account of the aspirations of human freedom, but a corresponding account of the natural and spiritual supports of those aspirations and, on that basis, their actualization. It could be said that Hegel’s famous aversion to edification – “that philosophy must be wary of the temptation” to propound truths that are too good to be practical, or too practical to be sound – led him to edify in the precise manner that encouraged philosophy after Hegel to recoil from Hegelianism. By contrast, Plato, as the conclusion of the *Gorgias* testifies, is not so worried about edifying false hoods, and for the simple fact that he doubts the

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city can depend on anything but. For reasons of a corresponding sort, we might consider myths, conspicuously passed off as *logoi*, favorable to *logoi* that encouraged all of posterity to reject them as myths.

**V. Hegel, Plato and the Problem with the Consolidation of Political Authority**

Let us conclude by noting that Hegel did not make the problem of political authority any easier for himself. For since the modern state emancipates the natural and moral wills, and entrenches them in the form of abstract right and rights of conscience, it must not only justify itself in relation to these, but effectively guard against being absorbed by either, and to the “satisfaction” of modern “self-conscious” man. Throughout Hegel’s writings we therefore find the narrow focus on necessity and a crass economizing spirit vying with abstract moral idealism for spiritual authority over the modern world. Hegel’s prescience in this regard is discernible in that these problems continue to be our own. For Hegel, the feared extremes were a Fichtean *Notstaat* and the French Terror. For us, it is Occupy vs. Wallstreet, Jihad vs. McWorld, the End of History vs. the Clash of Civilizations, and now Globalization vs. anti-Globalization. Perhaps, then, Hegel’s approach to the consolidation of political authority may be judged in terms of whether the modern state has proven able to effectively contain modern economizing and moralizing.35

Hegel was entirely aware of theories that expected or hoped that the state would give way to broader, more rational, international arrangements on the one hand, and the “grass roots” feelings of particular communities on the other. And he was sufficiently aware of the internal contradictions of capitalism to have been Marx’s foremost inspiration. But he insisted that the modern state was not to be transcended or dissolved, and that the continuing prospect of war, and not perpetual peace, should be taken for granted. He was of the view, moreover, that

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35 Cf. *PhR*, 83-84 [§30].
although modern civil society engenders a certain frivolity and fosters unprecedented inequalities, moments of crises could be relied upon to shake bourgeois man back to his senses and the state back to its ground.\textsuperscript{36} Thus political decay, born of unprecedented prosperity and stability, might be checked by awakened fears of insecurity, whether from within or without. Hegel trusted more in the capacity of modern civil society to embed itself in the natural will, and therefore re-channel alienation, than in the power of alienation to unsettle the modern state. As for the challenges posed by the moral world view, he very much doubted its power to overturn the modern state or withstand the pressures toward conformity engendered by civil society. Thus he trusted in the staying power of the modern state over and against the destabilizing forces contained within it. May we?

Hegel provided a robust account of the modern state insofar as the production of obedience is brought about in civil society by means of the “springs of action” and the “extreme of personal particularity.” The loftier goals of spirit are tied to the modern state’s capacity to set in motion the lower determinations of human willing for the purposes of political right. Thus Hegel’s account of civil society culminates in the internalization of abstract right by modern subjects. It was only on the basis of a perceived and intensifying disruption of that relation that Marx could posit a coming revolution and overturning of bourgeois right. For \textit{bürgerliche Gesselschaft} entails not only the actualization of abstract right, but also morality, in the form of specifically bourgeois morality, the morality that more or less scrupulously upholds the practices and perceptions that define the modern state as an ethically existent totality. At the same time, because the actualization of morality levels off with bourgeois morality, one sees very clearly that morality is not allowed to realize itself in the same manner or to the same extent as abstract right. Hegel does not bother to provide any corresponding account of the process according to

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. \textit{PhR}, 490-496 [§321-328].
which more extreme and abstract permutations of the moral world view are reconciled to the social order. He does not provide such an account because he does not believe that he needs to and, indeed, because he is of the view that reality tends to sort out those who cannot live within its limits. What is therefore left to the morally over-zealous is a “heroic” clash with reality in a time that no longer admits of heroes. There is reason to doubt that the moral world view could rest satisfied with that, let alone reconcile itself to the limits of reality so understood. Is that a problem?

Hegel’s realism on this count may be traced back to his view that existence comes at a cost. That cost, born of the ineradicable fact of contingency – that the highest aspirations of man are nested within a “hostile” physical world, that our experience of the social world may never fully transcend the “extreme of personal particularity” – works in favor of the modern state, while at the same time frustrating efforts to transcend it. The failure of the moral worldview to sufficiently accommodate reflection on political right to worldly imperfection therefore amounts to a deficiency in reason or self-awareness. We have seen, of course, that Hegel was concerned to draw attention to the many imperfections of modern life, and that he even did so with some great subtlety. But that he did not feel the need to fully resolve these imperfections, or to see them altogether eliminated, betrays his confidence that the problems they posed were less than fully decisive. And because the moral worldview is not, for related reasons, the reasonable world view, the justice and reasonability of the actual social order is not to be conceived simply in terms of whether it conforms to the expectations of morality – or at least not the morality that demands too much from the world and ourselves.

To put the matter starkly, if a bit harshly, Hegel dismisses the peaks of morality as a misunderstanding, and then accords to the morality that restricts itself to the ordinarily possible

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the full dignity once reserved in former epochs for the loftiest and least compromising of ethical standpoints.\(^{38}\) This paradox in the political philosophy of Hegel, perhaps above all others, has provoked posterity to reject it. The Hegelian aftermath stems not only from Hegel’s effort to bring “actuality” or the “effective truth” of things into the very centre of philosophy. It derives also and especially from his claim to have done so in a way that, far from amounting to a lapse in critical rigor, entails the completion of the critical project in accordance with the highest demands of “self-conscious reason” and to the “satisfaction” in principle of modern man.

Now there can be no doubt that Hegel is correct to call attention to the “monstrous power of the modern state,” and we take provisional confirmation from the resilience of the modern state. Hegel, of course, shied away from prophecy, and so should we. It is still too early for us to pass judgment on the staying power of the modern state. However that may be, the two best known sets of objections and predictions raised against the power of the modern state since Hegel’s time, those originating with Marxism on the one hand, and liberal cosmopolitanism on the other, have been contradicted by the course of the world as he understood it and described it. The post-bourgeois order never came, states and borders have not “withered away,” and least of all now could it be said that supranational governance or intergovernmental organizations have triumphed over the state and its much-disparaged parochialism. Similarly, the contradictions engendered by modern civil society – the production of large and disgruntled under classes, widespread and seemingly growing alienation, the building frustration of the moral world view, \textit{et cetera} – have so far each proven less formidable than the modern state’s capacity to co-opt and contain them, or at least preserve itself despite the challenges they pose. Indeed, far from heralding the end of the modern state, the anxieties and fears engendered by recent convulsions could well be at the root of a resurgent nationalism that appears presently underway. Were that

so, it would come as no surprise to Hegel, who was ever of the view that necessity can compel
man to narrow his horizons, while oblivion of necessity can encourage man to forget his limits.\(^{39}\)

But it is difficult for us not to conclude that Hegel was too sanguine about the
destabilizing potential of economic crises and too pessimistic about the appeal of abstract
morality. The economic crises of the recent past would give even the staunchest *alt Hegelianer*
good reason to sit up and pay attention. And while Hegel is correct to draw attention to the
impotence of moral abstractions, there can be no doubt that a sort of “empty-formalism” has
been able to insinuate itself robustly into the institutional matrix of modernity. At the very least,
then, if the modern state has been able to synthesize abstract right and morality, or encompass
and therefore subordinate these tendencies to a broader “ethical life,” that synthesis is at best a
very uneasy one. Can we dispense with the appearance, vouchsafed by the “ordinary” and
“reflective” understandings of things, that the present state of affairs amounts, instead of a
synthesis, to an impasse or stand-off? Who would dare say that present day tensions between
cosmopolitan moralism and anti-globalization nationalism bespeak a reconciled social order?

Although Hegel knew better than anyone that the ordinary and reflective understandings
would view the modern state and its system of needs differently than he did, he seems not to
have given that fact sufficient weight. In our time, the phrase “The System” is employed almost
exclusively by those who disparage it, and carries an ominous connotation that is indicative of
the basic difficulty that confronts the Hegelian understanding of civil society. For the natural
will, the will that is wholly invested in its particular projects, cannot suffer the frustration of its
aims, let alone the suggestion that they might be viewed, from a loftier standpoint, as means to
higher ends within a salutary mechanism of interlocking needs. As for the moral will, it can only
suffer the standpoint according to which man is as an “end in himself,” a standpoint that no

\(^{39}\) Cf. *PhG*, 15-17 [7-9].
sober interpretation of reality can simply sanction, but one no less popular for that reason. The speculative philosophy of Hegel, were it to affirm today the reasonability and justice of the modern state as it did once before, would have to dismiss the two as misunderstandings. But suppose it were right to do so – would that make it any less of a problem? And would those misunderstandings be irrelevant to the justice or reasonability of the modern state, to say nothing of the gradations of satisfaction attainable therein? We have reason to be more impressed by the potential dissatisfaction or alleged ignorance of the natural and moral wills than the prospect of reconciliation that the philosophy of Hegel may or may not offer to each and all.

We are therefore inclined to dispute especially the philosophical significance that Hegel accords to the actuality of the modern state, as well as the negative philosophical import he withholds from the imperfections that accompany it. We may do so without disputing the power of the modern state, or its capacity to provide the conditions for the realization of a kind of justice, which is by no means negligible or immaterial to the satisfaction of modern persons and subjects. But we suspect, in keeping more with the Platonic approach, that the springs of action remain at odds with justice and reason as understood from the standpoint of philosophy, or when viewed in light of the highest aspirations of the human spirit. And because we may doubt that the ends of the individual and the ends of the regime may be shown to readily coincide in the manner of Hegel, it may be denied for similar reasons that the synoptic view of man or “objective spirit” is superior to that which takes its bearings primarily from the individual and his first-person orientation toward the world and others. It remains entirely open for us to doubt that the sufficiently self-aware perspective is necessarily that which privileges such things as “inter-subjectivity” and “social reason.” For, if nothing else, it remains possible that the sufficiently self-aware perspective is that which doggedly pursues wisdom, the opinions and feelings of others being what they may. Indeed, we are given to wonder whether the difficulties
that dog the Hegelian approach to the consolidation of political authority – which the Platonic approach is entirely free from – may be traced back to differences such as these.

Plato discloses the highest ambitions of justice and reason in view of a most sober appraisal of the limits of political life. He does so being of the view that the highest in man is no less high for want of power, and the low no less low on account of its efficacy. He sets forth the extraordinary psychological power of the regime, which exerts itself through the desires, fears and contradictory opinions that hold sway in the city, but without obscuring the human significance of the longings and anxieties that grate against the city or point beyond it. He reveals the incommensurability of the life that devotes itself singularly to the examination of opinion, and the opinions common to most men. But he does so again without severing the connection that obtains between the former and the latter, or burying the obstacles that prevent the two from ever becoming one. For Plato is in general more impressed by the problems posed by misunderstandings of the whole than the satisfaction that a comprehensive view of the whole might lead up to – and quite independently of the possibility that he or one of his interlocutors may have landed on the “true” or “correct” view of things. For whether others can be brought to accept that view is a question he finds in certain crucial respects more significant than whether others ought to be persuaded by it or made to comply with it.

For related reasons, the Platonic approach to the problem of political authority can be said to derive its particular force from its specifically political bearing toward the human things, a bearing that conditions even its loftiest philosophical speculations. Thus the question concerning the production of obedience is approached in terms of what free and equal citizens in their specificity can find persuasive or be brought to internalize. But for that very reason the power, justice and reasonability of actual regimes are kept separate, and respectively illuminated on the basis of that separation. Do the more intolerable paradoxes of Hegel’s approach to the
problem of political authority derive from the fact that the political view of things is no longer his own?

Supposing that were so, it would remain for us to wonder if the Platonic approach could continue to illuminate today. For doesn’t the political view taken on by Plato consist in a historical phenomenon specific to ancient Greeks, and therefore a frame of reference that is inadequate for our purposes insofar as the ancient city is no longer a reality “for us”? If this challenge is to be taken seriously, we must decide if it remains adequate for us to continue to think of and refer to the conditions of communal life today as “political.” For there can be no doubt that the modern citizen does not to relate to the modern state as the ancient citizen related to the city, and for the simple reason that “institutions,” “representatives” and impersonal “processes” do the work once carried out by orators and statesmen. That too may be attributed to the success of the modern project, which may be understood in terms of a broader effort to “end” politics simply. But until it is shown that the modern project has succeeded “in and for itself,” it is safer to interpret the modern state in terms of the polis than the polis in terms of the modern state. For, at the very least, the modern project is constituted in the form of a response to the classical formulation of the problems, and does not come to sight independently of that relation, even and especially where it works to obscure its continuity with the past or surpass it.

In order for us to regard the present-day standpoint as the necessarily higher standpoint, we would have to articulate the necessity according to which we have arrived at the present standpoint, as well as the reasonability, sufficiency and finality of the presuppositions and commitments that guide it.\(^\text{40}\) At the same time, we would have to show root and branch how the political view of things is inadequate to the purpose of illuminating communal life today. The last and perhaps only great effort to undertake a task of the sort implied was indeed Hegel’s. For

reasons that needn’t be belabored any further, that effort could not silence all doubts. And because the needed account, which may or may not be forthcoming, remains nowhere in sight, and Hegel is correct to think that political philosophy can no longer justify its precepts on the basis of tradition, we have reason to deny the view according to which the essential comes last. Nor does it follow on the basis of the fact that modern man has become highly mediated in relation to the regime that political philosophy should become highly mediated in its effort to understand man. Thus, it remains entirely open for us to us suspect that the primary phenomena of politics, or man’s pre-theoretical relation to the regime insofar as it comes to sight in the classical writings, continues to illuminate the production of obedience in unsurpassed ways.

We therefore come around to the conclusion that the problems evident on the surface of the Preface to the Philosophy of Right are more fundamental than the solutions expounded in the core of the work that it serves to introduce. And since we have shown that the presuppositions of the Philosophy of Right may be understood in certain crucial respects as the problems of Plato’s Gorgias, we are inclined to favor the approach to the consolidation of political authority taken by the latter. For, in the meantime, the question concerning the power of persuasion in its political “intentionality” has come to sight as being better equipped to set the production of obedience in view of its human significance. That is not despite, but because it denies the possibility of providing a Philosophical Doctrine of Right, or takes the view that the problem of political authority is more fundamental than whatever solutions might be gleaned from the consolidation of political authority as an objective process, and from however “critical” a standpoint.

Although a certain dissatisfaction must accompany the view according to which the problems are more fundamental than the solutions, that bearing, which defines the Platonic approach from top to bottom, has the advantage of being entirely unburdened of the sorts of
challenges that the philosophy of Hegel visits necessarily upon itself, and must be shown to withstand. That crucial difference may be traced back to Plato’s more resigned disposition toward the imperfections of reality, or his view that reason and justice have limited supports in this world. For resignation, despite lacking the “warmth” of reconciliation, has at least the advantage of not seeking satisfaction in dubious places.
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