

## Coursework Sheet 1: 'Gorgias' 447a–461a

*General remark on coursework.* For CATS points, you can,

- (a) select a range of questions from the three coursework sheets and produce answers of about 2,000 words in total,
- (b) write an essay of about the same length on a topic arranged with me (perhaps based on one of the coursework questions), or
- (c) continuously work on a reflective course diary, writing up your thoughts about the reading, your questions about it and how the discussion in class provides answers, or how your understanding of the text grows as the course progresses.

At the end of the course I will write a summative feedback, but I provide formative assessment as we go (in marginal comments). Note too that the coursework questions are somewhat leading, and thus guide your preparatory reading for class. This is why the sheets are useful even if you do *not* take credit. (Questions with asterisks are a bit more difficult or demanding.)

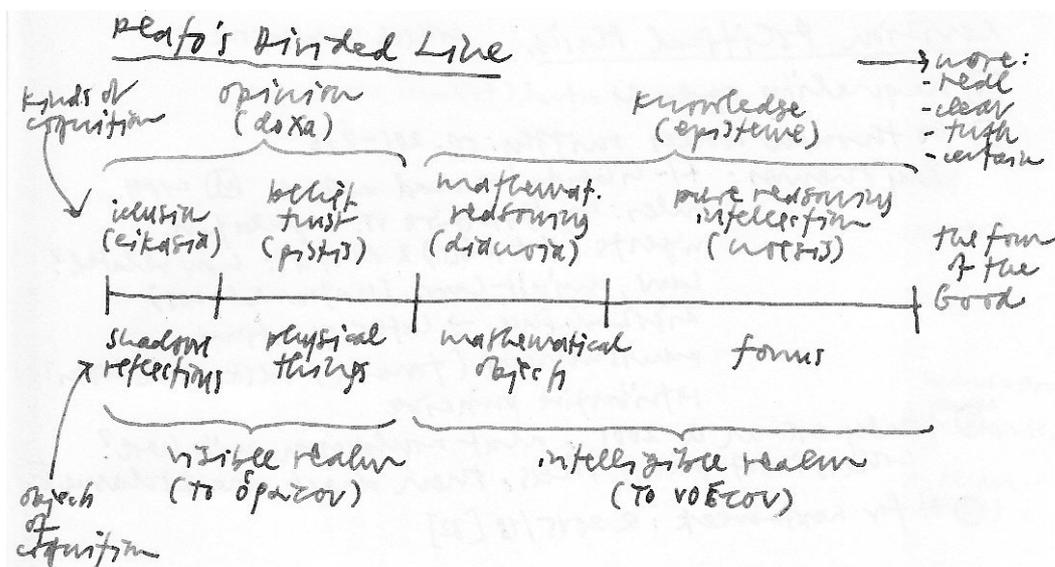
1. Study the tone of the first few exchanges. Does it matter that the opening words in Greek are polemou kai machēs (πολέμου καὶ μάχης), which means 'war and battle'?
2. Callicles thinks Gorgias will give a 'presentation' of his skills (447b),<sup>1</sup> but Socrates seems keener on a 'conversation', i.e. a dialogue (447c). What is the difference?
3. What does Socrates want from Gorgias? (447c–d)
4. Socrates remarks that Polus does not do what he promised (448d). Why not? (448c–e)
5. How is Gorgias portrayed in his first few contributions? (448a–449c)
6. Gorgias suggests that rhetoric is concerned with speaking (449e). Explain what Socrates thinks is wrong with this suggestion.
7. Socrates does not understand Gorgias' defence (450c). Do you?
8. After asking three times, Socrates gets Gorgias to suggest an improved definition of rhetoric. What is it? (452e–453a)
- 9.\* In four passages (453a–c, 454b–c, 457c–458e, 461a) Socrates switches from discussing rhetoric to discussing the process, or the dialogue itself. What are the main points of these meta-conversational digressions, and why do they matter? (There are several more passages like these later.)
10. Gorgias claims that persuasion is essential to teaching (453d). Why does he make this claim? Do you agree?
11. Why does Gorgias's second definition fails to convince Socrates? (453e–454a)
12. What is Gorgias' third suggestion? (454b)

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1 The numbers and letters in brackets are references to the Stephanus pagination, which any good translation adds in the margins.

- 13.\* What is the difference between conviction and knowledge (454d)? And how does this matter for Gorgias' fourth definition? (454c–455a)
14. Once Socrates has criticized that definition, Gorgias tries to defend it in a long speech. Does he succeed? (455b–457c)
- 15.\* Socrates says there is nothing worse than holding false beliefs (doxa pseudēs, δόξα ψευδής) (458a). Discuss this thought. (It will return towards the end of the discussion with Polus.)
16. At 459c, Gorgias suggests that the only craft one needs to learn is rhetoric. Provide the context for this bold idea. (459a–e)
17. Once the discussion returns to morality/justice, Socrates charges Gorgias with incoherence. Why? (460a–461a)

*Background Information.* (a) 'Expertise' is often mentioned (e.g., 450b). It also means 'craft' (τέχνη, technē), and this includes knowledge or understanding: experts know what they do and why, and they can explain their activity. In his discussion with Polus, Socrates will argue that rhetoric is not a craft at all (462b). (b) The Greek phrase 'peithous dēmiourgos' (πειθοῦς δημιουργός, 453a) is difficult to render: 'agent of persuasion' (Waterfield), 'maker of conviction' (Hamilton), 'craftsman of persuasion' (Irwin), 'producer of persuasion' (Zeyl). The basic idea is that rhetoric is a means to win over people, or to make them believe something. (c) At 453b Gorgias suggests that rhetoric is about right and wrong. The Greek terms dikaia (δίκαια) and adika (ἀδίκαια) can also mean 'just' and 'unjust'. Note they have obvious *moral* connotations: they are value terms. (d) With regard to Question 13: knowledge is epistēmē (ἐπιστήμη), and the key point about it is that it cannot be false, i.e. we cannot 'know' what is false. In contrast, conviction (or confidence, trust: πίστις, pistis) can be true or false. How to know the difference is one of the main problems that Plato discusses in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>2</sup> The famous line analogy in *Republic* (509d–511e), conviction is characterized as a kind of opinion (≠ knowledge):



2 [https://www.academia.edu/36680416/Platos\\_Theaetetus\\_Course\\_Material\\_](https://www.academia.edu/36680416/Platos_Theaetetus_Course_Material_)