

## Coursework Sheet 2: 'Polus' 461b–481b5

Polus now takes over the discussion, thus preventing Gorgias from responding to Socrates. The charge of incoherence is left dangling. (We may wonder what he would say.)

1. What is rhetoric according to Socrates? (462b–c)
2. Why does Socrates compare rhetoric with cookery? (462d–463c)
3. Socrates gives another definition of rhetoric. What is it? (463d)
- 4.\* Analyse Polus' immediate reaction to Socrates' two definitions.
5. Gorgias takes over briefly; he wants to know more about Socrates's definition. Socrates answers with a sort of theory and a long speech. What are the main points? (463d–466a)
6. Exasperated, Polus complains that Socrates is excessively obstinate (467b). Why? (466b–467b)
7. What is the universal principle that Socrates postulates at 467d?
- 8.\* What is the relevance of the distinction between doing what one wants, and doing what seems best to do? (466e–468e)
- 9.\* What do you make of Socrates' proof that rhetors are the least powerful people in a community? How does this proof work anyway? (466c and beyond)
10. Compare the opening of the dialogue (447a) with the example that Polus introduces (at 466b–c), and which is then repeated several times (at 468c–d, 468e, 469b). You can also include Polus' example at 473c.
11. Socrates claims that nothing is worse than doing wrong or an injustice (469b). This surprises Polus, who thinks that suffering an injustice is worse. Whose side would you take, and why?
12. What is the point of the knife-bearing lunatic on the agora? (469c–e)
13. Explain the connection between having power and being in one's interest. (470a–b)
14. What are the two different kinds of refutation, and which one does Socrates favour? (471d–472c) (There is a third kind mentioned at 473e.)
- 15.\* Compare the passages where there seems to me a pause, as when Socrates says, 'Why are you not replying?' (468c), 'Why are you not answering my question?' (468d), 'What is this, Polus, you are laughing?' (473e), or 'Do not hesitate to answer me, Polus' (475d). Do they have anything common, or do they indicate anything relevant *about* the dialogue?
16. 'It takes true goodness to make someone happy', say Socrates at 470e. Provide some context for this point.
17. Polus says, 'Nobody—not me, and not anyone else either—believes that' (474b). Believes what?
18. Socrates argues that wrongdoers ('criminals') are worse off if they escape punishment (476a, cf. 472e). Part of Socrates' long proof of this idea is the difference between doing something and having something done to you, and how qualities get transferred, so to speak. Try to trace out the steps of

Socrates' argument from the set-up (476b–d) to the end of this sequence (476e).

19. After the long refutation of Polus, Socrates suggests that rhetoric is least useful for those 'with no criminal intentions' (481b), or, inversely, most useful only for those *with* criminal intentions. Explain briefly what he means here. (Beware of the irony in this passage.)
- 20.\* Look back at Gorgias' speech at 456–7: he mentions the odd bad student who misuses rhetoric. Could Polus be one of them?

*Background Information.* (a) At 462a, Socrates mentions 'testing'. The Greek verb is *elenchō* (ἐλέγχω), from which the famous *elenchus* derives. See separate sheet 'Gorgias 5' on this. Importantly, at 473b Socrates suggests that the *truth* could not be refuted (to *alēthes oudepote elenchetai*). As we discussed, a key difference between dialectic and rhetoric is that the former works (best?) with *one* person, the latter in large crowds (475e–476a). (b) But *elenchus* is also a refutation, and thus has connotations to shaming. This is a recurrent and frequent theme in the *Gorgias*. The word 'aischunē' (αἰσχύνη) and its cognates is mentioned about 54 times overall ('elencho' etc. about 30 times). Our translation has 'embarrassed' and 'shameful', but most often 'contemptible'—to bring out the contrast to laudable, and so to goodness (*kalon, καλόν*), and thus to what is morally good. (c) 'Experimental knack' at 462c translates *empeiria* (ἐμπειρία), which lives on in the English 'empirical' or 'empiricism'. 'Empeiria' means experience, skill (craft), acquaintance, or experiment—but not expertise, i.e. *technē*: in *Laws* (857c), Plato describes as 'empirical doctors' medical practitioners who lack knowledge of principles, i.e. they work *without logos* (*aneu logou tēn iatrikēn* (ἀνευ λόγου τὴν ἰατρικὴν)). Since their techniques are mere 'knacks', they proceed as if by trial and error and thus by chance. The cognates are *empeiros*: to be experienced with, or practised in, something; *empeiraomai*: to try, or to try out; and *empeirazō*: to make an attempt. See also 465a. (d) 'Happiness' stands for the Greek *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία), and it means an enduring state of human flourishing, where all goes well for the person (Question 16). (e) When something *x* undergoes what an agent does to it, then *x* is the 'sufferer'. This is expressed by 'paschon' (πάσχον), which is the root of the English 'passion'. The contrast is thus between action and passion, activity and passivity (476b). (f) At 478d, Socrates mentions pleasure and enjoyment—this is an elegant return to the beginning of the discussion with Polus: see 462c. There, Socrates defines rhetoric as a 'knack' for producing pleasure (*hēdonē, ἡδονή*) and gratification (*charitos, χάριτος*). (g) There are some instances of irony in 'Polus', mainly at the end (480e–481a), but also at 467b, 470c and 473b. Interestingly, Polus uses irony too; usually it is only Socrates, to the others' irritation: as we see when Callicles re-enters the dialogue (481b). We will discuss irony in class; it is a vexed issue. (h) *Translation* (472d ff.): to be 'punished' translates from 'meeting justice', 'happen across justice' (*tunchanē dikēs*), or 'being given justice' (*didontas dikē*), which is a nice allusion to the idea that the wrong-doers, i.e. the unjust, are restored to a just state by punishment—they receive, or are returned, the justice they lack.

