Idea
Callicles says Polus lost the foregoing argument with his first concession.

1. Gorgias says he teaches rhetoric, and is proud of his concise answers.
2. **Rhetoric** enables you to win over public meetings to your side - the art of persuasion.
3. But surely **every** expertise attempts to persuade people about its subject?
4. The special aim of rhetoric is persuasion about right and wrong.
5. ‘Conviction’ and ‘knowledge’ are different, because the first can be false, but not the second.
6. Persuasion leads to both, so there are two kinds of persuasion.
7. Rhetoricians don’t give useful advice about practical affairs.
8. But they are more persuasive than the professionals about practical matters.
9. If rhetoric is misused, that is not the fault of the people who teach it.
10. We must be careful not to take philosophical disagreements personally.
11. **It is admitted that rhetoricians are persuasive without any actual knowledge.**
12. However, Gorgias claims that rhetoricians do have knowledge of morality.
13. Presumably, therefore, rhetoric can’t be misused after all?
14. Polus objects that everyone is bound to claim knowledge of morality.
15. Socrates says rhetoric is merely the knack of pleasing people (**like cookery**).
16. Rhetoric is bad because it is “a phantom of a branch of statesmanship”.
17. Cookery and ornamentation are false forms of medicine and exercise.
18. Similarly, sophistry and rhetoric are false forms of legislation and justice.
19. Only the intellect can save us from the chaos caused by cookery and rhetoric.
20. Rhetoricians lack power, and do what they think best, but not what they want.
21. The good we want from actions is in the ends, not in the means.
22. **So having power over people isn’t good, if misjudgement leads to a worse end.**
23. Nonsense, says Polus. Everyone would enjoy having power over other people.
24. But we should pity unjust dictators, and not envy the power of good ones.
25. **Being wronged is not pleasant, but it is preferable to doing wrong.**
26. **Anyone can commit murder or arson, so that doesn’t count as true power.**
27. For those you get punished, though you did what you want. Power gets what is **best** for us.
28. To prove that immoral power is good, look at the much-envied Archelaus, a successful murderer.
29. Just getting lots of people to say they envy Archelaus doesn’t prove anything.
30. Socrates says a criminal is better off if punished than getting away with it.
31. So it is better for a traitor to be tortured to death than to attain supreme power?
32. Polus admits that it is ‘contemptible’ to do wrong, although it is also ‘good’.
33. Things are judged ‘admirable’ or ‘contemptible’ according to certain standards.
34. Things are admirable or contemptible if they are useful, or pleasant, or both.
35. **Since doing wrong is contemptible but pleasant, it must therefore be harmful.**
36. **Since doing wrong is clearly more harmful than suffering wrong, it must be worse.**
37. In all actions, the quality of the deed is transferred to the recipient.
38. For example, if a person hits hard, the victim receives a hard hit.
39. **It follows that if punishment is done justly, the wrong-doer receives justice.**
40. **The wrong-doer receives no pleasure, and must therefore receive a benefit.**
41. The benefit for the criminal must be an improvement of the mind.
42. Immorality is the vice of the mind, equivalent to poverty and disease for the body.
43. Immorality is “the worst thing in the world”, because it is the most harmful.
44. Judges cure immorality, as doctors do disease, and business cures poverty.
45. Justice is more admirable than medicine or business, so it confers most benefit.
46. Best is to be moral, next best to be cured of immorality, and immorality is worst.
47. Criminals avoid punishment as patients fear treatment, because they don’t properly understand health.
48. Criminals, then, should **seek** punishment, not defend themselves with rhetoric.
49. The only use of rhetoric is denouncing criminals, including ourselves!
50. In fact, the only corruption we should defend is that of our enemies, in order to prolong it!
51. Callicles says Polus lost the foregoing argument with his first concession.
53. It is natural to hate suffering wrong, but conventional to hate doing wrong. 483a
54. In fact only weaklings suffer wrong - proper people avenge them! 483b
55. The conventional rules that are against doing wrong are created by weaklings. 483c
56. The strong take what they want, and the weak use the law to achieve equality. 483c
57. Education is used to tame the strong, who would naturally dominate. 484a
58. Callicles attacks philosophy, because it is impractical (especially in law courts). 484c
59. Socrates says Callicles is confusing ‘superior’ and ‘stronger’. 488c
60. If they’re the same, the whole populace is superior, because it is the strongest. 488d
61. But this superior populace supports equal distribution and doing right. 489a
62. Therefore nature endorses justice and morality, not just convention! 489b
63. Callicles says that clever people are superior, not a gang of stupid slaves. 490a
64. But surely doctors shouldn’t scoff all the food, because they are dietary experts? 490c
65. No, the greatest share should go to political experts, and the bravest. 491b
66. But surely even the experts should be controlled - by themselves? 491d
67. No. The ideal for superior people is total freedom in satisfying desires. 491e
68. People praise self-discipline and justice because they are too timid. 492a
69. No one with a dynamic potential for power and pleasure wants self-discipline and justice. 492b
70. But wise men suggest that only fools pursue insatiable desires - it’s like filling leaky jars. 493a
71. Pleasure is satisfying desires, not avoiding them (only stones and corpses do that!) 494a
72. Surely we must admit there are bad pleasures, like scratching an itch, or male prostitution? 494e
73. Callicles is adamant that pleasure and the good are identical. 495a
74. We agree, though, that knowledge, courage and pleasure are distinct things. 495d
75. Happiness and unhappiness are reciprocally related (cf. health/disease, and fast/slow). 496b
76. So if two things are lost simultaneously, they aren’t the good and the bad? 496c
77. But thirst is distress and drinking is pleasure, and they happen simultaneously. 496e
78. After a drink, we also lose the distress and the pleasure simultaneously. 497c
79. Therefore pleasure and distress aren’t the same as happiness and unhappiness. 497d
80. Fools and cowards are not ‘good’, but they get plenty of pleasure - and maybe more than others. 498a
81. If pleasure is the same as good, then bad people must be good! 498b
82. Callicles: obviously we must concede that there are good and bad pleasures. 498c
83. So we should aim for beneficial pleasure, but pleasure isn’t the ultimate goal. 500b
84. We must now decide between rhetoric and philosophy (as we did between cookery and medicine). 500c
85. Medicine is superior to cookery, as it involves means and ends and explanations. 501a
86. Similarly with the mind, there is the knack of getting pleasure, and there is careful thought about it. 501b
87. Whole crowds of people can be led to thoughtless pleasure, by music and theatre. 501e
88. Rhetorical speakers and dramatic poets both flatter large audiences to please them. 502d
89. A speaker who really cared for the welfare of the audience would be superior to a pleasing rhetorician. 503a
90. Even famous speakers like Pericles didn’t make their audiences into better people. 503c
91. A really good speaker is a craftsman who aims at justice, self-control and mental order. 504c
92. People who are sick in mind should no more pursue pleasure than physically diseased people. 504e
93. A summary confirms that a good mind is self-disciplined and appropriately organised. 506e
94. A just person shows appropriate behaviour in religion, courage and social affairs. 507b
95. Such behaviour leads to success and happiness (and self-indulgence brings unhappiness). 507c
96. We should devote ourselves to justice and self-discipline, in ourselves and in the community. 507d
97. Self-indulgent people are incapable of co-operation and friendship. 507e
98. We have proved that committing unpunished crime is the worst thing that can happen to someone. 509b
99. To avoid suffering wrong we need ability, but mere effort of will seems to avoid doing wrong. 509d
100. But no one willingly does wrong, so we must also need some ability to avoid it. 509e
101. We need the ability to control our community, or befriend the controllers. 510a
102. This involves being like a dictator in character, in order to befriend any dictators. 510c
103. Therefore we must be able to do wrong, in order to avoid suffering wrong. 510e
104. Of course befriending dictators gives power, but so do swimming and helmsmanship. 511d
105. Helmsmen are modest, because they know their help doesn’t actually improve people at all. 512a
106. You aristocrats look down on people like mechanics, who are as helpful as rhetoricians. 512c
107. Excellence does not consist in survival, but in using our allotted time well. 512e
108. To live well in a democracy, perhaps you should befriend and adapt to the common people.
109. Political leadership (and medicine) requires experience and expertise (not just talk).
110. Neither Callicles nor Pericles has actually improved the people of Athens.
111. The Athenians became more like wild animals after Pericles’s rule.
112. Eventually the people turn against the leaders of our democracy.
113. **All leaders bend to the people’s needs, when they should be changing those needs.**
114. Praising politicians above moralists is like praising cooks above doctors.
115. The blame for Athenian disasters lies in the values of the old leaders like Pericles.
116. Sophists sue their pupils for non-payment, so they can’t have taught them justice!
117. Other services must demand payment, but surely sophists should have secured just treatment?
118. One day Socrates may be on trial - for giving people medicine instead of sweets.
119. The best defence then will be innocence, and fine speaking will be irrelevant.
120. I am not frightened of death, but of facing judgement with a corrupt soul.
121. In life people may look good, but **Zeus judges us truly after we die.**
122. After death the body still bears its scars, and souls too can remain ugly and inharmonious.
123. Punishment in Hades can cure a soul - or at least offer a lesson to others.
124. The worst criminals are political figures (who work on a large scale), not petty criminals.
125. Power corrupts, so politicians who live well are especially praiseworthy.
126. **The best chance of having a pure soul is through the detached life of philosophy.**
127. When your soul is judged, only goodness will defend you, not speeches.
128. Join me in the pursuit of a moral life, which must precede any political involvement.

---

**INDEX** - to be filled in…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit &amp; Welfare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-indulgence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socrates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technē</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘**GORGIAS’ – STUDY GUIDE** (BASIC READING: PENGUIN EDITION PP.32-54 AND 104-113)

**BACKGROUND**: Written in about 387, after the death of Socrates, but set in 427, during the visit to Athens of the aged Gorgias and Polus, from Sicily. Callicles is an Athenian aristocrat. Rhetoric is the art of public speaking, taught to young men by the sophists. It is comparable to a barristers’ skill, advertising, party politics, spin doctoring and job interviews. Behind it lies a belief that morality is relative, merely a matter of convention (*nomos*), and that the aim of life is power and pleasure, achieved by persuasion.

**SOCRATES**: He was in his prime at this time. He engages in interrogation of people's views (his *elenchos*), which he insists must be sincerely held. He passionately believes in virtue, but always protests his ignorance of true wisdom. His aim is for people to follow the oracle's advice to 'know yourself'. He argues for 'moral egoism' – that virtue is in your own interest, because it brings a healthy soul. He is opposed to the view that pleasure is the good, and believes that all desire is guided by belief, so that all wickedness results from ignorance, and weakness of will (*akrasia*) is impossible.

**A. GORGIAS CLAIMS THAT RHETORIC IS THE HIGHEST SKILL**

1. **Rhetoric is amoral**
   - Rhetoricians deny responsibility for their pupils' acts
   - Clearly some pupils still behave immorally
   - Discussion: Election of doctors 456b,459a

2. **Rhetoric is not a proper skill (*techné*)**
   - It lacks a proper subject matter
   - It is not a rational activity
   - It is analogous to cookery and ornamentation
   - Discussion: Boxers, 456d 457d; Advantages of rhetoric, 460d-e

**B. POLUS CLAIMS THAT RHETORICIANS ARE SUPREMELY POWERFUL**

3. **Rhetoricians are not really powerful**
   - Power gets what you want, not what you judge best
   - Rhetoric is a neutral means, and may not get the end you want
   - Discussion: Tyrants, dagger 469d 466b-e

4. **It is better to be wronged than to do wrong**
   - Doing wrong is obviously more contemptible than being wronged
   - Contemptible things are either unpleasant or harmful
   - Doing wrong is more pleasant than suffering it, so it must be more harmful
   - Therefore doing wrong is worse than suffering wrong

**C. POLUS SAYS WE ADMIRE ARCHELAUS FOR GETTING AWAY WITH HIS CRIMES**

5. **It is better to be punished than to get away with crime**
   - If punishment is administered justly, the culprit receives justice
   - Discussion: Torture 473c 472e

**D. CALLICLES SAYS THE GOOD IS SELF-INDULGENCE AND PERSONAL PLEASURE**

6. **Pleasure is not the good**
   - Power is mainly used to achieve justice, not personal pleasure
   - Morality is natural (*physis*), not just conventional (*nomos*)
   - Pleasure is an insatiable tyrant
   - Some pleasures are obviously bad, and can’t be good
   - Some people are obviously bad, although they obtain a lot of pleasure
   - Quenching thirst makes us happy as the pleasure fades
   - Intelligent pleasures are better than thoughtless pleasures
   - Discussion: The mob want equality 489a; Food distribution 490c 489b; Leaky jar 493b 493e; Scratching and prostitution 494c 494e; Cowards 498c 498e; Drinking 497c 497c-d; Watering thirst makes us happy as the pleasure fades 501e

7. **The good consists of virtues, not pleasures**
   - Benefit and welfare are good, rather than pleasure
   - The benefit is an organised, healthy and controlled mind
   - Justice is innately good
   - Appropriate behaviour is always desirable
   - Co-operation and friendship are good in themselves
   - In politics we should lead the people, not follow them

---

**Table showing why rhetoric is not a true *techné* (see 464b–466a):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Expertise (<em>techné</em>)</th>
<th>Impersonates</th>
<th>Knack/Flattery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Ornamentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Cookery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind (Statesmanship)</td>
<td>Legislation</td>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>Sophistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status:</td>
<td>Rational</td>
<td></td>
<td>Irrational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim:</td>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pleasure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Discussion

1. Election of doctors 456b,459a
2. Boxing 456d 460d
3. Helmsmanship 511d 465c
4. At 482c, Callicles says Polus should never have conceded this
5. Jocasta, the dentist
6. Harmful for the doer, or for the victim?