

PLATO ON EVIL-DOING, *EUDAIMONIA*, AND THE ELENCHUS:
RECONSIDERING SOCRATES' ENCOUNTER WITH POLUS
IN THE *GORGIAS*

by

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I attempt to shed new light on the much-debated exchange between Socrates and Polus in Plato's *Gorgias*, particularly focusing on three major concepts that run throughout it: evil-doing, *eudaimonia*, and the elenchus. Upon close examination of the "Polus episode", it turns out that such concepts as virtue, benefit, and *eudaimonia* are literally treated as *defined-by-their-opposites* concepts whose main significance derives from their serving to signal either abstinence or relief from the greatest evil. There are many cases where things are beyond human control, and even the person preserving the virtue of his soul is forced to suffer either injustice or some accident, thus becoming deprived of his knowledge and affected in respect to his soul's health. Yet, as far as human control is concerned, one can attain a state of non- or less wretchedness by directing all his efforts towards (a) guarding against being wronged, (b) keeping on refraining from injustice and vice of soul as a whole, and (c) propagating the significance of both being refuted and refuting others, with the ultimate aim of disseminating the truth-knowledge of good and evil.

INTRODUCTION

On first reading, the *Gorgias* seems to be among the most complex of Plato's dialogues in both a literary and philosophical sense. This is far from being the case, however. When digging deeper into the text and sharpening the focus of inquiry, one cannot fail to see how the main ideas of the *Gorgias*, in their simplicity and comprehensiveness, unfold very organically. This paper is concerned with Socrates' exchange with Polus. Although several studies have been published on the Polus episode, none of them, as far as I can tell, has adequately shown how and to what extent the arguments set forth in the episode are related to the dramatic "plot" of the dialogue. My emphasis is not on examining Socrates' arguments exclusively on the basis of what they leave out, thus judging them as lacking, insufficient, contradictory, or even illogical, but on exploring what they actually include, treating them as integral parts of the dramatic structure. Besides, arguments must always be evaluated in conjunction with the