I. Dialogue with Gorgias (3-26)

A. What sort of man is Gorgias? (3-19)

1. Why does Polus believe “the art which (Gorgias) practices is the finest of all”? (6)

2. What are Gorgias’s first attempts to define his art (oratory) and how does Socrates criticize them? (7-15)

3. Note Gorgias’ final definition of oratory: “Oratory serves ... to produce the kind of conviction needed in courts of law and other large masses of people, and the subject of this kind of conviction is right and wrong.” (14)

4. What kind of conviction does oratory deal with? (15-19)

B. Socrates’s Criticisms of Gorgias’s Conception of Oratory (19-26)

1. Why, for Socrates, is it important that one be “glad to have their own mistakes pointed out and glad to point out the mistakes of others, but who would just as soon have the first experience as the second ...” (20)

2. Is Oratory a matter of the ignorant being more convincing among the ignorant than the expert; and is this a bad (or as Gorgias argues) a good thing? (22-23)

3. Does one have to know what right and wrong are to speak convincingly about it? Can orators teach their students about right and wrong if they don’t already know it? (23-26)

4. What exactly has Socrates shown about oratory in his criticism of Gorgias?

II. Dialogue with Polus (27-63)

A. Socrates’s definition of oratory: a knack (27-33)

Why does Socrates compare oratory to cookery rather than medicine?

B. Oratory and power (34-44)

1. Why does Polus think orators are very powerful?

2. Why does Socrates consider orators “the least powerful people” (35)

   a. Can power be had without a knowledge of what is best? (36)

   b. Power is attaining what we will. But are what we will and what we want as what seems best for us the same? (36-39)

   c. What point does Socrates mean to make in comparing the power of the orator to the person in the market with a dagger? (41-42)

   d. Why does Polus think the person in the market with the dagger does not have
great power? (42)

3. It is better to suffer wrong than to do it: it is better to do wrong and be justly punished than to do wrong and get away with it. (44-63)
   a. What are the major differences Socrates finds between his understanding of reasoning and the orator’s? (44-49)
   b. Why is it better to suffer wrong than to do it? (Warning: very complicated argument ahead!) (49-52)
   c. Why is it better to be justly punished if one has done wrong than to get away with it? (Warning: very complicated argument ahead!) (53-63)

III. Dialogue with Callicles (64-138)

A. Socrates and Callicles’s opening speeches (64-73)
   1. Is Socrates right when he tells Callicles, “that it would be better for me to have a lyre or a chorus which I was directing in discord and out of tune, better that the mass of mankind should disagree with me and contradict me than that I, a single individual, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict myself”? (66) Why or why not?
   2. How does Callicles respond to Socrates’ arguments about doing wrong and suffering wrong with his distinction between what is shameful by convention and shameful by nature? How does Callicles distinguish between what is right or wrong by convention with what is right or wrong by nature? (67-68)
   3. Why does Callicles advise Socrates to give up philosophy? Notice his claim that Socrates would have nothing useful to say in his defense in front of a court should he be tried and condemned to death? Is he right? (68-71)

B. Pleasure cannot be equated with the good (74-94)
   1. How does Socrates get Callicles to change his position on what is naturally right from the strong dominating and having the advantage over the weak to “the better and wiser man ruling over his inferiors and having the lion’s share.” (73-76)
   2. How does Callicles elaborate his vision of the good life; what should the better and wiser man have “the lion’s share” of? (76-83)
   3. What point do you think Socrates is trying to make with his story of the “catamite” (83-84) (p.s. - a “catamite” was a boy kept exclusively for the sexual pleasure of his master, something the Greeks generally thought of as a shameful mode of life.)
   4. Socrates’s first argument against the equation of pleasure with the good (85-89)
      What is it about pleasure and pain which Socrates believes distinguishes them from good and evil?
   5. Socrates’s second argument against the equation of pleasure with the good (89-93)
What is it about the coward’s ability to feel pleasure that Socrates believes makes it necessary that we distinguish the presence of pleasure in one’s life from the presence of a good life?

C. We need art and knowledge to distinguish good from bad pleasures (94-108)
   1. Contrast the importance of discipline and moderation in Socrates’s understanding of a good life with the understanding of a good life provided earlier by Callicles (see p. 80)
   2. How does Socrates distinguish good from base political oratory? (98-99) How does this relate back to Socrates’s understanding of oratory as a knack, a form of pandering, like cookery, which he derived from Gorgias’s initial conception of oratory?

D. Socrates’s response to Callicles’s condemnation of the practice of philosophy (108-129)
   1. How does Socrates attempt to show that we should leave our concerns with extending our life to the gods and devote ourselves instead to the question of how to “best live the life allotted” to us? (108-116)
   2. How does Socrates attempt to show that he is “one of the few Athenians who study the genuine art of statesmanship”? (116-129)
      a. What is it that leads him to cast doubt on the reputations of great Athenian statesmen such as Pericles?
      b. How does Socrates describe what we know will really be his fate, to be tried and sentenced to death by the people of Athens? (128) Is the analogy he uses apt?

IV. The Myth (130-136)
   A. What does Socrates’s story at the end of the Gorgias attempt to show?
   B. Why do you think he ends the dialogue with a story meant to provoke fear and inspiration rather than an argument meant to convince us of the truth of his position?