person, then our man should see to it in every way, both in what he does and what he says, that his enemy does not go to the judge and pay his due. And if he does go, he should scheme to get his enemy off without paying what’s due. If he’s stolen a lot of gold, he should scheme to get him not to return it but to keep it and spend it in an unjust and godless way both on himself and his people. And if his crimes merit the death penalty, he should scheme to keep him from being executed, preferably never to die at all but to live forever in corruption, but failing that, to have him live as long as possible in that condition. Yes, this is the sort of thing I think oratory is useful for, Polus, since for the person who has no intention of behaving unjustly it doesn’t seem to me to have much use—if in fact it has any use at all—since its usefulness hasn’t in any way become apparent so far.

Callicles: Tell me, Chaerephon, is Socrates in earnest about this or is he joking?

Chaerephon: I think he’s in dead earnest about this, Callicles. There’s nothing like asking him, though.

Callicles: By the gods! Just the thing I’m eager to do. Tell me, Socrates, are we to take you as being in earnest now, or joking? For if you are in earnest, and these things you’re saying are really true, won’t this human life of ours be turned upside down, and won’t everything we do evidently be the opposite of what we should do?

Socrates: Well, Callicles, if human beings didn’t share common experiences, some sharing one, others sharing another, but one of us had some unique experience not shared by others, it wouldn’t be easy for him to communicate what he experienced to the other. I say this because I realize that you and I are both now actually sharing a common experience: each of the two of us is a lover of two objects, I of Alcibiades, Clinias’ son, and of philosophy, and you of the demos [people] of Athens, and the Demos who’s the son of Pyrilampes. I notice that in each case you’re unable to contradict your beloved, clever though you are, no matter what he says or what he claims is so. You keep shifting back and forth. If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian demos denies it, you shift your ground and say what it wants to hear. Other things like this happen to you when you’re with that good-looking young man, the son of Pyrilampes. You’re unable to oppose what your beloveds say or propose, so that if somebody heard you say what you do on their account and was amazed at how absurd that is, you’d probably say—if you were minded to tell him the truth—that unless somebody stops your beloveds from saying what they say, you’ll never stop saying these things either. In that case you must believe that you’re bound to hear me say things like that, too, and instead of being surprised at my saying them, you must stop my beloved, philosophy, from saying them. For she always says what you now hear me say, my dear friend, and she’s by far less fickle than my
other beloved. As for that son of Clinias, what he says differs from one
time to the next, but what philosophy says always stays the same, and
she’s saying things that now astound you, although you were present
when they were said. So, either refute her and show that doing what’s
unjust without paying what is due for it is not the ultimate of all bad
things, as I just now was saying it is, or else, if you leave this unrefuted,
then by the Dog, the god of the Egyptians, Callicles will not agree with
you, Callicles, but will be dissonant with you all your life long. And yet
for my part, my good man, I think it’s better to have my lyre or a chorus
that I might lead out of tune and dissonant, and have the vast majority
of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony
with myself, to contradict myself, though I’m only one person.

CALLICLES: Socrates, I think you’re grandstanding in these speeches,
acting like a true crowd pleaser. Here you are, playing to the crowd now
that Polus has had the same thing happen to him that he accused Gorgias
of letting you do to him. For he said, didn’t he, that when Gorgias was
asked by you whether he would teach anyone who came to him wanting
to learn oratory but without expertise in what’s just, Gorgias was ashamed
and, out of deference to human custom, since people would take it ill if
a person refused, said that he’d teach him. And because Gorgias agreed
on this point, he said, he was forced to contradict himself, just the thing
you like. He ridiculed you at the time, and rightly so, as I think anyhow.
And now the very same thing has happened to him. And for this same
reason I don’t approve of Polus: he agreed with you that doing what’s
unjust is more shameful than suffering it. As a result of this admission he
was bound and gagged by you in the discussion, too ashamed to say what
he thought. Although you claim to be pursuing the truth, you’re in fact
bringing the discussion around to the sort of crowd-pleasing vulgarities
that are admirable only by law and not by nature. And these, nature and
law, are for the most part opposed to each other, so if a person is ashamed
and doesn’t dare to say what he thinks, he’s forced to contradict himself.
This is in fact the clever trick you’ve thought of, with which you work
mischief in your discussions: if a person makes a statement in terms of
law, you slyly question him in terms of nature; if he makes it in terms of
nature, you question him in terms of law. That’s just what happened here,
on the question of doing what’s unjust versus suffering it. While Polus
meant that doing it is more shameful by law, you pursued the argument
as though he meant by nature. For by nature all that is worse is also more
shameful, like suffering what’s unjust, whereas by law doing it is more
shameful. No, no man would put up with suffering what’s unjust; only a
slave would do so, one who is better dead than alive, who when he’s
treated unjustly and abused can’t protect himself or anyone else he cares
about. I believe that the people who institute our laws are the weak and
the many. So they institute laws and assign praise and blame with them-
selves and their own advantage in mind. As a way of frightening the more
powerful among men, the ones who are capable of having a greater share,
out of getting a greater share than they, they say that getting more than one’s share is “shameful” and “unjust,” and that doing what’s unjust is nothing but trying to get more than one’s share. I think they like getting an equal share, since they are inferior.

These are the reasons why trying to get a greater share than most is said to be unjust and shameful by law and why they call it doing what’s unjust. But I believe that nature itself reveals that it’s a just thing for the better man and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the less capable man. Nature shows that this is so in many places; both among the other animals and in whole cities and races of men, it shows that this is what justice has been decided to be: that the superior rule the inferior and have a greater share than they. For what sort of justice did Xerxes go by when he campaigned against Greece, or his father when he campaigned against Scythia? Countless other such examples could be mentioned. I believe that these men do these things in accordance with the nature of what’s just—yes, by Zeus, in accordance with the law of nature, and presumably not with the one we institute. We mold the best and the most powerful among us, taking them while they’re still young, like lion cubs, and with charms and incantations we subdue them into slavery, telling them that one is supposed to get no more than his fair share, and that that’s what’s admirable and just. But surely, if a man whose nature is equal to it arises, he will shake off, tear apart, and escape all this, he will trample underfoot our documents, our tricks and charms, and all our laws that violate nature. He, the slave, will rise up and be revealed as our master, and here the justice of nature will shine forth. I think Pindar, too, refers to what I’m saying in that song in which he says that

\[
\text{Law, the king of all,}
\]
\[
\text{Of mortals and the immortal gods}
\]

—this, he says,

\[
\text{Brings on and renders just what is most violent}
\]
\[
\text{With towering hand. I take as proof of this}
\]
\[
\text{The deeds of Heracles. For he . . . unbought . . .}
\]

His words are something like that—I don’t know the song well—he says that Heracles drove off Geryon’s cattle, even though he hadn’t paid for them and Geryon hadn’t given them to him, on the ground that this is what’s just by nature, and that cattle and all the other possessions of those who are worse and inferior belong to the one who’s better and superior.

This is the truth of the matter, as you will acknowledge if you abandon philosophy and move on to more important things. Philosophy is no doubt a delightful thing, Socrates, as long as one is exposed to it in moderation at the appropriate time of life. But if one spends more time with it than
he should, it’s a man’s undoing. For even if one is naturally well favored but engages in philosophy far beyond that appropriate time of life, he can’t help but turn out to be inexperienced in everything a man who’s to be admirable and good and well thought of is supposed to be experienced in. Such people turn out to be inexperienced in the laws of their city or in the kind of speech one must use to deal with people on matters of business, whether in public or private, inexperienced also in human pleasures and appetites and, in short, inexperienced in the ways of human beings altogether. So, when they venture into some private or political activity, they become a laughingstock, as I suppose men in politics do when they venture into your pursuits and your kind of speech. What results is Euripides’ saying, where he says that “each man shines” in this and “presses on to this,”

allotting the greatest part of the day to this,
where he finds himself at his best.”

And whatever a man’s inferior in, he avoids and rails against, while he praises the other thing, thinking well of himself and supposing that in this way he’s praising himself. I believe, however, that it’s most appropriate to have a share of both. To partake of as much philosophy as your education requires is an admirable thing, and it’s not shameful to practice philosophy while you’re a boy, but when you still do it after you’ve grown older and become a man, the thing gets to be ridiculous, Socrates! My own reaction to men who philosophize is very much like that to men who speak haltingly and play like children. When I see a child, for whom it’s still quite proper to make conversation this way, halting in its speech and playing like a child, I’m delighted. I find it a delightful thing, a sign of good breeding, and appropriate for the child’s age. And when I hear a small child speaking clearly, I think it’s a harsh thing; it hurts my ears. I think it is something fit for a slave. But when one hears a man speaking haltingly or sees him playing like a child, it strikes me as ridiculous and unmanly, deserving of a flogging. Now, I react in the same way to men who engage in philosophy, too. When I see philosophy in a young boy, I approve of it; I think it’s appropriate and consider such a person well-bred, whereas I consider one who doesn’t engage in philosophy ill-bred, one who’ll never count himself deserving of any admirable or noble thing. But when I see an older man still engaging in philosophy and not giving it up, I think such a man by this time needs a flogging. For, as I was just now saying, it’s typical that such a man, even if he’s naturally very well favored, becomes unmanly and avoids the centers of his city and the marketplaces—in which, according to the poet,\textsuperscript{11} men attain “preeminence”—and, instead, lives the rest

\textsuperscript{11}. Homer, \textit{Iliad} ix.441.
of his life in hiding, whispering in a corner with three or four boys, never
uttering anything well-bred, important, or apt.

Socrates, I do have a rather warm regard for you. I find myself feeling
what Zethus, whose words I recalled just now, felt toward Amphion in
Euripides’ play. In fact, the sorts of things he said to his brother come to
my mind to say to you. “You’re neglecting the things you should devote
yourself to, Socrates, and though your spirit’s nature is so noble, you show
yourself to the world in the shape of a boy. You couldn’t put a speech
together correctly before councils of justice or utter any plausible or persua-
sive sound. Nor could you make any bold proposal on behalf of anyone
else.” And so then, my dear Socrates—please don’t be upset with me, for
it’s with good will toward you that I’ll say this—don’t you think it’s
shameful to be the way I take you to be, and others who ever press on
too far in philosophy? As it is, if someone got hold of you or of anyone
else like you and took you off to prison on the charge that you’re doing
something unjust when in fact you aren’t, be assured that you wouldn’t
have any use for yourself. You’d get dizzy, your mouth would hang open
and you wouldn’t know what to say. You’d come up for trial and face
some no good wretch of an accuser and be put to death, if death is what
he’d want to condemn you to. And yet, Socrates, “how can this be a wise
thing, the craft which took a well-favored man and made him worse,”
able neither to protect himself nor to rescue himself or anyone else from
the gravest dangers, to be robbed of all of his property by his enemies,
and to live a life with absolutely no rights in his city? Such a man one
could knock on the jaw without paying what’s due for it, to put it rather
crudely. Listen to me, my good man, and stop this refuting. “Practice the
sweet music of an active life and do it where you’ll get a reputation for
being intelligent. Leave these subtleties to others”—whether we should
call them just silly or outright nonsense—“which will cause you to live in
empty houses,”
and envy not those men who refute such trivia, but those
who have life and renown, and many other good things as well.

SOCRATES: If I actually had a soul made of gold, Callicles, don’t you think
I’d be pleased to find one of those stones on which they test gold? And
if this stone to which I intended to take my soul were the best stone and
it agreed that my soul had been well cared for, don’t you think I could
know well at that point that I’m in good shape and need no further test?

CALLICLES: What’s the point of your question, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I’ll tell you. I believe that by running into you, I’ve run into
just such a piece of luck.

CALLICLES: Why do you say that?

SOCRATES: I know well that if you concur with what my soul believes,
then that is the very truth. I realize that a person who is going to put a
soul to an adequate test to see whether it lives rightly or not must have
three qualities, all of which you have: knowledge, good will, and frankness.

12. Here and just above Callicles again quotes or adapts Euripides’ Antiope.