Plato: Socratic Dialogue, from *Gorgias*

The son of a wealthy and noble family, Plato (427-347 B.C.) was preparing for a career in politics when the trial and eventual execution of Socrates (399 B.C.) changed the course of his life. He abandoned his political career and turned to philosophy, opening a school on the outskirts of Athens dedicated to the Socratic search for wisdom. Plato's school, then known as the Academy, was the first university in western history and operated from 387 B.C. until A.D. 529, when it was closed by Justinian.

Unlike his mentor Socrates, Plato was both a writer and a teacher. His writings are in the form of dialogues, with Socrates as the principal speaker. In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato described symbolically the predicament in which mankind finds itself and proposes a way of salvation. The Allegory presents, in brief form, most of Plato's major philosophical assumptions: his belief that the world revealed by our senses is not the real world but only a poor copy of it, and that the real world can only be apprehended intellectually; his idea that knowledge cannot be transferred from teacher to student, but rather that education consists in directing student's minds toward what is real and important and allowing them to apprehend it for themselves; his faith that the universe ultimately is good; his conviction that enlightened individuals have an obligation to the rest of society, and that a good society must be one in which the truly wise (the Philosopher-King) are the rulers.

Gorgias is a Socratic dialogue written by Plato around 380 BC. The dialogue depicts a conversation between Socrates and a small group of sophists (and other guests) at a dinner gathering. Socrates debates with the sophist seeking the true definition of rhetoric, attempting to pinpoint the essence of rhetoric and unveil the flaws of the sophistic oratory popular in Athens at the time.

Socrates: Then hear me, Gorgias, for I am quite sure that if there ever was a man who entered on the discussion of a matter from a pure love of knowing the truth, I am such a one, and I should say the same of you.
Gorgias: What is coming, Socrates?
Socrates: I will tell you: I am very well aware that I do not know what, according to you, is the exact nature, or what are the topics of that persuasion of which you speak, and which is given by rhetoric; although I have a suspicion about both the one and the other. And I am going to ask-what is this power of persuasion which is given by rhetoric, and about what? But why, if I have a suspicion, do I ask instead of telling you? Not for your sake, but in order that the argument may proceed in such a manner as is most likely to set forth the truth. And I would have you observe, that I am right in asking this further question: If I asked, "What sort of a painter is Zeuxis?" and you said, "The painter of figures," should I not be right in asking, "What kind of figures, and where do you find them?"
Gorgias: Certainly.
Socrates: And the reason for asking this second question would be, that there are other painters besides, who paint many other figures?
Gorgias: True.
Socrates: But if there had been no one but Zeuxis who painted them, then you would have answered very well?
Gorgias: Quite so.
Socrates: Now I want to know about rhetoric in the same way;-is rhetoric the only art which brings persuasion, or do other arts have the same effect? I mean to say-Does he who teaches anything persuade men of that which he teaches or not?
Gorgias: He persuades, Socrates,-there can be no mistake about that.
Socrates: Again, if we take the arts of which we were just now speaking:-do not arithmetic and the arithmeticians teach us the properties of number?

Gorgias: Certainly.
Socrates: And therefore persuade us of them?
Gorgias: Yes.
Socrates: Then arithmetic as well as rhetoric is an artificer of persuasion?
Gorgias: Clearly.
Socrates: And if any one asks us what sort of persuasion, and about what,-we shall answer, persuasion which teaches the quantity of odd and even; and we shall be able to show that all the other arts of which we were just now speaking are artificers of persuasion, and of what sort, and about what.
Gorgias: Very true.
Socrates: Then rhetoric is not the only artificer of persuasion?
Gorgias: True.
Socrates: Seeing, then, that not only rhetoric works by persuasion, but that other arts do the same, as in the case of the painter, a question has arisen which is a very fair one: Of what persuasion is rhetoric the artificer, and about what?-is not that a fair way of putting the question?
Gorgias: I think so.
Socrates: Then, if you approve the question, Gorgias, what is the answer?
Gorgias: I answer, Socrates, that rhetoric is the art of persuasion in courts of law and other assemblies, as I was just now saying, and about the just and unjust.
Socrates: And that, Gorgias, was what I was suspecting to be your notion; yet I would not have you wonder if by-and-by I am found repeating a seemingly plain question; for I ask not in order to confute you, but as I was saying that the argument may proceed consecutively, and that we may not get the habit of anticipating and suspecting the meaning of one another's words; I would have you develop your own views in your own way, whatever may be your hypothesis.
Gorgias: I think that you are quite right, Socrates.