

Study Guide for Plato's *Gorgias*

The Gorgias is a Socratic dialogue written by Socrates' pupil Plato. As in all of Plato's dialogues, Socrates uses what is known as the "Socratic method" of question and answers to arrive at "truth." As in all the other dialogues, Socrates always wins the argument.

Reading Questions

- a. What is the definition of Rhetoric that Socrates and Gorgias agree upon at the beginning of the dialogue? Is it similar to or different from the definition given by Aristotle and the beginning of *The Rhetoric*?
- b. What is the importance of the concept of "ignorance"? For the audience? For the rhetorician?
- c. What is the importance in the dialogue of the distinction between the *knowledge* vs. *persuasion*?
- d. What is the importance in the dialogue of the distinction between the *just* and the *unjust*?
- e. What is the importance in the dialogue of the analogies with medicine, physical training, and cooking?
- f. Is there any similarity between the rhetorician as described by Socrates and the bullshitter described by Harry G. Frankfurt in the following passage from his monograph *On Bullshit*.

The fact about himself that the bullshitter hides . . . is that the truth values of his statements are of no central interest to him; what we are not to understand is that his intention is to neither to report the truth nor to conceal it.

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