Week 5 Post

Post #4

In chapter 1 McComiskey attempts to present a more accurate depiction of Gorgianic rhetoric by analyzing Plato’s Gorgias against the work of Gorgias. Essentially, from this chapter we can gain a better understanding of Gorgianic rhetoric, and read an analysis of this rhetoric in opposition of the Gorgias we get from Plato.

Plato’s version is absurd and makes little sense, when in fact Gorgianic rhetoric does make sense, according to McComiskey. Gorgianic rhetoric is a relativistic epistemology and the methodology behind it “works to seize the opportune moment (kairos) in which certain kinds of language can be used to unite subjective consciousnesses into a communal desire for action (p. 18).” This differs from Plato’s depiction of Gorgias. In Plato’s version of Gorgias he contradicts himself. Beginning to understand Gorgias outside of Plato’s depiction is vital to understanding the potential motives Plato had for presenting a very specific version of Gorgias.

If the Sophists believed that mastering opinion would lead strengthens one’s ability to participate in a democratic society, then this information helps to explain why there would be tension between them and philosophers. Philosophers believed that the true knowledge was “limited to those of wealth and high birth,” which helps to not only reinforce their position in society, but also their students. If the Sophists believed that anyone could participate in governing the city, then they are natural adversaries. According to McComiskey, sophists didn’t believe that true, or pure knowledge could exist. This goes against Socrates and his capital T truth. Instead he believes that perception will distort reality, and that is what keeps us from attaining pure knowledge.

I don’t think it is as simple as wanting to opening the government to those not born of nobility and wealth, but clearly there was something to be gained by Plato writing Gorgias as he did. Plato could benefit from his depictions of not only Gorigas, but of rhetoric by labeling them both as absurd, contradictory, and dangerous. By demoting it to the level of skill, and keeping it from being seen as an art Plato could denounce all rhetoric, and thus all the Sophists that have different views and approaches than the philosophers.

1. What is to be gained from understanding the Historical Situation in Chapter 1?
2. Does reading McComiskey’s analysis of Gorgianic rhetoric and thoughts on Plato’s potential motives change your view of the works by Plato that we’ve read?