

### **Summary Of Professor Mauro's report regarding Ethics and Politics in Plato's Gorgias**

"Gorgias" is a dialogue written by Plato that dates back to the period prior to his first trip to Greece in 389-388 b.C. "Gorgias" consists of three dialogues with three sophists. The first conversation is between Socrates and Gorgias, the second between Socrates and Polus and the third between Socrates and Callicles. Finally there is a part constituted by an eschatological myth. In the "Gorgias" the most important political Athenian men are mentioned (*Cimon, Themistocles, Pericles, Miltiades*). In particular, in the passage 517 b-c. Callicles recalls how Pericles and Themistocles were great politicians. Socrates doesn't deny their capabilities and states that they were the best politicians of their time, for they supplied the state with what it wanted, but they were not greater than Socrates' contemporaries because they did not improve their fellow citizens.

Plato urges us to question ourselves about the path that led Athens to become the city that sentenced Socrates, "the most righteous man of his time" and he prompts us to ask ourselves what role the three sophists had and to do so he directs his attention to the three sophists. The difference between Gorgias and his disciples, Polus and Callicles, is that the latter straightforwardly affirm that ethics and morals are beautiful, but it is of no use to apply them in any situation. Virtue is practiced only when convenient.

In the "Gorgias", there is an observation on the relation between ethics and morals, between the individual and the πόλις. According to Plato there isn't an ethic that doesn't have a relapse on politics or vice versa. Plato affirms that a community of good men leads to a good rule. When Plato renounces to the utopian state, because he knows that it will never be accomplished, he doesn't give up on having a model, that at any rate serves the purpose of differentiating good and evil.

Socrates, in "Gorgias", ask the expert of rhetoric what rhetoric really is. In fact also Gorgias doesn't know well what it is. He knows that it is useful to persuade, but he doesn't know if it is merely the art of persuasion or the art of persuading regarding what is right or wrong. In the second case then it is necessary to have the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. Socrates states that justice is the social virtue, man is virtuous towards others and the more one is just, the more one will contribute to making others just. Therefore it is possible to understand the two statements of Socrates that seemed paradoxical. The first statement is that it is better to suffer injustice than to do injustice. The second affirms that the most important thing that a politician must do is to improve his fellow citizens.

In the passage 521 d Socrates declares that he has laid his hand on the real political art and it is a bit in conflict with what he himself had previously said, that is that he is not a politician. Socrates means to say that he is not a politician like Pericles, because he did not busy himself with the construction of arsenals, but he is a politician since he was more concerned with improving the citizens. The true politics is therefore the παιδεία and the duty of politics is to forge honest men. The instrument to do all this is not the rhetoric art but philosophy, which for Plato means the doctrine of Ideas. The difference between rhetoric and philosophy is that rhetoric talks about subjects that it doesn't know, philosophy instead discusses about what it knows or it is a vehicle of research. Philosophers are the only one that know what is good and what is bad.