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DESIRE AND ARGUMENT IN PLATO'S *GORGIAS*

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MONDAY, APRIL 26, 12-2PM
ZOOM REGISTRATION LINK:
[HTTPS://BIT.LY/3WC8WJB](https://bit.ly/3WC8WJB)

Abstract: Scholarship on the *Gorgias* is preoccupied with two things. The first is that that interlocutors are increasingly hostile to one another, and little agreement is reached. The conversation seems to break down. The second is that non-rational forces such as pleasures, pains, epithumiai, and the pathos of eros, come to the fore at various points. These twin factors have led to a growing consensus that what is demonstrated (if not yet theorized) in the *Gorgias*, is that “rational argument alone cannot sway [those] in whom non-rational forces – eros or non-rational desires in general - are strong” (Jessica Moss: 2007). I argue against this view and in support of Socrates’ confidence in the power of argument (513c). Socrates responds to Callicles with the claim that if they examine the same things “often and better”, Callicles – along with his demotic eros – will be persuaded. And Callicles does make progress. How so? ‘Argument’ needs to be conceived more broadly in a way that takes account of its form: Socratic dialogue is a form of koinonia, bound together by philia, which fosters orderliness, moderation, and justice, insofar as participants adhere to the rules of the game. Seen as such, it is not the case that the only psychic change such discussion can achieve is propositional; the content of the discussion is intimated, and internalized, in the performance of its form. This, as much as anything else, I argue, explains Callicles’ eventual progress.

