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Back to Ancient Questions?  
Tornare alle domande degli Antichi?

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Back to Ancient Questions?

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## The Dynasty of Logos. Gorgias' Fight for Helen\*

Andrina Tonkli-Komel

When Plato's Socrates (in the dialogue *Phaedrus*) suddenly turns against Sophistic *doxa* (that it is better to be loved than in love), he refers to the poet Stesichorus (243a), who lost his sight by blindly following the Homeric tradition and insulting Helen. Having lost his sight, he saw that he had incorrectly constructed Helen, whereupon he immediately deconstructed this construction and put it "back together" again. His Palinode begins as follows: «This is not the true tale: You never went in the well-benched ships. You did not go to the towers of Troy...». While Helen found honourable asylum in Egypt, the future Hellenes fought in Troy over her phantom. The "antipoem" served as an antidote. More precisely: "Helen's phantom" (243a), which Stesichorus "produced", turned out to be the medication (*pharmakon*) that cured both Helen's honor or good name, as well as the poet's sight.

Socrates attributes Stesichorus' understanding of the cause of his blindness to the fact that he is a *mousikos* (248d) – taken over/possessed by the Muses – as opposed to Homer, who remained blind. Socrates is smarter still than Stesichorus, as he formulates his recantation even before incurring his penalty for defaming Eros. While Homer blindly composes the most fascinating things, Stesichorus sees his Homeric blindness and turns away, Socrates on the other hand sees that he does not see even before losing his sight.

As Stesichorus fashioned an antidote for his poetic ventriloquism, now

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Socrates must do the same for the Sophistic. At the beginning of the dialogue both Phaedrus and Socrates present speeches that are not theirs: Phaedrus reads Lysias, and Socrates is convinced that his speech was inspired by Phaedrus and that he was just moving lips; he must immediately then turn around “his” own blind imitation of Phaedrus’ imitation of Lysias. Just as Stesichorus crafted a “false illusion” of Helen in Troy as an antidote for his poetic phantoms, Plato’s Socrates invented a false speech so as to make visible rhetorical deceit and to make a true speech even possible.

Helen’s ability to imitate foreign voices connects her with the poetic tradition. Stesichorus himself is a ventriloquist when he imitates Homer’s voice. But even when he runs against Homer with his construction of the false Helen, of her *eidolon* in Troy, is it not just Helen’s Egyptian pharmacy that are affecting him, about which Homer himself speaks? Helena knew not only how to call to hidden heroes using their wives’ voices (Odys. 4.277-79), she also knew – like the (Hesiod’s) Muses – how to lie or tell the truth (4.140), and with a pleasant voice (4.234) speak “appropriate things” (*eoikota*, 4.239). It seems that Gorgias in his “Encomium of Helen” refers specifically to this “great power” of speech, which softens even the firmest of memories or most rigid of opinions with the right words in the right time and achieves a state of forgottenness by “slipping in” a new opinion, or another memory. But Gorgias defends Helen as the very victim of a “strong *logos*”.

Gorgias’ Encomium ignores Stesichorus’ poetic construction and suggests that, even had she gone to Troy, Helen is but a “fiction”, a “raison d’être”; per se she does not exist, and even if she were to exist, she would not know what she was doing, and, even if she were to remember, she would not tell “the truth”. Helen and her ambivalent fame do not exist outside of speech, and Hellenic speech is not just one.

Although Helen herself embodies the power and dangerous aspects of speech (not just female polyphony, but also the musical, eristic, and erotic multiplicity), Gorgias defends her precisely as a victim of the great persuasiveness of *logos*, which forces her to leave without looking back (as Sappho already points out). The *logos* otherwise does not have the form of urgency (*ananke eidos*) of physical violence (*bia*), but it does have its power (*dynamis*). However Gorgias does not only show that Helen is not guilty for submitting to the great power of persuasiveness, but he also suggests that she is less guilty for having submitted to the “deception”, allowing herself to be “turned around”, than she would be for having remained indifferent.

Gorgias, in whose writing can be found traces of Eleatic dialectics, does

not agree with Eleatic extremism, which in the “teaching” of Melissus of Samos<sup>1</sup> is reflected in the equating of Parmenides’ *physis* and *einai*. This equation, whence it follows that the “being” is given “by nature”, does not hold water in his opinion. In his “palinody” “On Nature or On Not-Being”<sup>2</sup> Gorgias does not show that “nature” is simply non-being; he claims that it is neither being nor non-being, created nor uncreated, singular nor multiple; (as such) it is unknowable (*agnoston*) and cannot be revealed to others (MXG 979a 12).

That which is found in the “senses” could only be being, as that which is non-being, is not, and as such cannot be in our understanding (MXG 17); but: if all that one has in their senses and thoughts and all which can come to one’s mind, truly is, then error would be excluded – everything that appears and seems to a person would, well, exist (MXG 18). As many see the same thing, so do many also imagine the same (MXG 20). And even if we ignore what it is that we can actually see when we look, there is still the problem of how it is possible to relate to someone in a speech, i.e. explain something they have not seen themselves. Just as we cannot see sound by looking, listening likewise cannot hear colors. “Nobody speaks a sound or a colour, but only a word.” (MXG 980 a 19.) If then not even the same person in the same moment and in the same place comprehends the same in comparison to their very self, although doing all at once – listening, watching, feeling, and understanding – how then are two to succeed, as in addition to the listed problems they are further in completely different positions and places. Even if that were to be something that affects us “by nature” (*physei*), and even if it were somehow perceived, it still would not be possible to relate it to someone else.

That which arrives at our “senses”, whether seen, heard, imagined, or spoken, is not being, and likewise cannot be non-being; it is not one and therefore cannot be many, it has not come into existence and likewise does not remain existent. What comes to our senses affects us as an indistinct plurality, and we nonetheless understand that which we see, hear, and feel as one and the same, even though you cannot hear what is seen, nor see or

<sup>1</sup> «On nature or on Being» (*Peri physeos e peri ontos*).

<sup>2</sup> Also «On What Is Not». The text is lost and is available only in two intermediate sources: in a report from Sextus Empiricus (*Peri me ontos e Peri physeos*), which Diels also considers, and in the pseudo-Aristotelian text *De Melisso, Xenophane, Gorgia*, MXG; here cited from Th. Buchheim, *Reden, Fragmente und Testomonien*, Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1989 and *The Greek Sophistes* (by J. Dillon and T. Gergel), Penguin Classics, London 2003.

touch that which is heard. That one and the same obviously is not shown to any sense. Whatever affects us through our senses moves our soul (*psyche physei*, as “physical intervention”. The fact that we distinguish this diversity as unity evidently at the very beginning arises from something other than nature, namely from our own relationship to that to which we are subjected “by nature”. “By nature”, therefore, nothing is given to us that we can recognize as such, but it only receives its meaning in speech, and also only retains and preserves its meaning within speech.

Being, non-being, singular, plural, creation, existence are not given “by nature”, but arise in their distinction and determination from perception and agreement or speech. That which is shown, seen, and heard, and that which seems or appears as if it will not even for a second be interrupted, dissected or unified, created, left to remain, that which might remain or pass by, has been or not been... all this poses as a source of constant overwhelming and disturbance for the human soul, conjuring as it does wonder and fear, comfort and pain, excitement and indifference. It is in all this excitement and fascination of the soul that its perceptiveness is created, improved, and molded. That which appears namely looks much different in fear than in excitement, and pain frames things differently than pleasure. But in these disorderly excitations and movements of the soul, which uncontrollably and inexplicably transition from one to another, the base of even the strongest conviction will crumble, i.e. the possibility of convincing oneself with one’s own eyes and ears. It is not just that unity and true communication between the various modes of human perception do not exist, but even within the same mode, it seems, we never perceive things the same, but always differently.

This fundamental unreliability of every opinion does not clash with Gorgias’ later exposition of the enormous power of persuasion in his *Encomium of Helen* (*Gorgiou Helenes Enkomion*)<sup>3</sup>: «If everyone possessed memory of the past and understanding of the present and foreknowledge of the future, speech would not be equally powerful» (Hel. 11). But in the *Encomium*, in the very first sentence, Gorgias declares that «the purpose of this speech is to show what is true and stop the ignorance of opinion»<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Cit. *Gorgias Encomium of Helen* (edited with Introduction, notes and translation by D.M. MacDowell), Classical Press, Bristol 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Such inconsistencies have led scholars to rather extreme suggestions. Gompertz’s finding (*Sophistik und Rhetorik*, 1913), that Gorgias, who never developed a positive lesson but was merely a rhetoric virtuoso, should be erased from the annals of philosophy as a philosophical nihilist, was followed by suggestions that Gorgias’ extant speeches and other works should be



What is, then, “true speech”? Gorgias attempts to compose a speech (*logous platten*) that would save Helen’s bad reputation (*doxa*), namely that she is guilty of starting the Trojan War. It begins like this (Hel, 1): “The grace (*kosmos*) of a city is excellence of its men, of a body beauty, of a mind (psyche) wisdom, of an action virtue, of a speech truth; the opposites of these are a disgrace (*akosmia*). When it comes to man or woman, speech or action, state and thing, that which is praiseworthy must be praised, and that which is unworthy must be criticized. To the same extent it is wrong and ignorant to shame that which is praiseworthy, and to praise that which deserves criticism. As opposed to those who speak poorly of Helen and believe rumours about her Gorgias thus wants to – *logismon tina to logo dous* (Hel, 2) – clear her name of guilt, show the fault of her critics, prove the truth, and finally put an end to the ignorance. Speech in general is then true, when it “gives reasons” for what it speaks.

Helen, as Gorgias defends her, cannot possibly be responsible for what happened. This applies not only if she did what she did either by caprices of Chance (*Tyche*), the counsels of the gods, the decrees of Fate (*Anankes*), but also holds true if she was ravished by force (*biai*), persuaded by words (*logoi*) or captivated by love (*Eros*). The power of speech is namely the same as physical force or divine intervention. Logos is a powerful ruler, *dynastes megas* (Hel. 8): it ameliorates horror, alleviates pain, inspires people to joy, and causes emotional responses. With its ability to affect the

understood as a “joke” or even as a farce (K. Reinhard, *Parmenides*, Cohen, Bonn 1916), as an ironic *reductio ad absurdum* of the corpus of Eleatic philosophy (G. Calogero, *Studi sull’Eleatismo*, Tipografia del Senato, Rome 1932), or as *jeux d’esprit* (Les Éditions du Temple, Bruxelles 1948), C.M.J. Sicking (*Gorgias und die Philosophen*, in C.J. Classen ed., *Sophistik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1976, pp. 304 - 407) returns again to the finding that there is no place for Gorgias’ inconsistency of thought in philosophy, citing Plato as a proof. Differently B. Cassin, *Sophistical Practice. Toward a Consistent Relativism*, Fordham University Press, Bronx 2014. In a totally different way “The feminist and third Sophistics against the tyranny of Platonists and patriarchy” attempts to link the proverbial falsehoods-falsifications of women and Sophists, and to combine forces against academic discourse (M. Ballif, *Seduction, Sophistry, and the Women with the Rhetorical figure*, South Illinois UP, Carbondale 2001; also V. Vitanza, ‘Some More’ Notes, *Toward a ‘Third’ Sophistic*, in *Argument*, Vol. 5, 1991, pp. 117-139; S. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, Southern Illinois UP, Carbondale 1991; A. Wick, *The Feminist Sophistic Enterprise: From Euripides to the Vietnam War*, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 22, 1 (1992), pp. 27-38, who maintains that the Sophists were silenced for putting the patriarchy and its war under scrutiny). The Sophistic techniques of counterargument and rebuttal (*dissoi logoi*) should serve as an example of how it is possible to take a word and with a plurality of interpretations, including that of the position of women, introduce dissent into the ruling consensus about what constitutes “real knowledge”, show its fragmented nature, and challenge its authority.

“movements” (*pathemata*) of the soul, speech can either bolster someone to or turn them away from action. Gorgias mentions poetic speech as an example and proof of this (Hel. 9), as it instils in the listener fear and horror, moves the listener to tears, and simply by using words puts the listener in a position where they vicariously experience someone else’s joy and misfortune as their own.

The power of speech accords with the openness and perceptiveness of the soul for that which is shown and that which appears (*doxa*). Only while being perceptive can it be charmed, influenced, convinced, turned around. Only in this way can speech foster in the listener a conviction (*doxa*) that would otherwise be alien. Speeches affect the soul like drugs (*pharmaka*, Hel. 14) affect the body: sometimes like medicine, sometimes like poison, and thus – depending on the dosage – terminate either the illness or the patient’s life.

The relationship between the “psych(olog)ic” and the “physical”, which is established here by analogy, takes centre stage as the argumentation progresses to the discussion on the effect of *opsis* on the soul as its own sort of transfer or transformation. Just as the rhetorical persuasion (*peitho*) moves the soul and leads it wherever it wants (Hel. 13), *opsis* also reshapes the character (*tropos*) of the soul (Hel. 15). The physical stimulation conveyed by vision stirs the soul. That which is seen is namely not “innocent appearance”; it affects the soul, by evoking fear or some other emotion. This psychical motion then manifests itself again in an instinctive response, such as trembling or flight, etc. If through *opsis* we encounter worrying signs, such as for instance the approach of an army (Hel. 16), this excites the soul (*etarachthe kai etaraxetin psychen*), eliciting an immediate emotional response. It works circularly: the “physical” sensation that creates the impression which stirs the soul, and the excitedness of the soul in turn elicits an instinctive “physical” response. This circular process forms the basis of Gorgias’ concept of *peitho*.

The connection between *opsis* or *aisthesis* and conviction (a doxic state of the soul) is most specifically highlighted in the last part of the Helen Encomium, where Gorgias speaks of the influence Eros has on the soul. It is exactly in this case that it is most especially seen how our perception is never the perception of people and things such as they actually are, but always as attractive or repulsive, desirable or undesirable, as a source of pain or a source of pleasure. *Opsis* is never unaffected observation of the observable. *Au contraire!* That which we observe affects, moves the soul, stirs it into *mania*, or leaves it indifferent and thus in some sense also

blind. Observation therefore always adds and detracts something in such a way that we actually see that which is invisible and we do not see that which is visible. Observation changes the characteristics of the heart (*dia de tes opseos he psyche kan tois tropos typoutai*, Hel. 15).

We therefore do not see things “in their nature”, but only within a relationship, in response to that which befalls us. Things are revealed or hidden in affection and disdain, in fear, beauty, pain, etc., which disturb our soul through observation, and knock it out of ordinary balance. This loss of spiritual balance can mean an unhealthy obsession, a loss of judgment and ability to make distinctions, and it can also mean, as artistic fraud shows us, just the opposite: an increased capacity for insight, and even perceptiveness about the invisible and the incredible (Hel. 18). As proof that the power of observation (and of cognizance in general) is not to be found in the casual sobriety of “common sense”, Gorgias relates the work of painters and sculptors, who show the eyes not just bare pictures, mere imitated likenesses of people and things, but of actual pleasure and pain.

These different moods create the flexibility of “opinions”, the receptiveness of *doxa*. It is precisely due to this mutable doxic state, i.e. sensitivity to excitation, movement, persuasion, that it is possible to present to the eyes of *doxa* what would normally be invisible and incredible. This mutability, this receptiveness of the soul towards that which – not naturally but in affectation and excitation – appears to or is hidden from it is thus the basis of persuasion, of molding the listener with speech, and, at the same time, the firmest basis of every conviction. Due to this deep-rootedness in affectation, convictions cannot be changed merely by “sober” reasons.

*Logos* can have a very calculated impression on the soul and ready it for actions that are not in accordance with general custom, habit, or law (*nomos*) (Hel. 16). Its strength can thus be compared to an irresistible force: to a “physical” force (*bia*) or the necessity (*ananke*) of divine power. The calculability of *logos* is found in the fact that it does not attempt to reduce the power of the incalculable in the human soul, but quite the opposite. The convincingness of speech arises and measures against the sensitivity and susceptibility of the soul to movement and stimulus. Although, as such, it belongs to doxic perception and never reaches beyond that, its power to affect others is comparable to and is measured against “physical” or divine strength. What, then, is with “truth” and “the truthfulness of speech”?

Gorgias finds that “being” (*einai*) is not a presence that does not cease to show itself, but it is *aphanes*, if it doesn’t appear before the eyes of

*doxa*. So on the one hand «since opinion (*doxa*) is slippery and insecure, it casts those employing it into slippery and insecure successes» (Hel. 11), while on the other only persuasion with a “deception” (*apate*) can «make the incredible and obscure become clear to the eyes of belief» (Hel. 13). Does this mean that a rhetorical persuasion exactly by “turning around” a slippery and insecure opinion, changes the hidden into the “unhidden” and therefore “truthful”? Or does it simply “turn” something that seems incredible, because we do not see how it would be possible, so that it comes before our eyes?

Through persuasion (*peitho*) speech can, due to its very instability and receptivity, change a conviction or create or destroy a good opinion. If deceit (*apate*) is not understood here as hiding or disguising the obvious, but rather in the opposite sense as “making to appear”, does it not hold true that the misled is wiser than the one who remains unaffectedly indifferent? It seems that Gorgias’ concept of *apate* is not deceit in relation to truth, i.e. some unhidedness of “nature”, or some being as a permanent presence, but actually as an answer to the hiding or non-being of this truth itself. The *apate* is a mode of visualizing and communicating this obscure.

In order for «the incredible and invisible» to show itself before the eyes of *doxa*, speech must put the soul in an appropriate state. It must elicit both pleasure (*hedone*) and pain (*lype*) (Hel. 10) in the soul, move it, and force it to let go of its usual attitude. That is why, as Gorgias argues (fr. B 23), the character in a tragedy who deceives is righter than one who does not deceive; the deceived, on the other hand, is wiser than the one who is not deceived. Here, giving in to deceit means allowing to be persuaded, believing words, and agreeing with actions (Hel. 12), which again means: to see better, even that which is invisible to the eye.

This massive persuasive power of speech, which allows us to see that which is absent, is at the same time Gorgias’ major argument as to why Helen is not guilty. «Persuasion, though not having an appearance (*eidōs*) of compulsion (*ananke*), has the same power (*dynamis*). For speech, the persuader, compelled mind, the persuaded, both to obey what was said and to approve what was done. So the persuader, because he compelled, is guilty» (Hel. 12). «The power of speech bears the same relation to the ordering of the mind as drugs bear to the constitution of bodies» (Hel. 14). – It can therefore have an ameliorating or a harmful effect.

However, this is not necessarily related to its truthfulness or falsehood. Speech has neither cognitive nor communicative power, but creative power. It does not create or destroy (heal or poison) just a good “name” or

“reputation”, but the action itself. Actions are deeds only if they are praised: all that remains from deeds is fame (*doxa*), be it good or bad. But speech does not create or destroy great deeds only by celebrating, denigrating, or keeping silent on them; through the power of persuasiveness it causes or provokes them. It is this very power of “suggestion”, of affecting the most incontrollable of the human soul’s various instincts and inclinations – so it would seem – which is the greatest and yet the most hidden power of speech.

That with which speech achieves its effect on the listener is not just what is said, but the manner in which it is said. Speech is composed according to the rules of art (*techné*), not delivered with regard for the truth (Hel. 13). This does not mean that truth cannot be effective, nor that it cannot be a rule of art. Nonetheless speech is never mere communication of already determined truth. The truth therefore cannot be understood and extracted from speech, it is encompassed and can be experienced solely within speech, in its argumentation, persuasion, conversion, and deception. Fraud or deception is a rule of art in the same way that truth is, and therefore is not a deception about the truth. It does not conceal anything that is obvious, it does not forge the truth, but through persuasiveness upturns normal convictions, *revealing* to the eye of the *doxa* that which had been hidden up to that point.

Speech therefore both comes from general conviction, and at the same time, through persuading, creates it. It cannot escape this cycle. All that exists is a more or less corruptible opinion, a more or less fraudulent voice, which can and must be answered only through the creation of a new one. The unreliable and mutable realm of doxic validity must be dealt with through speech – praising the praiseworthy, criticizing what deserves criticism (Hel. 1) – according to the law of the appropriateness of *kairos* (fr. 13). The law of appropriate moment requires a particular skill: to strike while the iron is hot, not to miss the right moment, to know when “it is time” to speak, be silent, or act (fr. 6, 2). Only in this way can speech generate momentum.

Convincing speech must address the unaddressed in the soul and purge it of passion (*katharsis pathematon*), which, according to the homeopathic principle, is possible only by excitation and potentiating. This is made possible by choosing the right moment. *Kairos* is transient, a transition that gives change an opportunity to unfold. Like a moment of *physis* is that flickering, fleeting, intangible, never the same as it was and as such indistinguishable, and which is arranged into past – present – and future only in

relation with *logos*. On the other hand *kairos*, as a favorable moment, is always the right time, the timeliness, when events coincide as the simultaneity that in the story opens up into the order of past, present, and future.

Speech must constantly seek the right moment. Only by answering a favorable moment can speech occur. Speech must be obedient to the law of *kairos*, because *doxa* and doxic perception, from which it arises and which it attempts to influence, is in large part contingent upon the moment, and its sudden change, which forces the soul into impulsive reaction without consideration of the consequences, indeed without the possibility of insight into the unity of time, which is the condition for something to be considered a consequence of something else.

This ungraspable moment, always different, never the same as it was, spinning as it were in the whirlpool of constant disappearance and reappearance, which reaches and surprised the soul in shock and astonishment, cannot be singled out and retained as the identical “now” from which indifferent time arises. Because of the subordination of *doxa* to this immediacy it does not suffice for speech to merely offer reason and prudence; if it wants to be actually convincing, it must also be cathartic. What establishes the human world as orderly is purification from the unsteady, the fleeting, the absolutely distinct but never distinguishable, which is lost to timelessness without ever stretching into time, and which shows as a breakdown in communication between the different senses, such as the discord of the sensual and ultimately as the unsettled movements of the soul. This sensory disorganization must first be brought into order, as the whole strength of a *doxa* is rooted in sensory conviction («with one’s own eyes»). *Kairos* is that conjunction with the endlessness of constant exchange, in which everything, without ever being something or not being anything, has shown to be singular or plural, created or uncreated. Precisely as a conjunction is *kairos* at the same time a favorable, concentrating moment in which the onslaught of the infinite is halted and the situation unfolds. In this the unfolding of a situation always means a concealing of the whole. This is how *doxa* is appearing and how *physis* is hiding.

*Doxa* is not conviction in the sense of a view that someone either has or shares at their own discretion, but, quite the opposite, each person themselves is an integral part of what appears. Everything can therefore only appear in transition and in degrees – never in its entirety, but only partially and in this partiality as a whole. A part is always a deformation of the whole. *Doxa*, therefore, requires constant “informing” and molding. Without constant repetition, editing, repairing, it becomes an empty custom or

tradition in which, sure, old stories are preserved, but not the integrating intenseness of the event itself.

Cultivating *doxa* through speech is a fight for transparency that is always hidden, for a unity that is constantly being scattered, for “one” which is unstopably escaping our grasp. In order to bear things, one must face the unbearable. One must find a language for that which is constantly fleeting.

The emphasis of *kairos*, that is emphatic repetition, is not just a means of revitalizing old stories, but for a sensation to become an event. Identity remains only in repetition; it is the effect of the same thing said twice. The first time is informative, the second time confirmative. Here the repetition cannot simply be saying the same thing over and over again. Such speech is actually exhausted or hackneyed speech that nobody hears any longer. Repetition is that primordial focusing of time, which, in the rhythm of returning, distancing, and repeated approaching, creates tension between every right moment and every passing moment.

Speech must thus inspire perceptiveness. It achieves identity through therapeutic identification; by drowning in the infinite it must cleanse the soul from attacks wrought by the threat of losing oneself in constant motion. It must chase the soul out of itself, take it by the reins, and thrust it into motion (*pathos*) in order to save it from unrest and return it to a state of relaxedness and permanence (*ethos*). In this sort of purification rhetoric makes use of *kairos* itself; seizing upon the right moment is the only way through which speech can have an impact and coax the soul’s original perceptiveness for persuasion.

In order to attribute to speech such power of convincingness, which clearly cannot be grounded solely in the dry offering of reasons, Gorgias turns to poetry. Poetic speech is deceit (*apate*), but nonetheless righteous (*dikaia*) (fr. 23), since it uses enthusiasm to force a regular opinion from its regularity and with divine inspiration steer it in a new focus. But poetic speech is by its very nature *musical*. This difference takes on central significance with the question of catharsis. While musical catharsis is based on the natural source of movement and rhythm, the power of rhetorical speech is based on the presumption that human nature per se is not at all natural, but is established. The *musical* effect aims at the natural excitations and movements, which in their original forcefulness are reflected in rhythms themselves. Rhythm, in which on the one hand the titanic force of nature is fully expressed, while on the other there is something metrical, something both well-ordered and itself ordering. As the movements of the soul are expressed in rhythms, rhythms are themselves expressed in movements of the

heart. This back-and-forth rhythm is cathartic for the heart, as the heart is not only excited, but it is also *rhythmized* through these stimuli (comfort, pain, enthusiasm), i.e. purges it of disorderly movement, of unbridled, angry impulses. The *rhetorical* effect, on the contrary, is possible when even instinct, impulse, and affectation are constituent of *doxa*, not of nature.

To lend a “normal”, doxic speech the quality of cathartic persuasiveness (which reaches all the way to the prespoken, to the chaotic, and encompasses it) Gorgias had to make some bold moves. He attributes the musical enthusiasm to the entirety of poetry, and then defines or delimits poetry as merely a special version of speech, namely *logos metron echon* (Hel. 9). Thus he attempts to transfer the power that poetry has on account of its musicality (the ability to achieve harmony of the soul by inciting fear, comfort, pain and hysteria) to a new art of convincing through speech. The effect that originally belonged to musical catharsis can now be achieved solely *dia ton logon* (Hel. 9) – not solely by the given reasons themselves but with the manner of speech. Speech is not persuasive only through the content of what it says; when it is spoken, when it creates a speech-event, it converts: with dulcet and rhythmic speech and with the choice of the right moment it attempts to win over the listener.

*Although* Gorgias’ *logos* is not the type of speech that would be inspired by the Muses, as it lacks even the cathartic strength of music on which the Pythagorean attempts at healing the soul were based (and of course also lacks “true knowledge”), it is *dynastes megas* (Hel. 8). «Its substance (*somati*) is minute and invisible (*aphanestato*), but its achievements are superhuman (*theiotata erga*)». The convincingness of persuasion and of conviction must be sought in the deeper, visceral urgency of pleasure and discomfort, fear, compassion, and desire (Hel. 9), which controls man either as a natural force or as a divine power (Hel. 19). This “embodied conviction” is not just an empty opinion, but it actually creates a “second nature”. That which distinguishes *doxa* as a “second nature” from “first nature”, from that which is and happens “by nature”, is primarily the fact that it is always already a valuation, always a good or bad reputation. It is impossible to change a *doxa* merely with a lifeless enumeration of reasons; it must be softened, excited, and then tuned. A speech that aims at being convincing, at influencing the speaker’s general convictions, must motivate its audience, move it, and throw it off track. When with all their vigor the speaker addresses something or steers attention from something, accuses or defends somebody, praises or criticizes, they are not measuring against a secret “nature”, but are coming from the general “ethical” principle established by the Sophists that no one



does anything without a reason, but everyone does what they find best in the given circumstances. Even Plato's complaint that such a person does not concern themselves with the reasons why one thing is better than another, independently of the circumstances, and by doing so refusing to follow good itself, cannot overlook the fact that even the good is not only measured according to good itself, but always through some sort of *logos*.

Plato sees rhetoric as the craft of prudently composing speeches, calculatedly evoking pathos with sympathetic speech, as rhetorical pathology (Phaedr. 272a). But Plato keeps a crucial part to himself, failing to point out that Gorgias suggests a parallel between the persuasiveness of speech and erotic mania (Hel. 15). Just like speech, so can love, too, "detune" sound judgement. But, and this is almost the same argument that made Socrates turn in *Phaidros*: «if Eros is a god with a god's power, how would the weaker be able to resist it» (Hel. 19), or consider him as something bad. Gorgias adds: «If it is a human malady and incapacity of mind», therefore if (upon glancing at Alexander's body) Helen went mad, she did not do so on purpose, and thus in this case cannot be guilty. Plato's Socrates in some sense takes over Gorgias' argument, but attributes Paris' guilt as a persuader to "Sophistic rhetoric" and takes Helen's innocence as obsession with Eros and his dialectics.

## Abstract

*The article investigates the irresistible persuasive power of speech. As Gorgias stressed in his Encomium of Helen – "speech is the powerful master" (dynastes megas). It alters the mind and the persuaded cannot choose but is forced to obey. Gorgiasian "rhetoric" speech is neither music, poetic nor philosophic, it's persuasive power comes neither from enchantment nor from revealed truth. To refute the bad reputation and to alter the traditional public opinion does not require proof, but rather the possibility of alternatives.*

Keywords: Gorgias; speech; persuasion; rhetoric; thruth.

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