

Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* as a Model Speech

by

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Abstract

While it is regularly noted by scholars that Gorgias of Leontini likely provided his *Encomium of Helen* to his students as a model speech, the speech's status as a teaching tool has not been used as an interpretive thread to unpack its meaning. This essay proceeds from this basis and finds that an engagement with the *Encomium of Helen* furnished Gorgias' students with a thought pattern about a structure of causality that would serve to undergird their future acts of persuasion.

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Introduction

Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* as a Model Speech

When Gorgias of Leontini resided in Athens, he trained students in the techniques of persuasive speaking. These techniques were advertised as a means to acquire political power and command others in war, leading to fame, wealth, and the ability to influence public affairs on a large scale.¹ A central facet of the student's training, we learn from Aristotle, consisted of the memorization of model speeches.² Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* (henceforth *Helen*) is commonly thought to have functioned as such a tool.³ This essay is an exploration of the educational design of the *Helen*, which would lead the student toward the advertised ends of the Gorgian program.

This exploration is warranted due to the fact that the implications of the *Helen's* status as an educational tool have been largely overlooked in the scholarship on Gorgias. It has been common to principally consider the significance of the speech in terms of its

¹Plato, *Gorgias.*, 452d-e. All Plato translations are taken from *Plato: Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997). Xenophon, *Anabasis* (Trans. C.L. Brownson. Revised by J. Dillery. Loeb Classical Library, 1998), 2.6.16.

²Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations.*, 183b36. Though the actual practices of the sophistic educational programs in ancient Athens are not fully known to us, there is common consensus among scholars that the model speech method played an important role (George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980], 26). The sophistic training programs, however, were not uniform (Plato. *Protagoras*, 318d-319a. Also see, Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*. Vol. 1. Second Edition. Trans. Gilbert Highet. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1945], 305). Still, when Aristotle mentions this method in the passage cited, he names Gorgias in particular as user of it. Even so, there remains some controversy as to the primacy it had in sophistic rhetorical training and Gorgias' program in particular. G.B. Kerford, for instance, believes it was mainly commonplaces, i.e. short formulations that could be inserted into any speech, and not whole speeches that Gorgias intended his students to learn by heart (*The Sophistic Movement* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 31).

³*Helen's* date of composition has been estimated to be between 415 to 393 BC (Edward Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999], 115). All quotations from the *Helen* are drawn from George Kennedy's revision of his own translation found in *Aristotle On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic discourse*. Second Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Sections of the text are marked by numbers, I use these numbers for in text citations (i.e. "H1").

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textual content, which is considered to have relevance to a general audience, including a contemporary one.⁴ As such, the fact that the *Helen's* content may have been intrinsically related to its design as a teaching tool, i.e a device ready-made for the realization of desired ends, has not been paid sufficient heed. Indeed, it is possible that the *Helen* survived precisely because it was frequently disseminated as a model speech, and moreover because it may have been considered exceptional or exemplary in this regard. In fact, the centerpiece of the speech, which is concerned with the power of persuasive speaking, and is therefore a self-reflexive discussion of the power that the speech actively demonstrates, can be interpreted as indicator of its architectonic status. For this reason, Gorgias' *Helen* is arguably the ideal source for examining the dynamics of learning through model speeches in general, as well as the particular dynamics of Gorgias' program in rhetoric. Furthermore, placing it within the context of its original pedagogical format, I forward, will help to shed light on the speech's meaning and purpose.

The model speech method, the evidence suggests, customarily began with students listening to their teacher perform a speech, after which they were provided with a written copy that they would memorize through oral recitation.⁵ The original performance likely furnished the student with an example of the oral rhythms, cadences, and tonalities, as well as the physical gestures, facial expressions, and general bodily bearing that suited the delivery of the words. Based on this educational format, it seems

⁴See, for example, Scott Consigny, *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), Bruce McComiskey, *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric* (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), and Robert Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric: Gorgias, Plato and their successors* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁵Plato's *Phaedrus* provides an example of this process: Phaedrus acquires a speech from the orator Lysis after hearing him perform it with the intention of memorizing it (228a-b).

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probable that the student of Gorgias did not acquire the *Helen's* lessons by studying the meaning of its words or the rules of its style, but by absorbing the mental and physical habits of its practice via an imitative oral performance that was patterned on Gorgias' original presentation. In so doing, the student conditioned his memory such that he could deploy his training with unconscious ease when performing orations in front of the Athenian Ecclesia.

The intention of this educational program, as Gorgias reportedly claimed, was to accustom his students to using a toolbox of rhetorical devices. These devices, he said, did not dictate the terms of their use, but were neutral instruments that could be put towards the ends decided upon by the student.⁶ For example, the student who memorized the *Helen* would be habituated to the techniques of arranging a speech, constructing a logical proof, and imbuing a statement with a crowd-pleasing poetic flourish. Once the student had absorbed these devices, he could utilize them during the composition and performance of a eulogy, legal defense, political oration, or improvised discourse.

In this essay, however, I will hypothesize about a more consequential outcome of the student's engagement with the *Helen* in which the absorption of these "neutral" instruments produced significant psychological effects that conditioned the nature of their use. This hypothesis will be built upon (1) the assumption that the *Helen* was not only a model for Gorgian style, but that its specific contents also contained important lessons. For instance, the speech contains a theory of persuasive speech and a theory of visual experience, which are two parts of a larger teaching about a structure of causality that propels human actions in the political realm. Furthermore, the self-reflexive nature of the speech reveals this structure of causality to be at work in the student's experience of

⁶Plato, *Gorgias*, 456 c-d. Also see, Consigny, *Gorgias*, 198-199.

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hearing or reciting the *Helen*. This structure is never formulated outright, but rather, it is outlined through a network of conceptual parallels built by Gorgias over the course of the speech. The narrative of Helen's transgression both provides the occasion for the disclosure of this structure and fleshes it out with affective content.⁷ An affective engagement with the narrative shell was, it seems, integral to acquiring the lessons of the text that pertain to this structure of causality. The hypothesis also (2) takes into consideration the possibility that the method of learning played an important role in producing the educational outcome tied to this lesson. Simply put, as students absorbed the formal elements of Gorgias' speech by reinforcing rhetorical habits through conditioning their memory, so too they absorbed its theoretical elements in the same way, transforming trains of thought into motor reflexes. Thus, the student was progressively attuned to the aforementioned structure of causality as they strengthened the mental habits relating to its logic. And, lastly, (3) this hypothetical outcome must be held within the context of practical training, since Gorgias was commissioned to introduce students to the techniques of persuasion, not to guide them towards disinterested knowledge. As such, the criterion for a successful education under Gorgias was the use-value of what students learned for political life. Therefore, the acquisition of any "theory" during the training was primarily intended to contribute to the gaining of political power.

It is the aim of this essay to unearth the *Helen's* lesson about causality and the dynamics of the education process related to its acquisition. This will be accomplished through an analysis of the *Helen's* contents and style framed by the preceding

⁷As Mario Unterstiener puts it, in Gorgias' work, such as the *Helen*, "the harmony of speculation is embodied in the forms of expression: these forms endow the harmony of speculative theories with palpitating life and consequently with absolute validity" (*The Sophists*. Trans. Kathleen Freeman. [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954], 140).

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suppositions about the importance of the training method. Gorgias' other extant works, such as his *Palamedes* and *On What is Not* or *On Nature*, and reported utterances from the doxographical tradition will also be taken into consideration in order to achieve this aim.⁸ I forward that the practice of memorizing the *Helen* helped Gorgias' student acquire a formula, a kind of incantation, which evoked a self-deception concerning the underlying causal structures of political life. This was designed to put the student in the optimal frame of mind to carry out a successful act of persuasion. The engine of this incantation, and thus the source of the deception, was the unleashed *erōs* of the student.

By way of an analysis of the first part of the *Helen*, in the first chapter, I explore the relation of Gorgias to his precursors, the poets, and how his training method seems to have adapted the educational practices that had been developed in the poetic tradition. In the second chapter, I begin to map out the causal structure through an analysis of the first three likely causes that Gorgias posits as potential reasons for Helen's action. In the third chapter, I turn to the final likely cause, *erōs*, and explore its foundational position within the causal structure. After completing the analysis of the structure, I reflect on its educational meaning and value for the student of Gorgias. The remainder of this introduction will establish the interpretative frame for the analysis and present some initial implications of Gorgias' use of Helen's transgression as his theme.

⁸For Gorgias' fragments and reported utterances, as well as the other sophists, I use the translation of the Diels-Kranz text found in *The Older Sophists*, Ed. Rosamond Kent Sprague. (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, South Carolina, 1972); for Gorgias' *Palamedes*, I use the same text; for Gorgias' *On What Is Not*, or *On Nature*, the original of which is lost but whose contents are known to us from paraphrasings by Sextus Empiricus and the anonymous author of an "Aristotelian" work, *Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias* (MXG), I use the translations by Robin Waterfield in *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 232-239.

Frame for the Analysis of the *Helen*

For those who partook in the intellectual life of fifth-century Athens, the idea that there was an antithetical relationship between human convention (*nomos*) and nature (*physis*) was often used as the conceptual schema for debates about justice, religion, and truth.⁹ Though the *Helen* does not enter into this debate directly, this schema, as we shall see, appears to undergird the perspective from which it proceeds. For this reason, it provides a convenient frame for interpreting the meaning of the *Helen* and its educational value within the intellectual atmosphere in which it was composed and given to students.

It is said that this conceptual division can be traced to the "discovery" of nature by the first philosophers, which in turn resulted in a "discovery" of convention.¹⁰ That is, when a measure for truth about cosmic phenomena was posited beyond the explanations provided by religion, traditional custom and law, including notions of class, property, and morality, could no longer be taken for granted as reflecting eternal standards, except in a qualified sense. Instead, such social regulations came to be seen as products of convention that were constructed through human art (*technē*) in order to justify the ephemeral and relative boundaries of social and political life. E.R. Dodds refers to this collection of traditional beliefs buttressing convention as the "inherited conglomerate," to emphasize its cultural ubiquity, authority, and character as a "mass of confusion."¹¹ In their attempts to look past these projections and explain the natural forces of causality without the distortions of conventional prejudices, the early philosophers made it their

⁹For a general summary of this antithesis and the role it played within sophistic circles see Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, 111-131, W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy. Vol 3. Fifth Century Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 55-131, and E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 182ff.

¹⁰The dynamics of this process and its implications on political thought are discussed by Leo Strauss in his *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 90ff.

¹¹Dodds, *The Greeks*, 180.

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task to critique and overcome the bulwark enabling the continued authority of this conglomerate: the poetic tradition, the source for education, of which Homer was the greatest representative.

Eric Havelock holds that the key function of Homer's poetry was to be a preservative mechanism for cultural conventions in a Greek world that was dependent on the oral transmission of knowledge. The metrical and formulaic construction of the poetry, he states, were parts of a mnemonic "technology" that allowed Homer's encyclopedic compendium of social conventions (*nomoi*) and ethics (*ethea*), as well as technical practices (*technai*), to be accurately preserved and passed on to the next generation.¹² To ensure this occurred, the community entered into an "unconscious conspiracy" with itself by cultivating the "living memory" of each individual through the constant recitation and experience of Homeric poetry in private and public settings.¹³ The musicality of the poetry engaged the entire nervous systems of the reciters and listeners, which bolstered conventional behaviors by influencing unconscious muscle memory and the corresponding language habits, which, ultimately, served to condition habits of thought and judgment.¹⁴ Such was the way, according to Havelock, that Homeric poetry and its poetic descendants subtly regulated social life and the norms and possibilities of political speech and action.

It is not unwarranted to regard Havelock's analysis as replicating the insights stemming from the pre-Socratic "discovery."¹⁵ Prior to this discovery, the world of Homer depicted human affairs as being hedged in by cosmic forces, which, as Werner

¹²Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), 43.

¹³*Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 142, 145, 148-155.

¹⁵Indeed, the sophists thought of Homer as an encyclopedia of technical knowledge (Jaeger, *Paideia*, 36).

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Jaeger claims, ensured that the ethical boundaries of conventional life were seen as fundamentally related to "laws of Being."¹⁶ When the realm of nature was distinguished from that of convention, it became possible to objectify conventional life and perceive the perpetual influence of poetry at its roots; the "unconscious conspiracy" became conscious and the poetic gears that powered this "conspiracy" came into view. As a result, the ethical boundaries that were formerly grounded by poetic accounts of the cosmos were detached from their ontological import and began to appear elastic. While nature remained beyond the control of human design, the collection of ethical boundaries, i.e. convention, was always already made by humans and thus ripe for re-making. The teachers associated with the sophistic enlightenment made this malleable field their own.

The objectification of convention meant that a youth's education did not have to merely consist of an unconscious inculcation in the ways of political life and virtuous action through poetry and tradition, but could also include a consideration of how these mechanisms operated.¹⁷ To put one's hands on these mechanisms was to grasp the piping underneath the wellsprings of political decision-making. As a considered reflection upon the use of language to influence others in a way that poetry had done only half-consciously, the art of rhetoric was being formulated to fulfill this function.¹⁸ With the

¹⁶Jaeger, *Paideia*, 51.

¹⁷"It is the greatest part of a man's education," Plato has Protagoras say in his *Protagoras*, "to be skilled in the matter of verses, that is, to be able to understand in the utterances of the poets what has been rightly and what wrongly composed, and to know how to distinguish them and to account for them when questioned" (338e-339a). This results in the student having the ability to reflect upon materials that they have absorbed by habit in their early youth and critique them, which will allow them to elegantly argue an interpretation while utilizing both the training in speaking garnered from the practice of poetic recitation and the knowledge of models for virtue. Potential evidence of Protagoras' own critiques of Homeric literature can be found at DK80A30. Also see Kerford for more evidence of how critiques of literature were of central interest to the sophists (*The Sophistic Movement*, 40-41).

¹⁸For a compelling account of rhetoric's early development, which takes into account the influence of the poetic and logographic traditions, as well as the part that geographical and political factors played, see Richard Leo Enos, *Greek rhetoric Before Aristotle* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1993). For an alternate account of rhetoric's development, which characterizes the discipline of rhetoric

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ascendancy of democracy in Athens, in parallel to the increasing perception of established hierarchies as conventional or arbitrary, this newly formulated power provided the apparent means of the aristocratic class for retaining control of the political sphere.¹⁹

For his part, Gorgias contributed to the development of this practice in significant ways.²⁰ The stylistic innovation for which he would become most famous was the introduction of poetic words and phrasings into the prose speeches of civic oratory.²¹ This importation, it is fair to speculate, made it possible to operationalize the psychological responses inherent to poetic experience for the sake of manipulating political judgments.

On a practical level, many of Gorgias' students probably sought to acquire the art of persuasion so that they could give a convincing legal defense. Others perhaps wanted to give stirring speeches during state funerals. Still others may have simply wished to construct beautiful sounding speeches that would bring them honour as prose stylists. Whatever their motivations, students would have considered that once they had acquired the power of persuasive speech, they would be able to adapt it to any circumstance.

as a product of the formalization brought about by Plato and Aristotle, see Thomas Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) and Schiappa, *The Beginning of Rhetorical Theory*, who says that the early speech practices that came to be called "rhetoric" were in a "predisciplinary" state that lacked the codification necessary for it to be defined as stable discipline (14-29).

¹⁹For more on this see John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 14ff.

²⁰While ancient accounts tend to give Gorgias a prime place in the history of the development of rhetoric, modern commentators have attributed varying degrees of importance to Gorgias' contributions. George Kennedy thinks that his reputation was due more his "striking personality" than anything he added to the actual practice of rhetoric (*The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963], 62). Enos, on the other hand, thinks Gorgias' contributions were significant enough that he could be called, if not the father of rhetoric, than, at least, the "father" of the Sicilian Sophistic (*Greek Rhetoric*, 74).

²¹DK82A1, A2, A4.

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This is because these applications were subsidiary expressions of rhetoric's highest capacity, which was understood as the power to shape the ground upon which these various types of speech were delivered. Instead of merely giving a legal defense for oneself within the context of given laws, the power attained through the use of rhetoric allowed for the laws themselves to be changed. In other words, changing the "rules of the game" through manipulating the underlying supports for convention by using poetic means to play upon habituated affective responses engendered by the constant experience of poetry appeared to be a more effective way of achieving one's aim than merely playing within the rules that were already established.²² The elasticity of law in democratic Athens, so well-attested in the plays of Aristophanes, offered a ripe field for these acts of manipulation.

Plato has Gorgias characterize rhetoric as the most powerful *technē* because it subordinates all other *technai* to itself.²³ Similarly, in Plato's *Philebus*, Gorgias is reported to have said that the art of persuasion surpasses all other *technai* in power

²² This, at any rate, is the picture Plato has given us in his *Gorgias*. After Gorgias describes the immense power of the skills he promises to teach, he attempts to guard himself against any accusation that he fosters a dangerous use of these skills by saying that rhetoric is just like "any other competitive skill" such as boxing and military combat (456c-d). It is, in other words, designed to be used with the boundaries of certain context, which, he says, constitutes its "just" use. If students use these skills outside of these boundaries, as when boxer beats his parents, it constitutes an "unjust use" and the teacher of these skills cannot be blamed (457a).

Socrates uses these claims as a basis for drawing Gorgias into contradiction. He asks him if he passes along knowledge of justice and injustice to his students along with persuasive techniques (459d-e). Gorgias casually responds in the affirmative, which allows Socrates to contend that if his students had gained this knowledge they would not act unjustly, for "just" uses would be written into the practice of the art (460a-4561b). Gorgias does not question this contention and later in the dialogue, Callicles points out why: Gorgias was deferring "to human laws [*nomoi*]," as opposed to the laws of nature (482d). Gorgias, Callicles goes on, was implicitly operating with such a distinction in mind, but was too ashamed to call Socrates out on his tactics. If this observation is correct (Gorgias does not affirm or deny it), it clarifies the terms on which Gorgias was discussing the nature of rhetoric and its corresponding "knowledge" of justice and injustice—when he says that he will teach his students about "justice," he is saying that he will teach his students about convention. Yet, at the same time, to practice rhetoric is to manipulate conventional life, which is to say that it manipulates the ground for conventional "justice" (449a, 449e, 454b). Rhetoric, therefore, has the power to establish the rules of the game in which it is used.

²³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 456b.

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because it garners their willing enslavement.²⁴ If *technē* builds and maintains convention, then persuasive speech, as the master of all *technai*, is the master builder and guide for conventional structures. It is to this capacity that Gorgias may ultimately be referring when, in the *Helen*, he calls speech "a powerful lord that with the smallest and most invisible body accomplishes most godlike works" (H8). If the gods that embodied the "laws of Being" had formerly hedged in the boundaries of conventional life, the practice of persuasive speech was positioned to usurp their throne. And the *Helen*, in its status as a teaching tool in Gorgias' program, was the educational vessel for this power.

Helen as Theme

Gorgias' ostensible aim in the *Helen* is to persuade his audience that Helen of Troy deserves to be freed from the blame that she incurred for her infamous marital transgression. He proposes to accomplish this by adding logic (*logismos*) to his speech (H2). His "logical" method consists of listing the four likely causes behind her action—the gods, physical force, persuasion, and desire—and then detailing the nature of the power that inheres within each of these causes, thus proving that her transgression was the outcome of necessity and not the consequence of her free choice. By dispelling the ignorance surrounding these causes and thereby exonerating Helen of blame, Gorgias aims to restore to her the praiseworthiness that he claims she is rightfully due.

Over the course of the centuries preceding the sophistic enlightenment, there appears to have been a shift in the interpretation of traditional tales from a mythic

²⁴Plato, *Philebus*, 58a-b.

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understanding to a heroic one and then to a historical one.²⁵ The religious experience rooted in the dark age was amalgamated with an account of the warlike aristocratic morality of *aretē*, which then gave way to the idea that such tales, as they appeared in Homer for instance, were primarily a historical record. Of course, these modes of understanding were not discrete phases; vestiges of the earlier modes were inextricably embedded in the tales and remained powerful. In explaining the relevance of this process to the formation of the inherited conglomerate, Dodds says, "a new belief pattern very seldom effaces completely the pattern that was there before: either the old lives on as an element in the new—sometimes an unconfessed and half-unconscious element—or else the two persist side by side, logically incompatible, but contemporaneously."²⁶

Gorgias treats Helen's infidelity as a matter of historical interest, which falls in line with the contemporaneous sophistic tendency to interpret the epics as human dramas rather than cosmic ones. This perspective allows him to demonstrate an argument that deals with actual events, which also makes its form superficially applicable to a legal defense. Although he uses this as his starting point and the ostensible frame for his entire discourse, he nevertheless also delves into the rich history of the ways in which the story of Helen was experienced through Homeric poetry. This allows Gorgias to dig into the unconscious mechanisms embedded within the Helen myth. In doing so, Gorgias unearths the ideal character of Helen, the semi-divine object of *erōs*. This subtle narrative archeology, I argue, is what draws the student toward an absorption of the underlying causal structure that, in Gorgias' program, has adapted elements of, and ultimately supplanted, a mythical cosmology.

²⁵For more on this progression with regards to Helen, see Linda Lee Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1976).

²⁶Dodds, *The Greeks*, 179.

Chapter 1: Poetic Roots

This chapter is concerned with the pedagogical effects that the student of Gorgias experienced when he memorized the opening sections of the *Helen*. The student would have followed the pattern of rhetorical performance given in Gorgias' original presentation, thereby performing a kind of reenactment of it, and in the process he would have once again submitted himself to Gorgias' persuasive techniques. But because the student was the motive agent behind this persuasion, the passive submission experienced during Gorgias' presentation became an active practice of self-persuasion in which the student manipulated his soul in accordance with Gorgias' rhetorical aim. In the opening of the *Helen*, Gorgias is concerned with determining both the object of his negative project, i.e. the shroud of blame that covers Helen, as well as the affirmative upshot of that project, i.e. the recognition of that which is praiseworthy about her. When coupled with the process of self-persuasion, this aim amounts to the student dismantling the inherited *doxa* that was constituted according to the determinations of convention and recovering a suppressed dimension of the Helen figure.

Accompanying the analysis will be an account of the way that the training method was built upon ground prepared by the tradition of poetic education. Due to the conditioning provided by such education, the learning process under Gorgias would proceed efficiently as the student would be less prone to the resistance that ordinarily attends the learning of new learning habits. First, by way of creating a poetic experience through his initial presentation, Gorgias established the frame through which the power of the common *doxa* could be bracketed and dismantled. Second, by adapting the practices of memorization from poetic education, Gorgias fostered the student's

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internalization of the Helen symbol such that it would remain a potent force for overcoming the unconscious pull of conventional judgments that may have impeded his student's efforts to procure influence.

The *Helen* is often categorized as an *epidiexis* (a display piece) that was possibly used by Gorgias to demonstrate his skills and thereby attract students.²⁷ Gorgias' performance of the *Helen* thus first appeared to the student as a kind of advertisement of the skills they could acquire. The speech's direct glorification of the power of persuasion surely fed into this purpose. But the greatest potency of the demonstration resided in the fact that the student would experience Gorgias' power of persuasion directly by having it be applied to himself. The fact that the student was tacitly *convinced* by Gorgias' performance that studying with Gorgias could be beneficial was itself evidence that Gorgias' rhetoric was effective. Furthermore, as we shall explore in the following section, the student allowing himself to be persuaded was the first step of the training program, which established a condition that pervaded the rest of the training process.

1.1 The Poetic Nature of the Initial Presentation

It is reported that when Gorgias performed his speeches, he wore the purple

²⁷For interpretations of the *Helen* as an *epideitic* showpiece see, for instance, Charles Segal, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. Vol. 66, (1962):100, and John Robinson, "On Gorgias," *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*. Ed. E.N. Lee, P.D. Mourelatos, R.M. Rorty. (The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., 1973): 53. As Cole and Schiappa point out, however, this formal categorization is likely a product of the later formalization of rhetoric (Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 117, Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric*, 89). Still, this position does not preclude the possibility it was used as an advertisement. At the beginning of Plato's *Gorgias*, it appears that Socrates and Chaerephon arrive following the presentation of one of these advertisements (447a). Perhaps, we might imagine, it was the *Helen*.

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robes of the Homeric rhapsode.²⁸ This, Kerford says, "emphasize[d] [his] continuation of the [educational] function of poets in earlier days."²⁹ Wearing these robes, however, would have functioned as more than a mere symbolic gesture. Later in the *Helen*, Gorgias details the way in which visual cues establish expectations by eliciting an affective reflex. This will be addressed more fully in Chapter 3, but at present it suffices to state that Gorgias understood that by tapping into unconscious habits of visual association, such as that between purple robes and an experience of poetry, he would gain the power to orient unconscious behaviour. Beyond merely comprehending that Gorgias was associating himself with the poetic tradition by wearing these robes, the audience was unconsciously conditioned to expect a poetic experience and, accordingly, was primed to interpret Gorgias' oration as such.

Gorgias' style of speech and performance played into this expectation. As noted in the introduction, the innovation for which Gorgias would become famous was his importation of poetic words and phrasings into prose speeches. Diodorus remarked that the effect of these poetic elements in Gorgias' presentations "stunned" (*exēplēxe*) his audiences.³⁰ As Schiappa points out, *exēplēxe* is the same word that Plato uses to describe the effect of the rhapsodes upon their audiences.³¹ Thus, Gorgias' trademark poetic-prose style, it seems, had the effect of bringing about the kind of psychological response that was generated by an experience of Homeric poetry.

Using Homer's description of Odysseus' *apologoi* to the Phaiakians as a clue,

²⁸DK82A9.

²⁹Kerford, *The Sophistic Movement*, 29.

³⁰DK82A4.

³¹Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 101. Cf., Plato, *Ion*, 535b2.

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S.E Basset hypothesizes that Homer conceived his own poetry as a kind of "spell."³² The effect of this "spell," Basset goes on, was to make audiences "forget the real world about them and for the nonce enter a new and equally real world."³³ Using this as a thread, it is possible to say that by preparing the contextual ground through the use of the robes and extending the *exeplēxe* of rhapsodic performances to his speeches, Gorgias adapted the formal features of the Homeric "spell" that made his audience bracket the conventional world that regulated everyday life and temporarily enter a world of his making. Thus, the audience would be already accustomed to willingly experiencing the drama of Gorgias' presentation as "real." Though Gorgias' defense of Helen may not have been meant in earnest, it is fair to speculate that the audience would have been prepared to accept its dramatic stakes in order to feel the full force of the performance for the sake of greater pleasure.

In an utterance reported by Plutarch, Gorgias reflects on how a submission to the poetic "spell," this time in the context of tragic drama, is predicated on a reversal of the common association between wisdom and deception. Tragedy, he says, produces "a deception... in which the deceiver is more justly esteemed than the nondeceiver and the deceived is wiser than the undeceived."³⁴ In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche also reflects upon this phenomenon of deception, citing the satyr chorus as that which made it possible. The chorus, Nietzsche says, worked to excite the affects of the spectators to such a degree that they created a "living wall against the assaults of reality," which is to

³²Samuel Basset, *The Poetry of Homer* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003), 11. Cf. Homer, *Odyssey*. II.334;13.2.

³³Basset, *The Poetry of Homer*, 11. Also see the introduction to this work by Bruce Heiden, XIXff.

³⁴DK82B23. Cole clarifies the meaning of this utterance by saying it in another way: "The dramatist was...pledged to do his best to deceive the audience into thinking—for the duration of the performance—that they were seeing and hearing what they could never have seen or heard; and the audience was similarly pledged not to resist this effort at deception" (*Origins of Rhetoric*, 38).

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say the "reality" of conventional experience (in Nietzsche's language, the reality of the "cultured man").³⁵ Having given themselves over to this affective frenzy, "when the tragic hero appeared on the stage, [the audience] did not see the awkwardly masked human being but rather a visionary figure, born as it were from their own rapture."³⁶ According to Nietzsche, by drumming up a sufficient affective fervor, the satyr chorus elicited a feeling from the audience that overcame their basic experience of the theatrical artifice and affirmed the vision presented on the stage, i.e. the god or hero, as "real."

This capacity of tragedy, and poetry in general, is what Plato attacks in Book X of his *Republic*. Therein Socrates details the nature of the devices by which the poets retained the reputation for knowledge that gave them authority as educators. The use of these devices culminated in the capacity of tragedy to bring about a deception. The poet has "knowledge" about the way things appear—their "colors and shapes"—that he has gleaned from his perspective as a common observer.³⁷ His talent resides in his ability to recreate this appearance by structuring "names and phrases" with "meter, rhythm, and harmony."³⁸ Though the conscious mind knows that the poet is creating an appearance, the poet's tools work upon the unconscious affective reactions such that the deception gains a temporary reality. As a result, "trust" (*pistis*) in the knowledge of the poet is generated. Socrates also characterizes this power as a kind of "spell" when he says that it "falls nothing short of wizardry."³⁹

If we extend Gorgias' reflection to encompass the educational function of

³⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy in Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), 61.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 66.

³⁷Plato, *Republic*, 601a.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 601a.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 602d.

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tragedy and poetry in general, and take into consideration the accounts of Plato (while, for the time being, ignoring his pejorative conclusion) and Nietzsche, we find an interesting implication. Since the educational experience of tragedy depends on the success of poetry to usher in the experience of another world, not only is the spectator who is deceived "wiser" than one who is not by virtue of his capacity to be deceived, but it is moreover only through this deception that he will be able to experience and thereby acquire the "wisdom" of the tragedy. Along these lines, Nietzsche says that the ultimate effect of the satyr chorus' facilitation of deception through the bracketing of conventional life is that it allowed "a voice of wisdom at the heart of nature" to be proclaimed.⁴⁰ As with Homeric poetry, without a submission to Gorgias' poetic "spell" and the concomitant temporary relief from convention, the educational content of his orations could not be adequately grasped. The question that pertains to Plato's critique, i.e. whether or not the "wisdom" of the *Helen* is intended to pertain to "reality" or "wisdom at the heart of nature," will be approached in Chapter 3. For now, we will merely point out that Gorgias' appropriation of a poetic apparatus entailed that an entrance into his educational program required a submission to the "spell" of his rhetoric, i.e. its deception, and thus involvement with the drama of his speech as "real," the process of which potentially promised the acquisition of "wisdom."

If the student did indeed engage in an imitative reenactment, it is possible to hypothesize that the poetic context that was established in Gorgias' initial performance would reverberate throughout the entire training process. This is to say that when the student recited the speech he reactivated the original "spell" cast by Gorgias. Through this reactivation the student would learn how to bracket the "reality" of the conventional

⁴⁰Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 61.

world and enter the world created by Gorgias' speech, which for the duration of the recitation would be experienced as "real." Given that Gorgias placed himself within the educational tradition of the rhapsodes,⁴¹ what is said by the titular rhapsode of Plato's *Ion* provides us with an clue about the nature of this process: during a performance of Homer, Ion says, even the rhapsode himself believes that he is dwelling in the setting that he is describing.⁴² While Gorgias' students were learning the mechanics of casting spells over others, they were first of all learning how to cast spells over themselves, or less poetically speaking, they were learning the practice of self-deception.

1.2 The Introduction of the *Helen*

1.2.1 The *Archē*

As was detailed in the above section, Gorgias used a variety of formal techniques to establish a poetic context. It is the contents of the particular speech, however, that most significantly determines how the world of the poetic experience is constructed. The opening of the *Helen* provides a pattern for this construction. This pattern consists of a number of commonplaces that serve to amplify the speech's initial presence, characterize the speaker's standpoint according to ethical norms, establish the speaker's authority, and introduce the subject he has marked out for praise or defense within the context of conventional expectations. The cumulative effect of these commonplaces increases the import of Gorgias' discourse by characterizing it as playing a role in shaping and maintaining of the order of the city.

⁴¹Schiappa finds this element of Gorgias so telling that he categorizes Gorgias as a "prose rhapsode" (*The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 101)

⁴²So, for instance, when the rhapsode is recounting a frightening episode, his heart beats quickly as if he himself were frightened (Plato, *Ion*, 535c).

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That the question of order will be of significance in the *Helen* is indicated by the fact that Gorgias opens the speech with the word *kosmos*, which can be translated as "order" or "ornament." Though this is the only time it appears in the text, as the first term it acts as the initial rung in the conceptual scaffolding of the piece. It is the speech's *archē*, the cause that sets the rest in motion and to which everything that follows will stand in reference.

The term, however, is not explicitly defined by Gorgias. Rather, it is used as if its meaning has already been established. This leaves Gorgias room to subtly appropriate conventional meanings and reshape them according to his determinations so that his speech appears to flow out of the vagaries of common understanding. Yet, at the same time, in the opening sentence, through the indication of various manifestations of *kosmos*, a calibration of possible meanings of the term occurs. "To a city," Gorgias says, "[a *kosmos*] is a goodly army and to a body beauty and to a soul wisdom and to an action virtue and to speech truth [*alētheia*], but their opposites are unbecoming [*akosmos*]" (H1). With the elaboration of each particular *kosmos* throughout the speech, Gorgias illuminates the word's meaning. As such, only by the end of the speech does this meaning become fully apparent. Furthermore, as *alētheia* is indicated to be the *kosmos* of speech, and thus the *kosmos* pertaining to the immediate experience of Gorgias' recitation, the fleshing out of the other *kosmoi* will serve to disclose the nature of *alētheia* as it relates to its immediate manifestation in the form of Gorgias' speech.

Gorgias goes on to say that "man and women and speech and deed and city and object should be honoured with praise if praiseworthy, but on the unworthy blame should be laid" (H1). The measure of merit for this praise and blame is presumably the degree to

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which each of these things embodies their respective *kosmoi* or *akosmoi*. The success of this evaluative process, it seems, depends on the judges having wisdom and virtue, for, Gorgias says, "it is equal error [*hamartia*] and ignorance [*amathia*] to blame the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy" (H1). Gorgias appears to be indicating that those doing the praising and blaming are themselves subject to praise and blame. Their *akosmos* is a result of their inability or refusal to correctly distinguish *kosmos* and *akosmos*, and their *speech* should be blamed as it lacks *alētheia*, a speech's *kosmos*. These standards determine the statement that follows: "It is the function of a single speaker both to prove the needful rightly and to disprove the wrongly spoken" (H1). Gorgias thus characterizes himself as being categorically determined by the conventions that he has just established as the measures for his speech. According to his own standards, if the *kosmos* of a thing is indeed the measure used for praise, then the degree to which his speech manifests *alētheia* will determine whether it should be accorded praise or blame.

1.2.2 The Doxification of the Poetic Experience

Gorgias declares his purpose in the *Helen* to be to "refute those who rebuke Helen, a women about whom there is univocal and unanimous [*homophōnos kai homopsuchos*] testimony among those who have believed [*pistis*] the poets and whose ill-omened name has become a memorial of disasters" (H2). Unlike other "rationalists" of his time, Gorgias will not attempt to discredit the reliability of the poets by attacking the inclusion of fantastical elements in their stories or their anthropomorphic depictions of the gods. Nor does he attempt to defend Helen by offering an alternate narrative, as

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Stesichorus does in his tale that has not Helen but a likeness of her going to Troy.⁴³ Rather, Gorgias maintains the poetic consistency of Helen's character and circumstances along with the mythic frame in which they play out. As he says, Gorgias does not aim to refute a particular poet or work, but rather intends to overturn the popular consensus about Helen's guilt that is rooted in a number of poetic experiences. Gorgias' description of his objective tacitly identifies the outlines of a process by which particular and unique poetic experiences are collapsed into a common *doxa*. The trust (*pistis*) generated by the poets through the use of their talents for deception, as outlined above, is the prerequisite of this process.

A characteristic of the Homeric texts that undoubtedly contributed to their acceptance as "trustworthy" is the complexity of their characters. Such complexity is exemplified in Homer's depiction of Helen, whose characterization remains ambivalent, if not sympathetic. If Helen's characterization lacked this complexity, the full measure of her story's pathos, which discloses life to be at the whim of chance and necessity, could not be achieved. Along with this, such complexity helps to maintain the "reality" of the Homeric world in that it reflects the complexity of human experience.

However, once the "spell" of Homeric poetry, or the ecstasies of tragedy, come to an end, the audience is thrown back upon the "realities" of the conventional world that had been bracketed for the duration of the performance. The figure of Helen, who had been brought to life with all the complexity of a "real" person, is subsumed back into her iconic status, which merges each particular poetic depiction into a general characterization. This characterization is in turn merged back into what is perhaps the original mythic iteration, the tale of Pandora, out of which Helen gains her temporary

⁴³For Stesichorus' narrative, see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 243a, and Plato, *Republic*, 586c.

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definition in each performance.⁴⁴ As Gorgias says later in the speech, it is very difficult to remember the past, and, of course, this also holds true for the finer points of poetic experiences. As a result, he says, we must take a *doxa* as our guide (H11). In the case of Helen, the *doxa* that is furnished emerges from the ground of convention, which appropriates particular experiences for the sake of maintain order. Helen, who in her poetic "reality" discloses the human condition, is transformed into a cultural currency, a *doxa*, which serves the exigencies of political "reality," the "reality" of Nietzsche's "cultured man."

One of the results of poetic education was that it familiarized youths with a pool of common reference points that could be used in public discourse. Homer, Hesiod, and other poets were regularly cited as authorities for historical facts, ethical standards, and religious truths in contexts ranging from everyday conversation to legal defenses and political deliberation. Ultimately, the words that were uttered by particular characters with particular points of view were lifted from their context to provide the language that suited the needs of the public discourse. As the threads of such such discourse, these words united the political body into one voice (*homophōnos*) that continually reinforced the strength of mass mind (*homopsuchos*), i.e. convention, as it existed in each citizen. The residual memories of poetry then take the form of preventative opinions and Helen becomes a symbol that elicits a No-saying reflex. Her "name" becomes a cue for "remembering the disaster" that her actions brought about (H2). Out of the complex portraits of Helen given in poetic works, which had the power to elicit feelings of pity and desire along with fear and blame, Helen's transgression is transformed into a lesson

⁴⁴For more on Helen's origins in myth, see Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 13.

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about the dangers of adultery, an edifying parable about what happens when the first unit of political society, the *oikos*, is destroyed, and a warning and example for those who do not wish to be shamed. To reiterate, it is this No-saying symbol of shame, this cultural currency enmeshed in the social fabric, that is the object of Gorgias' refutation, and not the poetic accounts themselves.

In Athens, shame was, of course, used as a means for social control.⁴⁵ Fear of public opinion deterred unlawful acts and unseemly behavior. By cultivating popular sentiment, praise and blame could be used to lay the groundwork of justification for promotion or punishment. They were the mechanisms that gave a voice to a collective affirmation or negation about things that appeared on the political stage. By taking on the deeply-rooted blame of Helen as his subject, Gorgias is demonstrating a method of manipulating the sub-structures of affirmation and negation that order collective political judgments. Indeed, Gorgias seems to have put great stock in the power of praise and blame to control large groups of people. His student Proxenus of Boeotia even thought he could command his army solely through such means.⁴⁶

But in order to manipulate these structures, the student would first have to extract himself from their influence. This means that the structures that inhere within the student's habituated judgments would themselves need to be manipulated. As the student identified this preventative *doxa* through recitation, he would begin the process of dismantling the habituated structure of negation triggered by the figure of Helen. This process would further be tied to the student's act of "freeing" Helen from opprobrium through recitation of the speech, resulting in the extraction of a dimension of the figure

⁴⁵Cf. Dodds, *The Greeks*, 28ff.

⁴⁶Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 2.6.16.

that had been covered over by the process of doxification. The student would thus actively take part in freeing himself from the fetters of convention that had been instilled from youth.

1.2.3 Helen's Power

Having identified the object of his negative project, the second part of the opening section is concerned with an elaboration of his positive project, which takes the form of a description of Helen's praiseworthy qualities. It is these qualities that will orient the student's training. Gorgias first establishes the praiseworthiness of Helen through associative logic, which works to amplify her most laudable quality, her beauty. Recalling Gorgias' opening phrase, beauty constitutes the *kosmos* of a body. Therefore, it is possible to say that as Helen was mythologized as the most beautiful women, her beauty reflects perfection of a *kosmos*. Gorgias says:

Now that by nature and birth the woman who is the subject of this speech was preeminent among preeminent men and women, this is not unclear [*adēlon*], not even to a few; for it is clear [*dēlon*] Leda was her mother, while as a father she in fact had a god, though allegedly a mortal, the latter Tyndareus, the former Zeus; and of these the one seemed her father because he was, and the other was disproved because he was only said to be; and one was the greatest of men, the other lord of all. Born from such parents, she possessed godlike beauty [*isotheon kallos*], which getting and not forgetting she preserved (H3-H4).

Gorgias indicates here that Helen's power was not only a product of her divine lineage, but the proof of it. That is, the visual experience of her "godlike beauty" was so powerful that none who saw her could deny her divine origins. Furthermore, the "reality" of her divinity was a product of the affect it elicited. If Tyndareus tried to explain that he

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was in fact her father, this explanation was overpowered by a direct encounter with Helen's visual appearance—seeing, in other words, was believing. In this case, sight is privileged over speech as a way of gaining access to the "truth," even if the former includes a "rational" explanation.

Emphasizing the effectiveness of this visual power, Gorgias says,

On many did she work the greatest passion of love [*epithumias erōtos eneirgasato*], and by one body [*sōmati*] she brought together many bodies [*sōmata*] of men greatly minded for great deeds. Some had greatness of wealth, some had glory of ancient noblesse, some the vigor of personal prowess, some the power of acquired knowledge (H4).

This part of the speech refers to the competition in which suitors vied for Helen's hand in marriage. Gorgias indicates that Helen's beauty oriented men who were defined by different qualities and perspectives toward achieving the same end. "All came," he goes on, "because of a passion that loved conquest and a love of honor that was unconquered" (H4). The *erōs* she elicited, in other words, both fed into the desire of these men to achieve superiority over fellow combatants and drew them together in a shared purpose.

It was this same power of Helen, of course, that led to the Trojan War. With Helen as the object of orientation that charged men with an aggressive *erōs*, the disparate Achaeans were mobilized as a united military unit, which was led by heroes seeking to gain honour and fame from the recognition of their martial prowess and superiority. This allowed Greek warriors to establish a community through the synchronization of desire.⁴⁷ As Menelaus says in a defense of Helen in Euripides' *Andromache*:

Poor Helen had a time of it, not choosing

⁴⁷Cf. Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 21ff.

But chosen by the gods to exalt her country.
For innocent before of arms and battles
Greece grew to manhood then. Experience, travel—
They are an education in themselves.⁴⁸

Thus, the power of Helen's appearance, her *kosmos*, is principally characterized by its ability to elicit an erotic affect that affirms the "reality" of her divinity and, at the same time, has the power to draw many bodies seeking honour and fame into a united entity striving for a single goal.

1.3 The Operationalization of Helen's Power

1.3.1 Symmetry

With his description of Helen's power, Gorgias touches upon the hallmarks of aristocratic morality that are expressed in Homer's *Illiad* and evident in Greek ethics down to Aristotle and his magnanimous man. The heroes of Homer strove to achieve the ideal of excellence (*aretē*), which would garner them honour and fame. This desire was reflective of a drive, Werner Jaeger says, that stood behind the Hellenic spirit as a whole, which was, as Aristotle phrases it, to "take possession of the beautiful."⁴⁹ To attain *aretē* was to make the ideal part of oneself, to possess it, and ultimately to become a manifestation of it. As the object around which this striving coalesced, the Helen of the epics was the literal manifestation of this goal as she possessed to perfection that which was considered to be the highest of ideal of womanly *aretē*, physical beauty.⁵⁰

The conditioning and cultivation of this drive through the listening to and reading of poetry made up an important part of a youth's early education in Gorgias' time. As

⁴⁸Euripides, *Andromache*, 680.

⁴⁹Jaeger, *Paideia*, 13.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 22.

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Protagoras says in the Platonic dialogue, after being habituated to the basic distinctions between right and wrong by their parents, a child would read the words of the poets, which contained tales of "ancient, famous men," and by memorizing and reciting these words the youth would be driven to "imitate or emulate and desire to become like them."⁵¹ The effects of this education are evident in the decision of Proxenus to train with Gorgias: as Xenophon reports, from a young age he desired to do "great things."⁵²

The engine behind this desire for greatness, says Jaeger, was the "idealizing tendency" derived from the tradition of heroic balladry.⁵³ The gears of this idealization engine were formal mechanics of the poetry: epithets that conferred dignity, high expression that purified the baser aspects of reality of their squalor, and meter that ordered the chaotic events of war and suffering. These poetic mechanics transfigured everything they touched into something beautiful. It seems, then, that this power of idealization tapped into that same impulse towards beauty that drove the heroes in the epics; the heroes strove towards attaining an ideal of *aretē* and, through experiencing the singer's idealizations, the desire of the heroes was replicated in the audience. Thus, it can be said that an important educational virtue of the Homeric "idealizing tendency" was that it stoked and honed the natural disposition towards the beautiful, which was objectified in the epics in the form of heroic deeds. As such, the experience of Homer's words was as important as—and intimately connected to—the content that was disclosed by them.

Though Gorgias' stylistic novelties would come to be seen in later times as overly formal and artificial, when they were presented by Gorgias himself they were very well

⁵¹Plato. *Protagoras*, 326a.

⁵²Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 2.6.16.

⁵³Jaeger, *Paideia*, 43.

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received.⁵⁴ Perhaps the most notable element of Gorgias' style is the symmetry of his individual formulations. Indeed, Cicero says that Gorgias was the first orator to consistently aim at achieving such symmetry.⁵⁵ This symmetry is achieved through the use of parallel constructions, rhymed endings, the repetition of words, assonance, alliteration, antithesis, and the creation of successive clauses with an equal number of syllables.⁵⁶ All his poetic importations into oratory thus contribute to this overarching stylistic trademark. While Gorgias' speeches do not have meter and, as such, must be defined as prose, this symmetry could be said to function as a kind of replacement meter that orders the content of the discourse in a new but recognizable fashion.

Furthermore, this symmetry is not only a feature of each individual formulation, but also of each larger section and of the speech as a whole. For example, the *Helen* displays a "ring composition," a style of arrangement in which the beginning and end of the discourse contain the same idea, which also may have been derived from poetic tradition.⁵⁷ The full extent of this symmetry as it pertains to the whole will be further detailed in Chapter 3, but for now it will suffice to recognize that the "poetic beauty" of *Helen* is located in the symmetrical arrangement of its individual parts and how those individual parts are arranged within the symmetry of the whole.

The metaphor that likens the parts of a speech to the parts of a human body, which was well established by the Hellenistic and Roman periods, likely originated

⁵⁴For a catalog of ancient and modern criticisms of Gorgias' style see Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 95-98.

⁵⁵DK82A32.

⁵⁶For a more comprehensive catalogue of these stylistic devices see, Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 87. The most important of these devices is generally agreed to be his use of antithesis (Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion*, 65-66). On its importance for Gorgias' conceptual foundation, see Enos, *Greek Rhetoric*, 76.

⁵⁷Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 107-108. Also see Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion*, 5-12.

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during the first developments of rhetoric.⁵⁸ This analogy emphasizes the necessity of each part of the speech playing its particular role in the functioning of the whole. The most perfectly arranged speech, then, is like the perfect body. To put it another way, the most perfectly proportional speech, in which symmetry is an important feature, is like the most perfectly proportional, and symmetrical, human body.

Following this metaphor, we can consider the opening of Gorgias' speech as drawing out a direct relation between the formal elements of the speech itself and the Helen figure. Furthermore, whereas meter tends to engross a listener with its rhythm and thus with the movement of time, prose symmetry manifests a distinct sense of spatial order, albeit in the abstract. That is to say, it engenders a quasi-visual sense of the speech's arrangement much like the manifestation of Helen through the use of language to describe her beauty. The fact that the student who recited the speech would have been reading the discourse and thus literally seeing the arrangement would have certainly contributed to this experience. Taking this into account, it is fair to say that being enraptured by the symmetrical beauty of Gorgias' rhetoric was reflective of the experience of Helen's beauty. Thus, the student's desire to acquire Gorgias' rhetorical mechanics, which were captured in his sense of symmetrical arrangement, was comparable to the heroic desire to acquire Helen herself. Gorgias' replacement of meter with symmetry substituted the educational virtues of a quasi-visual arrangement for those of Homeric musicality and idealization.

Plato and Aristotle recognized that if a rhetor is seeking to persuade a person, he must appeal to the particular qualities that define the predisposition of that person's

⁵⁸See A.M Keith, "Slender Verse: Roman Elegy and Ancient Rhetorical Theory" *Mnemosyne, Fourth Series*, Vol. 52, (Feb., 1999): 41-62. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 176.

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character. We can assume that before this received a clear articulation in their work it was likely a part of the general rhetorical practice of the sophists, even if it was practiced intuitively. Since Gorgias was seeking to persuade young men of the aristocratic class whose political goal, in general, was to manifest their innate superiority within the confines of democratic politics, it would stand to reason that he would have geared his discourse to appeal to their particular character. Articulating what appears to have been a typical view of the disposition of young Greek men, Aristotle says that they are distinguished by excessive appetites (particularly as regards sexual desire) and emotions, as well as a desire for honour and an even greater desire for victory, both of which feed into a desire for superiority.⁵⁹ The rhetorical virtue of the recovered Helen symbol is that it draws these impulses, i.e. sexual desire and the desire for superiority, into sync, and thereby acts as a spur for their training.

Protagoras professed that he could satisfy the desire for *aretē* engendered by poetry by educating students in its practice. Unlike Protagoras and other sophists, however, Gorgias famously declared that he did not teach *aretē* and, further, laughed at those that claimed to do so.⁶⁰ This position was not derived from the traditional notion that *aretē* was an inborn quality of the aristocratic class that was passed down from parents to children. Rather, if we can take Plato's characterization of Gorgias' position in the *Meno* as accurate, he believed that manifestations of *aretē* are relative to particular contexts.⁶¹ As each situation is unique, it is impossible to educate others in that which would be suitable for all occasions. The implication of Gorgias' declaration is that "*aretē*"

⁵⁹Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1398ff.

⁶⁰Plato, *Meno*, 95c.

⁶¹Plato, *Meno*, 71d-e. Gorgias listed the virtues individually, but did not attempt a general definition (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260a25). Also see, Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 254.

does not exist, and while the word may be used as a rhetorical concept it is fundamentally disjointed from the realities of action it ostensibly indicates.

Given this situation, Gorgias proposed a more "modest" educational goal: "to make clever speakers."⁶² While the formal mechanics of Homeric poetry spurred the student to acquire *aretē*, those of Gorgias' speech inculcated the desire to gain the power of speech itself, which is embodied in the figure of Helen. Thus, the erotic desire of the student to achieve superiority is redirected from the quest for *aretē* to the pursuit of rhetorical mechanics.

1.3.2 The Helen Figure as Mnemonic Code

Earlier in this chapter, we looked at the way in which Gorgias adopted elements of rhapsodic presentation for his rhetorical displays. In the previous section, we took account of the way in which the mechanics of his rhetorical style may have functioned as a replacement for the educational purpose of the "idealizing tendency" in Homer. In this section, we will consider the possibility that these mechanics also served to replace another function of the poetic form—that of a mnemonic device. As previously noted, Havelock suggests that the use of poetic meter in Homer was born from a basic need of an oral culture to retain the accumulation of folk customs and technical practices. The tradition that grounded this preservation was that of the rhapsodes. It was they above all who made the most use of the Homeric "technology" to commit large portions of Homer's verse to memory.

Drawing on Milman Perry's research into modern traditions of oral poetry, Albert

⁶²Pl., *Meno*, 95c. Protagoras, to take a counter example, claimed he could make his student "better citizens" (*Protagoras*, 318e-319a).

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Lord, in his *Singer of Songs*, gives a speculative account of how the training of the rhapsodes took place through the absorption of this "technology." The oral poet, Lord says, composes a song by building the individual lines with formulas (groups of words structured by reoccurring phrases and rhythmic patterns) and the narrative with themes (plot patterns as major as the overarching narrative structure or as minor as the calling of a council).⁶³ Like Gorgias' student, the performer learns how to manipulate these structures in the same way that a person learns how to speak a language—not through systematic analysis, but through habitual oral practice.⁶⁴ Even before the singer begins to sing, however, he absorbs the melodic and metrical patterns of the poetry by listening to others.⁶⁵ The structure of the themes are absorbed in a similar way, but because they are not formulated in certain rhythmically-defined words, they are absorbed as semi-abstract patterns.⁶⁶ Due to the process of habituation, when the singer sings the formulas flow together with unconscious ease, while the theme stabilizes the overall structure and the projected end of the formula deployment. While the fully developed singer is able to engage in a process of word substitution and the production of new formulas, lending excitement and unpredictably to the performance, the structure of a theme remains determined, guiding the action.

It is possible that Gorgias, as a "prose rhapsode," adapted this "technology" as he adapted the other rhapsodic devices for training purposes, and the *Helen* lends itself to such a hypothesis. It has been pointed out that the rhetorical style used by Gorgias would

⁶³ Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

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have likely made his formulations more memorable for his audience.⁶⁷ This, of course, also applies to the effect they would have had on the memorizing student. For instance, the structure could be used by the student to order his own formulations, which would not only make his speeches more memorable for others, but also for himself. As speeches in the assembly were presented without texts on hand, this provided the student with an efficient means of committing an oration to memory. Like the formulaic construction of Homeric verse, Gorgias' prose provided phrasings that could be rearranged to suit the requirements of a particular discourse.

While drawing conclusions about the adaptation of formulaic construction as a mnemonic device is fairly straightforward, the adaptation of the thematic structure is more complex. It is possible to say, however, that when the student memorized the *Helen* he did indeed absorb a theme. The dramatic shell, which provides the apparent theme, contains an indication of the underlying theme: that Helen was compelled by necessity and therefore cannot be blamed. The underlying theme, we can then say, concerns a concept of necessity and the causal forces that evidence it. Though the specific theme of Helen's plight could not be applied to other orations, this underlying structure could be. The particulars of Helen's transgression are significant, however, both in that they offered a means of recalling the more fundamental structure, and, more importantly, also likely elicited the comportment necessary for the student to make the most use of rhetoric's power. This, as indicated in the introduction, will be the concern of the following chapters.

Follow the rhapsodes, the sophists were interested in producing mnemonic systems of their own, for it is only with the help of a well-conditioned memory system

⁶⁷ Joseph Russo, The Poetic of the Ancient Greek Proverb. *Journal of Folklore Research* 20 (1983): 25-35.

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that the precise arrangement of pre-composed oration could be effectively reconstituted during a delivery before a large crowd. Hippias of Elis, for example, was said to have invented a memory system that he regarded as his great achievement.⁶⁸ A potential clue to the nature of Hippias' invention and the mnemonic techniques developed by other sophists can be found in the *Dialexis*, a sophistic treatise composed around 400BC.⁶⁹ The anonymous author lays down three steps that could be used to effectively remember speeches. One is advised to (1) focus one's attention on the speech, which will increase one's perception of its parts; (2) verbally repeat it many times, which will help one remember it as an ordered whole; and (3) connect what is heard or read in the speech with what one already knows. For example, to remember words, he suggests associating them with images of things that contain an etymological resemblance, e.g. *chrusos* (gold) and *hippos* (horse) for Chrysis. To remember things, he suggests associating them with images from poetry and myth, e.g. Ares and Achilles for courage.⁷⁰

This technique of association contains a kernel of a device central to the mnemonic systems that would later developed by Cicero, Quintilian, and the anonymous author of *Ad C. Herennium Libri IV*. As powerful images are more memorable than abstractions, these authors taught, they could serve as the mnemonic foundations for associated concepts. By recalling images in a certain order during an oratorical presentation, the associated parts of speech could be remembered and delivered in their proper arrangement.⁷¹ The author of *Ad C. Herennium Libri IV* further suggested that the

⁶⁸If we rely on Plato's characterization, he used this system to absorb a good deal of historical trivia (*Hippias Major* 285b, *Hippias Minor* 368b). Also see, Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 45.

⁶⁹Guthrie surmises the *Dialexis* was a pupil's notes from a teacher who had adopted Protagoras' views (*A History of Greek Philosophy*, 45).

⁷⁰DK90IX.

⁷¹See Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 1-26.

images most easily remembered are those that contain dramatic action, whether it be horrific or comic, which serve to elicit some emotional affect.⁷² By coding abstractions with these images, the affect that they elicited would prompt the recall of arguments.

Even if Gorgias did not formulate a theory of memory or produce a mnemonic system, we can speculate that he would have been creating model speeches with such considerations in mind since memory training was integral to rhetorical training. Taking this account of a mnemonic system as a cue, it seems possible that the figure of Helen and her defining moment offered a mnemonic delivery system for the underlying abstractions of the structure of causality given in the *Helen*. It is telling that Gorgias says that Helen did not "forget" the beauty she received from her divine parentage (H4). This can be interpreted as a tacit cue as regards the student's reception of the speech. The recall of its "beauty," reflected in the Helen figure, elicited an erotic desire that called to mind the underlying theme, the structure of causality.

1.3 Conclusion

The educational aim of the *Helen* is to shape the soul of students who memorize it. The key to this shaping is the re-engagement with poetic receptivity, which, during the process of recitation, becomes an act of self-deception. In identifying that which is praiseworthy about Helen, Gorgias is recalling this quality of Helen as her defining characteristic and re-idealizing as a symbol that elicited an *erōs* that spurred action. This prepares the student by helping him to bracket conventional life, and frees his desires to engage with the image of Helen that is described. In his performance and the beginning

⁷²Ibid., 9-10.

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stages of the memorization this image remains a superficial one. Through the repeated internalization of the image, however, these desires are gradually furnished with a new ground, replacing the ground of convention that formerly suppressed them or channeled them to its own determinations. The internalized image will act as a catalyst for the transformation of the student's disposition and serve as mnemonic code for an entrance onto the new ground. This new ground is the structure of causality to be detailed in the next chapters.

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This chapter is concerned with how the first three likely (*eikos*) causes of Helen's transgression are used by Gorgias to map a structure of causality that would be absorbed by Gorgias' students during the memorization process. The final cause, *erōs*, which is posited as the motivating engine behind this structure of causality, will be dealt with in the following chapter. At the level of the ostensible aim, by tracing how the force of each cause follows a course of a necessity (*anagkēs*) that Helen's conscious willpower could not withstand, Gorgias claims that he will free Helen from any responsibility as regards her transgression. With the first cause, the gods, Gorgias discloses a hierarchy of power that provides the basic pattern for the causal structure. Accordingly, this pattern acts as the skeletal outline for the explanations that follow. The second cause, physical force, acts as the most apparent, i.e. concrete and tangible, example of the causal structure's dynamics. And with the third cause, persuasive speech, Gorgias self-reflectively deals with the structure as it is at work in the immediate situation. This pertains equally to Gorgias' performance of the speech, the student's memorization of it, and the student's eventual act of persuasion. This cause, in other words, draws the mechanics of the speech and its educational effects into focus within the context of the causal structure.

2.1 The Argument from *Eikos*

The argument from *eikos* is commonly identified as one of the most notable

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features of early rhetoric and is a rhetorical tactic frequently used by Gorgias.⁷³ In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates reports that Gorgias regarded likelihood [*eikos*] as being "superior" to truth.⁷⁴ From a pragmatic standpoint, this simply means that what has occurred in the past or will occur in the future is never completely accessible, so arguing from likelihood is a necessity. Furthermore, this situation allows a rhetor to argue any side of a case by way sheer volume of probabilities elaborated. No matter what the truth is, the more probabilities that are established, the more convincing a case will be. This is, of course, especially useful and common in legal defenses, and Gorgias demonstrates this application by using this device to exonerate Helen.

Gorgias also applies the argument from *eikos* in his *Palamedes*, a fanciful example of forensic rhetoric that likely served as a heuristic model for how to conduct a legal defense. Taking on the persona of Palamedes during the Trojan war, Gorgias acts out a defense of himself against Odysseus' accusation that he has engaged in traitorous subterfuge. As no one actually saw him (Palamedes) engage in such actions, Odysseus' claim relies upon the image of Palamedes' traitorous actions that he has built in the minds of the judges. Gorgias destroys this image by listing the various likely ways in which he could have carried out these actions and then discrediting each of these possibilities in turn by indicating their practical unlikelihood. For instance, in order to carry out his subterfuge he would have needed to communicate with the enemy, but how could he have communicated with the enemy, he ask his judges, if he does not speak their language? By compounding doubt in such a manner, he works to cleave apart the coherence of Odysseus' narrative.

⁷³Kennedy sees this mode of argument as part of the birth of rhetorical consciousness (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 30). For an alternate view, see Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 35-36.

⁷⁴Plato, *Phaedrus*, 267a.

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Gorgias uses a similar method in his philosophical speech, *On What is Not* or *On Nature*, in which he forwards three successive theses: nothing has being; even if it did, we could not have knowledge of it; and, even if we could have knowledge of it, we could not communicate it. Before proceeding from one thesis to the next, however, he briefly reestablishes each affirmative position he formerly argued against, for each successive thesis requires the stability of the affirmative position that was discredited in the preceding argument. This manner of development has the effect of tainting each subsequent affirmative position with doubt, which means that the foundations of later theses are planted on unsteady ground. This results in his final argument, i.e. that we cannot communicate a knowledge of being, becoming the strongest thesis, i.e. most destructive, not solely due to its individual arguments, but due to the precarious foundation that its corresponding affirmative position has been established upon.

In the *Helen*, as previously noted, whether the event in question did or did not take place is not in doubt. Furthermore, when detailing each likely cause, except for a few important instances, Gorgias does not deal in likelihoods. Rather, each likely cause is defined by a set of parameters that are consistent with a singular chain of necessity. This underlying chain of necessity links the different causes such that each account contributes to the elaboration of a unitary phenomenon from multiple perspectives. In effect, Gorgias builds an inter-subjective "truth" by using various forms of explanation. For instance, Gorgias uses a religious discourse for the first cause, while he applies a physiological discourse for the fourth likely cause.

The *Palamedes* and *On Not-Being* evidence Gorgias' ability to destroy both the mind-images of a constructed narrative and abstract concepts of philosophical arguments

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by compounding unlikelihoods. In the *Helen*, by constructing multiple narrative images through the use of likelihoods, Gorgias establishes an underlying "philosophical" abstraction, a sort of epic "theme" of the kind outlined in the previous chapter, which unites the argument as whole.

2.2 The First Likely Cause, The Gods

Starting with the gods is rhetorically beneficial. It aligns the first explanation of the speech with the historically "first" form of causal explanation. It introduces a tragic gravity to human actions by calling upon the mytho-poetic account of the human condition as being at the mercy of divine powers—indeed, it is common for characters in the poetic accounts to ascribe Helen's transgression to the gods. It also allows Gorgias to "piously" acknowledge the status of the gods. However, the most important aspect of beginning with this likely cause is the fact that it allows Gorgias to posit an all-embracing law of nature that will serve as the tacit framework for all the causes that follow. In this way, the first cause establishes the basic formula, a kind of genus, for the particular manifestations of the causal structure given in the preceding causes.

Helen would not have been able to withstand the wishes of a god, Gorgias says, because,

...it is impossible to prevent a god's predetermination by human premeditation, since by nature the stronger force is not prevented by the weaker, but the weaker is ruled and driven by the stronger; the stronger leads, the weaker follows (H6).

Gorgias thus posits what appears to be an intuitively valid maxim about the basic nature of force. This law, it will be recognized, was commonly cited during the sophistic era as the theoretical basis for the doctrine that it is "natural" for might to make right.

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This connection is made apparent by the fact that Gorgias formulates this law in terms of political power. When a political entity, whether it be a person or a city, needed to justify an action that was deemed unjust by conventional standards, they could call on the "natural" principle that the "stronger" necessarily determine the fate of the "weaker." This was a convenient way to abrogate ethical responsibility so that any means could be taken in order to fulfill a political will; it was an *enthymetic* avenue to override inter-state human *nomoi*. Of course, a famous instance in which it was deployed was during the Athenian embassy to the Melians as reported by Thucydides. Threatening the Melians with destruction, the Athenians demanded a declaration of allegiance. To justify their right to make this demand, they say, "divinity, it would seem, and mankind, as has always been obvious, are under an innate compulsion to rule wherever empowered. Without being either the ones who made this law or the first to apply it after it was laid down, we applied it as one in existence when we took it up and one that we will leave behind to endure for all time."⁷⁵

In Plato's *Gorgias*, Callicles fiercely defends this doctrine and uses it as a justification for the transgression of human conventions, which he says seek to limit this law of nature for the benefit of the many.⁷⁶ Only by convention, he argues, could the "weaker" attain power, but it is "natural" for someone like himself, the "naturally superior," to rule. Some sophists, like Protagoras, believed the preservation of convention in the face of nature to be advisable, as it maintained political order against the power of the unpredictable and dangerous natural world. When this law of nature, enters into conventional life, it overthrows the conventional structures of order in the

⁷⁵Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Trans. with an Intro and Notes by Steven Lattimore. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 5.105.

⁷⁶Plato, *Gorgias*, 483d-e.

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course of its manifestation. Such is the case with Helen, who, falling prey to the overwhelming power of the gods, was forced to break the conventions of marriage, which led, ultimately, to the suffering and destruction of war. While Callicles, throwing aside any adherence to conventional notions of shame, embraces this law as the justification for overcoming conventional restraints, fulfilling his desires and wielding political power, Gorgias, his teacher, posits it ambivalently in the *Helen*. Furthermore, within the ostensible context of the piece, he indicates its dangerous quality. Thus, Gorgias is able to establish it as a basic "law" while remaining neutral and maintaining the perception that he is upholding the authority of convention.

2.3 The Second Likely Cause, Physical Force

Though somewhat minor in comparison with the other causes, the second likely cause, physical force [*bia*], is significant in that it is the most apparent, i.e. visible and recognizable, manifestation of the law of nature in human affairs. As such, it acts as an easily intelligible pattern for the more abstract instances in which the causal structure is at work. Accordingly, this example provides a ready metaphor to discredit conventional laws as artificial constructions.

However, in the case of the *Helen*, as just indicated, convention is upheld for rhetorical purposes. Paris violates the conventions of hospitality, ostensibly buttressed by mythic boundaries or "laws of being," by drawing the force of this law into the human realm. Therefore, it is he that is to blame, Gorgias argues, for Helen's transgression. While Gorgias maintains his persona as a defender of justice on the level of the ostensible argument, he is, at the same time, providing an example of the law of nature at work in its

most basic human iteration. In such a way, this cause anticipates the cause that follows, human persuasion, by evidencing the clearest human manifestation of the causal structure given in the first cause.

2.4 The Third Likely Cause, Persuasive Speech

2.4.1 A Pure *Epideixis*

With the third likely cause, Gorgias begins to deal with that which reflects the immediate situation, i.e. himself giving a display or the student reciting the speech. Gorgias' aim in this section is to persuade the listeners of the power of persuasion [*peithō*] as part of the larger aim of proving that Helen is not accountable for her action. This section, in other words, is about itself, in terms of both the part, i.e. this section, and the whole, i.e. the entire argument.

Aristotle, of course, divided rhetoric into three genres: forensic, deliberative and epideictic.⁷⁷ Forensic rhetoric concerns events in the past, i.e. whether something did or did not happen. Deliberative rhetoric concerns the future, i.e. whether a course of political action should or should not be taken. Epideictic rhetoric concerns the immediate present, i.e. its own performance. That is to say, as a display of rhetorical prowess, the subject of the *epideixis* is often merely an occasion for the immediacy of pleasure taken in its style of composition and presentation.

This section of the *Helen* can be thought of as purely epideictic because it is a display, or demonstration, of that which is the subject of its immediate concern, the power of persuasion. The abstractions dealt with are thus actually in the process of being

⁷⁷Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1358b6ff.

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manifested in the present. This means that if the listener, or memorizer, is persuaded about the power of persuasion, he will automatically be affirming the power of persuasion as it is being applied to himself.

Further, this subsection takes place within the whole, which is to say that the pure *epideixis* takes place within the customary "partial" *epideixis* that is defined by its concern with the innocence of Helen. This leads one to assume that this section is a subsidiary part of the overall argument. But because it concerns the dynamics of the immediate situation in which the whole is being presented, it presents itself as an elevated platform of insight. Thus, it is possible to provisionally say that the whole in fact may be a subsidiary expression of this part. Therefore, it is possible to say that whatever conclusions are derived about that which is defined over the course of the whole, such as the structure of causality, merely contributes to the meaning of this subsection, which ultimately contributes to the meaning of the immediate situation in which the speech is being heard or memorized.

2.4.2 The Basic Definition of Speech

Gorgias opens his account of persuasion by stating that "if speech [*logos*] persuaded [Helen] and deceived [*apatēsas*] her soul, not even to this is it difficult to make answer and to banish blame" (H8). By establishing this association between persuasion (*peithō*) and deception (*apatē*) in his opening words to this section, Gorgias assures us that whatever follows in his account will stand in reference to this initial conceptual alignment. As he traverses a sizable field of speech forms, each will serve to highlight this foundation.

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In the same way that each section of the *Helen* has reference to and builds an account of a single causal structure, each particular mode of speech that Gorgias accounts for in this section appears to be merely a reflection of the single fundamental power. He indicates the immensity of this power in the first definition of speech he provides: "speech is a powerful lord that with the smallest and most invisible body accomplishes most godlike works" (H8). This metaphor, of course, aligns speech with the first cause, the gods, and provides us with an initial indication that the causal structure given in that cause will be related to the one disclosed in this cause.

The assertion that speech is "godlike" occurs in sources as early as Homer.⁷⁸ And Gorgias seems to have regularly characterized speech in such amplified terms. Persuasive speech, as mentioned in the introduction, appears to have been cited by Gorgias as the kind of speech that allows this "godlike" power to fully extend in that it has the power to re-arrange the foundations of conventional life. Given the basis upon which this description of speech's power is posited, we can say that this "godlike" capacity of persuasive speech is related to its capacity to deceive.

To provide evidence that speech is indeed "godlike," Gorgias cites the capacity of speech to "banish fear and remove grief and instill pleasure and enhance pity" (H8). The ability of speech to manipulate the affective life of those who hear it is, therefore, presented as fundamental to its deceptive potency. This characteristic, as the third part of the opening definition, which follows the alignment of persuasion and deception and the description of speech as "godlike," will tacitly undergird, like these two preceding determinations, the examples of speech forms that follow.

Gorgias next says that he will "show [*deixō*] how this is so" (H8). This statement

⁷⁸See, for example, Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.165-185.

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has a double meaning, which is related to this section's purely epideictic nature: (1) he will "show" this by way of a logical argument, which, in this case, takes the form of inductive reasoning from example; (2) he will also "show" how this capacity operates by using the power of speech directly upon his audience, that is to say he will influence their affective life.⁷⁹ This means that the capacity to elicit affects will necessarily background the logical argument, which evidences the power of speech to elicit affects through inductive reasoning. The eliciting of affect, i.e. the pleasure the listener/memorizer will receive from hearing/reciting Gorgias' explanation and the "pity" they will feel for Helen based on the explanation, and the pleasure they take in the presentation of the speech, will not so much be an effect of the logical argument but the experience that makes it possible to affirm it. What follows will more clearly situate this interplay between logic and affect, and will force us to reevaluate the meaning of Gorgias' opening claim that he will free Helen by "giving some logic to language" (H2).

2.4.3 Poetry

The first mode of speech that Gorgias uses to exemplify its basic power to elicit affect is the mode in which this power is most plainly at work, poetry, which he defines as "speech having meter" (H9). This definition provides an important clue about how the addition of formal elements work to structure the delivery of the basic power of speech.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric*, thinks this is a self-referential moment where he is evidencing that he is demonstrating poetry (41). As I argue, the opening indication is connected to but separate from his description of poetry. Therefore, Gorgias is not demonstrating poetry as much as he is demonstrating the capacity of speech that makes poetry possible, but which also makes a number other speech forms possible as well.

⁸⁰Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, points out that this "passage is remarkable for containing a potentially unprecedented propositional form: a definition...Gorgias' *Helen* may be our earliest example of the practice of explicating precisely what a particular word means in one's own discourse"

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This forces us to reconsider the meaning of Gorgias' claim that he will use "logic" (*logismos*) to free Helen (H2). It seems that just as poetry is produced by adding "meter" to "speech" (*logos*), rational argument is produced by adding "logic" to "language" (*logos*). Yet we can also say that it is the root power of speech—its "godlike" ability to elicit affect—that is always at work, even as it is being filtered through the particularities of a certain form. Rational speech and poetic speech, then, are variations, or derivations, of a singular power.

But poetry in particular channels this power in its least filtered form and heightens its potency not only by communing with the soul but also by directly impacting on the body through the visceral nature of its rhythm and dramatic intonation, and the dramatic accounts of human experience it reflects. Whenever it is heard, Gorgias says, the "experience" (*pathēma*) of another's "good and ill fortune" enters into the soul of the hearer, which results in "fear" and "pity" becoming manifested in the form of "shuddering" and "tears" (H9).⁸¹ Thus, poetry has the power to engender empathy, which is physically embodied in emotional reactions. Furthermore, this physical manifestation has the power of making that which listeners are experiencing viscerally "real."

At this point, it is appropriate to recall Havelock's characterization of Homer's poetry as maintaining its influence on the "living memory" of the populous through the way it engaged the "entire nervous system" of its hearers. If Gorgias is seeking to supersede Homer as an educator by reconditioning mental habits, he must exert an influence on the nervous system of his student, and indeed this would likely be the

(127).

⁸¹Thomas Duncan thinks that when Gorgias "compares prose and poetry" he is specifically referring to tragic poetry because the emotions Gorgias cites as being elicited by poetry are the emotions generally associated with tragedy ("Gorgias' Theories of Art," *The Classical Journal* 33, No.7 [April 1938], 408).

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outcome of the student's constant recitation. It is plain that Gorgias seeks to bring about the particular affective reversal he mentions—pleasure and pity from fear and grief—by giving a speech in defense of Helen. If his students indeed gave themselves over to the dramatic intention of the speech, we can regard this reversal as key to the educational outcome of the student's memorization. Though the *Helen* is not poetry, it makes use of the same power to influence the body in terms of the physical reactions it elicits. In the first chapter, for instance, we explored the way in which Gorgias' freeing of Helen allowed his students to reengage with the figure as an object of sexual desire, thus affecting a state of pleasure in association with the student's engagement with the speech.

2.4.4 Magic

The next mode of speech given account of is that connected to "witchcraft" and "magic," which transmit a "divine sweetness" that is "inductive of pleasure, [and] reductive of pain" (H10). Here the complexities of affect in poetic experience are reduced to the basic duality of pleasure and pain. These "arts" accomplish this, Gorgias says, by channeling speech into a "mighty incantation" that is able to "enter" the *doxa* in the soul and "alter" it with "persuasion," which results in the soul falling into "error" and *doxa* falling under the influence of a "deception" (H10). In contrast to poetry, which is characterized as directly affecting embodied experience, magical speech is shown to influence *doxa*, which then has implications for bodily experience. It is through the manipulation of *doxa* by way of deception, in other words, that pain and pleasure is affected in the body.

2.4.5 The Immediate Present and the Necessity of *Doxa*

Having moved from affective experience back to the explicit question of persuasion and deception with the transition from poetry to magic, Gorgias describes the paltry condition of human knowledge about temporal events. And it is this state of ignorance that allows speech to perform its godlike work. As he puts it:

If everyone, on every subject had memory of the past, knowledge of the present, and foresight of the future, speech would not do what it does; but as things are it is easy neither to remember the past nor to consider the present nor to predict the future (H11).

Simply put, the problem of human subjectivity is compounded by the problem of time. As Gorgias' reference to the possibility of complete knowledge indicates, humans are divided in terms of their spatial perspective and have different areas of expertise and stores of personal experience, and thus can only ever access a small part of what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will occur, both in terms of their own direct experience and the wider field of history. If a person wanted to give an account of an event taking place in any of the three temporal dimensions of human life by listing the causal ingredients that contributed to its occurrence, the accuracy of the account would inevitably be limited by the possibilities of the present. Were this account the only one, it would suffice, but among a myriad of others it provides only a small glimpse into a much larger causal matrix. The upshot of this situation is that "on most subjects most people take opinion [*doxa*] as the counselor of the soul" (H11). On the choppy waters of knowledge, *doxa* supplies a ballast against uncertainty and the resulting paralysis of judgment and action.

The symmetrical arrangement of this section draws the focus towards the primacy

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of the immediate present in this state of epistemological affairs. First, Gorgias gives a hypothetical formulation in which all people are all-knowing. Such omniscience would be something like the perspective of a god. He follows this with an approximate repetition of the hypothetical formulation, but modifies the terms by framing them in the negative, which serves to highlight the distance of the human perspective from that of the divine. His caveat about "the way things are" [*hois ta nun*] is the hinge between the hypothetical-positive and the actual-negative. Along with the general sense in which Kennedy translates it ("as things are"), "*ta nun*" also means "at present" or "right now." It thus carries with it an indication of the immediate situation; in other words, it can be interpreted as a direct reference to the immediate present in which Gorgias is uttering the words, or his student is reciting them. Thus, the *doxa* that emerges out of the immediate present is the *doxa* that Gorgias is providing about the necessity of taking *doxa* in the immediate present.

But the placement of this hinge phrase is significant in ways beyond the individual formulation. When he refers to the present state of things (*hois ta nun*) Gorgias is at the approximate mid-point of the sub-section on human knowing. When this section ends, we come to the mid-point of the section on persuasive speech as a cause. And finally, the words *parontōn ennoian* ("knowledge of the present") are located at the mid-point of the speech as a whole.⁸² We can assume Gorgias' listener, or memorizing student, would not have been counting words, but nonetheless this line in the speech would be spoken at its approximate temporal mid-point. Furthermore, anyone having the text in hand, as the student would have, could visually pinpoint these parts at the center of

⁸²The word count from which this was drawn is based on the Diels-Kranz edited text (including the interpolations).

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the speech. Just as the present is situated between the past and the future in language, i.e. Gorgias' speech, and experience, so too is the section of the account that addresses the immediate present positioned between the perfectly symmetrical past and future sections of the speech.

As described in the previous chapter, the poets united subjectivities together through performance, thereby making "real" an account of the past. As these particular accounts were subsumed back into the "inherited conglomerate," they collapsed into accessible and edifying *doxai*. What was originally given in the form of an immediate experience, transformed into an ever-present *doxa* that furnished a measure for ethical judgments that helped to stabilize the *nomos*, and thus political existence, against the perils of natural existence. Through the continual process of poetic mediation, the "unconscious conspiracy" bridged subjective experience and thus fostered a modified synchronization of thought and action, adapted according to the exigencies of the public world. In the immediate present, the past and future are established during their emergence from the ground of the *nomos*, which maintains and is in turn maintained by *doxa*.

Gorgias demonstrates this process with this self-reflective account by drawing his audience into a synchronized orientation that results in the production of a *doxa*. In the case of Gorgias' reciting student, at this point of the speech, he is opened up to a reflection upon, or rather, a direct experience of, *kairos*, "the timely."

vi. *Kaironomia*

The concept of the *kaironomia*, the art of the timely, is often regarded as the linchpin

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of Gorgias' rhetorical practice.⁸³ A precursor to the Aristotelian *phronesis*, *kaironomia* concerns the speaking or withholding of the appropriate words in the right place at the right time.⁸⁴ In coordination with this kind of practice, the term *kairos* also has the sense of what is "fitting" or "appropriate." Gorgias' practice of this "art" seems to be evidenced by his famous capacity to improvise.⁸⁵ He apparently tried to write about it, though Dionysus of Halicarnassus reports that he produced nothing "worth mentioning."⁸⁶

The practice of this art allows the orator to turn the dynamics of particular contexts to his advantage. By recognizing the elements that shape the immediate moment in which he is giving a speech, he can play upon the affects and beliefs of the audience that are informed by these various elements. Saying the right thing at the right time is dependent upon a perception about what would work most effectively in a certain group of people that have been shaped by a specific set of historical events and conventional attitudes. As indicated in the previous chapter, the subject of Helen's transgression was a "fitting" subject for the purposes of Gorgias' educational intention and thus the topic of the speech can itself be seen as an extension of *kaironomia*.

While the timely could relate to the fittingness of a single formulation in the middle of a speech or the appropriateness of discoursing on a certain subject, it could also encompass the broader historical sense in which the speech is taking place. This larger sense of the "timely" is reflected in the reaction of Gorgias to a speech by Prodicus. Gorgias laughed at him "for speaking what was old-fashioned and had often been said

⁸³Cf. Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, 160.

⁸⁴Cf. Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric*, 72.

⁸⁵DK82A1, A1a, Plato, *Meno*, 70a-b, Plato, *Gorgias*, 447c.

⁸⁶DK82B13.

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before, [while Gorgias] turned his own attention to what was timely."⁸⁷ Novel circumstances call for novel kinds of expression, which more accurately capture the particularity of the immediate situation. Thus, it is the speaker's task to manipulate everything at hand, both on the micro and macro temporal horizons, as to draw the audience into a united perspective that speaks to the most immediate concerns. Because, the timely is the temporal horizon out of which *doxa* emerges, the "facts" of historical events or future possibilities are dependent on the shaping of the *doxai* that occur in the present.

We have already indicated how the symmetrical arrangement of the speech highlights the centrality of the "timely" in the sense of the immediate presentation/recitation. But the progression of the speech also implies a certain temporal process in the larger historical sense. For instance, the sequence in which Gorgias presents each likely cause appears to approximate the historical progression of causal explanations. The gods of the first cause represent the age of mythic symbolization; the brute violence of the second, the age of aristocratic morality; the persuasive speech of the third, the age of the language arts, including poetry and political discourse, that shape the *nomos* through the manipulation of *doxai*; and the physiological description of *erōs* in the fourth, the age of the rational account of the material causes behind human action. Furthermore, like the causal explanations, it is possible to regard the order in which Gorgias proceeds through the different kinds of speech in the third section as reflecting a historical chronology of speech modes: he begins with poetry and magic, which can be considered "archaic" forms of speech expression, and ends with astronomy, rhetoric, and philosophy, products of an "enlightened" age. As indicated before, the account of the

⁸⁷DK82A24.

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present is located at the center of these historical frames. It is thus positioned at a liminal point between the "archaic" and the "enlightened," which provides us with an indication of how Gorgias may have understood his practice of rhetoric as a kind of bridge or combination of historical forms.⁸⁸

As just mentioned, Gorgias tried to write about the practice *Kaironomia*, but had little success. As the present is always changing, such a failure is understandable. The practice of this art would above all had to have been based on a well-honed intuition. Given what we have seen in this section, it is possible to speculate that Gorgias actually tried to manifest an experience of the present in *Helen*. That way with each recitation of the speech, the student would have practiced focusing on what is immediately occurring. The content of this occurrence is, of course, the structure of causality that Gorgias is demonstrating through the use of rhetoric. Therefore, we might say, the student was training to recognize the manifestation of the causal structure in the immediate present. This would indeed seem to be what Gorgias is dealing with when he places the "knowledge of the present" at the center of his speech.

2.4.7 The Force of Persuasion

⁸⁸The sense of this liminal status is captured in a number of the prominent readings of the *Helen*. Charles P. Segal, for instance, sees in the *Helen* evidence of a "rhetorical-aesthetic theory with some [materialist-]psychological basis" ("Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos" [*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 66, 1962, pp. 99-155], 100) Using the analogy between speech and drugs (dealt with below) in the speech as his cue, Segal sees the work as a materialist rationalization of the psychology of poetic-rhetorical experience, which prefigured the full blown accounts of this phenomena in Plato and Aristotle (135). Along similar lines, Jacqueline de Romilly sees in Gorgias' analogy between the power of words and the power of witchcraft the basis for Gorgias' "program for rhetoric," which makes Gorgias a "theoretician of the magic spell of words" (*Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975], 3). Whereas sacred magic remained mysterious, Gorgias' new magic is a technical practice (16). Though the power of poetry and magical incantations has formally been described in poetic or magical language, Gorgias offers a rationalization of the power of speech that is the force behind the success of these practices.

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"But," Gorgias cautions immediately following this account of the present situation, "opinion [*doxa*], being slippery and insecure, casts those relying on it into slippery and insecure fortune" (H11). For most people on most subjects the instability of their knowledge, as we have seen, mirrors the flux of temporal events in that it is ever-shifting. As such, they must hold onto a *doxa*, which provides relative stability. Yet this too, as Gorgias says here, has weak foundations. This is because, as Gorgias indicated earlier, it is prey to the strength of deception. This warning serves to reconnect these theoretical observations with the primary subject at hand, the persuasion of Helen.

As *doxai* are so weak, "what," Gorgias asks, "is there to prevent the conclusion that Helen, too, when still young, was carried off by speech just as if constrained by force [*bia*]" (H12)? Drawing out this comparison between persuasion and physical force, Gorgias says that the former "constrained her both to obey what was said and to approve of what was done" (H12). To reiterate his point, he says that "the persuader, as a user of force did wrong; the persuaded, forced by speech, is unreasonably blamed" (H12). Whereas in the opening definition, Gorgias compares persuasive speech to the first cause, the gods, here he connects it to the second cause, physical force. Further, Gorgias says that "persuasion has the same power as necessity" (H12). In effect, Gorgias' account of persuasion is posited as the middle term connecting the power of divine necessity with the most basic kind of human coercion. He thereby situates persuasion as a liminal power between the divine and the base, something that is both godly and an expression of sub-political force.⁸⁹ Persuasive speech, in other words, brackets the political realm. This serves to further unite all three causes as being different expressions of the same fundamental causal chain of necessity.

⁸⁹Unterstiener elaborates at length on how Gorgias deals with this convergence (*The Sophists*, 104ff.).

2.4.8 Astronomy, Philosophy and Public Debate

Following this comparison between force and persuasion, Gorgias again turns to some examples to illuminate the mechanics of persuasive speech. Here, he moves away from the verbal arts that ostensibly rely on a visceral impact or superstition and towards those that pertain to intellectual and political culture, which are primarily related to opinion. He prefaces these examples by saying that they will show that "joining with speech, persuasion is wont to stamp [*etupōsato*] the soul as it wishes [*ebouleto*]" (H13).

To see how this is the case, he says,

...one must study, first, the words of astronomers [*meterologōn*] who, substituting opinion for opinion, removing one and instilling another, make incredible [*apisitis*] and unclear [*adēla*] things appear true before the eyes of opinion; second, forceful speeches in public debate, where one side of the argument pleases a large crowd and persuades by being written with art even though not spoken with truth; third, the verbal wrangling of philosophers in which, too, a swiftness of thought is exhibited, making confidence in opinion easily changed (H13).

With the example of the *meterologōn*, Gorgias draws a parallel with his description of those that saw Helen in the flesh. What took place through the vision of the eyes in that case is accomplished by the *meterologōn* through the "eyes of opinion." Speech is thus paralleled with Helen's godlike beauty. This is confirmed by the reference to clarity [*dēlon*], that around which the question of Helen's parentage revolved. Like the beauty of Helen, the speech of the *meterologōn* overcomes mistrust [*apisitis*] and lack of clarity [*adēla*] by manifesting an appearance that garners trust through its apparent clarity. This conceptual congruence draws attention to a potentially analogous relationship between the experience of vision and the experience of speech, which

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foreshadows the description of the mechanics of visual experience in the next cause, but also serves to graft the structure of power in speech onto that given in the description of Helen's power, which further helps to clarify that specific nature of speech's godlike power. Yet, at the same time, it serves as a counterpoise to the theological account. Whereas a priest or poet cites the gods as causes of a meteorological event, the *meteorologōn* may give a materialist explanation. Perhaps Gorgias is even referring to the historical replacement of the former by the latter when he talks about the substitution of one *doxa* for another.

In the case of the philosopher, it seems that it is not what is said but merely the speed at which thought is demonstrated that results in the wavering of *pistis* in regard to any particular *doxa*. The rhetorical character of Gorgias' *On What is Not* reflects this outlook: as indicated earlier in this chapter, it consists of a barrage of paradoxes and rhetorical questions that seek to disrupt the confidence of the listener in being, the relation of thought to being, and the relation of language to knowledge about being. Of course, this "swiftness" is also evident in *Helen*, which itself delivers a plethora of ideas in rapid succession. Gorgias directly references his use of this technique when he segues from discussing poetry to magic by telling his audience to "listen as I turn from one argument to another" (H9). Every modern advertiser knows that before suggesting something to a potential customer, it is useful to disrupt chains of thought that may act as barriers to suggestion. One way this disruption is accomplished is by the technique of assaulting the senses with sounds and images. This demands a viewer's attention for a short period of time, quickly drawing them into an immediate involvement with the advertisement. As an advertiser himself, Gorgias demonstrates a command of this

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technique. Disrupting existing thought patterns is an efficient way of laying a foundation for the introduction of replacement thought patterns.

As we have seen, Gorgias draws attention to certain parts of his speech by placing them between formulations that form a stylistic or conceptual symmetry. As we just pointed out, at the heart of the speech is an indication that the median formulations about the "present" seem to be self-referential. In this section, by giving the median position to "the forceful speeches of public debate" in which "one side of the argument pleases a large crowd and persuades by being written with art even though not spoken with truth," Gorgias acknowledges the character of the "present" speech, i.e. the *Helen*, with amusing self-referentiality. That sophistic rhetoric persuaded merely by virtue of its form was, of course, a common charge given by its critics. Gorgias' inclusion of this characterization here is, therefore, mysterious. Some scholars maintain that Gorgias' comment is not meant to be self-referential; after all, why would he raise a point that might diminish the status of his own discourse? On the other hand, during a performance, the audience would arguably not have been invested in the truth of the speech so much as the entertainment derived from its form. As a clever rhetorical flourish, inclusion of this critique, which draws focus to the present situation, could be seen as having a certain entertainment value. In terms of its educational worth, it is possible that Gorgias is demonstrating a technique whereby an orator could deflect a common criticism by appropriating it in their own discourse. As with a number of formulations in Gorgias' speech, it likely served many of these purposes. The one that would become the most prominent depended on the level that the listener/reciter was engaging with the speech. Ultimately, it is a sly indication of the power of language that Gorgias is teaching, which

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aims at bringing about pleasure through formal composition, and which the more cynical student would have likely accepted without reserve. These examples, like the others, are characterized pejoratively only for the sake of rhetorical effect. Insofar as they are demonstrations of persuasion's power, however, they all contain an implicit undercurrent of affirmation.

2.4.9 Speech as *Pharmakōn*

The final part of the section on speech consists of an analogy between speech's power over the "arrangement" [*taxis*] of the soul through the manipulation of affects and the power of drugs [*pharmakōn*] over the *taxis* of the body [*sōmatos*] (H14). By returning to the fundamental power of speech, i.e. the power of affect manipulation, with which he opened his account of persuasion, Gorgias closes the circle of definition through the application of a "ring" composition. Through alternative analogies, the root power has been perceived according to two horizons: the first being the divine, the second brute matter. This structure, as has already been indicated and which we further explore in the next chapter, is a small scale reflection of the explanatory sequence that defines the arrangement of the whole.

Finally, this analogy serves to compact the power of language into easily "digestible" entity. Like persuasive speech in the form of an "incantation," it draws attention to the fact that compact speech "formulas" can be concocted that have a particular effect upon those that hear them. Pieces of speech, then, can be administered or self-administered to sooth for pleasure, gain influence through fear or, as Gorgias says, buttress the courage to act (H14).

2.5 Conclusion

While Gorgias' account of the gods as cause provides the framework for the causal structures that follow, and physical force examples the most obvious form of the causal structure at work, Gorgias' account of speech reveals that the structure is at work in the presentation of the speech and the student's recitation of it. And, just as with the order of the causal explanations, it seems that each particular mode of speech is merely a different avenue towards the same fundamental power that exists in all of them. The basic function of this power is to elicit affective reactions, and its principle result is the production of deceptions. As this definition pertains to all the speech forms that follow, we can say that this function and result are tacitly at work in the "rational" language arts, and therefore they are at work in Gorgias' own "logical" discourse, which seeks to produce a *doxa*. The final metaphor of speech as a *pharmakōn* is used to show that this power can be compacted into a kind of formula that has very specific effects upon the frame of mind of those who experience it. The formula that the *Helen* provides pertains to its "theme," the underlying structure of causality.

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This chapter is concerned with Gorgias' account of the fourth likely cause, *erōs*, which is given in the form of a theory of visual experience. This account completes the explication of the causal structure by positioning *erōs* as the motive force that generates it. Due to the fact that Gorgias has indicated that the structure of causality is at work in the immediate context of his presentation of the *Helen* and, accordingly, in the recitation process of his student, the fourth cause completes the picture of the dynamics that are at work in the student's engagement with the speech. This results in a disclosure of the structure that the students must themselves tap into in order to carry out a successful act of persuasion.

There is, however, an ambiguity at the heart of this disclosure, which pertains to the question of whether or not this structure is a deception, an insight into the currents of nature running under convention, or some combination of the two. By looking at a connection between Gorgias' possible "ontology" and the cosmology of his teacher, Empedocles, and also taking into consideration the third thesis in *On What is Not*, we will explore this ambiguity and its implications. This will allow us to speculate about the meaning of the educational result that is produced by the student's engagement with the *Helen*. We will conclude by situating Gorgias' claim that his *Helen* is a plaything [*paignion*] within the framework of this educational result.

3.1 The Fourth Likely Cause, *Erōs*

3.1.1 Images in the Soul

Gorgias begins his account of the fourth likely cause with the proposition that "we see [*opōmen*] not what we wish but what each of us has experienced; through sight [*opseōs*] the soul is stamped in various ways [*tropois tupoutai*]" (H15). *Opsis* is thus identified as the mediating agent between the appearance of things and the soul. When an appearance is encountered, this faculty inscribes that appearance upon the soul, thereby conditioning its general state of being. To put it in the terms of the natural hierarchy of power that is provided in the first cause: the soul is ruled by that which is seen; the soul is the weaker and the sight of the thing is the stronger; the sight leads and the soul follows. This power relation fundamentally depends, Gorgias indicates, on the inscriptions that *opsis* "stamps" upon the soul. These inscriptions take the form of images (*eikonas*) (H17).

Before giving his account of how *erōs* manifests by way of these optical mechanics, Gorgias describes how they bring forth its affective antipode, fear [*phobos*]. "Whenever men at war [*polemia sōmata*]," Gorgias says,

...buckle up in armaments [*hoplisni kosmon*] of bronze and iron, whether in defense or offense, when their sight beholds the scene, it is alarmed [*etarachthē*] and causes alarm in the soul, so that often they flee in terror from a future danger [*kindunou tou mellontos*] as though it were present [*ontos*] (H16).

The infusion of panic [*tarachē*] into the image that *opsis* engraves on the soul causes a projected *telos* to be drawn into the immediate present. In the case of the hoplite, we can assume that the image of this "future danger" concerns the hoplite's own violent death. Therefore, due to the affect brought about through *opsis*, the possibility

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overtakes actuality, resulting in the production of an immediate "reality" (*ontos*) that elicits an instinctive reaction from the hoplite.

The Greeks were very conscious of the effect military pageantry could have on enemy morale. For example, it seems that the reputation and consequent fear of Spartan prowess was in part established by the striking appearance of their polished bronze shields and scarlet cloaks. According to ancient accounts, soldiers were known to abandon their posts when they encountered the visual spectacle of the Spartan phalanx slowly advancing.⁹⁰ Though the Spartans are occasionally noted for their lack of "creative" production when compared to the Athenians, they effectively channeled their imaginative energy into producing an art, including a visual art, of war. In accordance with Gorgias' account of optical mechanics, we can say that the Spartans used a formidable visual impression to jolt their enemies into an experience of immanent death that was associated with said appearance. We recall how Gorgias used the purple robes of a rhapsode to affect the expectation of poetic satisfaction in a similar way. Both the hoplite and the listener to poetry have been habituated to associate a visual experience with future expectations through prior affective conditioning.

The psychological mechanism exemplified in the art of war (and analogously in Gorgias' use of rhapsodic robes), Gorgias says, is the same mechanism at work when the stewards of convention cultivate the "habit" [*sunētheia*] within citizens of preferring what is judged to be "good" [*agathou*] and "seemly" [*kalou*] (H16). We can take this to mean, broadly speaking, that the fearful sight of those who have been shamed, ostracized or, most of all, physically punished for transgressing convention on the one hand, and the

⁹⁰Victor Davis Hanson, *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought The Peloponnesian War*, (New York: Random House, 2005), 137. Cf. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 5.70.

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pleasant sight of those that have received honour and awards for upholding its ideals on the other, orient the citizen towards good habits by conditioning them to desire the latter through fear of the former. Actions, in other words, are conditioned by the outcomes that have been bound to them through habitual visual exposure. In this way, the habits of thought and action are perpetually determined to follow the conventional order.

However, Gorgias says, returning to the example of the fleeing soldiers, when a person sees something fearful, "thought" is "extinguished" and "driven out" such that the person "abandons" their "thought of the moment" [*paronti chronōi phronēmatos*] (H17). Here Gorgias establishes a clear congruence between the habits instilled by convention and what he calls the "thought of the moment." The habits engendered by an experience of the outcomes of conventional law, in other words, form the basis for the stability of judgment regarding any particular circumstance. It appears, therefore, that an experience of "the present" is defined by internalized mechanisms of cultural mediation. Therefore, it is possible to say that a person's cognitive relationship to the "present" is relative to their conventional background. When a mighty image informed by the "destined danger" is imprinted on the soul, however, it breaks down this bulwark of habit that regulates the "thought of the moment." In the case of the hoplite, it forces him to treat the soul-image as having presence (*ontos*), that is, immediate "reality," which compels him to flee. Thus, those who experience the artifice of poetic presentation or that of martial pageantry are thrown into a kind of alternate "reality" that brackets the conventional world and establishes a new relationship to the present (*ontos*).

When Gorgias transitions to an explanation of how *erōs* functions within this sketch of *opsis*, he begins by citing the effect of material images—i.e. pictures and

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sculptures—upon the humans that experience them:

Whenever pictures of many colours and figures create a perfect image of a single figure and form [*sōma kai schēma*], they delight the sight. How much do the production of statues and the workmanship of artifacts furnish pleasurable sight to the eyes! Thus it is natural for the sight sometimes to grieve, sometimes to delight. Much love and desire for many objects is created in many minds (H18)!

Having demonstrated the affective power of artificial bodily forms, which are equivalent to those of actual bodies, Gorgias asks, "if, then, the eye of Helen, pleased by the body [*sōmati*] of Alexander, gave to her soul an eagerness and response in love [*erōs*], what wonder" (H19)? Using the mechanics of *opsis* outlined in the preceding description, we can posit that the visual appearance of Paris inscribed an image on Helen's soul infused with *erōs* that drew the future satisfaction of the affect into immediate presence. This displaced Helen's "thought of the moment," i.e. the habits upheld by the images and impressions implanted by the convention. Upon being forced by *erōs* to acknowledge such a "presence," Helen was compelled to transgress the boundaries maintained by these habits.

With the fourth cause, Gorgias provides a compact account of the psychological mechanisms that produce human behaviours. We encounter a thing through sight; this thing impacts upon *opsis*, which infuses the visual phenomenon with a pre-conditioned affect; *opsis* then stamps this infused image upon the soul; and, finally, this affect-image forces us to act.⁹¹ This mediation produces an image that guides action, but is in fact disconnected from the original vision. Still, the affect helps to determine that this image is "real," which is what prompts the act. Habits of affect within *opsis* are normally

⁹¹For an exceptionally detailed summery of this process, see Charles P. Segal, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos" (*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 66 [1962]), 99–155.

conditioned by convention, which thereby ensures that visual experience is culturally mediated, resulting in "proper" actions. But an especially powerful vision will incite affect to such a degree that the resulting image displaces that which has been instilled by convention, resulting in an action that transgresses the "seemly."

3.1.2 *Erōs* as the Underlying Cause

Gorgias concludes the section on *erōs* by saying:

...if love [*erōs*], a god, prevails over the divine power of the gods, how could a lesser one be able to reject and refuse it? But if love is a human disease and an ignorance of the soul, it should not be blamed as a mistake but regarded as misfortune. For she went caught by the nets around her soul, not by the wishes of her mind, and by the necessity of love [*erōtos anagkais*], not by the devices of art.

In the first likely cause, Helen's action is implied to be motivated by Aphrodite, the unnamed god in the hierarchy of power. In the fourth cause, Gorgias says that *Erōs*, a deity associated with Aphrodite, rules over the gods, which gives us a clue about the force that is atop the hierarchy indicated in the first cause. If the first likely cause, the gods, provides the skeletal pattern for the relations of force that are found in the causes that follow, and *erōs* rules over the gods, then the necessity within the causal structure appears to be generated by the strength of *erōs*.

The speech's symmetry provides a further clue about the primacy of *erōs*. This cause is, of course, given a special status as the concluding argument. Yet, at the same time, it returns the listener to the first cause, the gods, who were piously given pride of place. This creates a mirroring effect in which the power of *erōs* falls on both sides of the human causes, physical force and persuasion, hedging them in and surrounding them.

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Moreover, it seems likely that *erōs* is the ultimate cause behind the human causes. Helen's ability to elicit aggressive *erōs* through her godlike beauty is, as Gorgias tells us in the opening section, her defining feature. It will be recalled that the two middle causes, which themselves are collapsed by Gorgias into a singular notion of human coercion, were instigated by the determination of Paris by *erōs* following an encounter with Helen's beauty. *Erōs*, then, can be regarded as the unstated cause of the two middle causes. Indeed, if Gorgias were to embark upon a defense of Paris, surely an argument for *erōs* as a likely cause would play a fundamental part.

Ultimately, Gorgias' arguments for why Helen should not be blamed for her actions can be collapsed into one—she was compelled to act by a causal chain of necessity, which was instigated by the power of *erōs*. And, furthermore, if we take Gorgias' description of *erōs* as a description of the power that can be found within each causal iteration, the force atop the hierarchy is revealed to be the process by which *erōs* produces images in the soul that instigate actions, which in this case leads to the transgression of conventional restraints.

In accordance with Gorgias' identification of *erōs* as a divine force, in poetic accounts the gods frequently elicit actions from mortals by altering the appearance of things. As E.R. Dodds pointed out, the gods cloud the judgments of mortals through such manipulations of perception so that heroes are compelled to commit actions that are extraordinarily courageous or extraordinarily horrendous.⁹² In either case, under the influence of a god's distortions of reality, heroes overcome the pressures of habituated social conformity and transcend common behaviours.⁹³ Thus, Gorgias' visual-

⁹²Dodds, *The Greeks*, 5, 8.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 18.

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psychological description of the fourth likely cause is coordinated with the traditional poetic explanation of how the gods affect human actions through deceptions that influence the state of the soul. By making this connection, Gorgias imbues his account with poetic gravity and also provides a symbol through which the basic mechanisms of the account of *erōs* can be constituted.⁹⁴

In the previous chapter, we forwarded the possibility that the total structure of causality was, in fact, a subsidiary part of the speech that buttressed the elevated platform of insight provided in the account of persuasive speech. That is to say, the conclusions derived from the completion of the causal structure help to define the immediate dynamics of the student's experience of the *Helen*. In the first chapter, we saw how the speech itself appears to be analogous to the figure of Helen, who elicits *erōs* with the power of her godlike beauty, which, in effect, makes the *Helen* a reflection of Helen. As *erōs* completes the causal structure, we can now see with greater clarity that it is the determining factor in the student's relation to the speech. Desire, for which Helen's godlike beauty is a point of orientation, is the mode through which the student experiences the lesson of the speech about the causal structure. In keeping with the mechanics of *erōs*, this engagement results in the production and affirmation of an image in the soul—a vision of the causal structure clothed in the skin of Helen—that displaces the habits that normally condition the student's relation to the present with a new, more powerful, "reality."

Using the poetic figuration given in the *Helen*, Gorgias' student could then conceive of himself as being "opened" to the power of the gods, thereby "participating" in

⁹⁴As Rosenmeyer says of the use of the divine in poetry to symbolizes various forces: "The deity is the necessary metaphor, the functional, mood-generating symbol without which no poet could hope to reach his audience" ("Gorgias, Aeschylus, and Apatē," 250).

"reality" at a higher level than that of conventional life. The student (passively) enjoys a prime role in the chain of necessity by making himself thoroughly available to influence; as a subject the student is the wielder of a powerful force, and as an object the student is a passive medium for the power of the gods. Ultimately, by submitting to the causal structure, and furthermore, by understanding his own acts of persuasion as an extension of the submission, he could picture himself and his desire for power (and, it can be added here, his desire to be loved by the *demos*) as one link in a chain of necessity that would allow him to overcome conventional restraints and define himself as uniquely superior.

3.1.3 Ontological Implications?

Gorgias, it seems, uses the mask of being convention's champion as a rhetorical front not only for the disclosure of a causal structure derived from the laws of nature, but also for a demonstration of how this structure is a work in an act of persuasion. To expand upon the ontological implications of the *Helen*, connections can be drawn between Gorgias' apparent postulates about nature and those of Empedocles, who, in the doxographical tradition, is said to have been Gorgias' teacher. For Empedocles, material reality is the product of six self-identical entities. Four of these are the elemental "roots" of fire, earth, wind, and water that, in various combinations, compose "all things."⁹⁵ The other two entities are Love (*erōs*) and Strife—the motive forces behind the combination and separation of the roots. It can be said that because Love is the principle that combines the "roots," it thereby "creates" phenomena, and because Strife separates the

⁹⁵All references to the Fragments of Empedocles are taken from Brad Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*. Revised Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). The first citation numbers refer to Inwood's ordering, while the second refer to the corresponding fragments in the Deils-Kranz ordering.

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"roots," it "destroys" phenomena.⁹⁶ The work of Love is indeed described with various terms that connote the activity of making.⁹⁷ At the same time, it acts as the "glue" that fits things together and holds them in their assembled state.⁹⁸ In one fragment, Empedocles compares the work of Love to that of a painter's *technē*.⁹⁹ Just as a painter mixes various pigments and applies them for the sake of assembling likenesses of humans, animals, and gods, so too does Love work upon the divided "roots" to fashion the originals of such likenesses.¹⁰⁰ In other words, Love is the force that creates wholes out of parts and maintains these wholes in a temporary state of constitution. Love, in such a way, grants material entities their being.

We can see certain correspondences between Gorgias' and Empedocles' respective accounts of *erōs* in that both are related to the constitution of "phenomena." However, as is apparent in the fourth cause, Gorgias' psychologizes the Empedoclean account by positioning *erōs* as a force that manifests mental "phenomena" in particular.¹⁰¹ In effect, we can say that Gorgias detaches the analogy of the painter's *technē* from its ontological correlate and instead uses it as a model for the work of *erōs* within the soul. His inclusion of the painter metaphor as a preface to his description of *erōs*' influence on Helen further confirms Gorgias' tacit appropriation of this analogy. Like the painter or sculptor, Gorgias' creates the "image" of the *Helen* by bringing together many figures (i.e. the likely causes) in order to produce a single figure (i.e. a fundamental causal structure) that elicits the desire of his students. However, during the recitation of the speech, the

⁹⁶Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*, 50-55.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 4/71, 100/86, 101/87, 102/95.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 101/87, 62/96, 63/34.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 27/23.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 26/21.

¹⁰¹When Empedocles speaks of *erōs* in these ontological terms, however, he does not seem to be referring to human *erōs*, i.e. human intercourse, as it produces strife by producing many from a few. Cf. Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*, 91.

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student himself would be enacting this process, thereby generating a single body, i.e. structure of causality, out of many figures, i.e. the four likely causes, through excitation of *erōs* in relation to the Helen symbol.

Still, by maintaining the cosmological significance of this process through his reference to the gods, Gorgias retains the allure of an ontological connection. Even so, Gorgias, by his tacit admission, is producing a deception, which could imply that this connection is fanciful and merely posited for the sake of narrative gravity. As we saw in Chapter 1, however, this deception may in fact be the prerequisite of an experience of the speech's *alētheia*. That is, through an experience of the speech's *kosmos* (its order), the student is able to reach beyond a rational account into an experience of "divine" power, just as the people who encountered Helen's beauty (her *kosmos*) were able to perceive the work of the gods. To understand this ambiguity better, we will examine Gorgias' extension of Empedoclean insights further and also consider the third thesis of Gorgias' *On What is Not*.

3.2 A Disjunct

Though the origins of philosophy were developed in contrast to mytho-poetic accounts of cosmic phenomena, the symbolic constellations found in the latter type of narrative were used to communicate philosophical thought. The Eleatics, like Empedocles, embraced the use of mythic symbolization, along with the narrative tropes and metrical style of poetry, to divulge both the experience of rational thinking and the principles of nature. It is said that Empedocles even had his philosophical poem recited by a rhapsode. Yet, by turns, Empedocles still charged the poets with distorting reality.

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Furthermore, he recognized that not only are mythological symbols problematic insofar as they can easily be arranged incorrectly, but language itself is problematic in that it is inherently anthropomorphic in nature. For instance, the terms "birth" and "death," mere facets of human experience, do not adequately capture the appearance and disappearance of phenomena because nothing is truly born or truly dies, but rather, basic elements come together and separate. Despite these problems, however, Empedocles conceded to using both language and mythological symbols, since these were the tools that convention had provided him to purvey his insights.

While Empedocles recognized the problematic relationship of language to the laws of Being, his student Gorgias radically expanded upon this kernel of skepticism. Gorgias' *On What is Not* evidences the nature of this expansion.¹⁰² In the Sextus paraphrasing of Gorgias' speech, the latter says that the spoken word is of a different "substance," if indeed it has "substance," than "external substances," i.e. material objects of sight. He then draws a comparison to the difference between audible phenomena and visible phenomena, and how one of these phenomena cannot transform into the other. Speech, therefore, cannot transmit the material reality we experience through vision because it differs in kind.¹⁰³

In the MXG paraphrasing of Gorgias' text, Gorgias expands upon this problem of communication by asking how anyone could communicate to another person what he has

¹⁰²For the source, see note 8 in the Introduction. There is some question as to whether or not this speech can be taken "seriously." Most contemporary scholars that work on Gorgias indeed approach it as a serious piece of philosophy, or at least, a serious "parody" meant to criticize philosophy. John Robinson offers a different perspective. He is willing to grant that Gorgias' speech was meant by Gorgias to be taken "seriously" ("On Gorgias," 53.) However, even if that is the case, he sees nothing in the tract but a "very "clever pastiche" of Eleatic logic that Gorgias probably thought was "every bit as good as the real thing" (59). He suggests that it is only an image of philosophy of the sort that described by Plato in his *Sophist*, and thus it does not merit serious study as a piece of philosophy (59).

¹⁰³Waterfield, *The First Philosophers*, 235.

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seen if the other person has not seen it. Since speech cannot carry visual "substance" within it, the listener cannot have access to the sight the speaker is expressing. Furthermore, even if both parties could perceive the same thing, that thing would look different because it is impossible for two people to inhabit the same perspective at once. Even a single person, he continues, is continuously perceiving different things due to the fact that his or her perspective is constantly shifting. Thus, if a single person's perception is in continuous flux, how likely is it that different people will have the same simultaneous perception? And, ultimately, how is it that they would be able to coordinate their language so as to refer to the same object of that momentary and fragile perception?¹⁰⁴

Still, the things of sight and words of speech do have an important relation. Gorgias goes on to say in the Sextus text that "speech is formed when external events—that is, perceptible things—impinge on us." For example, he says, when we taste food or see a colour, our exclamation of that taste or colour is "expressive of that quality." Thus, the spoken word does not indicate an external substance, but rather, that substance "becomes revelatory of the spoken word."¹⁰⁵ The word does not act as a sign for the things of perception or carry any trace of them, but that which is encountered through sense-experience does, in fact, generate the word. Yet, once it is generated, the word detaches from sense-experience and imparts itself to the world of language, which exists parallel to the "real" world and, we can say, goes by the name of "convention."

Even if speech can be said to be analogous to visual experience in the sense that they follow the same structure of causality, speech always begins at one level of remove.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 238-239

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 236.

It therefore primarily interacts with "images" that have already been detached from their origin. Speech, in other words, is at an insurmountable disjunct from "reality." Furthermore, we can conclude along with Rosenmeyer that "[speech] does not distort reality, for it has no measurable relation to it."¹⁰⁶ Speech for Gorgias, in the final analysis, can only ever be reflective of the conventional world. However, this realization does not reduce the power of speech, but rather increases it; as speech is no longer considered to be dependent on reality, it is free to build its own domain. Herein resides the "godlike" power of speech to control, build and manipulate convention.¹⁰⁷

3.3 A Charm and a *Pharmakōn*

In the face of such pronouncements, what the student of Gorgias is left with is an unresolvable ambiguity. On the one hand, the *Helen* affords the feeling that the structures that are disclosed have roots in nature, and can be reconciled with and symbolized by poetic accounts of divinity, which work to provide them a poetic gravity. Yet, at the same time, there is a tacit admission in the *Helen* and Gorgias' other work that the structure is a deception that amounts to a mere shuffling of mental phenomena that only pertain to the ephemeral structures of convention. Together these two accounts merge to transmit something like a heroic-tragic ontology of nature's power of necessity precariously balanced over an (anti-)ontology of perpetual and inescapable dreams that only ever reflect man's inter-subjective language worlds. Helen is the perfect symbol because she evokes an appeal to the heroic-tragic transmission such that it can be

¹⁰⁶Thomas Rosenmeyer, "Gorgias, Aeschylus, and Apatē," *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol.76, No.3 (1955): 231.

¹⁰⁷Cf., *Ibid.*, 232.

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constituted at least for a time, thereby keeping the (anti-)ontology at bay. Thus, once the contents of the *Helen* have been thoroughly internalized by the student, the ontology can be reconstituted and act as a deception that invokes a poetic frame, prompting action and ultimately mobilizing the power of persuasive speech.

Gorgias' rhetoric, as we have seen, had roots in the rhapsodic tradition, which itself had developed from earlier forms of "poetic" expression. Before the epithets referring to gods were used primarily for the sake of building a metrical line in epic poetry, Lord points out, they were likely religious incantations, prayers that called upon the gods to intervene in the affairs of the world.¹⁰⁸ By providing his student's with a set of formulas that invoke an insight about a structure of power, Gorgias provides a kind of substitute incantation, which prompts us to recall his characterization of magic. S.E. Basset says that when Homer refers to the words of a bard as "charms," the same word he uses to describe Circe's spell, we should remember that the ancients, like ourselves, used figurative language, and it must not be thought that Homer believed the bard to be a kind of "medicine man."¹⁰⁹ Even so, Homer's use of this language suggests that the words of the bard, and the rhapsode, retained an implicit connection to their "magical" and mythic roots.

Finally, just as the *Helen* can be seen as being related to magical incantations, it can also be seen as being importantly related to the other form of "compact" speech that Gorgias deals with in the third likely cause: speech as analogous to a *pharmakōn*. As an incantation, speech steadies the nerves through the increase of pleasure and reduction of pain brought about by calling on the power of a god for aid, and as a "*pharmakōn*" it

¹⁰⁸Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 67.

¹⁰⁹Basset, *The Poetry of Homer*, 11.

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buttresses courage and produces an intoxicating hallucination about the determinations of necessity and the promise of immense power.

3.4 The Helen as *Paignion*?

Gorgias ends the *Helen* by saying,

...by speech I have removed disgrace from a women. I have abided by the principle I posed at the start of my speech: I have tried to refute the injustice of defamation and the ignorance of allegation. I wished to write a speech that would be Helen's encomium and my own plaything [*paignion*]" (H21).

This final declaration is notorious among Gorgias scholars for the potential implications it could have upon the meaning and purpose of the speech. It implies, of course, that the *Helen* is nothing more than a kind of amusing game.¹¹⁰ This seems to undermine the possibility that there is anything to be taken seriously within the speech. Indeed, some interpreters hold this opinion.¹¹¹ It has also been suggested that this final revelation negates the possibility that the *Helen* could have been used as a model speech—for how could it be a model if every time the student read it, they finished by finding out that their work amounted to a good joke?¹¹² Schiappa, on the other hand, downplays its importance when he speculates that it may have merely been chosen as "a matter of acoustical preference" since it completes the melodic progression of the phrase that precedes it.¹¹³

I would suggest that before it can be interpreted as an ending that forces us to

¹¹⁰D.M. MacDowell, *Gorgias' Encomium of Helen* (Great Briton: Bristol Classical Press, 1982), 16.

¹¹¹Duncan, "Gorgias' Theories of Art," 404.

¹¹²John Poulakas, "Gorgias' *Encomium to Helen* and the Defense of Rhetoric" (*Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16 [1983]: 1-16), 3.

¹¹³Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory*, 130-131.

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reconsider the seriousness of what has come before, taken as evidence that the *Helen* could not be a model speech or disregarded as inconsequential, some other considerations must be taken into account. First, if we assume that the arrangement of words is integral to the rhetorical progression that reveals the speech's meaning, the final word, like the first word, would play a very important part. Second, if we are to take the propositions of the speech seriously, we must also paradoxically take the proposition that these statements were part of a game seriously. Third, we must consider that this statement has the emotional effect of deflating the amplifications that provided Gorgias' subjects, propositions, and evidence with gravity and gave his presentation a mood of high-mindedness. Lastly, we must recognize that accepting these considerations does not negate the possibility that this statement served an important function in the educational framework. In fact, by analyzing the statement's function within the speech's rhetorical dynamics, its effect within the model speech framework is clarified.

During a performance, the admission that the speech was written for Gorgias' amusement would likely have had a comic effect. It would break the spell cast by the gravity of the speech by revealing to the audience that their engagement was based on a deception about Gorgias' intended purpose. The gravity, pathos and theoretical import of the speech would thereby be decisively leveled, which would reduce the experience to an absurdity. Above all, this would deflate any lingering tension that remained from the body of the discourse. As such, this statement functions like a satyr-play following a tragic cycle, in which the mythic characters that were formerly treated with dignity are reduced to caricatures to be used for bawdy comic relief. The "high-minded" quest for virtue is re-imagined as bloated self-aggrandizement that masks the actual drive behind

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such quests, carnal desire. Accomplishing this, Gorgias' statement works as one last reflection of his *ethos*. As Aristotle says, "[m]ockery is more gentlemanly than buffoonery; for the mocker makes a joke for his own amusement, the buffoon for the amusement of others."¹¹⁴ Gorgias thus retains his dignity, and distinguishes himself as superior to those that were taken in by his display.

All of these effects would have repeated themselves when the student put himself in the place of Gorgias and recited the speech. After drawing out the theoretical structure of causality, creating the drama of speech, and playing the role of Helen's noble saviour, the student effectively reduces these intentions to nothing more than frivolous play. The gravity is loosened and the illusion is broken such that the student is able to look down on his work from the perspective of a god—a standpoint from which the affairs of men appear as playthings. As such, the whole *kosmos* of speech itself, i.e. the structure of causality represented by Helen, becomes a *paignion*. It/she is reduced to a pocket-sized toy very much like the physical copy of the speech itself. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus hides the speech he has obtained from Lysis under his cloak. We can imagine a student of Gorgias gripping the *Helen* speech under his cloak in a similar way. To have acquired the lessons of the speech in this way, that is, to have turned them into a plaything, an ontology in the cloak pocket, is to have completed Gorgias' program of the education.

3.5 Conclusion

Gorgias, as we indicated earlier, thought that likelihoods were superior to the truth.¹¹⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, this can be interpreted to mean that Gorgias

¹¹⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1419b6

¹¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 267a.

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thought likelihoods more "useful" than the truth and perhaps even considered them necessary, since he held that the "truth" is difficult, if not impossible, to access. Thus, it is reasonable to regard the structure of causality as a likelihood, a useful "argument" that justified the taking of a certain position. Similarly, it is possible that Gorgias' *On What is Not* may also have acted as a thought pattern through which a student could free himself from the need to have any adherence to "being." There is evidence that Gorgias' short ontological treatise, or at least the structure and central points of its triadic argument, was well-known during the late fifth and fourth centuries.¹¹⁶ Thus, like the *Helen*, it could have been collapsed into an easily digestible doxa. Within its destructive propulsion, it would have been a suitable primer to clear away "reality" such that the *erōs* could reengage with the *Helen* speech and generate the thought pattern about the structure of necessity that would lead them to affirm the trajectory of their desire for power.

¹¹⁶In his article, "On the Skeptical Influence of Gorgias' On Non-Being" (Journal of the History of Philosophy, Vol. 28, Num. 3, 1991, pp. 327-337), Steve Hays says that he "suspects that threefold structure [of *On Not Being*] was at least as well known among Plato's contemporaries as Descartes 'I think; therefore I am' is among us" (331). For example, he points out that speech of Euripides that opens Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae* "is a parody of the categorical distinction between senses which Gorgias employed to support his second and third skeptical theses" and the humour of the scene would have depended on the audiences general familiarity with Gorgias' argument (333). Furthermore, he speculates that Plato likely felt a response was philosophically necessary because of its pervasive influence. He points out that at 135a of the *Parmenides*, when Parmenides warns Socrates about skeptical arguments he may encounter in his search for being, he nearly quotes the first two arguments of *On Not-Being* verbatim (335). That Plato would come so close to the words of Gorgias without knowing them is unlikely, and that Parmenides, Gorgias' ostensible opponent in the piece, is saying the words is also evidence in favour of this reading (336).

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On Sicily in 427 BCE, Leontini and Syracuse were at war. With the aim of forging an alliance integral to their survival, Leontini dispatched Gorgias on an embassy to Athens. The stylistic novelty of the speech he gave before the Ecclesia made a great impression upon his audience. In the end, they decided to ratify the proposed treaty.¹¹⁷ Years later, this agreement would likely have been a factor in the Athenians' decision to carry out the disastrous military expedition against Syracuse that led to the eventual defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war.

This account of Gorgias' embassy comes to us from the doxographical tradition. These reports indicate that his speech impressed due to his famous poetic innovations in oratory. Philostratus measures the impact of these innovations by comparing them to Aeschylus' innovations in tragedy.¹¹⁸ Aeschylus, as is well known, effectively "created" tragic theatre by adorning its rudimentary antecedents with additional elements such as costumes and stage directions. In doing so, Aeschylus fashioned a visual spectacle that heightened the reality of poetic performance and demarcated tragedy as a phenomenon offering a distinct set of experiences. Gorgias effected a reversal of this development by breaking down the barrier between poetry and political life. It was inevitable that when the students of Gorgias put their education to work the pleasures of dramatic enchantment found in the theatre would bleed into the context of the political assembly. Gorgias, however, was not alone in promoting this importation. In a time when the novelty of

¹¹⁷DK84A4. Along with Gorgias' rhetorical prowess, it is likely that the cultural connection between Athens and Leontini, as well as the treaty that was already in effect, played some part in the decision of the Athenians (Enos, *Greek Rhetoric*, 46-56) .

¹¹⁸DK82A1.

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poetic images and drama held immense influence in cultural life, Cole notes, "the group best able to transfer the feeling of poetics to politics would win."¹¹⁹

In recent years a number of scholars have characterized the *Helen* as being part of a general Gorgian project to promote a certain kind of politics. Victor Vitanza sees the modern revitalization of interest in Sophistic thought and rhetoric as evidence of a "third" Sophistic, and says that Gorgias is the most important figure in this movement.¹²⁰ The work of Scott Consigny may be considered a confirmation that this is the case. He interprets the *Helen*, along with Gorgias' other speeches, as a performance piece that calls attention to the contingency of its own truth. This, Consigny argues, causes Gorgias' audiences to question the validity of championing one form of discourse, e.g. the "poetic" or the "rational," over another. Gorgias, Consigny says, was an "antifoundationalist" opposed to "foundationalist" projects such as those of Plato and Aristotle, thinkers who attempted to use rational inquiry to establish a ground of eternal laws as a basis for political life. Instead, Gorgias forwards the idea, says Consigny, "that people acquire and display knowledge, not by directly observing the world as it really is, but by participating in discursive agons sanctioned by the community, contests in which they advance rival interpretations designed to persuade specific audiences in the community."¹²¹ Likening Gorgias to Richard Rorty, Consigny maintains that Gorgias offers contemporary antifoundationalist theorists strategies to use against their foundationalist rivals. Similarly, Bruce McComiskey attempts to provide a holistic account of Gorgian philosophy by locating an internally consistent theory within Gorgias' existent texts.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric*, 28-29.

¹²⁰ Victor Vitanza, "Some More Notes, Toward a 'Third' Sophistic" (*Argumentation* 5 [1991]), 125.

¹²¹ Consigny, *Gorgias*, 208.

¹²² McComiskey, *Gorgias*, 32

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Like Consigny, McCominsky considers that the thought of Gorgias and other sophists can and should be adapted to "contemporary pedagogical and political ends."¹²³ Ultimately, McCominsky says, the *Helen* provides us with an example of how to engage in the "invention of ethical arguments" that could serve such ends.¹²⁴

The aim of this essay has been to reveal the underlying lesson of the *Helen* that, with each act of memorization, would progressively establish itself in the student's unconscious. The final result of this process would be the disclosure of the underlying casual structure that defines the student's persuasive acts as part of a chain of necessity. The more deeply this structure was internalized through memorization, we can speculate, the more it would have *determined thought*, as opposed to being *thought about*. This would, in the end, have produced a feeling of inevitability, of destiny.

Gorgias' teaching in the *Helen* does not suggest that students take up their responsibility as members of the community by engaging in discursive agons so much as it encourages them to break free of conventional responsibilities by ceding to the inevitability of desire, which vaults them above the multitude. Poulakas says that Gorgias "urged that the individual create his own religion."¹²⁵ It seems, rather, that Gorgias provided his students with a substitute "religion" that was aligned with the basic trajectory of their desire for power. More than a mere purveyor of neutral instruments, the *Helen* habituated the student to a set of affective and intellectual formulas that contributed to determination of his general state of being.

Speaking before the demos in the assembly was not an easy task; Plato refers to

¹²³Ibid., 1.

¹²⁴Ibid, 113.

¹²⁵John Poulakas, "Gorgias' Encomium to Helen and the Defense of Rhetoric," *Rhetorica: A journal of the History of Rhetoric*, Vol. 1. No. 2 (1983): 9.

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the demos as a great beast in need of taming.¹²⁶ Self-assertion before this beast required confidence and courage. The figure of Helen and her defining moment would work as a symbolic evocation of the structure of causality, fostering the state of mind that buttressed this courage. Through the memorization of the *Helen*, the student was habituated to the practice that allowed him to carry out this recall.

This recall would be like the breaking of a flare—a temporary surge of energy resulting from an envisioned jettisoning of restraints. The burnout, however, would likely have been substantial. Every time the *Helen* incantation was enacted, the toll was the tacit reinforcement of the commitment not only to a tragic worldview in which the agent is a powerful hero, but to one in which he must nobly come to terms with the reality that his agency is an illusion and that he is driven by the gods. In the end, however, the absence of foundations upon which this story is built would inevitably come to the fore, leaving the user of the *Helen* to be no more significant than a wanderer in a dream.

¹²⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 492c.

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