

## Rhetoric between Orality and Literacy: Cultural Memory and Performance in Isocrates and Aristotle

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*The essay argues for a reconsideration of the role of the “literate revolution” in the disciplining of rhetorical practice in the fourth century BCE. Specifically, the argument addresses the tension between oral memory and literate rationality in Isocrates and Aristotle to illustrate two divergent possibilities of appropriating oral linguistic resources of a culture. Aristotle’s literate classification of endoxa (received opinions) and pisteis (proofs) depoliticizes the oral utterances and maxims of contemporary Greek culture, thereby rendering discourse a mere accessory of a political agent. By contrast, Isocrates conceives of rhetorical performance as constitutive of political agency and civic identity. Key words: Aristotle, endoxa, identity, Isocrates, literacy, orality, performance*

IN the story of rhetoric’s origins and blossoming, the transition from oral modes of communication to writing is assigned the leading part. “Disciplinary” accounts of the emergence of rhetoric are virtually unanimous in the claim that rhetoric proper becomes possible only with systematic description of its principles.<sup>1</sup> In particular, it is only thanks to writing, and especially prose writing of the late fourth century BCE, that rhetoric seems to achieve its full potential as a “self-conscious manipulation” of the author’s medium (Cole IX) by means of which “one can ultimately view alternative forms of expression as tactical options in seeking to communicate effectively” (Johnstone 6). Echoing Aristotle’s famous definition of rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the existing means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (*Rhetoric* I.ii.1355b 2), these formulations betray a presumption of the separability of meaning from its form—a fantasy of a pliable communication medium. Such a conception of rhetoric—however attractive its implied confidence in the controlling agency of a rational human being—presents but a fossilized relic of rhetoric as social practice.

This essay argues instead that the consequences of the “literate revolution” for reflection about language must be reconsidered in the light of the surprising survival of the “oral” tradition within the literary practices of philosophers and rhetoricians. With a plethora of scholarship spanning the last twenty-five years at their disposal, classical rhetoricians and philologists now recognize orality and literacy not as mutually exclusive poles, but as complementary forces. After Eric Havelock blazed the trail, many studies have sought to examine the persistence of orality in what previously had been considered a uniformly “literate” culture. Furthermore, some scholars have called into question the deterministic approach of such general theorists of orality as Walter Ong, who argued that the shift from oral to literate modes of communication causes a drastic transformation in mentality.<sup>2</sup> Instead, they emphasize the *uses* of literacy in a concrete historical cultural context.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, this argument stresses the “gray” area between orality and literacy in order to show how Isocrates and Aristotle chart two divergent ways of textualizing rhetorical practice in a literate age that remains in many ways oral.

The reasons for juxtaposing Isocrates and Aristotle are both historical and polemical. Doxographic tradition and textual evidence suggest that Isocrates and his younger contemporary were rivals.<sup>4</sup> But the tension does not end there. Not only was Isocrates’

contribution to the history of eloquence overshadowed by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; but the very "foundational" story, and hence the *telos* of the art of rhetoric described in the opening of this essay, has been codified exclusively by means of Aristotle's pronouncements about it. When perceived through Aristotle's conceptual lens, rhetoric is akin to an instrument. It is an arsenal of persuasive means, which are external to rhetors and their situation. The history and theory of rhetoric would have been written differently if Isocrates' approach had prevailed. Isocrates' extant writings do not methodically specify the governing rules of "rhetoric." But in his self-reflexive and politically charged prose Isocrates assigns to discourse a socially constitutive, and not simply instrumental, function.

To appreciate this difference between Isocratean and Aristotelian understanding of *logos* and human agency, we will first reexamine the traditional opposition between "mythopoetic" and "rational" notions of speech, the former typically attributed to oral cultures and the latter to literate. With this backdrop, we will gain a more nuanced understanding of how both Isocrates and Aristotle are consciously positioning themselves vis-à-vis the oral tradition. The Isocratean use of literacy transforms the "mythopoetic" *logos* into a discourse that engenders, rather than merely serves, the rhetor's political identity. Aristotle, on the other hand, subverts oral elements in order to emphasize the *logos* that at once reflects purpose and stability of the ordered cosmos and serves as a conduit of extralinguistic content.

### Between Mythopoetic and Rational Reflection

The history of classical rhetoric, as the essay's introduction suggested, has been scripted as a tale of cultural and technological progress. Transition from a mythical to rational worldview as a result of increased literacy appears no less significant to the birth of rhetoric than to the emergence of abstract thought itself. As the story goes, the world of Greek gods—personified arbitrary forces of nature—gives way to abstract habits of thinking, thus allowing an individual to make judgments about causes and effects without the crutches of myth.<sup>5</sup> This trajectory may seem inviting, yet it presents too crude a picture of "rationality" on the one hand, and too simplistic an account of the cultural function of myth on the other. "Rationality" does not have to go hand in hand with the categorical slicing of the phenomenal world, and "myth" is not mere poeticized fiction. A different approach to "mythical" and "rational" consciousness calls for viewing *mythos* and *logos* not as polarized states of culture but as complementary linguistic resources of communal memory and critical reflection.<sup>6</sup> With this approach in mind, then, we may reevaluate the "mythical" heritage of the fourth-century rhetorics of Aristotle and Isocrates.

Archaic Greek culture did not distinguish between the mythical and the real in a religious ritual, prophetic utterance, or poetic performance. Indeed, the value of these types of speech stemmed from their claim to truthfulness. In archaic usage, however, the word for "truth," *alētheia*, did not designate the unassailable verity of an idea separated from its material symbol. It signified the power of memory over forgetting. As Egbert Bakker explains,

It is the Muse, an external personification of mental faculties like memory and imagination in the psychology and poetics of archaic Greece, who stands at the basis of activation and remembrance in the poet's mind and who in that capacity is a safeguard against forgetfulness, and eventually absence and death. What is activated is saved from *Lēthē* ("Forgetting") and is thus

*a-lēthēs* (free from *Lēthē*), and adjective that in later Greek comes to mean "true." The truth of epic tradition, however, is very far removed from the philosopher's notion of true and false statements: what is true in the epic tradition is what is active and thereby "present" or easily activated and thereby "near." (14–15)

In an oral setting, epic and religious poetry served as chief vehicles of propagation of cultural beliefs and norms of conduct. The absence of our traditional split between fictional and real resulted from another seeming lack of differentiation: speech was viewed not in terms of its content and a corresponding form, but in terms of its efficacy. For example, Marcel Detienne points to several mythical characters whose power to "realize" or "accomplish" is celebrated by the tragedians of the fifth century: "When Hermes plays the part of an inspired poet who, with skill and knowledge, can draw harmonious sounds from the lyre, far from pronouncing 'vain, useless' words, he 'realizes' the immortal gods and the dark earth" (71). By contrast, Cassandra, a truthful prophetess who does not wish to deceive, "seems capable of producing only 'vain' or even 'untrustworthy' words" (Detienne 77).

Efficacious speech belongs not to mythical deities alone. The opposition between powerful and weak words obtains in the realm of mortals as well (at least those who make up the human cast of the Homeric epics). As Richard Martin's study of speech types in the *Iliad* suggests, the effect of speech was not measured according to its "truthfulness" but according to its power. For example, the Homeric hero Achilles, admitting that his boasting had little effect, says: "A vain epos I tossed forth that day" (quoted in Martin 28). Conversely, the speech that commands recognition and brings about a desired action becomes "winged"; such "winged words" contrast with "vain" utterances both in their immediate effect and lasting quality (Martin 36–37).

Still, the question remains: what, in addition to its perceived power, enables poetic speech to achieve the quality of *alētheia*? Because of poetry's ties to religious ritual, the answer seems simple enough. For Detienne, it is "an act of faith that authenticates the power speech holds over others" (76). "The poet's speech," claims Detienne, "never solicits agreement from its listeners or assent from a social group. . . . It is the attribute and privilege of a social function" (75). Yet, however sanctioned or ritualistic poetic speech may be, its impact is still contingent upon the audience's response. Though his conclusions bolster Detienne's observations of the repetitive and sanctioned character of poetic performance in archaic Greece, Bakker nonetheless insists that the efficacy of each performance depended on the skill of the rhapsode and the audience's direct involvement in "the performance event" (15). *Alētheia* escapes forgetting thanks to the capacity of a performance to "realize" the mythopoetic life world. At the same time *alētheia* is closely followed by *lēthē*, since any performance, like Cassandra, is in danger of failing to persuade the listeners.<sup>7</sup>

The pre-literate culture of poets and prophets conceived of speech as an aesthetically potent—almost magical—social event, which activated in the listeners commonly held truths. Even naturalistic cosmology, which marks the emergence of Western rationality, still depends greatly on the mythopoetic tradition for its themes and language.<sup>8</sup> Although the written fragments of the Presocratics tend to disengage their thinking about the world from the arbitrariness of Hesiod's "Theogony," their appeal to contemporary audiences is beholden to poetic diction. As Havelock observed in his analysis of the Presocratics, criticism of the old world of myth, with its anthropomorphic deities and their deeds, does not try to break with the "thought-world of the oral period"; instead, this type of

discourse “seeks to alter the direction of a tradition” (236). The linguistic shape of much Presocratic writing is driven by what Kevin Robb terms an “oralistic” impulse. Robb points to the fragments of Heraclitus to illustrate how “the philosopher’s thought . . . was distilled into the form of the traditional saying or aphorism” (198). Among the oralistic devices inherited from the preliterate era, Heraclitus’ “persuasive euphony” is essential, however inessential it may seem in the eyes of today’s objectivist rationality. Robb elaborates:

The inclusion of persuasive euphony as a great philosopher’s conscious motive, and the goal to no small part of his professional labor, will be distasteful to some because today it is remote from professional philosopher’s training and goals. Truth and clarity are thought to be better served when uncluttered by attention to prose style, and mathematical notation is the purest truth of all. But the philosopher’s own complaint is unambiguous; he was forced to compete for an audience with street singers and rhapsodes, masters of aural appeal—no less than the poets of Greece in the persons of their reciters and performers, master artists—and to that competitive end he forged a rare verbal artistry. (199)

Given the point that philosophers, regardless of the peculiarities of their world view, had to compete for the audience’s minds by appealing to their ears, we might ask: is “oralistic” clothing of the utterance only conveying a “deeper” truth it intended to communicate? Can we speak of a new, non-mythical “content” that is surreptitiously lodged in the familiar and memorable “form”? I suggest that we cannot. To be sure, anthropomorphic deities of myths and epics are being replaced by the cosmic forces that are more inscrutable and hence more sublime. Such is the trajectory of change carried out by thinkers like Xenophanes, Anaxagoras, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. However, the “truth” of philosophical statements is wedded to their linguistic expression, with all of its aesthetic and cultural resonance. While the pre-Socratics were trying “to break with the oral tradition,” they composed under what Havelock calls “audience control” (“Preliteracy and the Presocratics” 233). In this sense, the mythopoetic truth, *alētheia*, which has to do with remembrance through repetitive reenaction, is not opposed to the truth of the cosmic order contemplated and performed by the philosopher.

Oral tradition does not wane by the time the Older Sophists had arrived on the scene, though the use of writing had increased. Like the Presocratics, the Sophistical movement makes good use of culturally embedded attitudes towards speech. In contrast with natural philosophers, rhetoricians are concerned not so much with the relationship between words and things as with the social function of language.<sup>9</sup> This bifurcation of rational thought about language develops, as Detienne puts it, “along two major lines: as an instrument of social relations and as a means of knowing reality” (106). Detienne’s “bifurcation” claim is correct only insofar as rhetoricians *emphasize* the former and philosophers the latter. The line between the two paths remains blurred, for language as an instrument of thought about reality is derived from its social function.<sup>10</sup> It will be shown later that even as Isocrates follows the former route by adapting the resources of mythopoetic tradition to his rhetorical and political project, his *philosophia* relies on a secularized and praxical conception of knowing, and, even as Aristotle attempts to subordinate his discourse on rhetoric to a distinct epistemology, his own philosophical prose functions rhetorically and politically. At this moment, however, we should pause on Gorgias, whose reflection on language represents a crucial juncture in the development of rational thought.

Gorgias gives us an image of *logos* as both a social force and a way, however deficient,

of making sense of our world. Though traditionally Gorgias has been classified in opposition to the philosophers, his extant fragments portray him as someone who navigated freely among discursive types now separated into philosophy and sophistry. Positioned on the cusp between orality and literacy, Gorgias shares with his philosophical predecessors and the tragedians of the fifth century an ambivalent attitude towards myth and poetry. On the one hand, Gorgias distances himself from the oral culture of mythmakers and poets; on the other, he strives to harness the sensual and social forcefulness of this past.

This attitude is most apparent in Gorgias' "Encomium of Helen," which embodies the tension between oralistic culture's non-rational persuasion and the self-reflexive distance aided by the onset of literacy. In the "Helen," Gorgias at once acknowledges the efficacy of performance of the myth and breaks its spell by revealing the chemistry of oral persuasion. Indeed Gorgias pronounces speech (*logos*) "a powerful lord (*dynastēs*), which by means of the finest and most visible body effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity" (8). The personification of the *logos* as an arbitrary ruler bears resemblance to the mythical narrative casting used by several Presocratics and by the poets of the archaic age. The power of the *logos* is akin to brute force (*bia*, 12) that moves the hearer in an almost physical way. Yet unlike the Presocratics, Gorgias is not concerned with the cosmic *logos*. Rather, he employs poetic technique to expose the mechanism of *alētheia* in its sense of un-forgetting. Since "memory of things past and awareness of things present and foreknowledge of the future" are unreliable (11), he contends, it is easy for people to come under the influence of speech.

However, besides reactivating culturally embedded truths, speech in Gorgias appears as a potent force that can be deployed by human agents to different ends. In addition to exposing the linguistic mechanism of enculturation, Gorgias sheds light on its new rationalistic uses aided by the onset of literacy. Speech, as it is practiced by the new "masters of truth," to use Marcel Detienne's expression, is now seen as a vehicle of social control. As exemplars of these new linguistic practices, Gorgias presents a motley crowd of experts:

To understand that persuasion, when added to speech, is wont also to impress the soul as it wishes, one must study: first, the words of astronomers who, substituting opinion for opinion (*doxa*), taking away one but creating another, make what is incredible and unclear seem true to the eyes of opinion; then, second, logically necessary debates in which a single speech, written with art but not spoken with truth (*alētheia*), bends a great crowd and persuades; and third, the verbal disputes of philosophers in which the swiftness of thought is also shown making the belief in an opinion subject to easy change. (13)

*Doxa* (opinion) is juxtaposed with *alētheia*, the latter having been interpreted, even by such an authority as Charles Segal, as "objective factuality" and the truth of the "phenomenal world" (112–14). It seems unlikely, however, that Gorgias is contrasting *doxa*, the opinions crafted by speakers and accepted by the audience, with truth of a philosophical kind. Instead, he is pointing out a shift from orally reinforced, univocal cultural knowledge to a multiplicity of truths spawned by the emergence of literate practitioners of persuasion in the second part of the fifth century. Gorgias' promise to remove blame from Helen by "displaying the truth" (*deixas talēthes*, 2) is a claim not of fact, but of value, since he proposes to beat the inspired poets at their own game. Likewise, the expression "written with art but not spoken with truth," applied to

“logically necessary debates” (13), refers to a desire to take advantage of the audience, rather than to misrepresent reality.

Gorgias thus continues to view speech as action rather than as a reflection of extralinguistic content. The myth of Helen’s abduction becomes objectified; it is used as a *paignion*, a “plaything” (21). Yet the *logos*—the vehicle of myth’s survival—retains a semi-autonomous status, even while it is being molded by the verbal artist. The new possibilities of the *logos* are predicated on the secular understanding of persuasion and human agency, but they are compatible with the transcendental quality of myth, if we take “myth” to be the preservation and activation of culturally valuable knowledge. What Gorgias bequeathed to fourth-century rhetoric is precisely this critical appreciation of the ambivalent potential of non-rational discourse. In fact, in his own performance Gorgias defies the separation between the rational and non-rational. He is an artist whose rationality is manifested by linguistic self-reflexivity rather than by a commitment to an “objective” way of thinking.

### Isocrates: Literacy, *Alētheia*, and Discursive Identity

Unlike Gorgias and the other Sophists, Isocrates is a literary rhetorician, whose self-declared difference from the “Sophists” seems to put him in the same intellectual camp with Plato. Indeed, Isocrates explicitly shuns and even attacks the oral culture of his contemporaries and often casts himself in the role of a truth-seeker. At the same time, Isocrates promotes the type of discourse that co-opts, thematically and stylistically, mythopoetic elements of composition and address associated with orality. Isocrates’ use of literacy, as will become clear, does not promote a separation between the linguistic apparatus of performance and the extralinguistic content. On the contrary, Isocrates retains the oralistic emphasis on the act of speech and its social function. But literacy allows him to strengthen the link between the linguistic act and the rhetor’s political identity. To flesh out these claims, let us examine Isocrates’ “quietist” literary strategy, his appeal to truth (*alētheia*), and the oral resources of his literary political discourse (*logos politikos*).

Contrary to ancient biographers and some contemporary critics, Isocrates’ preference for writing was not simply due to his physical ineptitude as an orator. As Yun Lee Too convincingly argues, Isocrates’ *ipsissima verba*, on which most traditional accounts are based,<sup>11</sup> constitutes a deliberate strategy of self-depiction, a part of a carefully crafted public persona. Isocrates engaged in writing not only to compensate for his bodily weakness or lack of courage. He pursued writing with a dual goal of shifting the focus of contemporary rhetorical practices from their traditional sites to a broader political forum and crafting his own distinct civic identity. At the same time, his shunning of the courts and the assembly—the places where citizens could influence the affairs of the *polis* through the power of their oral performance—marks Isocrates for his fellow Athenians as one of the “quietists” or *apragmones*. According to Deborah Steiner, in the context of the Athenian public culture, these individuals’ choice of reading and writing as well as their absence from public spaces of the *polis* signal “disenchantment with democracy and the desire for different social and political discourse” (187). Gunter Heilbrunn corroborates this interpretation when he reads Isocrates’ quasi-biographical statement about the lack of “voice and daring” in *To Philip* as an “accusation of the Athenian democracy” (175). However, unlike other literary *apragmones* of his generation, especially Plato and other Socratics, Isocrates adopts the quietist stance in order to reinvent democratic rhetoric,

not to disavow its legitimacy altogether. To validate this position, we must first inspect what Isocrates finds objectionable in rhetorical practices of his age.

Isocrates' criticisms of contemporary rhetoricians are well known: he seldom misses the opportunity to berate demagogues in the assembly, sycophants in law courts, logographers, and teachers of eristic disputation. Demagogic orators, who have undermined the civic potential of Periclean democracy, exemplify the excesses of oral powers of logos. In the pamphlet *On the Peace*, Isocrates puts his outrage at the abuse of public performance in the mouth of a pacifist speaker, who faces a hostile audience:

I observe that you do not hear with equal favor the speakers who address you, but that, while you give your attention to some, in the case of others you do not even suffer their voice to be heard. And it is not surprising that you do this; for in the past you have formed the habit of driving all the orators from the platform except those who support your desires. . . . Indeed, you have caused the orators to practice and study, not what will be advantageous to the state, but how they may discourse in a manner pleasing to you. (3-5)

One might conclude from this passage that Isocrates objects to aesthetically pleasing oral performance, just as Plato does in his *Gorgias*, when he chastises loudmouthed politicians who pander to their audiences in order to achieve selfish ends, or when he banishes poets from the city in the *Republic*. Plato's animosity, however, targets rhetorical instruction and poetic performance because they fail to measure up to the philosophical ideals of justice and truth. Unlike Plato, Isocrates does not condemn the aesthetic dimension of rhetoric. It is not the power of the spoken word that he questions, but the unrestrained pursuit of individual gain to the detriment of the political power of the *demos*, which has become the dominant type of rhetoric in the courts and the assembly. Isocrates' concern is echoed by prominent Athenian orators of the fourth century—Demosthenes and Aeschines, who castigate their audiences for becoming “prisoners” of the crowd-pleasers and, as a result, weakening the democracy.<sup>12</sup> Those whom Isocrates casts as his rivals, opponents, and detractors are guilty of not telling the truth. What does he mean by “truth” (*alêtheia*), we might ask, and how does his usage of the word position him among rhetoricians and philosophers?

It is difficult to discern what Isocrates means by *alêtheia* by reading English translations only. The Loeb translation by George Norlin often renders phrases like *alêthê legein* as “to state the facts,” whereas a more idiomatic translation<sup>13</sup> is “to speak truthfully, in a truthful manner.” More than philological niceties are at stake here. The former translation proposes that a distinction be drawn between objectively reported facts and fictitious account, the latter between honorable and shameful conduct. For Isocrates, honorable conduct depends on the exigency. For instance, the speaker of *On the Peace*, overwhelmed by the Athenians' bully-like actions towards their allies, exclaims: “I am at a loss what I should do—whether I should speak the truth as on all other occasions or be silent out of fear of making myself odious to you. . . . Nevertheless I should be ashamed if I showed that I am more concerned about my own reputation than about our common safety” (38-39). The honorable, and hence the true, thing to do is to act in the interest of the city and the alliance, however unpopular one's advice may sound at the moment.

The opening of the pamphlet *Against the Sophists* adds another dimension to the contrast between honorable and dishonorable action. Isocrates castigates other educators for offering empty promises to their prospective students. “If all who are engaged in the profession of education were willing to speak truthfully,” he begins, “and not to make greater promises than they are going to fulfill, they would not fare so badly with the

common people" (1). The truthfulness Isocrates invokes here is linked to the mythopoetic tradition's perception of speech as either efficacious or vain. To Isocrates, the philosophical and educational doctrines of these experts, like false oracles, do not yield the expected results. They promise to the young men that through their expert kind of knowledge they will attain a happy life (*Against the Sophists* 3). Isocrates contends that claims to such knowledge are a false advertisement, on the grounds that it is beyond our human capacity to divine the future. To drive home his point, Isocrates appeals to Homer: "we are so far removed from this prescience that Homer, who has been given the highest reputation for wisdom, has portrayed even the gods as sometimes debating among themselves about the future, not that he knew their thoughts, but because he wished to show that such power is impossible for humankind" (4). The attitude presented here is the one Isocrates will reiterate throughout his pedagogical and political life.<sup>14</sup> It summarizes to a large degree his relationship with the Socratics, whom, by virtue of the common label, he lumps together with the sprawling cottage industry of the science of speech, *tôn logôn epistēmē*. Isocrates objects to the practices of speech instructors because they profess to teach success through a "fixed art" (*tetagmenē technē*), undertaking "to pass on the science of discourse in the same fashion as they would teach the letters of the alphabet (*tēn tōn grammatōn*)" (10).

Isocrates, then, uses *alētheia* as a goading term in order to praise or blame political action or, in other cases, to point out fruitless promises of contemporary educators. The two senses of truth remain closely connected, because, for Isocrates, proper rhetorical education is a training ground for citizenly conduct. That is why, I believe, he resists the *technai* of the literate teachers of eloquence and chooses to pursue prose writing as a primary vehicle of his education and politics.

By abandoning the traditional venues of public performance for writing, Isocrates attempts to foster a different type of democratic rhetoric, which he terms *logos politikos*. Such a rhetoric, observes Takis Poulakos, "was an indistinguishably ethical and political art," for it combined both *eu legein* (the art of speaking well) and *phronein* (prudential thinking) for the benefit of the polis (*Speaking for the Polis* 68). The difficulty in articulating the difference and value of this educational project had to do not only with the lack of the immediacy and power of oral address, but also with the suspect status of writing in the fourth century BCE. Despite the use of writing by historians Herodotus and Thucydides, as well as by fifth-century dramatists, Athens was still primarily an oral culture, where writing functioned either as a supplement to oral communication, or, among the elites, as a diversion (*paignion*) (Harris 65–92).

To distinguish his art from both of these functions of writing, Isocrates attacks logography (ghost writing) and the intellectual exercises of the literate elites. To Isocrates, the former is contemptible because it is an instrument of the new politician and the litigious sycophant. The latter, though it does not promote unscrupulous quest for political power or material gain at the expense of others, is self-indulgent and often inconsequential. But it is precisely the novelty and elite nature of such writing that may cast doubt upon Isocrates' own compositions. That is why, in a famous passage in *Antidosis*, Isocrates explicitly contrasts his version of rhetoric—"speeches addressed to Hellas and the polis" (*logous Hellenikous kai politikous*)—with other types of prose writing: "genealogies of the demigods," "studies in the poets," "histories of war," "dialogues," and "private disputes" (45–46).

What, then, should be the model of *logos politikos*—the discourse that is at once



aesthetically pleasurable and politically beneficial to the state? Isocrates looks to the mythopoetic tradition as his resource. In *To Nicocles*, he instructs a rhetorician seeking consensus of the audience to follow the example of Homer. "Those who aim to write anything in verse or prose which will make a popular appeal should seek out," he writes, "not the most profitable discourses, but those which most abound in fictions; for the ear delights in these just as the eye delights in games and contests. Wherefore we may well admire the poet Homer and the first inventors of tragedy, seeing that they, with true insight into human nature, have embodied both kinds of pleasure in their poetry" (48). Isocrates sees his prose writing as a labor more challenging than that of poets. In the *Evagoras*, he lists the advantages of poetic craft. To the poets is "granted the use of many embellishments of language"; the poets are free to address epic subjects; they can go beyond "conventional expression" and summon "words now exotic, now newly coined, and now metaphors;" above all, poetic compositions "by the very spell of their rhythm and harmony . . . bewitch their listeners" (9-11). Isocrates enumerates these advantages as an implicit promise to surpass the poets—a gesture that is reminiscent of Gorgias' "Helen."

The appeal of mythopoetic discourse is not purely thematic (in the sense of the audience's recognition of familiar characters and stories)—it relies on the re-activation of emotions attached to shared cultural knowledge (such as the Greek expedition against the Trojans) through a rhapsodic performance. But Isocrates is not a rhapsode who captivates the hearers by his mimesis of Homeric verses. He is a prose writer who adapts mythopoetic discourse for his educational and political project. Isocrates appreciates the potential of oral performance even as he disdains the uses to which demagogic orators put it. As Too points out, Isocrates repeatedly draws attention to the lack of his bodily presence in his writings; on several occasions he describes his prose as "bereft." However, Too also suggests that repeated references to the apparent weakness of discourse stripped of the speaker's voice and the immediacy of the occasion "anticipate and defuse the criticisms that may be brought against the written text, above all the *logos politikos* which he produces" (120). Furthermore, while Isocrates loses the advantages of the oral performative situation, he gains something that only literacy can grant—time. Removed from traditional sites of public deliberation with their pressures to pass judgment soon after a speech was over, written rhetoric enjoyed the benefits stemming from a slower pace of reading and a possibility of rereading. According to Takis Poulakos, "with time on its side, eloquence would have a chance to develop its intrinsic qualities even as it continued to cater to an external situation, and to become a self-sufficient art even as it continued to be shaped by a purpose outside its form" (70).

The question arises, however, how would the writer's discourse, which now is "more closely tied now to the cultural and the thematic" (Poulakos, *Speaking* 70), exercise its influence on the audience? In the absence of the author's body and voice, what features of the written text would secure the delight and wisdom embedded in common cultural references? Though a critic of contemporary uses of orality, Isocrates presents himself as an inheritor of the mythopoetic tradition nonetheless. Unlike Plato, who defends orality but denigrates the mythopoetic tradition, he takes upon himself the rhapsodic labor of reactivating familiar cultural themes. Yet his mimesis is at once akin to and radically different from that of an oral rhapsode. The similarity between Isocrates and his poetic predecessors (variously referred to as *aoidoi* or *rhapsoidoi*) rests on the mode of composition and address. As *rhapsoidoi*, whose name derives from *rhaptō* ("sew together") and

*aidē* ("song"), Isocrates weaves his texts with a poet's attention to the rhythm of his utterance (Lentz 131). This link to the poetic tradition is not confined to the phonetic and syntactical levels of discourse. Like *rhapsoidoi*, who often stitched together "many and various fabrics of a song, each one already made" (Nagy 66), Isocrates inserts into his compositions fragments of already completed writings. Thus, intertextuality becomes a form of rhapsodizing. In *Antidosis*, a piece dramatized as a courtroom defense speech, "Isocrates" asks the clerk to read from previously published speeches—*Panegyricus*, *On the Peace*, *To Nicocles*—and quotes his "Hymn to Logos" from the *Nicocles* to display "what sort of eloquence it is which occupied me and given me so great a reputation" (43).

It is certainly possible to conceive of the *Antidosis* as a panoply of examples of eloquence intended primarily as instructional showpieces. However, a reading attuned to the performative aspect of this lengthy "court speech" shows Isocrates' writing as a genuine response to challenges against his character and his educational agenda and not as an "epideictic" exercise. It would not be too large of a leap, I think, to compare Isocratean self-defense in the *Antidosis* and other writings to the *muthoi* of epic heroes. In the previous section of this essay I called upon Martin's reading of the *Iliad* to show how mythopoetic discourse discriminated between powerful and ineffective speech. Martin also distinguishes between the effect of speech, rendered by the term *ēpos*, and the status-linked performance, marked by the term *muthos*. In Homer, *muthos* is "a speech-act indicating authority, performed at length, usually in public, with a focus on full attention to every detail"; it usually occurs when someone is boasting or defending his reputation (Martin 12). In *Antidosis*, too, the reputation (*doxa*) of the speaker is contested and speech performs an authoritative function. Isocrates himself draws a parallel between his discourse and "works composed in rhythm and set in music" (47). In addition, he urges the audience "to fix their attention even more on what is about to be said than on what has been said before" and "not to seek to run through the whole of it at the first sitting" (12). Significantly, written discourse is presented as an answer to previously uttered speech, and as a composition to be heard (or read aloud) by "those present" rather than a solitary reader. Whether such word choice is a matter of convention, as Norlin (Isocrates II, 192) suggests, is a different matter. Despite the written mode of composition, Isocrates emphasizes the act performed by the speech rather than presenting it as a mere expression of his thoughts. His *logos*, in other words, is not an autonomous medium that guarantees transmission of the message; the author portrays himself in a constant agonistic dialogue with the audience (Too 113–50).

The main distinction between rhapsodic and Isocratean performance resides in the identity of the performer. Whereas the fabric of Homeric epics is held together by recurring performances of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* at the Feast of the Panathenaia in Athens, for example, (Nagy 69), textual integrity in Isocratean writing is secured by the author's constructed identity. Rhapsodic mimesis brought to life the characters of an Achilles or an Agamemnon or even Homer himself, while the rhapsode's persona remained in the shadow despite considerable inventiveness and variation that he could bring to the performance. Nagy argues that when "the rhapsode is re-enacting Homer by performing Homer, . . . he *is* Homer so long as the mimesis stays in effect, so long as the performance lasts" (61). In Isocrates, on the other hand, the author's "I" refers most of the time to himself, and mythopoetic material is often employed to highlight his own constructed identity as a citizen-rhetor and educator.

*Panathenaicus*, a speech composed to celebrate Athenian leadership among the Hel-

lenes, illustrates the construction of the author's identity by its association with mythical personae. Here Isocrates invokes the memory of Agamemnon not simply to underscore the common heritage of the Greeks, but to draw an analogy between the Homeric hero's *doxa* and his own life-long literary labors of promoting *homonoia*, or unity, among the Greek states. "Although he took command of the Hellenes when they were in a state of mutual warfare and confusion and many troubles, [Agamemnon] delivered them from these. Having established concord (*homonoian*) among them and despising deeds which were superfluous, prodigious and without benefit to others, he assembled the army and led it against the barbarians. None of those with a good reputation at that time or coming later will be found to have engaged in an expedition finer or more useful to the Greeks than this individual" (*Panathenaicus* 77–78). Isocrates, although not a military leader, sees his *doxa* resting on his being a "leader of words"—*tōn logōn hēgemōn* (*Panathenaicus* 13), who through his logos has worked to foster concord and goodwill between the Athenians and other Greeks. And, thanks to the literary medium, he can appeal to the textual record of his statements as a proof of his identity as a citizen-rhetor.

Isocrates appeals to the mythopoetic tradition—the cultural capital of the Greeks—in a way that both illuminates contemporary oral rhetorical culture and produces a serious critique of its political and ethical shortcomings. Weary of other intellectuals' attempts to forge a scientific blueprint for virtuous conduct and effective speechmaking, Isocrates fosters a performance-oriented conception of rhetoric. He does so not through the laundry list of technical advice on speechmaking, but through his own performance. Drawing on the oral tradition's perception of speech as conduct, rather than a reflection of thoughts or reality, Isocrates carefully crafts his own image as a political agent. Though lacking bodily presence and the aural impact of speaking, Isocrates' oppositional persona gains its power through the record of deeds done in writing.

### Aristotle: *Endoxa*, Literate Categorization and the "Existing Means of Persuasion"

Aristotle opens his *Metaphysics* with a praise of the natural human desire to know. A sign of this desire, he says, "is our liking for the senses" (980a21–22). From among the senses the philosopher selects sight: "We choose seeing above practically all the others, not only as an aid to action, but also when we have no intention of acting. The reason is that sight, more than any of the other senses, gives us knowledge of things and clarifies many differences between them" (980a23–26). This statement may be read as symptomatic of the liberation of the mind from the shackles of myth, for the world has now been laid in front of an eager and discriminating gaze. A few lines further, Aristotle explains the development of crafts and sciences and sets up their hierarchy, in which purely theoretical sciences, pursued for their own sake, tower over the so-called "useful" crafts. In this context, the privileging of seeing acquires a new layer of significance. It asserts the ocularcentric rationality over the phonocentric. The critical eye now dominates the easily seduced ear.<sup>15</sup>

A problem arises, however, if we take into account Aristotle's expressed commitment to *phainomena* and *endoxa*, appearances and received opinions, which he seems to integrate into investigation of any subject matter, including the art of rhetoric. Indeed, many scholars make so much of his method of inquiry that Aristotle might not seem too different from Isocrates.<sup>16</sup> I propose, however, that in spite of his attention to appearances and opinions, Aristotle atomizes and reassembles bits of "popular wisdom"

contained in *endoxa* to forge a system that is intended to minimize, if not exclude, contradiction or conflict. I further argue that in rhetoric Aristotle confronts a formidably unstable object of inquiry from his point of view, and that he strives to neutralize it by forging a protective membrane between propositional content and the performative force of rhetorical utterances.

Let us consider Aristotle's treatment of *endoxa*. Available through what people say, *ta legomena*, *endoxa* come from the philosopher's linguistic and political community—in short, from the mixed heritage of poetry, rhetoric, and philosophical reflection. In the *Topica*, Aristotle defines *endoxa* as “the things believed by everyone or by most people or by the wise (and among the wise by all or by most or by those most known and commonly recognized)” (100b 20). Notice how received opinion is stratified *a priori* between the multitude and the wise. It is interesting to see how this distinction bears on Aristotle's method of selecting the most serviceable beliefs. In the *Metaphysics*, for instance, he faults dialecticians (the “wise” in his hierarchy of opinion-carriers) for relying on popular opinion (*endoxon*) (995b1–20). We shall keep this seemingly innocuous aside in mind when we observe Aristotle's dealing with *endoxa* in various contexts.

Still, Aristotle welcomes *endoxa*, even though he painstakingly qualifies what is acceptable. His most famous passage on the endoxical method is in the *Nichomachean Ethics*:

Our proper course with this subject as with others will be to present the various views (*ta phainomena*) about it, and then, after first reviewing the difficulties they involve, finally to establish if possible all or, if not all, the greater part and the most important of the opinions (*ta endoxa*) generally held with respect to these states of mind (*pathe*); since if the discrepancies can be solved, and a residuum of current opinion left standing, the true view will have been sufficiently established. (1145b 5)

As a philosopher, Aristotle tries to limit the multitude of the possible viewpoints to a neat, consistent definition. Martha Nussbaum describes the direction of Aristotle's intellectual exercise as follows: “This profound natural desire to bring the matter of life into a perspicuous order will not be satisfied, he believes, as long as there is contradiction. Our deepest commitment . . . is to the Principle of Non-Contradiction, the most basic of our shared beliefs. The method of appearance-saving therefore demands that we press for consistency” (247). Nussbaum aims to show that Aristotle subscribes, thanks to his friendliness to appearances, to a kind of philosophical, and hence ethical, pluralism, which sets him strikingly apart from Plato's ethical austerity.<sup>17</sup> What Nussbaum does not question is Aristotle's response to cultural and situational contexts out of which *endoxa* arise.<sup>18</sup>

If Aristotle strives to iron out contradictions among the many fragments of discourse he deems relevant to his subject matter, he must reconstitute the things said in terms of agreements and oppositions. In consequence, those views that seem to cancel each other are usually left behind, and the ones that appear unanimous are saved. This procedure, especially if its goal is to arrive at the most general definition, will by necessity flatten out the context of the utterances. A philosopher may rely on judgments about X pronounced by members of his or her linguistic community, but their political biases and cultural particularity will be obscured in a propositional statement like “X is Y.” In other words, the “residuum” of opinion will be exactly that: a referential statement devoid of markers of situation, purpose and audience. Philosophical writing, then, will tend towards maximum abstraction. Indeed, in contrast with the Presocratics, Plato and Isocrates,

Aristotle's sifting through the *endoxa* is not couched in a language meant to attract attention to itself, least of all to compete for acceptance with others. When references to myth and poetry occur in Aristotle's prose, they are almost invariably stripped of their performative context. It is as if what has been said before is now placed on the flat surface to be examined as an object. This strategy is evident in cases where a phrase from a poet is quoted to offer an illustration of a theoretical point. Reviewing the claims of the "first philosophers" in the *Metaphysics*, for example, Aristotle turns to Empedocles to point out that "if we follow Empedocles' argument, and do not confine ourselves to his mumbling way of expressing it, but attend to what he has in mind, we will find that love is the cause of good things, and strife of bad" (984b30–985a5). The desire to get to the propositional content of the argument eliminates other potential questions Aristotle might have asked.

The amputation of text from context is the product of a tendency towards abstraction abetted by literacy. Yet while in some cases Aristotle's tackling of *endoxa* is relatively innocuous, other examples may strike most modern readers as offensive. I am thinking, in particular, of a passage from Book I of the *Politics*. There, Aristotle distinguishes between the functions of female and slave in a household:

By nature, of course, female and slave are distinct. . . . Among the barbarians, however, the female is in the same position as the slave. But that is because there is nothing among the barbarians with the natural capacity to rule, and their community is that of male and female slave. Therefore "it is reasonable for Greeks to rule barbarians," say the poets supposing that to be barbarian and to be a slave are by nature the same thing. (1252a34)

The problem here is not with the *endoxa* itself, since the poets and tragedians of the classical period have thoroughly mythologized "the barbarian" as the Greeks' "Other."<sup>19</sup> Rather, it stems from the manner, at once serious and casual, in which the utterance is incorporated into the exposition of the origins of the *polis*. Aristotle accepts this opinion as given, indeed as a warrant for his own claim, and so precludes the opportunity of questioning the situation of its original performance (Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*) as well as its cultural value. A politically loaded statement has turned into a fixed assertion. As Havelock puts it, "the narrativized usage has turned into a logical one" (*Muse Learns to Write* 105). Havelock sees in Aristotle's *Politics* the expression of the same sentiments about the nature of humans as political animals as are present in Hesiod and Sophocles, only conveyed through a different syntax: "By the time the Aristotelian passage was written, it had become possible to describe this 'man' not by narrating what he does, but by linking 'him' as a 'subject' to a series of predicates connoting something fixed, something that is an object of thought the predicate describes a class, or property, not an action" (*Muse* 105).

Havelock's account of literate categorization is alarming, not so much because it shows the *possibility* of turning a narrative into a proposition, but because of its seeming political neutrality. Aristotle's literate usage sanctifies, so to speak, the relationship between the subject and the predicate by rendering it timeless and immutable. Note that his subject in the *Politics* is not celestial bodies or even animals, the things that are beyond the realm of human affairs (*ta anthrōpina*), but discussion of the most appropriate form of government.<sup>20</sup> In this context, Aristotle mentions the *doxa* of those who view slavery as a culturally created institution. But perhaps since their view is at variance with a series of "natural" correlations he has laid down already (husband-wife, master-slave, parent-child), Aristotle addresses it as a way of showing the "extremes" of *endoxa* concerning slavery. Indeed the correspondence between master and slave to Aristotle is both natural

and logical. In the *Categories*, the text explicating the logical function of predication, Aristotle happens to use “master” and “slave” to demonstrate the proper application of reciprocal terms: “Take the attribute ‘master’ from a ‘man’: then, indeed, the correlation subsisting between ‘man’ and ‘slave’ will have vanished. No master, in short, no slave” (7b 4–7). What begins as a richly ambivalent poetic utterance achieves its logical end as a severely circumscribed residue of opinion.

So far we have considered how Aristotle assimilates *ta endoxa* to his discourse about the first philosophy (metaphysics) and politics. When he approaches rhetoric, he does not change his method of cataloging the received opinions. As in other cases, he presents a “literature review” of previous (incorrect or incomplete to his mind) statements about rhetoric. Not content with the existing *technai* that instruct students of rhetoric how to rouse the audience’s emotions, Aristotle sets out to produce a *technē* more attuned to the theoretical tenets of the Lyceum. But precise definition of the subject eludes him: in an effort to pin down what rhetoric is Aristotle reaches for its association with other, considerably more stable, areas of inquiry: “Thus it appears that rhetoric is as it were an offshoot of dialectic and of the science of ethics, which may be reasonably called politics” (*Rhetoric* 1356a 7). The definition for which he finally settles, however, insists on the serviceable nature of the art. By choosing the term *dunamis* (faculty) Aristotle implies that it is not an activity (*energeia*), but a capacity that can be grasped by an already ethical agent. Let us examine what happens to *endoxa* in the service of an art that, to Aristotle, is itself an offshoot of dialectic.

*Endoxa* in the *Rhetoric* furnish raw material for enthymemes, or rhetorical syllogisms. One must use them in place of complicated logical demonstrations, for addressing popular audiences differs greatly from scientific or ethical teaching.<sup>21</sup> Thus enters into Aristotle’s plan the need to persuade the *hoi polloi*:

Nevertheless, rhetoric is useful, because the true and the just (*talēthē kai ta dikaia*) are naturally superior to their opposites, so that, if decisions are properly made, they must owe their defeat to their own advocates; which is reprehensible. Further, in dealing with certain persons, even if we possessed the most accurate scientific knowledge, we should not find it easy to persuade them by the employment of such knowledge. For scientific discourse (*ho kata tēn epistēmēn logos*) is concerned with instruction, but in the case of such persons instruction is impossible; our proofs and arguments must rest on generally accepted principles. (*Rhetoric* 1355a 12)

This passage bespeaks Aristotle’s vision of rhetoric as something external to both scientific and ethical deliberation.<sup>22</sup> It also indicates a desire to straighten up the heretofore frivolously applied *technē* by focusing on proofs (*pisteis*) and arguments (*logoi*). Indeed, anything outside proof Aristotle considers merely an appendage (*prostheka*) (1354a 3). Still, he must concede some power to *endoxa*, since the multitude (*hoi polloi*) are likely to respond to what harmonizes with their collective perceptions. In the case of rhetoric, then, *endoxa* seem to take on an even greater significance than in other treatises of Aristotle.

Here, we may expect that the aural echoes will flow back into the desiccated grooves of logical propositions. For in spite of the literary abstractness of Aristotle’s overall project, he is spelling out the rules of a spoken, rather than written, art. Could it be, then, that Aristotle’s “truth,” at least in this particular context, is a harkening back to the mythopoetic *alētheia*—the truth reactivated in the (popular) audience’s minds? Indeed, following William Grimaldi’s commentary on the *Rhetoric*, scholars have defended the

audience's active role in Aristotle's construction of rhetorical proofs (Farrell 95–97). Others have insisted that orality, no matter how much Aristotle squeezes it out of *ta endoxa* in the rest of his inquiries, makes a comeback in the form of “an unspoken oral premise” in the enthymeme. By turning to the opinions in the audience's minds as a source of persuasion, Aristotle seems to retain “ties to the common wisdom and concrete particulars that are a staple of the oral culture” (Lentz 172).

However, the equation of Aristotle's “truth” with the mythopoetic un-forgetting is offset by the fact that “the common wisdom and concrete particulars” have been already neutralized by virtue of their classification into commonplaces.<sup>23</sup> Aristotle devotes his *Topica* precisely to that task. Furthermore, in the *Rhetoric* he insists that one's natural capacity to discern the true (*alēthēs*) from that which resembles it is, in fact, a precondition for the capacity to “divine well in regard to *ta endoxa*” (1355a 11).<sup>24</sup> The truth he refers to is opposed to appearances, rather than to oblivion. Consequently, it is the propositional content of *endoxa*—not their performative forcefulness—in which Aristotle invests most effort. Thomas K. Johansen, following Burnyeat, explains that Aristotle transcends the cultural context of *endoxa* because of his belief in the cyclical view of history and immutability of true opinions: “The reason why Aristotle thinks that man can repeatedly come up with the right theories is that he believes that man by nature is a potential knower and that natural potentialities generally are realized. Truths grasped by our predecessors have been preserved for us in the form of *endoxa*. That is why we can grasp the truth adequately if we attend correctly to the *endoxa*” (288).<sup>25</sup> In the *Rhetoric*, as Brunschwig has pointed out, Aristotle “often uses the vocabulary of vision, as if the relevant object were already here, existing (*huparchon*), and just waiting to be brought into view” (44). Epistemologically, a rational agent's capacity to discern the truth is extrarhetorical, for it precedes his participation in civic rituals that activate communal memory. *Endoxa* are to be sifted through only to reveal what is common about human behavior in general.

Even when emotions (*pathe*) come into play as sources of proof (*pistis*) in the second book of the *Rhetoric*, their treatment manifests an instrumental attitude characterized by “‘surgical’ detachment and description” (Dubois 125). As Dubois comments on the procedure by which Aristotle enumerates and assesses various *pathe*:

The philosopher observes emotion without sharing it and proceeds like Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, like the Stranger in the *Sophist*, to hunt down the emotions, to pursue them relentlessly through division until the quarry is driven to earth. . . . Emotions are to be evoked and visited upon his audience as part of the orator's performance. The self-control of the orator and philosopher requires that he survey the field of emotions, assess the value of a particular emotional simulacrum, display it for the audience, produce and destroy it in his audience. (125–26)

For Aristotle, the principles that govern emotional excitation can be examined completely apart from the contexts in which real orators had produced specific passions. The individual verbal style and oral delivery become superfluous once the general mechanism of persuasion is laid down. In a particularly revealing passage of Book III, Aristotle states:

Since the whole business of Rhetoric is to influence opinion, we must pay attention to it, not as being right, but necessary; for, as a matter of right, one should aim at nothing more in speech than how to avoid exciting pain or pleasure. For justice should consist in fighting the case with facts alone, so that everything else that is beside demonstration is superfluous; nevertheless, as

we have just said, it is of great importance owing to the corruption of the hearer. However, in every system of instruction there is some slight necessity to pay attention to style; for it does make a difference, for the purpose of making a thing clear, to speak in this or that manner; still, the difference is not so very great, but all these things are mere outward show (*phantasia*) for pleasing the hearer, wherefore no one teaches geometry in this way. (*Rhetoric* 1404a 5–6)

Several crucial points about the oral aspects of rhetoric are articulated here: first, that rhetoric (unlike scientific instruction) cannot influence opinion without ingratiating the hearer. The rhetorician's speech reaches its goal by exciting the senses of a diverse public, while geometrician's terse prose addresses a select group of like-minded students. Second, this wandering into the territory of emotions is a risky enterprise and should be constrained. In this context, it appears that speeches concerned with civic matters should not emulate the dramatic style reserved for poetic performances—one should not divert the audience's intellect from the "facts." Finally, the manner of discourse is actually external to the matter at hand. The linguistic form is separated from its extralinguistic content. We get a set of conflicting statements: Aristotle concedes that persuasion is a blend of emotional and intellectual exhortation, but demands discursive discipline as an antidote for speeches that flatter and gratify the listener's fancy. On the other hand, these statements do not sound so contradictory; rather, they display an attempt to put a fence around a certain acceptable range of performative power. Poetic speech, predictably, is not the standard by which this acceptable range is determined.

Aristotle points to Gorgias as the one who invented the poetic style of oratory, which he considers inappropriate for rhetoric though "even the majority of uneducated think that such persons express themselves most beautifully." Why such an attack? Because poetic utterances, from Aristotle's point of view, "are devoid of sense" (1404a 8–9). The new non-poetic style that Aristotle offers as a replacement of poetic diction possesses "clarity" (*sapheneia*) as one of its chief merits: "This is shown by the fact that the speech, if it does not make meaning clear (*ean mē dēloi*), will not perform its proper function" (1404b1). Aristotle seems to be at pains to sever the force of the spoken word from its function of signification. For him, language allows the expression of relationships among things, and hence clarity becomes the standard against which all expression must be judged.

In contrast with Isocrates, whose view of language is inseparable from his understanding of political agency, Aristotle sees language primarily as a rational representation of natural relationships that exist outside the tumultuous wrangle of the Athenian culture. While Isocrates adopts an adversarial identity by leaving the sites of contemporary rhetorical practice, Aristotle puts himself above the fray to construct a consistent hierarchy of knowledge appropriate to theoretical sciences and pragmatic arts. His *Rhetoric* functions both as a guide for statesmen with training in philosophy and as codification of the commonplaces upon which rhetorical arguments are to be built.

Aristotle approaches rhetoric with the conceptual apparatus of his logical treatises ready at hand, and reluctantly concedes some importance to the elements that are "external" to the rhetorical demonstration. Though ostensibly arising out of the rhetorical culture, Aristotle's scheme furthers an understanding of language as a system of rules that dictates performance, not the other way around. Consequently, the power of speech is circumvented in order to give way to a distinctly transparent literate conception of the logos as reflection of the cosmos, not a creative force that shapes thought, action, and identity of human agents.



## The Logic of Literacy and Literate Logics

We began with an assumption about the emergence of rhetoric as an "art" in the fourth century BCE, according to which the disciplined *technē rhētorikē* of Aristotle crowns the evolution from the oral mythopoesis to literate rationality. This assumption, based to a large degree on Aristotle's literate conception, appears excessively deterministic, since it pictures a uniform trajectory of linguistic and cultural change from orality to literacy. I suggested that in order better to appreciate the difference between Isocrates' and Aristotle's *use* of literacy, we must examine the way they respond to and appropriate oral culture. To that end, the essay traced oral mythopoetic attitudes towards speech to note the survival of orality in the rhetorical practice of the fifth and fourth centuries.

Against the background of mythopoetic tradition's influence on cultural reflection about discursive types and functions, we have witnessed how Isocrates and Aristotle epitomize two divergent *literate* logics and two dissimilar visions of discourse in the fourth century. Both fully literate and addressing for the most part literate audiences, Isocrates and Aristotle rely on oral culture's mythopoetic elements. However, Aristotle renders the oral utterances and maxims of contemporary Greek culture abstract and timeless by focusing on the propositional content of speech, rather than its social function. He catalogues culturally particular elements of public discourse as instantiations of supposedly universal principles of eloquence discernable by those who already possess practical wisdom. As a result, Aristotle presents us with a picture of the rhetorical art that transcends historical specificity of received opinions (*endoxa*) and veils the political motivation behind this act of transcendence. The Isocratean use of literacy, on the other hand, does not remove him from the political and cultural life of the community. Nor does it reduce narrative elements to logical propositions. Presenting his compositions as performative proof of his citizenly identity, Isocrates transforms the "mythical" logos with its sensual impact and cultural resonance into a discursive site of cultural criticism and political intervention.

Why should it matter, then, that Isocrates and Aristotle differ in methods and goals of their appropriation and critique of the performance-centered Greek culture? Why can't we simply settle for a traditional view that Isocrates was a practitioner of rhetoric, and Aristotle, a theorist? I believe that to assimilate Isocrates' *oeuvre* to Aristotle's account of rhetoric would be to impose Aristotle's epistemological and political perspective upon an articulation of logos that goes against the very presumptions of Aristotle's worldview.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Isocrates preserves and amplifies the culture's emphasis on the act of speech, Aristotle approaches language as a reflection of extralinguistic reality. If Isocrates views rhetorical performance as constitutive of one's political agency, Aristotle relegates performance to a stylistic function. In other words, Isocrates and Aristotle constitute two distinct, even antagonistic, paradigms of reflection about discourse and human agency. The readers will decide to what extent either paradigm is congenial to their intellectual and pedagogical goals. However, I hope to have demonstrated that histories of rhetoric and philosophy should treat Isocrates not as a mere precursor, but as a worthy rival of Aristotle.

## Notes

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version of the essay has received the "Outstanding Student Paper" Award from the ASHR division of NCA for the year 1999.

<sup>1</sup>For "disciplinary" accounts of the emergence of rhetoric, see Cole's *The Origins of Rhetoric*, Johnstone's "Introduction" to *Theory, Text, Context: Issues in Greek Rhetoric and Oratory*, and Schiappa's *Protagoras and Logos* and *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece*. Cole's position seems the least convincing, as he disregards "proto-rhetoric" (in particular, discursive practices of the fifth century BCE) and presents rhetoric as a relatively static system of multiple, exchangeable means of transmitting extralinguistic content. His position presumes a literate condition of storage of linguistic devices as if they were neutral letters of an alphabet. Johnstone modifies Cole's thesis about the classical invention of rhetoric to account for "earlier intellectual, political and cultural conditions in the absence of which [rhetoric] could not have developed" (6). Johnstone nevertheless accepts Cole's premise about separability of form and content as a *sine qua non* of rhetoric: "Thus does mere expression become a message" (6). On the other hand, scholars like Kennedy and Enos have attempted to construct a rhetorical typology of archaic discourse going all the way to Homeric epics.

<sup>2</sup>See especially chapter 4 "Writing Restructures Consciousness" in Ong's *Orality and Literacy*.

<sup>3</sup>For example, William Harris' *Ancient Literacy* investigates "restricted literacy" in classical Greece. Rosalind Thomas' two monographs, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* and *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, blend the discussion of general theories of orality and literacy with historical research. Also of interest are studies that focus on the relationship between literate practices and power in antiquity, such as Debra Steiner's *Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece* and the volume *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, edited by Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf.

<sup>4</sup>Cicero's description of this rivalry in *De Oratore* runs as follows: "Accordingly when Aristotle observed that Isocrates succeeded in obtaining a distinguished set of pupils by means of abandoning legal and political subjects and devoting his discourses to empty elegance of style, he himself suddenly altered almost the whole of his system of training, and quoted a line from *Philoctetes* with a slight modification: the hero in the tragedy said that it was a disgrace for him to keep silent and suffer barbarians to speak, but Aristotle put it 'suffer Isocrates to speak'" (III. xxxv. 141). In addition to this anecdotal evidence, Aristotle's record reveals traces of Isocrates' agonistic influence. For the reconstruction of Isocrates within Aristotle's texts, see especially David J. Depew, "The Inscription of Isocrates into Aristotle's Practical Philosophy."

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Bruno Snell's *The Discovery of the Mind*.

<sup>6</sup>Susan Jarratt challenges the *mythos/logos* polarity in *Rereading the Sophists*. This polarity is further complicated in the recent collection of essays *From Myth to Reason?*, edited by Richard Buxton.

<sup>7</sup>Havelock and those who rely on his interpretation of oral consciousness in *Preface to Plato*, assume that this state of the listeners' mind was passive and the poet could make the audience identify almost pathologically with the content of what he is saying. I would take such an assumption with a grain of salt for two reasons. First, Havelock is following Plato's rather hostile treatment of oral poetry, motivated by a desire to substitute the traditional *alētheia* with one of a transcendental philosophical sort. Second, the contrast between "the words without realization" and those that "accomplish the truth" in epic discourse (Detienne 84) indicates a degree of uncertainty about the efficacy of speech within the oral culture.

<sup>8</sup>Jean Pierre Vernant observes that the "fundamental concepts upon which . . . construction of Ionian philosophy is based are (i) the separation out from a primeval unity; (ii) the constant struggle and uniting of opposites; (iii) an eternal cycle of change; and all three reveal how their cosmology was rooted in mythical thought. The philosophers did not have to invent a system to explain the world: they found one ready-made" (347).

<sup>9</sup>I do not wish to overpress the contrast between "philosophers" and "rhetoricians" (or "Sophists") in the fifth century BCE, since these categories were at the time still in flux. For an overview of the use of the term "sophist" in the fifth century and before, see Schiappa's *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece*, 50–53. For a contrasting interpretation of the sophists' identity, see John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, 11–52. In the fourth century, the distinction continues to be up for grabs, given Isocrates' insistence on calling his occupation *philosophia*. On Isocrates' use of the term *philosophia*, see Schiappa's *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece*, 162–184 and Timmerman's "Isocrates' Competing Conceptualization of Philosophy."

<sup>10</sup>"Reason," contends Vernant, "is not to be discovered in nature, it is immanent in language. It did not originate in techniques for operating upon things. It was developed from the organization and analysis of the various means of influencing men, of all the techniques for which language is a common instrument, namely, the arts of the lawyer, the professor, the orator, and the politician" (366).

<sup>11</sup>See especially Werner Jaeger's "The Rhetoric of Isocrates and its Cultural Ideal" in Book Four of his *Paideia*.

<sup>12</sup>See Ober's discussion in his *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, 321–22.

<sup>13</sup>Of course, any translation would be idiomatic, but some idioms are more indicative of the translator's unconscious biases. Norlin's translation reveals modern positivistic bias, since "truth" is interpreted as a faithful statement of objective facts.

<sup>14</sup>"Against the Sophists," according to Isocrates' own account in the "Antidosis," is an early composition. Its primary goal is to advertise Isocrates' school and his *philosophia* by way of criticizing contemporary teachers of philosophy and speech. Isocrates portrays himself as an "anti-disciplinary" kind of teacher as he denies that any systematic set of principles can ensure happiness and practical success.

<sup>15</sup>The range of "ocular" experience need not be confined to "objective" observation, of course. Seeing can be just as

seductive and overwhelming as aural persuasion. For instance, Gorgias draws a parallel between the ocular and oral illusions in the "Helen" (17–19). Plato, being far less sanguine about illusions, derides both "the lovers of sights and sounds" in the *Republic* (5. 476b).

<sup>16</sup>G.E.L. Owen was first to defend endoxology, an inquiry beginning with received opinions (*endoxa*), as Aristotle's method of investigation. See his essay "*Ti thenai ta Phenomena*" reprinted in the collection *Logic, Science, and Dialectic*, edited by Martha Nussbaum.

<sup>17</sup>Nussbaum builds upon and extends the argument first advanced by G.E.L. Owen. Owen defended a linguistic translation of Aristotle's *phainomena* as "ordinary beliefs" and "appearances." But he still demanded that *phainomena* be rendered as theory-neutral observations in Aristotle's physical treatises. According to Nussbaum, Owen's split attitude towards the term does the philosopher an injustice by charging him with equivocation "in just the area where Aristotle's precision and attentiveness are usually most striking" (244). See chapter 8 "Saving Aristotle's Appearances" in her *Fragility of Goodness*.

<sup>18</sup>Nussbaum argues that "Aristotle's ethical views make him hospitable to tragedy and its style as sources of illumination," but she defends Aristotle's austere style as something that does more justice to poetic art than its subversion by Plato: "We might think of the ethical works as works of interpretation, orderings of the 'appearances' found in ordinary life and in tragic poetry. They do not replace tragedy: for only tragedy can give us illumination through and in pity and fear. But they supply an essential part of tragic learning, a part that Aristotle might fear losing were he to run together criticism and madness, explanation and passion" (393). Such drawing of boundaries between philosophical writing and tragic drama is troublesome, since the "clarity" of Aristotle philosophical discourse may disguise, through its aura of scrupulous analysis, attitudes that are just as politically and culturally partisan as those of Plato.

<sup>19</sup>See Edith Hall's *Inventing the Barbarian* for a discussion of Greek self-definition through tragedy.

<sup>20</sup>In a recent commentary Peter Simpson states: "The *Politics*, according to Aristotle himself, is not about a historical phenomenon, nor is it about a Greek phenomenon. It is about a *natural phenomenon* which, if prominent in ancient Greece, could in principle exist in any place and at any time and which, moreover, is necessary at every place and at every time if human beings are to attain happiness" (xxi, emphasis added).

<sup>21</sup>Aristotle remarks immediately after that: "That is why Rhetoric assumes the character [*hupoduetai hupo to schema*, "slips under the appearance"] of *Politics*, and those who claim to possess it, partly from ignorance, partly from boastfulness, and partly from other human weaknesses, do the same" (1356a 7). Isocrates is the most likely object of attack here, for his *logos politikos* does not distinguish between the "higher" *pragmateia* of politics and the "lower" *technē rhetorikē*.

<sup>22</sup>In a recent essay titled provocatively "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* Against Rhetoric," Carol Poster argues that the *Rhetoric* is "provided as a manual for the student trained in dialectic who needs, particularly for purposes of self-defense or defense of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, to sway the ignorant or corrupt audience or to understand the functioning of rhetoric within the badly ordered state" (244).

<sup>23</sup>In Book III of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle summarizes his exposition of the sources of proof: "We have also stated the sources from which enthymemes should be derived—some of them being special, the others general commonplaces (*topoi*)" (1403b 1).

<sup>24</sup>In this passage, J.H. Freese translates *ta endoxa* as "probabilities." Aristotle's special term for "probability" is *to eikos*: "that which generally happens, not however unreservedly, as some define it, but that which is concerned with things that may be other than they are, being so related to that in regard to which it is probable as the universal to the particular" (*Rhetoric* 1357a 15).

<sup>25</sup>For a passage where Aristotle states his belief in the cyclical nature of knowledge, see *On the Heavens* 270b 19–20.

<sup>26</sup>In Aristotle's view, Isocrates is a valuable resource because of his command of the epideictic style. Yet while he singles out Isocrates as one of the eminent "Athenian orators" (*Rhetoric* 1418a 10), Aristotle also minimizes the political importance and timeliness of Isocrates' writings by tearing them into stylistically interesting but decontextualized fragments. Apparently, this practice did not escape Isocrates' notice. In his last pamphlet, *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates protests against those who gather "in the Lyceum" to dismember his discourses, "reading them in the worst possible manner side by side with their own, dividing them in the wrong places, mutilating them, and in every way spoiling their effect" (17–18).

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