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Source: *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 54, Fasc. 4 (Aug., 2001), pp. 393-408

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4433237>

Accessed: 30-10-2017 08:55 UTC

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# PATTERNS OF ARGUMENTATION IN GORGIAS\*

BY

D. G. SPATHARAS

Gorgias, according to Plato's *Phaedros* (267a), valued probabilities (εἰκότα) ahead of truth; in other words, Gorgias preferred probabilities to actual truth or—in a morally marked modification of this disclaimer—truth was practically neglected by him. To put it in Dodds' words he was the producer of "dazzling insincerities". An interesting version of this standard idea about Gorgias' argumentation is the one offered by Kerferd; commenting on *The Encomium of Helen* he says that Gorgias' "emphasis on truth" is "emphatic", because "deceit is only possible in relation to that which is actually true", which entails that truth in Gorgias' hands is nothing but a presupposition of effective deceit.<sup>1)</sup> This view has been challenged only very recently by Gagarin, who, instead of reading Plato's evaluation of early rhetoric, decided to read Gorgias' himself (and other early masters of rhetoric) and he concluded that what we have from Plato and some modern scholars is a distorted image of the so-called early rhetoric.<sup>2)</sup>

In this paper, following Gagarin's paradigm, I wish to shed some more light on Gorgias' argumentation; by attempting a classification of argumentative patterns employed by this Sophist, it will become more clear that arguments from probability is only one among several other patterns of reasoning used by him, and consequently that Plato singles out *this* argumentative pattern, because probabilities

\* I am grateful to Prof. D. M. MacDowell who read an earlier draft of this paper, and to Thomas McGrory who improved my English significantly.

1) E. R. Dodds, *Plato, Gorgias* (Oxford 1959), 8; G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981), 79. On modern scholars and argument from probabilities, see M. Gagarin, *Probability and Persuasion*, in: I. Worthington (ed.), *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action* (London 1994), 49-50.

2) In his own words, "Plato's criticisms on this point reflect his own concern with the overriding primacy of an absolute standard of truth, which is tied to and validated by his Forms; for him anything less than absolute truth was no truth at all", Gagarin (n. 1), 56-57.

can easily be regarded as opposed to factual truth. Moreover, I propose to show that Gorgias' process of argumentation is more complicated than it is usually taken to be. The patterns I wish to examine seem to be relatively recurrent in Gorgias' preserved texts (that is *The Encomium of Helen*, *The Defence of Palamedes*, and *On not Being*;<sup>3</sup>) I exclude the *Epitaphios* which should be considered as a longer fragment). They are the following: 1) arguments from probabilities, 2) arguments from antinomy, 3) 'theorisation' through examples, and finally 4) apagogic and 'Russian doll' argumentation.

### 1. *Arguments from probabilities*

The term argument from probabilities (εἰκός) means an argument which is not based on definitive factual reality; it is an argument the acceptability of which depends on its potential to reproduce facts on the grounds of common experience shared by humans. It is not necessary to go into details concerning the history of the probability arguments in Greek literature.<sup>4</sup>) It will suffice to mention the interesting case of the "reverse probability" argument (to use Gagarin's words), attributed by Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1402a17-28) to Corax; in a conflict between a weak and a strong man the weak man can simply argue that he did not attack the strong man because he was not able to do so; this argument cannot be employed by the strong man who can instead use the reverse probability: if I had attacked the weak man the obvious suspect would have been myself, so I never attacked him.

As far as I know, the reverse probability is never used by Gorgias, although his *Palamedes* makes an ample use of εἰκότα;<sup>5</sup>) according

3) Unfortunately Gorgias' original text has not been preserved; all the information we possess on its content is due to the accounts of the Anonymus author of the treatise *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* (*MXG*) 5-6, 979a12-980b21, and that of Sextus Empiricus' *Adversus mathematicos* 7,65-87.

4) Its origins are traditionally placed with Corax and Teisias, but it can be traced in early literature (see Gagarin (n. 1), 51, who maintains that "they did, however, develop a new form of this argument—... the 'reverse probability' argument"). On Corax and Teisias see S. Wilcox, *Corax and the Prolegomena*, *AJP* 64 (1943), 1-23; D. A. G. Hinks, *Teisias and Corax and the Invention of Rhetoric*, *CQ* 34 (1940), 61-69; and T. Cole, *Who Was Corax?*, *ICS* 16 (1991), 65-84.

5) The argument from probabilities in Gorgias has been discussed by I. Anastassiou, *Ἡ Πιθανολόγηση ὡς Μέθοδος Ἀπόδειξης στὸ Γοργία*, in K. I. Voudouris (ed.), *Ἡ Ἀρχαία Σοφιστική* (Athens 1982), 242-250.

to the version of the myth followed by Gorgias,<sup>6)</sup> Palamedes was falsely accused by Odysseus that he betrayed Greece to the Trojans. In order to support this accusation, he forged a letter ostensibly sent by Priam to Palamedes and placed it in the tents of the latter along with a quantity of gold. When Odysseus 'found' the gold and the letter, he accused Palamedes of treason, and after a trial heard by the Greek leaders the wise hero was condemned to death. Gorgias divides his defence into two major parts: a) if I had wanted to betray the Greeks to the barbarians I would not have been able to do so (6-12), and b) if I had been able to do it I would not have wanted to do it (13-21).<sup>7)</sup> The development of the argumentation in both parts makes abundant use of probabilities: in the first part, Palamedes proves that all the necessary stages for the preparation of the betrayal (communication with Priam, a pledge, the transfer of money etc.) were all impossible. His argumentation proceeds by conceding each step: in order to betray Greece I had to do A which was impossible; but even if A had been possible B would have been necessary; but B was impossible; even if B had been possible, and so on.<sup>8)</sup> This first part is, basically, a presentation of probabilities which are proved to be invalid, due to practical reasons. In the second part, probabilities are employed in relation to motives. It is an exhaustive examination of possible reasons for which one might have been tempted to commit the crime of treason (money, power, helping friends etc.); each one of these motives is dealt with separately and much of the persuasiveness lies both in the conformity of the hero with generally accepted moral standards and in the detailed discussion of practically every possible motive.

The *Encomium of Helen* is not marked by the use of probabilities; the mythological version adopted here is the Homeric one, according to which Helen *did* travel to Troy with Paris (cp. 5 ἐπράξεν

6) For Palamedes in Greek Literature see the most detailed, but less quoted G. Z. Lyra, *Ὁ Μύθος τοῦ Παλαμήδη στήν Ἀρχαία Ἑλληνική Γραμματεία* (Yiannina 1987); see also R. Scodel, *The Trojan Trilogy of Euripides* (Hypomnemata 60; Göttingen 1980), 43-63.

7) Notice that when probability arguments are employed, hypothetical clauses are very likely to appear; an εἰκός must have as its starting point a hypothesis, which is either confirmed or rejected; in *Palamedes* the two hypotheses are rejected, whereas in *Helen* the validity of the four hypothetical reasons for which Helen deserted her home is confirmed (see also Anastassiou (n. 5), 244).

8) See below, 'the Russian doll' argumentation.

ἃ ἔπραξεν); what is questioned in this speech is the responsibility of Helen.<sup>9)</sup> The invention of the reasons which made it possible for Helen to travel to Troy is the only trace of probabilities in this speech (cp. 6 τὰς αἰτίας, δι' ἃς εἰκὸς ἦν γενέσθαι τὸν τῆς Ἑλένης εἰς τὴν Τροίαν στόλον). These reasons are the following: a) the wish of the gods, b) natural violence, c) speech-persuasion, and d) love. Each reason is dealt with separately (as are the motives in *Palamedes*),<sup>10)</sup> and they are not mutually exclusive. At any rate, Helen is innocent; but her innocence, in this case, does not mean that she did not desert her husband, or that she did not travel to Troy with another man: it means lack of personal responsibility.

The absence of probability-arguments in *Helen*, and the ample use of them in *Palamedes* is a first indication that Gorgias did not actually prefer probabilities to truth, and that the use of this type of argumentation is not a matter of choice, but a matter of necessity.<sup>11)</sup> In the case of *Palamedes*, Gorgias undertakes the defence of a man accused falsely. At the very beginning of the speech (4), he has Palamedes claim that he is in a situation of ἀπορία (although he is πόριμος *par excellence* 25, and indeed the hero who made human life πόριμον ἐξ ἀπόρου 30) due to ἔκπληξις created by groundless accusation. The only thing Palamedes can do is trust 'truth' (ἀλήθεια),

9) T. Cole, *The Origins of Greek Rhetoric* (London 1991), 76 claims that *Helen* "is an illustration of what later rhetoricians (for example, Quint. 7.41) would call the *status qualitativus*", whereas "*Palamedes*' defense . . . provides a model for the *status coniecturalis*—the type of argument concerned with determining what actually occurred (cf. Cicero, *De inv.* 1.8.10)". M. Gagarin, *Antiphon, The Speeches* (Cambridge 1997), 122 saw both in Gorgias' *Helen* and *Palamedes* and in Antiphon's *Tetralogies* "a foreshadowing of *stasis*-theory in Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1.13.9-10, 1373b38-74a17), who distinguishes cases where the facts are in dispute from those where the facts are admitted but the defendant denies there is a crime". At any rate, Gorgias is aware of the fact that the two cases differ in this respect, and this awareness is depicted in both texts: *Helen* ἐγὼ δὲ βούλομαι . . . ἀμαθίας 2, προθήσομαι τὰς αἰτίας, δι' ἃς εἰκὸς ἦν γενέσθαι τὸν τῆς Ἑλένης εἰς Τροίαν στόλον 5, and *Palamedes* οὐδὲ οἶδ' ὅπως ἂν εἰδείη τις ὃν τὸ μὴ γινόμενον 5.

10) See below, 'apagogic' argumentation.

11) Gagarin (n. 1), 54 rightly observes that Helen's "case seems well suited for giving probability a higher value than truth, since many different versions of Helen's actions existed . . . in which she did not go to Troy", and concludes "Gorgias has no reason to resort to probability arguments, since the basic facts are known and accepted", though it is not certain if Euripides' *Helen* (included by Gagarin in these versions) existed before Gorgias' *Helen*. The dates of both *Palamedes* and *Helen* are uncertain; for some conjectures see M. Orsini, *La cronologia dell' "Encomio di Elena" di Gorgia e le "Troiane" di Euripide*, Dioniso 19 (1956), 82-88 with summary.

and 'compulsion' (ἀνάγκη), which (or who) are dangerous rather than resourceful teachers (διδασκάλων ἐπικινδυνότερων ἢ ποριμωτέρων). Why is truth a dangerous teacher? Because in his case, the truth is that he has not committed the crime that he is accused of—a disclaimer which admittedly is not of much convincing value—especially in the absence of witnesses. Gorgias certainly knows that judges are not persuaded by mere statements of innocence, which entails that an approximation of truth through arguments should be employed instead. This is exactly what probabilities serve for. In the case of *Helen*, the defence does not refute the facts; Gorgias, neglecting the morale of Stesichorus' suffering, seems confident enough to adopt the Homeric version of the myth: Helen *did* go to Troy. By doing so, he does not need probabilities. What is at stake in *Helen* is the removal of her infamy on the grounds of reasonable excuses; the notorious trouble-maker has been the victim of uncontrolled powers.

It seems thus, that probabilities appear when facts are disputed and that they are more of a necessity than mere choice; but even in the discussion of factual reality, Gorgias does not always prefer probabilities. He must have realized that other means of persuasion are sometimes equally effective and convenient. In *Helen* 13, he claims that a speech written with skill (τέχνη) persuades an audience without necessarily telling the truth. The form of a speech is there considered as a determinant factor of persuasiveness; if the admirers of truth may now feel ready to argue that this is a further proof of the (conscious) sacrifice of real facts for the sake of persuasion, there is the counter-argument that in cases like the one of Palamedes, the truth is that he *is* an innocent person, who has the serious task to defend his own honour and life. Who, in other words, would today accuse an advocate defending a victim of conspiracy on the grounds of his/her eloquence, especially in a case where the evidence is lacking?

Another vehicle of persuasion is, of course, direct evidence given by witnesses. In *Palamedes* (22) the defendant holds that an accusation is stronger, when it is accompanied by witnesses (πιστότερον γὰρ οὕτως τὸ κατηγορήμα μαρτυρηθέν).<sup>12</sup> In the following paragraph (23) the hero addresses Odysseus with the following words:

12) The false accusation of Odysseus is implied in *Palamedes* 7, where the defendant, for the argument's sake, concedes the possibility of communication with

ἀλλὰ σοὶ μὲν οὐκ ἦν οἶόν (τε) μόνον μάρτυρας ἀλλὰ καὶ ψευδομάρτυρας εὐρεῖν, ἐμοὶ δὲ οὐδέτερον εὐρεῖν τούτων δυνατόν.

The point is that Palamedes, being innocent, could not find any witnesses of a crime which has never been committed; but Odysseus, on the contrary, was able to present both witnesses—in case Palamedes *has committed* the crime—and false-witnesses<sup>13</sup>)—as, of course, *he has not committed* the crime. The reference to witnesses, that is to say people with personal knowledge, shows that Gorgias was aware of and able to use means which normally furnish direct evidence. This point becomes more interesting, when Gorgias attempts to transform Odysseus from an accuser into a witness or even an accomplice (22):

εἰ μὲν γὰρ εἰδώς, οἶσθα ἰδὼν ἢ μετέχων ἢ τοῦ (μετέχοντος) πυθόμενος. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἰδὼν, φράσον τούτοις (τὸν τρόπον), τὸν τόπον, τὸν χρόνον, πότε, ποῦ, πῶς εἶδες· εἰ δὲ μετέχων, ἔνοχος εἰς ταῖς αὐταῖς αἰτίαις . . .

To sum up, although probabilities are an important vehicle of argumentation, Gorgias does not value them ahead of truth; εἰκότα are necessary in cases where real facts are disputed and where evidence is lacking. Pleasure invoked in the audience by a skilled speech is also regarded by Gorgias as a factor which plays an important role in its persuasiveness, so that a good rhetor should take this parameter into account. Lastly, it is clear that direct evidence presented by witnesses is known to Gorgias, and, what is more, he seems to be aware of the function of this type of evidence, so that he can argue by using it.

## 2. Argument from antinomy

This pattern of argumentation (Aristotle describes it as τόπος ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων) is founded on the location of antinomic or contradictory properties attributed to one and the same entity.<sup>14</sup>) It occurs both

Priam, which entails that an interpreter should have been used. If this had occurred, the latter would have been a witness of the transaction. The failure of the opponent to provide witnesses or to accept evidence by means of βάσανος (cp. *Palamedes* 11) is a *topos*; see Antiphon 1.6.13, 23 and 29-30. Most recently I. M. Plant, *The Influence of Forensic Oratory on Thucydides' Principles of Method*, CQ 49 (1999), 66-67, 71.

13) For ψευδομαρτυρία see for example Antiphon 2.4.7, Andokides 1.7, Lysias 19.4.

14) See G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge 1971), 121 and J. Mansfeld, *Historical and Philosophical Aspects of Gorgias' "On What Is Not"*, in: L. Montoneri –

in *On not Being* (*ONB*), where it is used for the refutation of philosophical arguments and in *Palamedes*, where it is integrated in the characterization of the opponent.

In *ONB* Gorgias puts forward three major theses: a) nothing is, b) if it is it is unknowable, and c) if it is and it is knowable it cannot be communicated to others. A problem which has tantalized scholars is what exactly this 'it' refers to. Some scholars have said that it is the phenomenal world in general and some others that it is the fundamental entities of the philosophers, abstract notions expressed with the term ὄντα.<sup>15)</sup>

In the second part supporting the first major thesis (namely, 'nothing is'), Gorgias, as the Anonymus author of *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* (*MXG*) informs us, collected contradictory properties (τάναντία 979a15) attributed by philosophers to ὄντα; these contradictory properties, according to Anonymus, were discussed by Gorgias after the 'original proof' (μετὰ τὴν ἴδιον αὐτοῦ ἀπόδειξιν 979a24), in which he sought to show that 'it is not either for being or for not being'. In the version given by the author of *MXG* these properties are discussed in 979b20-980a9, where we learn that 'if anything is' (εἰ δὲ ἔστιν), it must be either generated or ungenerated, one or many, in motion or at rest.<sup>16)</sup> Each member of these pairs is proved impossible (with syllogisms which partly derive from axioms of the philosophers themselves), and from that it is inferred that 'being is not'.

F. Romano (eds.), *Gorgia e la Sofistica*, Siculorum Gymnasium 38 (Catania 1985), 245-249; reprinted in: J. Mansfeld, *Studies in the Historiography of Greek Philosophy* (Assen 1990), 99-102.

15) A full discussion of this point is far beyond the scope of this paper and it does not affect my arguments here; however, I am inclined to follow Mansfeld (n. 14), 248-249, who has shown that τὰ ὄντα in *ONB* are "the speculative theoretical constructs of the Presocratic philosophers, or the essential attributes of the things that are" (see also J. A. Palmer, *Plato's Perception of Parmenides* (Oxford 1999), 66 ff. and esp. 67 n. 24. G. B. Kerferd, *Gorgias on nature or that which is not*, Phronesis 1 (1955), 3-25, basically following G. Calogero, *Studi sull' Eleatismo* (Roma 1932), held that what is at stake in *ONB* is the "phenomenal world" (so H. J. Newiger, *Untersuchungen zu Gorgias' Schrift Über das Nichtseiende* (Berlin, New York 1973), 21-22).

16) The list of properties attributed to ὄντα by philosophers is fuller in *MXG* 979b20-980a9, for Sextus does not include the pair in motion/at rest. This pair is absent in the 'doxographical' summary in *MXG* 979a14-18, but it is traced in Xen. *Mem.*1.1.14. (Mansfeld (n. 14), 246-247 investigates the historiography of philosophy as a Sophistic activity and he shows how later doxographical accounts depend on it.) Gorgias' *ONB* does not merely intend to record earlier ideas out of historical interest, but it clearly seeks to refute them on the basis of 'logical' antinomies.



In *Palamedes* 25-26, the hero addresses the litigant; it is interesting that he does not attack Odysseus on the grounds of personal characterization (27, although numerous adjectives may have been used against Odysseus).<sup>17)</sup> The characterization of the opponent is built on two separate arguments: in the first one Palamedes explains that Odysseus relies his accusation upon belief (δόξα), which is defined as an ἀπιστότατον πρᾶγμα; serious accusations, we are told, should be based on firm knowledge.<sup>18)</sup> The second part of the apos-

17) T. Cole (n.8), 73 classifies the lack of *êthos* as one among other characteristics of late Fifth century rhetoric: "the absence of any attempt to give *êthos* to what is said by making it suggest the character of the person or class of person who is saying it . . . points to the demands of the practice and demonstration text" (79). There is no doubt, I think, that Gorgias' *Helen* and *Palamedes* are intended for practical didactic purposes, and a need for general applicability is also discernible; but this is rather different from saying that *êthos* is totally absent. In his self-characterization, Palamedes lists his inventions, which are presented as a great benefaction to the Greeks and humanity in general (30). These are very unique virtues peculiar to this specific hero, and it is impossible to think of any of Gorgias' students who might have been in a position to claim that he was the inventor of letters. It is now true, that much of the self-characterization of Palamedes makes use of standard moral values (29-32): he has never been accused of anything before (29; notice that λοιδορία, an inaccurate accusation, οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἔλεγχον, is imputed to the opponent); he does not cause pain to the elderly, he helps the young, he does not envy prosperous people, he sympathizes with those who suffer . . . (32); in short, Palamedes is in absolute conformity with moral standards and Gorgias is thus teaching prospective rhetoricians how to use the stock of conventional morality. This does not, I am inclined to believe, imply the absence of *êthos*; it implies a twofold function of self-characterization: a) to present an impeccable Palamedes for the purposes of *The Defence of Palamedes*, that is a Palamedes whose profile does not deviate from the mythical account, and b) to offer a paradigm of general applicability. If my reading is correct, then Cole's suggestion seems to be an unjustified generalization (I acknowledge, of course, that Cole examines a greater range of texts; my point is simply that Gorgias is not among those who neglect *êthos*).

18) Gorgias' texts have regularly been interpreted under the light of a distinction between 'knowledge' and 'belief'; the most eloquent representative of this line of inquiry has been Kerferd (n. 1), 81-82, who claims that "it is possible to discern a common conceptual model . . . on the one hand is the real world, labelled truth or that which is true. The cognition of this real world is knowledge. But the commonest cognitive state is opinion, not knowledge, and logos . . . operates upon opinion". A. Long, *Methods of Argument in Gorgias* Palamedes (in: Vouidouris, n. 5), 240, has rightly explained that "this is an unjustified systematization of Gorgias' principal preserved writings" (see also E. Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece* (Yale 1999), 125-126. The artificiality of this distinction cannot be shown here; it will suffice to say that it appears only in *Palamedes* 3 and 24, in a context which does not allow for generalizations. *Helen* 11 has also been taken to depict the prevalence of knowledge, but knowledge is not mentioned there at all. It is simply said that 'belief' (δόξα) is slippery (see D. M. MacDowell, *Gorgias, Encomium of Helen* (Bristol 1982) note *ad loc.*). I consider that this systematization is

trophe to the opponent makes use of an argument from antinomy; what is at stake here is the unreliability of a litigant, who referring to the *same* person, attributes to it contradictory properties.

In this context, Palamedes refers to the speech of accusation in which Odysseus had allegedly claimed that the defendant is both wise and mad: wise in respect to his resourcefulness, mad in respect to the fact that he betrayed the Greeks (25):

κατηγορήσας δέ μου διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων λόγων δύο τὰ ἐναντιώτατα, σοφίαν καὶ μανίαν, ὥσπερ οὐχ οἶόν τε τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνθρωπον ἔχειν. ὅπου μὲν γάρ με φῆς εἶναι τεχνήεντά τε καὶ δεινὸν καὶ πόριμον, σοφίαν μου κατηγορεῖς, ὅπου δὲ λέγεις ὡς προὔδιδουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα, μανίαν . . .

What we have here is a game of chess played by the same player: Gorgias, in defending Palamedes, has the privilege of answering accusations made by himself, while it should be noticed that these accusations could reasonably have been put forward by one who might have wished to capitalize on the overwhelming potential of this hero; if Palamedes is so resourceful, then he has probably used his resourcefulness for malicious purposes. The argument from antinomy, though more simple here than in *QNB*, is obvious; the 'two totally contradictory properties' (δύο τὰ ἐναντιώτατα) ostensibly ascribed to Palamedes by Odysseus make the latter's accusation contradictory itself, from which it is logically inferred that his accusation is unreliable (πῶς χρή ἄνδρι τοιούτῳ πιστεύειν, ὅστις τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον λέγων πρὸς τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἄνδρας περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν τὰ ἐναντιώτατα λέγει; Notice the αὐτός/ἐναντιώτατα antithesis). The defendant concludes that Odysseus is a liar (δι' ἀμφοτέρα ἂν εἴης ψευδής 26), by using the same argument. He asks him if he deems wise men as φρόνιμοι or ἀνόητοι; if wise men are ἀνόητοι Odysseus' claim is a flagrantly untrue novelty. If they are φρόνιμοι they do not prefer sufferings

partly the concomitant of considering *QNB* as a treatise in which Gorgias' own theoretical credo is embedded and explicitly put forward. However, this text is (and probably was intended to be) open to different readings; far from putting forward new theories, it questions the validity of established ones. If the message of *QNB* is that philosophical systems claiming absolute approaches to truth are refutable, as I think it is, then it may turn out to be the worst source of information for Gorgias' own premises, if they existed at all. In my view, *QNB* should be read as a criticism on the *process* of philosophical reasoning, as a scrutiny of philosophical discourse. The fragility of philosophical reasoning reappears in *Helen* 13 as well.

to goods they already possess. The conclusion is: εἰ μὲν οὖν εἰμι σοφός, οὐχ ἥμαρτον· εἰ δ' ἥμαρτον, οὐ σοφός εἰμι; in either case Odysseus' accusations are proved to be false, the opponent is a liar.

Logical argumentation is thus in Gorgias' hands a means of bringing out the *êthos* of the opponent; instead of a personal attack, we are provided with an analysis of the logical contradictions resulting from the opponent's charges. Two points should be made: a) the clarity with which this pattern of argumentation is presented serves as an example of Gorgias' teaching practices and the need for general applicability; having this example in mind, students of rhetoric can easily argue from antinomy; b) the *êthos* of the opponent (not that of the defendant) is not presented on the basis of personal attack; if one is reluctantly tempted to indulge in the discussion of the morality of Gorgian rhetoric by comparing the tactic of attack employed by Gorgias with that used by Fourth century orators (say by Aeschines in *Against Timarchos*), where even false evidence is used against the personalities of the opponents,<sup>19</sup>) then we may conclude that Gorgias was almost naïve.

### 3. *Theorization and examples*

This pattern is related to reasoning involving speculation which is not directly relevant to the theses defended. Criticism has focused mainly on the discussion of *logos* by Gorgias in *Helen* 8-14; this part of the speech includes one of the earlier approaches to the function of speech and persuasion (πειθώ), especially in connection to its impact on the human soul: poetry, incantations, the perception of speech by audiences, persuasive speech are all employed to exemplify the omnipotence of *logos*. However, it is critical to bear in mind that Gorgias *does not* support his argumentation by the means of theoretical discourse *solely* in this part of *Helen*. The final reason, namely love, is from the very beginning of its analysis linked to ὄψις ('vision'), and what follows is a theoretical evaluation of the function of this sense in relation to the emotional world.

The relation of *logos* with psychological parameters has been

19) On inaccurate personal attack, see Halliwell, *The Uses of Laughter in Greek Culture*, CQ 41 (1991), 292-294, P. Harding, *Comedy and Rhetoric*, in: I. Worthington (n. 1), 196-221.

admirably examined by Segal;<sup>20</sup>) what I intend to do is to show a) the ways in which the combination of theoretical generalization with the use of examples contributes to the argumentation in *Helen*<sup>21</sup>) and b) that the separate arguments included in the discussion of *logos* and love are underlined by a common pattern of analysis.

In 8, *logos* is defined as a great ruler with extreme powers (λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν); the realm of His activity is chiefly the emotional world of men. In order to demonstrate the impact of *logos* upon our emotions Gorgias brings in two examples corresponding to two different kinds of *logoi*: poetry, defined as λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον (9), and incantations, ἐνθροει διὰ λόγων ἐπωδαί (10). Poetry awakens within the souls of audiences emotions for the sufferings of others (that is, with the ‘suspension of disbelief’ audiences partake in the reality of the literary event), and incantations—by means of magical charming (γοητείας καὶ μαγείας)—make the soul act independently of its own will. In both examples, speech enters the soul physically, and the schema applied is common in both cases:

poetry → soul → emotions  
incantations → soul → charming

Both poetry and verbal incantations (διὰ λόγων) enter the soul (εἰσῆλθε, συγγινομένη) and they affect it.<sup>22</sup>)

The same pattern recurs in the analysis of love (15-19); the logical discussion of a notoriously irrational emotion<sup>23</sup>) is foreshadowed

20) C. Segal, *Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos*, HSCPh 66 (1962), 99-155; according to this scholar *Helen* appeals more to the emotional aspect of persuasion, whereas *Palamedes* makes use of logical reasoning. This distinction is somewhat elusive, because the *rationalistic approach* to *logos* is one thing, and the impact of *logos* upon the emotional world *itself* quite another (see I. Anastassiou (n. 5), 246-247).

21) *Helen* 8-14 can undoubtedly be regarded as an early piece of literary theory, and it is thus included in G. Lanata, *Poetica Pre-Platonica, Testimonianze e Frammenti* (Firenze 1962), and D. A. Russel – M. Winterbottom (eds.), *Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford 1972); this aspect of *Helen* is beyond the scope of my paper.

22) A.-P. D. Mourelatos, ‘Ο Γοργίας γὰ τὴ λειτουργία τῆς γλώσσας (in: Voudouris n. 5), 229-230 rightly maintains that the discussion of *logos* in *Helen* is basically behavioural, but he fails to observe that the same holds for the discussion of vision as well.

23) This is explicitly acknowledged by Gorgias (εἰ δ’ ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπινον νόσημα καὶ ψυχῆς ἀγνόημα, οὐχ ὡς ἀμάρτημα μεμπτέον ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀτύχημα νομιστέον 19); the superiority of love because of its divine nature (ὅς εἰ μὲν θεὸς <ὦν ἔχει> θεῶν θείαν δύναμιν 19) is not the cornerstone of Gorgias’ reasoning (it is mentioned in passing), and it is worth noticing that love is rationalized in the way that divine powers are rationalized in 6.

from the very beginning: Gorgias links ἔρως to ὄψις and he remarks that 'the objects of our sight do not have the nature that we want them to have, but the one they happen to have' (15). The problem, now, seems to be that 'soul is moulded by vision' (διὰ δὲ τῆς ὄψεως ἡ ψυχὴ κὰν τοῖς τρόποις τυποῦται). An example which supports this thesis is brought in:<sup>24</sup>) when soldiers face the weapon of the enemies, their soul is in panic, so that they fly without considering the bad consequences of their action (16). The function of ὄψις is based on the same pattern of analysis already employed in the context of *logos*-arguments:

vision → soul → flight (πολέμια σώματα ... → ἐτάραξε τὴν ψυχὴν → φεύγουσιν ἐκπλαγέντες).

Vision is again coming physically (ἐλθοῦσα 16) into the soul, which is 'moulded' (τυποῦται 15; notice also that the images of vision seen in the past are 'engraved', 'ἐνέγραψεν' 17).

The generalization about the function of vision is completed with a reference to the emotions aroused by fine arts (19). It is assumed that the function of painting and sculpture is to provide vision with pleasant images, and, what is more, from the products of art πόθος and ἔρως can be generated. If one can possibly fall in love with a statue (the example of Pygmalion is telling), then Helen's falling in love with the statuesque body of Paris is perfectly comprehensible.

It has been made clear, I hope, that the reasoning in the discussion of both *logos* and love develops with a good deal of theorization, which in some respects follows a common pattern of analysis concerning the relation of the stimuli to the emotions that they invoke in the soul. But what is the value of this pattern in association with the development of the reasoning for the case of Helen?

The answer is partly given by the text itself: at 12, Helen<sup>25</sup>) is called a victim of persuasion, and at 19 we are told that we should

24) The examples adduced in 15-19 correspond to a distinction between negative (16, 17, mainly fear) and positive (18, mainly pleasure invoked by painting and sculpture) emotions.

25) In spite of the textual problems the meaning is clear; my reading runs as follows: τίς οὖν αἰτία κωλύει νομίσαι καὶ τὴν Ἑλένην ὑπὸ λόγους ἐλθεῖν ὁμοίως οὐχ ἔκουσαν ὥσπερ εἰ βία ἡρπάσθη; ὑπὸ γὰρ τῆς πειθοῦς ἐξηλάθη τὸ νόημα· καίτοι πειθῶ ἀνάγκης εἶδος ἔχει μὲν οὐ, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει. Gorgias is clearly trying to present Helen as a victim of persuasion. That he intends us to construe Helen as another example confirming the view that persuasion is as effective as violence and necessity is brought out by the wording itself (καὶ τὴν Ἑλένην).

not consider Helen's falling in love with Paris as a strange thing, simply because her eye (sic) happened to see his body. Gorgias then uses theorization because he relies on *analogies*: if *logos* is omnipotent, as it is shown that it is, in what manner could Helen escape his power? If objects of vision contaminate our souls, as it is shown that they do, then how could Helen's soul avoid contamination by the statuesque body of Paris? In the theoretical pattern of reasoning, the person defended is just another example that confirms the theory. In addition, theorization has the virtue of explaining, giving logical meaning to things otherwise self-evident. Everyone has perhaps fallen in love; but Gorgias is there to show (in his own way) *why* and *how* this occurs. From an excuse love is elevated to a very important reason.

In conclusion, the discussion of *logos* in *Helen* 8-14, however interesting implications for the history of criticism in antiquity it may have, is intended as a separate argument of *equal* significance; theorization is used *both* in the examination of *logos* and in that of love-vision, where examples play an important role. The value of this pattern lies in that, by generalizing, it is analogously applicable to individual cases (in this case, Helen). We also have to assume, that much of the persuasiveness of theorization through examples may have been the product of ἐκπληξίς experienced by audiences (or readers) resulting from the impressive ability of the rhetor to apply elaborate 'knowledge' in demanding intellectual issues. There is one more question: if *logos* is able to deceive, why should *we* become the victims of the person who has just shown that *logos* deceives? This is a matter of a second-order reading of *Helen*, and it should be left open.<sup>26</sup>) Personal answers are, of course, always available.

#### 4. *Apagogic and the 'Russian doll' argumentation*

I include these two types in my classification reluctantly, for they concern formal schemata of reasoning. However, I hope that the investigation of their role in Gorgias' reasoning will be compensating.

26) For the role of ἀπάτη in Gorgias, see Verdenius, *Gorgias' Doctrine of Deception*, in: G. B. Kerferd (ed.), *The Sophists and their Legacy* (Hermes Einzelschriften 44; Wiesbaden 1981), 116-128; although Verdenius' study is learned and still up-to-date, in my view the phrase 'doctrine of deception' clearly overstates our evidence (see also n. 18).

Apagogic reasoning is employed both in *Helen* and in the discussion of motives in *Palamedes*; in the former, each reason is dealt with separately, and none of them results from or presupposes the preceding one.<sup>27)</sup> This is brought out from the text itself, because the transition from each reason to the following one is clearly marked (ἡ γὰρ . . . 6 εἰ δὲ βία . . . 7, εἰ δὲ λόγος ὁ πείσας . . . 8 καὶ ὅτι μὲν, εἰ λόγῳ . . . 15, τὴν δὲ τετάρτην αἰτίαν τῷ τετάρτῳ λόγῳ διέξιμι 15). Gorgias invents four reasons, each one of which is intended to show the same thing: Helen is not responsible. The same process is traced in *Palamedes* 13-21. Gorgias distinguishes between two types of motives (19): people commit crimes either in pursuit of a gain *or* in avoidance of a loss (ἡ κέρδος τι μετιόντες ἢ ζημίαν φεύγοντες) *et tertium non datur*. All the motives presented fall within those two categories; the arguments put forward show that if the defendant had committed the crime of treason, he would have had the opposite results. The apagogic reduction both in *Helen* and in *Palamedes* is used because each independent argument is meant to be perceived as equally strong as the rest of them. In other words, Gorgias is not compelled to present each step in any particular order, because in these cases his material does not impose upon him such a process.

On the contrary, the first major division of *Palamedes* (6-12) proceeds with the 'Russian doll' schema, which I take it to be an indication of Gorgias' awareness that motives and actions corroborate the argumentation in a different manner. As each new smaller doll is brought out from a 'Russian doll', in the same manner each stage in the discussion of the actions preparing an alleged betrayal is presented as logically following the preceding one.<sup>28)</sup> The more the arguments represent a logical string of acts, the more the argumentation is benefited; this is why the first argument deals with what should have normally been the starting point of a betrayal (6):

27) However, J. Porter, *The Seductions of Gorgias*, CA 12 (1993), 275, is certainly right in holding the view that "if Gorgias is trying to keep his *aithai* apart, he is trying no less hard to make that task next to impossible".

28) A. Long (n. 5), 235 remarks that "in a casual way examples of the technique [sc. the 'Russian doll' or the 'Chinese box' as Long labels it] can be found in the Attic orators, but I know of nothing comparable to its use in the *Palamedes*"; according to this scholar these examples are: Antiphon 3.4.6-7. 5.25, Lysias 9.8-10, Isocrates 21.7-8.

ἔδει γάρ τινα πρῶτον ἀρχὴν γενέσθαι τῆς προδοσίας, ἡ δὲ ἀρχὴ λόγος ἂν εἴη· πρὸ γὰρ τῶν μελλόντων ἔργων ἀνάγκη λόγους γίγνεσθαι πρότερον...

That each argument concedes the preceding one is indicated by the introductory phrase of each new argument: ἀλλὰ δὴ τοῦτο τῷ λόγῳ δυνατόν γενέσθαι . . . 7, ἀλλὰ δὴ καὶ τοῦτο γενέσθω, καίπερ οὐ γενόμενον . . . 8, φήσει τις . . . 9, καὶ δὴ τοίνυν γενέσθω καὶ τὰ μὴ γενόμενα . . . 11 etc. It is also worth our attention that the second major division is actually introduced by conceding the first one: 'if it were by all means possible (εἰ μάλιστα πάντων ἐδυνάμην), for what reason would I have wished to do these things?' (6). The value of this type of argumentation lies in the fact that it presents a cohesive string of arguments, based on logical assumptions. It can be conceived as a representation of the crime, in which the defendant is able to show that, what is presented by the accuser as a fact, is nothing but assumption.

The same pattern is followed in the philosophically oriented *On not Being*; each one of the three major theses concedes the previous one: nothing is (A), *if it is*, it is not possible to have knowledge of it (B), *if it is and it is possible to have knowledge of it*, it is impossible to communicate it to others (C). Although the schema is the same, it is not used to the same extent in the individual arguments of this text, as it happens in *Palamedes* 6-12.

In short, Gorgias seems to arrange his arguments in accordance to the nature of the case he defends; actions, normally developing in a linear, consecutive order suggest a similarly linear and exhaustive representation,<sup>29</sup> which demands some logical participation of the audience. In the case of self-content arguments on the other hand the argumentation is *apagogic*; different theses are supported by independent arguments: in *Helen* each reason is argued separately, so that the refutation of her infamy is based on four equally strong reasons; analogously, in *Palamedes* 13-22 each motive is dealt with separately as well, and it is shown that none of them could have led the hero to perform the act that he is accused of.

29) In Long's words (n. 18), 235 "the sequence of claims is assumed to be exhaustive, leaving the opponent no perch for any reply", and farther (237) he points out that the elimination of the defendant's opportunities "amount to . . . a reconstruction of the alleged treachery from its beginning to its end".



Gorgias' argumentative process does not merely consist in probabilities; Plato in his *Phaedros* (267a) simply singles out the type of argument which makes Gorgias susceptible to criticism, in view of the fact that probabilities do not reproduce factual reality. A sober assessment of the argumentation used by this Sophist, which is based on a close reading of *his own* preserved texts, shows that various argumentative patterns are employed by Gorgias and that he is wise enough not to ignore factual reality. Gorgias' reasoning is not as simple as it is usually taken to be: I hope that I have removed from the Sophist the infamy of probabilities, and that I have not engaged in the παίγνιον of composing a Γοργίου encomium.

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