

* Gorgias

Gorgias came from Leontini in Sicily. All sources report that he lived more than 100 years, c. 480–375. In 427 he came to Athens as an ambassador from Leontini and reportedly created a sensation with his rhetorical style.¹⁸⁵ He had many other interests in addition to rhetoric, for which he is best known. The material we translate includes two complete speeches attributed to mythological characters, a fragment of a funeral oration, a later summary/paraphrase of a philosophical treatise, and miscellaneous fragments and reports of his views. None of these can be dated, except perhaps for On Not Being, which was reportedly written in the eighty-fourth Olympiad (444–441).

Gorgias' teaching was closely associated by Plato with rhetoric, and he apparently disclaimed teaching all other subjects, including virtue. We arrange the material loosely by subject matter: first rhetoric, then ethics, metaphysics, and science.

* 1. Encomium of Helen (DK II)

According to the principal version of the myth (as found in Homer), when the Trojan prince Alexander (Paris) was a guest in the house of Menelaus, king of Sparta, he took advantage of Menelaus' absence to abduct his wife Helen and take her back to Troy with him. Menelaus raised a Greek army to recover Helen, hence the Trojan War. There were many other versions of the story, including some in which Helen did not go to Troy at all.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Diodorus Siculus 12.53.1–5.

¹⁸⁶ Most notably, the palinode of Stesichorus (see Plato, *Phaedrus* 243), Euripides, *Helen*; and Herodotus 2.118–120.

[1] For a city the finest adornment (*kosmos*) is a good citizenry, for a body beauty, for a soul wisdom, for an action *aretē*, and for a speech truth; and the opposites of these are indecorous. A man, woman, speech, deed, city or action that is worthy of praise should be honored with acclaim, but the unworthy should be branded with blame. For it is equally error and ignorance to blame the praiseworthy and praise the blameworthy. [2] The man who speaks correctly what ought to be said has a duty to refute those who find fault with Helen. Among those who listen to the poets a single-voiced, single-minded conviction has arisen about this woman, the notoriety of whose name is now a reminder of disasters. My only wish is to bring reason to the debate, eliminate the cause of her bad reputation, demonstrate that her detractors are lying, reveal the truth, and put an end to ignorance.

[3] That the woman I speak of is by nature and birth the foremost of the foremost, men or women, is well known by all. Clearly her mother was Leda and her father in fact a god, but in story a mortal: Zeus and Tyndareus. One was thought to be her father because he was, the other was reported¹⁸⁷ to be because he said he was; one was mightiest of men, the other tyrant of all. [4] Born from such as these, she equaled the gods in beauty, not concealed but revealed. Many were the erotic passions she aroused in many men, and her one body brought many bodies full of great ambition for great deeds; some had abundant wealth, some the glory of an old noble lineage, some the vigor of personal valor, and some the power of acquired wisdom. All came for love that desires to conquer and from unconquerable desire for honor. [5] Who it was or why or how he took Helen and fulfilled his love, I shall not say. For to tell those who know something they know carries conviction, but does not bring pleasure. Now that my speech has passed over the past, it is to the beginning of my future speech that I proceed and propose the likely reasons for Helen's journey to Troy.

[6] Either she did what she did because of the will of fortune and the plan of the gods and the decree of necessity, or she was seized by force, or persuaded by words, (or captured by love). If she left for the first reason, then any who blame her deserve blame

¹⁸⁷ Following MacDowell's text (see Bibliographical Note, § B.5).

themselves, for a human's anticipation cannot restrain a god's inclination. For by nature the stronger is not restrained by the weaker but the weaker is ruled and led by the stronger: the stronger leads, the weaker follows. Now, a god is stronger than a human in strength, in wisdom, and in other respects; and so if blame must be attached to fortune and god, then Helen must be detached from her ill repute.

[7] If she was forcibly abducted and unlawfully violated and unjustly assaulted, it is clear that her abductor, her assaulter, engaged in crime; but she who was abducted and assaulted encountered misfortune. Thus, the undertaking undertaken by the barbarian was barbarous in word and law and deed and deserves blame in word, loss of rights in law, and punishment in deed. But she who was violated, from her country separated, from her friends isolated, surely (*eikotōs*) deserves compassion rather than slander. For he did and she suffered terrible things. It is right to pity her but hate him.

[8] If speech (*logos*) persuaded and deluded her mind, even against this it is not hard to defend her or free her from blame, as follows: speech is a powerful master and achieves the most divine feats with the smallest and least evident body.¹⁸⁸ It can stop fear, relieve pain, create joy, and increase pity. How this is so, I shall show; [9] and I must demonstrate this to my audience to change their opinion.

Poetry (*poiēsis*) as a whole I deem and name "speech (*logos*) with meter." To its listeners poetry brings a fearful shuddering, a tearful pity, and a grieving desire, while through its words the soul feels its own feelings for good and bad fortune in the affairs and lives of others. Now, let me move from one argument to another. [10] Sacred incantations with words inject pleasure and reject pain, for in associating with the opinion of the mind, the power of an incantation enchants, persuades, and alters it through bewitchment. The twin arts of witchcraft and magic have been discovered, and these are illusions of mind and delusions of judgment. [11] How many men on how many subjects have persuaded and do persuade how many others by shaping a false speech! For if all men on all subjects had memory of the past, (understanding) of the present,

¹⁸⁸ Gorgias has a materialist theory of speech, derived perhaps from Empedocles.

and foresight into the future, speech would not be the same in the same way;¹⁸⁹ but as it is, to remember the past, to examine the present, or to prophesy the future is not easy; and so most men on most subjects make opinion an adviser to their minds. But opinion is perilous and uncertain, and brings those who use it to perilous and uncertain good fortune. [12] What reason is there, then,¹⁹⁰ why Helen did not go just as unwillingly under the influence of speech as if she were seized by the violence of violators? For persuasion expelled her thought – persuasion, which has the same power, but not the same form as compulsion (*anankē*). A speech persuaded a soul that was persuaded, and forced it to be persuaded by what was said and to consent to what was done. The persuader, then, is the wrongdoer, because he compelled her, while she who was persuaded is wrongly blamed, because she was compelled by the speech. [13] To see that persuasion, when added to speech, indeed molds the mind as it wishes, one must first study the arguments of astronomers, who replace opinion with opinion: displacing one but implanting another, they make incredible, invisible matters apparent to the eyes of opinion. Second, compulsory debates with words,¹⁹¹ where a single speech to a large crowd pleases and persuades because written with skill (*technē*),¹⁹² not spoken with truth. Third, contests of philosophical arguments, where it is shown that speed of thought also makes it easy to change a conviction based on opinion. [14] The power of speech has the same effect on the disposition of the soul as the disposition of drugs on the nature of bodies. Just as different drugs draw forth different humors from the body – some putting a stop to disease, others to life – so too with words: some cause pain, others joy, some strike fear, some stir the audience to boldness, some benumb and bewitch the soul with evil persuasion.

[15] The case has been made: if she was persuaded by speech, her fortune was evil, not her action. The fourth reason, I discuss in my fourth argument. If it was love that did all these things, she will easily escape blame for the error that is said to have occurred.

¹⁸⁹ Text uncertain, but the sense clearly is "the same as it is now."

¹⁹⁰ The text of this and the next sentence is corrupt, though the general sense is clear. We follow MacDowell's suggestions (note *ad loc.*).

¹⁹¹ This expression probably designates speeches in law courts.

¹⁹² See Plato, *Gorgias* 449d–466a.

For whatever we see has a nature, not the one we wish, but whatever each happens to have. And by seeing the mind is molded even in its character. [16] As soon as men in war arm their bodies against the enemy with armor of bronze and iron – some for defense, some for attack – if the sight sees this, it is shaken and shakes the mind, so that men often flee in panic from danger that lies in the future. And¹⁹³ the truth of law is firmly established through the fear that comes from sight, which, as it comes, causes acceptance of what the law judges honorable and justice establishes as good. [17] Some indeed, who have seen fearful things, have lost their present purpose in the present moment, so thoroughly does fear extinguish and expel thought; and many have fallen into useless labors, terrible diseases, and incurable madness, so thoroughly does sight engrave on the mind images of things that are seen. Many frightening things are omitted here, but those omitted are similar to those mentioned. [18] Further, whenever painters fashion one perfect bodily form from many colors and bodies, they delight the sight; the creation (*poiēsis*) of statues and the production of works of art provide a sweet sickness for the eyes. So by nature sight grieves for some things and longs for others, and many things make many people desire and long for many deeds and many bodies. [19] So if Helen's eye, pleased by Alexander's body, transmitted to her soul an eagerness and striving for love, why is that surprising? If love is a god, with the divine power of gods, how could a weaker person refuse and reject him? But if love is a human sickness and a mental weakness, it must not be blamed as mistake, but claimed as misfortune. For it came, as it came, snared by the mind, not prepared by thought, under the compulsion of love, not the provision of art (*technē*).

[20] How then can the blame of Helen be considered just? Whether she did what she did, invaded by love, persuaded by speech, impelled by force or compelled by divine necessity, she escapes all blame entirely.

[21] With my speech I have removed this woman's ill repute; I have abided by the rule laid down at the beginning of my speech; I have tried to dispel the injustice of blame and the ignorance of

¹⁹³ There is considerable dispute over the text of this sentence; we follow Buchheim, who adheres to the ms. version.

opinion; I wished to write this speech for Helen's encomium and my amusement.

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2. Defense of Palamedes (DK IIa)

*Palamedes was a minor Greek hero at Troy, best known for his intelligence and inventiveness. He was the subject of plays by Aeschylus (10-11) and Sophocles (19-20), that are now lost. According to tradition, Odysseus, out of jealousy because Palamedes outwitted him when he was trying to avoid joining the expedition to Troy, devised a charge of treason against Palamedes by hiding a sum of gold in his tent and claiming that this was the bribe Palamedes had received. The false charge was successful and Palamedes was put to death.*¹⁹⁴

[1] The determination of a death sentence is not the business of the prosecution and the defense, for nature (*phusis*) sentences all mortals to death with a clear vote the day they are born. What is at risk here is honor and dishonor: whether I may die with justice or be forced to die under the greatest reproaches and most shameful accusations. [2] Of these two possibilities, you are completely in control of the one and I of the other: I the master of justice and you of force. If you wish, you can kill me easily, for you have this under your control, while I happen to have no control over it.

[3] Now, if my accuser Odysseus made this accusation because of his concern for Greece, either in the clear knowledge that I was betraying Greece to the foreigners, or at least in the opinion that I was doing so, he would be the best of men. For how could he be otherwise, if he is saving his homeland, his parents, and all Greece, and is punishing a wrongdoer besides? But if he concocted this charge through envy, fraud, or wickedness, that would make him a complete rascal, just as other motives would make him quite superior.

[4] Where should I begin my speech on these matters? What should I say first? To what part of my defense should I turn? An unsupported accusation produces an obvious sense of panic; and this panic necessarily deprives me of every resource for speech unless I learn something from the truth itself and the present

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Alcidas' *Odysseus* (fr. 3) for a version of Odysseus' speech in the case.