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Helen's argumentative coherence and the didactic element of Gorgias' rhetoric

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Abstract: I argue in this paper that Gorgias' *Helen* is a coherent epideictic speech with a strong didactic element. This didactic element refers to the fact that, by using antilogic and making the weaker argument the stronger, Gorgias conducts the audience's opinion from one perspective to another. The coherence of the speech comes from the fact that Gorgias employs a commonsensical pattern of argumentation in the first two arguments to prepare the reader for the digressions on *logos* and love. Even though he never states it explicitly, Gorgias holds the endoxic idea that no one is responsible for an action committed under coercion. I argue that the reasoning structure of the digressions depends on the two previous arguments, i.e., that Gorgias transforms *logos* and love into a sort of violence. To conclude, I show that *Helen* is both a coherent and a didactic speech that imparts an antilogical education to the audience.

Keywords: Gorgias, Helen, Argumentation, Education, Antilogic, Rhetoric.

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La coherencia argumentativa del Encomio de Helena y el elemento didáctico de la retórica de Gorgias

Resumen: En este artículo argumento que el *Elogio de Helena* es un coherente discurso epidíctico con un claro elemento didáctico. El elemento didáctico está en que, usando la antilogía y haciendo del argumento más débil el más fuerte, Gorgias cambia la opinión de su público de una perspectiva a la otra. La coherencia del discurso está en el hecho de que Gorgias emplea un patrón de argumentación oriundo del sentido común para preparar al lector para las dos digresiones. Aunque jamás lo diga claramente, él adopta la idea endoxástica de que nadie es responsable por una acción que haya cometido bajo coacción. Defiendo que la estructura argumentativa de las digresiones depende de los primeros argumentos, es decir, que Gorgias transforma el *logos* y el amor en un tipo de violencia. Por último, muestro que el *Elogio* es tanto un discurso coherente como didáctico que imparte una educación antilógica a su público.

Palabras clave: Gorgias, Elogio de Helena, Argumentación, Educación, Antilogía, Retórica.

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Introduction

Apart from its seminal insights on aesthetics and psychology¹, Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* is perhaps the most significant document about sophistic theories of rhetoric, and scholars have thoroughly scrutinized it.² However, central questions about its nature and purpose remain unanswered. For instance, is it an advertisement for rhetoric (Duncan, 1938, p. 405), an epideictic oration, or an apology (B14-DK; *Hel.* 8, ἀπολογίασασθαι)? Why does Gorgias call it a παίγιον? Does this word contradict Gorgias' intent, i.e., to demonstrate the truth (δείξας τᾶληθές) and dispel ignorance concerning Helen (παῦσαι τῆς ἀμαθίας, *Hel.* 2)?

There seem to be two reasons for this *status quaestionis*. On the one hand, these problems result from the mixed nature of the speech. Composed in highly poetical prose,³ *Helen* presents a logical structure (λογισμὸν) made of different reasoning patterns: likelihood cases, moral and philosophical inquiry, medical and psychological reflections, etc. It is often hard to determine whether the arguments are required by the demands of logic or musicality. On the other hand, these questions are the outcome of an overdue focus on the philosophical sections of the speech: the digression on *logos* (8-14) and *eros/opsis* (15-19). Given their theoretical nature, some interpretive approaches have taken both digressions as autonomous parts and obliterated their relationship with the first arguments.⁴ In the end, this approach has missed the forest for the trees. The first two arguments are more accessible to grasp and, compared to the digressions, which presuppose an acquaintance with different arts and sciences, they are also down-to-earth. It is understandable that some scholars analyzed them superficially and showed themselves to be more interested in the connection between the digressions and other problems of Greek tradition. Nevertheless, we miss *Helen's* argumentative consistency and Gorgias' attempt to offer a coherent whole by focusing only on the digressions.⁵

1 Segal (1962, p. 122-124); Untersteiner (2012, p. 271); Traureck (2005, p. 114); Franz (1999)

2 The existence of a sophistic theory of rhetoric has been disputed. Whereas Poulakos (1983) tried to reconstruct it, Schiappa (1991, p. 10) called it 'an anachronism', but he admitted that Gorgias provided an authentic contribution to rhetorical theory. Cole (1986: 12) doubted the existence of a theory and saw the sophistic reflections as primarily practical. See also: Traureck (2005, p. 114). Poulakos (1990) responded to Schiappa, and the controversy continued (Johnstone, 1996). For Stroh (2009, p. 54), Gorgias is the first tangible figure in the history of rhetoric. The practical element is undeniable, but the sophists also dealt with several philosophical problems, as commented below.

3 Schaffer (1998, p. 245). Aristotle, Dionysus of Halicarnassus (A29-DK), and Philostratus (A1-DK) affirm that Gorgias first introduced poetic devices in prose. See also: Consigny (1992, p. 43); Schiappa (2003, p. 57).

4 "But the most important and interesting passage is the one about *logos*" (MacDowell, 1982:12). Immisch (1927: 22): "Ita intrat sophista in penetralia sua". Schiappa (2003, p. 60, n. 16) underlines *Helen's* theoretical depth in the digressions.

5 "It is not by chance that many scholars judge the section on persuasion so important that they identify it as the key topic dealt with in *Helen*. As a matter of fact, the topic of persuasion is clearly the most original, but there is little doubt that it remains but one element of a more comprehensive whole" (Rossetti, 2023, p. 6).

In this paper, I intend to do two things. Firstly, according to Gorgias' intent of delivering a concatenated reasoning (*Hel.* 3; 20; 21), I propose to see *Helen* as a whole. The consistency of the speech relies on assuming a commonsensical idea in the first two arguments and using it to clarify the digressions. As admitted,⁶ the speech aims to demonstrate that Helen was coerced and cannot be responsible for her actions.⁷ To do so, Gorgias anchors *Helen's* first arguments on a common view of voluntary actions. He never clearly states this view but assumes it is a reputable opinion (ἔνδοξον). Presenting a reasonable account of gods, destiny, and physical violence, he sets forth a reasoning pattern that clarifies and makes the digressions more persuasive to his varied and arguably uneducated audience.⁸ In other words, the first two arguments play a rhetorical and didactic role, for they train the hearers to understand and endorse the theoretically demanding claims in the longer parts of the speech. This does not mean that the digressions are not instructive. As they show that *logos* and *eros* are coercion factors, they also teach the audience.

Secondly, I take seriously the historical context of *Helen's actio* and propose that the movement above – the passage from more uncomplicated to harder arguments – is educational. *Helen's* delivery circumstances and its intent regarding the audience still puzzle the reader, and the extant testimonies do not provide any answer free from speculation. However, one historical fact cannot be disregarded: *Helen* was an epideictic speech to be delivered *coram populo*, i.e., Gorgias used this text to present his art, persuade and impress people. A pioneer in the study of *καίρος* (B13-DK), he presumably planned with care his *début* in the brilliant city that would build his career,⁹ and even his purple clothes may have been chosen as a component of kairotic effect on the audience (A9-DK). The popular and provocative *Leitmotiv* he chose, which attests to his pedagogical and rhetorical intuition (Romilly, 2002, p. 61), was probably intended to move and engage people since everyone could understand and relate to Helen's myth. With the aid of his exotic style, he dumbfounded the Athenians (A4-DK). This fact should be kept in mind and prevail over any theoretical interest he might have had. From the standpoint of the persuasion of the audience, it shows that there is neither a logical monstrosity

6 Gomperz (1912, p. 11); Spatharas (2001, p. 396); Päll (2018, p. 44); Poulakos (1983, p. 9); Segal (1962, p. 134); Pratt (2015, p. 166).

7 The discussion of causation builds a bridge between *Helen* and *Palamedes*, although both speeches have opposite views on human agency (Segal, 1962, p. 119; 120; 134). As to Gorgias' interest in Helen's ethical behavior, notice that the word *αἰτία* appears six times: *Hel.* 2, 5, 6, 8, 15, 20.

8 Gorgias avoids raising pity in *Palamedes* (33), but he tries to do it in *Helen*. In *Hel.* 13, the expression *πολλὸν ὄχλον* (large crowd) refers to people convinced by a technically produced speech that is deprived of truth. It seems an allusion to the courts (Immisch, 1927, p. 32; Untersteiner, 1949, p. 104; Buchheim, 1989, p. 169, n. 29). However, the expression may also signify that Gorgias, in *Helen*, is addressing a multitude.

9 Gorgias' activity are prior to his embassy and explains why he was elected ambassador (Buchheim, 1989, viii).

nor a lack of objectivity in *Helen's Beweisgang* but an educational process that concatenates the arguments to produce a coherent whole.¹⁰

As to the education involved in it, I point out two features. The first one is Gorgias' ability to teach his audience, which is related to the consistency of his speech. The instruction of the hearer, also at stake in *Palamedes*, is a primordial feature of Gorgias' rhetoric, although it has not always been acknowledged by scholars.¹¹ Just as expected from a teacher, Gorgias instructs his hearers with simpler reasoning patterns; he then uses them as a stepping stone to put forward more sophisticated ideas. For Spatharas, Gorgias' argumentation works as a "Russian doll," with each stage presented "as logically following the preceding one" (Spatharas, 2001, p. 406). This metaphor might not be entirely adequate, but the process Spatharas describes is. Gorgias carries out his train of thought by gradually unfolding new arguments, i.e., he uses a form of logical inference that is also visible in the treatise *On Nonbeing*.¹² In *Helen's* case, he proceeds from arguments that share two traits: pedagogically, they are easier to understand; rhetorically, they are easier to endorse. In terms of complexity, the persuasion/education of the audience begins with the argument everyone admits and comprehends. Once it is taken as given, the hearer is able to grasp the following argument and is forced to accept its conclusions. This also testifies to Gorgias' pedagogical and rhetorical intuition.¹³

The second feature is that this movement of education/persuasion depends on a sophistic technique: *antilogiké*.¹⁴ Only a few scholars have emphasized this point, and *Helen* is still missing in many lists of antilogic texts.¹⁵ However, read in this light, it is

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- 10 Gomperz (1912, p. 12) complains about *Helen's* lack of objectivity (*Unsachlichkeit*) and sees the speech as a logical monstrosity (*die logische Ungeheerlichkeit des Beweisganges*). In Antiquity, Athanasius also criticized Gorgias' allegedly flawed argumentation (B5a-DK).
- 11 Spatharas (2001) classified Gorgias' forms of argumentation: likelihood, antinomy, theorization, and apagogy. He does not mention instruction.
- 12 There are resemblances of this *Beweisgang* with the Eleatic method (Sicking, 1976, p. 396-397).
- 13 I assume here a partial identification between education and persuasion, as admitted by Socrates and Gorgias (*Grg.* 453d9-e5). It is not relevant to my argument if the persuasion and the education are based either on beliefs or on real knowledge, as later discussed by the characters (*Grg.* 454d). There is certainly a difference between Plato and Gorgias on this issue, for the sophist is more open to a kind of persuasion/education that does not depend on the truth.
- 14 This technique is traditionally connected to Protagoras, who "made the weaker argument also the stronger one and taught his disciples to blame and to praise the same man" (A21- DK). It was linked to the idea that concerning every subject, there are two arguments opposed to one another (B6a-DK), and the idea that there is no contradiction (*Euthd.* 286a). Other sophists also endorsed it, as suggested by Gorgias and the *Double Speeches*. The fact that Aristophanes' *Clouds* bases some of its jokes on such *topos* proves, as said, that it was seen as part of the sophistic legacy. See: Engler 2023; 2021; Schiappa, (2003, p. 110); Kerferd (2003, p. 147). However, it has gone unnoticed that this might be the reason why Gorgias calls his speech a "play". Schiappa (2003, p. 168) uses this idea to explain Gorgias' analogy between speech and drugs (*Hel.* 14) and argues that *logos* changes people for the better. But he does mention the fact that this is happening in *Helen*.
- 15 Gomperz (1912, p. 132) admits that Gorgias deals with paradoxical themes and compares him to Protagoras, but he never clearly states that *Helen* is an antilogical text. Rossetti (2023, p. 8) recognizes *Helen* as antilogical and shows how it destroys the commonsensical *logos*.

clear that *Helen* plays the argumentative game popularized by the sophists (Huizinga, 1980, p. 171). Gorgias employs a variation of the *disputari in utramque partem* and makes the weaker argument the stronger. Soon acknowledged as a primordial part of the sophistic legacy, this ability was attacked by Plato (*R.* 539b1-7; *Soph.* 232e; *Phdr.* 261e; *Phd.* 89d1-90c7) and Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1402a23-27). It was also used in Aristophanes' (*Nub.* 1337;1339) portrait of the *avant-garde* intellectuals of his time. Both Plato and Aristophanes suggest that *antilogiké* was the core of the sophistic education, and Socrates was accused of teaching it (*Apo.* 19b5-c1). The most common form of this technique, as preserved in the *Double Speeches*, consists of stating two opposite arguments: one that is admitted by most people (stronger) (*Rede*) and one that is more paradoxical (weaker) (*Gegenrede*). The idea is to develop both arguments, but the anonymous author of the *Double Speeches*, like Gorgias himself, does not conceal his sympathy for the most unbelievable argument, and the success of his rhetorical skill depends on making that the paradox overcomes common sense (*geläufige Meinung*) (Gomperz, 1912, p. 185; 188). As to *Helen*, the stronger argument was held by a long tradition that claimed Helen was guilty of and responsible for the Trojan War (*Hel.* 2). This is the opinion Gorgias wants to dispel from his audience. To be successful, he must convey innovative ideas and bring people from one mental or doxastic position to another. Such movement reveals Helen's didactic element: Gorgias instructs his hearers so that they change their minds.

This approach enables us to see the argumentative consistency of Gorgias' speech and highlights an essential feature of his rhetoric. It also opens an alternative to the dominant view on the status of Gorgias' rhetoric, strongly dependent on the treatise *On Nonbeing*. In this view, Gorgias liquidates objectivity with three bold hypotheses on Being and reduces everything to rhetoric.¹⁶ But he is led to admit that rhetoric itself is just a play (*Hel.* 21), a drug (*Hel.* 14), or a deception (B23-DK). Any educational intent is lost in this process, and Gorgias' epideictic speeches become a simple opportunity to show off his rhetorical mastery. Nevertheless, if this interpretation is correct and Gorgias truly believed that no knowledge is communicable, it would be impossible for him to educate people. Even if one reduces Gorgias' intent and the nature of his teaching to a minimum – say, it is only the production of a rhetorical effect – it remains the fact that he kept teaching and influencing his audience. As a motion of the souls (e-ducere), this influence is the essence of his education.¹⁷

16 See the comments in: Gomperz, (1912, p.1; 16; 26); Kerferd, (2003, p. 139-140; 161). For an alternative view, according to which Gorgias' concept of persuasion does not exclude truth and falsehood, see Bermúdez, 2017.

17 This doctrine influenced Plato's conception of education. He describes rhetorical persuasion as a kind of motion (*Phdr.* μεταβαίνων, 262a2-3, 262b5; 265c6), and defines education as a turning around (*R.* περιαγωγή, 515c7518c9, 518d4, 518e5; μεταστροφή, 518d5, 525c5; 526e3). Of course, there is a crucial difference. Whereas a sophist like Gorgias only changes people's minds from one opinion to another, Plato believes in an ontological modification that leads people from the world of opinion to that of Being and truth (*R.* 525c5). But in both cases this changing of mind is visible. For some scholars, a similar conception of education operates in Protagoras (Engler, 2019, p. 25).

To sum up, the historical fact that Gorgias did educate people who wanted to excel in political life cannot be denied (A5-DK). According to Aristotle (*SE*. 183b36-184a), he accomplished this by stimulating his students to learn by heart (ἐκμανθάνειν) his epideictic lectures. Aristotle criticizes this παιδευσίς as non-technical (ἄτεχνος), but acknowledges that the students' διδασκαλία was fast (ταχέϊα) (Bons, 2007, p. 40). Suppose one assumes that Gorgias was a philosopher interested in the coherence of his theories on *logos* and that his theses are self-referential. In that case, one may question the status of teaching based on deceptions and *jeux d'esprit* (Kerferd, 2003, p. 139). Nonetheless, one discards thereby childhood's most universal διδασκαλία and overlooks the epideictic nature of Gorgias' speeches. It is certainly worth describing Gorgias' theories as a coherent system, for the sophists inherited the Ionian spirit and fostered an investigative impulse akin to philosophy.¹⁸ But neither *Helen* nor *Palamedes* are philosophical treatises. They are occasional speeches that use philosophical, poetic, and scientific ideas to educate and persuade people. *Ergo*, the centrality of epideictic lessons cannot be ignored, nor can the fact that Gorgias continued to teach and to be sought out by students. Besides Aristotle's testimony, Plato's criticism of the sophistic ἐπίδειξις,¹⁹ and his fight to promote a better alternative, dialectic (*Grg.* 447c1-2; 448d7-10), suggests that this was the dominant teaching method of the elites of the time.²⁰

I believe it is important to investigate how this παιδευσίς is developed in *Helen's* case so that we can see Gorgias' rhetoric also as a form of instruction.

1. The first two arguments and their pattern of argumentation

The *Encomium of Helen* was delivered in Athens when Gorgias visited the city as Leontinoi's ambassador (A7-DK).²¹ The historical context suggests why Gorgias picked a popular subject, and the digression on *logos* may indicate that one of his goals was

18 It is impossible to deny that the sophists had a theoretical interest in philosophical themes, and Philostratus' (*Vit. soph.* 1) idea that the sophistic movement developed a philosophical rhetoric seems to be correct: many philosophical subjects are treated by them *sub specie rhetoricae* (see Engler, 2021, p. 50). However, these discussions are conditioned by a practical and political goal: to be rhetorically effective and teach the Greek elites.

19 Commenting on Plato's *Dialogues*, Nightingale affirms that "(...) the philosophical discourse is both defined and legitimated by way of its opposition to eulogy" (Nightingale, 1993, p. 112). See also: Cassin, (1993, p. 38).

20 Carey, (2007). Although Plato criticizes epideictic speeches, he uses them on several occasions: *Menexenus*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*. Depending on Socrates' interlocutor, he may abandon for a moment the *elenchus* and engage in a rhetorical speech. In my view, he does that because *elenchus* was still a novelty, and therefore hard to follow by some people, whereas epideictic speeches formed the curriculum of many of Socrates' interlocutors. See *Alc.* I, 106b14.

21 The date of such presentation has been disputed, despite the ancient testimonies on Leontinoi's embassy (*Thuc.* iii, 86, 3). For Buchheim (1989, p. 160), *Helen* was written before 415.

to advertise the art he was about to teach.²² His ability to persuade people produced perplexity among the Athenians (A1; A4-DK). By this time, rhetoric was still a novelty, often seen as “an instance of cultural iconoclasm threatening to uproot traditional institutions and values” (Poulakos, 1983, p. 6). But the Athenians soon began to appreciate this new form of ἀγών. Gorgias chooses a familiar *Leitmotiv* (*Hel.* 5), already sung out by poets (*Hel.* 2), and deep-rooted in the Greek foundational myth.²³ Arguing against the dominant opinion (stronger argument), he defends a paradoxical claim and transforms his speech into an event as alluring as Helen herself.

The beginning of Gorgias’ argumentation testifies to his pedagogic intuition and his interest in successfully persuading the audience: the first case evokes the power of the gods. Although *Hel.* 10 joins the approach of other sophists and reduces this power to rhetoric,²⁴ Gorgias starts his exposition with an *ad captandam benevolentiam* claim anchored on popular beliefs. *Hel.* 6 mentions the forces that may have coerced Helen to go to Troy: 1) the designs of fortune (Τύχης βουλήμασι), the plans of the gods (θεῶν βουλευμασι), the decrees of necessity (Ἀνάγκης ψηφίσμασι); 2) physical violence (βίαι ἀρπασθεῖσα); 3) persuasion by a speech (λόγοις πεισθεῖσα); 4) and love (ἔρωτι ἀλοῦσα).²⁵

The possibilities of 1 sum up almost everything that an average Greek thought about an objective power, beyond human capacity, that could be the cause of action. Gorgias’ first argument is compelling because it addresses the different beliefs of his audience and leaves no person aside. Anyone familiar with Homer – who explained the Trojan War and Helen’s fate due to Zeus’ decision (*Il.* 2, 160; *Od.* 4, 145; 11, 438)²⁶ – would accept that the Gods and Fortune determine human behavior. Pre-Socratic philosophy and Greek drama, in their turn, acknowledged the influence of Necessity

22 Following Duncan (1938), Segal (1962, p. 102) claimed that the speech “may have served as a kind of formal profession of the aims and methods of his art, a kind of advertisement”. For Poulakos (1983, p. 5-7), Gorgias used Helen as a personification of rhetoric, for “both are attractive, both are unfaithful, and both have a bad reputation”.

23 Isocrates praises Gorgias for he has mentioned Helen and “reminded us of such a woman” (B14-DK).

24 Jaeger (1976, p. 65). Jaeger does not cite Gorgias, and other analyses of the sophistic theories on religion have been restrained to the fragments of Protagoras (B4), Critias (B25-DK), Prodicus (B5-DK; D15, 16, 17), and Thrasymachus (B8-DK; D17), as well as to their connection with Melissus (B34-DK) and Xenophanes (B2; 11; 15; 16-DK). But Gorgias’ statement is decisive, for he first reduces religion to rhetoric. A similar idea appears in Critias’ *Sisyphus* (B25-DK, 39-41), where the belief in the Gods is the product of a deceptive speech.

25 The fourth reason was added by philologists. Cassin (1995, p. 43) refused the addition because she thought that the discussion of love belonged to another part of the speech, whereas Immisch (1927, p. 20) argued that the posterior discussion is about vision, not about love. In his version of the manuscript, he added ὄψει instead of ἐρωτι. However, Gorgias is interested in making his piece coherent, as paragraphs 3 and 20 prove, and he mentions the four causes together in 15 and 20. Therefore, the reason why he does not cite love/vision here must be found elsewhere. He might be holding his audience in suspense until he starts to analyze the cause that average people probably took to be the real one. As he brings up love as a fourth cause, he satisfies the expectations of his hearers and captivates their attention by returning to a familiar subject after the long digression on *logos*.

26 Despite seeing Helen as the cause of the war, Homer belittles her guilt by presenting her case as part of a divine scheme: See Zagagi (1988, p. 70); Coelho (2001/2002, p.160).

upon our lives.²⁷ Naturally, the depth of such an acknowledgment varied, and it was not unusual to blame an agent who acted under the influence of an extraneous force. The extent in the Greek tradition of what the Germans call *Fremdbestimmtheit* – the recognition that extraneous forces may shape our behavior – is still open to debate, and it involves the discussion of epic poetry, Greek drama, and philosophy.²⁸ For the present case, one must remember that Gorgias is delivering a speech for a multitude, not theorizing about our actions. He is aiming to be persuasive and thus arguing based on an opinion most people regard as worth respect (ἔνδοξον). Furthermore, the fact that he does not select one of three possible sources as definitive, but takes them as a whole, suggests that he wished to persuade every person in his audience without displeasing either the religious conservatives or the arguably small group inclined to philosophy.

The argument states that these forces are superior to human agency: man's calculated decision (προμηθία ἀνθρωπίνῃ) cannot avoid the vehemence (προθυμία) of the gods (*Hel.* 6). Besides, a natural hierarchy (πέφυκε) indicates that a stronger agent is not detained by a weaker, but the weaker is ruled and led by the stronger. Fortune and necessity (*Hel.* 20, ὑπὸ θείας ἀνάγκης) stand here for the gods. Therefore, if Helen succumbed to one of these cosmic powers, she cannot be found guilty.

If then it was for the first reason, then the one who is responsible deserves to be accused. For to prevent a god's vehemence is impossible for human forethought. For by nature the stronger is not prevented by the weaker, but the weaker is ruled and led by the stronger, and the stronger directs, the weaker follows. But a god is stronger than a human in force, in intelligence, and in all other respects. So if the responsibility is to be ascribed to Fortune and to a god, Helen too is to be freed from her ill repute (*Hel.* 6, Laks-Most).

The argument does not demand a deep philosophical understanding, only the basic recognition that some forces overpass the human capacity to plan the course of our actions. One does not need to decide which of these forces were responsible for Helen's case. It suffices to understand that our deliberate decisions (προμηθία) are ineffective in the face of superior powers, such as the gods, and that by nature stronger agents rule over weaker ones. This is the first argument:

27 Pythagoras, Parmenides, Empedocles, and the atomists acknowledged the importance of Necessity. Given that Gorgias was influenced by both Parmenides and Empedocles, he was aware of the philosophical usage of such a concept. A mixture of the philosophical and theological meanings of Necessity appears in several tragedies. See: Schreckenberg (1964, p. 73; 103). The role that the Greek drama played in Gorgias' thinking is often emphasized: Untersteiner, (2012, p. 163); Segal, (1962, p. 132). The expression Gorgias deploys to speak of Necessity resembles one used by Empedocles (B115-DK, Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα, θεῶν ψήφισμα) (Immisch, 1927, p.16-18; Buchheim, 1989, p. 163, n. 15; MacDowell, 1982, p.35-36, n. 6; Untersteiner, 1949, p. 93). *Pal.* 1 speaks likewise of "a manifest decree of Nature" (ἡ φύσις φανεραὶ τῆι ψήφωι).

28 See Rossetti, (1991); Schmitt, (2004, p.10-11;16); Idem, (1990).

it is clear, reasonable, and easy to endorse, for it appeals to beliefs most people support. Although the notions Gorgias uses – gods, destiny, human forethought, natural hierarchy – are controversial, he avoids a deeper discussion and presents them on a commonsensical level. Every sensible person would admit that he has a point. The pattern of this point – the fact that coercion eliminates responsibility – is never abandoned throughout the speech.

The following argument is also rooted in a commonsensical experience. Furthermore, it raises pity for Helen and thus contributes to the persuasion of Gorgias' hearers.²⁹ Gorgias claims that if a person is violently seized (βίαι ἠρπάσθη), illegally forced (ἀνόμως ἐβιάσθη), or unjustly outraged (ἀδίκως ὑβρίσθη), she does not commit any injustice, but is a victim of a misfortune (ἔδυστύχησεν). Conversely, the agent of such deeds commits an injustice. Therefore, the blame should fall upon Paris, not upon Helen.

But if she was seized by force and was overpowered lawlessly and was outraged unjustly, it is clear that the man who seized her committed an injustice, as he outraged her, while she who was seized suffered misfortune, as she was outraged. So the barbarian who undertook an undertaking that was barbarian with regard to speech and law and deed deserves to meet with an accusation with regard to speech, with dishonor with regard to law, and with punishment with regard to deeds; while she who was seized and deprived of fatherland and robbed of her dear ones – would it not be plausible for her to be pitied rather than defamed? For he committed terrible deeds, while she suffered them. So it is just to feel sorry for her and to feel hatred for him (*Hel.* 7, Laks-Most).

This argument is as simple as the first one. It only transfers the previous divine hierarchy to the realm of human beings: physical violence is now the equivalent of the gods, and Gorgias' treatment of human agency assumes again that responsibility for a certain deed can only be ascribed to a free agent. In a certain sense, this is a truism that every court supports, albeit involuntary homicide suggests that both common sense and law courts assign partial responsibility for unintended actions. The reading of Aristotle's ethical treatises proves that this discussion is deeper than Gorgias admits. Nevertheless, as said, *Helen* is not a treatise on ethics. Gorgias can ignore such controversy and state his idea so that everyone, especially those in a

29 Plato (*Phdr.* 267c) links Thrasymachus to the study of emotions, and Hermias mentions pity as one of the emotions the sophist taught how to raise (B6-DK). He wrote a book entitled *Expressions of Pity* (B5-DK). But Gorgias was also aware of the role of pity in persuading people. In *Palamedes* (33), the character claims that he will not persuade the judges through "lamentation, entreaties, and supplication of friends". Although the argument may be seen as a common-place, Plato uses it in his *Apology* (34d), a fact that perhaps confirms the influence of Gorgias' *Palamedes* and Xenophon's *Apology* on him (see Vrijlandt, 1919, p. 120). The fact that Gorgias tries to raise piety here indicates that *Helen* was written to be read to a crowd.

legal regime, can see its truth. The argument continues to be persuasive, at least in terms of *καίρος*, even if it may omit important facts.³⁰

Ancient philosophical schools used similar concepts to underpin the ideas of praise and blame, both vital to epideictic rhetoric (*Rht.* 1358b12-13). Praise or blame can only be assigned to a person whose actions rest on her deliberated decision; hence Socrates' complaint that he should be taught instead of being punished if he involuntarily corrupted the Athenian youth (*Apo.* 26a).³¹ In *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle upholds this thesis within a broader discussion of the actions that originated from man. His reflection is a vital testimony to the imbrication between epideictic rhetoric and moral culpability that appears in *Helen*, for he asserts that things originated either by fortune or by nature cannot be the cause of praise and blame.

But of things which it depends on him to do or not to do he is himself the cause, and what he is the cause of depends on himself. And since goodness and badness and the actions that spring from them are in some cases praiseworthy and in other cases blameworthy (for praise and blame are not given to things that we possess from necessity (ἐξ ἀνάγκης) or fortune (τύχης) or nature (φύσεως) but to things of which we ourselves are the cause, since for things of which another person is the cause, that person has the blame and the praise), it is clear that both goodness and badness have to do with things where a man is himself the cause and origin of his actions. We must, then, ascertain what is the kind of actions of which a man is himself the cause and origin. Now we all agree (πάντες μὲν δὴ ὁμολογοῦμεν) that each man is the cause of all those acts that are voluntary (ἐκούσια) and purposive (κατὰ προαίρεσιν) for him individually, and that he is not himself the cause of those that are involuntary. And clearly he commits voluntarily all the acts that he commits purposely. It is clear, then, that both goodness and badness will be in the class of things voluntary (*E.E.* 1223a8-20)³².

The series of passive verbs used by Gorgias denotes that Helen did not act purposely (*Hel.* 19, οὐ τέχνης παρασκευαίς) and that her actions were motivated by alien and superior powers: in short, that her case should be considered a misfortune

30 I disagree here with Rossetti (2023, p. 6). He acknowledges that Gorgias omits the discussion of Helen's co-responsibility, but he maintains that *Helen* is a crypto-treatise on the limits of our will. However, a systematic treatise would have to discuss such an issue, and Gorgias omits it to advance his argument most persuasively, since *Helen* is above all an epideictic speech.

31 Socrates employs this argument to prove that he was not wrongdoing voluntarily, which is the core of his ethics that "no one does wrong willingly" (*Prt.* 345e). Socrates may have adopted an idea explored in *Palamedes* (Calogero, 1958, p. 410).

32 This reflection may be seen as a result of Aristotle's careful reading of the sophists. Zingano (1997, p. 47) persuasively argues that Aristotle's discussion of voluntary and involuntary actions, especially his idea that it is ridiculous to consider that we are coerced when we act by anger or desire, since irrational feelings belong to human nature (*E.N.* III, 1), is a response to *Helen*'s fourth argument. Above all, it is a counterattack to the release of responsibility that can be derived from *Helen*.

(*Hel.* 19, ἀτύχημα νομιστέον). As Isocrates (*Hel.*14) noticed, this is also a legal issue. *Palamedes* and *Helen* indicate that Gorgias was somehow concerned, like Protagoras, with discussing juridical responsibility. He portrays different agents – Palamedes is rational and self-determined, whereas Helen is passive – but his discussion touches on similar problems. The case of Protagoras exemplifies how this discussion was developed at that time. He spent a whole day with Pericles examining the responsibility for the death of a certain Epitimus of Pharsalus, whom a javelin thrown by a competitor unintentionally killed. They investigated if the responsibility should be ascribed to the athlete who threw the javelin, the umpires, or the javelin itself (A10-DK). By raising these possibilities, Protagoras shows how deep this problem is. Gorgias' opposite portraits of Helen and Palamedes suggest that he was aware of these issues, but *Helen* just assumes a reasonable opinion for the sake of argument and unfolds other consequences.

In short, the first arguments, simple as they are, prepare the hearers to embrace the complex digressions and Gorgias' original view on persuasion and love. Their omissions or oversimplifications should not be seen as logical flaws, for the nature of the speech is not theoretical but practical: it is intended to present Gorgias' art and to persuade the audience. With the first two cases, the antilogical procedure is at work: the stronger argument (Helen is guilty) begins to seem more unlikely, whereas the weaker one (Helen is innocent) begins to appear more plausible. Like Protagoras and his antilogical technique (A21-DK), Gorgias teaches us how to blame and praise the same person (A25-DK).

2. Persuasion as a necessity and the digression on *logos*

In the first digression, Gorgias illustrates how *logos* permeates everything. His strategy is twofold: he proves both the omnipresence and the omnipotence of the speech; in sum, speeches of speeches, all is speech.³³ He thereby converts *logos* into an objective force like the ones mentioned before. Secondly, he defines persuasion as a constraint and reconducts the arguments to the conceptual structure of the previous arguments.

This *reductio ad rhetoricam* starts with a formalistic poetics³⁴ where *logos* is the source of poetry's miraculous effects, i.e., the magic of poetry derives from the divine corpuscles that speech introduces in the souls.³⁵ The materiality of the words

33 This is how Plato interpreted Gorgias: *Phlb.* 58a7-b3; *Grg.* 456a4-c7. See Engler, 2013.

34 Gorgias' poetic formalism was followed by both ancient and modern authors. By identifying the myth as the essence of poetry, Aristotle (*Po.* 1450a) objects to Gorgias' criterion. Schmitt (2011, p. 120; 219; 226).

35 "Gorgia ci propone qui una definizione di poesia aparentemente scontata, in realtà però assai significativa. Assistiamo infatti ad una radicale messa in questione del primato comunemente attribuito alla poesia nel mondo greco. La sua capacità di suscitare brividi di paura, compassione e desiderio di sofferenza viene qui ricondotta al *logos*, del quale essa è una sottospecie" (Stavru 2010, p. 681).

dethrones the Muses, and poetry becomes a matter of psychology (ἴδιόν τι πάθημα), not a divine dispensation (θεία μοίρα).³⁶

I consider all poetry to be speech that possesses meter, and I give it this name. Those who hear it are penetrated by terribly fearful shuddering, a much-weeping pity, and a yearning that desires grief, and on the basis of the fortunes and misfortunes of other's people actions and bodies their soul is affected, by an affection of its own, by the medium of words (*Hel.* 8, Laks-Most).

Once poetry is reduced to *logos*, Gorgias does the same with religion: for him, the most common effects of incantations inspired by speeches come from *logos*. He bases his claim on a psychological fact and naturalizes persuasion: the soul is susceptible to being persuaded because of its errors (ψυχῆς ἀμαρτήματα) and the deceptions of opinion (δόξης ἀπατήματα). For him, the basis of persuasion lies naturally in us, given that the power of incantation (ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἐπωιδῆς) is inherent to the opinion of the soul (συγγινομένη γὰρ τῆι δόξει τῆς ψυχῆς). This idea partly recurs to the natural hierarchy pattern of the first argument, for it suggests that persuasion is an autonomous or universal force as coercive as the hierarchy that states the gods' superiority over human beings. Moreover, a double technique teaches how to enchant and persuade.

The word τέχνη (Kube, 1969), as later explained by Aristotle (*Metaph.* 981a1-b13; 1032b; *E.N.* 1140a10-17), implies that this is a rational, practical, and teachable process. A τέχνη is both a theoretical knowledge and an expertise (Döring, 1972, p. 17-49). It is risky to take Aristotle's definition of τέχνη to interpret Gorgias because the Stagirite, in the wake of Plato's critique (*Grg.* 463a-d; *Phdr.* 260e2-7), blames Gorgias' non-technical rhetoric. But Gorgias was famous for having written a τέχνη (A1; A3; A4; A14; B6), which suggests that he was able to speak about causes, to give reasons and to understand rhetoric from a broader perspective. All these are features of art. Besides, he employs this concept in the sense of purposeful reasoning. In *Hel.* 13, he contraposes τέχνη and truth and states that a speech purposefully planned, however false, defeats a true one. In *Hel.* 19, he differentiates the involuntary constraints of love from the preparations of art: love is connected to destiny, and art to human thought. For this argument, the important fact is that religious incantation may be rhetorically produced. This is a golden testimony of Gorgias' secular view of religion.³⁷

36 Gorgias' statement is the beginning of the secularized poetics defended by Aristotle. See: Engler (2016); Romilly (1973, p. 160-161); Flashar (1956, p. 18).

37 For MacDowell (1989, p. 37), Gorgias accepts the popular belief that the power of spells derives from the Gods, while he "contrives to give the credit for their effectiveness to words". MacDowell does not see any rupture with tradition either here or in paragraph 9, where Gorgias psychologizes the effects of poetry. Immisch (1927, p. 24-26) thinks that Gorgias believed in the divine nature of poetry. As it happens in the case of poetry, I see here a critique of the religious tradition.

For incantations divinely inspired by means of speech are bringers of pleasure and removers of pain. For the power of an incantation, when it is conjoined with the opinion of the soul, beguiles it, persuades it, and transforms it by sorcery. For two arts have been discovered, those of sorcery and of magic, which are errors of the soul and deceptions of opinion (*Hel.* 10, Laks-Most).

The following paragraph adds important elements to the understanding of persuasion. It develops an ‘epistemological fallibilism’ that clarifies why opinion persuades and molds the souls.³⁸ For Gorgias, there is no ideal or stable knowledge and opinion is often our sole guide. Our understanding of the present is flawed, and we can neither perfectly remember the past nor foresee the future. Thus, without any sound knowledge, deceptive speeches become omnipotent.

Whoever has persuaded, and also persuades, whomever about whatever [scil. does so] by fabricating a false discourse. For if all men, with regard to all things, had memory of the ones that have passed by, (understanding) of the ones that are present, and forethought for the ones still to come, then a similar speech would not be similarly [scil. deceptive], as things are in fact in present, insofar as it is easy neither to remember what has passed by nor to examine what is present nor to divine what is to come. So that about most things most people furnish themselves with opinion as a counselor for the soul. But opinion, being slippery and unstable, involves those who use it in slippery and unstable successes (*Hel.* 11, Laks-Most).

In *Hel.* 12, Gorgias reveals the essence of persuasion. The link between persuasion and necessity speaks for the centrality of the first arguments. Having provided the reader with a basic reasoning structure on responsibility/voluntariness, Gorgias now applies it to the realm of speech. He shows that Helen acted involuntarily, was she persuaded, for persuasion is a force that compels the agent to act. And here is the most remarkable point about its nature: it does not look like a necessity (ἀνάγκη) – for it acts through pleasant words – but it has the same power (δύναμιν).

(...) For the part belonging to persuasion was permitted, and the mind, even if of necessity the one who knows will possess it, it still has the same power. For speech that persuades the soul constrains the one [i.e. soul] that it has persuaded both to obey what is said and to approve what is done. So he who has persuaded commits injustice by exercising constraint, while she who has

38 For a deeper and analytical discussion of this point, see Di Iulio, (2023, p. 105). Comparing Gorgias and Aristotle’s views on the concept of opinion/appearance, Serra (2014, p. 210) also speaks of an “epistemological pessimism”.

been persuaded is defamed in vain, for she was constrained by speech (*Hel.* 12, Laks-Most)³⁹.

This is Gorgias' most central thesis on persuasion. After he presented several examples of *logos'* omnipotence, he argues that *logos* is a form of constraint. The same pattern that operated before is now transferred to speech. If one takes this thesis as self-referential, one may wonder about the nature of Helen's persuasion: is Gorgias forcing his audience to accept his arguments? Is he being unjust, as he persuades us? Beyond any logical necessity, there certainly are elements of violence in every persuasive act, and even Plato (*R.* 515c6; 515d5; 515e1-6) admitted that philosophers might force people with their questions. In this case, violence is related to the changing of opinion: Gorgias presses people to move from one position to another.

Furthermore, persuasion was kindred in Greek mythology to Aphrodite's enchantments, which explains the following digression. The hypothesis that Gorgias was referring hereby to such a tradition and that his hearers would comprehend the word *πειθῶ* in a mythological sense cannot be excluded. If he was being traditional at this point, he was innovative as he linked persuasion to necessity, for they were seen as opposite forces. Whereas the former involved the idea of achieving a goal using non-violent methods, the latter was connected to violence and blind obedience.⁴⁰ Gorgias' new idea is taught through the examples he advances. For Calogero, Gorgias' principal task is to prove that persuasion is a form of violence:

39 This paragraph is crucial to understanding the ontological status of persuasion and the digression on *logos*, but it is, unfortunately, a *locus corruptus* (Immisch, 1927, p. 37: *divinandum aut desperandum*). Despite different suggestions, one fact stands out: everyone accepts that Gorgias transforms Persuasion into a sort of Necessity. Thus, Immisch (1927, p. 37) aptly claims that "suadae illecebrae tam inextricabiles sunt, ut a vi et necessitate nihil differant". Other translations corroborate such a view: "And indeed persuasion, though not having an appearance of compulsion, has the same power" (MacDowell); "Sarebbe, infatti, possibile vedere quanto potere ha la persuasione, che non ha la caratteristica della necessità, ma ne ha la stessa potenza" (Reale); "Die Überredung gleicht an Verfassung zwar nicht an Zwang, sie hat aber dieselbe Kraft" (Schirren-Zinsmaier); "Infatti, la forza della persuasione, dalla quale ebbe origine il modo di pensare di costei – ed effettivamente ebbe origine per necessità – non subisce biasimo, ma possiede un potere che s'identifica con quello di questa necessità" (Untersteiner); "Equidem persuasione mens attrahitur, eandemquem vim sentit (quamquam hoc turpe est), quam si necessitate traheretur" (Bembo).

40 Immisch is convinced of the mythological sense of the word and its connection with Aphrodite, whose son, Eros, appears in the last argument (Immisch, 1927, p. 37). The connection between Love and Necessity is as old as the *Homeric Hymns* (Parry, 1986, p. 257). Immisch also explains the opposition between Necessity and Persuasion; he quotes a passage from Herodotus (viii, 111), where Themistocles threatens the people of Andros by saying that the Athenians have come to them with two gods, Persuasion and Necessity, i.e., either to convince the Andrians or to force them to do what the Athenians wanted (Immisch, 1927, p. 39). The passage has been compared to the Melian Dialogue (*Thuc.* v, 84. 2; v, 98), where the Athenians justify their domination based on a cosmic law. See Mumson, (2001, p. 38). For Schreckenberg (1964, p. 102, n. 77), Necessity and Persuasion are terminologically *Gegensatzkomplemente*. In *Pal.* (14), Gorgias puts together Persuasion and *βία*. Aristotle's later testimony exemplifies how both concepts were usually seen: "On the other hand persuasion is thought to be the opposite of force and necessity" (*E.E.* 1224a39). See also Untersteiner (1949, p. 104). Other testimonies: Plato (*R.* 365d5; 548b7).

But now Gorgias maintains that she was irresistibly compelled, and therefore deprived of any αἰτία, even if the compulsion was only enacted through πειθώ, persuasion: and this despite the fact that βία and πειθώ were for his contemporaries the technical terms used to express the opposition between coercive and non-coercive behavior the distinguishing characters of tyranny and democracy, of slavery and freedom. This is evidently the main contention which Gorgias has to prove, and so he devotes to it seven central paragraphs of his speech (8-14: seven precede and seven follow) (...) (Calogero, 1957, p. 13).

Because of its very nature, persuasion forces the soul to believe in the words uttered and to act accordingly. From a moral perspective, the speaker performs an unjust deed by forcing his hearer to follow him despite the neutral disguise with which he delivers his speech. The convinced one, in his turn, is pointlessly blamed by public opinion, for he cannot avoid *logos'* coercion.

Gorgias underpins this idea through psycho-physiological reasons that point to the soul's passivity. He mentions in *Hel.* 13 three occasions where speech plays the chief role: natural philosophy, eristic or juridical debates, and rhetoric.⁴¹ He exemplifies in these cases how persuasion creates a psychic configuration – ἐτυπώσατο⁴² – and molds the soul.

And as for the fact that persuasion, joining together with speech, also shapes the soul as it wishes: it is necessary to learn first the arguments of those who study the heavens, who, abolishing and establishing one opinion instead of another, have made things that are unbelievable and unclear appear to the eyes of opinion; second, contentions that constrain by means of speech, in which one speech, written with artistry, not spoken with truth, delights and persuades a great crowd; third, contests of philosophical arguments, in which it is revealed that rapidity of thought too makes the conviction of an opinion easily changeable (*Hel.* 13, Laks-Most).

Hel. 14 explains this doctrine through an anatomical approach that returns in the following digression. *Logos* operates on the soul's configuration (τάξις) in the same way drugs operate on bodies. Drugs, magic filters, antidotes, and poisons – all of

41 For Diels (1976, p. 373), Gorgias began his career as a natural philosopher and turned into a rhetorician. See also: Segal, (1962, p. 99).

42 Plato's vocabulary in the *Republic* (377a12-b3), where he describes both the moldability (πλαττω) of souls and the "impression" (τύπος) one can engrave on them through education, is clearly Gorgianic. The same goes for his discussion of memory and knowledge in *Theaetetus* (192a4; 194b5). The word τύπος is another evidence of the influence Gorgias exerted on Plato. Plato's *Apology* benefited from *Palamedes* (Gomperz, 1912, p. 9-11; Biesecker-Mast, 1994; Barret, 2001; McCoy, 2010; Nerczuk, 2007), whereas Gorgias' bifurcated view of love – is it a God or a disease? – is similar to Plato's *Phaedrus* (265a) (See Buchheim, 1989, p. 173, n. 40). In my view, the rivalry between Plato and Gorgias (A15a-DK) was a productive *aemulatio*, not a vile competition.

them translate the Greek φάρμακον – change the body, expel its humors (χυμούς), and may cease a disease or even life. Likewise, speeches raise different emotions, drug (ἐφαρμάκευσαν), and bewitch (ἐξεγάγητευσαν) people. In *Hel.* 8, Gorgias claimed that words penetrate the soul and lead it to perform divine deeds. One sees how literal he is: words are material entities that modify the soul's material configuration, as though they rearranged the pieces of a Lego toy.⁴³ With the words *pharmakon* and *khumos*, Gorgias puts together pre-Socratic thinking and medicine to present a modern account of persuasion.⁴⁴

The power of speech has the same relation with the arrangement of the soul as the arrangement of drugs has with the nature of the bodies. For just as some drugs draw some fluids out of the body, and others other ones, and some stop an illness and others stop life, in the same way some speeches cause pain, others pleasure, others fear, others dispose listeners to courage, others drug and bewitch the soul by some evil persuasion (*Hel.* 14, Laks-Most).

The analogy with medicine also emphasizes the relationship between persuasion and necessity, for experience attests that a medication necessarily affects the body. To take a drug means to become a 'patient' who undergoes an effect over which we have little or no power. By stating that speech affects our soul, Gorgias recurs to a daily-life experience of his audience. Besides drugs, medicine also points to diseases, another case where involuntary forces act upon human beings, for no one chooses to get sick.

However, the most important fact is that the digression is predicated on the idea of responsibility vaguely stated in the first arguments. It shows how omnipresent and omnipotent *logos* is, so one understands that this 'great potentate,' like the Gods and physical violence, is also a universal and autonomous force. In the face of such a power, we are mere victims.

3. The digression on vision: love, images, and thought extinction.

The digression on love/vision continues to unfold Gorgias' anatomical approach and clarifies how Eros subjugates man's will. The traditional connection between Love and

43 "Ma la parola oltre ad avere un'origine e un processo di formazione materiale, è materiale essa stessa, o per lo meno una parte della sua struttura lo è certamente" (Mazzara, 1983, p. 132). This theory resembles the doctrines of both Empedocles and Democritus. Protagoras' materialistic account of the soul was also influenced by the atomists: see Engler, (2019, p. 16, n. 23). On Gorgias and the atomists, see Segal (1962, p. 106); Diels (1976); Sicking (1976).

44 Gorgias' brother, Herodicus, was a physician (A2-DK). In tandem with the influence Gorgias received from Empedocles, this fact must have played an important role in his intellectual formation. However, the technical language of medicine might have been adopted via Democritus (Segal, 1962, p. 115).

subjugation (MacDowell, 1982, p. 16) receives a scientific treatment and justifies Gorgias' conception of the soul as a passive and moldable entity. The most remarkable point lies in the soul's incapacity to overcome emotions: it links the digression to the first arguments, as it transfers the power of the Gods and physical violence to Eros. The first argument makes Gorgias' contention easier since Eros was already conceptualized as a divine and natural force.

At the outset, Gorgias affirms that there is an essential passivity in the way human perception works. We cannot choose how things appear to us. Sensible things have rather their nature, and when they affect our senses, they mold (*τυποῦται*) our souls.⁴⁵ "For whatever we see does not have the nature that we wish, but the one that each one happens to possess. And by means of sight soul is shaped even in its basic ways of being (*Hel. 15, Laks-Most*)". This statement shows how Gorgias unfolds new arguments from the previous ones: it follows from the preceding digression, as it appeals to the concept of *τύπος* and claims that sensible perceptions have the same mouldability power that *logos* has. The appeal to nature, in its turn, follows from the first argument. Both are explained through several phenomena that prove how the extraneous power of perceptions alters our deliberate action (*προμηθία ἀνθρωπίνη*). For instance, when a soldier beholds warlike bodies, his soul gets disoriented, and he may leave the battlefield and neglect the products of justice. Visible things are persuasive and necessary forces that change our behavior.

For the truth of their thought [*scil.* People who are afraid] establishes itself within them as forceful by the fear that comes from sight, which, when it arrives, makes people neglect both what is fine as judged by the law and what is good as produced by justice (*Hel. 16, Laks-Most*)⁴⁶.

The sophistic contraposition between *nomos* and *physis* affirms that natural things – *viz.*, sensible perceptions – are stronger than rational bonds and shall prevail over any conventional force that opposes them. "For what belongs to the laws is adventitious (*ἐπιθετα*), but what belongs to nature is necessary (*ἀναγκαῖα*)" (Antiphon, B44a-DK). Gorgias was aware of such contraposition – *Pal.* (1-2) opposes natural and conventional death – and he might be counting here on the constraints of natural necessity.⁴⁷

45 The ontological claim that *sensibilia* have their own nature and are independent of man's will is endorsed by Aristotle, for whom perception is based on the previous existence of some entity, in opposition to what happens with thinking. See *de An.* 417b24-26.

46 This paragraph's first line ("the truth of their thought") is another *locus corruptus*, and the attempts offered by philologists differ greatly from one another. I quote here Laks-Most's option, but Diels' solution, followed by Reale, is also plausible (ἡ συνήθεια τοῦ νόμου).

47 Although Gorgias alludes to such controversy in *Palamedes* 1, this passage under scrutiny has never been analyzed by scholars. See Heinemann, (1965); Kahn, (1981); Pohlenz, (1953). It is important to see it as a psychological or ethical consequence of the difference between law and nature.

In *Hel.* 17, Gorgias argues that the mind cannot resist the effects of visual perception: the fear printed by sight on the soul extinguishes thought. Besides, sight may cause diseases, distress, and madness. Like the speech that molds the soul, sight impresses (ἐνέγραψεν) perceptions on it and may cause involuntary actions.

And it has already happened that some people, seeing frightening things, have been driven out from their present mind in the present moment: in this way fear has extinguished and expelled thought. And many have fallen victim to groundless sufferings, terrible diseases, and incurable madness. Thus sight inscribes within thought the images of things seen (*Hel.* 17, Laks-Most).

In *Hel.* 18, Gorgias argues that artistic images offer a pleasant spectacle/disease⁴⁸ to our eyes and, like artistic words (*Hel.* 9), they naturally (πέφουκε) raise different emotions in us. The argument reveals that artificial images are as strong as the real perceptions mentioned above. Pygmalion's story (Immisch, 1927, pp. 49-50) fits perfectly here: it exemplifies how an agent can perform several deeds because of his desire for an art-made woman.

Moreover, whenever painters perfectly depict a single body or a form on the basis of many colors and bodies, they cause pleasure for the sight, and the sculpting statues of men and the manufacture of statues of gods provide a pleasurable sickness for the eyes. So by nature some things make sight feel pain and it desires others. But many things instill in many people love and desire for many things and bodies (*Hel.* 18, Laks-Most).

Like *Hel.* 12, *Hel.* 19 reveals Gorgias' strategy and connects the thoughts on sight and love to the pattern of the first arguments: *primo*, by using the word προθυμία, previously deployed to establish the superiority of the Gods; *secundo*, by comparing Eros to a divine force. After showing that perceptions are persuasive forces that shape our behavior, he describes the effect of Alexander's body on Helen. He hypothesizes that Eros may be a God and reconducts his argument to the first reasoning pattern. As a corollary of the demonstration performed in the first argument, his conclusion shows that, at this point, Gorgias believes that his audience has already been taught on such a matter.

But he draws another corollary from his previous teaching: the last argument recapitulates the medical reasons exposed in the analogy of medicine and rhetoric (*Hel.* 14), whereas the expression "ignorance of the soul" points to paragraphs 10 and 11 and the slippery world of opinion. In all these cases, Helen's behavior is not

48 There are two readings of this passage, either the word *thea* or the word *nosos*. Both terms work in my argumentation, but the latter one emphasizes Gorgias' medical approach and the important fact that a disease is an extraneous force that may shape our behavior.

a fault but a misfortune, for she was deceived by her soul and the constraints of love,⁴⁹ not by the decisions of reason.

So if Helen's eye, delighted by Alexander's body, transmitted to her soul an eagerness and a striving for love, what is surprising in this? But if it (love), being a God, possesses the divine power of the gods, how could someone who is weaker be able to repel it and defend himself? Whereas if it is a human malady and an ignorance of the soul, it should not be blamed as a fault but considered as a misfortune. For it came, as it came, by the huntings of Fortune, not by the plans of thought, and by constraints of love, not by preparations of art (*Hel.* 19, Laks-Most).

The soul's constitution contains the propensity to be persuaded and deceived by speeches and, consequently, is prone to be deluded by love. Furthermore, the *ipsis litteris* classification of Love as a constraint (ἔρωτος ἀνάγκαις) proves that Gorgias counts on the first arguments and tries to offer a coherent argumentation.

4. Conclusion

Gorgias was an orator and writer, but above all, he was a teacher and a showman who amazed, persuaded, and educated people. His writings and dazzling rhetorical performances may be seen as the result of a didactic purpose, for they likely formed the curriculum of the courses he taught for almost fifty years (*Soph. elen.* 183b36-184a) (Pratt, 2015, p. 164). He earned lots of money through his teaching and left several famous disciples, i.e., people who saw the effectiveness of his lessons. From a historical point of view, it is perhaps impossible to deny a didactic element in his conserved works since Gorgias had disciples and students. Still, it is easy to dismiss it once one assumes that his rhetoric was just a game and that games cannot be instructive. The deflationary ontology of the treatise on *Nonbeing*, as well as *Helen's* final and self-referential idea that rhetoric is a trifle, have led most of the interpreters on this route. Only a few people have underlined instruction as a relevant feature of Gorgias' rhetoric.⁵⁰ However, *Helen* and *Palamedes* cite it as one of their major goals.

49 The expression "constraint of love" (*Liebeszwang*) also expresses the natural laws that compel people to procreate. Schreckenberg (1964, p. 54) compares Gorgias' usage to Plato's (*R.* 458d; *Smp* 196b; 197b).

50 Poulakos (1983, p. 13) emphasizes the pedagogic element of Gorgias' *Helen*: "Consistent with his surface argument (Helen's accusers must examine the possible causes of her action before assigning blame), he attacks the cause of the problem, not its effects. Thus, his defense takes the form of an educational mission". By forcing his audience to analyze the causes of Helen's action, Gorgias takes a step further than Stesichorus, whose famous palinode (fr. 90) only tackles Homer's version and introduces the *eidolon* motif used by Euripides. Pratt also recognizes *Helen's* educational element: "The Gorgias that emerges from my analysis is an educator far more attuned to the social and ethical implications of his own pedagogy than is often supposed" (Pratt 2015, p. 164). But he sees *Helen* as a speech intended to be read by aspiring orators, whereas I think it was pronounced *coram populo*. For the meaning of the educational ideas within the sophistic movement, see Engler, (2021). Bons (2007, p. 42) also

Palamedes sees his defence as an opportunity to teach his judges about his unjust trial and, above all, about who he is. He deploys likelihood and apagogical arguments to attack the factual possibility of treason (*Pal.* 6-12). In every case, he explains the factual circumstances necessary to betray his comrades-in-arms. For instance, the traitor should be able to communicate with the Barbarians; however, this was impossible, for Palamedes did not speak Priam's language (*Pal.* 7). Such explanations are instructive, for they clarify the context of the treason and inform the verdict of the judges. In the next moment (*Pal.* 12-21), he tackles the idea that a person of his character would perform such a deed. The ethopoetic sections enlighten the jury about Palamedes' character and prove that he had no personal reason to betray the Achaeans. Similar arguments return in the final speech addressed to the judges (*Pal.* 28-36). Skeptic about his capacity to convey the truth (*Pal.* 35), Palamedes believes that he does not deceive the magistrates⁵¹ but teaches them the truth about what happened.

It remains to speak to you about yourselves: when I have said this, I shall conclude my defense. Well, lamentation, entreaties, and supplication of friends are useful when a judgment takes place in a crowd, but in the presence of you, who both are and are reputed to be the very first of the Greeks, I do not need to persuade you by means of the assistance of friends, entreaties, or laments, but to be acquitted of this accusation by the most evident justice, by teaching (διδάξαντα) you the truth (τάληθές), not by deceiving (ἀπατήσαντά) you (*Pal.* 33, Laks-Most).

As to *Helen*, Gorgias openly states in the foreword his didactic intent: “to show the truth (ἐπιδείξας καὶ δείξας τάληθές) – through the most usual form of sophistic instruction, the epideictic lecture – “and to stop the ignorance (παῦσαι τῆς ἀμαθίας)” about *Helen* (*Hel.* 2). To do so, he uses one of the most popular sophistic techniques and inverts the value of *Helen* within the Greek tradition.⁵² He presents a different heroine to an old tradition. In the peroration, he addresses the same point and indicates that the speech was an instructive journey that taught his audience to doubt tradition and to see *Helen* in a new light. One understands that some conservatives censured rhetoric, for it really uproots traditional values and narratives.

acknowledges *Palamedes'* didactic purpose. For him, the questions *Palamedes* raises on how to proceed with his speech (*Pal.* 4) are intended to teach the students of rhetoric.

51 The idea of deception is central to Gorgias' view of the arts. He claims that the deception involved in tragedy is necessary and that “the one who is deceived is more intelligent than the one who is not deceived” (B23-DK). The fragment is usually interpreted either as a defense of the fictional nature of tragedy or as a theorization on the concept of ‘tragic’ (Untersteiner 2012, p. 255). Parmenides (B8, 52-DK) used this concept to define the nature of opinion, whereas Plato (*Phdr.* 261e6) connects rhetoric and deception. See Rosenmeyer, (1955); Verdenius, (1981, p. 127).

52 Although he does not mention the sophistic technique, Buchheim (1989, p. 161-162, n. 8) writes that Gorgias offers a reassessment (*unwertende Interpretation*) of the facts at stake.

By my speech I have removed the ill repute of a woman, I have abided by the norm I established at the beginning of my speech. I have attempted to annul the injustice of blame and the ignorance of opinion (δόξης ἀμαθίαν), I wished to write a speech that would be an encomium for Helen and an amusement for me (*Hel.* 21, Laks-Most).

Gorgias' *Helen*, therefore, is a coherent and didactic speech. Its coherence is found in Gorgias' attempt to ground his four arguments on the idea that responsibility cannot be assigned to an agent who is coerced to act. He changes the coercion factor in each case he brings up, but his strategy is clear: he jumps from commonsensical (endoxastic) examples to more abstract theories. His concern with consistency shows up as he promises to offer a coherent argumentation (*Hel.* 3, λογισμὸν).⁵³ In the peroration, he didactically sums up his arguments (*Hel.* 20) and says that he has abided by the norm he put in the beginning (*Hel.* 21). From the perspective of the hearer, far from being a *logische Ungeheurllichkeit* (Gomperz, 19212, p. 12), *Helen* is instead a *rigoroso ragionamento* (Untersteiner, 1949, p. 91).

In terms of argumentation, instruction is then another reasoning pattern Gorgias employs. The analysis of the causes of Helen's action educates the hearers on a primordial feature of moral responsibility. But the hearers also learn about rhetoric, medicine, psychology, and love. *Summa summarum*, they learn that persuasion and love may start involuntary actions, for they are a constraint as powerful as other forces: the Gods, natural hierarchy, and physical violence. In a treatise, Gorgias would have to discuss whether these forces may always or sometimes trigger involuntary actions. In an epideictic speech delivered *coram populo*, he may count on the fact that they sometimes do, as the hearers' experience confirms. After this instruction, the audience sees Helen from a different angle. The change of this perspective, the moving from one position to another (*e-ducere*), is what an antilogical education is.

Finally, if *Helen* implies a teaching process, it is comprehensible that Gorgias calls it his *παίγνιον*.⁵⁴ The questions around this term are perhaps misguided: it is not a matter of deciding whether Gorgias took Helen's fate or his speech seriously or not.⁵⁵ The word is there because 'playing' is at the core of the Greek conception of

53 The concept used by Gorgias denotes that his encomium is not within the realm of poetry, such as Stesichorus' was, but within the realm of "science" or "philosophy". See: Untersteiner, (1949, p. 90); Buchheim, (1989, p. 161, n. 8). In the Hippocratic tradition, this word referred to a diagnosis that could not be given by empirical facts and needed the reasoning of the doctor Spatharas, (2007, p. 160). On Gorgias' influence on contemporary physicians, see Schollmeyer, (2017).

54 The word *παίγνιον* was perhaps a literary genre, for Thrasymachus wrote a collection of speeches entitled "Amusements" (*παίγνια*) (A1-DK). Likewise, there were speeches of the refutatory genre: Protagoras' *Kataballontoi*, Thrasymachus *Hyperballontoi*, and Diagoras' *Apopyrgizontes logoi*. See: Engler, (2019, p. 19, n. 24); Pernot, (1993, p. 20). Quintilian's ideas on the *laudativum genus* (*Inst.* I, 3, 11) corroborate the imbrication between epideictic rhetoric and playfulness.

55 Gomperz, (1912, p. 12); Guthrie, (1995, p. 181 n. 38); Stroh, (2010, p. 55). Immisch, (1927, p. 55); Sicking, (1976, p.405). Pratt (2015, p.166; 169) sees *Helen* as a game, but he emphasizes the *aporia* resulting from the fact that *Helen*'s seriousness is

education. Plato considered this when he recommended teaching children through playing (R. 424b; 425d; 537a). But he takes an ambiguous position on the matter. On the one side, he differentiates instruction from playing (*Phdr.* 262d; 265d) and reproaches the lack of seriousness of the mimetic activities (R. 602b8; *Soph.* 234b); he also dismisses as childish some of the rhetorical and dialectical games played by sophists and orators (*Soph.* 234b). On the other hand, he wrote a series of dialogues that engage the readers in an entertaining and instructive game, and he used at least one antilogical procedure to educate the young Phaedrus (*Phdr.* 265c7-8).⁵⁶ Huizinga (1980, p. 146) identifies in the *Dialogues* the “two main factors of social play” that made Gorgias famous and that are at stake in *Helen*: “glorious exhibitionism and agonistic aspiration”. The whole analysis Huizinga provides in his chapter on the play-forms in philosophy testifies to the argument presented here. Furthermore, Plato himself did not hesitate to embrace the playfulness of philosophy. The characters of his *Parmenides* play a laborious game (*Prm.* 137b2, *πραγματειώδη παιδιὰν παίζειν*) and Socrates defines philosophy as his *παιδικά* (*Grg.* 482a4), emphasizing both his love and the playful element of his activity. With his frequent discussion of playfulness and seriousness in the *Gorgias* (481b6; 482b5; 484e1-3; 485a7; 485b2; 485c1; 500b8; 500c1;), Plato probably alludes to the historical figure, who was notorious for using jokes to refute earnest opponents (B12-DK).

My final claim, then, is that Gorgias takes into consideration some of the educational elements related to the games which were later embraced *cum grano salis* by the ‘playful Plato’:⁵⁷ by creating an amusing rhetorical trifle, he entertains his hearers and teaches them several subjects. That is why *Helen* is his *παίγνιον*.

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dismissed by Gorgias. He makes real progress by interpreting the *παίγνιον* in an educational sense, as the stage in the education of the aspiring orator to whom *Helen* was allegedly written. *Helen* is a “toy whose conceptual horizon is to be broadened through the interpretive play that the speech initiates” (2015, p. 177).

- 56 As to the game, this point is already accepted by contemporary Plato scholars. “Dialogues in general may be defined as educational games” (Rosen, 1987, *Introd.* xlvi). Baratieri (2022, p. 94-114) offers an enlightening discussion of the *Dialogues* as (erotic) games and quotes the main authors who agree with him. Bons (2007, p. 43) also thinks that *Helen* is similar to the *Dialogues*: “The mixture of seriousness and playfulness, and the open ending, reminds one of Socrates in his aporetic dialogues as portrayed by Plato”. Kerferd (2003, p. 114) likewise compares Socratic *elenchus* and antilogic. As to the antilogic, it is not only the *Phaedrus* that performs it. Plato also uses it, perhaps with a comic intention, in the dialogue dedicated to the sophist who was acknowledged as the inventor of this method: the *Protagoras* ends with the inversion of the positions Socrates and his interlocutor had assumed at the outset (*Prot.* 360e6-361c1).
- 57 For the connection between Plato’s playfulness and philosophical pedagogy: Altman (2018, p. 94-95; 2012, p.44, 178, 189, 204, 333-36). On playfulness, philosophy, and rhetoric: Sermamoglou-Soulmaid (2014).

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