

GORGIAS AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSUASION

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1

Although the stated objective of Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* may be doubted¹ — to free Helen from blame for leaving her home and husband to go to Troy with Paris (2) — it surely contains a serious point. The speech seems more accurately an encomium of the *logos*, than Helen, leading Charles Segal to conjecture that it 'may even have served as a kind of formal profession of the aims and the methods of his art' (1962:102). Some regard it as one of our best insights into the state of late fifth century rhetorical theory (Kerferd 1981:78).

The present essay aims to re-construct the rhetorical theory described in and exemplified by *Encomium of Helen*. This reconstruction is offered as an alternative to the seminal and still orthodox interpretation developed by Charles Segal in 1962. Although Segal's account is extraordinarily comprehensive, it will be shown that it fails to satisfactorily accommodate the essential doxastic element in Gorgias' analysis of persuasion.

Gorgias' rhetorical theory may be analysed into three components: a theory of the soul; a theory of the *logos*; and an account of the relation between *logos* and soul. This bare analytical framework is developed in the essay as follows: §2 analyses the psychological concepts in terms of which Gorgias develops his rhetorical theory; §3 discusses Gorgias' conceptualisation of the *logos*, and argues that Segal's explanation of its persuasive mechanisms is incomplete; §4 offers an alternative account, and §5 outlines and responds to an objection to the proposed interpretation.

2

Although the *Helen* does not present an explicit theory of the soul — it is, after all, an epideictic encomium, and not a psychological treatise — some elements of what may be a broader psychological theory can be extracted from the speech. Gorgias' treatment of the soul is given in terms of two 'physical' metaphors which are juxtaposed and interwoven in the text (Segal 1962:104). The first of these compares the character and affectations of soul to those of the body: just as different kinds of drugs produce different effects on the body, so too different sorts of *logoi* have different effects on the soul (14). The second physical metaphor

¹ Gorgias describes the speech as a *παίγνιον* (21), a word which suggests 'play'.

involves the application of language drawn from sculpture and engraving to the soul. For example, in (13), persuasion (ἡ πειθῶ) is said to come in with words, and mould (ἐτυπώσατο) the psyche as it wishes. The root verb here is the physical τυπῶ, which carries the sense of impressing, stamping, forming, or modelling. Similar terms are employed in (15), where Gorgias offers a short analysis of perception and aesthetic experience. The word used is once more τυπῶ but now with reference to dispositions (τοῖς τρόποις) of the soul. And again, at (17), the receptiveness of psyche is portrayed in the language of writing or engraving: ‘Sight engraves (ἐνέγραψεν) upon the mind images of things which have been seen’.²

In addition to the application of physical metaphors to the soul, the *Helen* makes repeated reference to — what we would regard as — psychological states and powers. While it is uncertain whether Gorgias’ use of such concepts are informed by a broader psychological theory, the psychological states and powers appear carefully arranged into the categories of cognition, conation, emotion, and affect.

The basic cognitive concepts employed in the *Helen* are *doxa* and *pistis*. Gorgias distinguishes between *doxa* and *pistis*, or, at least, combines the terms in such a way that they cannot be regarded as synonyms. For example, at (13), the meteorologists make what is ‘incredible and unclear’ (τὰ ἄπιστα καὶ ἄδηλα) seem true to the eyes of opinion (τοῖς τῆς δόξης ὄμμασιν); and later in the same section, the philosophers are said to make ‘belief in an opinion’ (τὴν τῆς δόξης πίστιν) ‘subject to easy change’ (εὐμετάβολον). These passages — to be considered more carefully below — give reason for thinking that *doxa* and *pistis* refer to different things.

The concept of *doxa* is by no means a straightforward one. The basic problem — if it is that — is that at least three possible meanings of *doxa* and its cognates may be distinguished in the work. First, in some places, *doxa* is best understood as an intellectual faculty or power. For example, in (11), Gorgias argues that man’s intellectual frailty — the limitations of imperfect memory (μνήην), awareness (ἔννοια), and foreknowledge (πρόνοια) — necessitates his use of *doxa* as guide (ὥστε περὶ τῶν πλείστων οἱ πλείστοι τὴν δόξαν σύμβουλον τῆ ψυχῆ παρέχονται) even though it is insecure (ἀβέβαιος) and slippery (σφαλερά). In these contexts, *doxa* seems to be a second-rate cognitive power, albeit one upon which human beings must rely. It is not absolutely clear from the *Helen* what the contrasting and superior faculty would be; there is only a passing reference to technical skill (τέχνη) and truth (ἀληθεία) (13).

At other points in the speech, *doxa* is best understood as a cognitive state of an agent. For example, at *Helen* 13, Gorgias offers three examples of persuasion by

² Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by G Kennedy, as printed in Sprague 2001.

logos: the speeches of the astronomers (τοὺς τῶν μετεωρολόγων λόγους), the legal debates (τοὺς ἀναγκαίους διὰ λόγων ἀγῶνας),³ and the ‘contests among philosophers’ (φιλοσόφων λόγων ἀμίλλας). He says that the speeches of the astronomers ‘make what is incredible and unclear seem true to the eyes of opinion’ (τὰ ἄπιστα καὶ ἄδηλα φαίνεσθαι τοῖς τῆς δόξης ὄμμασιν ἐποίησαν). The reference to the ‘eyes of opinion’ suggests that *doxa* here refers to the subjective state of *taking* something to be the case. The astronomers are capable of producing appearances that certain things are true, or, what I shall call, in a technical sense, ‘truth-appearances’.

The English word ‘belief’ is ambiguous between an attitude maintained by a thinker and the content of the attitude maintained, that is, what the belief is about. The ambiguity consists in the application of the same word to both the attitude and the content of the attitude. It seems that much the same ambiguity applies to *doxa*. Consider the following clause: ‘it is necessary to offer a proof to my hearers with an opinion’ (δεῖ δὲ καὶ δόξῃ δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀκούουσι) (9). In this sentence, the dative case suggests that *doxa* is a kind of instrument used by the orator, and so is neither a cognitive power nor a subjective state of taking something to be true. This is then the third sense of *doxa* discernible in the *Helen*. Probably these variations in the meaning of *doxa* are a matter of deliberate design on the part of the writer. Gorgias is intentionally exploiting indeterminacy in word meaning to make a philosophical and rhetorical point, that is, self-exemplifying his claim that *doxa* are slippery and insecure (11).⁴

Although *doxa* and *pistis* are distinct concepts, the meaning of *pistis* is as ‘slippery’ as that of *doxa*. In the context of the ‘philosophical contests’, ἐν αἷς δεικνύται καὶ γνώμης τάχος ὡς εὐμετάβολον ποιῶν τὴν τῆς δόξης πίστιν (13), *pistis* seems to be a state of conviction in *doxa*, which must then be understood in an objective ‘propositional’ sense. This interpretation is suggested by Kennedy’s translation: ‘[in the] verbal disputes of philosophers [...] the swiftness of thought is shown making the belief in an opinion subject to easy change’; it also squares with Segal’s interpretation of *pistis* as ‘the state of conviction which results from

³ According to Kerferd 1981:79, ‘[this] is the case where *logos* is in peremptory contest with *logos* — one would suppose in a debate in the law-courts’.

⁴ Despite the indeterminacy of *doxa*, there is a way of conceptually connecting the above three senses of *doxa* to one another. The power or faculty of *doxa* could produce (particular) *doxai*, as, for example, the faculty of knowledge produces particular states of knowledge. These *doxai* would then be in one respect subjective states of the agent, but in another, attitudes to specific ideas or propositions, and this third ‘eidetic’ or ‘propositional’ sense of *doxa* could be that used by the orator in ‘offering proof to the opinion’ of his hearers (9). In other words, the orator would be putting forward certain ideas or propositions in an ‘objective’ sense, that is, in the sense of content which can be thought by different people.

successful persuasion’ (1962:113). However, only a few lines above, τὰ ἄπιστα (and also ἄδηλα) in (13) must be read in an ‘objective’ sense, perhaps along the lines of ‘that which gives trust or confidence’, or the *grounds* of belief. What Gorgias seems to be saying is that the astronomers make what are not grounds for belief (things which are ‘objectively’ unclear and incredible) seem to be grounds for belief.

As was the case with *doxa*, a search for a unitary and determinate meaning of *pistis* is likely to be a fruitless endeavour. First, the meaning of *doxa* shifts throughout the speech, and given the interweaving of *doxa* and *pistis*, it is likely that the latter would too. Secondly, and more importantly, in the context of what is effectively a rhetorical demonstration, stability of word meaning is *not* to be expected. Consistent use of words as technical terms is expected from Aristotle, but there is no reason to assume the same from Gorgias.

The non-cognitive elements of the soul referred to in the *Helen* may be divided into three types: feelings, emotions and desires. Without pressing too hard on this analytical division, it is plain that the productive powers of the *logos* include the ability to induce and dissolve feelings (ἡδονή, τέρψις, χάρις, λύπη), emotions (φόβος, ἔλεος, perhaps θάρσος), and desires (πόθος, ἔρωσις). In (8) the *logos* is said to be a great master, which has the power to stop fear (φόβον παῦσαι), vanquish grief (λύπην ἀφελεῖν), produce joy (χαρὰν ἐνεργάσασθαι), and augment pity (ἔλεον ἐπαυξῆσαι). In (9), in the context of the poetic *logos*, Gorgias makes reference to ‘fearful shuddering’, ‘tearful pity’, ‘grievous longing’ and the soul’s experience of its own private *pathos*. The emphasis is initially on poetry’s capacity to produce unwelcome emotions, though more positive states are not overlooked (10): the power of incantation through words produces pleasure and banishes pain (αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι διὰ λόγων ἐπαγωγὴν ἡδονῆς, ἀπαγωγὴν λύπης γίνονται). Later, the power of persuasion is linked to the production of pleasure (τέρψις) (13), and the taxonomy of states listed in (14) as produced by *logoi* includes pain (λύπη), fear (φόβος), and boldness (θάρσος).

The *Helen*’s description of the mechanics of *logos* is given in two different vocabularies, the first corresponding with the language of science, and the second, with that of magic and witchcraft. With respect to the ‘scientific’ description of the character of *logos*, there are also two elements, the first, roughly, the domain of physics, and the second, that of biology.

In (8), the *logos* is described as a physical force, which accomplishes divine deeds by means of the ‘smallest and most invisible bodies’ (σμικροτάτω σώματι καὶ ἀφανεστάτῳ). This reference to ‘the smallest and most invisible bodies’ may be

an allusion to Empedocles' physical theory (Segal 1962:99). In addition, the analogy between *logoi* and drugs (φάρμακα) suggests a second "biological" mechanism whereby structural changes in the psyche are brought about. The *logos* is explicitly said to have a power (δύναμις) over the structure of the soul comparable to the power of drugs to impact on the constitution of the body (14). Later, in the context of the aesthetic theory sketched in *Helen* 15, the soul is moulded in its dispositions (τοῖς τρόποις) (Segal 1962:107); and similarly, (16) makes reference to settled states of *nomos* being 'ejected by fear resulting from sight'. Given the conceptual connection between dispositions and physical structure, Gorgias appears to believe that persuasive speech reconfigures the very constitution of the soul.

The second, and to some extent opposing characterisation of *logos*, is developed in terms of magic, enchantment, and bewitchment. This description appears to involve a juxtaposition of a broadly 'naturalist' world view, with another, perhaps older, 'super-naturalist' one (Segal 1962:112). The juxtaposition is evident from the beginning of (8) when the *logos* is described as a 'powerful lord' (δυναστίης μέγας), 'which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works' (ὅς συμκροτάτω σώματι καὶ ἀφανεστάτῳ θειώτατα ἔργα ἀποτελεῖ). Here the *logos* is in a single sentence personified as a great ruler or lord, who accomplishes divine deeds; but the bringing about of these 'deeds' is presented in the terms of a 'physical' theory. The supernaturalist conceptual framework comes to the fore again in (10), somewhat inexplicitly at first, in the reference to 'sacred incantations' (αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι διὰ λόγων ἐπωδαί), but more overtly later in the same verse: 'For the incantation's power, communicating with the soul's opinion, enchants and persuades and changes it, by trickery' (συγγινομένη γὰρ τῇ δόξῃ τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ δύναμις τῆς ἐπωδῆς ἔθελεξε καὶ ἔπεισε καὶ μετέστησεν αὐτὴν γοητεῖᾷ). The very difficult closing sentence of the section, 'Two distinct methods of trickery and magic are to be found: errors of soul, and deceptions of opinion' (γοητείας δὲ καὶ μαγείας δισσαὶ τέχναι εὐρηγνται, αἱ εἰσι ψυχῆς ἁμαρτήματα καὶ δόξης ἀπατήματα) settles the point.⁵ The relation between the *logos* and magic may explain Gorgias' tendency to connect persuasion with deception.⁶

The *Helen* offers a fairly detailed picture of the psychological mechanisms whereby *logos* affects the psyche. This picture is given at a different level of abstraction from the physical and biological descriptions discussed above, and in terms of the production of recognisably psychological states such as pleasure, pain, fear and joy. It is not initially clear how these psychological states and powers are

⁵ The translation is by Brian Donovan.

⁶ For a discussion of *apate* in relation to Gorgias, see Rosenmeyer 1955.

to be connected with the supernaturalist framework of magic and enchantment. At any rate, (8-14) of the *Helen* aim to prove the efficacy of *logos* by reference to the power of poetry (9), of 'divine prophesies chanted with words' (10), and persuasion through arguments (13). These sections indicate that the compelling power of the *logos* derives at least in part from its ability to control emotional responses. This is confirmed at *Helen* 9ff, in Gorgias' description of the power of the poetic *logos*.

Fearful shuddering and tearful pity and grievous longing come upon its hearers, and at the actions and physical sufferings of others in good fortunes and in evil fortunes, through the agency of words, the soul is wont to experience a [*pathos*] of its own (9).

The *logos* brings about *pathos*. Although *pathoi* may be positive or negative in character, the emphasis is on unwelcome emotions (φρίκη), and strong desires such as πόθος φιλοπενθήζ, perhaps to be translated as 'bereaved yearning' or 'grievous desire'.

The role of emotional affectation in the agency of *logos* is complicated somewhat in Gorgias' description of the power of prophetic incantations in (10), which bring pleasure and banish pain, and by 'merging (συγγινομένη) with *doxa*' bewitch the soul. It seems that the power of incantation is due to the pleasure it brings; it is by means of pleasure that words beguile the soul. This view is confirmed later on in the reference to logically necessary debates (τοὺς ἀναγκαίους διὰ λόγων ἀγῶνας), of those who persuade by 'moulding a false argument', and which explicitly links pleasure and persuasion: 'A single speech, written with art but not spoken with truth delights (ἔτερψε) a whole crowd and persuades (ἔπεισε)' (13). The point seems to be that the speech delights individuals within a crowd and on this account persuades each of them. Here again *logos* 'leads in pleasure' and beguiles the soul. The persuasiveness of a speech does not depend on its truthfulness but on its facility in producing pleasure.

Gorgias' text strongly suggests that the persuasive force of *logos* derives from pleasure and emotion. However, it is not entirely clear just how pleasure and pain are related to the emotions, and also how this relationship enables the orator to achieve his desired end of producing persuasion in the hearers. One possible account, suggested by Charles Segal, is that persuasion, or the process of coming to be persuaded, is a two-stage process involving, first, a passive aesthetic response, and, secondly, an active emotional impulse, which produces action. He writes:

[The] fully effective impact of *peitho* involves the emotional participation of the audience, which is made possible by and takes place though the aesthetic pleasure of *terpsis* (1962:122).

And again:

The association of *eleos* and *phobos* together and of *lype* and *terpsis* [suggests a] division of the emotional response into a ‘passive’ or purely aesthetic and an ‘active’ or motivational stage (ibid. 124).

On Segal’s account, pleasure and pain (τέρψις, λύπη) are passive states, occurring in the first stage of the process, while fear, love and boldness (φόβος, ἔλεος, θάρσος) are representative of the more active motivational states of the second stage (ibid.). This causal process, Segal claims, exemplifies and illuminates the operations of persuasion (πειθῶ), making it ‘possible to see how the verbal artist could create a *logos* which, through its *terpsis*, can arouse in the hearer the desired emotions and hence lead him by a “divine *dynamis*”, as it were, to the requisite action’ (ibid.).

Segal’s analysis is subtle and illuminating. However, it is not clear that he has actually provided an interpretation of Gorgias’ theory of persuasion (πειθῶ). Segal’s reading appears to offer an account of how someone can come to be motivated to act in a certain way but, at the very least, omits the details of how the *logos* produces belief or conviction. This criticism of Segal’s interpretation may be explained in terms of a basic ambiguity in the concept of persuasion. In English, the verb ‘to persuade’ has two primary uses, the first having to do with action, and the second, with belief. This distinction is to some extent reflected in the grammar of the English language in that one can be persuaded to do something, or that something is the case. I shall distinguish these as ‘action-persuasion’ and ‘belief-persuasion’ respectively. Although action-persuasion and belief-persuasion are related in that one can persuade someone to do something by persuading him that something is the case, belief-persuasion is primarily related to truth, not action. Crucially, it is possible for someone to be persuaded in the ‘belief’ sense without being motivated to do anything at all.

A failure to draw distinction between action-persuasion and belief-persuasion leads Segal into puzzlement regarding why Gorgias associates persuasion (πειθῶ) — which is distinguished ‘from the other *technai* by the fact that it [makes] everything its slaves, not by force, but by voluntary action’ — with necessity (ἀνάγκη).⁷ The appearance of conflict comes from describing persuasion

⁷ Segal 1962:122: ‘The suggestion that persuasion operates by such a process is made in Plato’s *Philebus* (58a): πάντα γὰρ ὑφ’ αὐτῆ δούλα δι’ ἐκόντων ἀλλ’ οὐ διὰ βίας ποιοῖτο’. Segal’s concern and attempted resolution are as follows: ‘This concept of voluntary persuasion seems at first to contradict the connection made between *peithô* and *anankê* in the *Helen*. Plato is doubtless exaggerating here, but the statement need not be absolutely false or in such patent conflict with Gorgias’ own words in the *Helen* as at first appears’ (ibid., and also 123).

as both *voluntary* and *necessary*, and may be resolved by understanding ‘voluntary’ as a predicate of action, while ‘necessary’ as applied to belief or judgement. If a person is enslaved voluntarily ($\delta\iota'$ $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\acute{o}\nu\tau\omega\nu$), then he will do what one wants him to do of his own will. But this is achieved by changing his conception of what he wants to do. Voluntary action occurs once one’s beliefs have been changed; but the force of persuasion on the beliefs themselves is, or at least, may be, that of necessity.

Segal’s analysis of Gorgias’ theory of persuasion is an analysis of action-persuasion and not an analysis of belief-persuasion. This is of course only a problem for Segal if the evidence from the *Helen* suggests that Gorgias either distinguishes belief-persuasion from action-persuasion, or includes doxastic states in his account of persuasion, since these are not easily explicable on Segal’s actional model. The basic question is then the identity of persuasion ($\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\acute{\omega}$): is it some kind of belief, judgement, action, motivation, combination of these, or something else entirely? For Aristotle, ‘the aim of rhetorical persuasion is a certain judgment (*krisis*), not an action or practical decision (*prohairesis*)’ (Rapp 2003:§5). However, the word *krisis* does not occur in the *Helen*, and it should not be assumed that Gorgias’ account maps onto Aristotle’s. Gorgias’ conception of persuasion ought to be — insofar as it is possible — extracted from the *Helen* itself.

One central feature of Gorgias’ account of persuasion is surely that it be capable of explaining how Helen was (non-culpably) persuaded to leave her husband to go to Troy with Alexander. This is fundamentally a matter of action-persuasion. On Segal’s account of Gorgias’ theory, then, Helen was charmed by Alexander’s words, which caused her to be overcome by strong emotion, presumably, love ($\acute{\epsilon}\rho\omega\varsigma$), thus explaining her action, and, more controversially, in a way that excuses her from blame. So, it might be thought, Segal’s interpretation leaves nothing out, since action-persuasion is of central relevance to the goals of the speech.

Although the above line of reasoning is correct as far as it goes, it is also incomplete. The *Helen* indicates that the *logos* brings about a change in *doxa*, and *doxa* is not a motivational concept, but relates to perception and belief. This point stands irrespective of whether the details of the above discussion of *doxa* are accepted, and is amply demonstrated by Gorgias’ ‘three examples’ of the impressing power of persuasion through *logos* (13), viz., the astronomical *logoi*, the legal debates, and philosophical contests. The orator’s compelling power over the hearer’s *doxa*, roughly, perceptions and beliefs, is an essential part of the concept of persuasion developed in the *Helen*.

A second argument for the centrality of belief-persuasion is that the *Helen* self-exemplifies its own rhetorical theory. The speech should persuade the hearer

that Helen is not morally responsible for her action, or at least, give insight into how a relevantly similar construction, suitably adapted to a court of law, say, could bring about such persuasion. These points are connected since the judgment that Helen is not culpable for her action depends on the hearer's being persuaded that she was persuaded in the way that the speech indicates.⁸ If the hearer is (or could be) persuaded of Helen's innocence, this will involve the same process that persuaded Helen. But the persuasion produced by the *Helen*, or a relevantly similar speech, is not primarily a matter of action, but of belief. Any further effects, such as verbal statements expressing Helen's innocence, are extraneous to the process of belief-persuasion itself.

On balance of evidence, then, Segal's reconstruction of Gorgias' theory of persuasion seems incomplete. An analysis of the sort provided by Segal would have the listener (or reader) paralysed by aesthetic pleasure, and then motivated to do something. This simply omits the states of belief and conviction, and the experience that some particular claim is true.

4

The above criticism of Segal's reconstruction of Gorgias leaves the original question standing. What is known is that the *logos* produces persuasion, which is a state in which something appears to be or to be true, by some process involving pleasure and emotion. The difficulty is finding an explanation for how pleasure and emotion could produce what I have called 'truth-appearances', rather than simply moving someone to action. I suggest that the concept of an illusion enables the completion of Gorgias' theory of persuasion. In outline, the aesthetic and emotive aspects of *logos* produce truth-appearances by creating illusions.⁹ There will be three stages in my development of this thesis. I shall offer a brief discussion of illusion in general, then as it appears in the *Helen*, and, lastly, I shall show how it resolves the incompleteness in Segal's account of Gorgias' psychology of persuasion.

Illusion is inextricably bound up with truth. The concept of illusion is the concept of something's appearing to be, or to be a certain way, or to be true, when

⁸ It depends also on the assumption that her being so persuaded was not blameworthy.

⁹ Segal 1962:113, himself gestures to such an explanation: 'Men do [not] transcend the medium and reach true Being, but their knowledge of the world inevitably contains an admixture of their own perceptual energies and psychological and linguistic patterns. It is on this basis that the rhetor tries to change their view of reality by manipulating these variable patterns of appearance and language'. But he misses or at least fails to spell out the crucial connection between illusion, emotion and pleasure.

it is not, or not that way, or not true.¹⁰ ‘Appearance’ is to be understood in terms of something’s being presented to consciousness, and is then constituted by a particular quality of experience. For example, the two lines in the Muller-Lyer optical illusion seem to be — in this case, ‘look to be’ — of different length; and this appearance is not undermined by knowledge that they are of the same length. What is significant about an illusion is then that it involves the presentation of something as being, or being a certain way, or being true. An illusion is just as much of a truth-appearance as a veridical perception, though it, like Janus, ‘looks’ in two directions at once: it presents itself as truth, while instantiating falsehood.

The concept of illusion occupies a central place in the *Helen*. At (10), Gorgias says that the power of sacred incantations sung with words (αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι ἐπῳδαί) enchant and persuade and alter the state of the soul with witchcraft (γοητεία), and goes on to make reference to the twin arts of magic and witchcraft. ‘The association of incantation with enchantment, and thus with fascination and bewitchment, leads Gorgias to maintain that speech is like magic: it has the power of producing illusions’ (Johnstone 2006:277). Further on, in that important passage at *Helen* 13, in which Gorgias describes speeches of the astronomers (τοὺς τῶν μετεωρολόγων λόγους), the key point of contact is perceptual: ‘what is incredible and unclear’ are made to *appear* (or appear to be) to the ‘eyes of opinion’. This sounds very much like the production and perpetuation of a visual illusion.¹¹

The claim that illusion is a key ingredient in Gorgias’ theory of persuasion is confirmed by the *Helen*’s association of persuasion with deception. The discussion of persuasion in (8) begins with a statement of this relation: ‘If the [*logos*] persuaded and deceived her soul ...’ (εἰ δὲ λόγος ὁ πείσας καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπατήσας ...) Moreover, in (13), the legal debates are said to offer an example of how pleasure causes persuasion by means of artful yet deceptive speech. Lastly, and more significantly, in (14) some *logoi* are claimed to be capable of drugging and bewitching the soul with a ‘kind of evil persuasion’. It seems natural to connect the evil of persuasion with its deceptiveness: the bewitching of the soul, one might say, amounts to its being deceived, i.e. coming to be in the grip of illusion.¹² The *Helen* also suggests that illusion, pleasure and emotion are closely related. In (10), the sacred incantations mix with *doxa* and persuade the soul with

¹⁰ I mean here to distinguish between existential, predicative, and veridical uses of the verb ‘to be’ (*einai*).

¹¹ See also Gorgias’ discussion of *opsis* in *Helen* (17).

¹² References to illusion in the *Helen* are unified by a common visual element, involving the eyes, sight, visions, and so on. However, it is likely that Gorgias does not mean to limit the concept of illusion to vision, but that the emphasis on sight reflects a natural tendency to focus on the visual, the most important of our distance senses, and one that is typically emphasised by classical writers.

witchcraft. But these sacred incantations were a sentence before described as bearers of pleasure, and banishers of pain. It seems eminently plausible, then, to postulate a link between illusion and pleasure.¹³

This completes the second step in my argument; what remains to be explained is just how the above analysis of illusion completes Gorgias' psychology of persuasion. There are two aspects, now considered analytically rather than textually: first, the relation of illusion to pleasure, and, secondly, its relation to emotion. I discuss these in turn.

Gorgias' discussion of persuasion is embedded in a more general theory of the — broadly — 'affective' power of *logos*. It is significant that in canvassing the possibility that Helen was persuaded to go to Troy with Alexander, and claiming that even here it is not difficult to exculpate Helen, Gorgias immediately introduces a definition of poetry as *λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον* (9). This suggests that the affective power of the *logos* is intimately related to its 'metrical', or more generally, 'formal', features. The latter point attains a more concrete development in a reference to 'divine incantations sung with words', which 'lead in' pleasure and banish pain (10). It seems that the formal features of the incantations, i.e., their being incantations, are at least as important as the content of what is being sung in the production of aesthetic response. Moreover, since the formal features of sacred incantations are independent of any *particular* propositional content, they induce aesthetic response independently of the content of any particular thoughts expressed.

In developing this idea further, let us apply the above point to the *Helen* itself, and consider how the speech exemplifies the principles that it presents. The most striking stylistic feature of the speech is its style. The *Helen* is composed in a 'highly ornamental prose style, where balanced clauses and euphonious word choice dazzle the ear and titillate the mind in sentence after sentence' (Kahn 1998:145). The power of the formal aspect of speech to produce pleasure (*ἡδονή, τέρψις*) 'is rooted in the psychological effects of the sounds of words when they are spoken and heard' (Johnstone 2006:277). What is especially significant about the above is that Gorgias' ornamental style does not produce pleasure with regard to any particular idea. (Of course, this does not entail that various ideas, either alone, or spoken with pleasing sounds and rhythm, cannot produce pleasure). Rather, the formal and ornamental features radiate through the work as whole, and may be understood as conditioning the very interpretation of the particular ideas developed therein. The function of Gorgias' ornamental prose is to produce pleasure in the

¹³ The description of sight (*ὄψις*) at *Helen* 17 suggests a causal trajectory from frightening things (*φοβερὰ*) to emotion (*ὁ φόβος*), and the driving out of reason (*ἀπέσβεσε και ἐξήλασεν ... τὸ νόημα*), to madness and states akin to illusion (*δυσίατοις μανίας*).

targeted audience. It is a truism that, when one is pleased, things do not seem the same as when one is pained, and, moreover, that this difference is a matter of general perspective and not necessarily reducible to any particular thought or judgment. (Consider the experience of looking at oneself in the mirror on days of depression, as opposed to days of high spirit). Aesthetic pleasure conditions the representation of *everything* that appears within the purview of the perceiver. I shall refer to this as the construction of an evaluative framework. The evaluative framework constructed by the permeation of aesthetic pleasure does not yet qualify as an illusion because it lacks determinate content, that is, something about which to be mistaken.

Aside from the construction of an evaluative framework by means of the formal features of speech, the orator aims to conjure evaluative illusions with respect to some subject matter by arousing particular kinds of emotions. This operates at a different level from the evaluative framework, and in fact, within that framework, although this difference in level does not entail any temporal difference. The function of the emotions is to alter and manipulate the hearer's attitude toward particular objects and ideas.¹⁴ This kind of manipulation and illusion is fundamentally evaluative, that is, relates to the assignment of value to objects. Emotional affectivities produce truth-appearances, where in this case, a truth-appearance is a 'value-appearance' i.e. a presentation to the soul that something is frightening, good, bad, noble, base, and so on. Since not all truth-appearances are illusory and emotions can be fitted to their objects, it is necessary to discriminate the illusory from the veridical truth-appearances. To this end, I shall say that an evaluative illusion is the *appearance* that states of affairs or objects possess value or disvalue that they do not in fact possess.¹⁵ The *logos* operates within the evaluative framework, which it itself has constructed, and alters the emotional state of the hearer as directed to people and their actions, thereby affecting the kinds of values that he is likely to attribute to them.¹⁶ In as much as this alteration fails to correspond with 'reality', it may be said to produce evaluative illusions. Evaluative appearances are truth-appearances because they involve the representation of the world as containing value. The sensitivity of the

¹⁴ Gorgias devotes three sections (3-5) before the beginning of his main argument to a glorification of Helen and her ancestry. Presumably the point of this is to connect with the hearer's beliefs concerning the goodness of Helen. In this way, one can see how an *encomium* of Helen could play a role in exculpation: a judgment that Helen is good is in tension with a judgment that Helen is blameworthy.

¹⁵ The same point applies with respect to other evaluative properties.

¹⁶ We shall also find that this analysis coheres with data we have on the historical Gorgias, who is said to have been interested in optics and colour, and the problem of illusion (cf. Segal 1962, 114).

faculty of opinion (*doxa*) to variable evaluative representations makes it ‘subject to easy change’ (13). What this means is that the states produced by the faculty are themselves states of appearance and illusion created through the manipulation of emotion. It is important to note that while for Segal the perceptual part of the persuasive process is developed in terms of pleasure, and the motivational part in terms of action, on my account, the emotions are themselves implicated in the perceptual part of the process, and hence causally implicated in the production of truth-appearances. Illusory truth appearances are, on my view, products of the faculty of *doxa*.

It is now possible to consider how the above ideas apply to the speech itself. Gorgias aims to persuade the hearer that Helen is not blameworthy for her action or, more accurately, I would suggest, to show the hearer how such a persuasive speech could be constructed. The intended psychological state produced is an evaluative belief, because blame is a moral evaluation. Blame is one mode of evaluation under which a person or action appears as *bad*. Bringing about the judgment that Helen is innocent requires that the orator alter the psychological state of the hearer so that it *seems* to him that *Helen* does not deserve blame, and even deserves praise. Segal’s first stage — paralysis by aesthetic pleasure — corresponds roughly to my first stage, in which the formal features of the speech condition the interpretation of the ideas presented therein by producing aesthetic pleasure. This cultivates an attitude of openness and sympathy towards the orator’s words, ideas, and arguments. Segal’s second stage involves the production of emotions that motivate a person to action. By contrast, on my account emotions cause the subject matter described within the evaluative framework to be presented in a certain way: particular objects appear as good, bad, and so on. Insofar as these representations contain an element of falsehood, they are evaluative illusions.

These abstract points may now be concretely illustrated as follows. Gorgias’ strategy in showing why the explanation of Helen’s action in terms of persuasion does not imply guilt is to assimilate persuasion to force, which was — and still is — widely recognised as an excusing condition. Although he does not present an explicit argument for this claim, he appeals by association to a rich body of literature, philosophy and common belief. His use of the term ‘δυνάστης’ here is telling, for as a ‘lord, master or ruler’, *logos* is something that must be obeyed’ (Johnstone 2006:276). ‘*Peithō* and *anankē* are strongly associated in *Helen* 12’ (Segal 1962:121), and although (12) is ‘hopelessly corrupt’, Diels’ proposal, ‘persuasion does not have the outward form of necessity (*anankē*), but it does have the same power’,¹⁷ would do nicely. The divine nature of persuasion (πειθώ) is again emphasised at the end of (14), where its powers are likened to those of drugs

¹⁷ See Porter 1993, 275.

and sorcery. The divine is associated with ‘sheer physical force of irresistible intensity’ (6) (Segal 1962:121). It is clear then that $\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\acute{\omega}$ is located within an array of concepts implying force and violence, which are likely to bring about pity in the hearers, which — and this is a crucial point — itself perpetuate illusions of Helen as victim, and hence, immune from blame. This perceptual language is to be taken seriously: in as much as the hearer pities Helen he *sees* her as a victim. The direction is from emotion to perception, rather than — as is often supposed — the other way around. What seems to the hearer to be an independently reached judgment that Helen is a victim, causing and rationalising pity, is really a projection of his emotion onto the world. In other words, the experience of pity brings about the perception that Helen is a victim, a perception which, in its indifference to the reality of the situation, is reasonably described as an illusion.

Once members of an audience has been convinced, they may be motivated to action in accordance with their convictions, although this stage is beyond the realm of belief-persuasion *per se*, and constitutes the stage of action-persuasion. I agree with Segal that action is motivated by the emotions produced by the orator, although this is outside the central mechanisms of persuasion described and exemplified in the *Helen*.

5

On the account of Gorgias’ psychology of persuasion offered thus far, the *logos* brings about persuasion by producing illusions relating to particular objects, actions, and events, within an evaluative framework constructed and conditioned by aesthetic pleasure. One problem with this theoretical reconstruction is that it appears to omit what Aristotle later distinguishes as the rational mode of speech, viz. the logical force of reason.¹⁸ This omission is problematic because Gorgias grants the rational mode of persuasion a certain prominence — if not priority — in the speech. For example, he says that his proof will proceed by reasoning ($\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu\ \tau\iota\upsilon\alpha\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \lambda\acute{\omicron}\gamma\omega\ \delta\omicron\upsilon\acute{\varsigma}$) (2), and he lives up to the promise for the speech unfolds ‘in terms of rational argumentation, [and] the enumeration and exclusion of a series of alternatives’ (Segal 1962:115). If the *Helen* self-exemplifies its own rhetorical theory, then something needs to be said about the relation between the rational mode of persuasion and the aesthetic and emotive processes described above. This is because ‘logical argument’ is a significant part of what is performed in the speech.

¹⁸ This concern is not only a concern with my account, but applies equally to Segal’s reconstruction.

In drawing out the necessary transactions between rational and non-rational modes of persuasion, it will be useful to offer a brief overview of Aristotle's rhetorical theory. According to Aristotle, there are three distinct modes of persuasion, *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos*, of which the logical mode is primary. This seems to be a point about the efficacy of the different modes of persuasion rather than the imposition of a moral restriction on how persuasion is to be brought about. 'We are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated' (1355a5). The enthymeme or 'orator's demonstration' is generally 'the most effective of the modes of persuasion' (1355a7).

Whatever the merits of the 'primacy' claim, Aristotle's contention that 'persuasion is a sort of demonstration' seems problematic to a modern philosophical reader, who will draw a sharp distinction between psychological and logical features of proofs or demonstrations. The claim that 'persuasion is a sort of demonstration' appears to commit a kind of category mistake — how could a psychological transaction be a kind of logical transaction? Perhaps one might explicate Aristotle's point as follows. The thought that something has been demonstrated brings about persuasion in the sense that thinking that one proposition *entails* or *follows from* another 'compels' the mind to accept the latter proposition. What we have here in outline is a sketch of a kind of psychological necessity operating between thoughts, at a level parallel to the level of abstract logical relations. Interpreted as a causal process, the idea may be that the thought that (an arbitrary proposition) *p* has been proved *produces* (or at least tends to produce) conviction. The thought that *p* has been proved must amount to the *appearance* that *p* follows from a certain set of premises. If the logical property of entailment is understood quasi-perceptually ('a rational appearance'), then Aristotle's view is that 'rational appearances' incline the assent in a particularly robust manner.¹⁹ In any event, what is plain is that Aristotle's tripartite distinction between modes of persuasion requires that their 'mechanisms' be distinct. If the logical mode were a special case of the emotive mode, it would not amount to a distinct mode of persuasion.

Gorgias probably thinks of the matter differently. According to Guido Calogero, 'the famous passage on the power of the *logos*' in (9), beginning with 'λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν', refers not only to 'the emotional force of poetry, λόγος ἔχων μέτρον, or the magic wizardry of incantations [but] also the power which we could call the persuasive force of reason' (Calogero 1957:13). I would

¹⁹ One consequence of this account is that there cannot be an art of rhetoric *per se* since the argumentative mode of persuasion is dialectic. 'Rhetoric ... is not a constellation of three bright stars. A different metaphor is needed: rhetoric is a magpie, thieving a piece of one art and a piece of another, and then botching a nest of its own' (Barnes 1995:264).

develop Calogero's intriguing suggestion as follows.²⁰ The *Helen* offers an account of persuasion according to which (what Aristotle would distinguish as) the rational mode of persuasion proceeds by means of the same mechanism as the emotive mode. Gorgias' view is that rational appearances are simply a particular kind of evaluative appearance. The experience of 'logical force' or 'logical correctness' is the experience of a certain kind of 'λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον'. In developing this idea, I shall begin by providing textual evidence for thinking that Gorgias would include logical force in the category of the 'λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον', and then attempt to make sense of the idea.

In the highly compressed *Helen*, Gorgias does not explicitly discuss the relation between emotive and rational modes of persuasion. But the idea that rational persuasion is to be explained in terms of λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον is supported by consideration of the structure of *Helen* (8-14), and some historical evidence as to the development of the concept of logical necessity. First, with regard to the structural point, it is noteworthy that once Gorgias has introduced the possibility that Helen was persuaded and deceived by the *logos* (8), he goes on to associate persuasion with necessity (ἀνάγκη) (12). He justifies this connection with three examples: the arguments of the 'meteorologists', the 'legal contests', and the philosophical debates (13). It seems then that philosophical debates, surely paradigm instances of logical argument, are treated as continuous with the courtroom speeches (τοὺς ἀναγκάϊους διὰ λόγων ἀγῶνας), which employ emotion and pleasure in bringing about persuasion. And, strikingly, all three examples are presented as subsidiary to the effects of poetical *logos*. It may be then that Gorgias thinks that rational persuasion and emotional affectation are both produced by the formal features of *logoi*, and does not draw a sharp distinction between logical and emotive modes of persuasion. Secondly, the historical claim is that Gorgias' association of persuasion (πειθῶ) with necessity (ἀνάγκη) echoes a philosophical tradition to be found in Zeno and Melissus, where 'anankê is the signature of deductive inference and is used quasi-adverbially in lieu of "it follows that"' (Vlastos 1965:155). There is therefore at least some evidence for thinking that the experience of logical force is the experience of a certain kind of λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον.

If logical force is produced by a broadly aesthetic process continuous with that which produces emotional persuasion, then the rational *logos* will operate according to a mechanism similar to that described above, viz., by pleasure, emotion, and illusion. It was argued above that pleasure is capable of conditioning an entire evaluative framework, thereby producing a kind of generalised distortion in the world as it appears to a given subject, while emotions create (or can create)

²⁰ Calogero does not himself develop the point.

truth-appearances, some of which are illusory, and are therefore capable of producing conviction. It has also been suggested that the logical force of reason may be understood in terms of another kind of appearance, viz., a 'rational' appearance, which is itself a particular kind of evaluative appearance. The remaining task is to show that 'logical appearances' may be understood as a specific variety of aesthetic appearance.

The required 'logical' phenomenology may be developed in terms of the concept of 'fittingness'. The concept of 'fittingness' is a generic normative term applicable in a wide variety of contexts.²¹ When an action is seen as unfitting, it is seen as wrong and bad; when an artistic work is seen or heard as unfitting, it is perceived to be ugly (cf. *Helen* 17-18); when a belief is judged to be unfitting it is false. In each case, there is a conception of how things 'should be' and a way which things are, where the way things are does not fit the way they should be. Actions should be good and right, beliefs should be true, and works of art should be beautiful.

Now, when an inference is 'seen' to be unfitting, it is perceived as 'not following'. Conversely, the experience or appearance of 'logical correctness' — that a certain proposition follows logically from other propositions — is really the experience of a 'fit' between the premises and the conclusion. For example, if someone argues that Darwin's theory is true because it is possible, the conclusion does not appear to fit the premise, in as much as there appears to be a gap, here understood phenomenologically, between what is claimed and what it is presented as reason for that claim. By contrast, if someone argues that since Brutus was taller than Julius, and Julius was taller than Anthony, Brutus was taller than Anthony, the conclusion appears to *fit* the premises. There is an experience of 'togetherness' or 'harmony', which tends to compel belief. This is fundamentally a point about 'logical phenomenology', rather than what might today be described as the logical relations between propositions.

If the experience of logical 'correctness' is the experience of a certain kind of fittingness, so that the 'ugliness' of a painting and the 'ugliness' of an inference are in some sense continuous, then the perception of the logical force of reason is a special case or range of an aesthetic responsiveness to what may be described as *λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον*. This accommodates the possibility of an 'apparent syllogism', and the production of 'logical' illusions. An *apparent* syllogism will be a false logical appearance or logical illusion, that is, the appearance that one proposition 'follows from' another, when in fact it does not. Perhaps inferences presented within a context in which the hearer is lulled by aesthetic pleasure will

²¹ Other generic normative terms include 'correctness', 'rightness', 'concordance', 'congruity', 'appropriateness'; these terms could be used interchangeably throughout.

tend to seem better than they are. This will be particularly the case in the moral domain relevant to the aims of the *Helen*, an epideictic encomium, and emotions could also be implicated in the construction of arguments which have premises that seem to fit their conclusions, but in reality, do not.

The precise nature of the means whereby logical illusions are created awaits discussion on another occasion. For the present it is sufficient to have shown how a logical phenomenology may be articulated in aesthetic terms. This model makes space for the possibility of an art of rhetoric *per se*, rather than a hybrid combination of dialectic and moral psychology.

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