ISOCRATES THE PHILOSOPHER

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of Isocrates' claim to being a philosopher. Isocrates is often discredited as a philosopher because he thought the pursuit of abstract arguments about metaphysics, axiology, and human nature do not really constitute the love of wisdom. Real wisdom, for Isocrates, lays in understanding how to put knowledge to practical use. This ability is exemplified in the intellectual excellence *phronêsis*. Those with *phronêsis* are able to produce reasonable opinions that have practical benefits. The soundness of such conjectures is not presented through geometric proof; rather, Isocrates argues in a way that he deems suitable for the topic at hand.

For Isocrates, the most important issue for deliberation is the course of human affairs, especially those of the community. However, justifying a given course of action requires a different means of argumentation than what one may use when justifying a mathematical conclusion. Isocrates rejected the Platonists' goal of strictly governing all praxis by reference to the forms because he contended that there are no hard and fast rules about how to apply knowledge in a given situation. The person of practical wisdom does not seek to eliminate the role chance plays in the outcome of a decision because such a feat is impossible; instead, he or she minimizes the influence of luck by grounding *doxai* in reference to the past or common knowledge.

Since Isocrates highly values practical wisdom, philosophy is defined as the pursuit, or study, that can provide the kind of insight which improves the power to generally determine what is the most expedient course. It is the man of sound opinion that Isocrates calls the philosopher.

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Introduction

Isocrates is not usually considered to be part of the philosophical tradition, yet he did not hold back from referring boastfully to his writings as philosophy. So why is his work not studied in the discipline of philosophy? It is certainly not due to any shortage of source material. Rather, the tradition of western philosophy has been shaped by the Platonic ideals of knowledge and method. Unfortunately for Isocrates, these ideals have captured the imagination of philosophers, leaving him in the dust of the history of philosophy. The project I set before myself in this composition is to restore, so to speak, Isocrates, to his rightful position as a philosopher. I accomplish this by arguing that, for Isocrates, philosophy is a practice essentially connected to developing the ability (*phronêsis*) to produce sound and useful conjectures (*doxai*). Philosophy, understood in this way, is a practice that makes use of reasoning which relies on the past to bear light on the present circumstance (*kairos*) people find themselves in while conducting public and private affairs.

The first chapter of this work fleshes out the intellectual atmosphere of the ancient Athens Isocrates would have found himself in. This was a time marked by the flourishing of professional sophists. These men were able to provide a service which facilitated the needed skills for succeeding in the Athenian *demos*. The second chapter focuses on the unique challenges Isocrates' philosophical program faces from Plato's critique of rhetoric. Morally outraged with the orators of his time, Plato left little room for the art of oratory in his conception of philosophy. In

the *Phaedrus*, Socrates emphasizes the indifference of rhetoric to truth, which includes an indifference to what is just and unjust.

This text presents a challenge to Isocrates' conception of philosophy, which is plainly intertwined with rhetorical argumentation and is aimed at helping individuals govern the affairs of their community and household. Do the shortcomings Plato identifies with the orators' practice justify the conclusion that rhetoric is inferior to, and hence distinct from, his brand of philosophy? What consequences follow for Isocrates' use of *doxai* and *eikos* if rhetorical persuasion must be informed by philosophical understanding? It seems that Isocratean 'philosophers' are pseudo-philosophers if true philosophy is a method of securing scientific knowledge about abstract concepts. Drawing mostly from the *Phaedrus*, but also the *Republic*, I shall outline Plato's objections to the 'art' of rhetoric that are presented through the character of Socrates.

After the section on Plato's critique of rhetorical argumentation, I defend the claim that Isocrates' brand of philosophy is able to provide the benefits which he boasts that it can. This is based on an informed understanding of the reasonable standards of argumentation Isocrates used to establish his ideal of a pan-Hellenic culture. Isocrates' use of eloquent speech and arguments from likelihood to secure *doxai* is not exactly the same as Gorgias' and Protagoras'. Isocrates's position on persuasive speech differs from the sophists' by relying on *doxai* from the past to ground a newer *doxa*. He also differs from the sophists in arguing that the pursuit of wisdom cultivates the ability to soundly conjecture about useful and practical matters. Isocrates' notion of practical wisdom and consulting the past provides

reliable grounds for justifying opinion that does not rely upon geometrical reasoning about forms.

The third chapter addresses a particular criticism by Plato to which Isocrates is vulnerable, as were his contemporary professional instructors. This criticism comes from the uniquely Platonic alignment of rhetoric with mere opinion and philosophy with true knowledge. Placing the true philosopher in the realm of rationally established abstract knowledge, Plato is able to distinguish and subordinate other arts according to the subject matter of their discipline. Since Plato sees rhetoric as solely aiming at persuasion, and not critically discovering the truth, it does not operate within the boundaries of the only art which gives us true knowledge: philosophy. It is true that Isocrates did not write about metaphysical issues, or about how to rationally establish abstract knowledge. But in this chapter I intend to show that, while Isocrates agrees with Plato on the view that *doxai* can be secured through reasoning, he does not attempt to entirely remove the possibility of doubt. Rather, experience provides a reliable pattern that can serve as the grounds of good reasoning. Such reasoning cannot attain the certitude of mathematics, but it can serve the pragmatic purpose of helping humans make good judgments.

While Isocrates may have conceded to Plato that he is concerned with opinions (*doxai*) and pursuing energetic studies in the realm of *doxa*, Isocrates would not have found this to be a devastating position. Isocrates was firmly convinced that the kind of knowledge Plato was striving towards was not attainable, and not fruitful. Hence, Plato's philosophers would not be able to

restore Athens to her glory. In *Helen*, Isocrates wrote: "Likely conjecture about useful things is far preferable to exact knowledge of the useless" (5). We can pick out from Isocrates' writings a coherent defense of the study of *doxa*: since all we have are *doxai* we must learn to do the best with them. He does not sentence humans to life in a shadowy world of fleeting appearances; but rather, Isocrates lays out a program for how to develop good judgment to help select between competing *doxai*.

Since Isocrates did not believe in Plato's ontological distinctions, Isocrates' method could not attain the knowledge which would justify labeling him as a philosopher in Plato's eyes. Following from this, those who seek to establish beliefs in a rhetorical manner can never be philosophers in Plato's ideal state. But, if we refuse to accept Plato's position that there is a universal objective truth underlying things, then those who pursue such knowledge will not be the wisest after all. If wisdom is attained through a different process, then it will be those active in such a process who deserve to be called philosophers. And, according to Isocrates, wisdom is constituted in the ability to wrestle reliable judgments (that is, successful *doxai*) out of experience. The job of philosophy is to study the way 'wise' people have acted in deliberative situations before and how their 'wisdom' panned out. Philosophy in this sense is inherently tied to the art of persuasion, because to study the way people act in deliberative situations *is* to study the way that people persuade themselves and others to accept a belief. Provided that these studies are directed at understanding how wisdom panned out in previous deliberative situations, rhetoric has an important role in philosophy.

The fourth and concluding chapter will attempt to bring the previous discussions to bear on our modern-day situation. I argue that Isocrates' account of *doxa* provides an exciting perspective in a postmodern intellectual atmosphere that is looking for ways to evaluate and produce sound decisions without being committed to an absolute truth. Turning to Toulmin and Perelman, I argue that the modern trend in argumentation away from formal logics is actually a return to Isocratean argumentation. Toulmin's layout sheds light on rhetorical aspects of Isocratean argumentation such as the use of 'type-jumps' and the role context plays in using qualifiers like 'possibly.' Toulmin argues that Plato's ideal of establishing claims through geometrical proof has led philosophers to impose the rigor of analytical reasoning on all argumentation. This in turn has crippled the legitimacy of argumentation that does not take the form of analytical deduction, such as using the past to conjecture about likely events in the future. Toulmin's insistence that philosophers can reasonably use non-analytic argumentation opens the door for Isocrates to once again be included within the label of 'philosophy.'

Perelman's great accomplishment was facilitating a rapprochement between argumentation with its rhetorical roots, which provided grounds to reason about values again. His study led to the rediscovery of the important role audiences have in the development of argumentation. Perelman stresses how argumentation analysts need to factor in the quality of the audience that a speech is aimed at and acceptable to. I present Isocrates' *Antidosis* as an example of adaptive performance where argumentation is adapted to the imagined audience. Isocrates does not theorize on the concept of audience, but his works demonstrate

an awareness that appropriate reasoning depends upon what the intended audience will accept. To those theorizing about argumentation, this serves as a reminder that standards of discourse arise from practice, not from abstract principles free of logical contradiction.

It is not my contention that we need to change our modern-day conception of what philosophy is in order to make room for Isocrates' texts. Rather, while the goal of Isocrates' philosophy - one which is fine and worth trying to incorporate into our own - may differ from the traditional goal, his writings do engage traditional philosophical issues. So, while I argue that the label of 'philosopher' should be broadened to include Isocrates, there is still some reason for someone who rejects that broadening to acknowledge that Isocrates does merit a place as a philosopher in the tradition of the discipline.

Chapter I: The rise of Rhetoric and Relativism

I.1 Introduction

Isocrates and Plato both wrote at a time when there was a great demand for the skill of persuasive speaking in Athens. In reaction to this demand, some ancient Greeks tried to make a living by selling lessons, which they claimed would make their students powerful speakers. Judging by the accusations made against these instructors by various ancient writers, such lessons tended to impart a relativistic outlook on the world that was seen as a threat to traditional Greek values. The first half of this chapter examines what I consider to be the main conditions that brought about the demand for rhetorical skills in ancient Greece. These include the rise of the Athenian *demos* and the prevalent litigation found in the life of Athenian citizens. This investigation will clarify why rhetorical skills were in demand and how rhetoric entered the pedagogical marketplace where it was differentiated from and subordinated to the discipline of philosophy.

The second part of this chapter delves into the philosophy of Protagoras and Gorgias. The purpose of this section is to bring to light these sophists' ideas about *doxa* and persuasive speech which influenced the negative view Plato held of rhetoric, and how they differ from Isocrates' rhetoric. I do not intend to use the term 'sophist' with any negative connotations; rather, I am using it as a convenient label for those thinkers and educators (lesser and greater[1]) who made a

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[1] By 'lesser sophists' I mean those who charged a small fee and promised great results for the student. Examples of such ones include Evenus of Paros, who is ridiculed by Socrates in Plato's *Apology* (20b-c), and those who are the target of Isocrates' criticisms in his *Against the Sophists*. By 'greater sophists' I am referring to those who not only taught but also composed treatises on nature and language.

business of dispensing 'wisdom'. While Gorgias may not have identified himself as a sophist (as Protagoras does in Plato's dialogue), his discussions about existence, truth, knowledge and communication deal with the nature of wisdom and the possibility of transmitting it.

Gorgias' arguments for the slippery nature of *doxai* and the powerful force of *logos* imply that a persuasive speaker can force others to believe whatever he or she desires through eloquent speech and arguments from probability (*eikos*). Even during his lifetime, Protagoras was notorious for allegedly promoting a relativistic epistemology and making the case that any argument, or *logos*, can be opposed by a contrary *logos*. Protagoras' infamous measure maxim and legacy of opposing arguments support the position that there is no absolute standard outside the human realm, and that arguments from probability can be utilized to help make the weaker argument appear stronger.

Appreciating Gorgias' and Protagoras' perspectives will help us understand the shortcomings Plato saw in rhetorical persuasion which one has to address in defending Isocratean rhetoric. This investigation will help us see where Isocrates' notion of *doxa* and good judgment fits between those of the 'relativistic' sophists and the absolutism found in Plato's dialogues. By 'relativistic', I am referring to the point of view that human beliefs and actions have no absolute reference and that opposing points of view can hold some level of equal status for those agents.

I.2.i Change in ancient Athens: The rise of the Athenian *demos*

The cultural ramifications of the ancient Athenian *demokratia* are many and interesting in their own right, but relevant to my purposes is how this change popularized education in persuasive speech. The *demokratia* meant, more or less, that all legitimate Athenian citizens could have a say in the operation and management of their own city. This 'say' was not solely expressed through an institution of voting; rather, any adult freeborn native Athenian male, regardless of his position within the community, could stand up in the assembly and speak his mind.

Athenian democracy gave a new power to the citizens of the city. What this meant for Athenian citizens can be explicated through understanding the concept of *demos*. Blackwell identifies three different, though related, meanings of *demos* that are all important for Athenian democracy. The first definition of *demos* he gives is as the Greek word for 'village'. In this sense, *demos* can be translated as *deme*. *Demes* were "the smallest administrative unit of the Athenian state, like a voting precinct or school district" (Blackwell, 2003, p. 3).[2]

The second meaning of *demos* which Blackwell considers is *demos* as "People," as in the "People of Athens," the collective body of citizens. "So a young man was enrolled in his *demos*, and thus became a member of the Demos

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[2] Demosthenes' *Against Leochares* (35) and Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens* (42.1) mention how it was necessary for young Athenian men to report to the officials of their *deme* before being able to enroll in the "Assembly List", or the *pinax ekklesiastikos*. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure that the men met the criteria for making the Assembly List; for this they had to be at least 18 years old, have Athenian parents and not be slaves.

(the People). As a member of the Demos, this young man could participate in the Assembly of Citizens that was the central institution of the democracy" (p. 3).

The third use of demos comes from decrees issued by the Assembly. These often began with the phrase "Resolved by the People."[3] Sometimes, "Demos" was invoked to distinguish between the Assembly of all citizens and the Council/Boule of 500 citizens, which was another institution of the democracy (Blackwell, p. 3). Some decrees began "Resolved by the Demos", or "Resolved by the Boule", and others began, "Resolved by the Boule and the People."[4] So, according to Blackwell's analysis, the Athenian Demos was one's local village, the general citizenry, and the assembly of citizens that governed the state.

In the *Constitution of Athens* (41.1), Aristotle gives credit to the *demos* for restoring democracy and establishing self-rule when Sparta defeated Athens. "...

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[3] Papanikolaou (1991, Footnote 16, Chapter 1) writes the following:

> See, for example, G. Dittenberger, SIG^3, no. 121. Cf. R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p 2, no. 2: " The city thus decided . . . ;" (ad' eFade/poli). Equivalent decree-formulas were the phrases "the demos decided" (*edoxen to demo*)--in decrees and inscriptions the term `demos' meant the people constituting the citizen assembly--and "the council of the citizen assembly and the demos decided" (*edoxen te boule kai to demo*).

This book can also be found online at http://www.crvp.org/book/Series01/I-5/ (Accessed Feburary 28th, 2006).

[4] The Troezen decree proposed by Themistocles begins with "Resolved by the Boule and the People." Charles Fornara presents his translation of this text (1977) and a list of literature that discusses the decree on his website: http://www.livius.org/he-hg/herodotus/themistocles.htm (Accessed Feb. 28, 2006). See also, http://www6.tltc.ttu.edu/forsythe/aei.htm (Accessed Feb. 28, 2006) for more examples of the opening words of Athenian decrees collected by Dr. Gary Forsythe.

the people gained control of affairs and set up the present constitution, in the archonship of Pythodorus" [404/3]. At 41.2, he says that the *demos* made themselves masters of everything, controlling by means of decrees and jury-courts. (See also: Aeschines's *Against Ctesiphon* 260.)

In the Assembly, each male citizen of Athens could speak, regardless of his station. Aeschines says that

> the herald, acting as a sergeant-at-arms, does not exclude from the platform the man whose ancestors have not held a general's office, nor even the man who earns his daily bread by working at a trade; nay, these men he most heartily welcomes, and for this reason he repeats again and again the invitation, 'Who wishes to address the Assembly?' (*Against Timarchus* 27)

According to another orator, Demosthenes, his fellow Athenian citizens "were present at every Assembly, as the state proposed a discussion of policy in which every one might join." Here, "everyone" means those citizens who had made it on to the Assembly List for their local Deme (*On the Crown* 273).

I.2.ii Rule of the Best Man

Just being a member of the assembly and having the privilege to participate in discussions about state policies did not guarantee individuals an equal say in managing the affairs of the city. As one may expect to be the case with a public decision-making process, some personalities tended to dominate the Athenian assembly and were able to persuade others to vote in certain directions.[5]

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[5] The number of individuals present at assembly meetings, council meetings, and trials ranged from 201 in private suits involving less than 1000 drachmas up to 6000 at assembly meetings where executive pronouncements were made, where the assembly elected some officials (such as military generals), and at public hearings political where crimes were tried. According to

Pericles was one of the most famous people to take the lead in assembly meetings. Although Pericles made proposals which faced emotional opposition from others in the assembly, Thucydides reports, in reference to Pericles, that "in short, what was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen" (*The History*, Ch.2, 65.10). Athens "again elected him general and committed all their affairs to his hands, having now become less sensitive to their private and domestic afflictions, and understanding that he was the best man of all for the public necessities" (*The History*, Ch.2, 65.4). Just how great Pericles' accomplishments were was a contentious matter for the ancient Greeks, but Thucydides' account in *The History* illustrates how a successful life in politics came with esteem, honour, and the ability to exercise independent control over the multitude. Thucydides' *History* also provides a description of Pericles' ability to move his audience.

> Whenever he saw them unseasonably and insolently elated, he would with a word reduce them to alarm; on the other hand, if they fell victims to a panic, he could at once restore them to confidence. (Ch.2, 65)

Despite Thucydides' praise for Pericles in the same passage for never controlling the crowd through flattery or other "improper means", this testimony exhibits just how powerful the *logos* can be when the right words are used.

Demosthenes, at least until the middle of the fourth century BCE the assembly sometimes met to conduct a public trial. In his *Apollodorus Against Timotheus*, we read about Timotheus' public impeachment trial (See section 10.). Thucydides says that during the Peloponnesian War (431-404BCE) 5000 were present at meetings (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian Wars*, Book 8, Ch. 72). However, 6000 citizens were regularly needed to vote on conferring citizenship on non-Athenians. (Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates*, 45; *Apollodorus Against Neaera*, 89. And see Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens*, 53, for testimony on the number of adjudicators present at court trials.)

Pericles' leadership of the *demos* set an example for Athenians who wanted to exert their influence in the city's affairs. The power of the city resided in the assembly, which could be manipulated to go along with what one man said. So, if one wanted to sway decisions about the approval of formal laws,[6] going to war, or building new architecture, it was expedient to establish oneself as an authority in the assembly. Alcibiades was one young man who was portrayed by Plato as being anxious to advise the assembly on the city's affairs.[7] In *The Knights*, Aristophanes presents us with a caricature of Cleon trying to persuade his master, the demos, who is depicted as stupid and fat. The opportunity for Athenian men to become powerful and hold influence existed in the form of membership of the assembly. And the key to gaining this influence was persuasive speech.

1.2.iii Litigation and Self-defense

One of the most characteristic scenes of Athenian life was the law-court. Shortly after Solon was chosen *archon* in 594 he established law courts[8] which

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6 Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates* (20): "In the first presidency and on the eleventh day thereof, in the Assembly, the Herald having read prayers, a vote shall be taken on the laws, to wit, first upon laws respecting the Council, and secondly upon general statutes, and then upon statutes enacted for the nine Archons, and then upon laws affecting other authorities."

7 See *Alcibiades I* 105b where Socrates says about his friend, "You think that as soon as you present yourself before the Athenian people – as indeed you expect to in a few days – by presenting yourself you'll show them that you deserve to be honoured more than Pericles or anyone else who ever was. Having shown that, you'll be the most influential man in the city, and if you're the greatest here, you'll be the greatest in the rest of Greece, and not only in Greece, but also among the foreigners who live on the same continent as we do."

were reformed by Ephialtes in 462.[9] The cases brought to these courts were basically of two types. The first was a private case, or *dikê*, which did not affect the community as a whole, but individuals who felt wronged in private affairs (Wikipedia, "Athenian Democracy: Courts"). Since any citizen could charge another with wrongdoing, many Athenians were forced to defend themselves in court from accuser. The second kind was a public case, or *graphê*, which concerned community affairs such as treason, embezzlement of public money, desertion, or mismanaging a city office (Wikipedia, "Athenian Democracy: Courts").

> In the sense of "lawsuit," *dikê* can be used either generically, to refer to any type of indictment, or else (more commonly) in a semi-technical sense, to denote the older "private suit" (which only the aggrieved party or his immediate or his immediate personal representatives could bring) as opposed to the newer "public suit" (*graphê*), which could be brought by any citizen in good standing. (Todd, 2003, p. 20)

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[8] My authority for the date Solon became *archon* is Peck (1898). And see Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens* (1.6-9) for a list of accomplishments Solon made once he was chosen to be *archon*.

[9] See Martin's "Athenian Empire in the Golden Age: The Democratic Reform of the Athenian System of Justice" in his (1996, 9.2) *An Overview of Classical Greek History from Mycenae to Alexander.*

Any citizen claiming to have the city's interests in mind could charge another to appear in court. Such a citizen-initiator was called *ho boulomenos* - he who wishes, or anyone who wishes.[10]

With such legal institutions established, litigation in ancient Athens abounded. The plot line of Aristophanes' *Clouds* is typical of Athenians looking to better themselves by being able to defend their property in court. Ironically, the young man seeking an education in the *Clouds* ends up being taught to take his own father to court. Plato's *Apology* presents us with a picture of an innocent man being charged with specious accusations and condemned to death at an Athenian trial. And Isocrates complains in his *Antidosis* that he is being unfairly prosecuted because his reputation has been distorted by the public's misunderstanding of his wealth and work. There are many examples and comedies about forensic speeches in 430-420 BCE. Forensic speech writing was common because many found it difficult to compose a defense that could withstand prosecution from experienced sycophants . As Polus says in Plato's *Gorgias*, good speakers have a power that can put others to death (*Gorgias*, 468e). Thus, the skill of good speaking was an invaluable asset, not only to hold sway in the assembly, but also to prosecute others and defend oneself from litigation. Isocrates was one Athenian who made a living in his earlier days writing such speeches for others to deliver in defense at their trials.

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[10] See Aristophanes' *Wealth* (850-958), where the sycophant tries to defend himself as fulfilling an important role for the *polis* as a volunteer prosecutor, or *boulomenos.*

1.3.i The Sophists and Rhetoric

The word 'sophist' is the agent noun form of the Greek adjective *sophos*, which means 'wise.' 'Sophist' etymologically means 'wise person', and was used to denote those who had wisdom and knowledge. This label was originally used to apply to poets, and the object of such wisdom was thought to reside in poetry.[11] As Tindale writes,

> When Plato takes pains to distinguish Socrates from the Sophists he is in the process understanding 'Sophist' in a particular way that deviates from earlier practice. As Protagoras himself is allowed to say in the dialogue which bears his name, the extension 'Sophist' covers such workers with language as Homer and Hesiod. (2004, p. 37)

However, the sophists which concern us here are those closer to the time of Isocrates and Plato who had a reputation for instruction in the art of persuasion, as opposed to the poetical sophists like those considered to be among the Seven Sages. The two most famous and influential teachers of persuasion were Protagoras and Gorgias. Both these men taught a way of arguing that influenced the next generation of Athenians[12] and made a prosperous living in doing so. Although we still have several works credited to Gorgias, much of what we know about Protagoras comes from Plato 50 years after the sophist arrived on the scene in Athens. While it may be impossible to know for certain exactly what a lesson

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[11] In early Greek thought, there were no clear distinctions made between history, literature, philosophy, poetry, and science. These topics were covered by various poets in verse.

[12] The reach of Protagoras' and Gorgias' influence extends right into our own time. Tindale's approach to argumentation (2004) draws heavily from Gorgias' work. See also Mendelson's 2000, which presents a Protagorean approach to the theory, practice, and pedagogy of argument.

from Gorgias or Protagoras would precisely consist of, I think it is reasonable to assume that they would have instructed their students using the same kinds of arguments later attributed to them. I will now sketch out the positions of Gorgias and Protagoras on two related issues: 1) what they had to say about the nature of persuasion, and 2) the connection persuasion has to grounding one's opinion in a world of competing *doxai*.

I.3.ii Gorgias: Rhetoric as Value-neutral and *Doxa* in the Community

Gorgias' *Defence of Helen*[13] (13) presents us with the idea that, although different in form, persuasive speech has the same power as compulsion. He reaches the conclusion that Helen is not to blame for the war through an argument from elimination, where he presents what are considered to be every possible reason for Helen's action. When he arrives at considering whether Helen is to blame for her acts if she was persuaded by the words of another, Gorgias presents his famous metaphor of speech constraining the soul. He summarizes his argument at 15 where he says that "if [Helen] was persuaded by speech she did not do wrong but was unfortunate." Personifying the *logos* as a "powerful lord", Gorgias argues that it is the one who persuaded Helen that ought to be charged with wrongdoing - for she was the victim: "What cause then prevents the conclusion that Helen similarly, against her will, might have come under the influence of speech, just as if ravished by the force of the mighty?" (12) This view is echoed by Plato's Socrates, who often describes his state of mind as being

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[13] As translated in Kathleen Freeman's *Ancilla to the Pre Socratic Philosophers* (2003).

dreamy after listening to a powerful orator - it's as if he was cast under a spell.[14] Gorgias is pleading with us to understand that the *logos* can be so powerful that speech can amount to coercion. The forcefulness of such speech resides in the skill, or *technê*, of the speaker (13).

In identifying the power of *logos* with the speaker's skills, Gorgias places persuasive speech outside the realm of truth. According to him, persuasive speech is the result of skillful rhetoric, regardless of whether what one says is true or not (13). Thus, if one is clever enough, he or she could persuade someone to believe anything. Gorgias implicitly suggests that what is true is relative to what the most persuasive speaker says is true, since persuasive speech "impresses the soul as it wishes." Gorgias backs up his claim with three examples: Astronomers' speculations about unseen objects are persuasive by mere opinion; speakers in law-courts are persuasive by virtue of their written speeches despite not having truth on their side; philosophers win arguments and debates by being quick in thought. The powerful *logos* can take the form of poetry, divine incantations, and rhetoric. All of these linguistic practices move people to do and believe things beyond their control. Gorgias' comments on persuasive speech leave us with a picture of rhetoric as being a compelling force in the hands of a skilled speaker. He does not suggest that philosophers and orators should not be trusted, but he does hold the persuader responsible for the actions resulting from the speech (12).

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[14] See for example, *Protagoras* (328d), *Menexenus* (234c-245b), *Apology* (17a).

He goes on to compare the *logos* to intoxicating influences that can affect an audience in positive and negative ways.

> The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion.

Besides such rhetorical tactics as appeals to authority and quick-wittedness, Gorgias emphasizes the importance of rhythm, meter, and ornamental words in composing persuasive speech.[15] In section 9 (*Defense of Helen)*, Gorgias says that the right words can make the soul experience the suffering of others. Eloquent words have the capacity to move people, and when put to use in persuasive speech, the *logos* can bind up its audience like a captive.

It seems as though Gorgias' account characterizes rhetorical skills as trumping knowledge of the actual subject under discussion. A skillful enough speaker should be persuasive on any topic he or she fancies. This apparent shortcoming later proves to be a serious concern for Plato and constitutes the basis of his criticism of orators at his time: as an art, rhetoric is devoid of knowledge and aims at pleasing its audience through ornamental language.

Gorgias' perspective on the nature of opinion, or *doxa*, can be found in his *Defense of Helen. Doxa*, according to Gorgias, throws its users into "slippery and

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15 See Kathleen Freeman's *Ancilla to the Pre Socratic Philosophers* (2003, p. 82) (which is an English translation of Diels and Kranz's *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, p. 82, B5a15-16) for testimony that Gorgias' speeches contained euphemisms and metaphors.

insecure successes" (11). The slipperly nature of *doxa* can be manipulated by speakers through the use of *eikos*, by which I mean an argument scheme that relies upon reasonable expectations, or what is likely. We can find examples of appeals to the probable in Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* and *Encomium of Helen.*[16] In his *Defense of Palamedes*, Gorgias argues that it is unlikely that Palamedes could have secretly met with the Trojans because they have no common language. And even if they did meet, how would they have exchanged pledges in secret? The arguments in Gorgias' *Helen* also depend on *eikos*. There, he presents his audience with only four possible reasons for Helen's journey to Troy, and then argues that on all four accounts Helen is not guilty. This argument pattern is useful when testimony is not available. It allows one to speculate on what is likely to have been the case based on what is known. For example, it is known that Palamedes and the Trojans spoke different languages and that people who speak different languages have great difficulty communicating. So, defeating propositions aside,[17] it is unlikely that Palamedes made a secret pact with the Trojans. But, if no witness is available to serve as an authority on what really happened, and if judgment cannot decide what was likely to have been the

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16 I do not mean 'probable' in the statistical sense.

17 'Defeating propositions' are any statement which casts doubt upon the supposed 'facts' of the matter, the inference, or the conclusion. (See Bart Verheij's paper in *Arguing on the Toulmin Model*, 2006.) In this particular instance, if one could prove that Palamedes had been secretly learning the Trojans' language or had an interpreter, then there would be reason to doubt that it was impossible for Palamedes to meet with the Trojans on the grounds that they could not speak with each other.

case, a contest of speeches appealing to *eikos* can be merely a contest between the persuasive powers of two speakers.

Examining Gorgias' work and thoughts on persuasive speech leaves us with a picture of rhetoric as a powerful tool in the hands of a skilled speaker. According to Gorgias, it is by virtue of a speaker's skills, and not a correspondence to reality, that arguments are won and beliefs are established. These skills include quickness, pleasantness of speech, and the ability to formulate probable judgments based on limited or unclear information. Gorgias' implicit rhetorical theory offers no certainty on matters - what we consider to be the case is that which was presented most persuasively and seems most likely based on available evidence. According to Gorgias, humans have access only to opinions because of the nature of memory and [unconscious] selective reconstruction of events. Consequently, the human condition offers no guarantee of certitude or absolute reference. This may be acceptable to some who see the world as an ambiguous place where the best one can do is settle on the most likely, but Gorgias' philosophy could be seen as a threat to those who believe in a universal truth underlying human experience and desire a system that can produce truth which we can be certain corresponds to reality. It will also prove unacceptable to Isocrates, who held that experience provides individuals with reliable patterns for reasoning which forms the basis of wisdom and sound judgment.

I.3.iii Protagoras: The role of Rhetoric in Opposed Speeches

It is difficult to determine what exactly can be attributed to the historical Protagoras, since only a few fragments credited to the sophist have survived. Most of what we know about Protagoras comes either from Plato's dialogues or from fragments and handbooks attributed to students of Protagoras. However, in ancient texts his name is often associated with the art of presenting arguments on both sides of an issue.[18] It seems likely that other sophists in Protagoras' time also taught the art of opposed speeches because this practice was part of the charges brought against Socrates in Plato's *Apology*.

Dissoi Logoi is an anonymous text which contains a series of arguments for both sides of various philosophical issues,[19] and appears to some to clearly be the work of a student or admirer of Protagoras (Mendelson, 2000, p.109). The first four chapters provide arguments based on contraries and reversals. The text emphasizes the relativity of judgments: what appears to be just for some is unjust for others and what is bad for an individual at one time can be good for the same one later (*Dissoi Logoi*, 1.1[20]). The author even argues against the popular opinion that one ought to never lie to his or her parents on the ground that there are exceptional conditions where lying is good - such as if one had to trick an ill

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18 Evidence of this exists in Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, IX.51), the *Tetralogies of Antiphon*, *Dissoi Logoi*, as well as in the *History* of Thucydides and the plays of Euripides and Aristophanes. All these sources contain examples of making the weaker argument stronger.

19 Such as the *nomos/phusis* debate in ethics, epistemological relativism, and the teachability of virtue.

20 As translated in Kathleen Freeman's *Ancilla to the Pre Socratic Philosophers* (2003).

parent into taking life-saving medicine which the parent had refused to accept (3.2). In breaking the universal imperative to "never lie to one's parents," Protagorean thinking emphasizes relativity and context in ethics. While it may appear reasonable to lie to one's parent to save one's mother's life, the argument comes across as rather bombastic in its denial of the common-sense opinion that one ought never lie to one's parents. Hearing such arguments no doubt made some ancient Greeks who believed in traditional moral codes suspicious that foreign sophists like Protagoras were undermining the moral foundation of Athens. After all, if every argument could be opposed by another, how can one make a case for what is good behaviour? If both sides of an issue seem equally reasonable, how does one tip the scales to favour one position over another?

Another challenge that Protagorean thinking has contributed to argumentation and epistemology is that of subjective relativism – the view that each person is the authority for his or her own judgments. Protagoras is most famous for what is called the 'Measure Maxim': "That, of all things, the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not." This maxim has been interpreted a number of ways. Taking 'Man' to mean individual people, such that each particular human being is the measure of what is and what is not. According to Plato, this maxim implies that perceptual judgments are true for each individual person at any given time (*Theaetetus* 152a). On the other hand, 'Man' has been interpreted as humans in general, or 'society,' on this interpretation the maxim implies that human beings are where standards and judgments come from - for example, that scientific 'laws' are useful

postulates, as opposed to discoveries about the 'real' nature of the world. Both interpretations seem plausible, but what is undeniable is that both emphasize relativity in human judgment: truth is determined by each individual or by us as a species - there is no other realm to turn to for absolute certainty.

Doxa, for Protagoras, as it was for Gorgias, is slippery and ambiguous. One *doxa* can be opposed by a contrary argument, exceptions to general moral rules can be found in particular situations, and there is no litmus test outside of the world of human experience with which we can test conflicting *doxai*. If my beliefs are always true for me, and yours for you, and if our beliefs are incompatible with each other, how would one determine which to hold as true? The ambiguity of *doxa* can be managed and contained through imposing a logic of contradiction, but how does a speaker tip the scales in his or her favour when met with an opposed argument? What instruction would Protagoras, as an instructor of argument and fine words, give to students who might face an argument equally as logical as their own in a court of law or the Athenian assembly?

The bits and pieces of text credited to Protagoreans suggest that the key to tipping the scales in one's favour is through the use of fine words and rhetoric. As As Protagoras makes evident in his "Great Speech" in Plato's dialogue named after the sophist, he is not afraid to use logical arguments and poetical myths in so far as they serve his end. He suggests that in any situation one *logos* will tend to be dominant or 'stronger' than any opposed *logos*, and will thus be accepted by a community as 'true' for this reason (*Theaetetus* 166e-167d). Mendelson (p. 113)

writes, "The single argument standing by itself is a false synecdoche, a part pretending to be the whole." He contends that arguments, for Protagoreans, are never wholly finished or complete because there is a 'multivocality' of views which can be drawn upon for new argumentative perspectives (p. 112). In Protagorean 'antilogic' there is no final word or reasoning on an issue that can "transcend multiplicity and achieve certainty" (p. 113). The rhetorical features of the dominant *logos* mask its tentativeness and situatedness, so that it appears to be complete or correspond to the 'facts of the matter'. It is a mistake to think that *logos* offers access to reality in itself, for, as mentioned above, Protagoras insists that "Man is the measure of all things," affirming that humans, and not any external criteria, are the ultimate judges of a given *logos*.

Putting together an authentic 'Protagorean' position is difficult because of the fragmented nature of sources pertaining to this sophist. However, it is quite certain that he became very wealthy by teaching in Athens and that behind his instruction lay two main ideas: 1) There are at least two sides to every issue which should be explored by those investigating a given matter. 2) Judgments about what is the case are relative to individuals and/or human communities. Like Gorgias, Protagoras finds himself situated in a world of unclear *doxai* and develops a means to secure *doxai* through use of the concept of *eikos*. Both sophists would have probably advised their pupils, who mostly would have been on the verge of joining the Athenian assembly, to promote their own opinion in the sea of *doxai* through the use of persuasion - regardless of what that opinion may be. Aristotle says that the public became wrathful at Protagoras' use of *eikos*

because it made the worse argument appear to be the better one (*Rhetoric* II.24). This method raised the fear that a good orator could successfully defend the guilty or convict the innocent.

I.4 Conclusion

Throughout its democratic history, Athens struggled under the poor leadership of some and flourished under the good leadership of others - such as Pericles in the so-called Golden Period. The rise of the Athenian *demos* gave new power to those who were denied such an opportunity in the city's past. Being a proper Athenian citizen meant that he could stand up in the assembly and share an opinion regardless of his station in life. This process of public decision making and debate naturally led to the assembly being directed by those who dominated discussions through fine speech. Athenians recognized how valuable it was to be a persuasive speaker because it could mean being able to influence the assembly, for either good or egotistical ends.

But simply being a powerful figure in the assembly did not guarantee a life of ease. Any citizen could bring charges against another in the name of the city's best interest. While this arrangement was established to keep the political system in check and open to public scrutiny, it was abused by malicious sycophants and those who were misinformed about fellow citizens because of rumours and hasty generalizations. It was necessary to be a skillful speaker so one could defend oneself in court if and when one was accused of some wrongdoing. Thus, between a citizen's life in the assembly and the courts, a great demand arose for skillful argumentation.

Although the sophists started out by teaching poetry, their subject matter changed to politics and speech as the demand increased for training in these areas. A handful of foreigners found a market in Athens for lessons which they promised would improve their students' abilities. Gorgias and Protagoras had great success in collecting students who paid handsome fees to spend time with the sophists. However, these sophists were not merely giving lessons in persuasive speech; they broke ground on the role rhetoric plays in epistemology and belief. Both thinkers saw human opinion as a changing system of beliefs affected by persuasive speech, and both denied the possibility of accessing some realm or test outside human experience in which one can determine the ultimate truth of the matter. For Gorgias, opinion is too slippery to attain certitude. And for Protagoras, its variance from one individual or community to another makes it impossible to determine what is 'true' or 'correct'; we can only strive to improve our judgment and refer to one choice as 'better' than another. Such new ideas were threatening to some who felt they undermined traditional values which are universally valid.

These new concepts about belief, truth, and rhetoric set the background out of which Plato and Isocrates would emerge. Both resisted the sophists' relativistic epistemology and the ethical implications which they saw as following from sophistical reasoning. Plato was the toughest critic of the orator's profession. His analysis and objections to the practice of persuasive speech challenge the position that wisdom is to be found in the realm of *doxai*. What does Plato see the orators doing wrong? Is Isocrates susceptible to such criticisms, as a proponent of

rhetorical argumentation? Is it possible to achieve a method of justifying beliefs that transcends mere persuasion? Or are we condemned to a life of uncertainty and changing *doxai*?

Chapter II: Isocrates the Beautiful

II.1 Introduction

This chapter first examines rhetoric primarily as found in Plato's *Phaedrus*. I argue that the condemnation of oratory found in Plato's dialogues is not a universal one; rather, he presents serious reservations about the art of persuasion and provides guidelines for a philosophically informed art of oratory. Pertinent to this are Socrates' comments on *eikos* and its relation to philosophy. Ultimately, Socrates concludes that skilled oratory depends upon philosophical knowledge, which attains a certainty that surpasses mere *eikos*. Skillful oratory, thus being dependent upon philosophical knowledge, becomes subordinate and inferior to philosophy; not having the right kind of knowledge (that is, Plato's kind of knowledge) prevents a speaker from being skillful, in the proper sense. Dealings in rhetoric, devoid of Plato's kind of knowledge, have no right to be labeled philosophical in Plato's eyes. As Nehamas and Woodruff write in the introduction of their translation of the *Phaedrus*:

> Since knowledge of the truth is necessary for the ability to treat rhetoric systematically, and since Plato believes that the search for truth is philosophy, the implication of Socrates' controversial argument is that finally only philosophers can be adequate rhetoricians. (1995, xxxi)

Next, I propose that some of the opinions Socrates expresses about the importance of self-cultivation over gaining wealth may have led to the favorable comment Plato penned about Isocrates. However, key disagreements in the reasoning for their positions bring to light aspects of Isocratic thought which Plato could not accept as being truly philosophical. Isocrates' pragmatic approach to

reasoning does not contain the features characteristic of Plato's ideal 'philosophical method'.

Is Isocrates entitled to label his work philosophical? Is anyone justified in referring to Isocrates as a philosopher? For Plato, the goal of a philosopher is to attain knowledge which is built upon an unshakable foundation – a true belief secured by reason. The contents of such knowledge are not relative from one individual or community to the next. Nor is it justified through arguments from likelihood; rather, it is ideally justified through geometrical deductive inferences which leave no room for doubting the establishment of a claim. For those more practically oriented thinkers, whose goal is to gain the wisdom needed to make expedient choices in life, doubt and luck do not need to be eliminated, but minimized to a reasonable extent determined by the situation. How is it possible that Isocrates – one who talks about useful conjectures and likelihoods – is a philosopher when Socrates has concluded that philosophers are those who get behind opinion and attain justified true beliefs? Isocrates may not fit into Plato's ideal notion of a 'philosopher', but he is not lumped in with all the orators and sophists whom Plato condemns. Plato no doubt had mixed feelings about what Isocrates was up to when his Socrates expresses admiration for the orator and a hope that the speech writer would become more philosophical in old age (*Phaedrus* 279a-b).

II.2 Plato's attack on Rhetoric: Truth, Knowledge, and Argument

II.2.i *Eikos:* Mere Likelihood

Plato's attack on rhetoric comes to us through the mouth of Socrates. While Plato does have Socrates touch upon the nature of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*,

and the *Republic*, I believe that the *Phaedrus* contains Plato's most developed and sophisticated views on oratory. The *Phaedrus* is also the most interesting dialogue that deals with rhetoric because, instead of merely refuting the claims of supposed experts and concluding that rhetoric is to be absolutely avoided, Socrates takes a more nuanced position in favour of the possibility that oratory can be fine and useful.

After Socrates proposes to examine when a speech is well written and delivered, and when it is not, he and Phaedrus conclude that real oratorical skill is an application of philosophical argument and analysis, and is hence dependent upon it (*Phaedrus* 259e-262c). Socrates goes on to argue that if an orator is to speak about a topic, say for example what just things Athenians ought to do, then the orator must know what justice and goodness in themselves are (the kind of objective knowledge philosophers have about things). For if a speaker is "to deceive someone else and to avoid deceiving [him or herself], [he or she] must know precisely the respects in which things are similar and dissimilar to one another" (262a6-8). According to Plato's Socrates, to lead an audience towards the opposite of what is the case through a set of small steps (so as to "more likely escape detection"), the speaker must know "what each thing truly is" (262a). So the orators' position Phaedrus presents at 260a1-4 is refuted by Socrates through an *ad hominem* argument. Phaedrus presents their claim as follows:

> it is not necessary for the intending orator to learn what is really just, but only what will seem just to the crowd who will act as judges. Nor again what is really good or noble, but only what will seem so. For that is what persuasion proceeds from, not truth.

Socrates has shown that those who espouse the belief that persuasion does not proceed from truth are trapped in a contradiction of their own making since persuading an audience to believe the opposite of what is the case through skill, and not chance or luck, requires knowing "what each thing truly is." Socrates is here contending that knowledge of a given topic must necessarily precede speech on that topic. Yet in the *Gorgias*, Socrates suggests that knowledge of a subject will naturally make an individual the most persuasive about that. I take this difference to be a subtle concession on Plato's behalf that rhetoric as skill in itself has value to add to knowledge of a particular field or craft. This is a departure from what Socrates in the *Gorgias* says about the expert being the most persuasive about what he is an authority in (*Gorgias* 453d-454a4).

Instead of consulting the truth about what is just or good when conducting professional activities and in preparing speeches, an orator must, Socrates says, pay attention to plausibility (272c-e; see also 259e) - that is, what is probable or likely to be true (*eikos*). And, drawing from an alleged example of Tisias', Socrates demonstrates that the focus of orators is on plausibility. The example Socrates presents, which is supposed to be typical of the way orators taught their students to argue, resembles the sophistic way of arguing from what is likely. The case at hand involves a weak yet spunky man who is arrested for beating up and robbing a stronger, but cowardly man. The point Socrates dwells upon is that Tisias advocated that these men defend themselves in front of their judges by appealing to what is plausible or likely to have been the case in the eyes of their audience, not to what the facts of the matter actually are. According to Tisias,

neither party should tell the truth in his argument about the event since the jury would not believe either one if they did. Instead, the injured party ought to claim that the attacker was not alone, but had assistance. The perpetrator should deny that he was accompanied and "then have recourse to the famous plea 'How could a fellow like me have attacked a fellow like him?'" (273b9-c1). In this way the skilled speaker should seek out the plausible. Oratorical skills have to do with knowledge of the plausible, not about figuring out and presenting the truth.

Turning to the practices of his contemporary orators, Phaedrus acknowledges that skilled speakers are able to make the same thing appear, for example, just and then again, if there should be reason to do so, unjust to the same persons. And on this ground Socrates includes Zeno of Elea as an orator[21] (261c10-d1). If oratory, as it is being practiced, is a systematic art, then it is the disciplined ability to argue with plausibility on either side or both sides of a disputed question. The orator's skill is indifferent to the facts. In the popular tradition of oratory, a speaker is neither limited to argue for what is in fact true nor, even if what one arguing for is true, does that individual have to argue for it by appealing to accurate statements of the actual circumstances.

In the previous chapter examples of arguments from plausibility were provided from Gorgias and the Protagorean tradition. Their arguments tended to rest upon a community's expectations of what is usually the case. Speakers can make appeals to what an audience believes would have happened to support their

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[21] He has in mind Zeno's dialectical method of drawing contradictory statements from an opponent's thesis, such that something is both at motion and rest or is one and many.

claim. For example, in the *Defense of Helen*, Gorgias argues that Palamedes could not have met with the Trojans because they had no common language, which is a necessary condition for secret meetings. This example serves to further illustrate Socrates' point that orators have been able to make their case without consulting the truth - they only know what their audience deems plausible. According to Socrates, orators say what is plausible, which for Socrates is the same as what the group being addressed thinks. "Does [Tisias] maintain that the probable is anything other than that which commends itself to the multitude?" (273a10).

If oratory is to be a *technê* and not an *atechnos tribê* (an 'artless practice'), then it must be based in some form of disciplined knowledge. We get an idea of the kind of disciplined knowledge Socrates has in mind at 270d where he uses Hippocrates' method as the correct way to think systematically about the nature of things. According to Socrates, this method consists of investigating what it is that gives a thing its power to be active and acted upon. And if something is complex, then it needs to be broken down into its simple pieces where investigation continues of "how each is naturally able to act upon what and how it has a natural dosposition to be acted upon by what." Applying this method to the art of persuasion means that a truly skilled orator will understand what the different components of speech are, and why they bring about the results that they do. That is, a skilled orator must actually understand how and why he or she succeeds in being persuasive to the extent that is obtained,[22] which includes having the same

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[22] For example, an orator should know what type of people will find certain features of actions to really be connected to wrongness, and why they will do so,

type of systematic knowledge about the dispute, or subject matter, at hand. In order to persuade an audience to believe, for example, that a particular act was an instance of injustice, the speaker must know the truth about injustice (and justice). In some cases experience may provide one with a shallow acquaintance which might have furnished such a person with a 'knack' for saying what an audience believes. But an individual will not *know* how to do that unless he or she knows which possible things to say about the act in question are closely enough connected to wrongness such that an audience will accept them as sufficient reasons to conclude that the act was wrong.

Without a concern for the truth, Socrates says, one cannot come to know what to put forward as the grounds for believing the conclusion. Hence, knowledge of what is the plausible thing to say presupposes knowing the sort of truth - truth about the nature of things like justice and goodness - that in fact only philosophical methods are designed to bring to light.[23] If that is the case, then Socrates is a good position to insist that the orator cannot reliably carry out his or her task without the knowing the truth about goodness, badness, justice, and so on. But why does one need to go behind what people actually think to some essence or nature of what it means for something to be right or wrong?

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and be able to identify a given audience so as to select the best means of persuasion.

[23] At 266b-c Socrates praises the method of dialecticians who define concepts through rigorous proofs.

II.2.ii *Eikos:* Like Truth

Tisias says an orator should focus on *eikos*, as opposed to the truth. *Eikos* is a neuter participle of the verb *eoika*, primarily meaning, "to be like."[24] It also implies that something is 'likely, probable, or reasonable.' According to Socrates, knowledge about plausibility cannot be acquired without philosophical knowledge about the true natures of wrongness and other such matters about which orators try to be persuasive. "If [an orator] does not know the truth about a given thing, how is he going to discern the degree of resemblance between that unknown thing and the other things?" (262a6-8). Socrates adds that the person who knows the truth about wrongness will obviously be in the best position to determine which features of an act can be claimed to be similar to wrongness. Socrates has turned the orators' claim that a skilled speaker only needs to know what an audience deems plausible on its head. As Socrates brings out at 273d3-4, "people get the idea of what is likely (*eikos*) through its similarity (*homoiotêta*) to the truth." So, if an orator aims at what his or her audience will find plausible, then the orator needs to know the truth of the matter. Plato leaves his readers with the impression that the best understanding of what is *like* the truth (*eikos*) comes from knowing what the truth really *is*.[25] Nehamas and Woodruff summarize Socrates' argument well when they write:

> Socrates' response [to the argument that the rhetorician only needs knowledge of what is

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[24] According to the LSJ (s.v. *eikos* A.I)

[25] That is, the best understanding of what is like the truth comes from the one who knows the truth (*ho tên alêtheian eidôs*) (273d).

> plausible] is that no can know what is plausible without knowing what is true. After all, he claims, what is plausible is identical with what is likely; and knowledge of the truth is therefore necessary in order to know what is likely and, for that reason, plausible. (xxxiv)

For Plato, having an accurate understanding of the nature of wrongness - a philosophical understanding - means that one grasps the intelligible form of wrongness. Generally speaking, these forms are archetypes or abstractions of qualities and types from the plurality encountered in experience. But these are not just universal categories free from any particular accidents; rather, Plato writes about them as having an independent objective existence outside the realm of our everyday sensible world – only thought can "see" (*idoi*) them (*Republic* 511a). Despite the conflicting opinions and arguments humans present to each other, in Plato's world there really is a matter of fact about what actually is good and bad.

Interestingly, forms completely unknown to the audience allegedly influence the selection of those ideas about goodness, rightness, and so on, that individuals and communities have formed over the years. The ideas that strike an audience as correct are partially a reflection of the real essences. For example, in the *Phaedo* Socrates points to how we are able to identify two sticks as being "equal" despite the fact that they are not perfectly or absolutely equal. Since we never encounter any perfect equality in our present life, Socrates concludes that this idea must have been acquired previously [before birth]. Therefore, on Plato's theory, a speaker can introduce new ideas that will be accepted because they will resemble the truth, and can even have the power to persuade those who may be in disagreement with an orator. Speakers endowed with proper philosophical

knowledge can use that superior grasp of the truth and what resembles it to expand the stock ideas of the audience. This is another point of departure from the conclusions reached by Socrates in the *Gorgias*, where orators are dependent upon knowing what ideas their audience already accepts as the means by which to persuade them.

II.3.i Isocrates the Beautiful

While there is no Platonic dialogue which chronicles a discussion between Isocrates and some other character, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* does pay the great speech writer a sort of back-handed compliment. At 278e8 Phaedrus solicits Socrates for his opinion of Isocrates *ton kalon* (the beautiful[26]). Socrates responds by expressing admiration of Isocrates' noble character and literary skills.[27] He even claims that Isocrates' character and ability to write speeches exceed Lysias' accomplishments and nobility. But Socrates goes on to say that nature has endowed Isocrates with *tis philosophia* (a certain love of wisdom) and hopes that he will cultivate this *hormê theiotera* (divine impulse). Why does Plato praise Isocrates' skill and character? And, why does Isocrates fall short, according to Plato, of being a bona fide philosopher?

II.3.ii The 'Socrates' in Isocrates: Cultivating the Self

Isocrates' texts present an emphasis on virtue, cultivation of the self, and

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[26] The word *kalon* is often used in reference to something's outward appearance (LSJ, s.v. *kalon* A.I.1). However, it can also have a moral sense such that it refers to one's moral beauty, as in 'noble' or 'honourable' (LSJ, s.v. *kalon* A.II.1).

[27] The words which Socrates uses in this passage in reference to the type of discourse Isocrates is engaged in are all forms of *ho logos.* 279a4: *tous logous*; a6: *tous logous*; a7: *tôn logôn.*

giving heed to the common good. These themes are similar to what Socrates focuses on in, what are traditionally considered to be, Plato's earlier dialogues. It is particularly striking how much of Isocrates' advice is in line with the words and actions of Plato's Socrates. For example, Isocrates upheld the idea that an individual's true advantage is to be found in a life of justice that is concerned with bettering the common good as far as he or she can. In his *Antidosis* (275), Isocrates presents three conditions for what people have to do in order to 'better' (*beltious*) themselves and improve their 'worth' (*axious*). One such condition is for them to have their hearts set on "seizing their advantage (*tês pleonexias*)." The Greek word Isocrates uses here comes from the verb *pleonekteô*, which the LSJ says denotes a sense of 'greediness', 'getting more, or claiming more than one's due in a bad way.'[28] But, the etymological root of the word simply means, "to get more."[29] Isocrates clarifies that the advantage he is talking about getting more of is not that of thieves and liars, who believe their evil actions will bring about desirable benefits. Isocrates argues that one's true advantage cannot be 'gain' acquired through unjust means because those who partake of such actions put themselves in a position of disadvantage in life (281). While such persons may think that they are benefiting through such actions, according to Isocrates, they are mistaken on two counts. Firstly, there is difficulty in living a life of deceit. Isocrates does not here go into detail about the difficulties he has in mind, but in *Nicocles*, he writes "Envy not those who possess the most wealth, but those who

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28 LSJ, s.v. *pleonekteô* A.I.

29 *pleon* means "more," and *echô* means "to have."

are conscious of no guilt; for it is in such a frame of mind that a man can pass his life most pleasantly" (59). His reader is to imagine the psychological distress (*aporia*) and shame experienced by immoral people who must constantly cover their tracks in order to keep their petty gain. Secondly, those who deal in an upright manner with their associates actually receive "the better portion at the hands of men" than those who take a portion by deceitful means (*Antidosis* 282). As Norlin says about Isocrates' notion of 'advantage', "it works no disadvantage to others."[30] A reputation for being righteous and upright has greater returns than "the small gains" acquired with the base reputation which goes along with immoral behaviour.

In *On the Peace* (33-34) and *Nicocles* (59), Isocrates denies the claim that unjust acts can bring any overall advantage to the culprit, on the ground that advantages gained through immoral means (e.g., lying or stealing) do not bring happiness with them. Rather, any benefit gained through evil will eventually be overshadowed by the misery and difficulty of life that follows such acts. Socrates picks up this line of reasoning early in the *Republic*. In the first book, Thrasymachus claims that immorality is more rewarding than morality. Socrates attacks this claim and the apparent effectiveness of immoral behavior. Criminals fall out with one another, and therefore cannot act in agreement. And an immoral person, like Thrasymachus' dictator, will fall out with himself. Thrasymachus eventually succumbs to Socrates' argument because he agrees that immoral acts

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30 From the second footnote (in section 2) within his translation of *Nicocles*.

essentially destroy harmony and union (350d-352d). Both Socrates and Isocrates are proponents of the view that it is in one's own best interest to live justly.

However, for Isocrates *pleonexia* is necessary for maximizing enjoyment in life, while for Plato, the checking of *pleonexia* is necessary for facilitating psychic harmony and living the happy life. On Isocrates' grounds, *pleonexia*, properly understood, is respectable. In Plato's *Republic*, all those involved in the discussion agree, either implicitly or explicitly, with the popular assumption that all immoral behaviour involves some form of *pleonexia* (getting more than one's fair share). But the *pleonexia* discussed in the *Republic* connotes a material and or physical sense of gain which Isocrates strives to surpass. For instance, when Thrasymachus describes the kinds of profit gained by those with a great ability to seize the advantage (*ton megala dunamenon pleonektein)*, he talks about evading taxes, holding ruling positions, robbery, kidnapping, and thievery (343c-344b). So, while Socrates' job in the *Republic* is to prove that a happy life does not arise from *pleonexia*, Isocrates argues that *pleonexia* does not have to entail disadvantage for another. For Plato, it is in one's own best interest to check *pleonexia* because such restraint will produce a state of inner harmony. But for Isocrates, the object of *pleonexia* must be virtue, because it is otherwise a self-defeating notion, since those who seek an apparent advantage through evil means are actually putting themselves at a disadvantage.

When Isocrates says that virtue brings gain, or advantage, for the possessor, he places virtue in a class of goods which Glaucon describes as those which are "onerous but beneficial to us, and we wouldn't have chosen them for

their own sakes, but for the sake of the rewards and other things that come from them" (*Republic* 357c-d). In contrast to Plato's Socrates, Isocrates' position is that virtue is a pragmatic means to external success. As Isocrates writes in *Nicocles*, "we reverence the gods and practice justice, and cultivate the other virtues, not that we may be worse off than our fellows, but that we may pass our days in the enjoyment of as many good things as possible" (2). This point is made in stronger language in section 217 of his *Antidosis*: "I maintain that everyone does everything which he does for the sake of pleasure or gain or honour; for I observe that no desire springs up in men save for these objects." That is, the acquisition of the conventional goods (such as pleasure and honour) is the end of virtuous action. This marks another important difference between Platonic and Isocratic thought. Both thinkers agree that "injustice is never more profitable than justice" (*Republic* 354a), but they are not of the same opinion when it comes to what good there actually is in being just. For Isocrates, it is a means of gaining honour, [a long lasting] reputation, and relationships which bring about a greater qualitative and quantitative return than what may be gained through immoral acts. While Plato may concede that these goods do follow from being virtuous, his Socrates ultimately says that virtue is the kind of good we value for its own sake too, one which "in and of itself, makes anyone who possesses it good, whether or not it is hidden from the eyes of gods and men" (367e). This is a project Isocrates would not have found agreeable because the value of being moral exists in social intercourse and for the goal that others know about it.

Isocrates and Socrates share a similar attitude toward the value of wealth and material possessions. In the *Apology*, Socrates says, "Most excellent man, are you who are a citizen of Athens, the greatest of cities and the most famous for wisdom and power, not ashamed to care for the acquisition of wealth and for reputation and honour, when you neither care nor take thought for wisdom and truth and the perfection of the soul?" (29d-e). And at 30a-b Socrates says:

> ...I go around doing nothing but persuading ... you not to care for your body or wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul, as I say to you: "Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively."

Isocrates and Socrates both contend that cultivation of the soul is a greater pursuit than accumulation of power and wealth. In his *Antidosis*, Isocrates writes:

> If, however, you are wise, you will put an end to this confusion, and you will not continue, as now, to take either a hostile or a contemptuous view of philosophy; on the contrary, you will conceive that the cultivation of the mind (*tên tês psuchês epimeleian*) is the noblest and worthiest of pursuits and you will urge our young men who have sufficient means and who are able to take the time for it to embrace an education and a training of this sort. (304)[31]

Those who tend to their intellectual faculties and moral character before tending to their possessions will experience a far more fulfilling life. It is better to be in a state of honest poverty than unjust wealth because virtue is greater than riches

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[31] See also *To Demonicus* (40), where Isocrates writes: "Give careful heed to all that concerns your life, but above all train your own intellect (*tên sautou phronêsin askei*)."

(*To Demonicus* 38). However, there again is a key difference worth noting. For Socrates, poverty is a by-product of caring more about his quest to 'know thyself' than about physical appearance, wealth, and status. Caring for the best possible state of his soul takes precedence over concern for 'wordly' things. For Isocrates, poverty ought to be a preference over acting unjustly because it preserves a fine reputation. Wealth, as Isocrates describes it in his letter to Demonicus, is to be valued for two reasons, "first, that you may be able to pay off (*ektisai*) a great loss; and, secondly, because you can help a good friend in trouble" (28). Isocrates' point is that the good things which come from an admirable reputation are of greater gain than the possessions acquired through unjust acts. If it is not possible to have wealth and be virtuous, then one ought to choose virtue because it provides a greater return; the reputation for being a good person pays more than any amount of unjust wealth. So, while Plato may have been in general agreement with Isocrates that cultivating the soul is a greater pursuit than caring for possessions, there are important differences between how the two justify their ideas which bring to light just how much Socrates and Isocrates differ.

II.4 Conclusion

In the *Phaedrus* Socrates emphasizes the indifference of rhetoric to truth, as he and Phaedrus see it being practiced and taught. Such indifference includes an indifference to what is just and unjust. Tisias contended that it is not necessary to consult the truth to be persuasive, and we have seen that Gorgias and Protagoras presented rhetoric as being a value-neutral enterprise which can be

used to attain whatever end a skilled individual desires - it is indifferent to vice and virtue. Socrates at the end of the *Phaedrus* does not outright dismiss rhetoric; that is, he does not encourage Phaedrus to stay as far away as possible from rhetoric. Instead, he argues that orations need to be informed by the truth, which only philosophical methods can reveal.

Towards the end of the dialogue, Phaedrus asks Socrates what they are to make of the orator Isocrates. Socrates expresses his admiration of Isocrates' writing and character but does not think that the rhetorician is yet truly philosophical. During the time at which the *Phaedrus* is supposed to take place (roughly 416 BCE[32]), Isocrates would have only written forensic speeches for others to deliver in court. So the dialogue's characters would not have been familiar with Isocrates' later, more sophisticated, writing that focuses on his pan-Hellenic goals and cultivation of the self. Since Plato lived and wrote during the period when Isocrates' school for rhetoric flourished, he likely would have been exposed to Isocrates' public speeches and forensic discourses. So, if we accept Nehamas and Woodruff's (1995, p.xiii) arguments for dating the *Phaedrus'* time of composition between 375 and 365 BCE, Isocrates would have been about seventy-seven and would have already written about the "more important things" which Socrates might be referring to. Plato and Isocrates' general perspective on the moral life, that virtue is a greater pursuit than material possessions, and that no lasting good comes from unjust conduct, have points of agreement. But Isocrates' practical rhetoric encourages his audience to take confidence in the value of his

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32 According to Debra Nails (2005, Section III).

advice by orienting them towards the 'true advantage'. One may object to labeling Isocrates' writing as philosophical because it does not contain the kind of sustained logic-oriented argumentation exemplified by Socrates' dialectic, or because it is not informed by abstract ideas like the forms. However, it certainly is normative in content and invokes a great deal of reasoning and justification to support its claims. The tension lies between Plato's Ideals or Forms and Isocrates' practical concerns. Taking the time to understand how Isocrates reasons and its significance for rhetorical discourse will help us understand on what terms Isocrates understood his activity to be "philosophical" and why he deserves attention today from philosophers.

Chapter III: Isocrates on Good Judgment and *doxa*

III.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will see on what grounds one who is "concerned with opinions and pursu[ing] their energetic studies in the realm of opinion" (*Philebus* 58e) can legitimately claim to be a philosopher. Plato would deny that this is possible since philosophers are those who seek out what is behind opinion – the absolutely unchangeable truth - by understanding the forms. Isocrates makes a number of claims about what constitutes a trustworthy opinion that do not rely upon Platonic idealism. Examining these claims will help come to terms with the implicit understanding Isocrates had of the nature of knowledge (*epistêmê*), conjectures (*doxa*), practical wisdom (*phronêsis*), and the practice of philosophy. The result will be uncovering an implicit approach to argumentation and epistemology that Plato would not have found agreeable, but which may appeal to contemporary philosophers who are interested in argumentation that does not appeal to absolute truth.

Plato and Isocrates have different ends in mind for their philosophical programs and Isocrates' is plainly not to uncover any metaphysical truth.[33] In a discussion on "the old quarrel" between rhetoric and philosophy, Roochnik writes: "Isocrates' position contrasts with that of the 'Platonist' who, after all, is said to argue for a strict set of forms that should govern the entirety of praxis" (1991, p. 236). Plato connects human wellbeing to knowledge of the truth which

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[33] Isocrates often refers to 'truth' in an ordinary sense to mean 'facts'. (See *Antidosis* 178; *Against the Sophists* 1; *Panathenaicus* 46, 62, 73, 225.)

is to be attained through mathematical sciences (*Republic* 521d). If one does not recognize that there are absolute moral truths behind our shifting world of experience, does not control his or her appetites, and does not understand the Forms, then he or she is clearly unfit to rule in the city. For Plato, to philosophize is to practice dialectical reasoning which

> does not consider these hypotheses as first principles but truly as hypotheses – but as stepping stones to take off from, enabling it to reach the unhypothetical first principle of everything. Having grasped this principle, it reverses itself and, keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on from forms to forms and ending with forms. (*Republic* 511b)

In the *Phaedrus* Socrates emphasizes the indifference of rhetoric to truth, which includes an indifference to what is just and unjust. In contrast, Isocrates objects to teaching rhetoric as a skill without teaching justice (*Against the Sophists*, 6). He places human wellbeing in the sphere of political activity and posits the useful conjectures of rhetoric as the means of attaining this goal. In an appendix to a collection of essays on the *Phaedrus*, Burger writes: "Competition in the effort of persuasion is necessary and justified, Isocrates argues, since the final court of judgment is not divine truth but human opinion" (1980, p. 118).

In his *Antidosis*, Isocrates describes philosophy as a study of deliberation which can assist one through life with resourcefulness and success (285). Philosophy, for Isocrates, is not a discipline that is primarily concerned with abstractions about the nature of the world, but with improving thinking abilities, which leads to a fulfilling life (266). In *Helen*, he wrote: "likely conjecture about

useful things is far preferable to exact knowledge (*akribôs epistasthai*) of the useless (*achrêstôn*)" (5), and argued that teachers of youth ought to instruct their students in practical affairs like governing. For Isocrates, philosophy is essentially pragmatic and should help one in life through developing sound judgment and a good reputation. Isocrates states that a philosopher is one who occupies himself with pursuits (*tôn epitêdeumatôn*) from which he can most quickly gain the kind of insight that will allow him by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course of action and speech (*Antidosis* 271). Isocrates hints at the kinds of pursuits he has in mind at 285 (*Antidosis*) where he writes that the term "philosophy" ought to apply to those practices which help in wisely governing one's household and the commonwealth, not just to the mental acrobatics of the ancient sophists. While science and eristics help to train the mind and keep it active, they fail to deliver the content needed to draw upon when conjecturing about human affairs (which are of greatest importance in Isocrates' scheme of things). Instead, the fields which are concerned with the human condition and culture facilitate wisdom and character. Being guided through studying poetry, history, and politics exposes a student to how great thinkers from the past deliberated about issues that will be always pertinent to humanity. Isocrates does not explicitly list these fields as the topical pursuits of a philosopher, but the resources he draws from include the speeches of former political leaders, records of public deliberation, and Homer.

Having the correct 'field' orientation is only one part of being a true philosopher for Isocrates. The other part is being able to produce *doxai* which can

lead to the best course of action and speech. This ability to make successful decisions is the result of cultivating sound judgment - that is, bringing experience to bear on the situation at hand.

In an article from 1998, Timmerman argues that Isocrates' conception of *philosophia* can be classified into five interconnected strands: 1) Cultivation of the mind and proper thinking; 2) The *logos* strand; 3) The educational strand; 4) The practical wisdom strand; 5) The moral strand. He identifies these themes in Isocratean *philosophia* by citing passages and expanding on the context in which uses of the "*philosoph-*" stem occur (he counts eighty-seven in total). These are all legitimate strands in Isocratean *philosophia*, but Timmerman does not take the next step in theorizing how the various strands are connected: "this essay describes the dominant strands of Isocrates' use of *philosophia* as a predisciplinary term relative to Plato's definition and use" (p. 149). My analysis ties these threads together by showing that Isocratean *philosophia* should be understood as the pursuit of developing *phronêsis*, which is the ability to use the powers of conjecture to arrive at the best course of action or speech. Cultivation of the mind is to focus on developing *phronêsis* to achieve practical wisdom. This goal requires education so that the mind has the resources and discipline to produce reliable *doxai*. And *phronêsis* is necessary for choosing the just course of life and speaking well. My analysis does not so much build on Timmerman's arguments, but rather presents a conceptualization of Isocratean *philosophia* that underlies the various strands.

III.2 Isocrates and *doxa*

Isocrates shared Plato's and the sophists' perspective that humans experience a world of uncertainty and contingency. However, unlike Plato, Isocrates did not contend that studying mathematics would help the human condition. For Isocrates, philosophy should be relevant to deciding how to conduct one's life individually and to manage the affairs of the city collectively (*Antidosis* 285). The Isocratean philosopher is one who can arrive at *doxa* through skill. *Doxa* is not irresponsible guessing, but insight based on experience: worldly wisdom, which education can develop when natural ability is not lacking.

Just as the best speech according to Isocrates is that which aims at improving the community's welfare, so too the most valuable *doxa* will be that which is aligned with benefiting the community. But, given the nature of any art which 'aims' at a 'target', conjectures intended to help the city may miss the mark. Poulakos (2004) argues that Isocrates' choice to speak about *doxa* as an art that aims at a target (stochastic), such as archery or sailing, can help us to understand the connection between conjectures and experience. He writes:

> By developing a conventional discourse about stochastic arts to present his own version of the art, Isocrates could cast political deliberation as a process of aiming at the right course of action in the face of uncertainty, and *doxa* as conjecture aimed at making the right decision. (p. 52)

In *Peace* 28, Isocrates says that some people hit upon *doxa* which can be "sound and capable of hitting the right course of action (the 'true advantage)" and some people completely miss. And in his *Panathenaicus* (248), Isocrates writes: "those who are reputed to be the wisest sometimes miss the expedient course of action, whereas now and then some chance person from the ranks of men who are

deemed of no account and are regarded with contempt hits upon the right course and is thought to give the best advice." Isocrates is more realistic in his project of seeking to minimize *tuchê* (luck) through education, as opposed to Plato, who sought to completely eliminate the role luck plays in decision-making. It is the educated person who possesses *doxa* "which is accurate in meeting occasions as they arise and rarely misses the expedient course of action" (*Panathenaicus* 30).

Poulakos argues that, for Isocrates, experience improves one's ability to produce conjectures that hit the 'target'. Practice and study can help form a body of experience that improves the ability to hit upon the right solution. He writes:

> Unlike Plato, who sought to eliminate completely the grip of luck on decision-making, Isocrates attempted to lessen it. In fact, he considered his entire program of education as being oriented toward this single objective – the goal of removing *doxa* from the rule of *tuchê* and of bringing is as directly as possible under the control of *padeia*. (p. 53)

Poulakos points out a noteworthy difference between Isocrates and Plato on the role that education plays in improving *doxa*: for Isocrates judgments are not improved through a higher level of knowledge such as the forms, but through the cultivation of practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) (p. 54).

Isocrates directs his audience to develop their powers of conjecture on the basis of personal and communal experience. Returning to the metaphor of aiming at a target, successful *doxai* result from much practice which eventually transforms lucky shots into reliable precision. Experience facilitates a grasp on the present by bringing to a situation an awareness of possible outcomes that could arise in the future. Throughout Isocrates' texts, he contends that through the past,

the unknown can become known. Examining several passages where Isocrates invokes the past to justify his conjectures about the future will help clarify how he brings experience to practically bear on decision-making.

In his 1979 essay, "Greek Rhetoric and History", Hamilton identifies three different ways Isocrates uses the past to "suit his particular purpose at a given moment (*en tôi kairôi*)" (p. 296). The first is the employment of "historical examples to exhort his audience to adopt a particular course of action, or to alter their conduct in conformity with certain standards" (p. 296). The second use of the past is "as a source of knowledge which can help the well-informed to avoid making mistakes in similar circumstances" (p. 297). The third use of the past is "in helping to explain the present" (p. 297). These different uses are the same as what we will find in my analysis below, but my examples are different from those cited by Hamilton.

In the first example, Isocrates uses the past for the purpose of moving his audience to adopt a particular course of action grounded on historical examples. Isocrates' *Archidamus* is written in the voice of Spartan royalty addressing an assembly on how to deal with the hard times that had fallen on the city after the battle of Leuctra in 371. While making the case for war, the speaker addresses the criticism that Sparta is too much weaker than its enemies to engage in battle with them. He then responds to the responds to the audience's demand to know where reinforcements shall come from (58).

In the character's voice, Isocrates responds to this objection by arguing that Sparta's good qualities are the city's best allies, since they make its army

stronger than those who have greater numbers and place the community in favour with the gods (59). The phrase Isocrates uses to justify this claim is *eiper chrê peri tôn mellontôn tekmairesthai tois êdê gegenêmenois*, which can be translated as "For it is necessary about what is going to be *tekmairesthai* by past events." Robert Sullivan presents a convincing interpretation of this passage as an argument from analogy, arguing that the verb *tekmairesthai* is used in Isocrates' texts to mean 'drawing a conclusion from an analogy' (p. 458). Sullivan mentions this section in passing, but I would like to add to the analysis of this argument the qualification Isocrates places on conclusions drawn from the past. He writes, "for it is probable (*eikos*) that the favor of the gods will be with those who deal justly" based on conjectures inferred from what has happened (59). Isocrates here expresses his awareness that conclusions drawn from the past do not attain absolute certainty; rather, the conjectures have a tentative status as what is probable or likely to occur. We should not take this concession to be a weak point in Isocratic thought, supposing that it only supports Plato's argument that practicing orators deal exclusively with mere opinions which lack the nondeliberative universality of scientific knowledge. However, since it is impossible to gain a body of knowledge which enables one to know (*eidenai*) exactly what is to be said and done with respect to the future (*Antidosis* 271), Isocrates harnesses the practical wisdom found in his advice to aim for the best course of action appropriate for a particular.

The *Panegyricus* is a significant text in the Isocratic corpus because it focuses on the speech writer's career goal of uniting Greek cities together in a

pan-Hellenic alliance against their common enemy, Persia. In section 141 Isocrates makes the case that, based on past events, it is more likely that the Persian king, Artaxerxes Mnemon, would face another revolt before quashing Evagoras. Here we have another instance of Isocrates using historical examples to move his audience to take up a particular course of action. The phrase used here is *ei de dei ta mellonta tois gegenêmenois tekmairesthai,* which can be translated as "if it is necessary for what is going to happen to be *tekmairesthai* (inferred) by what has happened."[34] Isocrates brings experience to bear on the present situation by appealing to the results of the king's previous decisions as a precedent for what will occur in the future. We can also discern from this passage the qualifications which he deems appropriate to place on the conclusions drawn in arguments that make use of the past. The sentence following the one above reads *polu pleiôn elpis estin heteron apostênai prin ekeinon ekpoliorkêthênai.* Instead of using the word *eikos*, Isocrates sets up a comparative construction to qualify his claim, saying that "there is much more expectation for a revolt from another before [Evagoras] is reduced by a siege."[35] Although Isocrates continually exhorts his audience to use the past as a guide in making decisions about the future, he does not exaggerate the certainty such analogies can provide. Isocrates does not guarantee that the outcome he predicts shall occur, but humbly acknowledges that there is more reason to expect a particular result than another since that is all one

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[34] This is my translation, which is based on the Greek found in Isocrates (1945).

[35] This is also my translation, which is based on the Greek found in Isocrates (1945).

conclude when reasoning from the past. Isocrates places his *doxai* (opinion and reputation) in the public sphere by leaving it up to his audience to render judgment on the value of his compositions and benefits they bear for the city. Isocrates does not demonstrate his wisdom by basing it on a science of "how each of the beings is" (*Charmides* 166d). Rather, his wisdom will be rewarded by the reputation conferred upon him by the community for success of his *doxai.*

The *Areopagiticus* addresses issues internal to Athens. In this speech, Isocrates recalls the time when the Athenian democracy was guided by Solon and Cleisthenes. This composition is significant because it includes Isocrates' comments about past statesmen who exemplify *phronêsis* through the combination of wisdom, eloquence, and statesmanship. But it also contains an instance of Isocrates appealing to the past in justifying his claims about the present. We may classify this example as using the past as a source of knowledge to help avoid making mistakes in similar circumstances.

In sections 74-75 of the *Areopagiticus,* Isocrates valorizes the ancestors of Athens for their heroic battles and virtue. While other lands are known for their ability to produce fruit, trees, and animals, Athens, on the other hand, far surpasses these because it has reared men of "superior natural character" (75). These honourable ancestors faced dangerous conflicts with various armies and overcame the barbarians. While they often accomplished such feats with aid from other cities, they also had the ability to band together with other communities and coordinate victorious battles. However, Isocrates warns his audience not to think that Athens deserves the same praise at the time he was writing. He criticizes

Athenians for turning away from their noble heritage to pursue "vice" and "evil ways" (76). After rebuking their behavior, Isocrates cautions Athenians that if they continue down the path they are on, the wars and suffering will continue. However, he offers hope to his audience in suggesting a reformation of the Athenian constitution in section 78. According to Isocrates, reforming the constitution will return Athenians to a political state resembling that of their ancestors, and hence they will enjoy the same condition of affairs as those just praised.

The justification for this argument is grounded on the Isocratic principle of using past experiences to provide insight on the present situation or circumstances (*kairos*). He writes: "for from the same political institutions there must always spring like or similar ways of life" (78). Isocrates does not use the verb *tekmairesthai* in this statement. Isocrates is able to discern the likely course of events for Athens' future without writing that what is going to happen can be *tekmairesthai* by the past. Hence, he leaves us with an instance of inferring the future from the past in which the language of signs and tokens is not actually used. So, when looking for instances of Isocrates inferring what will happen from what has happened, it is important to go beyond indexical searches for '*tekmairesthai*'. The Greek phrase Isocrates uses to express the grounds on which he can predict the future state of affairs for Athens is *anankê gar ek tôn autôn politeumatôn kai tas praxeis homoias aei kai paraplêsias apobainein*. Isocrates is not claiming that the same situation necessarily follows the same political arrangement. Rather, Isocrates qualifies his comment by writing that what shall

occur will be similar (*homoias)* and nearly resembling (*paraplêsias)* what has happened.

These passages present Isocrates' understanding of how one ought to go about deliberating. They capture Isocrates drawing from past matters to shed light on the present situation, which is the essence of Isocratic practical wisdom - the ability to consult the past for illumination on decisions about action and value judgments that assist human praxis. Isocrates often grounds his conjectures by formulating analogies, taking from particular past cases a generalized inference, which can then be used to illuminate what to do or say in a given situation. The past can be consulted for examples to ground *doxai.* It is not possible to turn the history of human action into a scientific body of knowledge (*epistêmê*), such that exact systems can be discerned which lead to certain predictions about the future. Isocrates makes this point clearly in his pamphlet, *Against the Sophists*, where he writes:

> For I think it is manifest to all that foreknowledge of future events is not vouchsafed to our human nature, but that we are so far removed from this prescience that Homer, who has been conceded the highest reputation for wisdom, has pictured even the gods as at times debating among themselves about the future--not that he knew their minds but that he desired to show us that for mankind this power lies in the realms of the impossible. (2)

But where does the ability to create reliable conjectures and analogies come from? What governs the selection of particular cases and their application?

III.3 Isocrates on *phronêsis* and Philosophy

The ability to practically bring experience to bear on a current situation is at the centre of deliberation for Isocrates, as he wrote to Demonicus: "let the past

be an exemplar for the future, for the unknown may be soonest discerned by reference to the known" (34). For Isocrates, the past is an inheritance for us all; yet the ability to use the past well is the unique gift of the wise (*Panygericus* 9). The Isocratic notion of *phronêsis* is similar to Aristotle's in the sense that they both see *phronêsis* as deliberative intelligence used in the pursuit of what is in one's best interest, which Isocrates ultimately aligns with the benefit of the city. In section 207 of his *Antidosis*, Isocrates associates intelligence (*tên phronêsin*) with those who "turn their mind to their own opportunities/affairs" instead of living a lackadaisical life. This intelligence considers what needs to be acted on by the one deliberating and selects a course of action to put into effect within the confines of a particular situation. Today, we might call Isocratic *phronêsis* "common sense", although it is exemplified in its highest form through the deliberation of Athens' greatest statesmen. Common sense and great statesmen both utilize experience to replace luck with judgment. The statesmen are exemplary because they combine the loftiest of deliberative subjects - the common good - with superlative eloquence (*Antidosis* 235). The 'truly educated' are able to utilize the past to put forward useful conjectures as the situation calls for, which could be a traditional or novel handling of the subject depending on the circumstances.

In *Helen* and *Panegyricus* Isocrates uses what we may call facts – things that can be memorized and learned by rote – to ground conjectures on values and action. Roochnik explains Isocrates' perspective as follows: "The ability to apply 'creatively' what has been learned mechanically, is reserved only for the special student with a manly and intuitive mind, and for this, there is no systematic, no

technical, mode of instruction" (p. 235). In these places, Isocrates does not infer the future by what has happened, but draws upon stable *doxai* of the past to ground a new *doxa*. Isocrates does not use abstract principles or analytic reasoning to persuade his audience. He attempts to establish his pan-Hellenic ideal by utilizing established *doxai* within the community.

The *Helen* begins with a criticism of the earlier sophists' choice and treatment of subjects. Isocrates takes issue with Gorgias' encomium of Helen, saying that it is more of a defense of her behaviour than an *enkômion* (14). He goes on to present his ideal version of what an encomium to Helen should be in a form reminiscent of funeral orations – praising her beauty, heritage, and the good deeds she helped bring about. Isocrates demonstrates his masterful command of Greek mythology, literature, and history all the while putting it to practical opportunist use by ultimately concluding that it is thanks to the war originally started over Helen that the Hellenes were saved from the barbarians. In this way Isocrates uses the past to help explain the current situation of Athens and other Greek cities. Isocrates sets a paradigm example for how devotees of philosophy can engage a traditional subject in a creative way which demonstrates wisdom and serves the common good. Instead of arguing that Helen should be excused for being persuaded to leave Sparta with Paris by the power of the *logos*, Isocrates praises Helen's admirers, virtues, and deeds. He creates a narrative where the community's common beliefs are arranged through an informed understanding of past events that results in practical advice for the audience. Section 67-68 demonstrates how Isocrates combines an old subject and knowledge of history

with practical wisdom and current circumstances by choosing impressive examples:

> Apart from the arts and philosophic studies and all the other benefits which one might attribute to her and to the Trojan War, we should be justified in considering that it is owing to Helen that we are not the slaves of the barbarians. For we shall find that it was because of her that the Greeks became united in harmonious accord and organized a common expedition against the barbarians, and that it was then for the time that Europe set up a trophy of victory over Asia; and in consequence, we experienced a change so great that, although in former times any barbarians who were in misfortune presumed to be rulers over the Greek cities (for example, Danaus, an exile from Egypt, occupied Argos, Cadmus of Sidon became king of Thebes, the Carians colonized the islands, and Pelops, son of Tantalus, became master of all the Peloponnese), yet after that war our race expanded so greatly that it took from the barbarians great cities and much territory.

Isocrates seizes the opportunity (*kairos*) of praising Helen to further his political goal of uniting Hellenes against the barbarians. In this text, Isocrates presents his audience with a history that points to a previously united Hellas and the great events which resulted from this union. This is no speech on the paradoxical nature of reality, nor a courtroom style defense of Helen's conduct; rather, it is an oration that creatively uses eloquent personal style to apply past examples in support of a practical goal that benefits the city at an opportune time (*kairos*).

The second example of creative oration comes from the *Panegyricus* where Isocrates reinvents Pericles' famous presentation of Athens as the school of Hellas from Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* (Book II, 39.1). Pericles uses

the notion of Athens as the centre for education to show the difference between Spartans and Athenians:

> We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger.

Isocrates takes this old comparison and uses it in support of his pan-Hellenic ideals. He does not merely repeat Pericles, but utilizes this point of Athenian pride to make the case that Hellas ought to form an alliance against the barbarians. Isocrates argues that because Greeks were influenced by Athenian education, Hellas has more Athenian culture than it may have realized and hence, more in common. He uses the image of Athens as a school to characterize it as a leader and educator, not a harsh authority that will be a tyrant over Hellas. In section 50 (*Panegyricus*), Isocrates writes,

> And so far has our city distanced the rest of mankind in thought and in speech that her pupils have become the teachers of the rest of the world; and she has brought it about that the name "Hellenes" suggests no longer a race but an intelligence, and that the title "Hellenes" is applied rather to those who share our culture than to those who share a common blood.

Isocrates is able to use the sound conjectures of great deliberators in a creative way to ground new, less stable, *doxai* in the present.

In the *Antidosis*, Isocrates says that speakers are to

> select from all the actions of men which bear upon his subject those examples which are most

> illustrious and most edifying; and, having habituated himself to contemplate and appraise such examples, he will feel their influence not only in the preparation of a given discourse but in all the actions of his life. (277)

Isocrates is implying that character cannot flourish when a student is restricted to generic argument strategies and litigious expertise. Those composing a speech need to be directed in their creative application of knowledge, choosing examples they find best for a situation. Habituating oneself to think about examples inculcates discipline of thought and reflection before choice, which spills over and benefits one's personal life. Isocrates exercises a kind of deliberation in his texts that suits human affairs and decision. This is the same sort of deliberation we practice in our everyday affairs: we draw from experience to minimize luck in our decisions. Hence, there is a direct contribution studying philosophy can make to the personal lives of its devotees.

III.4 Eloquence and Wisdom: Expression as the Completion of Opinion

The acquisition of eloquent speech is necessary to formulate conjectures and maximize their usefulness by persuading others to act upon them. A point taken from M. Merleau Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* underscores Isocrates' stress on studying words. For the French phenomenologist, thought and speech are interinvolved: sense is held within words and words are the external existence of sense (p. 211). According to Merleau-Ponty, thought requires expression for completion. He supports this claim by reminding us that even the most familiar is indeterminate until it is named. The denomination of objects does not follow upon recognition; rather, denomination *is* recognition. Likewise,

authors do not write so as to have a record of what may be forgotten, but to complete a thought in the act of thinking. 'Pure thought' (thought without words) is unconsciousness (p. 206).

Taking our expressions to be the completion of thought, it is easier to understand Isocrates when he says that the power to speak well (*legein*) is taken as the surest index (*megiston sêmeion*) of a sound understanding (*phronein*) (*Nicocles* 7 and repeated in *Antidosis* 255). Cultivating eloquence is the cultivation of *phronêsis,* since studying words expands a speaker's repertoire in kinds of discourse and improves the ability to discern what aspects of the past are relevant for grounding speech in a particular circumstance. Eloquence (*eu legein*) and wisdom (*phronein*) were the goals of Isocrates' instruction, as he says in his *Antidosis* (277). It is Isocrates' emphasis on the link between fine speech and wisdom in the form of good judgment - combining practicality with reasoning from the past - which is to keep orators in check. Eloquence is to be used in concieving "the right sentiments about [the deeds of the past] in each instance, and to set them forth in finished phrase" which is the mark of the wise person (*Panegyricus* 9). After all, such persons do not merely produce pleasure for their audience, but are deemed to be "wiser and better and of more use to the world" than courtroom orators (*Antidosis* 47). Isocrates has accomplished the Greek goal of combining wisdom with beauty.

For Isocrates, philosophy is the means to attaining eloquence and wisdom. In one of his most celebrated passages, Isocrates defines the philosopher as one who "occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain

phronêsis", where *phronêsis* is understood as the ability to generally arrive at the best course of action or speech through the powers of conjecture (*Antidosis* 270-271). The wise person is one who is able to utilize his or her insight into the past when deliberating, and the philosopher is one who gains such *phronêsis* through study. Through utilizing experience, philosophy minimizes the role luck plays in the outcomes of human decisions. Comparing those who happen upon eloquence by nature with those who cultivate it through study, Isocrates says that "those who have gained this power by the study of philosophy and by the exercise of reason (*logismôi*) never speak without weighing their words, and so are less often in error as to a course of action" (*Antidosis* 292). Natural talent in speech may help one to be persuasive, but the type of discerning ability needed to be wise in deliberation calls for practice and study. Hence, Isocrates demands that teachers make their students apply the particular things they learn in practice because those "who most apply their minds to them and are able to discern the consequences which for the most part grow out of them, will most often meet these occasions in the right way" (*Antidosis* 184).

The business of philosophy is to study the way wise persons have acted in deliberative situations before. Philosophers seek to understand how 'wisdom' has panned out in the past. This is not a matter of analyzing their arguments in terms of rational demonstration, but seeking to apply their counsel in a way that practically helps one in life and benefits the community. It is an occasion to study the deliberating practices of great statesmen in the past. For, it was the great statesmen of the past who, giving most study to the art of words, brought their

city its blessings (*Antidosis* 231). Isocrates' philosopher is not one who leaves the world of *doxai* for a realm of enlightened absolute knowledge - according to Isocrates, such knowledge is impossible for humans to attain, and would be useless in a world constituted of particular circumstances. The wisdom they pursue does not lie in the capacity to understand the relation between forms and particulars; rather, it resides in their ability to contribute to the greatest good - that of the community - by sharing their judgments based on experience and insight. Discourse which drifts away from human action falls short of truly being philosophical because it lacks the concern real wisdom has for practical affairs and the human condition.

III.5 Conclusion

Like the sophists and Plato, Isocrates struggled to make sense of a world that is uncertain and abounding in opinions. However, Isocrates could not appeal to abstract definitions or forms to justify his claims because of his belief that absolute knowledge is not within the grasp of human beings. It would be unfair to group Isocrates with other sophists who developed a relativistic notion of what is right based on the subjectivity found in human experience. Isocrates did not consciously develop his style of discourse in opposition to Plato's idealism or the sophists' argumentation, but in the absence of a theoretical metaphysics, Isocrates' texts present an interesting alternative to absolute or individualistic reasoning.

Isocrates looks to the past in making judgments about the present and future. He turns to experience and insight into history to help in deliberating with others. The ability to aptly consult the past to choose expedient courses for the

future is presented as the sign of a wise person. Such wisdom is developed in a reciprocal relationship with fine speech - they inform each other since deliberation can have different styles of presentation. The wise person is not Isocrates' philosopher, per se; rather, philosophers are those who study to improve their conjecturing abilities in reasonableness and lofty subject matter. However, Isocrates does contend that the wisest are those who have studied how other great minds have deliberated in the past and how their judgments turned out; that is, the wisest are philosophers. And it is the realm of political discourse where this man is occupied because of the demands of practicality.

Chapter IV: Isocrates and the Argumentation movement

IV.1 Introduction

In this chapter I identify Isocrates' pragmatic and reasonable approach to argumentation with that of two modern thinkers who have worked hard on reestablishing standards of reason and argument which Isocrates makes use of. Firstly, I align Isocrates' general resistance to eristics, metaphysics, and Platonic philosophy with Stephen Toulmin's project of criticizing the notion that any argument can be put into formal terms. I argue that Toulmin's proposed model of argument shares a similar structure to that of Isocrates' arguments which make use of the past. Secondly, I propose that Perelman's notion that successful argumentation depends upon the response of the audience can be found operating in Isocrates' *Antidosis*. An important different is that Isocrates does not theorize this idea, but performs it.

Isocrates does not make any explicit theoretical comments on the nature of argument, logic, or rhetoric like those we see in Aristotle. Nor do we have a handbook from Isocrates like the one Tisias has been credited with authoring. However, Isocrates' writing does contain an implicit approach to argumentation, and Isocrates does make a number of comments on whether specific arguments should be acceptable. As Sullivan notes, Isocrates argues in a common language way which provides us with a window into how some people were composing attempts at persuasion before Aristotle (p. 459).

What I particularly want to draw out from Isocrates' texts on the topic of argumentation is how his approach emphasized the 'reasonable', as opposed to 'rational-formalistic' argument. Isocrates does not refer in his texts to analytic

arguments like that found in Aristotle or Euclid; however, he lived and composed during the same period that Aristotle's *Categories, Topics,* and *Sophistical Refutations* are dated. Isocrates may have also been aware of the method of philosophy developing in Plato's academy, where the phrase "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here" adorned the entrance. Yet Isocrates appears to ignore this trend in argumentation, instead choosing to argue as he sees fit for the matter at hand. I am using the term 'rational-deductive' to label that approach to philosophy where the connection between the parts of the argument must always be thought of as necessary. This is the pursuit of systematizing arguments such that every consequence can be deduced from basic principles and axioms, thus turning natural language arguments into a series of calculations and predictions which resembles mathematics.

Since arguments are what we use to defend and justify the beliefs we hold, they play a critical role in what we claim to know. As pioneering argumenation theorists such as Toulmin and Perelman have brought out, it is not only an unrealistic expectation to have rational-deductive arguments for all our beliefs, but as a matter of fact, people do not argue with each other in a way that can be fitted into a rational-deductive model. These famous thinkers share with Isocrates the conviction that when it comes to human activities and decision making, we must invoke practical standards of reasonableness which vary according to the issue at hand and the context in which they arise. Both Toulmin and Perelman portray a return to Isocrates' ways of thinking about reasoning and argument.

IV.2 Towards 'Reasonable' Argumentation

1958 witnessed the independent publication of two books that are now considered to be the most influential texts in the field called argumentation theory or sometimes informal logic: Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* and Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric*. In both of these classics the author(s) emphasize the judicial nature of argumentation and develop concepts that serve this purpose. Toulmin and Perelman stress the rhetorical aspects of argumentation and shift epistemology away from logical systems that leave no room for debate once the rules of the system are established. Although they are not opposing exactly the same position, they share a common concern. On the one hand, Perelman criticizes logical positivism for invoking general principles in a normative system that are not logically necessary and cannot be empirically verified (1963, p. 52). On the other hand, Toulmin challenges the mathematical conception of logic for turning the process of inferring into calculating (2003, p. 5). Toulmin and Perelman argue that the standards for argument vary from group to group and that a theory of argument needs to accommodate the particular context in which argumentation takes place. They turn to standards of reasoning which can allow for arguments that make use of the past to ground a claim about the present or future

IV.3.i Toulmin's Project

Toulmin writes in the preface to the updated edition of *The Uses of Argument* that his aim in the book was

> ...strictly philosophical: to criticize the assumption, made by most Anglo-American academic philosophers, that any significant argument can be

> put in formal terms: not just as a syllogism, since for Aristotle himself any inference can be called a 'syllogism' or 'linking of statements', but a rigidly demonstrative deduction of the kind to be found in Euclidean geometry. Thus was created the Platonic tradition that, some two millennia later, was revived by Rene Descartes. (vii)

In the fifth essay of the same book, Toulmin argues that the appearance of analytic arguments as being more rigorous (than substantial arguments) has led philosophers to "regard the standards of judgment appropriate to analytic arguments as superior to the standards we employ in practice in judging arguments from other fields" (p. 202). For Toulmin, analytic arguments are those where the backing for the warrant includes the information conveyed in the conclusion (p. 116), meaning that it is "impossible to accept the data and the backing and yet deny the conclusion" (p. 134). This development has resulted, according to Toulmin, in epistemologists working on the project of improving substantial arguments by making them analytic (p. 202), and in philosophers holding out analyticity as the "ideal standard" (p. 206). In Toulmin's characterization, all attempts to reduce arguments to analytical form, where "claims to knowledge will be seriously justifiable only when supporting information can be produced entailing the truth of the proposition claimed as known" (p. 202), have resulted in 'logical-gulfs' or 'type-jumps'[36] which leaves knowledge claims open to the skeptical challenges like those of David Hume.

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[36] Toulmin lists many examples of type-jumps: "We make assertions about the future, and back them by reference to data about the present and the past; we make assertions about the remote past, and back them by data about the present and recent past; we make general assertions about nature, and back them by the results of particular observations and experiments; we claim to know what other people are thinking and feeling, and justify these claims by citing the things that

In response to the epistemological problems Toulmin sees caused by the logicians' method of justificatory analysis, he presents his famous Data-Claim-Warrant model of argument that can be applied across fields without, supposedly, having to reduce arguments into an analytical-deductive form. Although Toulmin refers to his project as "analyzing the rational process" (2003, p. 7), and speaks about what is 'rational' in accordance with his model, he is moving away from the logicians' standards of rationality toward a more practical interpretation of arguments.

Returning to substantive argumentation, which allows for exceptions and rebuttals, constitutes what I call a return to reasonableness. This is a return to the realm of uncertain opinions, which can be made stronger and become reliable, not through logical demonstrations of necessity, but through debate and agreement supported by experience. It is to leave behind the situation Toulmin describes on page 235 where "Substantial arguments in natural science, ethics, and elsewhere have been severely handled and judged by philosophers, solely on the grounds of not being (what they never pretended to be) analytic." Toulmin reopens the door to the gray space which subjects like ethics and conjectures about the future seem to occupy. His work is a return to using normative standards in argumentation which are derived from practice, not a hypothetical set of principles used to arrive at a claim.

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they have written, said and done; and we put forward confident ethical claims, and back them by statements about our situation, about foreseeable consequences, and about the feelings and scruples of the other people concerned" (Toulmin, pp. 202-203).

IV.3.ii Isocrates and Toulmin on Argumentation

On page 35 of *The Uses of Argument*, Toulmin argues that to call something a 'possibility' is to claim that a given suggestion is worthy of "genuine consideration." A 'possibility' is more than the "absence of any demonstrable contradiction" which is the standpoint of mathematics. In some fields, it takes a lot more than an absence of contradiction for a suggestion to be considered 'possible.' He writes: "The criteria of possibility, on the other hand, are field-dependent...[it] will depend entirely on whether we are concerned with a problem in pure mathematics, a problem of team-selection, a problem in aesthetics, or what." Possibilities also range over a spectrum of likelihood within fields: "In every field of argument, there can be some very strong possibilities, other more less or less serious ones, and others again..." (p. 35). For something to be a real possibility, "it must 'have what it takes'" for it to be considered so "*in that context*" (p. 35). In some fields, possibility may be understood in statistical terms, but that does not mean that other uses of 'possible' or 'possibility' are unreasonable. "In considering...the different grounds on which something may have to be ruled out in the course of an argument, we found...nothing which led us to conclude that any special field of argument was intrinsically non-rational, or that the court of reason was somehow not competent to pronounce upon its problems" (p. 37). Toulmin does not believe that there are any grounds for deeming mathematics and similar matters as "intrinsically more open to rational assessment" than law, morals, or aesthetics (p. 37). This is why I have called Toulmin's philosophy a 'return to reasonableness': resisting the logician's axiomatic reduction of arguments, Toulmin makes it possible to reason again

about those problems and issues which contain 'logical gulfs' or 'type-jumps' because acceptable conclusions no longer need to be the results of timelessly valid logical demonstrations.

In using the phrase 'reasonableness', I do not want to imply that fields outside of mathematics are non-rational. After all, Toulmin wants to describe as 'rational' the process by which "claims in general can be argued for and settled" (p. 7). A return to reasonableness is hence a return to understanding the rational process in a way that is not strictly analytic, but takes into account contextual dimensions like fields and challenges from others. Returning to reasonableness is not an abandonment of analytic logic, but abandoning the position that the only acceptable form of reasoning philosophers ought to accept is that found in the analytic ideal. In fact, as Dr. Hitchcock has shared with me, Toulmin wanted to call his most recent book *Return to Reasonableness*. However, since he was unable to persuade the publisher to accept this title, the book has been published with the title *Return to Reason*. Toulmin identifies the source of the problem he's grappling with as reaching back to Plato: "It need not surprise us that Plato, the organizer and director of a notable school of geometers, should have found in geometrical proof a worthy ideal for all the sciences" (p. 229). This has resulted in giving "one an unbalanced idea of the nature of reasoning" (pp. 229-230).[37]

Isocrates did not subscribe to Plato's ideal of geometrical proof; instead he argues in a common-language style which includes what Toulmin calls 'temporal

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[37] Toulmin cites for this comment William Whewell's lecture *On The Influence of the History of Science upon Intellectual Education.*

gulfs' (p. 232), using the past and/or present to ground a prediction about the future. Isocrates also invokes what Toulmin calls 'type-transitions' when he appeals to historical events to ground moral claims. This means of arguing is what I refer to as 'reasonable', because claims are made good by what seems likely to be the case – what is deemed plausible by an audience (or by a challenger who must have the question 'what have you got to go on?' satisfied (p. 120)). Part of this reasonableness is qualifying the claim in terms of strength.

Isocrates does not argue that his analogies or appeals to precedent lead one to an absolute conclusion; rather, Isocrates qualifies his conclusions by saying they are eikotic – they are based on defeasible inferences or generalizations, which take the form of sign and analogistic inferences. Isocrates' *eikotic* qualifications can be seen as corresponding to the 'qualifier' component in Toulmin's model of argument. A 'qualifier' for Toulmin, is the degree of force a warrant confers on the conclusion being justified (p. 93). Some warrants authorize us to accept a claim necessarily, while others are more tentative, being qualified by 'probably' or 'presumably' (p. 93).

Not all of Isocrates' qualifications are ones of likelihood. In *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates argues that if a devotee of philosophy is to meet success, he or she must have the appropriate set of conditions. Failing to have any one of these, that one will necessarily (*anankê*) "fall below the mark" (18). In Isocrates' argumentation we can also find instances of what are called 'rebuttals' on the Toulmin model. Rebuttals are the "circumstances in which the general authority of the warrant would have to be set aside" (p. 94). A good example of Isocrates'

use of 'rebuttals' can be discerned from the reoccurring theme of limitation and natural aptitude in education. In *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates sets forth his view that proper training (as exemplified by his own courses no doubt) is that which helps students speak with a degree of grace and charm not found in others (18). This is to hold good *unless* a student lacks natural aptitude (*Against the Sophists* 14; *Antidosis* 186-188). A lack of natural ability for debate and speech is a circumstance in which Isocrates' warrant would have to be set aside. Here the warrant is something along the lines of 'Training in speech and debate from Isocrates will give that one a degree of grace and charm not found in others'.

While Isocrates' arguments could be made to fit into Toulmin's model, I do not think that this makes Isocrates a proto-Toulminian. Rather, Isocrates and Toulmin make use of a similar justificatory process that operates with argumentative terms that are contextually grounded – like common knowledge and satisfying audience demand. Isocrates withstood the Platonic trend of idealizing justification into geometrically styled demonstrative proof. Toulmin, on the other hand, found himself in a period when the Platonic ideal had captured the minds of philosophers, and so worked on reestablishing a 'rational' process that can be used in the gray space of opinions.[38]

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[38] In a conversation with Sheldon Hackney, Toulmin criticizes 'modernity' for "...the belief that rationality has to be understood in terms of formal argumentation, in terms of rather strict ideals of argument, which, in the ideal case, should become geometrical in the kind of way that Plato explains -- whether he advocates it or not is another matter -- in antiquity, and which Descartes makes explicit in his discourse." (http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1997-03/toulmin.html) Accessed May 21, 2006.

Isocrates' rhetorical means of arguing and establishing proof are more in line with the demand of reasonableness that is advocated by Toulmin, as opposed to analytic rationality. Isocrates' notion of practical wisdom and philosophy itself is tied up with the ability to produce practically useful conjectures. The very nature of this kind of activity is deliberation and weighing of claims – it is not the calculation required in the field of geometric-mathematical logic. For Isocrates, to turn philosophy into a discipline that is concerned with formal logical analysis is to end the practice of philosophy itself.

While Isocrates' arguments make use of the reasonableness that Toulmin's model offers, I believe that Isocrates would have been resistant to Toulmin's notion of a field-independent layout of argument, for two possible reasons. Firstly, Isocrates might found the practice of fitting every argument into one layout similar to the sophistic practice of teaching their students to apply firm rules to a creative process, since what works for one individual may not for another (*Against the Sophists*, 11-14). However, the pedagogical side of Isocrates may have been friendly to Toulmin's model as a useful tool for students to understand the justificatory structure when people make various claims. Since aspects of the layout's features can be found in Isocrates' argumentation, he would have more likely preferred it to the geometrical models growing out of Plato's Academy. The second point of resistance Isocrates may have had to Toulmin's model is that it focuses solely on the justificatory structure of arguments. Toulmin does not pretend that the model does otherwise, but since Isocrates believes that eloquence and style play important roles in persuasion, he

may have found that the Toulmin layout is an interpretation of argumentation which misses other factors that affect humans' beliefs. Wisdom is not constituted by knowledge alone – justified beliefs – but the ability to also put words into "striking character" (*Antidosis* 47-48; *Panegyricus* 9). For Isocrates, the best arguments are those which combine sound judgment with eloquent speech suitable for its audience.

IV.4.i Old Rhetoric and *The New Rhetoric*

The authors of *The New Rhetoric* have been engaged in a similar project as Toulmin in leading the movement away from formal logic in argumentative analysis. Perelman and Toulmin share the position that standards of reason can still be met when proof cannot take the form used by mathematics. Perelman originally set out in the 1940's to produce an account of justice from within the perspective of logical empiricism. He concluded that the values justifying juridical practice cannot themselves be justified by the standards of logic or empirical science. Unsatisfied with this conclusion, he set out to investigate "the manner in which the most diverse authors in all fields do in fact reason about values" (1979, p. 9). This research lead to what he called a rediscovery of rhetoric:

> We obtained results that neither of us had ever expected. Without either knowing or wishing it, we had rediscovered a part of Aristotelian logic that had long been forgotten or, at any rate, ignored and despised. It was the part dealing with dialectical reasoning, as distinguished from demonstrative reasoning-called by Aristotle analytics -which is analyzed at length in the *Rhetoric, Topics*, and *On Sophistical Refutations*. We call this new, or

> revived, branch of study, devoted to the analysis of informal reasoning, *the new rhetoric*. (p. 9)

Perelman writes that a "general theory of argumentation" should be "a rhetoric adaptable to all kinds of audiences, which would allow us to introduce along with the efficacy of the discourse, the quality of the audience as an element determining the value of an argumentation" (p. 58). Like Toulmin, Perelman is critical of limiting the study of argumentation to the study of analytic deduction because this makes reason seem "entirely incompetent in those areas which elude calculation" (1969, p. 3). I have made it clear in the previous section how this informal approach to argumentation is harmonious with Isocratic thought and his resistance to 'mere eristics'. What I would like to flesh out here is that Perelman's idea that a change in audience means a change in the appearance and quality of argumentation can be found performed by Isocrates in his speeches.

On page 5, the authors of *The New Rhetoric* describe their 'rapproachment' with antiquity as aiming "at emphasizing the fact that it is in terms of an audience that an argumentation develops" and later write that

> The orator indeed is obliged to adapt himself to his audience if he wishes to have any effect on it and we can easily understand that the discourse which is most efficacious on an incompetent audience is not necessarily that which would win the assent of a philosopher…A change in audience means a change in the appearance of the argumentation and, if the aim of argumentation is always to act effectively on minds, in order to make a judgment of its value we must not lose sight of the quality of the minds which the argument has succeeded in convincing. (p. 7)

The same sentiments can be found in Isocrates' compositions. For example, in *On the Peace* (5) Isocrates complains about how Athenians have led speakers to study

how to speak pleasingly, not what is beneficial to the common good. The authors of *The New Rhetoric* and the old rhetoric both contend that there is a dynamic relationship between the role of audience and speaker: speakers need to adapt to the demands of their audience to maximize persuasiveness.

Since the *Antidosis* involves the use of a phony court-room setting, it is a good composition to examine for analyzing Isocrates' use of argumentation and the connection argumentation has to audience. If Isocrates were defending himself in a real court-room setting, he most likely would have used a different speech. Isocrates' earlier forensic speeches make use of arguments from likelihood resembling those of Tisias and do not contain the reflective comments about his own work that we see in his later compositions. If the *Antidosis* were a record of an actual defense, we should expect to find Isocrates defending his refusal to exchange property as Athenian law dictates.[39] Instead, his *Antidosis* is a defense of his career and the right to label himself a philosopher. The audience of a typical Athenian court would probably not have appreciated Isocrates' way of defending himself by explaining what he deems philosophy to be and what the true advantage is.

Isocrates says himself at the beginning of his speech, "If the discourse which is now about to be read had been like the speeches which are produced either for the law-courts or oratorical display, I should not, I suppose, have

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[39] It was the duty of wealthy Athenian citizens to furnish triremes (ancient Greek warships that had three tiers of oars on each side) for the public service. This public duty was called a 'trierarchy'. If the *boulê* found a citizen to be a suitable candidate for a trierarchy, he could then attempt to avoid it by challenging someone he deems more wealthy to an *antidosis*. Isocrates is here the one challenged with an *antidosis*.

prefaced it by any explanation" (1). Isocrates claims that he failed to persuade the audience at his trial which was over the exchange of property on the question of a trierarchy. The *Antidosis* is not addressed to those jurors who found Isocrates guilty. Rather, he turns the subject from a private quarrel to questions about the common good – that which the best speeches aim at. Isocrates has chosen to address an audience that is of higher quality than that at an Athenian court trial, and in doing so adapts his speech to his ideal audience. This is no ordinary court defense for Isocrates. Like the practice in our time of 'appealing to a higher court' when an individual deems a given audience wrong in their verdict, Isocrates turns to a more contemplative audience who can take the time to meditate on and appreciate his claims. The audience he aims at persuading is one that will exist over a long period of time, since it is written, not delivered orally, and intended to preserve his reputation as an upright and philosophical thinker. This requires a speech "novel and different in character" (1) than speeches aimed at a typical forensic audience. Perhaps Isocrates used the line of defense found in the *Antidosis* at his real trial, but the jury failed to appreciate it. So, like Plato, he composed an apology that would be appreciated by a different audience – a better audience.

Isocrates does not explicitly argue that the best speech is that aimed at persuading the best audience. However, in the *Antidosis* Isocrates adapts his argumentation according to the audience he envisions will receive his speech, not the literal audience present were the *Antidosis* a real record of his trial. He does not invoke typical forensic discourse; rather, he steps up his speech so this new

audience can reach an accurate understanding of his career and the concepts important to it. Hamilton says of Isocrates, "He had a sense of his readers and of what they expected to hear about the past (p. 298). In Isocrates' adaptive performance we see that it is ultimately up to the audience to confer the value on a speech – sound argumentation is effective argumentation. And as van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Kruiger (1984) summarize the perspective found in Perelman's treatise on *The New Rhetoric*, "argumentation is effective when it obtains acceptance of the audience it was intended for" (p. 221). This is a fine example for argumentation theorists today, who are not trying to evaluate speech in an abstract, formal manner. Rather, valuable insight into an argumentation can be gained by keeping in mind the audience it was aimed at. This will help us appreciate that standards of reason depend upon the argumentative context and what humans accept.

IV.5 Conclusion: Isocrates - An exemplary figure for modern Argumentation Theorists

Isocrates' texts provide useful insight for argumentation. Isocrates' rejection of Plato's attempt to ground appearances on a transcendent reality and his effort to bring reason back down to the existence of people who live in a realm of opinion make him part of what Gary Madison refers to as the 'Counter Tradition'. The Counter Tradition is characterized by

> its refusal, consistently reiterated over the course of time, of the claims and pretensions of rationalism...The entire history of philosophy can indeed be considered to be constituted by two movements: there is the dominant current of rationalism and, within this current, a counterpart

> which attempts to bring man back to a more just appreciation of his powers. (2001, p. 293)

Isocrates' notion of philosophy and argumentation exhibit just that realistic appreciation of human powers that many today are searching for after experiencing disillusionment with rationalism and extreme relativism.

I argued that the current counter-tradition to rationalism in argumentation has been a return to reasonableness and a new appreciation for rhetoric. Philosophers like Toulmin and Perelman have developed new standards for good reasoning which are in line with argumentation as Isocrates practiced it. Their resistance to formal logic and emphasis on rhetorical concerns like audience and probability demonstrate the timeliness Isocrates' texts have for a modern reader. Isocrates' argumentation utilizes analogies and probabilities which would have been looked down upon by Plato, but can again enter the realm of practical philosophy.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to understand on what ground Isocrates can be referred to as a 'philosopher'. I argued that philosophy for Isocrates is a practice which aims at developing *phronêsis*. While anyone can produce *doxai* or choose a course of action that turns out to be beneficial once in a while, those with *phronêsis* are able to put forward *doxai* which can often be relied upon and should have practical benefits. However, Isocrates does concede that the wisest sometimes miss the most expedient course of action and do not always recommend what turns out to be best. This is important because for Isocrates *phronêsis* aims at practical goals. Practical goals include human affairs such as managing one's city and one's household well, as well as attaining a level of certainty appropriate for a situation.

One theme I stressed in this composition is Isocrates' preference for 'useful conjectures' over 'exact knowledge of the useless'. This opinion influences Isocrates' practical orientation in his notion of philosophy and his emphasis on practical wisdom. Isocrates states that a philosopher is one who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain the kind of insight which will allow him by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course. Thus, it is the man of opinion, *ho doxastikos*, that Isocrates alone calls the philosopher.[40]

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[40] I am using the masculine pronoun here because the Greek text contains masculine pronouns.

Isocrates' position that philosophers cannot transcend the realm of opinions places him in opposition to Plato, who contended that philosophy is about getting behind mere opinion to an unchanging truth. Isocrates and Plato both believed that *doxai* can be improved through education and be grounded so as to improve their epistemic status. But Isocrates did not seek to eliminate the role chance plays in successful conjectures; rather, those with *phronêsis* minimize the influence of chance as the context demands. Plato, on the other hand, wanted to secure *doxai* with dialectical reasoning – which I argued is idealized in the form of geometric proofs.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato's Socrates implies that the best arguments from likelihood and plausibility will be those informed by the truth of the matter, which can be discovered through dialectical methods. Those who do not know the truth merely have a 'knack' for saying what their audience deems likely. Isocrates has a different approach to argumentation that is not founded on Platonic idealism yet does not rely on mere 'knack'. The basis of his argumentation is using the past to provide insight on the present and what may happen in the future. Isocrates grounds his appeals to what is likely to occur by referring to analogous cases in the past. This assumes of course that the past is a reliable guide for the future – the very claim which David Hume says that strict logical analysis cannot support.

Isocrates aligns *phronêsis* with using the past to ground inferences about what will happen. Practical wisdom also knows the limits of such inferences. Isocrates' frequent use of qualifiers demonstrates his belief that *eikotic* arguments only provide tentative conclusions. But this is no weak point in Isocratean

conventional arguments one could expect in a forensic speech, Isocrates presents a speech that is "novel and different in character." He adapts his speech according to who the actual audience will be: people who can read ancient Greek and have the resources to reflect on Isocrates' arguments. Perelman and Isocrates both find argumentation to be effective when the intended audience accepts it.

As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write in *The New Rhetoric* (p. 514): "argumentation which is neither necessary nor arbitrary is needed to create a space where reasonable choice can be exercised. In this space, humans are free to debate possibilities and weigh consequences." Isocrates' political orientation and 'informal' argumentation may place him outside of the traditional platonic definition of philosophy; however, the modern shift towards practical standards of reasoning reintroduces a place for Isocratean philosophizing that aims at benefiting the common good.

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