

Public Reasoning and the Role of *Logos* in Gorgias and Aristotle

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Abstract

This paper focusses on the role of public speech in the process of political deliberation and collective decision-making. Specifically, it pays attention to Gorgias and Aristotle's reflection on the role of persuasive *logos* in the domain of public reasoning. The aim of this paper is to examine the common features of Gorgias and Aristotle's understanding of the human condition and the ways of managing it in the context of social life.

Gorgias' fundamental contribution to this topic can be seen in his *Encomium of Helen*, a pioneering argument on the power of *logos* within the human world. On this basis, this paper clarifies the theoretical background of Gorgianic anthropology and highlights its sensitivity to the situational framework of human decision-making. Recognising the essential ambiguity of the human situation in the absence of an absolute measure of human action, sophistry advocates techniques of immanently controlling the world and recognises the key role of rhetoric communication in this process. In this context, Gorgias' in-depth analysis reveals the power of speech in manifesting the relevant aspects of the situation, grasping current options and encouraging a proper response on the level of deeds.

Aristotle can be compared with Gorgias precisely with respect to their shared sensitivity for the situational character of human deliberation and decision-making. Aristotle's detailed account of individual deliberation in the varying constellations of particular situations (*EN* III 2-3) at the same time provides a suitable model for public deliberation. On the level of public reasoning, the role of *logos* becomes prominent again. The *logos* is effective within the contingent world where the future is uncertain and open to various possibilities. Grasping the optimum while respecting all unique circumstances, including the proper time for collective action that the community should take, defines the public debate. In this context, this paper examines Aristotle's concept of deliberative rhetoric (*Rhet.* I 3-4). Special emphasis is placed on the fact that in the case of deliberative speech (unlike forensic speech), Aristotle admits using non-argumentative procedures such as appealing to one's emotions, etc. His approach suggests that he does not understand political deliberation as an impartial assessment of neutral options, but as an engaged discussion about shared goals and the common good, which is influenced by the emotional attitudes of the interested members of the political community. For Aristotle, public reasoning remains a contest for attention and trust. Exploring these aspects allows evaluating Aristotle's contribution to managing political reality through persuasive speech.

Keywords: Gorgias, Aristotle, *Logos*, *Doxa*, Public reasoning, Deliberation, Persuasion

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en el papel del discurso público en el proceso de deliberación política y aprobación de decisiones colectivas. En concreto, se presta atención a la reflexión de Gorgias y Aristóteles sobre el papel del *logos* persuasivo en el dominio del razonamiento público. El objetivo de este trabajo es examinar los rasgos comunes del análisis de Gorgias y Aristóteles sobre la condición humana y las formas de gestionarla en el contexto de la vida social.

La contribución fundamental de Gorgias sobre este tema se puede apreciar en su *Encomio de Helena*, un argumento pionero sobre el poder del *logos* dentro del mundo humano. Sobre esa base, en este artículo se aclara el trasfondo teórico de la antropología del sofista y se destaca su sensibilidad en el marco situacional de la toma de decisiones. Reconociendo la ambigüedad esencial de la condición humana en ausencia de una medida absoluta de su acción, la sofística aboga por técnicas de control inmanente del mundo y reconoce el papel clave de la comunicación retórica en este proceso. En dicho contexto, el análisis en profundidad de Gorgias revela el poder del habla para manifestar los aspectos relevantes de cualquier situación, captar las opciones actuales y alentar una respuesta adecuada en el nivel de los hechos.

Aristóteles puede compararse con Gorgias precisamente con respecto a su sensibilidad compartida por el carácter situacional de la deliberación y la toma de decisiones humanas. La detallada descripción aristotélica de la deliberación individual en las diversas constelaciones de situaciones particulares (*EN III, 2-3*) proporciona al mismo tiempo un modelo adecuado para la deliberación pública. En el nivel del razonamiento público, el papel del *logos* vuelve a ser prominente. El *logos* es efectivo dentro del mundo contingente, donde el futuro es incierto y abierto a varias posibilidades. Captar lo óptimo respetando todas las circunstancias únicas, incluido el momento adecuado para la acción colectiva que la comunidad debe concretar, define el debate público. En dicho contexto, el artículo examina el concepto aristotélico de retórica deliberativa (*Rhet. I 3-4*), haciendo especial hincapié en que en el caso del discurso deliberativo (a diferencia del discurso forense), Aristóteles admite utilizar procedimientos no argumentativos como la apelación a las emociones, etc. Según su planteamiento, la deliberación política no se entiende como una valoración imparcial de opciones neutrales, sino como una discusión comprometida sobre objetivos compartidos y el bien común, que está influida por las actitudes emocionales de los miembros interesados de la comunidad política. Para Aristóteles, el razonamiento público sigue siendo un concurso de atención y confianza. Explorar estos aspectos permite evaluar la contribución de Aristóteles al manejo de la realidad política a través del discurso persuasivo.

Palabras clave: Gorgias, Aristóteles, *Logos*, *Doxa*, Razonamiento público, Deliberación, Persuasión

This presentation concerns the role of *logos* in the public sphere. Specifically, it focuses on the role of public speech in the process of political deliberation and collective decision-making. For this purpose, two authors have been chosen - Gorgias and Aristotle, who both pay close attention to these processes and offer substantial insight into the role of persuasive *logos* in the domain of public reasoning. My aim is to examine how their reflection is embedded in their overall understanding of the human condition and the common features that can be traced in their conceptions. Here, a shared sensitivity for the situational character of human deliberation and decision-making will be stressed.

I.

Gorgias is an author whose extant work represents the first theoretical treatise on the issue of speech. His fundamental contribution to this topic is the *Encomium of Helen*, a pioneering argument on the persuasive power of *logos*. I assume this issue to be the central theme of the treatise¹. The analysis of the nature of *logos*, occupying roughly the middle third of the text, has a complex internal structure. In gradual steps, Gorgias first reveals the character of *logos* and then the character of a human mind affected by the *logos*. Consequently, from this double perspective, emerges the role of *logos* in the social world.

Logos: a mighty master

Gorgias starts his argument with a spectacular statement about *logos* as an autonomous power² which is imperceptible in its substance but strong in its effects (*Hel.* 8):

Speech (*logos*) is a mighty master, and achieves the most divine feats with the smallest and least evident body³.

The explicit claim about the somatic character of speech (*smikrotatō sōmati kai afanestatō*) indicates that Gorgias does not consider language in terms of representational properties. For him, speech is a force in its own right - it does not represent reality, i.e. it does not simply mirror objects perceived in the world, rather it brings things to light, and in this sense constitutes what is recognized as a credible form of reality. This process involves emphasizing the relevant aspects of a particular situation, which in turn shapes the reality and lets it appear in a certain light before

¹ Cf. BARNEY (2017), 4. Barney summarizes the characteristics of the *Encomium of Helen* as follows: «So the *Helen* presents a bold thesis about the nature of language and persuasion, nested within a valid and disturbing argument about moral responsibility, wrapped up in a spectacularly self-undermining showpiece of rhetorical display» (*ibidem*, 24).

² The autonomy of speech is specified by Charles P. Segal, following Rosenmeyer: «Hence the *logos*, free from a metaphysical correspondence with a higher 'reality', can be treated as an art, a *techne*, where its distortive nature is, if anything, an asset to be exploited in the interests of *peitho*, a tool for persuasion, without any necessary correlations with the world of Being. Gorgias, then, as Rosenmeyer has well remarked, has discovered 'the autonomy of speech'; for him 'speech is not a reflection of things, not a mere tool or slave of description, but ... it is its own master.' The *logos* is thus as free from the exigencies of mimetic adherence to physical reality (*apate* is, in fact, an important part of the art of the *logos*) as from an instrumental function in a philosophical schematization of a metaphysical reality» (SEGAL, 1962, 110).

³ Λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν, ὃς σμικροτάτῳ σώματι καὶ ἀφανεστάτῳ θειότατα ἔργα ἀποτελεῖ. Translations from the *Encomium of Helen* are from GAGARIN-WOODRUFF (1995).

the eyes of others. Such shaping seeks to obtain public consent and bring about a change of opinion⁴.

This general outline is carefully elaborated in the text of the *Encomium*. Gorgias opens his demonstration of the power of *logos* by reference to poetry. Gorgias himself uses poetic techniques, and by adopting a poetic framework for the outline of speech functions, he suggests significant parallels between the effects of poetry and the effects of rhetorical speech in the sphere of political decision-making.

These parallels are based on the traditional concept of poetry performance: poetry visualizes the essential characteristics of persons and highlights relevant aspects of deeds and situations. Through the utterance of praise and blame, it shapes the contours of human characters and actions and grants them a proper value. Gorgias recalls this evaluation practice in his initial declaration (*Hel.* 1):

For a city the adornment (*kosmos*) is abundance of good men, for a body beauty, for a soul wisdom, for an action *arete*, and for a speech truth; and the opposites of these are indecorous. A man, woman, speech, deed, city or action that is worthy of praise should be honored with acclaim, but the unworthy should be branded with blame. For it is equally error and ignorance to blame the praiseworthy and praise the blameworthy⁵.

Appropriate praise brings deeds and events to completion. It is not a matter of an additional embellishment, but rather a matter of revealing the reality in its fullness. The nature of events, in itself indistinct, is revealed in sharp contours only through poetic rendering. Poetic narration focalises characters and deeds and lets them stand out from the indifferent mass of events. Through utterance and poetic performance, they obtain full clarity: they are illuminated in bright light, so they clearly stand out in their prominence. In this way, poetic speech brings events to accomplishment.

⁴ SEGAL (1962), 109 emphasizes the character of *logos* as a medium: «Gorgias, however, does not draw the conclusion that communication is impossible, but rather defines more precisely the nature of this communication and its limitations. It occurs primarily through the *logos*, the word or language. Through language men communicate not the reality of things, but only words: 'For that by which we impart information is *logos*, but *logos* is not the things that are or that exist; we do not then impart to others the things that exist, but only *logos*, which is other than the things that exist' (B3, Sext., *Adv. Math.* 7.84). Gorgias, in other words, is aware of the peculiar nature of the communicatory medium *qua* medium. Communication itself, therefore, is a special area of human activity, an invention of society based upon prearranged conventions, and must inevitably involve distortions and rearrangements of the message. There is no such thing as a purely objective transmission of reality».

⁵ Κόσμος πόλει μὲν εὐανδρία, σώματι δὲ κάλλος, ψυχῇ δὲ σοφία, πράγματι δὲ ἀρετή, λόγῳ δὲ ἀλήθεια· τὰ δὲ ἐναντία τούτων ἀκοσμία. ἄνδρα δὲ καὶ γυναῖκα καὶ λόγον καὶ ἔργον καὶ πόλιν καὶ πρᾶγμα χρῆ τὸ μὲν ἄξιον ἐπαίνου ἐπαίνῳ τιμᾶν, τῷ δὲ ἀναξίῳ μῶμον ἐπιθεῖναι· ἴση γὰρ ἄμαρτία καὶ ἄμαθια μέμφεσθαι τε τὰ ἐπαινετὰ καὶ ἐπαινεῖν τὰ μωμητὰ.

This is well known in the case of heroic glory when the *kleos* of a hero is spread by a singer who imparts immortal memory to the hero and brings his life and deeds to completeness⁶. Such a sharp visualization is inherent not only in the epic but also in the drama that portrays the heroic fates and makes apparent the unseen web of their causes and consequences. The need for visualization through speech is equally evident in the case of hymn poetry celebrating gods. Divine nature, often elusive, can be captured and revealed with maximum clarity in a song of praise. On the largest scale, the revelation of reality is entrusted to Muses that complete the world with their glorious singing. Here, too, the structure of the entire world is not only established during the cosmogonic process but also made manifest through celebrating speech⁷. We will see that Gorgias' concept of *logos* supposes the similar visualizing effect of rhetorical speech which makes the confusing world of situations more transparent.

In line with this traditional background, Gorgias proceeds to emphasize the emotional effects of speech (*Hel.* 9):

To its listeners poetry brings a fearful shuddering, a tearful pity, and a grieving desire, while through its words the soul feels its own feelings for good and bad fortune in the affairs and lives of others⁸.

The intense emotional response of the audience during a poetic performance is well attested⁹. Emotional attunement will prove necessary for the functioning of social

⁶ Cf. Odysseus' anxiety of drowning in the wild waves of a sea storm without a memory mediated by a glorious song of a poet (Hom. *Od.* V 308-312). The passage clearly contrasts heroic death celebrated by a poet and a woefully anonymous end without glory.

⁷ In this sense, the song of the Muses crowns and completes the cosmogonic process. Cf. Hes. *Theog.* 1-115. For later evidence cf. Aelius Aristides, *Orat.* 45, 106: Πίνδαρος δὲ τοσαύτην ὑπερβολὴν ἐποίησατο ὥστε ἐν Διὸς γάμῳ καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτοὺς φησὶν ἐρομένου τοῦ Διὸς εἶ του δέοιτο αἰτήσαι ποιήσασθαι τινὰς αὐτῶν θεοὺς, οἵτινες τὰ μεγάλα ταῦτ' ἔργα καὶ πᾶσάν γε δὴ τὴν ἐκείνου κατασκευὴν κατακοσμήσουσι λόγοις καὶ μουσικῇ. Cf. Philo of Alexandria, *De plant.* 127-130.

⁸ Ἦς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολὺδακρυς καὶ πρόθος φιλοπενθήης, ἐπ' ἄλλοτριῶν τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἴδιόν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἡ ψυχὴ. Regarding political impact of emotional involvement and empathy, OESTERREICH (1994) 72 points out: «Das Pathos, das - angesichts des tragischen Geschehens - die Zuhörer mit Schrecken erfüllt, sie erschauern läßt, sie zu Tränen rührt und in ihnen wehmütiges Verlangen erweckt, einigt die Menschen, indem es sie in eine gemeinschaftliche seelische Befindlichkeit versetzt. Sie gewinnen - herausgerissen aus der rationalen Distanz zum Dargestellten - die gemeinsame Fähigkeit, sich mit dem fremden Schicksal zu identifizieren. Das durch pathetische Rede erweckte Mitleiden setzt das *principium individuationis* außer Kraft. Die Zuschauer werden zu einer ungetrennten Erlebnisgemeinschaft, in der das fremde Leiden als das eigene durchlebt wird. Das erschütternde Pathos führt somit zu einer politischen Gesinnung: der empathischen Anteilnahme des Bürgers am Schicksal des anderen, in der der ansonsten grenzenlose Egoismus des Einzelnen aufgehoben ist».

⁹ Hom. *Od.* VIII 521-531; cf. Pl. *Ion* 535d-e.

communication in the mode of persuasion. As Charles Segal puts it: «the fully effective impact of *peitho* involves the emotional participation of the audience, which is made possible by and takes place through the aesthetic pleasure of *terpsis*»¹⁰. It is important that emotional involvement allows openness to the presented message so that the speech affects its listeners in a benevolent manner¹¹. Gorgias shows that speech works gently (unlike *ananke* and *bia*) and here he can also build on tradition, namely, on a claim of an essentially benevolent character of the public speech of a judge clearly expressed in the proem of Hesiod's *Theogony*¹². However, in its gentleness, speech has effects comparable to physical violence. It has an immediate impact on soul analogous to the effect of drugs on the body (*Hel.* 14):

The power of speech has the same effect on the disposition of the soul as the disposition of drugs on the nature of bodies. Just as different drugs draw forth different humors from the body - some putting a stop to disease, others to life - so too with words: some cause pain, others joy, some strike fear, some stir the audience to boldness, some benumb and bewitch the soul with evil persuasion¹³.

¹⁰ SEGAL (1962), 122.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 122: «There is, however, the suggestion of greater complexity in Gorgias' conception of *peitho*, that the process is not simply the conquest of a weaker subject by a stronger force, but that the persuaded is himself an accomplice to the act of persuasion, that he allows himself to be persuaded, and that persuasion is thus inseparably connected with the emotions aroused by the aesthetic process».

¹² Hes. *Theog.* 81-103: «Whomever of heaven-nourished princes the daughters of great Zeus honor and behold at his birth, they pour sweet dew upon his tongue, and from his lips flow gracious words. All the people [85] look towards him while he settles causes with true judgements: and he, speaking surely, would soon make wise end even of a great quarrel; for therefore are there princes wise in heart, because when the people are being misguided in their assembly, they set right the matter again [90] with ease, persuading them with gentle words. And when he passes through a gathering, they greet him as a god with gentle reverence, and he is conspicuous amongst the assembled: such is the holy gift of the Muses to men. For it is through the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that [95] there are singers and harpers upon the earth; but princes are of Zeus, and happy is he whom the Muses love: sweet flows speech from his mouth. For although a man has sorrow and grief in his newly-troubled soul and lives in dread because his heart is distressed, yet, when a singer, [100] the servant of the Muses, chants the glorious deeds of men of old and the blessed gods who inhabit Olympus, at once he forgets his heaviness and remembers not his sorrows at all; but the gifts of the goddesses soon turn him away from these». English translation is from EVELYN-WHITE (1914).

¹³ Τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον ἔχει ἢ τε τοῦ λόγου δύναμις πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς τάξιν ἢ τε τῶν φαρμάκων τάξεις πρὸς τὴν τῶν σωμάτων φύσιν. ὥσπερ γὰρ τῶν φαρμάκων ἄλλους ἄλλα χυμούς ἐκ τοῦ σώματος ἐξάγει, καὶ τὰ μὲν νόσου τὰ δὲ βίου παύει, οὕτως καὶ τῶν λόγων οἱ μὲν ἐλύπησαν, οἱ δὲ ἔτερψαν, οἱ δὲ ἐφόβησαν, οἱ δὲ εἰς θάρσος κατέστησαν τοὺς ἀκούοντας, οἱ δὲ πειθοῖ τινι κακῇ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐφαρμάκευσαν καὶ ἐξεγοήτευσαν.

Doxa

The explanatory basis for the irresistible impact of speech on the human mind is provided by Gorgias' anthropological concept. In his view, human beings are deprived of the certainty of knowledge¹⁴. Their lives are inscribed in a temporal structure whose understanding is definitely beyond their reach (*Hel.* 11):

[...] as it is, to remember the past, to examine the present, or to prophesy the future is not easy; and so most men on most subjects make opinion (*doxa*) an adviser to their minds. But opinion is perilous and uncertain, and brings those who use it to perilous and uncertain good fortune¹⁵.

Humans are exposed to a confusing world of situations in which it is difficult to navigate. They have no firm external measure regulating their action, and their epistemic reliance on *doxa* causes their minds to fluctuate in an unstable stream of events. Nevertheless, humans are not completely lost in this uncertainty and are able to navigate their lives with a certain degree of meaningfulness. They can follow an immanent measure through which they can flexibly assess situations and circumstances in which they find themselves. Such an assessment is always set in a particular situation and is guided by the view of an internally interested agent, not by an external view of an impartial observer. This ability is indicated by Protagoras' crucial statement about human measure (B1):

A human being is measure of all things, of those things that are, that they are, and of those things that are not, that they are not¹⁶.

Read in a political context, the measured things are not entities existing *per se*, but human affairs that affect us fundamentally¹⁷. The human measure related to these affairs is not given once and for all but must be found again and again in changing

¹⁴ Here, we can assume an echo of archaic anthropology reflected in lyric poetry and considering man as ignorant and erring.

¹⁵ Νῦν δὲ οὔτε μνησθῆναι τὸ παροϊχόμενον οὔτε σκέψασθαι τὸ παρὸν οὔτε μαντεύσασθαι τὸ μέλλον εὐπόρως ἔχει· ὥστε περὶ τῶν πλείστων οἱ πλείστοι τὴν δόξαν σύμβουλον τῇ ψυχῇ παρέχονται. ἡ δὲ δόξα σφαλερὰ καὶ ἀβέβαιος οὔσα σφαλεραῖς καὶ ἀβεβαίοις εὐτυχίαις περιβάλλει τοὺς αὐτῇ χρωμένους.

¹⁶ Addressing notorious problems with translation, SCHIAPPA (2013), 121 offers this alternative to the standard translation: «Of everything and anything the measure [truly-is] human(ity): of that which is, that it is the case; of that which is not, that it is not the case».

¹⁷ Cf. SCHIAPPA (2013), 116: «It may have been that Protagoras used the world *chrēmata* because it implies things that one uses or needs, such as goods or property, which derive their status of things from their relationship to humans».

circumstances. In this way, the fluctuating human mind, dependent on fragile opinion, gains some clues for its orientation.

Persuasive logos in the political context

Recognizing the doxastic character of human life and the absence of an absolute measure of human action, sophistry advocates techniques of immanently controlling the world. Here, the immanent measure of the human situation aims at what is credible at the moment and what can bring about general agreement and consensus of citizens¹⁸. In a contingent world, where the state of affairs alone does not allow reaching a clear decision on an issue, public reasoning and decision-making are guided by probability (*eikos*). If decisive proof is lacking, the assessment of a situation depends on «criteria of comparison with what the person or persons called upon to judge take to be the case or the state of affairs generally. Their criteria are based on experience and commonly accepted knowledge about human behaviour, and the expectations they have on the basis of this»¹⁹. Given these circumstances, sophistry recognises the key role of rhetoric communication in the process of public reasoning²⁰. Gorgias himself emphasizes that speech acts in the mode of persuasion (*Hel.* 13):

[...] persuasion, when added to speech, indeed molds the mind as it wishes²¹.

Effective shaping and changing of attitudes require rhetorical ability which can capture the strong and persuasive aspects of the situation and present this situation to others in the light of momentary expectations and current options. This visualization takes place within the public sphere and the speaker's role is to make manifest what would otherwise remain unseen without the power of public utterance. Gorgias claims (DK 76 (82) B 26):

Being is invisible (*aphanes*) if it does not meet with seeming (*dokein*), and seeming is weak if it does not meet with being.

¹⁸ OESTERREICH (1994), 64.

¹⁹ BONS (2007), 41-42.

²⁰ As OESTERREICH (1994), 64 puts it: «Die Bedeutung der Rhetorik für die Sophistik ergibt sich aus der Grundeinsicht, daß das immanente Maß der menschlichen Situation den Charakter des jeweils Glaubwürdigen besitzt, das allgemeine Zustimmung und Konsens der Bürgerschaft zu bewirken vermag».

²¹ [...] ἡ πειθῶ προσιούσα τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐτυπώσατο ὅπως ἐβούλετο. On the issue of persuasion as a form of deception see VERDENIUS (1981).

The chiasmic structure of the fragment indicates that “reality” is in itself inaccessible until it becomes apparent through revealing speech, but on the other hand, this speech must not be entirely arbitrary - it must point to the convincing aspect of a particular situation that can gain general consent²². Thus, the speaker demonstrates a particular situation from a certain perspective with which the citizens are willing to identify and which they accept with a corresponding mental response in the form of hope, fear, anger, trust, etc. This emotional attitude is subsequently embodied in a particular action (*Hel.* 12):

A speech persuaded a soul that was persuaded, and forced it to be persuaded by what was said and to consent to what was done²³.

In this way, the convincing speech is able to organize a confusing world of diverse possibilities according to a situational measure. Technical control of the power of *logos* is able to put an end to hesitation, guide the fluctuating human minds in a preferred direction and direct the plurality of diverse human opinions towards a shared goal, established at the intersection of momentary circumstances²⁴. These are the claims of Gorgianic rhetoric.

II

Now, on what basis can we compare Gorgias with Aristotle? Aristotle’s general attitude toward sophists is notoriously critical. He mentions those commonly regarded as sophists repeatedly in his works²⁵. For example, in *On Sophistical Refutations*, he defines sophistic art as «a skill that appears to be such, but is not real” and the sophist as “someone who makes money from such apparent, but unreal skill» (165a 21-23). A crucial characteristic of Aristotle’s sophist thus seems to be pretentiousness.

²² Cf. SEGAL (1962), 113: «The discovery of ‘reality’ for men involves a necessary subjective element of ‘seeming’; and here Gorgias indicates his awareness of the importance of the medium of perception in the area of epistemology, parallel to the intermediate function of the logos in communication. In neither case do men transcend the medium and reach ‘pure’ Being, but their knowledge of the world inevitably contains an admixture of their own perceptual energies and psychological and linguistic patterns. It is on this basis that the rhetor tries to change their view of reality by manipulating these variable patterns of appearance and language».

²³ Λόγος γὰρ ψυχὴν ὁ πείσας, ἦν ἔπεισεν, ἠνάγκασε καὶ πιθέσθαι τοῖς λεγομένοις καὶ συναινέσαι τοῖς ποιουμένοις.

²⁴ In this context, we may consider the analogy between Helen and *logos* suggested in the *Encomium of Helen*: by one body, they both bring together many (bodies) of men to perform great deeds (*Hel.* 4).

²⁵ Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1004b 17-26; *EN* 1164a 22-32; *EE* 1218b 22-24; *Pol.* 1307b 36. Numerous references are in the *Organon* (for a description of sophistic practice see for example *Top.* 111b 32-33; *Soph. el.* 172b 25-26).

However, as Joachim Classen has shown, Aristotle's attitude toward sophists is not entirely negative and his assessment of individual sophists is more subtle²⁶. Aristotle treats with respect the older sophists such as Protagoras and Gorgias and, although he argues with them, he never ridicules or ignores them, but takes them seriously²⁷. Gorgias himself is often mentioned in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* - primarily as a rhetorician, not a sophist - and on this ground, Aristotle often refers to him approvingly or without explicit criticism²⁸. With this clarification, I address the announced search of common features in Gorgias' and Aristotle's concept of the role of *logos* in the public sphere.

Individual and public deliberation

Aristotle can be compared with Gorgias precisely with respect to their shared sensitivity for the situational character of human deliberation and decision-making. This is indicated by Aristotle's analysis of the process of deliberation and choice, carefully elaborated in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, the focus is primarily on individual deliberation, but most of Aristotle's observations apply to political deliberation as well.

Aristotle's analysis is based on the assumption of contingency²⁹: human action takes place in a domain where the state of affairs is variable, and it is this radical openness of the world where things can be otherwise (*allôs echein*)³⁰, which leaves room for deliberation. Aristotle starts his analysis of deliberation by defining its scope. His initial demarcation is negative (*EN*1112a 22-30):

Now about eternal things no one deliberates, e.g. about the material universe or the incommensurability of the diagonal and the side of a square. But no more do we deliberate about the things that involve movement but always happen in the same way, whether of necessity or by nature or from any other cause, e.g. the solstices and the risings of the stars; nor about things that happen now in one way, now in another, e.g. droughts and rains; nor about chance events, like the finding of treasure. But we do not deliberate even about all human affairs; for instance, no Spartan deliberates about the best constitution for the Scythians. For none of these things can be brought about by our own efforts³¹.

It remains that (*EN*1112a 31-32):

²⁶ CLASSEN (1981).

²⁷ Arist. *Pol.* 1260a 25-29.

²⁸ CLASSEN (1981), 21.

²⁹ AUBENQUE (1963): Czech translation AUBENQUE (2003), 78 nn.

³⁰ Arist. *EN*1139a 8.

³¹ Cf. Arist. *EE* 1226a.

We deliberate about things that are in our power and can be done (βουλευόμεθα δὲ περὶ τῶν ἐφ' ἡμῖν καὶ πρακτῶν).

Within this domain, further restricted to things that happen in a certain way “for the most part” (*EN*1112b 8), deliberation consists in considering possible alternatives which are the subject of preferential choice (*EN*1113a 3-6)³² It is significant that such consideration should take into account the situational circumstances of the intended action. For Aristotle points out (*EN*1106b 18-23):

For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue³³.

Since there are no universally valid patterns of action, what may be adequate behaviour under certain circumstances may be inappropriate in other circumstances. This calls for a sensitive assessment of what should be done here and now. Nevertheless, unlike Gorgias, Aristotle does not situate this assessment into the sphere of mere *doxa*. There is a final measure of human action - it is the unqualified human good, *eudaimonia*, conceived as the ultimate goal of human life. This human good is manifested in a life lived by specific agents at specific times and in specific circumstances and its fulfilment needs a “true grasp” of what it means for that agent, at that moment, to be living well. There are normative standards of practical truths and correct desires³⁴ and Aristotle expresses this synergy of reason and desire, aiming at the same goal, in his definition in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1139a 22-26):

³² Arist. *EN*1113a 8-12: «The object of choice being one of the things in our own power which is desired after deliberation, choice will be deliberate desire of things in our own power (ἢ προαίρεσις ἀν εἴη βουλευτική ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ' ἡμῖν); for when we have reached a judgement as a result of deliberation, we desire in accordance with our deliberation».

In this context, Christian Kock emphasizes Aristotle's intention «to distinguish between the domain where we *ultimately* discuss truth, and the domain where we *ultimately* discuss choice» (KOCK, 2014, 16). Nevertheless, with regard to *EN*1139a 22-31, it doesn't seem correct to exclude the notion of truth from the sphere of practical reasoning. Detailed analysis of “practical truth” offers OLFERT (2014).

³³ Cf. Arist. *EN*1104b 24-26. Sensitivity to these situational factors is terminologically fixed in the so-called doctrine of the mean.

³⁴ OLFERT (2014), 221: «the common denominator of what makes desires, decisions, and practical thought correct or incorrect is their relationship to what is unqualifiedly good for human beings».

Since moral virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, and choice is deliberate desire, therefore both the reasoning must be true and the desire right, if the choice is to be good, and the latter must pursue just what the former asserts.

Within this complex structure, the invariants of human happiness must be translated into terms of particular and changing circumstances. This kind of reasoning can take place in private as if someone in an internal conversation advises himself, but it can also include consultation with others (*EN*1112b 10-11). Moreover, the features of individual deliberation apply also to collective deliberation because like the former, the latter seeks to determine which acts will most contribute to the goals that the community seeks to achieve. Aristotle makes this proximity clear by recalling the findings from the *Nicomachean Ethics* in his account of deliberative rhetoric in political assemblies in the *Rhetoric* (1357a 2-10):

The function of rhetoric, then, is to deal with things about which we deliberate, but for which we have no systematic rules; and in the presence of such hearers as are unable to take a general view of many stages, or to follow a lengthy chain of argument. But we only deliberate about things which seem to admit of issuing in two ways (βουλευόμεθα δὲ περὶ τῶν φαινομένων ἐνδέχασθαι ἀμφοτέρως ἔχειν); as for those things which cannot in the past, present, or future be otherwise, no one deliberates about them, if he supposes that they are such; for nothing would be gained by it.

On the level of public debate, the role of *logos* becomes prominent. It is clear that public deliberation necessarily involves speech because it requires the sharing of reasoning and confrontation of arguments. Moreover, the centrality of *logos* corresponds to the political character of human beings, defined in the *Politics* precisely by their capacity to use reasoned speech and to make arguments about good and bad and right and wrong (*Pol.* 1253a)³⁵. This assumption places rhetoric at the heart of political deliberation³⁶.

Deliberative rhetoric

Aristotle defines rhetoric as a faculty to discover “the possible means of persuasion” (*Rhet.* 1355b). According to him, rhetoric controls the three chronological dimensions of human life - the past, the present and the future - and is

³⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1253a: «Speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state».

³⁶ YACK (2006).

distinguished into corresponding types: the forensic, epideictic and deliberative rhetoric (*Rhet.* I 3).

The future-oriented character of deliberative rhetoric indicates that it focuses on expected consequences of actions we are about to take, rather than an assessment of acts that have already been performed. Given the open nature of future events, it deals again with the indeterminacy of things, the outcome of which is never quite clear in advance (*Rhet.* 1357a). Its persuasive function arises from the fact that it helps the members of a political community to determine which collective action to support and prepare their decisions about what collective actions their communities should take. This process requires persuading the rest of the citizens about what best serves their shared or common good.

What calls for attention is that in the case of deliberative rhetoric, Aristotle admits the use of non-argumentative forms of proof, such as appeal to character and emotions. This is closely related to the nature of political deliberation as a social practice: public reasoning does not involve only strictly rational argumentation – it is more like a contest for attention and allegiance. As such, it rests on establishing a specific social relationship between the public speaker and his audience. Therefore, concern for reputation is an important part of public speech³⁷. Since political deliberation deals with questions that inevitably involve a certain degree of uncertainty and indeterminacy, the character of the speaker may provide an indispensable piece of evidence about the quality, sincerity and credibility of his political proposal (*Rhet.* 1356a). Moreover, the public speaker shares an interest in the outcome of the issue at hand with his audience. His effort to persuade the listeners corresponds with the willingness of the listeners to be persuaded.

At the same time, public deliberation is not an impartial assessment of neutral options, but an engaged discussion about shared goals and the common good, which is influenced by the emotional attitudes of the interested members of the political community. Aristotle pays much attention to the role of emotions in public reasoning. While in the case of court judgements, he warns judges and jury members not to be distracted from the issue at hand by appeals to emotions and urges them to judge impartially; in the case of public deliberation, he admits emotional interference. To underpin this differentiation, we may recall Book III of the *Politics* where Aristotle declares that law operates without passion (*Pol.* 1286a 19-21). Translated into the context of forensic rhetoric, it suggests that the application of the law to a particular

³⁷ NIEUWENBURG (2004).

case during court proceedings should avoid any passionate involvement. However, deliberation about future action is a completely different matter. As the account in the *Nicomachean Ethics* shows, decisions about the future and choice of a particular action are based on the activity of reason informed by emotions that interest the agents in the consequences of their decisions.

To sum up, instead of disinterestedness, public reasoning based on mutual communication assumes committed and emotionally coloured attitudes of the citizens who consider matters related to their own ends. At the same time, the pursuit of common good permits a plurality of perspectives, from which the ways of its realization are considered. Thus, the process of common deliberation through persuasive speech permits partiality instead of neutrality, which makes the collective decisions situated and context-related³⁸.

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³⁸ GARSTEN (2009), 129 speaks about "situated judgement": «When we engage in situated judgment, we make decisions using criteria drawn from our own perspectives - from our experiences, our emotions, and even our prejudices. Insofar as Aristotelian deliberation involved thinking through our intentions in relation to an end of our own, it incorporated and encouraged situated judgment».

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