

Part I

Classical Greek Rhetoric



Introduction to Greek Rhetoric

Rhetoric today has many different meanings. In some cases, we use the term to designate language that is pretentious or insincere, as in the expression “empty rhetoric.” In other cases, we use it to refer to a particular kind of language, as in “political rhetoric” or “campaign rhetoric.” We also use it to refer to speaking effectively and persuasively, as well as to college composition courses, which often are described as courses in rhetoric. In addition, rhetoric describes a field of academic study. The sheer number of different uses of the word makes it difficult to define, and some scholars have argued that this difficulty is symptomatic of a greater problem – a pervasive decline in the value we accord language in general and rhetoric in particular. Addressing the state of rhetoric as it is embodied in composition courses, Fleming (2002), for example, argued that it is an anemic enterprise compared to the rich tradition of rhetoric in the past.

Many of us – perhaps most of us – are immersed in pedestrian language that lacks precision and persuasive force. Only when we hear the “I Have a Dream” speech of Martin Luther King or the speeches of John F. Kennedy are we reminded of how language can elevate us, move us. It often seems that effective communication is discounted because close attention to language is considered elitist. Yet there was a time when attention to language was so great that entire societies recognized rhetoric as the most important subject a person could master. In the history of Western civilization, in fact, the intense study of rhetoric lasted for more than 2,000 years. On this basis, our current period could easily be considered an anomaly.

But what about the Classical Period? How was rhetoric defined then? Close examination of the available texts indicates that even in classical times it lacked a single definition. The simplest definition, linked to Plato (c. 427–347 BC), who may have coined the term, was persuasive speech in a public forum. But he also defined rhetoric as a form of pandering that influenced the masses by telling them what they wanted to hear. It was the artificer of deception, the antagonist of truth and justice. Aristotle (c. 384–322 BC) complicated matters further by presenting several definitions in his *Art of Rhetoric*: It is an “art” (*technê*), “a counterpart to dialectic” (I. I. 1), and the ability of observing or discovering “in each case the existing means of persuasion” (I. I. 14), with the aim of securing a judgment. In all these definitions, however, one factor is consistently present – the power of language to persuade and influence others.

The Origins of Rhetoric

Today we recognize that rhetoric existed (and exists) in many forms in many societies. We may talk about Chinese rhetoric, for example, or Arabic rhetoric. Yet as far as we

can tell, it was the ancient Greeks who were the first to engage in the systematic study and teaching of rhetoric and oratory. Tradition holds that the formal study of rhetoric began around 467 BC in the Greek city of Syracuse on the island of Sicily. In Book 3 of *The Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle identified Corax and Tisias, two Sicilians, as the first teachers of rhetoric. In the standard account, Corax, after observing several trials, noticed that successful litigants used certain techniques in speaking that their adversaries did not. He used his observations to develop a “system” of rhetorical study and began teaching classes on how to win in court. Corax took on a student named Tisias, and together they supposedly went on to produce handbooks on public speaking that were very popular, especially in Athens (Enos, 1993; Kennedy, 1980), where democracy was well established and where a less systematized form of rhetoric combined to provide fertile ground for the handbooks. The handbooks did not survive the passage of time, but various sources report that their primary contribution to rhetoric was the introduction of argument based on probability. That is, in any cause of action, the paramount question was whether it was *probable* that the accused had committed the wrong. The value of this innovation can be properly understood only when one considers that direct testimony of witnesses was highly suspect in ancient Greece owing to the prevalence of rampant bribery. In most cases, a jury just could not believe witnesses.

Plato and the origin of rhetoric

Both Cole (1991) and Schiappa (1999, 2003) argued that there is no evidence to support the claim that Corax and Tisias were the first teachers of rhetoric – and more important, that the term “rhetoric” did not even exist before Plato wrote his dialogue *Gorgias* around 385 BC. In his extensive review of classical texts, Schiappa (2003) found that the term “rhetoric” (*rhêtorikê*) “does not appear in fifth- and early fourth-century texts where it would be expected to appear if the term were in common, or even in specialized, usage” (p. 41). Instead, the word used in these texts is *logos* (and its variants). On this account, Cole and Schiappa declared that Plato originated rhetoric, at least in the formal sense. From this perspective, those who came before Plato practiced a form of public speaking, but it was not rhetoric.¹

The difference may initially appear overly subtle, but *logos* is a difficult word to define, owing to its numerous uses in ancient Greek. In many fifth-century texts, it appears as *technê orthos legein*, “the skill of speaking correctly” and as *technê logon*, “the skill of argument.” According to Schiappa (2003), these terms are broader than “rhetoric,” which seems to derive from *rhêtôr*, the term used in the sixth and fifth centuries to designate a politician who frequently made speeches in the assembly. Schiappa argued that Plato coined the term “rhetoric,” as well as the term “oratory,” to shift the focus, to establish a technical vocabulary that differentiated persuasive discourse from just correct speaking: thus, *rhêtoreia* (oratory) and *rhêtorikê* (rhetoric).² On this account, Schiappa noted that “oratory ... [was] the product of the rhetor, and rhetoric ... [was] the art or skill of the rhetor” (2003, p. 40). *Logos*, on the other hand, focused on precision in language and critical thinking, not on persuasive public speaking, which was secondary. Schiappa claimed, therefore, that “It is more likely that Corax and Tisias attempted simply to teach would-be orators how to plead reasonable and hence believable cases” (2003, p. 51).

¹ For several decades, it has been popular to define all communication as rhetorical. Doing so may be overstating the case and confusing rhetoric with semiotics. In any event, ancient Greeks may have questioned this definition as too broad.

² Note that in modern Greek *rhêtoreia* and *rhêtorikê* have almost exactly the same meaning: public speaking.

Not all scholars agree with the claim that Plato coined the term “rhetoric.” Pendrick (1998), for example, argued that the Sophists’ broad understanding of *technê logon* did not preclude the more specific application to speeches in the courts and the assembly. In support he noted that Plato, Isocrates (c. 436–338 BC), and Aristotle attested to the existence of various handbooks on rhetoric that offered some measure of technical discussion on the skill of speaking correctly. We might consider, in this regard, the discussion of “books of rhetoric” in Plato’s *Phaedrus* that provide for the division of oratory into its various parts – exordium, statement of facts, presentation of witnesses, and so on. Pendrick on this basis concluded that Cole and Schiappa’s argument that Plato invented rhetoric lacks substantiation: “All our evidence indicates that even before Plato’s attack on ρητορικη [rhetoric] there existed an evolving discipline concerned with the techniques of persuasive speech” (1998, p. 23).

Slavery, freedom, and democratization

If we are to locate emergent rhetoric in its social context, we must consider a number of related factors that influenced Greek social structure, attitudes, and ways of thinking. Of paramount importance is the high value the Greeks had placed on public discourse for centuries. Homer’s (1991) *Iliad*, put into written form around 800 BC, provides some insight into the nature of Greek education before the sixth century. Here we find that the hero Achilles was tutored as a youth to be “a speaker of words and a doer of deeds” (9.454–455), and the work includes numerous speeches that illustrate the importance of speaking well. As Wheelock (1974) noted, “All this foreshadows the conspicuous place of ... elocution and rhetoric in later Greek education” (p. 4). We therefore can safely conclude that education, public speaking, and politics developed a symbiotic relation early in Greek society. Vernant (1982) argued, therefore, that democracy and rhetoric – used now in its technical sense – were simultaneously stimulated in Athens in the middle of the seventh century BC when the ruler Draco (c. 659–601 BC) codified Athenian law, thereby setting limits on aristocratic power and laying the foundation for democracy. In this view, Draco’s laws were revolutionary because they articulated a new way of governing: The sword ceased being the sole – or even the primary – means of governing the populace. Vernant also argued that after the seventh century BC, speech gained increasing importance as a means of exercising political power, in large part because increasing numbers of people were becoming literate. At the core of this argument is the astute awareness that rhetoric in the Classical Period was closely tied to politics.

Other factors to consider when exploring rhetoric’s origins are the social and economic changes that began in the seventh century, when agriculture in Greece shifted from grain to olives, figs, and wine. The Greek mainland is mountainous and rugged and therefore not well suited to agriculture. The little cultivable land available was of poor quality and produced such low yields that by the fifth century BC the bulk of Athens’ grain came from Euboea and the Bosphorus region. The new crops were significantly more profitable than grain because they were less taxing on the soil and because they were in high demand. But they required large sums of capital owing to the fact that the trees and vines took several years to bear fruit. Thus, Patterson (1991) argued that the shifting economic base effected changes in politics and education that gave rise to rhetoric. Lack of sufficient capital for orchards and vineyards, combined with poor yields, forced many small farmers and sharecroppers off their land, and those who were displaced had no alternative but to travel to Athens in search of work. Patterson suggested that the displaced small farmers created a farm-labor shortage and that the landowners responded by relying increasingly on slave labor to tend and harvest crops.

In the ancient world, warfare and the loot it provided upon success were important parts of all economies. Warfare also offered Athens a steady supply of slaves to solve the labor crisis. But there were unforeseen consequences. Hesiod's *Works and Days*, written in the eighth century, described eloquently the value inherent in hard manual labor and how life on the farm was embedded in the very notion of human dignity. But by the fifth century, when 30 percent of Athens' population consisted of slaves, these notions had to strike many as quaint (see Martin, 1996). With slaves doing all the hard work, manual labor came to be viewed as demeaning and unbefitting a citizen.

Warfare and changing economic conditions, moreover, seem to have changed Athenians' understanding of the world and themselves. They more clearly recognized the ease with which a person's life could be turned topsy-turvy. As the number of slaves increased, Athenians gained a keen perception of life's vicissitudes and an even keener appreciation for freedom, especially as the economic plight of displaced farmers grew so extreme that large numbers were sold into slavery (often to foreign masters) to satisfy their debts. Solon's (c. 640–559 BC) decree prohibiting slaves from using the gymnasia, which they had been able to do previously, reflected a social move to differentiate more rigorously freemen from slaves. Simultaneously, Solon authorized the use of public funds to purchase the freedom of all Athenians whom necessity had put under the yoke of slavery; then he took the even more extraordinary step of discharging all debts for the lower classes and forbidding the practice of indebted slavery for citizens.

In this context, the many free but destitute displaced farmers in Athens used the threat of revolution as leverage to pry political power from the ruling oligarchs, demanding and getting restraints on the elite's power and greater roles in the political process. About 10 percent of Athenian citizens were wealthy, and by law they were required to use their wealth to erect government buildings, pay for festivals, and field armies and navies in time of war – expenditures that frequently sent families and entire clans into bankruptcy. The poor made up about 50 percent of the citizens, and the middle class made up the remaining 40 percent. The shift in the economy led to an expansion of trade, especially as Athens established its empire, which allowed some members of the middle class to become wealthy. Their wealth, in turn, led them to demand a greater voice in public affairs, thereby challenging the traditional role of the nobility. Overall, however, the middle class, like the poor, lacked the means to provide material benefits to the city, so their contributions came in the form of government service, a happy compromise, particularly after Pericles (c. 495–429 BC) used his influence as leader of Athens to secure payment for those who held government positions. The ruling elite were saved from revolution, while maintaining their general status, and the displaced received a modest stipend that enabled them to survive. The result was a movement toward democratization that accelerated when war broke out between Athens and Sparta in 431 BC. Athens depended on members of the lower and middle classes to man its large navy, and with the spark of democracy burning in their breasts, these warriors demanded and received greater participation in political decisions. Freedom took on new meaning and became one of the more discussed and analyzed topics over the next 100 years. Participation in politics, however, required skill in public speaking. In this analysis, the combination of democratization, war, and a new sense of freedom was the catalyst for rhetoric.

Missing from discussions of the socioeconomic influences on rhetoric, however, is recognition that increasingly stable political structures and more equitable distribution of resources led to increased prosperity and more leisure time for Athenian citizens.

Sources of entertainment were extremely limited, and without the burden of constant toil to put food on the table, people were no doubt eager to find interesting ways to spend their time. The literature on rhetoric and oratory from both the Greek and the Roman periods frequently mentions the ability of speakers to attract large crowds and to awe them with their orations. Some rhetoricians were treated like today's movie stars, celebrities whose fame and fortune were unparalleled. For us to begin to understand the role of rhetoric and oratory in the ancient world, therefore, it is important to recognize that, in addition to its important pragmatic functions, oratory served for centuries as one of the more popular forms of entertainment.

Precursors of Rhetoric

Although the above accounts of rhetoric's origins are interesting, they are not sufficiently elaborated and do not fully address the complexity of the subject. A given in the study of history is that few, if any, events spring out of nothing. The closer we look, the more obvious it becomes that everything develops from and is connected to what existed previously. This understanding makes the traditional account of rhetoric's origins involving Corax and Tisias, for example, seem suspect and leads inevitably to an obvious question: What came before? Answering this question requires us to look farther back in history.

Writing originated in about 4000 BC in Mesopotamia and spread throughout the Mediterranean in different forms. According to Maisels (1990), by the time of King Sargon (reigned c. 2334–2279 BC), every household in Sumeria included “at least one person able to read, write, and calculate” (p. 121). Around 2000 BC, writing appeared on the island of Crete, home of the Minoan civilization, in the form known as Linear A – hieroglyphics that scholars have not been able to decipher but that are decidedly non-Greek. Over the next several centuries, the Minoans had increasing contact with Greek-speaking traders from the mainland, commonly known as Mycenaean. Little is known about the relations between the two cultures, but based on artwork and archaeological excavations, the Mycenaean appear to have been significantly more warlike, which has led to speculation that they conquered the Minoans. In any event, by about 1500 BC, the Mycenaean were in control of Crete and began the transfer of culture and artifacts to the mainland. In the process, they adapted Linear A to writing early Greek, which we have in the form of what is known as Linear B.

The Mycenaean civilization prospered until about 1200 BC, at which time unknown factors led to its collapse. Some scholars believe that a tribe called the Dorians, originating in what is now Macedonia, swept through Greece, defeating the Mycenaean armies and destroying cities and towns until little was left. Others attribute the collapse to a full-scale assault by seafaring warriors called the Sea People, who terrorized the entire Mediterranean, crippling the Egyptian Empire and destroying the ancient civilization of the Hittites. Still others see the end of the Mycenaean civilization as being part of a region-wide social collapse owing to rapid and drastic climate change – perhaps accompanied by the widespread destruction wreaked by bands of warriors like the Dorians and the Sea People – which caused famine on an unprecedented scale. In this account, cities and towns were depopulated as residents left in search of food and safety. What followed was a massive migration of people across the entire Mediterranean that reconfigured centuries-old cultural and social characteristics and plunged the Aegean region into a dark age. In this chaos, literacy was lost among the Greeks.

Women and poetry

The most important social institutions, however, were not lost – education and religion chief among them. Women played important roles in both. They had held significant positions in religion from the earliest days of the great civilizations. Campbell (1970) pushed the dates back even further, arguing that women’s prominent place in religious rituals may have begun as early as the proto-Neolithic Period (c. 12000–8000 BC), or earlier, and that by the Neolithic Period (c. 8000–4000 BC) religion was dominated by women who were responsible for pervasive mother-goddess cults.

One of the better known examples of a woman in a powerful religious position is Enheduanna (c. 2300 BC). Although officially she was high priestess to the moon god Nanna in the Mesopotamian city of Ur, Enheduanna appears to have dedicated herself to the goddess of love and war, Inanna. As J. Roberts (2004) noted, the role of high priestess was complex, involving supervision of religious rituals (particularly those associated with harvests and child birth), support for the divine right of the king, and the composition of hymns to the gods. Enheduanna excelled in this latter task, and her poetic songs of praise are “the first known written record of a religious belief system” (Meador, 2000, p. 155). They also are among the oldest known examples of literary writing and are the earliest in which we find the writer working in the first person, writing as an individual.

The scarcity of historical artifacts and texts forces us to speculate, but it seems reasonable to assume that women held similar positions during the Mycenaean Period in Greece. We know, for example, that from at least 1400 BC the most important religious site in Greece was at Delphi, where women served as the Pythia, the oracle and priestess of Apollo.³ When the dark ages descended and literacy was lost, however, the only way priestesses could continue to produce hymns to the gods was through oral composition. After 400 years or more, Greece began to emerge from the dark ages and entered what is referred to as the Archaic Period (c. 800–500 BC), and by then, the oral tradition was fully developed.

This tradition was based solidly on poetry, performed as song, usually accompanied by music. The poetry was not limited to hymns to the gods; it also preserved and conveyed history, morals, and social norms. We cannot determine the degree to which priestesses and other women in the temples contributed to the development of the oral tradition, but it seems likely that their role was significant. The collapse of the Roman Empire may provide a useful analogy here. During the Dark Ages that followed the Empire’s collapse, the Church was one of the few institutions that survived, and its priests and monks became the custodians of knowledge. The priestesses of the Greek temples may also have taken on this task, which would explain why the (female) Muse of poetry grants divine inspiration and knowledge, thereby setting the poet apart from ordinary mortals. It also would explain why the history that was preserved involved epic stories of gods and heroes, legends and myths – and why the dead Mycenaean Period that is the subject of these tales emerged as a Golden Age.

What we know with certainty is that during the Archaic Period, women in the temples as well as those outside the priestly class frequently engaged in religious activities and festivals, in which they sang songs and recited poetry. Evidence comes from existing

³ We also know that this tradition continued through both the Archaic and Classical periods. As Gould (1980) noted, “In the sacred and ritual activities of the community the active presence of women in the public world is not merely tolerated but required. As priestesses in many of the major cults of the polis, as *kanephoroi* [basket carriers] and *hydrophoroi* [water carriers] in the great religious processions ... in mourning and at funerals, in the rituals of marriage, the participation of women is indispensable to the sacral continuity, the ordering of society” (pp. 50–51).

fragments, such as the Spartan poet Alcman's (c. 650 BC) *Partheneia*, a choral song performed publicly by young girls during their rites of initiation into womanhood. Sappho (c. 610–570 BC), the only female Greek poet from the Archaic Period whose writing has survived, wrote poems that seem to deal with the initiation rites of young girls. On this basis, some have argued that Sappho operated a school for girls that prepared them for marriage (such preparation was necessary because girls in all Greek communities other than Sparta were closely sheltered and also because they commonly wed between the ages of 13 and 15). In addition, Greek funerary vases provide a glimpse into women's role in funeral rites. As early as 750 BC, these vases depicted women mourners, and there is some evidence that a century later women's participation had become institutionalized to such an extent that the practice of hiring them as mourners was widespread (Fantham et al., 1994; Holst-Warhaft, 1992).

Social structures, however, appear to undergo a change in the seventh century, which imposed greater restrictions on women's activities. Gould (1980) offered a possible explanation when he noted that legal cases involving women reveal a "strict parallelism between the formal rules controlling the treatment of women and those that govern the transmission and inheritance of property" (p. 44). Such cases also suggest that the presence of women in public offered opportunities for seduction, which threatened both the concept of property and social stability. We see evidence of the increased restrictions under Solon's (c. 640–559 BC) leadership. He implemented a law that controlled women's dress, their travel about Athens, and their mourning and lamentation at funerals:

He [Solon] regulated the walks, feasts, and mourning of the women, and took away everything that was either unbecoming or immodest; when they walked abroad, no more than three articles of dress were allowed them; an obol's worth of meat and drink; and no basket above a cubit high; and at night they were not to go about unless in a chariot with a torch before them. Mourners tearing themselves to raise pity, and set wailings, and at one man's funeral to lament for another, he forbade.

To offer an ox at the grave was not permitted, nor to bury above three pieces of dress with the body, or visit the tombs of any besides their own family, unless at the very funeral; most of which are likewise forbidden by our laws, but this is further added in ours, that those that are convicted of extravagance in their mournings, are to be punished as soft and effeminate by the censors of women. (Plutarch, 1959, p. 97)

It is difficult to gauge accurately the effect this and other, equally restrictive, laws had on women, but the available evidence indicates that they created a society in which reputable women were largely separated from males. Homes in Athens, for instance, consisted of separate living quarters for males and females. The female quarters had only one entrance/exit, and it was accessed via the male quarters, thereby limiting freedom of movement out of and into the house. Not all households could afford slaves to do the shopping, so the *agora*, or marketplace, in Athens was divided into male and female areas to allow poorer women to shop without significant face-to-face contact with males. Most telling in the context of rhetoric, however, is the fact that Athens failed to produce a single female poet. Sparta, on the other hand, which had a significantly different social structure that gave women more freedom, produced two – Megalostira and Cleitogora (Fantham et al., 1994).

Literacy and *Paideia*

The most esteemed poet was Homer, and the most esteemed work was *The Iliad*. Homer's works provided edification (*paideia*) on the nature of the divine, the relationship

of god to man, the essence of friendship, courage, moderation, and good leadership (Robb, 1994). Indeed, poetry in general was a source of *paideia* until the early sixth century, when what we may think of as the Age of Myth began to give way to reason and logic.⁴

In his classic work on mythology, *The Masks of God*, Campbell (1970) noted that early cultures viewed the world as a richly spiritual place. Supernatural beings existed everywhere – in rivers, forests, oceans, clouds, on mountaintops. Gods and demigods controlled not only their individual domains but also the lives of men and women and had to be propitiated through ritual and sacrifice. What we think of as natural phenomena were, in early cultures, understood to be the acts of deities. Thus, in *The Iliad*, it is Apollo, not a virus, who strikes down the Greek army with the plague, and he does so in response to the prayer of his devoted priest Chryses:

<p>“Hear me, Apollo! God of the silver bow who strikes the walls of Chryse and Cilla sacrosanct ... god of the plague! If I ever roofed a shrine to please your heart,</p>	<p>ever burned the long rich bones of bulls and goats on your holy alter, now, now bring my prayer to pass. (I.43–48)</p>
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Literacy appears to have brought about a cultural shift away from this mythic view, as well as its corresponding way of thinking about the world. Although writing had reemerged from the Greek dark ages between 800 and 700 BC, for perhaps 200 years only a small percentage of the population was literate (Robb, 1994). The situation began to change fairly rapidly, however, following Solon’s reforms, and Greece started shifting from an oral to a literate culture. The evidence is not conclusive, but there are indications that democracy accelerated the reemergence of literacy in Athens. When Solon opened government service to those who were not members of the elite class, the entire male population required more and better education and greater skill as speakers in the governing assemblies. Athenian society was growing more complex, and complex societies are difficult to manage without literacy.

Literacy on even a modest scale required schools. As a result, education for boys moved out of the privacy of the home. According to Marrou (1982), a system of education beginning at the elementary level and proceeding through the secondary level was well established by the middle of the fifth century BC (also see Beck, 1964; Welch, 1990). Young boys typically finished their secondary education around the age of 15 or 16. We learn in Plato’s *Protagoras* that families with the means continued the education of their sons by providing them with advanced training in rhetoric. On this basis, Raaflaub (1983) stated that “To go to school and to be trained in a few elementary disciplines had become fairly normal for an Athenian citizen” (p. 530). Many of the teachers in these schools seem to have come to Athens from Ionia, where education and literacy were more advanced and had been for some time.

⁴ Frenztz (2006) argued that the *paideia* of oral culture required an audiences’ rapt attention because whatever “was forgotten was lost forever”; therefore, any “careless moment ... any lapse of concentration ... could result in lost knowledge” (p. 247). He went on to claim that Greek audiences listening to poetry “became mesmerized, drugged, ‘lost’ in the performance, for only this mind state could record the living history that was Greece” (p. 247). This analysis seems significantly off base. It fails to acknowledge the fact that poetry was embedded in the daily lives of Greeks. Homer’s epics were not performed once in a lifetime but repeatedly, portions perhaps even daily. Furthermore, Frenztz ignored the mnemonic effect of rhythm and rhyme, which enable the mind to remember long stretches of discourse after a single exposure. The modern musical provides a relevant example: Audiences commonly exit the theater singing (mentally or not) a tune they have heard but once.

We should not be surprised that the move away from *mythos* began in Ionia. Formal education affects cognition. In one of the more thorough studies of the consequences of schooling and literacy on an oral culture, Scribner and Cole (1981) reported the following: “Of all the ... [investigated] tasks, logic problems proved the most predictable and demonstrated the strongest effects of schooling. Not only did amount of school increase the number of correct answers, but it contributed to the choice of theoretical explanations, over and above correct answers” (p. 127). That is, the schooling necessary for teaching literacy – not literacy itself – improved the ability of the subjects in Scribner and Cole’s study to perform logical operations correctly.⁵ The change entailed the application of *formal logic*, as opposed to the informal logic of everyday life that, as Johnson-Laird (1983) noted, is based on perceptions and what is already known rather than on systematic principles of reasoning.

The Milesians

Perhaps it was the effects of schooling and literacy or the city’s position as a major trade route, with the resulting confluence of ideas, but in any event, Miletus, located on the western tip of Ionia, gave birth to three innovative thinkers: Thales (c. 625–546 BC), Anaximander (c. 610–546 BC), and Anaximenes (c. 585–525 BC). These *hoi physikoi*, or “physicists,” developed what may be considered a proto-scientific approach to observing and explaining natural phenomena. Consequently, they discounted the involvement of gods and strove to use formal reasoning to explain such phenomena by reducing causes and effects to basic principles, thereby adopting a monistic view of the universe. According to Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 983), Thales believed that water was the first principle from which all things originated. Anaximander, on the other hand, proposed that the first principle was an undefined “limitlessness” (*apeiron*), or force, that gave rise to the world. Anaximenes saw air as the first principle. Through condensation, air forms moisture; further condensation converts moisture into earth. Although from our perspective these speculative notions seem primitive, they were revolutionary at the time. We can see in them an attempt to explain the world through natural processes governed by some as yet unknown natural laws. In stark contrast is the mythic view, which relies on anthropomorphized metaphor and allegory to explain natural phenomena.⁶ The Greeks described a flash of lightning, for example, as Zeus hurling his thunderbolt. Storms at sea were attributed to Poseidon.

The individual ideas of these men were influential, but their approach to knowledge was more so. Over the next hundred years, efforts to understand the world using observation, reason, and logic increased. Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes were followed by such important intellectuals as Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570–480 BC), Pythagoras (c. 582–507 BC), Heraclitus (c. 535–475 BC), Parmenides (c. 510 BC–?), Anaxagoras (c. 500–428 BC), Zeno (c. 490–425 BC), and Empedocles (c. 490–430 BC). Some of their ideas resonate with us today. Heraclitus, for example, remains famous for his statement on relativism: One cannot step into the same river twice. And relativism was to have a significant influence on the development of rhetoric. Pythagoras we remember for his groundbreaking work in mathematics: the Pythagorean Theorem and the discovery of irrational numbers. Zeno is well known for his paradox “proving”

⁵ Many scholars have been confused on this issue, mistakenly identifying literacy as the cause for changes in cognition (e.g., Colby and Cole, 1976; Dillon, 1981; Goody, 1968, 1972, 1987; Greenfield, 1972; Ong, 1982).

⁶ Science also relies on metaphor but without anthropomorphizing.

that the great runner Achilles cannot overtake a tortoise in a race. Efforts to account for change in a monistic universe led to the postulation of dichotomies and dualism. Anaximenes' cosmology, for example, was driven by the interaction of two opposing "forces": heat and cold. For Xenophanes, it was earth and water; for Heraclitus, fire and water. Such attempts to understand the workings of nature through agonistic contraries probably underlie Parmenides' considerably more abstract views on how to think about the world. One of the more important was his assertion that in saying what something is, we also are saying what something is not.

The spread of education meant that not only the ideas of these philosophers but also their proto-scientific approach to understanding the world were familiar to increasing numbers of people. The old myths, with their all-too-human gods committing adultery and murder, did not serve as well as they had in the past; and among many intellectuals, at least, there was the growing sense that these tales were both metaphorically inaccurate and substantially immoral. Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that Greek society became secularized as a result, there is no question that the thinking of people like Thales, Xenophanes, and Anaxagoras led to a shift away from unquestioned belief in myth to the application of reason to cosmology and, more important, human affairs (see Bryant, 1986; Burket, 1985; Den Boer, 1973; Dodds, 1951).

The Athenian Legal System

Solon not only canceled the debts that had enslaved the poor but also reformed the Athenian legal system. Prior to his reforms, justice was administered by elected magistrates called *archons*, and only members of the aristocracy were allowed to serve in this position. Recognizing the growing influence of the middle class, Solon instituted a property qualification for the archonship that allowed citizens of means to serve as magistrates even though they were not members of the nobility. This innovation had several consequences, but among the more important was that it led to additional democratic reforms that eventually eliminated the long-standing property requirement for citizenship and participation in the governing assembly (Samons, 2004). Unlike virtually all modern countries that practice democracy but that are nevertheless republics, Athens practiced direct democracy, with citizens making decisions, establishing laws, and setting policies through hands-on involvement in the political process. A simple majority vote was required to pass a measure.

As in our own judicial system, specific courts in Athens were designated for certain types of cases. The Middle Court, for example, heard misdemeanors, whereas the Areopagus and the Palladion dealt with homicides. Jury service was a duty for all male citizens (females were barred from service), and when Pericles established payment for jurors (three *oboloi* a day), it reduced the hardship of jury duty for poor citizens (*thetes*). In an attempt to attenuate rampant bribery and intimidation, Athenian juries were large, ranging from several hundred to several thousand members, depending on the court in which a case was heard. Such numbers made corruption more difficult, but they also meant that jurors could not confer to evaluate facts in evidence or to decide a case. They received tokens before each trial that they afterwards deposited to signify their verdict. Again, a simple majority determined the outcome. Trials typically consisted of two parts: the guilt phase and the penalty phase. Decisions could not be appealed.

There were no attorneys in ancient Greece, nor were there state prosecutors. Complaints of all types were brought by individual citizens. Litigants were not allowed to have someone speak for them – both prosecutor and defendant had to speak for

themselves. Women were not allowed in the courts, and as Gould (1980) noted, the names of respectable women generally could not even be uttered in court; they were identified as the wife or daughter of a man whose name was given. Consequently, women who had a legal complaint were required to have a male relative bring their suit to trial. By the same token, if a woman was accused, she had to enlist the aid of a male relative to defend her in court. The concept of legal evidence as understood in the modern world did not exist in ancient Athens, although both prosecution and defense were allowed to present witness testimony. Cases therefore depended almost entirely on the speeches of the litigants, and they were carefully crafted to be persuasive. Each speech was timed via a water clock to ensure expediency and fairness.

Penalties for what today might seem minor offenses were often harsh: large fines, confiscation of property, exile, and death. Found guilty on the charge of mutilating sacred statues, Alcibiades (c. 450–404 BC) was sentenced to death; Socrates (c. 469–399 BC) received the same sentence after being found guilty of corrupting Athenian youth. A citizen who prosecuted a case unsuccessfully also was at risk of having to pay a fine. Moreover, it was quite common for a defendant to file a counterclaim against the prosecutor. Thus, for anyone engaged in a legal proceeding, the stakes were high, and many trials became literally life and death struggles. With so much riding on the effectiveness of a single speech, few litigants were willing to trust their own skills as an orator, and those who could afford to do so hired a *logographos* – a legal speech writer – to produce a speech for them.

The fears of conservatives like Plato that rhetoric would make a mockery of the legal system were not without foundation. We do not have to look all the way back to ancient Greece to see the power of rhetoric to persuade and influence large numbers of people, but if we do we find clear examples of what, from our perspective, appears to be injustice in the Athenian courts. Alcibiades and Socrates were mentioned above, but we could just as easily consider the many trials during the Peloponnesian War in which Athenian generals were tried and executed because they had lost a battle. In addition, during the fourth century BC, litigation initiated by poor complainants hoping to secure a monetary judgment against an aristocrat – or the threat of litigation to secure an out-of-court settlement – became so common that the assembly passed a law against such frivolous suits that fined the *sykophantai* who filed them. Nevertheless, it is important to note that from Solon to Alexander the Great, the Athenian legal system changed very little, suggesting that it adequately served the needs of the people, even with its notable shortcomings from our perspective.

The Sophists

By the fifth century BC, formal education in Athens and other Greek cities was fairly well established. It focused on poetry, which during the dark ages had become the repository for history, religion, ritual, culture, and morals. Poetry was the oldest subject of study in Athens. It was deemed to contain valuable lessons encompassing all facets of an honorable life. Stories of the gods and their interactions with people provided a solid foundation in religion and guidelines for worship. Not surprisingly, knowledge of poetry and the ability to produce poetry were linked to ideals of *aretê*, or personal excellence. We can see, therefore, that poetry had a different place in Greece than it has in modern society. It was part of the very substance of Greek life – for men as well as women – because its truths and moral lessons were deemed vital in educating the young and providing guidelines for proper behavior.

Initially, much of the schooling children received was provided by slaves, but as the fifth century progressed, there was a shift to better trained and more knowledgeable teachers, many of whom came from Ionia. Young men of means began looking to continue their education beyond the secondary level, and a small group of teachers emerged willing to provide it. They came to be known as *Sophists* – from the Greek word for wisdom, *sophia*.

Any definitive understanding of the Sophists probably will always be beyond us, but some general observations are possible. They were not prolific writers, and what survived the millennia consists largely of fragments embedded in the works of others who may have produced inaccurate records. Even though we refer to them as a group, the Sophists held only a few views in common, which increases the difficulty of reaching any generalizable conclusions about them. One point, however, is crucial to our understanding of Greek rhetoric: The Sophists were heirs to the proto-scientific approach to knowledge developed by the Milesians and the philosophers who followed them.

The Sophists taught grammar and poetry, and their inclination to look below the surface of things led them to construct the technical vocabulary necessary to professionalize poetry and thereby change how it was understood. This development was important because, until the mid-fifth century, poetry in Greece was entirely a performative act – song presented to a group, accompanied by music. Thus, when we use the word “poetry” in relation to ancient Greece, we must recognize that it existed as song embedded in the religious and cultural activities of the society.

The centrality of poetry in Greek social life is evident in the popularity of *symposia*, regular meetings in private residences in which men drank and sang songs: some traditional, some current and popular, and some made up on the spot. Although the circumstances in which women gathered to perform their own songs cannot be reconstructed with any certainty, it appears that they may have had similar gatherings. Given the potential for such assemblies to become drunken revels, a high value was placed on order (*kosmos*) and decorum, which when preserved were deemed to reflect the social order of the community.

The emphasis on *kosmos* suggests that *symposia* were more than drinking contests or merely a form of entertainment. We know that different occasions called for different types of song, and Ford (2002) argued that a singer was criticized if his selection did not fit the occasion. A goal of *symposia* attendees, therefore, was to perform songs that did fit (*prepei*) so that their peers would judge them as appropriate to the social and religious performative dimensions of the event, even after everyone had been drinking for hours. Plato’s dialogue *Symposium* suggests that in some instances singing did not occur at all, and if it has any basis in reality, the dialogue reflects how these gatherings involved intellectual discussions that served didactic purposes.

In Ford’s (2002) analysis, song could not truly take on the characteristics of poetry as we know it until the Greeks developed a formal, technical vocabulary that professionalized the discussion of verse and that separated the linguistic act from performance. According to Ford, without such a vocabulary, any critique of a song would be limited to performance and appropriateness – to the quality of voice, for example, or tone. A technical vocabulary enabled discussion of rhyme, meter, alliteration, and so on, which opened an entirely new dimension of critical analysis that shifted poetry outside the religious and morally didactic spheres that had governed performance for centuries.⁷ Equally important, although often overlooked, is the likelihood that the analytical

⁷ Note that even Greek theater was solidly rooted in religion. The term “tragedy” (*tragoidia*), for example, literally translates as “goat song” and is associated with the traditional sacrifice of a goat as part of a religious ritual.



tools the Sophists developed gave them more insight into poetry's expression of individuality, which had been evident since the work of Enheduanna around 2300 BC and which had emerged with powerful effect in Archilochus and Sappho. Jaeger (1976) examined individuality in the work of the great poet Archilochus (c. 680–645 BC) and declared: "Man's thought now becomes master of his traditional morality. ... [W]hen a poet begins to write freely of his private pleasures, it is a new step in poetry, and one which deeply influences human nature" (pp. 126–9). That is, the expression of individuality in poetry not only reflected but also reinforced the concept of a personal relationship with the gods that had begun two millennia earlier, allowing people to believe that they had more control over their lives. When the Sophists applied their study and teaching of poetry to rhetoric, they no doubt found fertile ground. Their infusion of individuality into oratory met the needs of the ambitious who sought to elevate themselves above the level prescribed by tradition, and it simultaneously fueled democracy. We may not be unjustified in concluding that poets like Enheduanna, Archilochus, and Sappho indirectly influenced rhetoric, politics, and even entire societies.

Some Sophists expanded their study of poetry to include philosophic contemplation of the world. Like the Milesians, Protagoras (c. 490–420 BC), for example, was interested in mathematics; Gorgias (c. 483–378 BC) produced a treatise on nature. We do not know when the Sophists began teaching rhetoric, but it probably was toward the middle of the fifth century BC. Nor do we know why they enlarged their curriculum. The various social changes already discussed – war, the spread of democracy, the growth of empire, and so forth – no doubt exerted considerable influence, but it seems reasonable to propose that a significant factor was their general embrace of the proto-scientific way of thinking, with its emphasis on classification, reduction to first principles, and *physis*. As Cole (1991, p. 66) stated:

the rationalizing tradition to which the Sophistic belongs was concerned with rewriting history and mythology to meet the demands of logic, empirical observation, and Ionian "science." To those involved in it the process doubtless seemed a single, unified effort to purge traditional lore of the fabrications with which poetic fancy had encumbered it..

Charges of immorality

Although the Sophists are sometimes credited with establishing rhetorical theory (albeit rudimentary), the evidence for this is sparse. As a group, they may have developed the idea of argument from probability, but this feature of their theory/practice may have been predicated simply on the legal realities of the time. Their primary goal was pragmatic: to give their students the tools necessary to prevail in courts and governing assemblies (see Wardy, 1996). We know that their teaching of rhetoric was controversial because it was believed that they provided students with the means to defeat just arguments, which was deemed immoral, and because some charged high fees for their services, at least at the advanced level, which made them appear to be more interested in money than in truth or justice – both topics of immense concern during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Kimball's (1986) assessment is typical in this regard: "The Sophists ... attended more to devising persuasive techniques than to finding true arguments, and this amorality exacerbated the disintegration of the ethical tradition and led to their condemnation" (p. 17).

The charge that Sophists were immoral is widespread in the existing literature. It finds specific expression in *The Art of Rhetoric*, where Aristotle noted that Protagoras, and by implication all Sophists, made "the worse appear the better argument" (1402a).



Aristophanes' *The Clouds* provides an example of this charge in action. In the play, the main character, Strepsiades, has been driven into debt by his wastrel son. Hearing that Sophists teach students how to make the worse case seem the better, Strepsiades goes to the Thinkery, home of the city's most renowned Sophist, Socrates, to learn how to cheat his creditors. Although Socrates readily provides instruction, Strepsiades proves to be a dull student and is expelled.

Some Sophists undoubtedly adopted this position – after all, it would have a tangible appeal in many cases – but we cannot be certain that “making the worse appear the better argument” is what Protagoras wrote or meant. Schiappa (2003) argued that the phrase has been consistently mistranslated, owing to the influence of Plato and Aristotle. In his view, a more accurate translation is “to make the weaker argument stronger.” As he noted, “Translating the fragment accordingly makes its interpretation far more comprehensive in terms of fifth-century thinking” (p. 107) – and it certainly is more congruent with the teaching and practice of rhetoric. Furthermore, if Plato's *Protagoras* even modestly reflects Sophists' views (and the assessment of many scholars is that this is one of the least biased of the dialogues), we have to conclude that they do not appear to be either immoral or amoral. Quite the opposite. Protagoras' sense of morality as presented in the dialogue, however, is different from Socrates' – or Plato's (see Poulakos, 1995).

Another factor that perhaps influenced the assessment that Sophists were immoral is the nature of their discourse. The available documents suggest that, like the Milesians, they tended toward relativism. Morality, however, is based on absolutism, and commonly it has some form of divine support. Although viewing human actions in absolute terms may be fruitful when engaged in philosophy, it has little utility in a court of law, and perhaps not even in the governing assembly, because so often human actions do not involve questions of what is absolutely right or absolutely wrong but rather what is more right and less wrong.

Sophistic relativism had manifold consequences. Relativism is ineluctably tied to individuality, and thus in advocating this view the Sophists undermined the traditional concept of the divine and placed mankind, not the gods, as the arbiters of morality and justice. In this respect, Sophistic relativism also appears as a form of humanism, as we see in this fragment from Protagoras: “Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.” Relativism and individuality led the Sophists to understand that there are at least two sides to every case, both equally valid from the perspective of their champions even though diametrically opposed; thus, those advocating these positions think that they are obviously right and that their opponents are obviously wrong. This understanding is known as the *dissoi logoi*, or “two sides,” argument, attributed to Protagoras (or in some instances Pythagoras) but reminiscent of Milesian foundational dualism: what is/what is not; hot/cold; wet/dry. Sophists believed, on this basis, that just as the philosopher will understand what is not by understanding what is, a competent rhetorician should be able to recognize and argue both sides of a topic or dispute so as to have more control over the issues, and their teaching incorporated *dissoi logoi* as practice. Given the human tendency to view the world in black and white terms, instruction in *dissoi logoi* combined with instruction in making weaker arguments stronger may have been more than sufficient evidence of the Sophists' immorality.

The role of technai

To a certain degree, the Sophists resembled the rhapsodes insofar as they led peregrinary lives, traveling from city to city to increase the pool of potential students. They

would go to the *agora* upon entering a city and give demonstration speeches that displayed their skill and eloquence. Teaching typically took place in a private residence, a situation that did not change until Plato and Isocrates opened their schools in Athens in 387 and 390 bc respectively. We have no way of knowing how long an individual Sophist would stay in a given city, but anything shorter than a year or two probably would have resulted in fairly shallow instruction.

The demand for rhetorical training was great owing to democratization and the plethora of lawsuits in which plaintiffs and defendants had to plead their own cases. Some Sophists consequently earned their living as *logographoi*. (Litigants memorized their respective orations and presented them to the jury, a task that required a prodigious memory because speeches were sometimes quite long.) The extant speeches show great attention not only to a recitation of the facts of the case but also to the speakers' characters and to argument from probability. Such speeches were expensive, for obvious reasons; yet the hot litigious atmosphere of the times meant that many men were brought to trial more than once, particularly if they were influential. Government administrators were selected from the aristocracy, and at the end of their one-year appointment, they were required to submit financial accounts (*euthynai*). Any citizen could charge the outgoing administrator with financial malfeasance, and as the tensions between rich and poor escalated, many did. Instruction in rhetoric, therefore, was a smart investment, reducing the need to hire a *logographos*. Only a small percentage of people, however, had the means to pay for advanced rhetorical training, and most likely many students could afford only a few lessons. Although Plato portrayed the Sophists as scoundrels who became rich by charging wealthy young men exorbitant fees, Isocrates gave what probably is a more accurate assessment in *Antidosis*, in which he noted that most Sophists barely made ends meet owing to the fact that they charged low fees so as to attract the widest range of pupils.

This reality, together with their wandering from city to city, necessitated that Sophists provide students some sort of relatively inexpensive pedagogical resource that would serve them when instruction was limited and the teacher might pack his bags and be gone on short notice. The available evidence suggests that many Sophists put their demonstration speeches into writing and sold them as instructional texts (*technai*). Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle described instructional handbooks (which also were labeled *technai*) that addressed such features as structure and organization, but none have survived the passage of time. In *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, Cole (1991) argued that *technai* were not theoretical but rather reflected the pragmatic orientation of the Sophists. They identified a topic or theme (*topos*), such as Helen's elopement with Paris, and illustrated several different ways of arguing the point. This structure recognized the fact that the uncertainties in the assembly or court made a memorized speech problematic. What an orator or a litigant needed was the flexibility afforded by a repertoire of arguments or argumentative approaches for the matter at hand.

Sophistic *technai* fell short of theory because they never achieved a sufficient level of generalizability. Their *topoi*, for example, were always specific and were the equivalent of case studies or exercises that offered students several possible solutions to real-life problems. Lacking any development of general principles, a given *technê* might illustrate half a dozen different argumentative approaches, but it would fail as a pedagogical tool the moment the orator was faced with the need for a seventh. Cole (1991) therefore identified the Sophists as "proto-rhetoricians" and their *technai* as "proto-rhetorical." As far as we can determine, *technê* in the sense of the formal handbook combining theory and technical matters did not appear until Aristotle produced his *Art of Rhetoric*.⁸

⁸ We know from Book I of Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* that handbooks had existed for some time, but they "provided us with only a small portion of this art" (I.1.3).

The Sophists and aretê

As is typical of many traditional societies, ancient Greek culture was rooted in the concepts of honor and the heroic. Nowhere are these intertwined concepts more visible than in *The Iliad*. Linked to both was the notion of *aretê*, which in *The Iliad* can be translated as either “excellence” or “virtue,” depending on context. Although *aretê* signifies a quality (the adjectival form is *agathos*), it also can signify one’s effort at striving to be the best one can be.

Aretê appears to have played an important role in the development of rhetoric, in part because the Sophists consistently claimed that they could teach it as an inherent part of rhetorical study. We can begin to understand this role by considering how the concept changed between the eighth and fourth centuries. *Aretê* in the Homeric world focused on actions and abilities associated with warfare but nevertheless included other dimensions, such as speaking. The true possessor of *aretê* displays excellence in all arenas, which explains, perhaps, why in *The Iliad* Achilles is not only the best warrior but also the best speaker. It is important to note, however, that in *The Iliad* *aretê* is a complex combination of extreme individuality and conservative tradition. King Agamemnon gathered the heroes of Greece to attack Troy not in the name of what today we might think of as national interests but to avenge the stain on his brother Menelaus’ honor. Thousands die because Menelaus’ wife, Helen, ran away with Paris, prince of Troy. The heroes on both sides do not fight indiscriminately but battle only with their peers, usually in *individual* combat to display their *aristeia*, or “finest moments.” But although the *aretê* of Achilles and *The Iliad* is personal, its locus nevertheless is the self as defined by lineage as well as deeds, which explains why the introduction of each hero includes his patrilineage and his list of accomplishments.

Munn (2000) argued that the Greek’s victory over the Persians in 480 BC may have been a significant factor in altering the concept of *aretê*. Victory was won when the Athenian fleet routed the Persians at Salamis, and the level of pride Athenians took from defeating the greatest empire in the world when outnumbered 10 to 1 was considerable. Heroditus (c. 484–425 BC) offered insight into one effect of the victory when he reflected on the unlikely outcome and the special love of freedom and the strength of the *demos* that made it possible. Munn therefore proposed that the defeat of the Persians and the subsequent growth of empire nurtured a sense of pride as well as manifest destiny among the Athenians, which in turn led to widespread reflection on the various factors that distinguished Athens from all other cities in the ancient world.

One result was a shift in the ideals of personal excellence or virtue to include the ideals of civic duty: An excellent man was also an excellent citizen. This change had important consequences. As Guthrie (1977) noted, “*Aretê* when used without qualification denoted those qualities of human excellence which made a man a natural leader in his community, and hitherto it had been believed to depend on certain natural or even divine gifts which were the mark of good birth and breeding” (p. 25); and then, “Any upper-class Athenian should understand the proper conduct of [political] affairs by a sort of instinct inherited from his ancestors, and be prepared to pass it on to his sons” (p. 39). In Munn’s (2000) analysis, however, Athenian society, and the very concept of *aretê*, underwent a transition to a *communal identity* as a result of the Persian war. This communal identity resulted in a redefinition of *aretê* – it came to mean, first and foremost, *civic virtue*.

Attributing such a significant cultural change to one or two factors is not entirely satisfying, and Munn’s (2000) assessment does not adequately take into account the spread of literacy toward the end of the fifth and beginning of the fourth centuries BC.

We no doubt should consider the Sophists' claim to teach *aretê* in the context of the Milesian influence, as well as their role as teachers of literacy, grammar, and poetry. In Schiappa (2003), we find yet another interesting perspective. He argued, for example, that rhetoric was not the principal focus of Sophistic teaching but that *logos* was – moreover, that they “were representatives of an intellectualist movement that favored abstract thinking over what Havelock has called the poetic mind” (p. 55). Their teaching was predicated on the proto-scientific principles established by the Milesians and was designed to challenge the mythico-poetic traditions of Greek society. According to Schiappa, Sophistic teaching “called for *arguing* rather than merely *telling*. The substantive challenges to traditional ways of thinking brought a new humanism of *logos*” (p. 56).

The “new humanism of *logos*” entailed a redefinition of the individual vis-à-vis society and politics, leading the Sophists, in Munn's (2000) words, to adapt “their teachings and writings to the subject of politics and to its medium in another form of artful expression: persuasive non-poetic speech” (p. 78). This redefinition may well have started with the Sophists' interest in grammar. They created the technical vocabulary necessary for describing language, giving us not only the terms for nouns, verbs, prepositions, and so forth, but also – and more important – the abstract concepts necessary for grammatical analyses that differentiate form and function and that allow for meta-linguistic taxonomies. This vocabulary enabled the study of language as an artifact separate from its performative dimension as speech act. Today, we readily recognize that we can examine any utterance in two ways – in terms of its social effects (its performative, or illocutionary, force) and in terms of its structure – but this was a novel idea in Greece, fifth-century bc. Ford (2002), for example, noted that the word *metron* was used in either the simple sense of “unit of measure” or in the ethical sense of “due measure” throughout most of the fifth century bc. Only toward the end of the fifth and then more frequently in the fourth century do we find *metron* being used to describe poetic meter. And even then this usage was novel, as illustrated “by a scene of higher education in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (first performed in 423), where understanding such matters as ‘dactyls’ and ‘meters’ (*metra*, 638) is beyond the ken of a yokel ... who naturally takes *metra* as referring to bushels and pecks” (Ford, 2002, p. 18).

One of the more obvious consequences of this shift is that by enabling the separation of poetry's performative from its linguistic dimension, the Sophists were separating poetry from the religious and ethical. Another is that by developing the analytical tools necessary for examining structure, they established poetry as an object of study. With such tools, one could consider whether a poem was well formed, regardless of its effect on an audience. And the systematization of poetry had the added benefit of enhancing the Sophists' pedagogy: *Systems can be taught*.

And here we seem to find an important foundation for the development of rhetoric as well as for Munn's (2000) assessment that the Sophists adapted their teaching to “persuasive non-poetic speech.” Both became systematized and professionalized. The clearest examples of the intertwined nature of this change are Aristotle's *The Art of Poetry* and *Art of Rhetoric*, which Cole (1991) characterized as “sister” works (p. 15). The formalization of poetry, in other words, provided the basis for the formalization of persuasive speaking. Once this process began, the Sophists saw abundant opportunities in other areas and applied it to examinations of the nature of truth, virtue, society, politics, and knowledge (*epistêmê*). Rather than teach one specific subject, such as rhetoric, the Sophists appear to have offered a more comprehensive education that included both practical and technical knowledge in an effort to understand the human condition. The goal – at least for some men, such as Antiphon and Isocrates – was to develop leaders who understood the contingent nature of government and society. Antiphon, for

example, noted in *On Truth* that justice reflects agreements among people regarding behavior, not established truths. This represented a significant, one might even say radical, departure from traditional views, but it came to be widely embraced by Athenians and citizens in other democratic city-states. The semantics of *logos* became more philosophical, and the Sophists began to emphasize a theory of knowing, particularly as it related to the nexus of the personal and the communal. In addition, the professionalization of language and the study of poetry seem to have led to a better understanding not only of structure but also of substance. From this perspective, the systematization of poetry provided deeper immersion in the lessons to be found in both poetry and myth, including those associated with *aretê*.

In search of civic virtue

According to Munn (2000), by the early fourth century BC a new sense of community led to an expanded concept of *aretê*: "Private identity ... now openly competed with communal identity" (p. 52). The change was significant. We know that by the fourth century the *aristeia* of *The Iliad* was a thing of the past and that among the aristocracy *aretê* was generally limited to a combination of birth, wealth, and education. We also know that the meaning had shifted. In Homer, for example, *aretê* signifies both excellence and virtue, depending on context, but the emphasis is on excellence. By the fourth century, the emphasis was on virtue, especially civic virtue. In the process, notions of *aretê* changed to such a degree that the distinction became blurred, if not lost, between what Edmund Burke, writing in the eighteenth century, called *actual* and *presumptive virtue*. Members of the aristocracy *presumed* that they possessed *aretê*, yet with few opportunities to display *aristeia*, there was little evidence to support this presumption. *Aretê* could be enhanced, certainly, through success in war, politics, sports, and poetry, but the triad of personal traits was a prerequisite.

The Sophists challenged the belief that *aretê* was innate and claimed that they could teach students how to be better citizens. In doing so, they were solidly locating the new definition of *aretê* within their pedagogical tradition. As the Sophists adapted their teaching to persuasive speaking, they did not abandon poetry but rather applied their knowledge of it to rhetoric. The study of rhetoric, moreover, proved a much more effective means of supporting the claims of inculcating civic virtue, for the spread of literacy, formal logic, and scientific reasoning had shifted social perceptions of *paideia* from poetry to prose, firmly embedding rhetoric in two of society's more important institutions: government and law. The transition to a literate society immersed in politics and litigation, with success in both arenas increasingly predicated on rhetorical skill, seems to have led naturally to a fusion of the hermeneutics of poetry and persuasive non-poetic speech. For the Sophists, business was good.

The Sophists' logic appears to have been impeccable. Not everyone is blessed with the gift of song, and in a society in which song and singing are important factors, being able to teach singing more effectively will have clear benefits. Likewise, not everyone is blessed with the ability to produce poetry or persuasive speeches, so in a society that places high value on both, the rewards will be great for those who can devise a better teaching method. Moreover, students and society also benefit. Some Sophists may well have viewed their efforts to teach rhetoric as serving the public good by developing citizens who could produce and deliver the well-formed, effective speeches necessary in a deliberative democracy. Systematization was the key.

Plato's dialogues make it plain that he thought the Sophists' claims were absurd, but a moment's consideration shows that they were not. There is no question that Sophists

had been teaching *aretê* for years as instructors and interpreters of poetry. Whether they were successful is irrelevant, for we must remember that Greek culture as a whole accepted the idea that hymns and familiarity with poems like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* instilled a full range of virtues. In addition, Plato's objections were not based on the idea that virtue cannot be taught, but rather on his disagreement regarding methods and techniques. There is no question that he believed in the teachability of *aretê*: *The Republic* can be viewed as a manifesto on how best to educate people and thereby form the perfect state, and we know that he was intimately involved in a messy coup in Syracuse that temporarily installed his student Dion in power. From Plato's *Letter VII* (see Bluck, 1947), we know that he believed, at least initially, that his instruction would enable Dion to be a wise and prudent leader.⁹ Also, Plato's academy must have promised to teach *aretê*, given how important Athenians deemed civic virtue at the time. The issue was that Plato equated virtue with knowledge. Because the Sophists, in his view, taught deception and had no knowledge, they could not teach *aretê*.

Inherent in the claim that civic virtue can be taught is the implication that it had to be taught. If this assessment is correct, two explanations are possible. First, the quest for virtue may very well have been embedded in the significant social and cultural changes that began in the seventh century BC – the spread of education, literacy, and the proto-scientific approach to understanding the world – that led philosophers like Xenophanes to question religion. (If an ox could draw, Xenophanes declared, his god would look like an ox.) Our understanding today is that morality and virtue are based on the reciprocal altruism necessary for sociality. As humans transitioned to agriculture, the size of social groups expanded significantly, from the one hundred or so that characterized hunter-gatherers to villages with several hundred and towns with thousands. The need to expand the radius of trust that enables people to live and work together cooperatively increased correspondingly, but so did the likelihood of a violation of trust by individuals who derived benefits from the group without contributing to it, the so-called “freeloaders” (Aviles, 2002). According to N. Wade (2006), “Human societies long ago devised an antidote to the freeloader problem. This freeloader defense system, a major organizing principle of every society, has assumed so many other duties that its original role has been lost sight of. It is religion” (p. 163).

Religion replaces kinship in larger societies as a means of controlling cheats and liars. It establishes an in-group with bonds that resemble kinship and regulates behavior accordingly, providing an effective means of social control. The focus on *aretê*, therefore, may be viewed as a response to the decline in religious belief (at least among élites) resulting from proto-scientific reasoning and a tendency toward secularism, which has the potential to increase the level of freeloading significantly. As the Greeks began to have less faith in the traditional gods, they needed something to replace the sacred so as to maintain barriers to freeloading and thereby hinder the inevitable social damage. The emphasis on civic virtue would have served this need, in effect establishing service to the state as a new locus of belief, and the laws governing mischievous behavior would have enforced sanctions through altruistic punishment. This analysis helps us understand why punishments in Athens were so severe, especially for those found guilty of crimes against the state. Thus, religion as a form of social control can be seen as giving way to social conventions associated with civic virtue, and hence the need to teach *aretê*.

The second explanation lies in the Sophists' challenge to the idea of *aretê*'s innateness, which suggests that they were supporters of democracy (see Beck, 1964). There is little

⁹ Dion turned out to be a thug and was soon overthrown. Plato blamed the bad outcome on Dion's limited intellect, not on his instruction.

direct evidence to support this view, however, and the indirect evidence is far from dispositive but is nevertheless interesting. Instruction in rhetoric was the equivalent of a college education, and if the tuition was high, students did not come from the lower classes, and probably the number from the middle class was limited to those from upwardly mobile families. In his dialogue *The Sophist*, Plato described Sophists as hunters “after young men of wealth and rank” (223). Even if this characterization was only partially accurate, those who received education in civic virtue were primarily (although not exclusively) members of the aristocracy and nobility.

These young men, it seems, generally did not pursue rhetorical training to become better citizens but rather to become more influential ones. A cynic therefore might propose that the claim of teaching civic virtue was merely a charade to appease critics who saw the Sophists instructing their students how, as Aristotle noted, to make “the worse appear the better argument.” Another possibility is that with more critical reasoning faculties, the Sophists and others benefiting from the change to formal schooling recognized that the concept of *aretê* found in Homer could not logically apply to democracy or to empire. The communal or civic identity necessary for both requires a suppression of extreme individuality and a rechanneling of energy and commitment from personal goals to the common good (an idea later developed more fully by Aristotle in his *Politics*). Without this commitment, a political entity larger than a city is difficult, if not impossible, to sustain because the society fragments into social islands defined by kinship, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ideology, and so forth, which fosters civil conflict. As Fukuyama (1999) and Putnam (2001) argued, social capital and a wide radius of trust are vital to political stability and social harmony.

A civic identity among the *demos* would serve the empire, and it is certain that the benefits of empire trickled down to the *demos*. The principal beneficiaries, however, were members of the aristocracy. As the empire expanded and their fortunes grew, their hubris no doubt swelled as well. Any number of events from 480 BC on demonstrate that many of Athens’ élites had a distorted notion of communal identity, if they had one at all. From the realist’s perspective, the Sophists’ claim to teach civic virtue can be seen as a response to a pressing state of affairs: Young men of the ruling class needed to be taught civic virtue because they had so little. We might say that the louche actions of the aristocracy had subverted the presumption of *aretê* that had been their birthright from the earliest days of the Mycenaean era. Citizens of the lower and middle classes had ample reasons for entertaining this view, just as they had ample reasons for embracing the notion that civic virtue can be taught. Doing so surely would have served as an anodyne for the generations of slights and insults suffered at the hands of the aristocracy, and it would have been congruent with the political philosophy underlying democracy. In the Platonic dialogue under his name, Protagoras explains his views on the moral education of the child, noting that “all men are teachers of virtue, each one according to his ability” (328). If we can invest any historical credibility in this statement as a true reflection of Protagoras’ thinking, at least one Sophist, it seems, believed that a pedagogical agenda that included civic virtue had the power to undermine the notion that *aretê* was innate among the élites, to attenuate the extreme individuality among the ruling class, to imbue them with a sense of *communitas*, or community, and to sow the seeds of *dignitas* in those who were not wealthy and privileged.

Whether the Sophists failed or succeeded in teaching civic virtue is an open question, but what is certain is that various leaders, such as Alcibiades and Cleophon, used the inclusive definition of *aretê* to their advantage. The pursuit of *aretê* among the aristocracy continued to be linked to reputation and status. On the personal level, they could cultivate reputations through athletic competitions, appearance, success as military

leaders, and, *ne plus ultra*, success in politics. On the communal level, they relied on lineage and public service in the form of gifts to the city. The common people, on the other hand, had few if any opportunities for personal *aretê*. They could participate in politics and government to a limited degree, but average citizens frequently failed to speak with one voice. Moreover, important decisions often were worked out in secret among the wealthy and influential of the city. The *demos* therefore were forced to turn to those among the aristocracy willing to align themselves with the people – demagogues (from *demos*, “people,” and *agogos*, “leading”) – and thereby advance their own ambitions and dreams of power. Cleophon serves as an illustrative example. Having made his fortune as a manufacturer of musical instruments, he rose to political prominence by asserting that all Athenians were entitled to the privileges of the aristocracy and that these could be attained through distinguished public service. Such political rhetoric made average citizens feel good, even though the realities of life and politics made it extremely difficult for them to rise above their stations.

This analysis would explain why shared notions of civic virtue did not lead to harmonious relations between aristocrats and the common people. The opposite was true. Even as average citizens embraced the idea of communal identity, resentment among many members of the aristocracy toward the *demos* became sharper. For their part, the common people became intoxicated with their growing power and wanted more. It was the people and their leaders, for example, who, blinded by greed and a lust for booty, urged the conquest of Syracuse so as to expand the empire, ignoring completely those who advised caution and restraint.¹⁰ Sparta was drawn into that conflict, which resulted not only in a disastrous defeat in Sicily but also the Peloponnesian War (see Kagan, 2003).

What seems obvious is that, initially, developing *aretê* among the general population may have accrued significant social capital without much cost to the ruling class. Civic virtue among the common people led them to support the empire while earning minimum wages rowing the galleys and serving in the military. However, the accrual of social capital and the leadership provided by demagogues changed the dynamics of power. A communal identity imbued average citizens with a sense of worth and a sense of recognition that, as Hegel (1956) argued, is at the core of social change, and clearly Athens became more democratic during the fourth century. It seems reasonable to conclude that the Sophists’ role in shifting the concept of *aretê* influenced the spread of democratic ideals in the fifth and fourth centuries, which eventually led to the defeat of the oligarchs and their supporters in Athens. It is important to note, of course, that there is no evidence that the Sophists were aware of the effects their teaching was having on society.

War

The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta began in 431 BC and brought a new level of intensity to political debates. Because the stakes were so high, the usual struggles for power and prominence became more vicious. Effective speeches in the assembly and in the courts were more important than ever. The assembly necessarily had to

¹⁰ The principal opponent of the expedition was Nicias, who deliberately inflated the estimated costs and number of ships and troops required, thinking that this would dissuade the assembly. He failed. The assembly not only voted to accept his inflated estimate but also selected him to serve as co-leader of the invasion force.

make decisions on myriad details involving the conduct of the war, and in retrospect, several critical decisions were fundamentally wrong. The war went badly for Athens as a result. By 405 BC, the city was forced to discuss surrender terms. Cleophon, who championed the people, urged the assembly to hold out while seeking aid from abroad. We know from the surviving works of Lysias (c. 459–380 BC), however, that pragmatists and Spartan sympathizers among the aristocracy were ready to end the war, and when their leader, Theramenes, proposed that he could negotiate a peace treaty that would preserve the city, the assembly made yet another huge mistake: Not only was Theramenes granted full authority to negotiate a treaty, he also was sent to Sparta alone.

In *Against Agathos*, Lysias reported that Theramenes “stayed ... [in Sparta] a long time, though he had left you here in a state of siege and knew that your population was in desperate straits, as owing to the war and its distresses the majority must be in want of the necessities of life” (13.11). The goal was to so enfeeble the population that they would accept peace under any conditions, and he succeeded. The terms were that Sparta would spare the city and its inhabitants, provided its protective walls to the sea be torn down, that it abandon all the holdings acquired during the empire, and that it accept the return of all those citizens who had been exiled for their support of oligarchy over democracy. The terms were nonnegotiable and seem to have been harsher than what had been offered before Theramenes’ mission. Facing a huge fleet off the coast and a large army to the north, Athens was forced to surrender to Sparta in April or May of 404.

What followed was the summary execution of the most outspoken supporters of democracy. A governing Council of Thirty was formed upon the exiles’ return, with Theramenes, Agathos, and Critias taking prominent roles. Critias, it is worth noting, was related to Plato, either his cousin or uncle. The Thirty’s first act was to arrest and execute Cleophon. Then, concerned that resistance might be fomenting in Eleusis, just a few miles west of Athens, the Thirty, at the urging of Critias, ordered all the young men in Eleusis of military age to register for duty. Xenophon reported that approximately 300 men were thus seized, bound, and executed.

To suppress democracy further, the Thirty limited Athenian citizenship to 3,000, thereby disenfranchising most of the population, and ordered all non-citizens expelled from the city, conveniently confiscating their property in the process. At the time, the total population may have been about 120,000 (reduced by the war from about 180,000) (Domitius, 2005). Anyone who refused to leave was immediately executed. The Thirty also banned the teaching of rhetoric on the grounds that it encouraged sedition, and at least one rhetorician, Euthydemus, was executed simply owing to his reputation as a gifted speaker.

Civil war: The crucible of rhetorical theory

As the Thirty were consolidating their power through murder, intimidation, and confiscation of property, resistance was stirring. Surprisingly, it appeared first inside the Council of Thirty itself, when Theramenes suggested to his colleagues that limiting citizenship to 3,000 might be a mistake. Enraged at what he saw as opposition to the regime, Critias ordered Theramenes arrested and executed.

Expelling the majority of Athenians from the city may have satisfied an ideological agenda, but politically, it was a significant error. The exiles were no longer under the direct threat of the Thirty and began organizing via the leadership of General Thrasybulus, a hero from the war with Sparta. Within a few months, he had an army of supporters. Lysias reportedly provided the men with money and shields. Ironically, few

of these troops were from the *demos*, a group that had been so beaten down by fear that they had no will to fight; instead, they were from the middle class and the aristocracy, groups that had lost the most during the reign of terror. Meanwhile, Spartan leadership had grown uncomfortable with the actions of the Thirty, a position that was exacerbated by disagreement between the two Spartan kings, Lysander and Pausanias. When conflict broke out between Thrasybulus and his men and the supporters of the Thirty, the Spartans did not intervene. After an initial skirmish at Phyle, not far from Thebes, Thrasybulus marched to Piraeus, the port of Athens, where thousands of additional exiles joined his forces. Overconfident, Critias and several other members of the Thirty marshaled the 3,000 “citizens” of Athens and attacked Piraeus, only to be soundly defeated. During the battle, Critias was killed, as was Plato’s brother Glaucon.

Even though the power of the Thirty was effectively broken, the civil war continued for a year. Several factors worked to end the fighting, particularly King Pausanias’ decision to resolve the conflict and a desire among the exiles and supporters of the oligarchy to find a mutually acceptable compromise. It quickly became apparent that the only obstacles to peace were the surviving members of the Council of Thirty, which had been reorganized as a Board of Ten. Pausanias therefore dissolved the Board and arranged for new elections that effectively restored democracy while leaving the other terms of the peace treaty in place. Defeated politically as well as militarily, what was left of the Thirty, as well as the Ten and their supporters, exiled themselves to Eleusis toward the end of 403. The civil war was over.

The restoration of democracy in Athens did not end the conflict between the supporters of oligarchy and democracy; it simply changed the terms. For the next few years, debates raged in the assembly over the laws that should govern the city. The courts were equally busy as litigants sought to redress wrongs committed during the Thirty’s reign of terror. The atrocities during 404–403 were perpetrated under the color of authority, and neither side was willing to walk that dark path again. Consequently, a commission was formed to review all laws, with the aim of determining their legitimacy. When we scrutinize extant speeches after the restoration, we see a sudden change in the nature of debate: There are fewer and fewer arguments from probability and a much more careful examination of the exact wording and meaning of laws. For the first time, we are able to find extensive citation and interpretation of written statutes in speeches presented in the assembly and in court.

Historically, Athenians had recognized two types of law: *physis* (natural law) and *nomos* (manmade law). The authority of manmade laws was based on the perception that they were related to laws of nature and therefore were rooted in fundamental truths that, although never clearly defined or explicated, were recognized by everyone. After the reign of terror, the majority of Athenians were unwilling to accept this nebulous relationship between *nomos* and *physis* because they had seen how easily it could be made to serve evil purposes. They also were skeptical of any manmade law that was not crystal clear, for they understood that even the slightest ambiguity could be manipulated. We get a sense of just how seriously Athenian courts adhered to manmade law after the restoration by looking at the speech *Against Ctesiphon*, by Aeschines (c. 390–314 BC), politician and subsequently practicing Sophist:

I have heard my own father say, for he lived to be ninety-five years old, and had shared all the toils of the city, which he often described to me in his leisure hours – well, he said that in the early days of the reestablished democracy, if any indict-

ment for an illegal motion came into court, the word was as good as the deed. For what is more wicked than the man who speaks and does what is unlawful?

And in those days, so my father said, they gave no such hearing as is given now, but the jurors were far more severe toward the authors of illegal motions than was the accuser himself; and it frequently happened that they made the clerk stop, and told him to read to them the laws and the motion a second time; and they convicted a man of making an illegal motion, not in case he had overleaped all the laws together, but if one syllable only was contravened. (3.191–192)

Plato on Rhetoric

Plato came of age during this time of turmoil. His family, although not especially wealthy, was nevertheless part of the aristocracy and had been influential in Athenian politics for generations. As already noted, Critias was a close relative and leader of the Thirty Tyrants; Plato's brother Glaucon fought and died in support of the oligarchy. Although we must be careful not to get drawn into any nature/nurture debate, it seems undeniable that the decades-long conflict between the supporters of oligarchy and those of democracy – of which the Peloponnesian War was a part – influenced Plato during his formative years.

Brilliant, complex, and articulate, he could have entered politics but chose philosophy instead. This decision proved advantageous, for it probably saved him from execution and gave us a body of work that has influenced Western civilization for nearly 2,500 years. Only a small part of this work is related specifically to rhetoric, which Plato viewed very negatively, but it laid the foundation for the fully developed theoretical work of Aristotle.

The emphasis on justice

People and ideas exist in a context. Sometimes when writing about history, we cannot determine what the context was, but in the case of Plato we have enough information to do so. The Peloponnesian War ended when Plato was in his 20s. It was followed immediately by the Athenian civil war. When his teacher Socrates was executed in 399 BC, Plato was about 28. Throughout this period, in the governing assembly and the courts, Plato observed rhetoric in action. He saw how easily rhetoric inflamed already hot passions and social divisions. He witnessed how readily the *demos* could be persuaded to change its opinion, frequently with disastrous results, and act unjustly.

The most well-known case involves Socrates. Plato wrote four dialogues concerning the trial and execution of Socrates: *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. In each of these, Socrates is characterized in the most positive terms as an innocent unjustly accused of impiety and corrupting the youths of Athens. Anyone unfamiliar with the history of the period would be led to believe that Socrates was a martyr for truth and philosophy who was executed by ignorant brutes. The charges against Socrates can be hard for us to fathom today. The Platonic dialogues portray Socrates as a teacher of young people, not a corrupter. But in *Apology* (the Greek term *apologia* means “defense”), Socrates states that he follows his own *daimon*, or god, which was not recognized by the state and therefore was deemed an act of impiety.

The second charge – corrupting the youth of Athens – was perhaps more damning because of the events immediately following the war with Sparta. The tyrant Critias was one of Socrates' students, as was the demagogue Alcibiades, one of the more

fascinating figures in ancient Greece.¹¹ And if Socrates' association with such persons was not sufficiently serious, the jurors at his trial had to contend with other unsavory facts: Socrates had been consistently critical of democracy and had lived safely in the city during the rule of the Thirty while other citizens were being murdered or exiled; although at his trial he claimed to have disobeyed an illegal order he received from the Thirty, at no point did he offer any evidence that he opposed their tyranny or protested their crimes. We also learn from *Apology* that this was not the first time that Socrates had been accused. He had faced similar charges some years earlier, but the case was dismissed when the complainant failed to appear. Thus, the jury had yet another factor to contend with in its deliberations – Socrates' unmitigated arrogance. The previous charges had been a warning that he chose to ignore completely. And his arrogance is manifest throughout *Apology*, even though it was composed by his most devoted student. He refused to address directly the charges against him and elected instead to insult the jury, and thereby all Athenians, as loggerheads. When found guilty on both counts, he angered the jury by recommending that his punishment be a reward – free meals for life at the city's expense. Convinced at this point that Socrates was hopeless, the jury voted overwhelming to sentence him to death rather than impose some lesser penalty, such as a fine.

From what was probably Plato's perspective, however, Socrates was just being Socrates – a quarrelsome old man who had been annoying Athenians for decades but who never meant anyone any harm. The trial of Socrates from this point of view was not about facts or capital crimes, and it most certainly was not about justice. It was about the public's dislike of someone who enjoyed showing people how stupid they were. Rhetoric gave the prosecutor the means to demonize Socrates, to turn dislike into a darker emotion, and to secure the death penalty on the basis of who the defendant was rather than what he had done. Plato saw rhetoric's power to overcome reason, its power to inflame passions to such a degree that facts and truth became irrelevant. And such power is dangerous because it subverts justice.

Acknowledging this perspective and putting it in the context of his philosophy helps us understand why Plato's dialogues interpret actions and ideas in terms of justice and knowledge. His philosophy is based on *rationalism* – the belief that reason, rather than empirical observation, is the only valid source of knowledge and truth. The dialogues express the rationalist's conviction that knowledge leads to justice, whereas lack of knowledge leads to injustice. We find Socrates asserting in *Protagoras* that evil actions are the result of ignorance, not evil intent. This rubric allowed Plato to reduce the complex calculus of human behavior to a simple equation. As Candreva (2005) noted: "By making justice or *dikaiousune* the standard against which all other virtues are measured, Plato attempts to avoid the uncertainty and relativity of *doxa*" [opinion] (p. 37). In the context of Platonic rationalism, opinion – the province of rhetoric – is always in a state of flux, always capricious; knowledge, on the other hand, is the province of philosophy and is both absolute and certain. Thus, we find in the dialogues an important dualism – opinion/knowledge – that reflects a yearning for certainty in an uncertain world.

¹¹ Alcibiades – intelligent, strong, ambitious, reportedly the most handsome man in Greece, an incorrigible womanizer, brilliant commander, and superb rhetorician. His speech before the governing assembly in 415 BC led to his being appointed general of Athenian forces in yet another attempt to conquer Sicily. As soon as he set sail with his forces, his enemies accused him of sacrilege. He was tried in absentia and sentenced to death. Rather than face execution, he fled to Sparta, betraying military secrets that contributed to Athen's defeat in the campaign.

Oakeshott (1991) argued that this yearning becomes hazardous in the world of politics because of rationalism's unquestioned belief that all political problems – which is another way of saying all human problems – can be solved through the application of reason: “[T]he ‘rational’ solution of any problem is, in its nature, the perfect solution” (p. 10). According to Oakeshott, “the politics of perfection ... are the politics of uniformity” (p. 9). But in the sphere of human behavior, the only way to achieve even a measure of certainty and uniformity is through a radical abridgment of individuality and freedom, not through knowledge. We find the blueprint for uniformity in Plato's *Republic*, which calls for an end to individuality and freedom. It would accomplish these goals through laws, to be sure, but also through education and state-imposed class structure. From this perspective, *The Republic* represents Plato's ultimate and final response to the Sophists.

Plato's criticism of the Sophists and rhetoric may therefore be viewed as an ideological dispute between rationalism on the one hand and pragmatic realism on the other. As ideology, it transcended Plato's place and time. After a long period of quiescence, rationalism reemerged forcefully during the British Enlightenment to exert a powerful influence on Western culture. The faith that all problems – from teenage pregnancy to racism – can be solved through education and knowledge governs virtually all public policy and can be viewed as the triumph of Platonism.

Aristotle

Aristotle was born circa 384 BC in Stagira, a town in the northern part of Greece. His father, Nichomachus, was the court physician to King Amyntas of Macedonia. Although it is likely that his family expected him to become a physician, this plan was derailed by the untimely death of his father. His guardian, Proxenus, sent him to Athens at age 17 to attend Plato's academy. After completing his studies, he stayed on as a teacher for many years. Kennedy (1991) suggested that, along with other classes, Aristotle began teaching rhetoric of some kind in the late 350s: “The course seems to have been open to the general public – offered in the afternoons as a kind of extension division of the Academy and accompanied by practical exercises in speaking” (p. 5).

There is no question that Aristotle was brilliant, and it is enticing to imagine the interactions that must have transpired between Plato and his pupil. Clearly, Aristotle's intelligence was drawn to a wider range of subjects. He reportedly produced approximately 150 scientific and philosophical treatises. Only 30 survive, but they give some sense of the breadth of his interests, covering biology, zoology, psychology, physics, ethics and morals, aesthetics, politics, poetry, logic, and rhetoric. In many instances, these subjects did not exist as systematic areas of study before Aristotle. He laid the foundation for taxonomy in biology and zoology, was the first to explore psychology systematically, and established various axioms for deductive logic, such as the well-known syllogism:

Every Greek is a person.
Every person is mortal.

Therefore, every Greek is mortal.

His foundational work permeates nearly every facet of intellectual life today, and even many of his speculative conclusions remain relevant, such as his assessment in Book IV of *Physics* that time is related to movement through space.

Aristotle's intellectual pursuits were different from Plato's in numerous respects. Even a nodding acquaintance with Plato's work makes plain that his focus was much more narrow. What may not be quite so obvious is that Aristotle and his mentor had fundamentally different ideas about the source of knowledge. Plato maintained that the world we perceive is only a faint semblance of what he called the "Ideal Forms" that comprise reality. He captured the essence of this philosophy in *The Republic*, through his allegory of the cave: Like imprisoned cave dwellers whose understanding of the world is based on their view of shadows cast on the walls by the sun outside, our knowledge is merely a weak reflection of reality. Because our souls are divinely connected to the Ideal Forms, we can discover truth and acquire knowledge merely by thinking, provided we apply philosophical inquiry, or dialectic. Rhetoric necessarily fails us in this regard because it does not separate the true from the false but simply flatters us into believing that the shadows we perceive are reality, thereby keeping us happy prisoners in the cave of our own ignorance. His discussion of Forms hinges on the notion of *a priori* knowledge – that is, knowledge that is independent of experience and that therefore can be obtained only through ratiocination.

Perhaps because of his early training in biology, or perhaps owing to witnessing his father practicing medicine, Aristotle took a different approach. He based his work on collecting and categorizing data from nature and then reasoning his way to conclusions based on *observation*. Aristotle's philosophy, therefore, is an early form of *empiricism*.

These two approaches to knowledge and understanding the world still govern much of our thinking. Work in humanities – such as literature, for example – tends to focus on reflexive contemplation owing to the belief that each individual is connected to pre-existing universal truths that are inherently generalizable once they are recognized, what William Faulkner once called the "eternal verities." Work in science and social science, on the other hand, tends to be based on the collection, classification, and analysis of data, with generalizations limited to the data under consideration. We therefore can say that Aristotle advanced significantly the proto-scientific approach to knowledge that began with the Milesians, giving us the necessary foundation for science.¹²

Aristotle's divergent method of inquiry may have had a tangible consequence. When Plato died in 347 bc, Aristotle, as the Academy's outstanding student and its most successful teacher, should have been the logical choice to become the new head of the school, but Plato's nephew Speusippus was selected, instead. Aristotle's approach to knowledge may have been too radical for Plato and others associated with the Academy. His connection to the Macedonian court and the fact that he was a *metic*, or resident alien, may also have been contributing factors. At about this time, King Philip of Macedonia was striving to bring all of Greece under his control, and Athenians were bitterly opposed. In any event, Aristotle left Athens shortly after Plato's death and traveled to the city of Assos, in Asia Minor, just east of Lesbos, where he enjoyed the hospitality of King Hermeas for approximately three years. During this time, he married the niece of the king, fathered a daughter, and gathered around him a group of scholars with whom he engaged in intensive biological and zoological research – the very sort of study that Plato ignored. Soldiers of the Persian Empire attacked Assos in 344 bc, forcing Aristotle and his family to flee. They traveled first to Lesbos and then to Macedonia, where King Philip made Aristotle the court philosopher and put him in charge of educating Prince Alexander, later called The Great.

When Philip was assassinated in 336 bc, Alexander was elevated to the throne. His duties as tutor over, Aristotle returned to Athens with the aim of founding his own

¹² Science but not the scientific method.

school. By this time, Athens and Macedonia had signed a treaty that created a less hostile political environment than had existed a decade earlier. Although facing competition from Plato's Academy and from Isocrates' school, Aristotle established the Lyceum in 335 BC. The school flourished, and it was during this period that Aristotle is thought to have produced most of his treatises, which many believe were his lecture notes and were never intended for publication.

As Alexander proceeded to conquer the Persian Empire, there was growing unrest on the Greek mainland. He was forced to maintain a sizable army there to prevent rebellion. Headstrong and freedom-loving, most Athenians resented being under the hegemony of Macedonians, whom they classified as barbarians and contemptuously refused to recognize as Greeks (see Cartledge, 2004). In 323, after countless battles and numerous grievous wounds that would have killed a lesser man, Alexander settled in Babylon to plan a major campaign against the Arabs when he suddenly contracted a fever and died within a matter of days, at the age of 32. The Athenians immediately organized neighboring city states and attacked the Macedonian garrisons in what is known as the Lamian War. Aristotle's close association with Macedonia became a serious liability without the might of Alexander as protection, and he was forced to flee the city. He traveled to the island of Euboea only to fall ill and die in 322 BC.

As in the case of Plato, rhetoric for Aristotle was merely a side interest. We can assume that he taught rhetoric, but there is no evidence that he practiced it. His interest, in fact, appears to have been predicated on his effort to produce a comprehensive examination of human nature. Even so, his book *The Art of Rhetoric* is arguably the most influential text on the subject in history, rivaled only by Cicero's works. He based his theory on observations of public speaking as it was practiced in the assembly and the courts, on his observations of people and their behavior, and on the analysis of existing speeches produced by Sophists. Although he was neither a Sophist nor a rhetorician, the often exquisite detail of his *Rhetoric* suggests that he understood that he could do a better job of explaining the nature of the art than anyone who had previously addressed the topic, including Plato.

The Stage Is Set

Together, Plato and Aristotle set the stage for all discussions of rhetoric that followed. Although Plato's treatment of rhetoric does not reach the true level of theory because it lacks an explanatory component and its descriptive component is simplistic and biased, it nevertheless established ethical and moral criteria by which rhetoric has been judged ever since. Aristotle, on the other hand, provided a richly detailed theory that has resonated throughout history and continues to be relevant. Current textbooks on rhetoric, for example, commonly make reference to Aristotle's notions of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* as rhetorical proofs. Modern theories of communication and advertising rely heavily on the notions of *ethos* and *pathos*, as well as the psychology of the audience, a point that Aristotle emphasized. Furthermore, Aristotle's *Art of Poetry* and *The Art of Rhetoric* may be viewed as the culmination of the Sophists' efforts to systematize the two forms of linguistic expression – and also the completed transition from an oral to a literate society. The quality of a given poem or speech was no longer limited to its performance or the effect it had on listeners but now could also be assessed on the basis of its structure. As societies changed over the centuries and occasions for oral discourse diminished or disappeared altogether, the work begun by the Sophists and completed by Aristotle took on ever growing importance.