

4. See Victor J. Vitanza, *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1997) and Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991).
5. See Vitanza, *Negation*.
6. See John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece* (Columbus: U of South Carolina P, 1995) and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987).
7. John Sallis, *Double Truth* (State U of New York P, 1995).
8. See especially W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971): 55–163 and G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981): 111–30.
9. Guthrie 40.
10. Guthrie 40–41.
11. Guthrie 50.
12. See especially Guthrie, *The Sophists* 176–225, 250–60 and G. B. Kerferd, "The Future Direction of Sophistic Studies," Ed. G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophists and Their Legacy* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981): 1–6.
13. Richard Marback, *Plato's Dream of Sophistry* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1999): 13.
14. See Jacques Derrida, "Difference," *Speech and Phenomena*, 1967, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973): 129–60.
15. Sallis xi.
16. Sallis xi.
17. Edward Schiappa and John Poulakos have debated the possibility of fixing either the historical or conceptual identity of rhetoric and sophistry according to our available disciplinary vocabulary. See John Poulakos, "Towards a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16 (1983): 35–48; "Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 215–26; and "Interpreting Sophistical Rhetoric: A Response to Schiappa," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23 (1990): 218–28; Edward Schiappa, "History and Neo-Sophistic Criticism: A Reply to Poulakos," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23 (1990): 307–15; "Neo-Sophistic Rhetorical Criticism or the Historical Reconstruction of Sophistic Doctrines?" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23 (1990): 192–217; and "Rhetorikê: What's in a Name? Toward a Revised History of Early Greek Rhetorical Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (Feb. 1992): 1–15.
18. Derrida 250.

Paideia versus Techne: Isocrates's Performative Conception of Rhetorical Education

Although the classical Platonic question whether "rhetoric" is an art (*techne*) seems to have been settled by Aristotle in rhetoric's favor, the existential doubt continues to animate many a discussion in both rhetorical historiography and contemporary rhetorical theory. The debate has now moved beyond the "foundational and totalizing question 'What is rhetoric?'" to the more inclusive and proactive question "What can a rhetoric be?" (Lucaites, Condit, and Caudil 19). In the spirit of anti-foundationalism, this paper seeks to revisit the question of *techne* from a perspective of Isocrates, the rival of Plato and Aristotle. Isocrates gives an ambivalent response to the question "do you possess a *techne*" often posited in Platonic dialogues to poets and rhetoricians alike. Answering "yes" or "no" would mean to yield to the assumptions of Plato's epistemology. Instead, Isocrates ushers in a notion of a discursive education (*logon paideia*) that is grounded in the pre-Platonic performance culture. Rather than objectify the subject matter of a "rhetoric," *paideia* fosters self-reflexive performance (*mimesis*) of civic excellence. Isocrates's language game is worth the attention of today's rhetorical educators as he argues for an inclusive and politically responsible discursive training (*logon paideia*) over and against the disembodied mastery of a *techne*. However, *logon paideia* would stand in sharper relief if we first consider the implications of the *techne* question in Plato and Aristotle.

The Techne Question in Plato and Aristotle

Isocrates's reluctance to identify his profession as a *techne* and his expansive conception of *paideia* can be understood as tactical maneuvers in an ongoing rivalry with Plato. Plato's Socrates uses the *techne* question to refute his interlocutors' claim to legitimate knowledge. This knowledge, for Socrates, must be about a definitive subject matter, otherwise no *techne* can be claimed. Hence, the ubiquity in many Platonic dialogues of the "*peri ti*" probe ("what is X about?"), which Socrates uses to determine the "aboutness" of a particular sphere of human activity.

Platonic criticism of performers of poetry and rhetoricians highlights the same putative deficiency in regard to "subject matter": their subject matter is *logoi*,

rather than the knowledge of shipbuilding, medicine, or mathematics. The dialogue *Ion*, for instance, pictures Socrates failing to pin down the rhapsode's knowledge: "You are exactly like Proteus, twisting back and forth, assuming every shape ... in order not to display how skilled you are in wisdom about Homer (*peri Homerou sophian*)" (542 a). Ion's knowledge, however, unlike the expertise of the doctor, the fisherman, or the charioteer, does not attach itself to a specific group of objects. In fact, it is not attached to objects at all: the rhapsode knows "the kind of thing ... that a man would say, and a woman would say, and a slave and a free man, a subject and a ruler—the suitable thing for each" (540 b). Ion imitates only Homeric words, but does not possess an expertise in a distinct craft.

This charge of epistemological deficiency, however, is tied to Plato's negative conception of performance, according to which verbal or bodily imitation (*mimesis*) is always inferior to the "original." Plato apparently invented the pejorative sense of mimesis as a "bad copy." According to Havelock, pre-Platonic usage "refers to 'sympathetic behavior,' not to abstract copying or imitation, and in great many cases this behavior is physical, a matter of speech, gesture, gait, pose, dress and the like" (*Preface to Plato* 58 n22). Havelock points out that Greek education was based on a performative union of speech and action:

What you 'did' were the thousand acts and thoughts, battles, speeches, journeys, lives, and deaths that you were reciting in rhythmic verse, or hearing, or repeating. The poetic performance ... had itself to be a continual re-enactment of the tribal folkways, laws and procedures, and the listener had to become engaged in this re-enactment to the point of total emotional involvement. (159)

Socrates forgives Ion his epistemological failure in exchange for an admission that the rhapsode's skill is not an art, but a product of divine inspiration (*Ion* 542a). Plato does not offer this plea bargain to rhetoricians. Like the *Ion*, the *Gorgias* employs the *techne* question, only in this dialogue rhetoricians are charged with moral deficiency as well. Because rhetoricians ingratiate their audience without having a clearly circumscribed expertise in a particular subject, and do so shamelessly, they are deliberate impostors. Socrates summarizes this twin indictment in his conversation with Polus:

Flattery, however, is what I call it, and I say that this sort of thing is a disgrace ... because it aims at the pleasant and ignores the best; and I say it is not an art [*techne*], but a habitude [*empereia*], since it has no account [*logos*] to give of the real nature of things it applies, and so cannot tell the cause [*aitian*] of any of them. I refuse the name of art to anything that is irrational [*alogon*]. (465a)

Plato wrote *Gorgias* around the same time as Isocrates composed *Against the Sophists*. While exact dates of these texts are contested (see Roochnik 182), the *techne* question is pivotal in both. Isocrates refuses to equate his teaching with a

tetagmene techne, a "fixed art," and negates a possibility of a *techne* that "can implant sobriety and justice in depraved natures" (*Against the Sophists* 12, 21). Not that Isocrates denies that he professes a teachable knowledge (why open a school and charge tuition, then?); rather, his dancing around *techne* suggests that affirmation would render Isocrates vulnerable to Plato's epistemological criteria. As Roochnik points out, Plato sets up an elaborate trap for Socrates's opponents:

All of these arguments hinge on granting the goodness of *techne*. Should the interlocutor agree to this, he is committed to the notion that knowledge is good and not equivalent, either in kind or value, to opinion. It further implies that he thinks determinacy, clarity, precision, and arithmetic stability, the hallmarks of *techne*, are desirable. Should the interlocutor agree to these assertions, he will be refuted by Socrates, for his own views cannot measure up to these standards. Once refuted, he becomes open to the exhortation to seek moral knowledge, that is, to become philosophical. (204)

Roochnik argues that Socrates resorts to *techne* analogy *only* for purposes of refutation and exhortation, while never claiming a *techne* of moral knowledge himself (227–31). If this is so, Isocrates's eschewing of *techne* and his expansive claims to *paideia* and *philosophia* make more sense, since the supposed value of *techne* is but a bait designed to marginalize rhetoric and endow philosophy with a higher intellectual and moral status. Not only status is at stake, however. As will be discussed later, Isocrates presents a contesting version of philosophy, the one thoroughly based in performance culture and political discourse (*logos politikos*), in explicit contrast with Platonic flight from the traditional performative *paideia*.

By the time Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* is written, the meaning of *techne* and the value of rhetoric have evolved. If Plato consistently divides knowledge between theoretical and productive types, Aristotle offers a tripartite classification of knowledge into theoretical, practical, and productive. Unlike Plato, Aristotle reserves the term *techne* only for productive arts (such as poetics and rhetoric). Also, Aristotle considers rhetoric as a systematic *techne* rather than as a "knack" (*Rhetoric* 1254a2). Finally, Aristotle pronounces rhetoric "useful" (*kbresimos*) (1355a12). Aristotle, then, seems to have exculpated rhetoric from the twin charge of epistemological and ethical deficiency and thereby established rhetoric as a legitimate discipline. Such is the prevailing opinion in contemporary rhetorical historiography.

Yet legitimacy is purchased at a price of rhetoric's subordination to practical arts of ethics and politics, and separation between propositional content and performative power of discourse. Comparing rhetoric with other areas of inquiry, Aristotle states: "Thus it appears that Rhetoric is as it were an offshoot of Dialectic and of the science of Ethics, which may be reasonably called Politics. That is why Rhetoric assumes the character [*bupoduetai bupo to schema*, "slips un-

der the appearance”] of Politics, and those who claim to possess it, partly from ignorance, partly from boastfulness, and partly from other human weaknesses, do the same” (1356a7). In this veiled attack on Isocrates’s *logos politikos*, Aristotle indicates that rhetoric gives expression to political subject matter, but must not be confused with it. Here, subordination is a matter of distinguishing between substantive knowledge furnished by extra-rhetorical disciplines of ethics and politics and potential public statements. Rhetoric’s function is “to observe (*to idein*) in each case the existing means of persuasion” (1355b14); it is merely a “faculty [*dunamis*] of furnishing arguments” (1356a7). Furthermore, this “faculty” is a mark of already fully habituated ethical agents. “The *Rhetoric*,” as Poster contends, “is provided as a manual for the student trained in dialectic who needs, particularly for purposes of self-defense or defense of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, to sway the ignorant or corrupt audience or to understand the functioning of rhetoric within a badly ordered state” (244).

Another related legitimacy condition pertains to the relationship between political agents and received opinions (*endoxa*) from which rhetorical syllogisms are formed. According to Aristotle, to gain mastery of rhetorical argument (to become *enthymematikos*), one must be able to discern the true (*alethes*) from that which resembles it. Such is the requirement for the capacity to “divine well in regard to *endoxa*” (1355a11). Grimaldi thinks this passage implies that the rhetor simply aims at what is true in each particular case (1:23), but there is a good reason to disagree with him. I have argued elsewhere that Aristotle remains consistent throughout his corpus in his treatment of *endoxa*. Because of his belief in the cyclical nature of knowledge, he approaches them as manifestations of universal truths about cosmos and human nature, rather than as culturally and situationally specific utterances (Haskins 168–73). Indeed, even before deploying *endoxa* in an argument, the rhetor must reconstitute the propositional content of *endoxa* in terms of commonplaces (*topoi*) (*Rhetoric* 1403b1). Consequently, the linguistic form is separated from its extralinguistic content and performative elements of discourse are relegated to style (*lexis*), treated in the *Rhetoric*’s third book apart from the discussion of proofs, genres and emotions.

So, while Aristotle gives a positive answer to the Platonic probe “is rhetoric a *technē*?” he also significantly limits the scope and function of rhetorical practice and education. If Plato “had developed the metaphysical justification for an epistemology that rendered rhetoric irrelevant to the central problem of connecting ideas with words, objects, and actions” (Ober, *Political Dissent* 251), Aristotle took a different route. He redefined rhetoric as a neutral capacity (*dunamis*) in the hands of a rational agent. It may well be that Aristotle’s response to the *technē* question was a “correction” not of Plato, but of Isocrates.

Isocratean Logon Paideia as Performance

In none of his extant texts does Isocrates directly name his profession a *technē*. Translators of the Loeb edition in many instances have offered phrases

“art of discourse” or “art of words” where no such terms exist in the original Greek (Roochnik 283–88). Roochnik sees Isocrates vacillating between rejecting *technē* and associating with it. For despite his negative view of a “fixed art,” Isocrates still wishes to “hang a shingle,” or advertise his knowledge as something worth paying for: “[Isocrates] studiously avoids actually using ‘*technē*’ to speak about what it is he teaches, while at the same time trying to associate what he teaches with the arts” (287).

Isocrates’s ambivalence on the *technē* question is important for at least two reasons. First, it reminds us of the mutability of the terms we have embraced to explain our profession to insiders and outsiders alike, as well as of the role these terms play in a convoluted dynamic of status and marginality in the history of rhetoric (Hariman). On the other hand, this ambivalence points to a conception of education that does not sit easy with a demand for a discreet body of principles which could be viewed apart from performance (as Aristotle would imply by the phrase *to idein*, to observe). Isocrates challenges our deep presumption of the goodness of a systematic rhetorical methodology, rooted as it is in Aristotle’s account of the art of rhetoric. For example, Solmsen’s landmark essay “The Aristotelian Tradition in Ancient Rhetoric” bemoans the fact that in Isocrates “we lack a starting point of the same solidity and authenticity as Aristotle’s three books on rhetoric” (36). On the other hand, a few scholars have attempted to reconstruct Isocrates’s “theory” on the basis of ancient testimonia’s assumption that Isocrates had produced a handbook. They typically proceed by extracting from Isocrates’s extant writings a set of principles or criteria that can qualify as theory. For instance, Gaines interprets Isocrates’s putative emphasis on the parts of speech as a valid rhetorical theory. Rummel seeks to find the conceptual grounding of Isocrates’s “ideal of rhetoric” in his reliance on opinion (*doxa*).

However, if we keep reading Aristotle back into Isocrates, we are likely to discover mostly those elements that are congenial to Aristotle’s epistemology and politics. I suggest that Isocrates’s compositions do not aspire to an atemporal status of theory. Several scholars have questioned the desire to ascribe a *technē* to Isocrates. Michael Cahn focuses on *kairos* (“opportune moment”) as a key notion explaining Isocrates’s radical indeterminacy and Yun Lee Too depicts Isocrates as a hegemonic rhetor who ensures the pedagogical and political relevance of his writings by accenting his role as an agent of knowledge. I would like to add to these insights another perspective—the one derived from Isocrates’s own descriptions of the performative dimension of his *paideia*. While “performance” has certainly become an academic buzzword, I do not imply that we need to import it into our readings of ancient texts. In Isocrates, the notion of performative education is readily apparent. Unlike Plato, whose relationship with the oral performance culture is marked by antagonism, Isocrates builds upon the traditional Greek link between speech and action, common in pre-Platonic understanding of mimesis (Havelock 57–60).

Isocrates explicitly affirms his debt to the poetic tradition. In his monumental *Antidosis* (itself a “mimesis” of Plato’s *Apology*) he substitutes the term *philosophia*

for *mousike* in a description of the two disciplines “bequeathed to us by our ancestors”: “physical training for the body, of which gymnastics is a part, and, for the mind, philosophy” (181). In Greece of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE *mousike* denoted the educational practice of memorization and recitation of the poetic tradition; while at the time of publication of *Antidosis* (354–353 BCE) *philosophy* was precisely the term contested by Plato and Isocrates (Timmerman 149).

How, then, does *philosophia* work as the mental counterpart of gymnastics? Isocrates pictures a progression from imitation to self-conscious performance. First, “those concerned with philosophy impart to their pupils all the forms which speech (*logos*) happens to use,” then follows a period of intense exercise and habituation, and finally, the pupils are set to test if they can “bring their opinions (*doxais*) into closer touch with the occasions for applying them” (*Antidosis* 184). This picture of Isocrates’s *logon paideia* appears almost too simple, unless we recognize the striking strategy of using *philosophia* in place of *mousike*, as well as the insistence on *doxa* as a pinnacle of an apparently long and arduous learning process. Indeed, Isocrates accents *doxa* in what seems like a deliberate gesture against Plato’s conception of philosophy as an ascent away from “mere opinion.” As Takis Poulakos comments, “the kind of learning Isocrates promotes, then, has to do with the ability to make experienced judgments in those affairs that present themselves full of uncertainty and ambiguity but which nevertheless must be addressed” (97).

The ability to address unforeseen contingencies does not exhaust the performative thrust of Isocrates’s *paideia*. If this were the only Isocratean contribution to the classical rhetorical lore, it could be easily assimilated into Aristotle’s conception of *techne* (sans the proud label of philosophy, of course). Rather, it is the notion of political identity as a product of discursive training and recurrent political performance that seems to fly in the face of the Academy and the Lyceum.

Performance is not just a way of knowing, it is a way of doing and being. Isocrates promotes discursive education (*logon paideia*) as training in social action. Students arriving at Isocrates’s doorstep should expect not only to memorize and practice poetry and prose for the sake of acquiring facility in oratory, but also gradually to grow into public persons whose actions are worthy of poetic and political praise. We should keep in mind that another meaning of the term *doxa* is “reputation.” For Isocrates, “An honorable reputation [*to dokein einai kalon kagathon*] not only lends greater persuasiveness to the words of a man who possesses it, but also adds luster to his deeds, and is therefore to be sought after more zealously by men of intelligence than anything else in the world” (*Antidosis* 280). If Aristotle’s “ethos” constitutes an intrinsic proof, a means to an external end, Isocrates stresses “good reputation” as both a means and an end of public performance.

An ancient aristocratic ideal of goodness and nobility, *kalokagathia* by Isocrates’s time had become transformed “into the inborn nobility of the citizen body as a whole” (Ober, *Mass and Elite* 263). Its aesthetic and political aspects

are no doubt linked for Isocrates, as he imagines *kalokagathia* as a kind of mimetic magnet for those who embark on the study of philosophy. But he adds an ethical dimension to this “god term” by stipulating that mimesis of worthy discourses requires contemplation and appraisal (*theorein kai dokimazein*) of models of civic excellence, not unreflective mimicry (*Antidosis* 277). Thus, to Aristotle’s subsequent displeasure, Isocrates is able to claim ethics as a province of a discursive *paideia*.

But there is more. Isocrates argues that a good reputation is ultimately bestowed on an agent by a political community: “the stronger a man’s desire to persuade (*peithein*) his listeners, the more zealously will he strive to be honorable (*kalos kagathos*) and to have the esteem of his fellow citizens” (*Antidosis* 278). Whereas Aristotle prefers to bracket the consequences of performance for a speaking subject by stressing rhetoric as a capacity rather than activity, Isocrates considers the audience’s response essential to one’s political agency. Aristotle would find such a life, dependent as it is on vicissitudes of audiences and situations, burdensome and even vulgar. Unless speakers stay within a circle of like-minded friends or disciples (“the ideal speech situation”) possibilities of failure abound. In Isocrates’s view, those who do not seek approval of their political community, like his former student Timotheus, find themselves in disrepute. As is evident from *Antidosis* and *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates puts himself in a position of constantly proving his professional and political worth to his audience.

To claim a *techne*, then, whether in Plato’s or Aristotle’s sense of the term, may not be the best course for defending our profession. As Isocrates’s case suggests, we cannot—indeed, we shouldn’t aspire to—settle the question “What can a rhetoric be?” once and for all. By the same token, the indeterminacy of a performative *paideia* entails not less but more responsibility on the part of rhetorical educators. Rather than declare a Baudrillardian victory and go home, indeterminacy challenges us to accept the burden of proof as agents of knowledge.

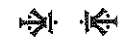
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