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**A new understanding of sophistic rhetoric: A translation, with commentary, of Mario Untersteiner's "Le origini sociali della sofistica"**

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A New Understanding of Sophistic Rhetoric: A Translation, with Commentary, of Mario

Untersteiner's "*Le origini sociali della sofistica*"

by

Elisabeth LoFaro

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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## **Dedication**

To my father who did not live to see this day but told me the last time I saw him to finish what I started and without whom I would have never spoken English in the first place. I know that he is watching over my shoulder as I write these words. I love you, dad. Thank you for trying your hardest to give me more than everything.

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**A New Understanding of Sophistic Rhetoric: A Translation, with Commentary, of**

**Mario Untersteiner's "*Le origini sociali della sofistica*"**

**Elisabeth LoFaro**

**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation translates an essay by Mario Untersteiner "*Le origini sociali della sofistica*" ("The Social Origins of Sophistry") unpublished in English, and explores its significance in terms of classical and contemporary rhetorical theory, as well as the composition classroom. In the process, I attempt to contribute to reestablishing sophistry and rhetoric within our contemporary cultural milieu. More specifically, the dissertation is organized into five main parts: The first chapter offers an introduction to and thorough background of the sophists in ancient and classical Greece; the second chapter reviews the scholarship about the sophists, as well as that on Mario Untersteiner and his "*Le origini*," exploring the commonly known difficulties of translation. Chapter three provides my translation of the complete essay, while chapter four presents my interpretation of the most salient issues in the essay and their importance to classical rhetorical theory. The concluding chapter presents my conclusions and relates my findings to the composition classroom, the university, and society at large, arguing for the reintegration of certain sophistic rhetorical theories and practices.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Science, politics, philosophy, drama, literature, architecture—a great number of Western civilization’s most prized, honored, and respected achievements emerged in classical Athens at roughly the same time in which rhetoric and sophistry<sup>1</sup> developed and flourished. The reasons behind this coterminous appearance offer room for speculation, yet some educated conjectures materialize more strongly than others. Social, philosophical, cultural, and political circumstances not only enabled but also created the conditions for the emergence of sophistry, for the sophistic movement responded to a new need in a dynamic, evolving social configuration. The sophistic tradition thus emerged 2,500 years ago in the Mediterranean at a time of ardent fervor and shifts in the organization of human life and Western civilization. This dissertation examines the conditions that engendered this tradition, including a review of the literature to date, a translation of a germinal essay by Mario Untersteiner “*Le origini sociali della sofistica*” (“The Social Origins of Sophistry”) unpublished in English, and discusses Untersteiner’s significance in terms of classical and contemporary rhetorical theory, with implications in the composition classroom. I attempt to the continuing reassessment of sophistry and

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<sup>1</sup> Although sophistry is now often a pejorative term, as it was in Antiquity, I am using the term descriptively rather than evaluatively.

rhetoric within our contemporary cultural milieu. More specifically, the dissertation is organized into five main parts: the first chapter offers an introduction to and thorough background of the sophists by contextualizing them in archaic Greece; the second chapter reviews the scholarship about the sophists, as well as that on Mario Untersteiner and his “*Le origini*,” exploring the commonly known difficulties of translation. Chapter Three provides my translation of the essay in its entirety, while Chapter Four presents my interpretation of what I deem the most salient issues in the essay in terms of classical rhetorical theory and scholarship. The final chapter presents my conclusions by relating my findings to contemporary rhetorical theory, the composition classroom, the university, and society at large.

In order to understand the importance of sophistry, one must recognize the circumstances that were in place before and during the time in which sophistry emerged, prior to the social conditions that Mario Untersteiner discusses in his essay. These circumstances allowed sophistry to flourish and within the scholarly and public imagination, even if in a negative manifestation and despite the pejorative perspectives of Plato’s dialogues. I discuss the circumstances leading up to classical Greece, the context of Untersteiner’s essay, in terms of their socio-historical, cultural, and philosophical manifestations.

There is, of course, inevitable overlap between categories, for any sort of grouping or classification system will reveal complications, inconsistencies, and overlap. Definitional categories are inherently somewhat unstable, and, to a degree, arbitrary. However, they are necessary to organize and present opportunities for analysis. In order to elaborate upon the context of Untersteiner’s essay, I divide the contextual background

of the sophists into distinct (although constructed categories) that are not flawless and may blur in some places. I include political events and the development of rhetoric within the socio-historical section, discuss education in the cultural section, and briefly review the pre-Socratics in the philosophical one. Without question, these could have been arranged differently. Nevertheless, they are necessary for communication and for understanding the context of the events discussed in Untersteiner's essay, which examines the social conditions in the age that followed promoting the appearance of sophistry.

The main events that stimulated radical changes in Greece and created conditions favorable to the appearance of sophistry occurred due to a number of "paradigm shifts," to borrow Thomas Kuhn's famous expression, which took place around 600 BCE. These events and changes are important not only for the birth and flourishing of sophistry but also, by extension, of the whole of Western civilization, for the advancements (political and social) of this time laid the foundations of Western thought, even if not always for the best, and, continue to be aspirational and inspirational for many individuals. By the time the sophists appeared, Athens was a cultural cauldron of activity. The arts and sciences were thriving, and a previously unseen inquisitiveness and suspicion regarding myth, superstition, and custom emerged, as well as a new belief in "progress" and the potential of human beings. The literary arts, oratory, and rhetoric flourished in response to contemporary needs. These great, unparalleled accomplishments were the fruit of a number of shifts from earlier ways of thinking, changes that arose out of the events that occurred during the centuries before the Golden Age. Among the most significant socio-historical, political, and philosophical events leading up to this Golden Age of the

Hellenes were the transformations in the social organization of, between, and for the historical population.

### **Socio-Historical Context**

The development of the *polis* occurred over a long period of time. For thousands of years, the Aegean, a small sea in the eastern Mediterranean, hosted many societies—first the Aegean civilization in the third millennium BCE, then the Minoan, and finally the Mycenaean in the subsequent thousand years. These societies leave records of their cultures in the oral myths of Homer. One significant change occurred when the few kingdoms that ruled Greece in the second millennium BCE, known as the Mycenaean Age, ended suddenly in 1200 BCE. A period of deep economic and cultural cutbacks accompanied by a decline in population that lasted for 350 years ensued after this time and came to be known as the Dark Ages, from roughly 1200 BCE to 800 BCE. Historians argue that, in these conditions, the necessary component of Greek life was the self-sufficient farming villages, ruled by *basileis*, a term that approximates the word “chieftan” more than “king” (Starr 17). From these villages, the new *poleis* were to emerge in the eight century BCE (Nagle & Burstein 2).

At this time, Greece divided into small communities that shifted from being controlled by *basileis* to being under aristocratic rule by 700 BCE. Only kings and holy seers were allowed to speak in this political landscape. Homer offers an example of this trend in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, when common soldier Thersites attempts to address an assembly of the Greek army and asks what would today be considered a plausible and excellent question: “Why must we continue to die here for the greed and lust of you

kings?" (Qtd. in Robinson 22). Homer shows Thersites as ridiculed and silenced (Woodruff and Gagarin x, Robinson S 22). At this time, only people of higher classes were considered competent to speak and make decisions. Hesiod's political accounts of the time also show a similar situation in a pastoral setting. Kings had all the power, and justice remained arbitrary and fragile (Woodruff and Gagarin xi).

### **Development of the *poleis***

The greatest changes concerning every feature of Greek life took place from the eighth to the sixth century BCE, the period immediately preceding the emergence of sophistry and the Golden Age of Athens. At this time, a civilization began to emerge whose existence was recorded in much greater detail than ever before. From the eighth century forward, small independent city states, or *poleis*, developed out of self-sufficient farming villages around the Aegean. Historical data regarding the actual dates of the development of the *poleis* is scarce until sixth-century Athens, which was among the later *poleis* to develop, but the work of political anthropologists investigating the evolution of *poleis* dates them after the Dark Ages. These Aegean states, such as Corinth, Argos, Thebes, Sparta, and Athens, were societies of farmers and craftsmen. Many of them were isolated by mountains, yet the inhabitants developed abilities as seamen, abilities that enabled trade. The trade links they established with each other and with peoples from the Near East, the Western Mediterranean, and beyond enabled these *poleis* or city-states to grow prosperous on trade. Although independent and autonomous, the people of these city-states began to develop a common national identity, and as merchant classes became

economically independent. A move away from the government by kings began to develop.

These *poleis* also brought about the development of constitutions and codification of laws. A population boost and a dynamic economic growth that had not been witnessed since the second millennium BCE culminated in the creation and spread of currency, a development that radically changed economic activity (Nagle and Burstein 43). Further, a common language and alphabet came into being around the Aegean. A nation was forming, with religion providing the strongest unifying force, and the *poleis* were the center of the entire process. Archeological records note that shrines also began to appear around this time. Centers of civic unity, these temples replaced the huts of the earlier part of the eighth century (Starr 39). While this development can be overemphasized, festivals at these early sanctuaries drew large masses of people together and held economic functions as well.

*Polis* commonly translates as city-state in English. The numerous contemporary definitions of city and state, however, cannot capture the full meaning of *polis* and even the closest contemporary understanding possible cannot come close to the meaning of this ancient social organization, as is often the case with ancient Greek terms. The *polis* was quite different from today's city and state. D. Brendan Nagle and Stanley Burstein point out that the connotations of the two words—city and state—have little to do with the *poleis* of ancient Greece. Rather than political institutions, *poleis* had *politai*, that is, citizens whose citizenship was passed on by questionable claims of descent and who both govern and are governed, as Aristotle would later state. For Gagarin and Woodruff, the *polis* was “a tightly knit community bound by cultural and religious ties and sharing

certain military and economic goals” (xi). Therefore, more than its usual translation as “city-state,” the *polis* was a “community of self-governing citizens” (Nagle and Burstein 1).

Philip Manville offers a particularly pointed exploration of the term. Agreeing that the Greek *polis* meant more than any state or city-state current or historical, Manville finds answers in the *Politics*, the treatise in which Aristotle most closely examines the character and qualities of the Greek *polis*, despite Aristotle’s common blending of the theoretical and the empirical (38). The encouragement of *arête*, a term with a complex meaning which I will explore throughout the dissertation but that loosely translates to virtue, emerges most prominently and is among the most interesting requisites of the *poleis*, as well as central to this discussion. For Aristotle, Manville elucidates, “the *polis* exists by nature [and] developed out of simpler forms of society, evolving toward its ultimate goal of ‘the good life’” (43). More than an association or an alliance, the *polis* is a *koinōnia*, which is a special type of association that “unites and harmonizes the functions of its members for their mutual benefit . . . consisting of rulers and ruled whose final common purpose is the encouragement of excellence (*arête*) among all citizens” (43—44).

To ensure this goal, *dikē* or justice becomes a fundamental element of the *polis* and inextricably linked to *arête*. Justice, however, cannot be guaranteed exclusively through institutions such as the constitution, laws, and courts, but must be a “spiritual commitment of the citizens, a shared belief that the form and processes of the institutions will lead to goodness” (44). As a result, the *polis* had to articulate what is just so as not only to enable but also to encourage the best human qualities to burgeon. Despite

Aristotle's quarrels with the sophists regarding *nomos*, *physis*, and *dikē*, one basic belief remained regarding the *polis*: "it was a special kind of community in which citizens benefited by their membership" (48). For Werner Jaeger, the development of the *poleis* marked the beginning of classical Greek culture (*Paideia*, Vol. 1, 77). The benefits citizens gained through their membership could and were abetted by the services that the sophists provided in Greek *poleis*, as I will discuss below.

The Greeks founded hundreds of these totally independent city-states in the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins between the mid-eighth and the late sixth century BCE. Of 1500 *poleis* around the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, most did not cover areas larger than one hundred square miles and had fewer than one thousand citizens. Founding colonies, however, was an arduous and perilous process—what today would be considered a speculative venture—that included the risk of death. The impetus behind these hazardous undertakings stemmed in part from the possibilities of accumulating wealth but perhaps even more so such colonization offered the possibility of a fresh start that differed from the conditions and friction of Archaic Greece. Such feelings and attitudes of optimism and apprehension of the pioneering Greek explorers emerge prominently already in the *Odyssey* (Nagle and Burstein 21). Herodotus also offers accounts of the founding of some *poleis*, for example, in his account of the case of Cyrene. Such colonization obviously promotes a clash between peoples that inevitably leads to the encounter and spreading of new ideas. As the Greeks sought new arable land and trade prospects, these new ideas entered Greek thought, not always for the best and too often with violent outcomes. Nevertheless, the proliferation of these emerging

concepts predictably produced fertile ground for change and development, out of which the sophists with their inquiring could raise a rich array of questions.

### **Political Context**

A definite power shift also occurred in Greece after the developments of the tenth and ninth centuries BCE. Exact dates are unavailable due to the lack of writing at the time, and the reasons for the shift from aristocracy to democracy are too many to explore in this brief introduction; nonetheless, an adequate preamble is necessary and aligned with the scope of this introduction. Once again, Homer offers the first discussions of political thought.

Worth quoting at length, Kurt Raaflaub posits that Homer discusses political problems and as a result educates the people:

[T]he concerns emphasized by the epic poet . . . deal with basic problems of life and relationships in a community. The thought devoted to these concerns is political thought. It occupies a remarkably prominent place already in these earliest works of western literature. In keeping with the literary and poetic nature of these works, such thought is fully integrated into the narrative and expressed through action and speech. In other words, the poet uses traditional mythical narrative to discuss ethical and negative models of social behavior, by illuminating the causes and consequences of certain actions and relating those to the well-being of the community, the poet raises the level of awareness among his listeners, he forces them to think, he educates them. Here then, to say it

paradoxically, in non-political poetry in a prepolitical society, lie the roots of Greek political thought. (“Homer” 33)

Raaflaub argues that, from its earliest records, Greek thought addressed a great number of issues: the injurious results of clashes within the leading classes and of reckless actions of the nobility; the ways to avoid such clashes and overcoming them should they occur; the discrepancy between communal and individual interests; the ways to improve and implement justice; the role of the community and nobility for outsiders and the socially underprivileged; and the political and moral problems surrounding warfare (34). Such issues were of critical importance to the development and success of the community and remained within Greek thought for centuries. They also indicate a shift of responsibility from the gods to human agents, who now become accountable for actions and mistakes within society and must, therefore, cogitate and deliberate upon their own actions. The most significant changes within political organization occur when human beings begin to question relations between social classes, formerly thought of as ordained by the gods, setting the stage for the subsequent appearance of the sophists.

### **Shift from Tyranny to Aristocracy to Democracy**

The eighth century BCE brings yet another change, one of the earliest events that began changing the course of Western civilization. Deference to the dominant elites of past times, elites who did not heretofore have to answer to anyone, began crumbling as these *poleis* developed throughout Greece (Robinson S. 21—22). The masses of Greeks rather suddenly and consciously rejected absolute authority, a transformation in consciousness

that caused a change in power relations (21). This change created a need for rhetorical prowess, as I will discuss in more depth below, for the Greek masses now had to be persuaded by their leaders even while the aristocracy continued to dominate. Already in the worlds represented by Homeric epic poetry, kings and military leaders depended upon their rhetorical dexterity to function smoothly; as the often quoted dictum indicates: “a hero must be not only a doer of fine deeds, but a speaker of fine words” (Homer, *Iliad* IX). Although the aristocracy had ultimate power over the people, leaders nonetheless had to gain consensus from the masses of Greek farmers, who also comprised the militias. The causes for this alteration in power relations remain concealed behind a lack of written records during the ninth and tenth centuries BCE. However, what records remain clearly indicate a modification of power from absolute to consensual in the eight century.

A stir in socioeconomic/political relationships also took place at this time, and would turn out to be one of the greatest changes in terms of the developments it set into motion. Military service and political privilege were very directly linked until this time, as already evident in the earliest classical Greek history and literature such as Homeric poems. In the *Iliad* Homer portrays societies ruled by a “warrior elite of great landowners,” referring to them as “heroes” and “kings” who alleged to descend from the gods and claimed that their paramount role in battle held the right to govern their communities (Nagle and Burstein 28). This connection between military glory and community leadership, however, dissolved around the seventh century BCE, when the aristocracy, whose members also claimed to be of divine descent, replaced the monarchy. Daniele Vignali, dean of the Istituto Paritario Nobel in Rome, states that aristocratic

power was primarily economic and only later did the aristocrats claim themselves as superior based on the virtue of their birth and the possession of ethical virtues connected to their divine descent; he writes that the aristocrats, “*la cui potenza era principalmente ed originariamente di carattere economico, si presentarono in un secondo tempo come individui superiori rispetto ai propri concittadini in virtù della loro nascita e del possesso di virtù etiche legate appunto alla loro presunta discendenza da una stripe divina*” ([the aristocrats] whose power was primarily and originally of an economic character, presented themselves at a later time as superior individuals compared to their fellow citizens by virtue of their birth and possession of ethical virtues tied to their supposed descent from a divine bloodline) (22). This shift in political power soon led to yet another development, between the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, one that saw the imperious economic ascent of the middling class due to the expansion of mercantile trade and radically changing social conditions (22).

Wealth and welfare, formerly extremely circumscribed, broadened. Even the honor of being part of the army and therefore defend the native land, formerly reserved exclusively to the nobles, was granted to anyone who could afford arms for combat due to mutations in military strategy and especially with the institution of the hoplite phalanx, a disciplined heavy infantry (Vignali 22, Nagle and Burstein 29, 43). The development of the hoplites slowly dissolved the supremacy of the cavalry and the aristocrats, who held most of their power because they had the funds for horses. Once the middle class could afford armor and weapons, a sense of community between the leaders and the middle class emerged. While at first these *nouveaux riche* attempted to integrate with the aristocratic elite, the conditions of aristocratic domination were miserably crumbling.

Power now hinged on how well a phalanx of hoplites could fight together in the interest of the community as a whole. At this stage, the individualism of an Achilles disappeared altogether (Woodruff and Gagarin xi).

Because of their military commitment and wealth, non-noble citizens began demanding both political recognition and a written codification of laws that protected them against the arbitrary will of the aristocratic courts and protect the non-nobles from the abuse of power of the nobles (Vignali 23). These factors engendered the birth of the first written legislations, particularly those of Solon at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, which essentially formed a timocracy,<sup>2</sup> a salient step towards democracy, lightening the pressure of aristocracy over the people. The interests of those who served in the army—a middle class of farmers, artisans, and merchants—were of primary importance at this stage. Political reform started to occur, and social classes had to find a middle ground rather than win one over the other. Solon's reforms, however, pleased neither the aristocracy nor the middling class, creating a political instability that led to the tyranny of Peisistratus and his sons until 510. This tyranny, however, was not able to impede the complex political-social process that would bring about the rise of the first democratic institutions (Vignali 23).

The tyranny of Peisistratus was benevolent, for he turned to common Athenians for support, thereby further undermining the hierarchy of aristocrats over commoners that had endured for centuries. Jaeger argues that tyranny was successful when in the hands of a genuinely gifted man such as Peisistratus, who was devoted to the service of the people;

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<sup>2</sup> A stage of political development in which political and civil honors are distributed according to wealth (Unabridged Webster).

for both political and economic motivations (228). Agrarianism accelerated and production soared, finding a ready market with other city-states and in the rest of the Mediterranean. Although it inhibited individual initiative and upheld every state action, the tyranny of Peisistratus nonetheless had considerable weight politically, in his words, “by creating, through legislation, an ideal which allowed and even enjoined political activity on the part of the citizens” (229). While the tyrant did not educate the people toward political *arête*, he stood as a model in another sense, becoming the “prototype for alter centuries” as the first to engage in “real *politics*” (229). From these earliest dabbles in democracy which allowed unprecedented freedom, the Athenians had shown their remarkable capacity for extraordinary achievement. When Peisistratus’ son Hippias took over and did not share his father’s fair-minded ruling for very long; the freedoms that Athenians had gained under Peisistratus quickly vanished as a the full-blown tyranny of Hippias took over when his brother was murdered.

Cleisthenes overturned him, ushering in a new (democratic) era in which, as within the Olympic Games, anyone could seize victory and glory. This new ideology, however, made power more unstable, and soon others were conspiring against Cleisthenes. Isagoras, another aristocrat, with the help of the Spartans, overturned and banished Cleisthenes and hundreds of others households, establishing an oligarchy. This arrangement did not last long, and for what many deem the first time in recorded history, the ordinary people, after that taste for freedom and self-governing, like their mythical heroes, took their destinies into their own hands, turned on their rulers, and seized power for themselves by rising up in revolution. The Athenians turned to Cleisthenes, calling him back from exile; in a sense, he was to face the remarkable challenge of designing a

revolutionary governmental solution for a revolutionary political situation since neither putting a group of aristocrats back into power nor making himself tyrant were options at this point.

At this time, the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes created what many consider the first democratic institutions. The challenge that Cleisthenes faced was how to give his fellow Athenians the say in their future that he knew they now must have. He therefore had a great meeting place carved out from the bare rock where citizens of Athens could gather to discuss the future of their state. This place is the ancestor of the British House of Commons, the U.S. Congress, and various parliaments across the world. In these forums, rich and poor alike could stand and address their fellow citizens. Whereas government had once been decided by strength, Cleisthenes instituted the simple vote—a white pebble for yes, and a black pebble for no—the rule of the people, a system of government now known as democracy. The great Athenian assembly would gather every nine days covering the entire administration of the state: from the raising of taxes to the building of roads, from the price of olives to the declaration of war.

The route to democracy went from monarchy, aristocracy, timocracy, tyranny, a very brief oligarchy and finally democracy at the end of the sixth century. The “official” date usually attributed to the birth of democracy is 507-08 BCE with the reforms of Cleisthenes. At that time, Athens, still a tiny city in mainland Greece, saw ordinary people turning on their rulers and demanding freedom from centuries of oppression. Democracy represented a decisive break from what had preceded it. An originally elitist culture was now turned around, and the idea was that even common Greeks who were not aristocratic nor rich could be, as it were, heroes in politics. It was a system of government

that would transform this tiny state and stimulate one of the greatest flowerings of civilization that the world had ever seen. The fifth century saw a rapid growth of democracy in Greece, with its climax occurring in fifth-century Periclean Athens. At this juncture, Sophistry emerged and flourished in Greece, displaying its connection to democratic political thought.

Several scholars have asserted that the essential qualities of democracy legitimate the rise of sophistry. For example, Daniele Vignali argues that democracy accounts for the rise of sophistry, stating that this form of government, “in ragione di alcune sue peculiarità giustifica e legittima il sorgere della sofistica” (23—24). The doctrines of the sophists, he continues, would hardly be comprehensible and explicable if not viewed as a rejoinder to the needs of a novel democratic society: in his original words, “*La [sic] dottrine dei Sofisti risulterebbero difficilmente comprensibili qualora non fossero considerate come una risposta alle peculiari esigenze poste dalla nuova società democratica Greca*” (25). Like other scholars who explore this connection, Vignali attributes the correlation between sophistry and democracy to the “centralità assoluta” (absolute centrality) of the “arte della parola” (the art of speech), the oratorical ability which could move public opinion determining its political vote (25). Rhetorical ability and dialectical skill thus became essential abilities of the ruling class. Drawing on Martin Heidegger and R. Dherbey Gilbert, he underscores the dedication of the sophists to these disciplines, presenting themselves as teachers of rhetoric and dialectic, for these thinkers offered their students the competence and knowledge necessary to reach and exercise power within a democratic society (25).

Thomas Conley also champions this view regarding the connection between democracy and sophistry. Conley finds that, due to the political reforms of the time, “[i]t is no accident that the sophists should have been drawn to Athens” where they found “a ready market for their wares, particularly in terms of rhetorical instruction” (4). More specifically, the reforms of Cleisthenes establishing a form of democratic government and those of Ephialtes reforming the court system in Athens initiated two basic principles: “that power should reside in the people as a whole, not in an elite few, and . . . that high offices should be entrusted by lot to those among the citizens who were perceived as best fitted for them” (4). The reforms of Cleisthenes created an unprecedented social mobility by opening up Athenian politics allowing any citizen to “become a member of the assembly, to vote on public issues, and to hold administrative offices” and “aspire to a career in politics or civil service,” while those of Ephialtes instituted the right for every citizen to bring suit against any other and be decided by a Heliastic jury (4). Because lawyers such as those of today were nonexistent, every citizen involved in a lawsuit had to argue his (not her) own case; furthermore, these juries consisted of over two hundred members, making deliberations significantly more public than today’s (4—5). As a result, eloquence became extremely advantageous and therefore sought-after. Among the numerous skills that the sophists offered in their teachings, adroitness in public speaking was the most in demand.

The importance of a free, democratic regime cannot be overemphasized, for the sophists would have had no market without a society of free individuals. An unquestioned tyranny, aristocracy, or monarchy has no use for teachers of persuasion, oratory, and other skills useful to free citizen *politai*. The end of tyranny, in fact, marks

the beginning of rhetoric and vice versa; according to Thomas Habinek , “the ancient belief in the mutual exclusivity of tyranny and rhetoric is itself a variation on the wider theme of rhetoric’s role in the foundation of the state” (8). Rhetoric, one of the main subjects many scholars argue fell into the realm of most sophists’ curriculum, would not be relevant in a society in which truth were undisputed, unchallenged, and certain, regardless of the claims that the idealist philosophy of Plato, for example, would like to hegemonize. Athens, as the center of the Greek empire, was the perfect and obvious choice for the sophists to market the commodity they were offering. Without the establishment of democracy in the fifth century BCE, the prodigious success of the sophists would be inexplicable—as would the immense hostility and enmity they aroused in their most ardent competitors from philosophy.

An indispensable element for the development of sophistry, then, democracy saw the appearance of certain fundamental constitutional innovations starting in 460 BCE that allowed even the poorest to hold public office. Power was distributed on relatively equal bases on all Athenian citizens, which did not include women, metics, and slaves. Worthy of note, only property-owning, male, Athenians-born citizens took part in and benefitted from democracy. According to Josiah Ober, the citizen population was “never much more than about 15 to 20 percent of the total population or half the adult male population” (117). Public decisions were reached in public assemblies in which the different factions confronted one another dialectically. The art of rhetoric and debate, as a result, became the primary ingredients of political success. As a matter of fact, rhetoric and oratory began appearing as human communities systematized into identifiable city-states (Habinek 1). When speaking of the socio-historical and political context of sophistry, one

cannot but recognize the nexus between democracy, sophistry and rhetoric—or more specifically, the systematic study of rhetoric—for these emerged contemporaneously.

### **Cultural Context**

A cultural shift also occurred from the Dark Ages and Archaic to Classical Greece in the *paideia*. The Greek term *paideia* denotes culture in a more multifaceted and expansive way than today's conception of culture, encompassing the "entire complex of all the ways and expressions of life which characterize any one nation," particularly "a consciously pursued *ideal*" (xvii). This Greek ideal of culture differs from any other Pre-Hellenic culture; what begins with the Greeks is a "world in which a cultural ideal was first established as a formative principle" (xviii). Jaeger identifies a "new awareness of the position of the individual in the community" and "the beginning of a new conception of the value of the individual" (xix). The Greeks realized that the "world is governed by definite and comprehensible laws" (xx). Werner Jaeger defines education as "the process by which a community preserves and transmits its physical and intellectual character" and sees in the Greeks, the beginning of civilization (xiii—xiv). The role of Sparta in creating the new Greek ideal of man<sup>3</sup> as citizen remains among the easiest to define than the rest of Greece due to its key movement toward this ideal (Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. 1, 99). Ionia, despite the dearth of reliable information, also played an influential role in the development of these innovative Greek ideals. Even though the aristocracy remained in power since the political and legal reforms did not eliminate the privileges of status and bloodline, the *polis* was nonetheless a new social ideal.

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term "man" for human beings because in effect these new ideals applied more directly to men.

Much of what scholars know about early education once again originates in Homer (Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol 1, 100). Many scholars believe that the works attributed to Homer had a strong pedagogical influence on Greek society. Jaeger goes as far as considering him “the first and the greatest creator and shaper of Greek life and the Greek character” (36). Deemed the earliest and utmost testaments of Greek literature, Homer’s epics had as their purpose not the writing of history but the exploration of human capabilities and limitations (Starr 17). Werner Jaeger also claims that neither epic can be examined as a “historical description” (*Paideia*, Vol. 1, 16). What the *Iliad* can do is tell the story of “an age almost wholly dominated by the ancient hero-spirit of *arête*” and show the “glorification of fighting and heroic prowess” (17—18). While the *Iliad* offers “a largely idealized picture of the aristocracy” and of the “superhuman *arête* of the ancient heroes,” the *Odyssey* displays more human characters, both commoners and nobles, who nonetheless bear “the invariable stamp of decorum and good breeding in all situations” (19—20). Jaeger believes that Homer had an educational purpose in glorifying their culture and high refinement, one that is marked by “*discipline*, the deliberate formation of human character through wise direction and constant advice” (21). Although directed toward the aristocracy, this process shows education turning into culture for the first time. Once democracy took form, this process extended to the middling class and questions of the teachableness of virtue or *arête* became issues discussed at large in classical Greece. Before democracy and the sophists, myth and heroic poetry are the nation’s source of ideals and standards (Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. 1, 41). Among their various innovations, the sophists questioned the divine will that governs these epics.

The Hellenes regarded every part as subsidiary to an ideal whole, the universal, the *logos*, and aimed to utilize that knowledge as a “formative force in education . . . to shape the living man as the potter moulds clay and the sculptor carves stone into preconceived form,” making the human being into “the greatest work of art” and being the “first to recognize that education means deliberately moulding human character in accordance with an ideal” (Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. 1, xxii). This molding of human character directly relates to the social role that the sophists provided. Given this focus on the shaping of character, the appearance of the sophists once again emerges prominently and unsurprisingly. They aimed to help, for a profit, individuals to compete for their own good, as inspired by the *polis* and encouraged by the *paideia*. The sophists descanted on traditional Greek themes about human nature and society, justice and happiness. In general, the sophists agreed with Socrates on several counts, believing that flourishing communities and lives necessitate civic virtues like justice and moderation, that moral education of some sort promotes these virtues, and that natural talents and practical training are necessary components of moral education and verbal instruction (Rawson 214).

### **Development of Rhetoric and Sophistry**

The systematic study of rhetoric has uncertain origins but probably originated in Sicily after the overthrow of the tyrants. Citizens had to learn how to express their defenses and give formal talks in assemblies and law courts so as to recover, for example, property that had been usurped by the tyrants (Gagarin 30). More specifically, around 467 B.C.E. in Syracuse, a tyrant named Hieron died and quarrels over the formerly seized lands

developed (Herrick 32). Corax, a rhetorician, and later his student Tisias responded to this need by creating rhetoric, understood as the art of persuasive speech, and teaching it for a fee. They trained citizens in judicial pleading to help them argue their claims in court and recover their lands. Corax was also instrumental in the development of democratic reforms in Syracuse. Corax, Tisias, or both also crafted a written *Technē*, a manual or handbook that covered the “division of speeches, the argument from likelihood, and perhaps other subjects” (Gagarin “Background” 30). Either fellow Sicilian Gorgias brought their achievements to Athens in 427 or Tisias himself may have done so and is said to have taught Lysias and Isocrates among others. Aristotle, if not one of his students, knew the book or books and summarized the contents of numerous early handbooks in his now lost *Synagōgē Technōn*, or Collection of Arts, a work that became the principal source for later scholars of Corax and Tisias (30).

Scholars disagree on the validity of this story, and many of whom either do not mention it at all or question its legitimacy. For example, Thomas Conley calls it “old story . . . probably just another of those stories about ‘first discoveries’ Greeks were so fond of” (4). Others even question the existence of Corax and Tisias, such as Thomas Cole, who claims that hard facts about the two figures are lacking (“Who”). Also, Michael Gagarin claims that “[h]ard facts about Corax and Tisias are almost entirely (some would say entirely) lacking” (“Background” 30). However, Italian authority in rhetoric, Bice Mortara Garavelli, calls Corax and his student Tisias as “i fondatori della retorica [the founders of rhetoric]” without question (17). Edward Schiappa also refers to this story as “the standard account” (4—6, 30—37).

Whatever the origin, however, teachers and rhetoricians known as Sophists quickly picked up this systematic approach to teaching rhetoric, carrying it to Athens and other city-states in Greece where they offered their services for a price (Herrick 32). The sophists as they came to be known later traveled around the *poleis* as intellectuals who taught subjects useful to effective citizen orators, including rhetoric. They fulfilled a novel need within Hellene society that needed rhetorical skills in order to work together in peace within the new social organization of city-states, *poleis*. Through rhetoric, then, civilization began to form itself in the way that we know it today. Thomas Habinek argues that rhetoric and oratory come to life when human communities become recognizable states. Each of these communities created a governing system and “a sense of purpose independent of the authority and aspirations of individuals, no matter how powerful” as it began to record a common history that surpasses the limits of any individual human life (1). Rhetoric becomes, then, the specialized speech of the state. The sophists answered this call by providing their services for a fee, a fee that elicited Plato’s reproaches that caused the negative connotations thereafter associated with sophistry, as I will discuss later on.

In these years, the democratic regime affirmed itself in the greater part of Greece, and Athens became with Pericles the cultural and artistic center of the Greek world. Greece’s success against the Persians triggered a growth of self-belief. Starting in 478 BCE, a period of approximately half a century, the Pentecontaetia, began and lasted until the Peloponnesian war (432 BCE). This period of peace allowed great developments and is considered one of the periods of most magnificence of the Greek spirit and culture—the Golden Age or the Greek Enlightenment. Daniele Vignali argues that the sophists

were children of this time and their thought and pedagogical praxis answered the exact exigencies of this historical, social, and political moment (25). During this flourishing of democracy, the art of rhetoric and oratory become absolutely central to move the masses and determine their political vote. Within a democratic regime, only those able to persuade listeners and if necessary to dispute interlocutors and opponents in the presence of the assembly of gathered citizens could manage the newly distributed power (25). Rhetorical and dialectical ability became essential requisites of the ruling class, and the sophists dedicated their attention to these skills, presenting themselves as teachers of these abilities.

Full participation in the life of the city-states, therefore, continued to call for the mastery of rhetoric because citizens had to be able to resolve issues among themselves within the flourishing democracy. As a result, rhetoric comes to replace combative resolve of conflict, even if supporting brutal hierarchies, for example in the maintenance of a powerful male citizen population (Habinek 6—7). Although rhetoric becomes an option to violence in conflict resolution, it also serves as a way to exclude others from power (8). The Hellenes were also extremely preoccupied with excluding tyranny. The teachings of the sophists had a clear political legitimation and were clearly although not exclusively offered to those with political prospects, as many scholars show (Vignali 25). While some scholars argue that the contributions of the sophists to philosophical inquiry were inconsequential, the philosophical context of their appearance is crucial to our understanding of their thinking. Werner Jaeger contends that the relevance of the sophists to their age through the “searching changes which their new intellectual attitude [made] in the development of the Greek character” significantly contributed to the theories of the

great natural philosophers in the advancement of philosophical thought (Paideia, Vol. 1, 150). Up until the Presocratics and society, the leader of the people was the poet, as well as later the law-giver and statesman (Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. 1, 152).

### **Teaching of *Arête***

The teaching of virtue or *arête* was a central argument between the sophists and traditional beliefs or *orthodoxa*. Plato brought this debate to life in one of his most animated Socratic dialogues, in which Socrates argues that *arête* cannot be taught, although Socrates believes that all virtue is a kind of knowledge. Protagoras, on the other hand, contends that all kinds of virtues can be taught—and are taught especially well by him—but that they are not forms of knowledge.

The social factors in place when the sophists rose to prominence in Athenian culture were unprecedented due to unexpected military victories against the Persians, as well as technological innovations that stressed human rather than divine intervention. At this time, Athenian democracy, an experiment like no other in direct and participatory democracy, came to flourish, offering power to any eligible citizen who could persuade crowds to his point of view. Rhetoric at this time became a necessary tool, as it is still today, of the right of free speech and a just trial. Being teachers of rhetoric and other skills useful for civic status, the sophists visited Athens frequently, even taking part in the cultural reform of Pericles. Furthermore, the growing prosperity of Athens generated a class of citizens with enough time to devote time to their education, which was largely lacking at the time and usually complete by one's early teens. The sophists offered a

unique service, previously unseen, providing education in an extensive assortment of subjects that would have appealed to young men.

### **Philosophical Context: Presocratics**

The Presocratics had concerned themselves with the nature of reality and its relation to sensible phenomena (Guthrie 4). A shift in interest from natural phenomena to human affairs occurred around the fifth century BCE. Jaeger believes that scholars should examine the combination of the ethical, political, and religious thought of Solon and the Ionian poets and explode the dichotomy between poetry and prose to understand the development of philosophy in an accurate manner. Only then can scholars begin to see the shift as a process rather than one system leaving another one behind overnight. Jaeger maintains that political theory is practical while speculation regarding *physis* and *genesis* is theoretical: only after studying the external world theoretically did the Greeks think of human nature in those terms as well (*Paideia*, Vol. 1, 152).

Establishing the precise time in which rational thinking begins in Greece remains challenging. In the age of the Presocratics the poet was still the unquestioned leader of his people, slowly being joined by the statesman and law-giver. Jaeger identifies the Ionians as the first philosophers, a term that, of course, did not gain currency until Plato. Ionian poets had already been “voicing their emotions and opinions on human life and their own age,” while the philosophers “applied pure independent logic to the current conception of the universe” (154—55). Both endeavors centered on the “growing power of the individual” (155). Around the sixth century, philosophers started probing the origin of the universe—its *physis* (Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. 1, 155). After finding that Egypt and the

countries in the Near East had disparate creation and divinity myths, the Greeks began subjecting their own myths of creation to theoretical and causal inquiry (156). They also incorporated their neighbors' technical innovations to study the origin and nature of the universe, inquiring within nature before human beings. Jaeger marks this moment as the "origin of scientific thought" (156). However, the mythical thinking of the epic and rational thinking ran parallel for quite some time, with logic appearing within mythology, as well as Plato and Aristotle still mythologizing (151). The Greeks started thinking of human nature theoretically when, by studying the external world through medicine and mathematics, they had created a precise method to study the inner world of humans (152).

Philosophers also began writing down their thoughts for the first time.

Anaximander was the first one, viewing the world as built up by an orderly rather than a chaotic system. His, however, was more of a moral than a physical law of nature regarding the eternal processes of compensation and power of *diké* ruling over natural phenomena (160). His idea of *dike* is "the first stage in the projection of the life of the city-state upon the life of the universe" (161). The Milesian philosophers used human life as an example interpreting *physis* (161). Similarly, Pythagoras, another Ionian philosopher, although he worked in the south of Italy, founded *mathemata*, which blends the science of number, the theory of music, the movement of the stars, known as geometry at the time, and Milesian natural philosophy (162). Number, for Pythagoras, is the principle of all things, ruling the entire cosmos and human life, making mathematical science the new element of Greek culture and connecting mathematics and music with far-reaching consequences (162—64). The connection created new laws that governed all

aspects of existence, and the new inquiry into the structure of music produced knowledge of harmony and rhythm, concepts that affected all spheres of life in a way that resembled the doctrine of justice in society of Solon (164—65). Pythagoreans believed that harmony was the principle of the cosmos (165). Behind harmony lay the concept of proportion, which affected all forms of culture including sculpture, architecture, poetry, rhetoric, religion, and morality (165). Like the rule of justice, the Greeks realized that the rules of fitness and propriety had to be maintained.

In the sixth century, the Orphic movement formulated a new doctrine of the soul. This doctrine began creating “a new consciousness of the self and a new feeling for human life” (166). While with Solon, the idea of responsibility meant that each individual held a social responsibility toward the community, in Orphism it meant a moral responsibility “or the religious ideal of the pure life” (166). Humans started believing in their divine destiny, a central innovation in the development of human consciousness of selfhood. Although the soul has no place in the cosmos of the physicists, in the Orphic movement, it restores itself within its religious consciousness of selfhood.

Civilization came to be seen as discovered by human beings rather than a gift of the gods, as in the mythical tradition. Although Anaximander and Anaximenes created these doctrines of naturalistic explanation of the universe, Xenophanes advocated them with ardent conviction. This new truth transformed the life and faith of humankind, making it the foundation of a new culture and the “metaphysical foundation of city-state morality” (171). Xenophanes also promotes his new conception of *arête*, holding that philosophical truth is the guide to true *arête*, depicting the conflict between “the old aristocratic culture and the new philosophical ideal of humanity which now sought to

eject from its place and power in the social order” (173). In the old aristocracy, the Olympic victor still represented the highest ideal, but Xenophanes first questioned that traditional ideal of manhood, defending philosophical knowledge and showing a new conception of *arête* in the form of intellectual culture. Jaeger identifies Xenophanes’ ideal as the final phase of “the development of the political conception of *arête*: first came courage, then prudence and justice, and now finally wisdom—the virtues which Plato retained as the essence of the citizen’s highest *arête*” (174). While he may not have been an original thinker, Xenophanes was the first to tell the Greeks that philosophy could be a cultural force.

In addition to Milesian natural philosophy and the arithmetical theories of the Pythagoreans, the final element Greek thought to influence human intellectual and spiritual life was logic. Parmenides, considered by many as one of the greatest philosophers of all times, altered the guiding force behind the speculations of early physicists, which were hitherto led by other forms of spiritual activity. His philosophy revolves around pure reason, making a distinction between thought and perception, between “the way of the senses and the way of reason” (177). Therefore, whatever is not known through reason is mere opinion. At this point, religion begins to give way to philosophy. Like the Milesians, Parmenides had dehumanized the problem of finding an objective conception of the universe, losing track of human life in the in the immense design of nature.

Heraclitus humanized philosophy, placing the human soul at the center of all the energies of the cosmos. While earlier philosophers undertook “logical reasoning or intellectually ordered observation of phenomena,” Heraclitus showed how a new realm of

knowledge could be achieved if the soul were to examine herself (180). He transformed *logos* from the conceptual thinking of Parmenides to a “form of knowledge, the origin of both ‘action and speech’” and viewed life as a *griphos*, a riddle to be interpreted (180-81). Just like the city, the universe appears to have laws of its own for the first time in human history, and only *logos* can understand divine law. *Logos* is the mind that perceives the meaning of the cosmos. Thinkers before Heraclitus had discerned a new cosmos; Heraclitus gave the human being his/her place as a cosmic being. Furthermore, he viewed the process of human existence in an innovative way, seeing both intellectual and physical activity as made up of dichotomies incessantly replacing one another. For Heraclitus, human beings are part of the cosmos, subject both to its laws and to the laws of the city-state; this kind of freedom differs from the freedom of modern individualism in that human beings are part both of the universal community and the community to which they belong. Heraclitus created a moral law of the entire cosmos.

The Presocratics started a revolution by applying a scientific approach to the inquiry into nature. While they cannot be lumped together as having had an identical or even similar worldview, they do share some commonalities in the form of scientific attitudes (Waterfield xix). As “proto-scientists” they were the “first to make and explore assumptions which is absolutely crucial to the development of science, that the human rational mind is the correct tool for understanding the world” (xix). They endeavored to provide an orderly explanation of the whole cosmos and all its main characteristics. Although in the history of ideas one cannot identify exact origins, before the Presocratics, the world was imbued with sacred meaning, permeated by divinities, gods, goddesses, nymphs, and local deities in every natural manifestation. Anthropomorphized to an

extreme in Homeric poetry, the deities controlled every aspect of nature including humans. The Presocratics found order in the world, an order that can be understood by the human mind.

The Presocratics diverged both from the foregoing weltanschauung and full-fledged scientism. Although they asked questions similar to those of their predecessors, the presocratics based their answers in an unorthodox framework: they replaced the function of the gods with natural phenomena, used logic to rationalize observable facts, formed general philosophical hypotheses, and held a clear, unrestrained spirit of inquiry. They differ from scientism by lacking scientific method, building neat but not demonstrable systems (Waterfield xxiv). Although they were not likely the first and only ones to base their conclusions on observation and rational argumentation, the way they expressed their conclusions was different from Hesiod and other predecessors. They started a revolution that took centuries to complete, centuries in which a substrate of superstition was still present in the larger part of the population.

### **Sophists**

The sophists do not at first glance appear as direct successors of the presocratics, given the lack of sophistic interest in scientific issues and metaphysics. The sophists directed their attention to language and all aspects of *logos* rather than the origin and nature of the cosmos. Nevertheless, the sophists were indeed the direct successors of the presocratics because once the presocratics had opened up the Pandora's box making the world at least potentially intelligible to the human mind, "a humanist or anthropocentric emphasis on human beings was inevitable" (Waterfield xxvii). The sophists were pioneers in

broaching questions regarding moral, social, and political philosophy. Further, while contemporary science has answered the questions raised by the presocratics, those of the sophists remain debated and largely unanswered.

The term *sophist* (*sophistês*) has held varying meanings throughout the millennia since its first appearance. Originally, it referred to a person of *sophia*, usually translated as skill or wisdom. The word derives from the adjective *sophos*, which in its original sense applied to people “skilled in a particular craft, and extended to mean generally knowledgeable or wise” (McKirahan 372). The noun *sophist* means “‘one who exercises wisdom,’ that is to say, a specialist in wisdom” (372). Protagoras was the first to apply the term to himself although the word dates further back than the fifth century and had been used on poets, musicians, seers, and sages—those who had special knowledge and insight, and the gift of communicating it to others,” thereby including Homer and Hesiod, as even Plato’s *Protagoras* notes (373). Nevertheless Jacqueline de Romilly interprets it as “professionals of intelligence [for] they certainly set out to teach people how to use their intelligence” (1). Unlike sages, *sophoi*, which indicates a state of being rather than a profession, the sophists were masters of thinking and talking who made knowledge their area of expertise. Patricia O’Grady condenses it to “‘freelance, mostly non-Athenian, independent teachers who travelled throughout Ancient Greece from city to city making their living out of the new demand for education” (12). Due to the breadth of the term *sophist*, it could be applied to anyone who exercised this profession.

In the strict sense of the word, the sophists were “itinerant educators who operated independently and charged fees [who] taught different ranges of subjects, but all taught rhetoric, the art of constructing and delivering public speeches,” the “key to success in

public and private life” (McKirahan 363). They were also “professional rivals, competing for fame, wealth, and pupils” and “their shared interest in rhetoric and related issues led them to develop philosophical theses, and their rivalry led them to challenge each other’s views and formulate competing ones” (363). De Romilly notes that the sophists went from being “experts in wisdom” to practitioners of “crafty thinking (xiii). Conceivably, she adds, what ruined the reputation of the sophists may have been their “all too self-satisfied disciples . . . were the real, perhaps the only, amoralists,” such as Callicles, Euripides, and Democritus , who may have been influenced by the sophists (xiv).

In ancient times, the term was applied both to individuals still known as sophists today and those who later rejected and contributed to the downfall of the term. Classical texts record the term used on people as varied as Prometheus, Homer, Hesiod, Damon, Solon, Thales, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Zeno, Plato, Socrates, and Isocrates were called sophists (Schiappa, “Sophistic” 682). Many of these would roll in their graves at the thought of the term being used on them and some actually contributed to the term’s fall from grace.

Today, the people most often referred to as sophists include Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, Prodicus, Thrasymachus, Critias, and Antiphon, as well as on occasion Polus, Euthydemus, Dionysodorus, Callicles, Socrates, Antisthenes, Alcidamas, Lycophron, and the authors of *Dissoi Logoi*, the *Anonymus Iamblichi*, and the *Hippocratic Corpus* (682). In *I sofisti*, Untersteiner discusses Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Antiphon, and Hippias in depth, as well Thrasymachus and Critias . The meaning of the word sophist changed between the time of Protagoras and that of Aristotle (McKirahan 372). Garavelli identifies the sophists’ system of precepts on the following principle: “il *sembrare vero*

conta più del *essere vero*; donde la ricerca sistematica delle prove e lo studio delle tecniche atte a dimostrare la verosimiglianza di una tesi” (17). On this basis—that *seeming* real is more important than *being* real—the sophists became an easy target for attacks regarding moral relativism.

The sophistic tradition as such includes a number of theoretical principles sometimes grouped together under the term “sophistic rhetoric” (Schiappa, “Sophistic” 682). The phrase, however, is an anachronism, for it does not appear in any Greek text, Aristotle’s and Plato’s included. Edward Schiappa identifies Edward M. Cope as one of the pioneers in describing “‘sophistical’ rhetoric” in the mid-nineteenth century, a category thereafter often taken for granted, although the sophists often held different, even contrasting positions on numerous subjects; therefore, “sophistic rhetorics” proves a more accurate and constructive label for their projects than the monolithic singular term (682). The term rhetoric, too, was not coined until the early fourth century BCE, and did not appear in any existing texts by the fifth-century sophists. For this reason, Schiappa advocates referring to sophistic rhetoric as sophistic theories of discourse or persuasion or, alternatively, consider such doctrines as “implicit or incipient theories of rhetoric” (684).

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Despite their virtual disappearance for millennia, the sophists lingered within the scholarly imagination throughout their historical exile, if for no other reason as the contrast to all that is good, moral and virtuous—the antithesis of idealist philosophy. Their reputation ruined by Plato—to the point of engendering the negative word, sophistry—they have been viewed as sketchy thinkers and accused of producing specious and flawed arguments, a peculiar outcome considering that originally the word sophist meant wise person, as its root σοφία—*sophia*, the Greek work for knowledge—indicates. Nevertheless, during their 2,500-year exile, these figures have come close to without ever fully disappearing. Overcoming the negative connotations associated with sophistry has not proved a simple task. For centuries after the Hellenic period, the sophists were viewed exclusively through the interpretations of Plato. Having become relatively irrelevant and over two thousands of years, the sophistic tradition has never the status it earned in the fifth and fourth century BCE in Athens, particularly in those circles of people who could enjoy—and afford—their services. In the *Webster Unabridged Dictionary*, sophistry denotes “reasoning that is superficially plausible but actually fallacious.” According the *Oxford English Dictionary*, sophistry signifies “Specious but fallacious reasoning; employment of arguments which are intentionally deceptive,” since

the fourteenth century, appearing in 1340, and even “Cunning, trickery, craft” as used by Chaucer in 1385. Nevertheless, scholars have been making some progress in reestablishing the positive contributions the sophists have made to democratic societies in the past and can make in the present. In the nineteenth century, sophistry began assuming its meaning as “The type of learning characteristic of the ancient Sophists; the profession of a Sophist,” starting in 1837 (*OED*). The same century witnessed the beginning of the sophists’ resurgence.

### **Nineteenth-Century Recovery**

The recovery of the sophists has been attributed to different thinkers at various times, but starting around the middle of the nineteenth century, when Western civilization took a skeptical turn toward a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” to use Paul Ricoeur’s phrase, through the work of Marx, Nietzsche, and subsequently Freud, the sophists came to be reconsidered. This resurgence of these controversial thinkers would emerge expectedly at this point in human history given that most foundational pillars of knowledge crumbled, much in the way that the sophists believed two millennia earlier.

The recovery of the sophists began in the nineteenth century when the sophists were salvaged from the shadows of history by a number of high profile intellectuals. Specifically, G. F. Hegel in his *Lectures in the History of Philosophy*, later published in 1832, takes sophistic relativism as the antithesis of pre-Socratic naturalism in his well-known dialectical view of history. Despite its negative representation, Sophistic subjectivism, in this view, was a crucial step in the history of philosophy because necessary to the movement of thought within Hegel’s Dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and

synthesis. The first stage, for Hegel, spans from Thales to Anaxagoras, when thought appeared in sensory determinations that formulated proto-scientific statements about the physical world being perceived. Next as the antithesis, the sophists, Socrates, and the adherents of Socratic thought, strangely grouped together, through skeptical criticism repudiated this view replacing it with an emphasis on the perceiving subject—what today would be dubbed subjectivism. From this clash between thesis and antithesis emerged the synthesis of Plato and Aristotle. The importance of the sophists, then, was merely as a negative but nonetheless important stage in the history of the dominant idealist philosophy.

This revival brought sophistry back into the scholarly conversation, allowing it to be revisited by later historians and reopening the argument between Plato and the sophists in its various forms, such as the interconnected debate between rhetoric and philosophy and the one between knowledge and discourse. Nevertheless, as many scholars have shown, Hegel's reintegration of the sophists did little in the way of improving their reputation as philosophers, for by making them subjectivists and assigning them the antithesis subdivision of his scheme to the history of Greek philosophy, Hegel appeared to agree with the inimical estimation of Plato and Aristotle, and idealist philosophy continued to prevail until the mid-twentieth century, with truth and reality still viewed as objective. By being considered opposed to objective truth, especially in the moral realm, the sophists held on to their position as the foes of philosophy. Despite this far from glorious return, however, the sophists at least reentered the conversation and continued to be discussed throughout the nineteenth century.

Among the scholars to revisit the sophists are historian Eduard Zeller in Germany, as well as George Grote and George Henry Lewes in Britain.

Although Zeller recognizes that the sophists had been misrepresented throughout history, he ultimately considers them lacking in comparison to Platonic idealism. Zeller views the sophists as having much in common regardless of individual distinctions, viewing them as part of the same educational discipline, a view still debated today as I will discuss below. Following in the lines of Hegel, for the most part, he considers the sophists as detrimental to the scientific enterprise, holding their rhetoric as dealing with appearances and condemning their morals as downright perilous. However, he observes some redeeming qualities, acknowledging the philosophical validity of subjectivity for the first time. Zeller's was the last study to hold an almost completely negative view of the sophists and their teachings, his conclusions deeming the sophists as making truth as a matter of personal preference and as an instrument to fulfill selfish needs. Further, in the sixth edition of Zeller's *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* published in 1920, Wilhelm Nestle denied them the title of philosophers, reestablishing philosophy as exclusively traditional. Despite these efforts in the nineteenth century, the end of the century had yet to see the rehabilitation of the following one, and by the last third of the nineteenth century, Henry Sidgwick sums up the prevalent estimation of the time as considering the sophists as "charlatans" who taught "fallacious discourse" and "hollow rhetoric" to credulous Athenians until Socrates overthrew them (Qtd. in Guthrie 11).

George Grote and George Lewes, on the other hand, were more approving, particularly of sophistic philosophical skepticism and the sophists' knack for creating

consensus. Grote, in particular, viewed them as exponents of intellectual progress though not as an organic whole. Further, Grote rejected Plato's attacks regarding the sophists' purported immoral doctrines on the grounds that not even Plato had attacked the principal sophists—Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippais, and Gorgias. While defending them against dismissal based on the views of any individual sophist, however, Grote's view did not allow the sophists to be secured as a class of intellectuals, and despite Grote's success shielding the sophists against the accusations of corrupting the Athenian moral character, the lack of cohesion in sophistic thought made them difficult to safeguard. George Lewes followed Grote's defense of the sophists.

### **The Twentieth Century**

The sophists have been enjoying increasing and considerable attention in the scholarship since their revival in the nineteenth century. Their recovery continued in the twentieth century, which, however, begins in a way that would have pleased Plato and his followers in the subsequent two millennia. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an actual revitalization of their ideas. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, scholars relegated the sophists to the margins by including and by appealing to them primarily as predecessors of philosophers proper.

Discussions of the sophists continued to appear regularly in scholarly works until the mid-twentieth century although minimally. They materialized in scholarly works under subordinate categories such as presocratic philosophy, humanism, epistemology, ethics, pragmatism, and nihilism within minor entries in the work of Jean Bordieau, William James, James H. Tufts, John Dewey, and F.C.S. Schiller, rather than receiving

expansive treatments of their own. These revaluations of the sophists still relied on Plato, reassessing and reappraising his interpretations of the sophists rather than turning to the work of the sophists themselves. Nevertheless, the primary contributions of the sophists came to be recognized as less than negative in the first quarter of the first century but nonetheless remained secondary to other branches of learning. After World War II, a turn against Plato occurred due to numerous studies tying Nazism to Platonic ideals of a stratified society.

While not devoted to the sophists as such, Werner Jaeger notes them as making a significant contribution to the Greek *paideia* by devoting an entire chapter to them in his masterful work on the ideals of Greek culture. Jaeger towers among classicists, not only to the history of the sophists but also to classical *paideia* in general. A renowned Aristotelian, he had and continues to have a colossal influence on his generation of classicists and beyond. I draw on Jaeger throughout this dissertation, so for now suffice it to say that Jaeger views the sophists as the inventors of intellectual culture, the art of education, pedagogy, and rhetoric (297—98).

This lack of formal and expansive treatments is nevertheless revealing in itself. It exposes the absence of an official restoration of the sophists as serious intellectuals and even philosophers, as the scholarship of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship in particular will do. The dearth of comprehensive studies up until the mid-twentieth century further indicates that the sophists were yet to be considered as worthy of intellectual attention in their own right. Up until this stage, the sophists, although “recovered,” were yet to qualify as making an intellectual contribution worthy of

substantial scrutiny and analysis. This academic phenomenon makes the work of Mario Untersteiner on the sophists particularly noteworthy.

*I Sofisti (The sophists)* by Mario Untersteiner, was and remains an authority on the subject despite the number of scholars who followed him. He offers one of the first full-scale treatments of the sophists, which was first published in Italy in 1949 and translated into English by Kathleen Freeman in 1954. Untersteiner's powerful, probing, and comprehensive historical and philosophical reinterpretation of the sophists, whom he examines primarily as theoretical philosophers more than as rhetoricians. Untersteiner veers away from presenting an account of their unfavorable history as assailants of traditional values, squabblers, and spurned paid teachers, as, he states in the opening, do the textbooks before him. While the conclusions in his study do not diverge greatly from earlier studies, Untersteiner proposes that the sophists, each of whom he explores in depth within each chapter, contend with the same issue from which emerge disparate answers. The issue they deal with is that of humanity. Mario Untersteiner's *I sofisti* remains among the most extensive treatments of the primary sophist.

In a less developed study of the sophists, Eric Havelock attempts to correct the history of political theory in his *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics*, finding that up until then, it had been “written in modern times exactly as Plato and Aristotle would have wished it to be written” (18). Havelock, however, views them as leaders of democratic and liberal thinking in Greece and seeks to resuscitate the liberal pluralism of the sophists as “an act of historical justice” (18—19).

G.B. Kerferd—whose work I discuss in more detail below—offers a useful classification of the defenders of the sophists in the twentieth century, placing them into

two groups: those who view the sophists as ““positivists of the Enlightenment”” and those who were Hegalian (10). While these two classifications are never precise, leanings can be easily noticed. The positivist view examines what the sophists did and were rather than what they thought. In this view, the sophists

. . . were inspired above all by the educational ideal of rhetoric . . . the encyclopaedists or illuminators of Greece [,] above all teachers of the ideal of political virtue (or more simply how to succeed in politics) or of the ideal of virtue or success in life in all its aspects . . . or . . . humanists in that they put man [the human being] and his[/her] values in the central place in the interpretation of the universe. (10—11)

In this sense the sophists fully embody the *paideia* as outlined by Werner Jaeger. On the other hand, Hegalians, such as W.C. Guthrie, situate the sophists within the history of philosophy. These two camps recreated the ones between the sophists and Plato in classical Greece. Classicists and historians of rhetoric, such as W.C. Guthrie, G.B. Kerferd himself, John Poulakos, and Richard Enos, fall into the objectivist group, aiming to substantiate the sophists as consequential intellectuals. The sophists remained among the philosophers in the views of many other scholars. W. K. C. Guthrie, for example, continues the Hegelian tradition. Although his own views seem to lean in favor of the idealist tradition, he credits the sophists with being an intellectual movement unparalleled in the “permanence of its results” (3).

From the early 1960s through the 1970s, works on rhetoric presented a very limited and negative view of the sophists. George A. Kennedy's *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (1963) and *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (1980), James L. Kinneavy's *Theory of Discourse* (1971), Corbett's first edition of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1980) all follow an Aristotelian *episteme*, either ignoring or presenting a very negative view of the sophists. This orientation offers a view of rhetoric that favors what George Kennedy calls "philosophical rhetoric" in his *Classical Rhetoric*, reinscribing, therefore, the philosophy/rhetoric dichotomy (16). However, several exceptions surfaced, with numerous studies now being devoted to the sophists in their own right.

One of the most significant contributions to sophistic scholarship emerged in Great Britain within the work of G.B. Kerferd, particularly his *The Sophistic Movement*. Kerferd seeks to establish the sophists as philosophers, opposing the traditional charges held against them as unphilosophical and immoral by contending that the sophists not only continued the philosophical conversation with the presocratics but also propounding that close to every philosophical issue broached by Socrates and Plato was sparked by the sophists. The main focus of his germinal study, however, consists of his interpretation of the key contributions of the sophists to specific fields of inquiry. Outlining the range of problems formulated and addressed by the sophists, Kerferd deems them incredibly modern in their scope. The two dominant themes he attributes them are the "need to accept relativism in values and elsewhere without reducing all to subjectivism, and the belief that there is no area of human life or of the world as a whole which should be

immune from understanding achieved throughout reasoned argument” (2). These themes resonate today as much as they did then.

While Kerferd does not claim to make a dent in the subject, he introduces and addresses a great number of issues. The philosophical problems in the theory of knowledge and perception; the nature of truth; the sociology of knowledge; a belief in progress; the questioning of religious deities, the theoretical and practical problems of life within society in general and democracy in particular; the meaning of justice; the problems of punishment; the nature and purpose of education; and the mindboggling suggestion regarding the “teachability” of virtue. Kerferd rejects the contention that the sophists were of limited importance and merely served to pave the way for Plato and argues that rather “every point in Plato’s thought has its starting point in his reflection upon problems raised by the sophists” (173). He finds that the sophists not only have broached all facets of human activity but also did so for the first time. Ultimately, Kerferd grants the sophists a place among the great achievements of Periclean Athens, not only in their own right, but also, perhaps surprisingly, in the history of philosophy (176). While Kerferd makes no attempt to analyze or even survey the fragments left by the sophists, his *The Sophistic Movement* makes a well-rounded contribution to sophistic scholarship.

Susan Jarratt, in *Rereading the Sophists*, revisits the sophists to explain and offer an alternative to the Aristotelian orientation still prevalent in the first two thirds of the twentieth century. Jarratt’s text aims both to add to our historical backgrounds and bring new concerns to the field of rhetoric and composition, which in her view discovers its history in classical tradition, adding the sophists to the commonly discussed Aristotle,

Cicero, and Quintilian. The book investigates the reasons why the sophists reappeared in the history of rhetoric and argues for giving them a more prominent role because the sophists, as the supposed inventors of rhetoric, offered the first systematic instruction in the arts of speaking and writing in the West. Ultimately, Jarratt posits that “a more comprehensive view of ‘the tradition’ will provide rich antecedents for later rhetorical developments” (xix). Her primary aim is dislodging implicit control of philosophic thought inherited from Aristotle and Plato by discussing the sophists in terms of history and historiography, exploring the shift from *mythos* to *logos*, adding a feminist interpretation to the first sophists, and offering a view of sophistic pedagogy, both in classical Greece and current United States.

Jacqueline de Romilly studies the sophists in relation to the Athenian culture that they so deeply influenced. By focusing on the dialogue that occurred between the sophists and the Athenian public opinion, de Romilly considers the sophists in their myriad roles: teachers, bold thinkers, moral philosophers, and political theorists. A similar pattern emerges when looking at the sophists; their audacious discoveries aroused outraged responses and acrimonious criticism merely to reappear and be accepted when revisited. Despite the harsh criticisms and fragmentary remnants of sophistic writings, the degree of their innovations proves undeniable, particularly from a postmodern standpoint. De Romilly finds that their impact upon the history and development of Greek thought can be assessed “both by the reactions that they provoked within philosophical circles and by their legacy to cultural life in general,” for no matter Plato’s criticism, “the Sophists certainly played a decisive role in the development of Plato’s own philosophy— if only by virtue of the responses that they forced out of him” (235). For de Romilly, that

two completely so utterly contrary forms of thought—“one humanistic and practical, the other transcendental and idealistic”—emerged contemporaneously is nothing short of a miracle (235—36). The victory went to philosophy, of course, and de Romilly concludes that due to the loss of Athenian independence and the lack of written works left behind, the role of the sophists lost its import.

Further, their multiple roles, as philosophers, teachers of rhetoric, political advisers, logicians, stylists, and scholars, were too much to carry and eventually narrowed down to teachers of rhetoric. Nonetheless, the movement they set into motion undoubtedly generated novel outlooks in every intellectual field. Basic procedures of rhetoric, both involving style and composition, as well as reasoning and a sort of logic; the study of grammar; reflections on human nature, psychology, reactions to different circumstances, strategy, and politics; comparative studies of different societies; a vast array of *technai* or human sciences, ones that the modern age is revisiting and continuing—all emerged from the sophists.

Much of the recent scholarship takes on individual sophists. Scott Consigny characterizes this new stage in the scholarship on sophistic rhetoric in his *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist* (2001). Considering Gorgias the most elusive sophist, he finds that the primary issues that scholars have with Gorgias are that 1) his extant texts are far from complete, 2) his writing is slippery, and 3) our own impossibility in recreating the historical context. Gorgias' primary texts, *On Not-Being* and *Helen*, are not only possibly inaccurately transcribed and paraphrased but also dubiously authored. Even assuming their authorship and accuracy, the writing itself proves extremely ambiguous through lack of definition and use of sphinx-like tropes (5). Nevertheless, he identifies former

scholarship as either “subjectivist,” begun by Hegel and developed by Untersteiner, Rosenmeyer, Gronbeck, Miller, and White; or “empiricist,” initiated by Grote, and continued by Loenen, MacDowell, Romilly, Enos, and Schiappa.

His approach to Gorgias differs from these previous studies. Consigny views Gorgias as an “antifoundationalist” who rejects the “entire foundational project of his philosophical predecessors and contemporaries” (35, 203). Gorgias, rather, understands language as “an array of maneuvers or tropes that people use in various socially sanctioned agons or games,” portrays “inquiry as a debate between rival rhetors in sanctioned agons of the culture,” and sees truth as “a label of endorsement awarded by a community to an account that it finds most persuasive” (60). Further rejecting subjectivist and empiricist readings, Consigny offers a different reading of Gorgias’ ethical and political views, which he considers as promoting a Pan-Hellenic community of individuals who mold themselves and each other by taking part in a variety of agons, and Gorgias’ style, which draws attention to the “rhetoricity, situatedness, and artificiality of all texts” by playing with genre conventions (119—49). Consigny contends that Gorgias’ *On Not-Being* contributes both to pre-Socratic philosophy broadly and to Eleatic ontology and epistemology more specifically, as well as anticipating twentieth-century views of language, knowledge, and truth of Heidegger, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Ayer, Rorty, and Fish, while *Helen* treats a variety of epistemological and ethical issues, including the “nature and power of language; the epistemological status of poetry and science; the limits of free choice in the face of chance, fate, and compulsion; the conflict between obligations to one’s family and the pursuit of personal happiness; and the struggle between Greeks and barbarians” (6). Ultimately, Consigny’s study is an

*apologia* that differs from other rehabilitations of Gorgias by taking the middle road between the historical reconstruction and contemporary interpretation approaches to Gorgias.

Consigny aims to show the sophist as one who both rejects and embodies logical and mythic thought, replacing the evolutionary narrative of progress from myth to the rationality and objectivity of science and logic or of regression with “an *agonal* narrative” that shows Greek culture not as an evolution from unreason to reason but as a struggle between models of rationality (205). The *agonal* narrative coincides with contemporary philosophy the likes of Richard Rorty, who views rationality as the faculty of drawing from existing resources to handle effectively with one’s contingent situation, accepting opposing points, and employing persuasion over coercion (205—206). This view posits the ancient quarrel not as one between “a mythically minded herd and enlightened analytical fifth-century individuals,” as commonly held, but as a “struggle between agonists and dogmatists” (206). Therefore, Consigny views Gorgias as championing neither mythic nor logical thought; rather, Gorgias encourages the contingent convention of the agon in which individuals propose competing interpretations to persuade particular audiences within a community. Consigny’s reading thus considers Gorgias as an antifoundationalist who plays a considerably more important role than previously seen as a precursor of contemporary thought.

Numerous studies that cover individual sophists further connect them to influential modern thinkers. Keith Crome seeks to displace the opposition between sophistry and philosophy by examining Jean-François Lyotard’s interpretation of sophistry. His study reveals that Lyotard sought to establish the originality of thought and

contribution of the sophists as more than merely contributing to the development of philosophy. Crome seeks to restore sophistry by reconstructing its complex role in the constitution, institution, life, and destiny of philosophy thus offering a critical perspective on its origins and genealogy that can aid in putting the truth of philosophy into question, a truth which Crome calls “constitutive of the West itself” (41). After an excellent account of the sophists, Hegel and sophistry, and Heidegger and sophistry, Crome finds that in *Just Gaming* Lyotard views intelligences as regulated by diversity and difference of opinion (121). Therefore, Lyotard considers sophistry as an “attempt to retrieve or restore a type of political intelligence that is sophistical, a manner of acting or judging politically without criteria, and case by case, preserving the heterogeneity of the social” (160—61). Lyotard’s response intensifies in *The Differend*, further and more radically redeeming sophistry, by connecting the sophistic notion of truth to his notion of *differend*.

The *differend*, as opposed to litigation, is ““a case of conflict between two parties (at least) that cannot be decided equitably for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments”” (Qtd. Crome 123). Crome explains that in such cases, both parties have equally valid and necessary grounds, giving rise to an antithetic, for neither party has a justifiable basis for superiority (123). Lyotard casts his account of the *differend* with respect to Kant’s antinomies of pure reason into soul, the world, and God, which Crome addresses as psychology, cosmology, and theology, all of which can indicate apparent, unmistakable, overpowering, valid proofs, which Kant calls dogmatic; thus Lyotard points beyond Kant and toward sophistry (124—25). Lyotard, in this view, is arguing that “the very possibility of philosophy is itself engaged from out of sophistry and in itself implies—even if it does not acknowledge it—the idea of the *differend*” (129). In his

account of Lyotard's work, Crome seeks to establish a relation between philosophy and sophistry different from Plato's, one that does not exclude the sophist from truth, by arguing that Lyotard reveals that sophistry "comprehends philosophy" and is "the very condition of philosophy itself" (130). Crome's reading of *On Nature or On Not-Being*, already within the title of Gorgias' work, illustrates the concept, for nature or *physis* and not-being are opposites.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, scholars have shifted the recovery of the sophists to Friedrich Nietzsche, in addition to the other major German scholars recognized as having regenerated a positive interest in the sophists, such as G.W.F. Hegel. Untersteiner is among the first scholars to take this turn in the first half of the twentieth century, and in the 1990s Eric White, Victor Vitanza, David Roochnik, E. R. Dodds, Daniel Shaw, John Poulakos, Joel Mann, and several other scholars follow this drift, publishing numerous articles regarding the connection between Nietzsche and the sophists. The last decade of the twentieth century saw a definite trend exploring this connection.

Contemporary rhetorical theorists draw upon the sophists' texts for a variety of insights that are relevant to current theories of discourse and composition. Scholars continue to show great interest in the epistemological doctrines of the sophists based on Protagoras famous *dictum* that 'humanity is the measure of all things' rather than the gods, and thus he has been characterized as an early humanist. The twenty-first century continues to witness the production of studies on the on individual sophists. Protagorean studies in particular appear in contemporary scholarship. One such study, Edward Schiappa's *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2003)

treats Protagoras' contributions to rhetorical theory. Schiappa finds that although Protagoras did not author a *techné* about rhetoric, he conceived the scope and function of *logos* that laid the groundwork for the development of rhetoric. Although a unified sophistic rhetoric cannot be ascertained due to the sophists' varied ideas and practices, the sophists shared an inclination toward oral prose over poetry, as well as humanistic *logos* over *mythos*. Therefore, Schiappa calls for individual studies of sophists to generate a recovery of embryonic sophistic theories of rhetoric. Furthermore, this study grants Protagoras the position as the first professional sophist to examine and critique epic poetry and identifies Protagoras' teaching methods, namely a formal expository style, dialogic interaction in small groups, and antithetical articulation of public positions. Schiappa also concedes that Protagorean theory and practice of *logos* aimed at improving individuals, thus departing from the traditional view of *arête* as a matter of noble birth or wealth. Furthermore, the teachings of Protagoras held the ideological function of advancing Periclean democracy and disputing aristocratic monism, as well as defending consensual decision-making and providing a system to assist organized debate. Nevertheless, Schiappa distinguishes between a theory of rhetoric proper and that of *logos*, as evidenced by the title of his work, believing that they are not entirely the same.

Gorgias continues to be discussed. A particularly interesting contribution comes from Bruce McComiskey's *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric* (2002). The first part of the work takes on the task of correcting Platonic misrepresentations of Gorgias and offers a thorough reading of Gorgias' texts. The rest of the work covers "neosophistic appropriation," identifying sophistic doctrines of use for contemporary issues in rhetoric and composition. In the process, he considers the theory of rhetoric's epistemic relativism

as a way to analyze the function of language in shaping of human knowledge. Further, he identifies similarities in “sophistic rhetorical traditions and modern philosophical traditions” such as pragmatism, poststructuralism, and public discourse (66). Identifying a third sophistic, he presents the feminist rhetoric of Susan Jarratt and the “postmodern sophistic critical attitude” of Victor Vitanza (73—75). McComiskey concludes with a discussion of the implications of sophistic rhetoric and multiculturalism in the global village.

Other studies on the sophists in general also continue to be published.

Patricia O’Grady’s *The Sophists* (2008) offers an excellent introduction to sophistry in a collection of essays that treat the main sophists, as well as the theoretical issues and historical context surrounding them. One of the contributors, Steven Robinson adds an interesting take on the historical development of the sophists. Robinson offers an example directly related to the most common origin story of rhetoric. He quotes Pindar, who in the second of his *Olympian Odes* writes the following verses: “Many swift arrows have I crooked beneath my elbow in the quiver for speaking to those who understand; but for the masses interpreters are required. Wise is the man with much inborn knowledge; while those who learn by study, like a pair of greedy crows, spout indiscriminate chatter compared to the divine bird of Zeus” (qtd. in S. Robinson 23). Robinson glosses Pindar as claiming for himself “a kinship in wisdom with his ‘target’ audience, those who understand his words (i.e., his ‘arrows’) by means of their own inborn knowledge” (23). Opposite these voices with “inborn knowledge” we find “lesser, competing voices,” who should be ignored for they “acquire their intelligence not by birth but by study (i.e., social climbers)” (23). Compared to Pindar’s self-appointed status as a “‘divine’ eagle,” the

competitors are “greedy, ugly and chattering . . . ‘crows,’” a direct reference to Corax and Tisias.

### **Mario Untersteiner and “*Le origini sociali della sofistica*”**

Mario Untersteiner, a prolific and renowned Italian scholar of literature and history of philosophy, spent his career publishing on a number of subjects for decades. Along with Augusto Rostagni and Doro Levi, he ranks among the most authoritative voices of international rhetoric in general and Italian rhetoric in particular. Although Untersteiner’s interests were wide-ranging, varying from religious to literary history and from philology to philosophy, which became his predominant concern in the last years of his life, his entire activity as a scholar rotates around a great central theme that constitutes its object and instrument: reason, intelligence, or, to use the term in his classics, *logos* (Caizzi 39). Furthermore, in his studies, the profound connection between myth and philosophy emerge clearly (41). Despite the almost thirty years since Untersteiner’s death in 1981, his name remains cited regularly throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century and still today. Most significant, his work on the Sophists plays a major role in the scholarship devoted to this harangued group of individuals, and he ranks among the authorities in regards to the sophists.

Untersteiner taught and studied the Greek world as a professor and scholar. His first published interest was Parmenides in 1925. His attention in the 1930s and 1940s then shifts to the history of literature, particularly Greek tragedy and religion. His studies on Sophocles, Aeschylus, Pindar, and Plato culminate this phase with two volumes on the

origins of tragedy and physiology of myth titled *Le origini della tragedia* (*The Origins of Tragedy*, 1942) and *La fisiologia del mito* (*The Physiology of Myth*, 1946). In the 1940s, Untersteiner became interested in the sophists. The first edition of *I sofisti* appeared in 1949, while the second was published in 1967. In the 50s and 60s, he published two volumes collecting the fragments of Xenophanes and Parmenides; then his interest shifted to Aristotle and returns to Plato. Influenced by German neo-humanism, Untersteiner exulted classical ethics over Christian ones and the incitement to classical studies as the antidote to every sort of spiritual deadening (Parente 36—37). Within his own scholarship, *I sofisti* completes the path begun with *La nascita della tragedia* (*The Birth of Tragedy*) and *La fisiologia del mito*, three autonomous but homogenous moments of the progressive establishing of the rationality of *logos* and the correspondence of this development with the explanation of the problems faced by the Greeks in the apprehension of reality (Brancacci 100).

When the first Italian edition of *I sofisti* appeared in 1949, it did not include “*Le origini sociali della sofistica*,” which was added later. Aldo Brancacci explains in his “*I sofisti* di Mario Untersteiner” that “*Le origini*” was conceived as the third and final part of the work begun with *La fisiologia del mito*. Scholars agree that *I sofisti* is most likely the most influential and famous among Untersteiner’s works. To this day, it remains among the most thorough and expansive treatments of the sophists. At the time of its publication, *I sofisti* was the first full-scale treatment of the subject; despite the forty or so years since its second publication, it remains extremely valuable to scholars and laypeople. The English edition first appeared in 1954, translated by Kathleen Freeman. To the best of my knowledge, the second Italian edition has never been translated.

Aldo Brancacci delves into both *The Sophists* and the “*Le origini sociali della sofistica*” in his “*I sofisti*,” finding that the latter completes the *oeuvre* of Untersteiner’s scholarly work. Brancacci argues that *La fisiologia del mito*, published in 1946 confirms the nexus that, already from these years, connects the studies on tragedy and myth to sophistry (99). More specifically, the re-elaboration of the notion of myth in the poetry of Pindar, the tragedy of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and the historiography of Herodotus is succeeded by the epoch of solutions, realized by sophistry, which reinterprets the mythical forms in light of the rationality of thought and language, bringing the implicit tensions to bear (99). Brancacci argues that the three steps, *La nascita della tragedia*, *La fisiologia del mito*, and *I sofisti*, constitute three autonomous but homogenous moments of a single path turned towards reconstructing the successive stages in the progressive establishment of the rationality of *logos* and to indicate, more precisely, the corresponding of this development to the different modes of explanation of the problems that the Greek (hu)man poses himself in the apprehension of the reality in front of him/her (100).

In “*Mario Untersteiner: la fiducia nella ragione*” (Mario Untersteiner: Faith in Reason”), Fernanda Caizzi explains Untersteiner’s main interest in *logos*. *Logos*, one of the most multifaceted and nuanced terms that contemporary rhetorical studies has inherited from classical Greek thinking, has shifted in meaning throughout the millennia since its first appearance. Drawing on the words of Untersteiner himself, Caizzi states that his interest in the Greek world emerged from the Greek’s merit in having made the greatest attempt to justify to themselves and for themselves their own existence in the world, an attempt that could best be understood by reconstructing the history of the

emergence of *logos* in ancient thought (40). This attempt, however, should not be understood primarily or exclusively as a history of the process of rationalization, even though it occupies an important role; the studies that Untersteiner dedicates to the ancient world propose to make evident the various and diverse moments of the exegesis of the problems that the relation of humans with their reality generates (40). Never adopting a materialistic interpretation in his explanations of the ancients, the formulation of his research did not prevent any direction in his inquiries, particularly social and political, as his essay “*Le origini sociali della sofistica*” clearly demonstrates (40).

“*Le origini sociali della sofistica*” (“The Social Origins of Sophistry”) was originally a lecture presented in Brussels on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1949, and later at the Sorbonne, on May 5<sup>th</sup> of the same year. The piece was subsequently added to the second edition of *The Sophists*, which was also considerably revised from its previous release. As the title explains, “*Le origini sociali della sofistica*” explores those social events that brought about and facilitated the appearance of sophistry. This supplementary treatment of a subject Untersteiner explored in such depth adds a social element to rhetoric, the primary subject taught by the sophists.

### Chapter 3

#### Translation: “The Social Origins of Sophistry.”

[A well-known Italian maxim reminds translators, “Il traduttore è un traditore” (“A translator is a traitor”). Because of the complications and problematic nature of translation, I face the dilemma of any translator: fidelity to word translation or fidelity to capturing the “spirit” of the original. As Peter France clarifies, what matters is “to become aware of the way in which the translator, like the orator, negotiates between a subject and an audience, seeking out a rhetoric adequate to the situation . . . Communication is inescapably rhetorical; this is as true of translation as it is of public speaking or letter-writing” (267—268). I preserve the original terminology wherever possible. Nevertheless, certain nuances and connotations, with the aggravating circumstance of time, will inevitably be lost in translation. ]

#### **1. The Pentecontaetia as the Age of the Problems Posed by Social Life.**

With the present research, one [the author] does not want to penetrate within the mystery of the creative genius of all of the sophists. Their originality can be interpreted but never completely relived in its mysterious development in anticipation of the insight that created individual philosophical systems. Nevertheless, in the case of sophistry, it is legitimate more than other [forms of] philosophy to attempt the discovery of a vision of

particular movements not even specifically philosophical, but rather social that, which appearing over the course of a very specific age, have brought forth a grouping of problems and a wave of spiritual moments, / destined to inevitably lead to speculative thought. Drawn by an irresistible attraction, the sophists throw a penetrating glance on the turmoil of complex and various human “experiences,” aiming to grasp the profound sense of their role in the logical coherence of reality.<sup>1</sup>

As philosophers of “experience,” the Sophists depend on social phenomena that, in moments of crisis, impose persistent issues, and they seek out well-defined revolutionary paradigms, without dismissing opposite interpretations from time to time. That such a condition may have taken place is understood clearly when one remembers the manner in which sophistry, more than any other philosophical school, must be understood as the natural expression of a new consciousness that is ready to inform how contradictory, and therefore tragic, reality is. One may very well claim that the formation of sophistry was the consequence, in the speculative domain, also of an historical and social situation that defined itself as a tangle of crises culminating during the pentecontaetia and, in part, in the decades that preceded this period. Later, when the Peloponnesian war erupted, the sense of all these crises became even clearer [538] within its own terms and, therefore, became exacerbated toward a problematic situation that might have seemed, and perhaps was, unsolvable.

Hellenic social life—especially the Attic one in which sophistic thought was able to crystallize—was subjected, from the beginning of the fifth century BCE and with an

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<sup>1</sup> For the sophists as philosophers of “experiences,” see my present treatment *I Sofisti*, which will be cited as *Sofisti*.

accelerated movement after the Persian wars, to / continuous subversions due to new events. If it is true that the Hellenes did not know the modern concept of society, wrapped up as they were in the constraints of the limitations of a relational contrast between the “many” and the individual,<sup>2</sup> and if it is true that, unaware of the idea of history as evolution, they saw “within current affairs a social awareness in contrast with the social state similar to nature,”<sup>3</sup> we must nonetheless recognize that social life, not yet translated into scientific awareness, precisely in the fifth century began to form as an operating reality. In fact, the physical barriers between separate tribes and people come to fall definitely, and more or less directly into the relationships [as they] began forming between these social entities.<sup>4</sup>

Imagine: the closed circles of the impenetrable and autonomous unity of the noble families, whose fracture in Attica had begun with Draco and with Solon, are definitely torn apart only immediately after the age of the thirty tyrants, when collective responsibility in terms of penal law is condemned, so as to recognize instead the full freedom of the individual, who within the new deeper and more human<sup>5</sup> social kinship is united with every other equal citizen.<sup>6</sup> However, evidently,<sup>6</sup> over the course of the century, at the benefit of the critical spirit, the war had continued between the political solidarity, by now triumphant, and that of the noble families, hard to perish.<sup>7</sup> / One must also think of the commerce that, in this century, “contributed to overcoming the isolation

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<sup>2</sup> Cp. M. POHLENZ, *Der hellenische Mensch*, Göttingen, 1947, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> CHIAPPELLI, *Sof.*, pp. 18—19.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. L. T. HOBHOUSE, *Sociology*, in J. Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, XI, p. 654 b, which considers these factors as essential for the study of society.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the Athenians insistently prided themselves of their φιλανθρωπία: cp. A. CROISET, *Les démocraties antiques*, Paris, 1920, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> G. GLOTZ, *Histoire grecque*, II (1931), pp. 136 ff.; II (1936), p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> L. GERNET et A. BOULANGER, *Les genies grecs dans la religion*, Paris, 1932, pp. 289—290.

of the *poleis* opening the way to the formation of more ample economic unities,<sup>8</sup> apt to establish, due to their own depth of relationships, the rise of an attitude of inquiry and judgment<sup>9</sup>; furthermore, all this movement, with the enabling of an always greater influx of Metics, expanded and universalized, through the rich spiritual contribution that they brought,<sup>10</sup> the horizon of culture, even if the Hellenics, more due [538] to national prejudice than for sentimental repugnance against different origins,<sup>11</sup> ended up stalling, for the most part, in the face of the decisive step of internationalism, too dominated as they were by the pride of their own spiritual superiority. Also, this limitation established an ulterior deficiency in the sociology of the Hellenics.<sup>12</sup> However, those bastions that in the political domain were meant to be conserved crumbled rather rapidly due to the problems of thought.

A political event that occurred over the course of the fifth century had a determining importance within social life and wielded, as will be clarified later on, a decisive influence on the laying out of the problems confronted by sophistry. The aristocracy, as a specific political phenomenon, ends in many areas even though it does not perish intestate, since it will renew itself / in the oligarchies. However, right around the middle of the century, the breakdown of the Boeotian independence, at least until Chaeronea, causes a crisis that sweeps the entire aristocracy and that is particularly significant because it was suffered by Pindar,<sup>13</sup> so that a political event became a spiritual

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<sup>8</sup> G. DE SANCTIS, *Storia dei Greci*, Florence, 1939, II, p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. MÜHL, *Mensch.*, 1928, p. 12; GOMPERZ, *Pens.*, II, pp. 167.

<sup>10</sup> Cp. GLOTZ, *Hist. gr., note*, II, p. 256.

<sup>11</sup> A. DILLER, *Race, Mixture among the Greeks before Alexander*, University of Illinois, 1937, p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Cp. SCHMID, *Lit.*, I, pp. 573—574, and H. GUNDERT, *Pindar und sein Dichterberuf*, Frankfurt a. M., 1935, p. 48. It is good to keep in mind that, if the crumbling of the aristocracy in Boeotia has a

problem.<sup>14</sup> The Homeric ideal is no longer current if not through a critical and dramatic transformation that, glimpsed by Pindar, inclined to interpret the past profoundly, and is driven to extreme consequences by the open-mindedness of the sophists, whose glance wants to comprehend in a primary way the present turmoil.

When one world sets and another one rises, souls are lost not only in thought but also in action. The spiritual unity of a Solon or a Peisistratus is over forever. One need only recall the Thucydidean representation of the pentecontaetia, during the development of which, with respect to society, two moments mark themselves as decisive: the problem of the human character and that of constitutions, a sign of a typical attitude of correspondent people.

In the first place, the two figures of Pausanias and of Themistocles fill the scene of the pentecontaetia much more than what Thucydides materially renders. To Pausanias [539], the historian informs us, “it was by now insufferable to adapt his life to the brakes of tradition,”<sup>15</sup> / so he plotted to accomplish something that had to surpass the normal political categories of the Hellenics.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, his collusion with Persia became without a doubt a fault, although it corresponded to a political plan later carried out by Lysander,<sup>17</sup> and analogously Themistocles, who went to Persia to the new king Ardashir I, [and] was tried, evidently for anti-Spartan politics that had to be carried out later by

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paradigmatic value for us, the political phenomenon is not isolated since, even earlier, it had manifested itself in the western Greece and in the Peloponnesian, especially in Argos and Ilia: cp. GLOTZ, *Hist. gr. cit.*, II, p. 123, and H. SCHAEFER, *Staatsform und Politik*, Leipzig, 1932, p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> Cp. JAEGER, *Paid.*, I, pp. 291—294, 317—318.

<sup>15</sup> THUC., I, 130 (transl. Sgroi).

<sup>16</sup> THUC., I, 130, 2: ...ά τη γνώμη μειζόνως ες έπειτα έμελλε ραξειν. For the interpretation of μειζόνως, see THUKYDIDES erkl. Von J. Classen, I. Bd. Bearb. Von J. Steup, Berlin, 1919, *ad. L.*

<sup>17</sup> G. DE SANCTIS, *St. gr. Cit.*, II, pp. 54—55.

Conon.<sup>18</sup> Thucydides, despite not being able to defend Themistocles, nonetheless foresees this in full clarity: “by natural intuition . . . with very brief reflection penetrated deeply the contemporary events, and commendably divined the consequence of the distant future.”<sup>19</sup> However, from the entire narration of Thucydides we feel, more than an exhaustive historical judgment, the agonizing and astonished impression that the Hellenics felt in the face of those two so enigmatic characters. After all, even though Thucydides does not confront the problem, the figure of Cimon must not have appeared less complex, even according to those who admired him.<sup>20</sup> One might say that in this epoch all the great characters had to have appeared as hardly understandable as they submitted themselves to the judgment of the crowd, because in the new age the human spirit took on much more complex attitudes than in the past.<sup>21</sup> / This was the effect none other than of a social life so rich of elements that had to have repercussions upon the inner being of the single individuals.

The two opposing speeches—that pronounced by the Corinthians on the occasion of the Congress of Sparta, held immediately preceding the Peloponnesian War, and that of the Athenians unfolding before the Spartans<sup>22</sup>—meant especially that, by this point, the constitution and social impact of a people, mutually influencing each other, resolve

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<sup>18</sup> G. DE SANCTIS, ΑΤΘΙΣ, *Storia della repubblica ateniese*, Turin, 1912, pp. 396—397.

<sup>19</sup> THUC., I, 138. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Critias DK 88 B 8 and 52

<sup>21</sup> This can be said, for example, also of Aristides (cp. DE SANCTIS, ΑΤΘΙΣ, *cit.*, p. 390 and previous pages) and especially Pericles: recall the contrasting judgments that his contemporaries formulated of him. To have an overall view, apt to feel the problematic of the great figures of the pentecontaetia, one can see in Plato’s *Gorgias*, where they presented themselves in their hardly resolvable complexity, which transpires also within the words of Plato, who, though condemning these men of the past, appears to be almost obsessed by them: cp. PLAT., *Gorg.*, 503 C, 515 C, 519 C.

<sup>22</sup> THUC., I, 67—71; 72—78. An interesting passage should be recalled from the VIII letter of Plato (355 D), which states that having saved Hellas from the barbarians brought, as a result, to the possibility of constitutional discussions.

themselves in spiritual unity. But, in addition, the socio-political organism turns out to be the fruit of complex encounters brought about by a more lively dramatic existence of the Hellenic “city” so that it [the socio-political organism], taken in itself, forms an unsolvable problem in view of every other. [540]

One must, therefore, recognize in the age of the pentecontaetia a perennially renovated encounter of social events that, already because often for the first time they become apparent with such decisiveness, they soon transform themselves into problems that bring about the formulation of new ideas, new political and philosophical systems with the aim of suggesting possible solutions simultaneously.<sup>23</sup>

## **2. The Crisis of the Aristocracy Determines a New Spirituality in the Hellenic World.<sup>24</sup>**

### **A. The Idea of Community and its Gnoseological Consequences.**

Even the Hellenic aristocracy, as all the great human manifestations, fixed their thought in the most systematic and durable way, when the time of its decline had already been marked. The same would happen, one century later, for the *polis* that found in Plato and Demosthenes its most comprehensive interpreters.

The commemoration of certain ideas, that have established the eternal power of the aristocracy, will turn out to be particularly important in light of determining the main

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<sup>23</sup> Regarding the fifth century as an epoch that poses problems, and having posed them, resolves them, see also what I had occasion to clarify in *Mito*, pp. 240—242; 300.

<sup>24</sup> CORBATO, *Sof. pol.*, p.3: “a confirmation to what we have believed to find regarding the relationship between Sophists and the aristocracy, we believe can be found in the . . . “Social origins of sophistry” by Untesteiner, which seems exactly of great importance for the clarification of these connections and to highlight the genesis of some ideas of the sophists.” Corbato has, moreover, had the credit of confirming my thesis, observing, with rich documentation, how there had been a close and continuous relationship between oligarchs and sophists: these were often the teachers of those (cp. *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 15—16; 20, 36—37).

causes for the formation of that social substrate, from which came a necessary orientation for sophistry.

In the figure of the aristocratic person and in his relationship with \ the community one establishes a completely unusual gnoseological situation. In fact, one can say that, on the one hand, the aristocrat requires the envy expressed from those below him to highlight his autonomous happiness,<sup>25</sup> while on the other, bound as he is to the judgment of his fellow citizens, he finds difficulty to “transcend too extensively the normal limits of existence.”<sup>26</sup> This fluctuation of man between creative autonomy and submission to a collective entity is truly decisive: the regulated life, the by now firmly definite customs establish the limits on desire / and, therefore, to the free self-actualizing of individuals.<sup>27</sup> When the aristocracy began to lose energy and finally crumble, man as gnoseological and ethical entity became a problem. Sappho, when she sings: [541] “some say a army of horsemen / some say a host of foot-soldiers on the black / earth, is the most beautiful thing, I say / whatever one loves,”<sup>28</sup> displays how a type of loss had pervaded, in Mytilene, the aristocratic world, when it felt the vanishment of the “ancient social order, that was based on solid values, free from any doubt,” so that man found himself swept away by a kind of relativism,<sup>29</sup> in nearly a renunciation of proudly dominating the whole world, according to a sound principle. When the noble truths of aristocratic ethics, which imposed a course of action, vanish, then, in front of the possibility of setting out to attain and attaining any goal, the will goes wild, free by now of restraints: so Solon,

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<sup>25</sup> Cp. PIND., *Ol.*, VI, 6—7; *Phyth.*, I, 85, VII, 19 ff. Ecc., AESCH., *Ag.*, 937—939.

<sup>26</sup> MAX WUNDT, *Geschichte der griechischen Ethik*, Leipzig, 1908, I, p. 82. Cp. EUR., *Ion*, 602—604.

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> Fr. 27 a, 1—4 D (transl. Romagnoli).

<sup>29</sup> Cp. HERMANN FRÄNKEL, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentum*, München 1962, pp. 211—213.

Pindar, and Aeschylus create the theodicies,<sup>30</sup> so that, as in the case of public opinion, individual liberty contrasted the barrier of a universal concept. This problem of the constructive will presents itself as hardly solvable: so states implicitly the aristocratic Theognis when he cites this epigram from Delos making it his own: “The loveliest thing is justice. Of everything health is most valuable, / the happiest is to win one’s love.”<sup>31</sup> Against the barrier of the justice, which / the aristocracy attempts to elevate to give unity to the manifold manifestations of existence, the author of these verses uncovers, without stating it explicitly, the power of the will that comes to be arranged on the same level of the absolute, normative principle. Man, therefore, during the crisis of the aristocratic age vacillates between the seduction of the individual impulse and the ambition towards a universal ethical principle, so that the conquest of personal originality represents a slippery problem within a conscious achievement.

For the aristocratic world, especially at the time of the decline, the most immediate ambition vibrates in the awareness of efficacy that emanates from eternal ideas.<sup>32</sup> First of all, the two fundamental political principles, αἰδώς [*aidos*, reverence/respect] and δίκη, [*dike*, justice/theodicy], generic concepts more than anything, constitute the basis of aristocratic society,<sup>33</sup> as appears clearly from Theognis that opposes them to the laws, to the νόμοι, [*nomoi*, laws/customs],<sup>34</sup> both of which had

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<sup>30</sup> Cp. SCHMID, *Lit.*, IV, p. 458.

<sup>31</sup> This Δηλιακόν ἐπίγραμμα, cited by ARIST., *Eth. N.*, 1, 9, 1099 to 25, is in THEOGN., 255—256 (transl. Romagnoli).

<sup>32</sup> Recall D. M. ROBINSON, *Pindar a Poet of Eternal Ideas*, Baltimore, 1936.

<sup>33</sup> Cp. SCHMID, *Lit.*, IV, pp. 524, 531, 557, 559, 560, note 2. For αἰδώς, cp. also G. GLTOZ, *Études sociales et juridiques sur l’antiquité grecque*, Paris, 1906, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> THEOGN., 291-292; cp. vv. 937—938. Citing Theognis, one disregards, in the present research, the matter of authenticity, importing only the testimony of a certain current of thought. After all, it was observed, almost all the elegies of the anthology “date back to a rather ancient age, that is to say none

become the password of the common people.<sup>35</sup> [542] Far richer is the concept of “harmony,” insistently proclaimed in the aristocratic society, which abhors war,<sup>36</sup> to rise towards the Pan-Hellenic idea, that Pindar heard from his earliest years, as appears in the tenth Pythian Ode of 498 BCE, and / that he continually affirmed,<sup>37</sup> in conformity, after all, with the spirit of Hellenic aristocratic families, that—still at the time of Thucydides—felt so connected to one other, in order to exceed the limits of the *polis*.<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, then, in the domain of aristocratic ideas one encounters the spiritual motivation and attitude of the φιλανθρωπία [*philanthropia*, philanthropy/love of honor], destined to hold great importance in the Attic world.<sup>39</sup> In the legislation of Charondas (around the middle of the sixth century), that was of aristocratic character,<sup>40</sup> one notices the imprinted disposition of φιλανθρωπία, as noted in ancient sources.<sup>41</sup> One must, then, recognize a certain value to the Theognidean testimonies, which exhort to forgive the errors of others,<sup>42</sup> according to the spirit of φιλανθρωπία.

The social foundation of these ideas can be considered their distinguishing note insofar as they implant themselves on the premise of a collective experience that becomes an abstract concept. The constitution of Charondas seems to offer ulterior proof with established law so that all the citizens would learn to read and write with paid teachers of

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appears very much earlier than the fifth century” (THEOGNIS, *Poèmes élégiaques*, texte établi et traduit par Jean Carrière, Paris, 1948, p. 13).

<sup>35</sup> V. EHRENBERG, *Recht.*, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Cp. THEOGN., 761 ff., 755 ff.; PIND., fr. 109-110 = 120 Turyn.

<sup>37</sup> G. CURTIUS, *Storia greca* (Italian transl.), II, p. 53; cp. GUNDERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 85.

<sup>38</sup> Cp. H. BERVE, *Thukydides*, Frankfurt a. M., pp. 3—4, 41, 53; cp. U. WILAMOWITZ, *Glaube*, II, p. 129.

<sup>39</sup> Cp. G. GLOTZ, *Solidarité de la famille dans le droit criminel en Grèce*, Paris, 1904, p. 423.

<sup>40</sup> E. CIACERI, *Storia della Magna Grecia*, Milano ecc., Vol. II, 1927, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> DIOD., XII, 16, 1—2. For the historicity of the norm within the cited passage, cp. G. BUSOLT, *Griechische Geschichte*, Gota, 1893, I, p. 428.

<sup>42</sup> THEOGN., 323—328.

the city.<sup>43</sup> The measure corresponds perfectly to that of Lycurgus, / who had wanted an education of the state and not that of privates<sup>44</sup>: it was “an education for the state and by the state; it was a principle into agreement with the general tendency of aristocratic society” and, undoubtedly, in opposition to individualism.<sup>45</sup>

The recognition seems granted, then, namely that in the aristocratic society there was a spiritual structuring that brought to the definition of a collective entity, expressing the eternal—and therefore ideal—essence of man.

Such a “collective entity” that, as a positive act, belongs, certainly, to all the epochs and all the locations, for the Hellenics of this age, makes up an element of great significance, [543] because it subsists as a creative force and, at a time, as limit: it is a point of inspiration for the thought that perceives the possibility of transferring it [the collective entity] in the domain of the universal; it [the collective entity] is nonetheless a restraint to the freedom of the individual, who wants to establish himself in absolute autonomy and originality of the person. The community appears, then, as a spiritual fact that awaits interpretation.

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<sup>43</sup> DIOD., XII, 112, 5; for the interpretation of the passage and for the plausibility of the information, see Ciaceri, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 42—44.

<sup>44</sup> XEN, *Resp. Lac.*, II, 2; PLUT., *Lyc.*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> J. LUCCIONI, *Les idées politiques et sociales de Xénophon*, Ophrys s. a. (ma 1948), p. 145. The character of Hellenic teaching, greatly less individualistic compared to the modern one, was elucidated very well by NESTLE, *Eur.*, p. 188: “the student learns from the teacher, welcomes from him the artistic and poetic technique and therefore certain forms of representation constitute themselves, in which the individual does not have to take on changes and can introduce very little of his individuality. . . This is in relation with the fact that the Greek gives immense value to theoretical knowledge: that which was recognized as just, the form, in which the representation found a satisfactory expression, is conserved, and subsequently does not concern itself as much with new creations as with reproductions certainly surely perfected by an already conquered type.”

After all, one can observe that the aristocracy provided a decisive contribution, as evidenced by its religiosity, to the consciousness of the community, although it is a phenomenon, as will be shown later, / not limited to the aristocracy. Well-known is that the god particularly close to Pindar was the Delphic oracle,<sup>46</sup> the god who, for the period under study—the end of the sixth century and beginning of the fifth—, becomes the representative, through its oracle, of the conservative and antidemocratic currents.<sup>47</sup> One comprehends how the Theban poet, interpreter of the political and ethical ideal of the aristocracy, was persuaded to impress the seal of Apollonism upon its entire thought.<sup>48</sup> The god of Delphi always operated with an eye on peace among men and gods, attainable when the former act according to justice,<sup>49</sup> so that the latter become ethical powers.<sup>50</sup> However, next to this universalistic conception of religion, according to which the single gods have a tendency to become ethical concepts of all-encompassing validity, one must note the Delphic idea of the hero<sup>51</sup> directed in the same sense. The interpretation that Pindar gives of it corresponds to the clarification of a religious idea, particularly widespread among Hellenics. The poet, proclaiming that the gods and men draw life and breath from the same mother (*Ne.*, VI, 1 ff.), does not signify anything other than that the gods are the archetypes of men, although different. In the consciousness of the separation that intercedes between the ideal world and its reflection in the perceivable kind, man comes to comprehend how “the crowning of life, that even the mortal / being can earn, is the memory of his virtues. Not his person, but, what is more, the spirit of his perfections

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<sup>46</sup> Cp. L. R. FARNELL, *The Works of Pindar*, London, 1932, II, p. 462.

<sup>47</sup> Cp. C. LANZANI, *L'Oracolo delfico*, Genoa etc., 1940, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> MARTIN P. NILSSON., *Griech. Rel.*, pp. 617—618.

<sup>50</sup> M. POHLENZ, *Der hellenische Mensch*, Göttingen, 1947, pp. 54—55.

<sup>51</sup> Cp. LANZANI, *op. cit.*, pp. 16—17.

and creations wins death and from generation to generation flies eternally young in [544] singing, since only form belongs to the reign of the eternal.”<sup>52</sup> The figures of the winners in the agons celebrated by Pindar end up being, in reality, no longer persons but “types” that would represent a particular aspect of human life;<sup>53</sup> so from this Apollonian religiosity, emanation of aristocratic society, that very “type” that “is at one time a universal beyond the individual and a detail among other types”<sup>54</sup> comes to be exalted as an eternal value. That which counts for the men of the age of the poet, still enlightened by the aristocratic ideal, is true also for the heroes of myth.<sup>55</sup> This perpetuity of the idea, by which the individual can perfect himself in the universality of the type, since his immortal being will actualize in the eternal glory of the surname and, therefore, in his descendents,<sup>56</sup> corresponds, precisely, “to the faith of society, for which Pindar wrote his poems and to which he belongs, and of the families that we can say detain the power in all the Doric cities and even in Athens really govern public matters, at the time in which he spent the period of his studies.”<sup>57</sup> That universal that is the aristocratic parentage (γένος, bloodline/patronage) / reveals itself as an idea, in which, moreover, hums the dichotomy—felt in the Theognidian verses quoted above—of the individual and of that community seen as a general entity. But, in the spirituality of the political life of the aristocracy, the latter prevailed, for its nature brought to break every barrier and embrace

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<sup>52</sup> WALTER F. OTTO, *Die Götter Griechenlands*, Bonn, 1929, p. 100; cp. GUNDERT, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> This point has been elucidated very clearly by FR. SCHWENN, *Der junge Pindar*, Berlin, 1940, pp. 38, 49, 71.

<sup>54</sup> JOËL, *Gesch. Phil.*, p. 129; 135—136.

<sup>55</sup> See for what can be observed, regarding the Pindaric Ajax, G. COPPOLA, *Introduzione a Pindaro*, Rome, 1931, p. 72; cp. GUNDERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 59—60.

<sup>56</sup> U. WILAMOWITZ, *Pindaros*, Berlin, 1922, p. 252 and previous pp.

<sup>57</sup> WILAMOWITZ, *Glaube*, II, p. 129.

multiplicity into unity,<sup>58</sup> as is evident even by the inclination that this society demonstrated toward pan-Hellenism.

However, Pindar—despite the universality of this “type,” despite the absolute ideas that circulated at his time such as αἰδώς (*aidos*, reverence), δίκη (*dike*, justice), φιλάνθρωπια (*philanthropia*, philanthropy), and ομονία (*omonía*, harmony of mind/one-mindedness) and others, with which one sought to hamper, by means of ideas, the indomitable natural complexity of experiences<sup>59</sup>—perceives notwithstanding something crucial in the essence of human personality. Man, according to his Pindar’s thought, must perform the ability not exactly of seeming good, but of knowing how to impose being good with undisputed vividness: that which matters for man is πείρα (*peira* or experience) (cp., for example, *Ne.*, III, 70, etc), and πόνος (*ponos* or effort) (for example, *Ol.*, XI, 4; *Pyth.*, [545] VIII, 73), so that he can, up against anything and depending on the various occasions, enact his own dominion (μέτρον [measure, due measure, proportion]: cp. *Ol.*, XIII, 47—48; *Pyth.*, II, 24; *Isth.*, VI, 71) .<sup>60</sup> Therefore, one could say, and with good reason, that [the] “*arête*,” according to this conception of the poet, could not be enacted until it remained within the confines of the aristocratic world, since the individual, / to be, must act on his own, “even without the support of a community.”<sup>61</sup>

This structuring of a huge social problem, which had formulated itself as the antithesis community-individual, whose terms interfere among each other with reciprocal critical aggressiveness, manifests itself truly definitively throughout the entire fifth

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<sup>58</sup> Rightly, S. MAZZARINO, *Or. Occ.*, Florence, 1947, p. 220, speaks of the “anxiety of a collective life, to be celebrated in the composite religious beauty of the *polis*” as one of the “aristocratic ideals.”

<sup>59</sup> Cp. A. LABRIOLA, *La concezione materialistic della storia*, Bari, 1947, pp. 135 ff.

<sup>60</sup> For the interpretation of μέτρον, cp. *Sofisti, Excursus* al cap. III.

<sup>61</sup> GUNDERT, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

century, during which, the two moments, in the process of clarifying themselves to maintain their supremacy at the end of the dialectic scale of the real, struggle with evermore intense drama.

Perhaps one may be surprised that the aristocratic world starts the dominant note of a civilization—that of the fifth century—which in Athens, where it must converge and centralize itself, takes on the character of a democratic light that often projects itself beyond the narrow confines of Attica. However, this appears completely logical. Only beginning in the age of Marathon a new civilization slowly begins to form,<sup>62</sup> one that has to create its own values and interpret the already existing ones. One cannot, of course, imagine that a world of original imprint can develop out of nothing, especially in Greece, that reached its most daring accomplishments rising above tradition. After all, through representatives such as Theognis and Pindar, it has been possible to ascertain the power of thought within a politically won social milieu. However, this is the typical way of defeat: to prompt violent reactionary comebacks, as occurred in Greece, there where the aristocracy managed to conserve itself,<sup>63</sup> or to stir up fertile reflection. Not surprisingly, despite the innovative currents, the population was inclined to loyalty toward ancient traditions and to recognize the superiority and the ability of the aristocracy as guides for the people.<sup>64</sup> The idea of equality, despite its seductiveness, did not appear commensurate to reality; the power [546] of capital, though significant, did not have the same value as the ancient classes. For this reason, “the aristocracy conserved its influence for a long

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<sup>62</sup> V. EHRENBERG, *Ost und West* [“Schriften der philos. Fakultät der deutschen Universität in Prag” Bd. 15]; Brünn etc., 1935, p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> E. MAYER, *Geschichte des Altertums*, IV, 1., Stuttgart, 1939, p. 399.

<sup>64</sup> MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

time, even when its rights had been eliminated.”<sup>65</sup> One reached, then, a paradoxical situation, so that the aristocrats on one side became the heads of the democracy,<sup>66</sup> while on the other they continued to operate as an official party and in secret societies.<sup>67</sup> The observation seems accurate, then, that the rising democracy “does not democratize an ousted aristocracy, but rather, on the contrary, feudalizes itself; that is to say that with its political advent it identifies itself with the full mindset and in all the forms of life of the ousted aristocracy. The new society is . . . aristocratic with an expanded circle of privileged individuals.”<sup>68</sup>

The concept of “community,” with all the gnoseological consequences, conserves and expands itself from the aristocratic spirituality, in the experience of the democratic epoch.

The conception of unity, in blood, of all the members of a lineage (*γένος* [*genos*, bloodline/patronage]) persists, despite the political decline of the aristocracy, but undergoes a transformation: the relationship of man with his *γένος* extends to the entire population, in which one blood lives: “the community to which one belongs / by birth, gives the content of life. One is what one is by birth”; the *physis* is the primal essence of man. “The conception of aristocratic ethics survives, even if birth, as the origin of a certain *γένος*, loses its significance.”<sup>69</sup> The universal condition replaces the universal Delphic and aristocratic ethics.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> MEYER, *op. cit.*, pp. 529—530.

<sup>66</sup> Cp. GLOTZ, *Hist. gr., cit.*, p. 248

<sup>67</sup> Cp. Croiset, *Dém. Ant., cit.*, pp. 193—194.

<sup>68</sup> HASEBROEK, *W. G.*, p. 216; cp. pp. 185—186; 222; 232—233.

<sup>69</sup> O. THIMME, ΘΥΣΙΣ ΤΡΟΠΟΣ, ΗΘΟΣ, Quakenbrück, 1935, pp. 117—118.

<sup>70</sup> T. ZIELINSKI, *Iresione*, Leopoli, 1936, II, pp. 98—99.

The upper classes and the political privileges, even under the influence of the Peloponnesian war, gradually disappear in favor of the vaster unity of the *polis*.<sup>71</sup> The Athenian population feels that it constitutes a homogenous and—therefore—universal entity: it preoccupies itself with making prevail that which corresponds to the common utility<sup>72</sup>: all together the citizens “have a fair amount of common sense; and, men of judgment being among these, under their influence act well and benefit thus to the city . . . But the individuals, taken each for himself, are not [547] able to judge righteously.”<sup>73</sup> To an historian, such as Aristotle, both the universal value of community and the problem of the individual possibilities appear clearly in the *polis*. During the pentecontaetia—and especially in the period in which Athens prepares to conquer its empire—“one could say that only one will animates Athens foreign policy . . . The collective ambition of the population is sufficiently vast so as not to be surpassed by any individual conception”<sup>74</sup>; in the age Pericles “neither the state will have / to fear individual selfishness nor the individual protected by the constitution will have to fear the will of the state.”<sup>75</sup> The law is an expression of the collective reason,<sup>76</sup> which gives it [the law] validity,<sup>77</sup> and—then again—from it receives the mark of universality.<sup>78</sup> For this reason, Thucydides often cites speeches of a community—the Corinthians, the Corcyrians, the Athenians, the Melians, etc—that are certainly not among the least important of his history.<sup>79</sup> For Thucydides the

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<sup>71</sup> G. GLOTZ, *Le travail dans la Grèce ancienne*, Paris, 1920, pp. 204—205.

<sup>72</sup> GLOTZ, *Le travail, cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>73</sup> ARISTOT., *Pol.*, III, 1281 b 34 ff. (Transl. Constanzi).

<sup>74</sup> GLOTZ, *Hist. gr.*, II, p. 145.

<sup>75</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>76</sup> CROISET, *Dém. ant.*, p. 157.

<sup>77</sup> Cp. THUC., VI, 14, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Cp. HDT., VII, 104, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Cp. W. NESTLE, *Thukydides und die Sophistik*, “Neue Jahrbh.”, 1914, now in *Griechische Studien*, Stuttgart, 1948, pp. 341 and 350.

community is a *physis*<sup>80</sup> that suggests to its own activity a purpose with logic as much subjective as objective,<sup>81</sup> and in which it finds exactly the guarantee of its own universality.

Less vast collective entities establish themselves, such as are the activities of those who exercise a trade, the common voice of the many, and many judges of the Elis, or Eleia, etc., within this community, fastened by a lively sense of universal religiosity<sup>82</sup> that no longer distinguishes between national gods and those of foreigners, as demonstrated also by the attitude of the Delphic oracle.<sup>83</sup>

In exchange for this preeminence of the “common interest,” one perceives that it ends up toning down individualism.<sup>84</sup> But the bitterness of the political struggles and the violence of the passions once again pose / the difficult problem of individualism that, by another way, found a difficulty, a shadow laid by a universal idea to impede every autonomous gesture.<sup>85</sup> The antithesis community-individual represents itself in all of its urgency in the age of democracy.

The war—a particularly effective social phenomenon as stimulus of ideas (more on this later)—at [548] the time of the Persian battles, presented the problem of the responsibility of the individual toward his / her people, without coming to an open contrast between state and individual; this [the individual], even though truly odd, was rejected once again the universality of that [the state].<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless the individual

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<sup>80</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 346—347.

<sup>81</sup> Cp. V. PARETO, *Compendio di sociologia generale*, Florence, 1920, § 71, p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> Cp. F. PFISTER, *Die Religion der Griechen und Römer*, Leipzig, 1930, pp. 213—214.

<sup>83</sup> Cp. T. ZIELINSKI, *La religion de la Grèce antique*, Paris, 1926, p. 93.

<sup>84</sup> MEYER, *op. cit.* IV, 1, p. 763 and WUNDT, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>85</sup> See WUNDT, *op. cit.*, pp. 311—312, and POHLENZ, *Staat.*, pp. 49 sg.

<sup>86</sup> Cp. EHRENBERG, *Ost. U. W.*, *cit.*, pp. 131, 135, 139.

existed in all of its original autonomy: I have already mentioned how all those men characteristic of the medical wars were problematic.<sup>87</sup> One feels the complexity of being human and, in the past, influenced by that universal which is the community of the *polis*, one preferred submerging the individual in an intimate versatility but an almost anonymous one; a versatility that would be a general attribute of man. Aeschylus, for example, completely dominated by the idea of the *polis*, is not interested in knowing and enabling others to know the name of the Hellenic hero or heroes that were glorious at Salamis, while he worries about emphasizing the power of human astuteness (*Pers.*, 355 ff.), the figure of the πολύτροπος, [*polutropos*, broadly a cunning person or one who knows many ways of expressing the same thing], that, immediately after Homer, was felt as something specifically Hellenic, as the essence of this “type.”<sup>88</sup> Therefore, / that which the social phenomenon “war” allows to break in within life, comes to be dominated and diminished by the socio-political phenomenon which blocks the individual impulse stretched out toward a constructive freedom in order to absorb it in its own generic universality. In this way the individual stops himself at the limitation of the “type.” Even in the second half of the fifth century, Athenian democracy, in defense of the principle of equality, suspects prominent people,<sup>89</sup> whose marked individualism comes to be aimed at by comic poets, such as Phrynichus and Aristophanes.<sup>90</sup> If one then fixes his/her gaze on a few decisive moments of the Peloponnesian war, s/he will see that these [moments], for their universal aspect, had to bring in the masses, absorbed by the monotony of a

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<sup>87</sup> Cp. also WUNDT., *op. cit.*, pp. 150—153.

<sup>88</sup> Cp. E. BETHE, *Homer, Dichtung u. Sage*, Leipzig, 1927, III, pp. 38—39 and Ph.-E. LEGRAND, *Hérodote, Introduction*, Paris, 1932, pages 124—125.

<sup>89</sup> NESTLE, *V.M.z.L.*, p. 478.

<sup>90</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 461 and 468.

problem, to the creation of collective states of mind that ended up concretizing themselves in typical characters. The plague of Athens raises from the mystery of consciousness the amoral selfish type; the facts of Corcyra identify the ambitious and unbridled passionate type; the episode of the vandalizing of the *hermai* delineates the superstitious type. In general, the game of personal interests, of [549] partisan or class grudges, breaks the moral unity of the homeland, which had been enacted at the time of the Persian wars,<sup>91</sup> and creates those typical characters that, venting in impulses, halt the free conquest of the character.

It has been said that the “type” corresponds to one of the essential manifestations of the aristocratic spirituality. We can specify and complete this historical element noting the way in which the more intense and exasperated the turmoil of the political conflict, the more easily it ends up in the creation of certain typical and characteristic figures. One can say that this corresponds to a necessary social law. If, in fact, it was observed, sociology suggests friendship and cooperation, which in effect take place in relationships between men; in reality, then, these “are mixed with hostile or indifferent processes and feelings.” Even these are social facts. Therefore, “envy, enmity, spite, and every lack of good will—the social and antisocial elements in the strict sense of the word—unfortunately pertain to the study of social facts in the broadest sense.”<sup>92</sup> Social life attracts, therefore, all the interest on human typology because through its aspects, the principal forces that act in the complex world of humanity define themselves. And,

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<sup>91</sup> Cp. DE SANCTIS, *ATΘΙΣ*, p. 457.

<sup>92</sup> HOBHOUSE, *op. cit.*, 654 b and E. DUPRÉEL, *Sociologie générale*, Paris, 1948, p. 129.

specifically, these forces are dominated by the conflicting polarity of good and evil, which manifested itself particularly effectively in the Greece of the end of the century.<sup>93</sup>

In this way, from the social typology of the aristocratic environment,<sup>94</sup> which formed out of the crash between good and evil (recall the contrast between κακοί [*kakoi*, lowborn] and αγαθοί [*agathoi*, aristocrat] right in the political thought of Theognis and his fellow party-members), one moves on to an analogous typology that had to define itself within the turmoil of the political struggles of the second half of the fifth century, without substantial / psychological and gnoseological differences, even if the historical terms had transformed themselves or even reversed compared to what had occurred during the course of the age of Theognis. The intrusiveness of the social fact with its natural laws at the expense of the unrepeatable originality of the individual reflects itself remarkably precisely on the literary manifestations that place individuals as themes of their own representation. Therefore, one [550] has been able to see a “virtual identity of every will” as characteristic in the characters of Herodotus<sup>95</sup>; an idea or a type in those of Sophocles;<sup>96</sup> and something analogous for those in Euripides<sup>97</sup> so in this age the overall

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<sup>93</sup> See documentation in GLOTZ, *Solidarité, cit.*, pp. 423—424.

<sup>94</sup> Take into consideration, for Theognidean typology—so aristocratic—of the πολυτροπς, the verses 213 ff., 309 ff., 963 ff., 1071 ff., in which the central moment is given by the concept of οργή, which means, rather, the intimate character of man, as determined by his ambitions and impulses (GUNDERT, *op. cit.*, p. 116, note 86; cp. also SCHWENN, *op. cit.*, p. 193, note 154; THIMME, *op. cit.*, p. 28—29), but does not go beyond that which constitutes “the type” (cp. W. MARG, *Der Charakter in der Sprache der frühgriechischen Dichtung*, Würzburg, 1948, pp. 13—14, 19, 41—42.

<sup>95</sup> A. MADDALENA, *Interpretazione erodotee*, Padua, 1942, p. 49.

<sup>96</sup> MARIO UNTERSTEINER, *Sofocle*, Florence, 1935, pp. 622 ff.

<sup>97</sup> W. ZÜRCHER, *Die Darstellung des Menschen im Drama des Euripides*, Basel, 1947 (cp., p. es., p. 87: character is that “of which we can say how it would have manifested in other cases”). However, moreover, see UNTERSTEINER, *op. cit.*, (in the previous note), p. 618 ff.

concept of ‘character’ does not seem to have been reached, even if the elements that constitute it are identified.<sup>98</sup>

To philosophy “the infinite variety of beings and of individual phenomena, coexistent in space and succeeding one another in time,” the “live awareness . . . of the indomitableness of every single being and of every single conclusion to any other” had appeared so certain that they had to draw out of this statement “the concept of the infinite number,” the idea “of the infinite quantities of the differentiations.”<sup>99</sup> However, the social experience, so urgent in such an age of wars and internal contrasts, did not grant the possibility of a corresponding and constructive close examination. The universal and the individual both misfire, so as to / have to truly conclude that the issues of spirituality according the aristocratic world are, yes, clarified, but still not surpassed.

### **B. Community and Individual in the Theories of the Sophists.**

The philosophy of the sophists can be considered as the speculative mirror of these social forms of the human spirit, for which it demonstrates a particular historical sensibility and in front of which it creates a philosophic and systematic interpretation.

One should take a look at the doctrine of Protagoras<sup>100</sup>: for this sophist the persistent experience of the contradictions between type and individual, between universal man and particular man correspond to a fact which constitutes a problem that needs to be resolved urgently. He, always so sensitive to the social and political phenomenon, as is evidenced in his relations with Pericles, by his activity as legislator,

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<sup>98</sup> THIMME, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>99</sup> MONDOLFO, *Inf.*, pp. 191—192.

<sup>100</sup> Here I dogmatically summarize my interpretation of the thought of Protagoras (see, above, cap. III).

by the particular accent given to the πολιτική αρετή [*politike arête*, political virtue], intended as virtue *par excellence*, ends up establishing a dialectic of human gnoseology [551] according to the terms laid down by social reality. Man, he says, insofar as “ruler of all experience” πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον [measure of all things] (80 B 1), manages to gain for himself individually the knowableness of the real, which can also be contradictory. This rift, which is always possible in the entanglement of phenomena and brings about immense differences between one individual and another, can be placated, by means of a release of the relativistic phenomenalism of the individual. This occurs when the wise person succeeds in transforming experiences lacking in / value for the individual into others that result and are endowed with value,<sup>101</sup> since he knows how to “reduce the minor opportunity of knowledge into a major opportunity of knowledge.”<sup>102</sup> This wise person who, depending on the case, can be a physician, farmer, orator, sophist, etc., because he provokes such a gnoseological process, becomes the representative of that interest of the community,<sup>103</sup> sum of individuals of a certain category, that finds itself unified, gnoseologically speaking, by a coincidence of relative knowableness of a determinate experience. Therefore, only collective man, man in general—the “type”—is able to perfect the knowableness of the experiences in the interest of the single individual. Hence, in the evolution of civilization, the condition of perfection is reached when the life of the *polis* is held up by δίκη [*dike*, justice] and αιδώς [*aidos*, respect]

<sup>101</sup> Cp. PLAT., *Theaet.*, 166 C – 167 D: cp. dK 80 A 21 a.

<sup>102</sup> ARISTOT., *Rhet.*, B 24 1402 a 23 = DK 80 A 21: τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν.

<sup>103</sup> PLAT., *Theaet.*, 172 B το κοινὴ δόξαν. As I corrected the second draft of the present essay in its first edition, I received the new volume of E. DUPRÉEL, *Les sophists*, Neuchâtel, 1948—49. The work, printed on October 31 1949 (cp. p. 408), was in typesetting from 1948 (cp. frontispizio). Therefore, this work and mine around it are independent of each other. I note only that, to be useful to the ends of my present research, which Dupréel, by other way and with a different critical method than mine, reaches an identical representation of the sociological—collectivist of the gnoseology of Protagoras: see what Dupréel says especially pp. 23, 27, 28, 35, 38, 43, 53, 56, 57.

(ethical motivations also of the aristocratic spirituality!),<sup>104</sup> which consists of the universal πολιτική ήρετή [*politke arête*, political virtue] and that reduces to unity the single individuals. Therefore, all the manifestations of life, for Protagoras, are constrained in the pattern of a universal leveling concept.

As for the aristocratic situation, transformed by the contemporary socio-political activity, Protagoras innovates because he reduces to an organic system that which was earlier a compound of scattered and instinctive experiences,<sup>105</sup> translating into a philosophic concept defined as “major possibility for knowledge” ([κρείττων λόγος *Regarding or About Loss*]) that which /was a social phenomenon: the annihilation of the individual interest into the collective one.<sup>106</sup>

One can say that the philosophic and rationalistic idea of community constitutes the fundamental problem also for many [552] other sophists: here we find ομόνοια [*omonoia*, like-mindedness], the “concord” of Antiphon; the cosmopolitanism of the very Antiphon and that of Hippias, even more profound in the theorizing of the unity of individuals, whose concrete actions resolve themselves in the universality of κοινοί νόμοι [*koinoi nomoi*, common traditions/laws]<sup>107</sup>; the conception of the laws as universal fact and, therefore, identical for everyone, evident in the moment in which the individual *physis* recognizes itself an essential and a universal *physis*,<sup>108</sup> according to the author of

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<sup>104</sup> PLAT, *Prot.*, 320 C – 322 D = DK 80 C 1.

<sup>105</sup> The coherence, dialectically constructed, of the Protagorean system may more fully emerge from the whole chapter regarding Protagoras more than from the present ideas.

<sup>106</sup> Cp. PARETO, *op. cit.*, § 572, p. 241; see also § 253, p. 119.

<sup>107</sup> *An. Iambli.*, 7, 15 (= DK 89). The *Anonymus Iamblichii* is to be identified with Hippias; see MARIO UNTERSTEINER, *An. I.* Accepting my interpretation C. DEL GRANDE *Hybris*, Naples 1947, p. 524.

<sup>108</sup> For all this, see *Sophists*, ch. XVIII, § 5.

the anonymous treatise *Περί νόμων* [*About Traditions/Laws/Customs*].<sup>109</sup> This rationalistic solution, naturally, had to have been in conflict with all the difficulties that universal concepts entail and, given its origin, against the reality that did let itself be reduced to such a conceptual uniformity: this is perceived particularly by Lycophron, who had to have reliably critiqued the idea so as to disown every possible ethics; therefore the collective unity of men is an ideal, more than a reality.<sup>110</sup>

Similarly, for sophistry the individual appears as a type rather than an individual / passable to infinite differentiations: therefore sophistry deals with typical characterology that, in reality, is always a manifestation of the universal: the ambitious,<sup>111</sup> the envious,<sup>112</sup> the slanderer,<sup>113</sup> etc. And particularly noteworthy is the fact that Hippias, who seems to have deliberately confronted the problem of character,<sup>114</sup> has been able to disentangle it from the constant and dialectical polarity of good and evil,<sup>115</sup> as after all does Prodicus, whose Heracles forms himself spiritually between the contrast of the opposite tendencies of good and evil.<sup>116</sup> Of particular importance, the circumstance that the genetic process of the character-type according to the two sophists is provoked precisely by that antithesis good and evil, from whose turmoil, even if under a distinctly political type, had sprouted the typology of the aristocratic spirituality.

<sup>109</sup> This treatise was recovered in [Dem.] XXV, by POHLENZ, *An.*; the text, now, in *Sof. T. F.*, III, 11, pp. 192—207.

<sup>110</sup> ARIST., fr. 91 Rose (STOB., *Flor.*, IV, 29, p. 710 h.) = DK 83, 4. For the interpretation, see: *Sophists*, ch. XVIII, § 3.

<sup>111</sup> Remember the *Περί φιλοτιμίας* of Protagoras (DK 80 A 1, 55): cp. UNTERSTEINER, *Sophists*, ch. II, § 2 C.

<sup>112</sup> In Hippias: STOB., III, 38, 32 (= DK 86 B 16).

<sup>113</sup> In Hippias: STOB., III, 42, 10 (= DK 86 B 17).

<sup>114</sup> Cp. UNTERSTEINER, *Teofr. E Ipp.*, B 19a, pp. 92—97.

<sup>115</sup> Cp. PLAT., *Hipp. Mag.*, 295 B C; 295 E; 296 D and [Theophr.] *Proem. Ad Char.*, 2—3 (for the belonging to Hippias of this preface, cp. the article cited in the previous note). The text, now, in *Sof. T. F.*, III.

<sup>116</sup> Cp. CHIAPPELLI, *Sof.*, pp. 241—242.

Nevertheless, one can say, for all sophists it is the will factor that determines the character of the individual. Of course, this [will factor] happens in the most disparate ways: according to Protagoras the greater possibility for knowledge, the κρείττων λόγος [*kreitton logos*, stronger/better argument], shapes, with an act of universal will, the ethical values for human community; for Gorgias the moment of decision confirms the [553] culminating point of individual action; the same is to be said for Prodicus; Critias, then, characterizes the individual who, / with an overturn of Protagoras' position, imposes social ethicality upon the universality of the law, which conforms to its will. In the clash between the most contrasting solutions one is the presence of the will, of which political life had sensed the effectiveness, but it is also an arduous and insoluble problem: necessary for the setting up of the universal, both in the name of a community and in the name of the individual, it is nevertheless problematic. Gorgias gave rigorous proof of it.

A fundamental attitude of aristocratic thought—which hinges on the problem of a fluctuating community-individual alternative and, therefore, upon the typical characterology of the individual, owing to his persistence in the social and political praxis—had to dominate speculative thought. Sophistry welcomed it and created a universal concept, whose abstraction is not transcendent—as Platonic idealism will become, for example—but inspired by a social and political experience; and, moreover, represented those single human attitudes, valid as typical and immutable paradigms for individuals who, in order to operate in social life, have to define themselves according to characteristics that are readily recognizable and, therefore, schematic.

### **C. The Relativistic Experience of Aristocratic Society in the Effort for the Reconstruction of Proper Ideals**

Other characteristic influences have been established by the complex experience of the aristocratic society on the formation of sophistry, which derived singular aspects from them.

It is well known that one of the attitudes of thought that gives a tone of uniformity to sophistry can be recognized in the relativistic dissolution of values. The age of Hellenic humanism arrived at such a conclusion following many routes: not last among these was the experience of travelers who, comparing / Hellenic folk customs and laws with those of Barbarians (the most sensational and significant is the one narrated by Herodotus III 38), could not infer anything other than that which had been believed eternal, indestructible due to the power of a safe tradition, in reality lost value in any other environment: Herodotus and the logographers present numerous facts that bring us to this necessary observation. But such an influence, though crucial, interests us less because it is a prevalent cultural fact, imposed from above, rather than sprung from the immediate power of a social phenomenon.

The tragedy of the aristocracy, which, at the time of its decline, does not give up believing and proclaiming its ideals, makes clear, for an internal impetus, that relativism which, at first glance, seems so contradictory with the persistent traditionalism of this society.

The social events resulted in catastrophes, felt to be serious in the judgment of the interested interpreter, had to have appeared even to Pindar, representative of the

aristocracy, as something “suprarational,” that is as the manifestation of a *tremendum*.<sup>117</sup>

The concept is explained in clear political terms by Theognis: “that you will learn good things from the good: mixing with sad people | you will remain bereft of judgment that you have of your own (τον εόντα νόον [ton eonta noon, the true/existing mind, the wisdom one has].”<sup>118</sup> The νοῦς [*nous*, mind/intent], that is reason,<sup>119</sup> becomes problematic under the pressure of political contrasts: the νοῦς will no longer be εῶν [*eon*, existing/real/true], consistent and absolute: the advent of the new democratic order will cause one to notice / that “between good and evil no difference exists” (οὔτε κακῶν γνώμας<sup>120</sup> εἰδοτες οὐτ ἀγαθῶν [*oute kakon gnomas eidotes out agathon*, knowing neither the opinions of neither evil nor good men])<sup>121</sup>: we no longer have a rational possibility of determining the truth of things in the domain of political experience, as Pindar also states<sup>122</sup>: one will see a subversion of the very concept of the “just,” a κακῶς τα δίκαια νομίζειν [*kakos ta dikaia nomisdein*, to think about just things faultily] .<sup>123</sup> The positive law does not have, therefore, any value: this is the desperate but not completely disinterested conclusion of the aristocratic world.

<sup>117</sup> G. RUDBERG, *Zu Pindaros Religion*, “Eranos,” 43, 1945, pp. 334 ff., that cites Pindar, *Pae.*, IX, 15 (fr. 51 Turyn).

<sup>118</sup> THEOGN., 35—36 (transl. Romagnoli).

<sup>119</sup> For this sense of νοῦς, cp. R. SCHOTTLAENDER, *Nus als Terminus*, “Hermes,” 64, 1929, p. 231.

<sup>120</sup> “Criteria, normative judgments” (JAEGER, *Paid.*, I, p. 309) and *ibid.*, note 1); cp., also B. SNELL, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie*, Berlin, 1934, p. 34; cp. THEOGN., p. 319. However, more exactly understood by NESTLE, *Kr.*, p. 179 (= *Griechische Studien*, p. 291), who identifies, for Critias (an aristocrat) 88 B 39 DK γνώμη with ἡγεμονικόν, and by SCHMID, *Lit.*, III, p. 160, and, *ibid.*, note 1, which sees in γνώμη, also for Theognis, the higher degree of knowledge compared to the inferior one obtained by way of the senses.

<sup>121</sup> THEOGN., 60 (transl. Romagnoli).

<sup>122</sup> Cp. W. SCHADEWALDT, *Der Aufbau des pindarischen Epinikioin*, “Schriften der Königsb. Gel. Gesellsch.” 5, 1928, 3, p. 311.

<sup>123</sup> THEOGN., 279.

The consequences of this theoretical position developed in two ways. One should remember that law, that inflexible and unitary νόμος [*nomos*, law/custom/tradition], on whose power the democratic war against the Persians had hinged, that met the proudest [555] oppositions of the aristocratic world. So, this very world casts doubt in regards to the validity of the new law rising from the ruins of its class. Thus expressing its thinking, the aristocracy, in order to devalue the democratic *nomos*, was preparing the way to renewed possible attacks, which actually, by a return of an oligarchic flame, exploded in Athens in 411 and at the time of the thirty tyrants. The aristocrats had made the law under their will, because / from time to time, under the pressure of circumstances, they had molded it according to their immediate and selfish necessities,<sup>124</sup> though claiming that it was the expression of divine will.<sup>125</sup> Now, complying in its own way to every reactionary movement, the aristocracy tend to use the arms of the adversary for their own aims: the law, mutable by approval of the popular assembly had to actually favor the notorious pluralism of Attic law.<sup>126</sup> But this, in reality, could coincide, because its sanction was different, with pluralism—arbitrary as it was—of the aristocratic regimes. Those who had belonged or still belonged to it waited for nothing other than the propitious occasion to be able to impose, even in the new era, now one law then another. Within the passion of this spiritual turmoil the famous verses of Pindar take on a very definite sense, in my opinion: “(νόμος<sup>127</sup> [*nomos*, law/custom/tradition]), | the king of all |of mortals and

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<sup>124</sup> Cp. G. GLOTZ, *La cité grecque*, Paris, 1928, pp. 108 ff.

<sup>125</sup> GLOTZ, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>126</sup> Cp. U. E. PAOLI, *Studi sul processo attico*, Padua, 1933, pp. 15 ff., 19 ff. See also R. HIRZEL, *Nomos*, pp. 42—44.

<sup>127</sup> Everyone knows that a meaning of *nomos* approved by everyone has not been reached at this point. Usually, one sees in this νόμος “the currently existent reign of Zeus,” “form of appearance of Zeus himself in the universe” since in the *nomos* next to justice, the power also manifests itself: cp. HES., *Opp.*, 276 ff.,

immortals | carries everything with a sovereign | hand, justifying the extreme violence.”<sup>128</sup> The relativism of the customs<sup>129</sup> and, therefore, of the laws inherent within them, can be accepted, Pindar seems to say, since contemporary revolutions confirm it,<sup>130</sup> on the condition that, under this instability, one always recognizes the divine<sup>131</sup>: Pindar transfers that relativism of the laws, which Theognis had denounced, in vexation, within the new democratic order, to the aristocratic spirituality, without full awareness of the use that would have been made of it, in the second half of the century. But in the meantime that aristocracy that had suffered the damage of the new concept of the law contributes to deepening the criticism of the law in abstract, independently of its aristocratic or democratic foundation. It will not seem [556] odd then, that, exactly in the aristocratic Critias, one can encounter a felt sensitivity for the rifts of the law.<sup>132</sup>

The discovery of the relativism of the law, so acutely sensed and accentuated by the aristocratic, brought an ulterior consequence. In fact, if a law is mutable within a population and variable from population to population, a / foundation of that ethics, which human conscience postulates as immutable, became elusive.<sup>133</sup> So, to fulfill this requirement, the concept of “the unwritten laws” came to be elaborated; these can be the

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SOLO fr. 24, 16 ff. D. (K. KERÉNYI, *La religion antica nelle sue linee fondamentali*, Bologna, 1940, pp. 69—70; analogously, EHRENBERG, *Recht.*, p. 120; GUNDERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 49—50; STIER, *Nomos*, pp. 229—230, 238 etc.). In reality, the exact interpretation is the recent one of M. POHLENZ, *Nomos*, “Philologus” 97, 1948, p. 139 “conventional opinion.” Cp. *Sophists*, ch. XV, § 3, note 30.

<sup>128</sup> PIND., fr. 169 Schroeder = 187 Turyn (transl. Romagnoli).

<sup>129</sup> Cp. PIND., fr. 215 = 188 T. Bear in mind that, probably, in this fr. Pindar does not actually relate to the consequences referred to by the “periegeti” logographers, but wants to recognize the social and political fact of the reaction, after the Persian wars, on the part of the smallest cities that demanded their autonomy against the large hegemonies, Athens and Sparta (cp. also THUC., V, 18) (HIRZEL, *Nomos*, p. 54). So another social motivation, concomitant with the aristocratic one, gives origin to the relativism of the laws.

<sup>130</sup> U. WILAMOWITZ, *Pindaros*, Berlin, 1922, p. 462.

<sup>131</sup> This appears clearly in PIND., *Pyth.*, II, 86 ff. (cp. HEINIMANN, *N. u. Ph.*, p. 71) and especially comparing fr. 169 (187) with fr. 81 (= 88 T.): see MENZEL, *Hell.*, pp. 116—118.

<sup>132</sup> Cp. *Sophists*, ch. XVIII, § 4.

<sup>133</sup> Cp. NILSSON, *Gr. Rel.*, I, p. 391.

sacred aristocratic laws<sup>134</sup> as much as—with an extension, favored by the cosmopolitanism of the aristocracy—those laws that are valid for all the people, founded on the universality of nature. Once again, the refuge of the aristocracy against the written laws transforms itself from the start for a revolutionary interpretation of these unwritten laws, to which conservatism attaches itself, as appears clearly in Spartan activity.<sup>135</sup> The problem formulated according to the aristocratic need for salvation, by necessity had to be often recovered, with variously nuanced interpretations, by sophistry itself, as attest the doctrines of Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, and Antiphon.<sup>136</sup> Among the ways in which the “unwritten laws” in the age of sophistry had the chance to materialize, one should not forget that anxiety of a return to the “constitution of the fathers” (πάτριος πολιτεία [*patrios politeia*, inherited/ancestral polity or constitution]), that is welcomed by Thrasymachus<sup>137</sup> and that is proclaimed as absolutely valid, by virtue of that divine nature guaranteed by the goodness demonstrated over the course of time.<sup>138</sup> With this recent constitutional formula, the Sophistic age, in its moments of spiritual return / to the aristocratic world translates, according an antidemocratic politico-social plan,<sup>139</sup> the ancient idea of the unwritten law.

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<sup>134</sup> [LYS] *or.* 6, 10; cp. THUC., II, 37, 2.

<sup>135</sup> The elements of these notations are drawn from HIRZEL, *Nomos, passim*, but especially pp. 21, 23, 28, 43—44, 48, 71—72; I notice that the particular tone in the interpretation of this material is mine. Cp. also A. BANFI, *Socrate*, Milan, 1944, p. 7.

<sup>136</sup> For more details, see the *Sophists*.

<sup>137</sup> DION. HAL., *Dem.*, 3, p. 134, 9 (= DK 85 B 1).

<sup>138</sup> HIRZEL, *Th.*, pp. 361—362, and *Nomos*, p. 75.

<sup>139</sup> For the aristocratic character of the πάτριος πολιτεία, cp. WUNDT, *op. cit.*, I, p. 324; NESTLE, *Weltansh.*, p. 99; GLOTZ, *Cité cit.*, p. 73 and *Hist. gr. cit.*, II, p. 718. After all, also the Attic comedians, as conservative as they are, aspire to this very ideal: cp. SCHMID, *Lit.*, IV, pp. 19, 29, 30, note 8, 33

The relativism and the attempts to resolve it in a spiritual manifestation, free of disagreements, find their primordial patterns in the anguish of readjustment of the aristocratic conscience and ideals.<sup>140</sup> [557]

#### **D. The *Aporias* of the Aristocrats in the Problem of the Teachability of Virtue.**

Among the most demanding problems of the sophistic age one should remember that of the possibility of teaching virtue. One can say that such a question had also been posed by the aristocracy in the moment of its crisis. Of course, the possibility of teaching virtue opposes itself anti-ethically to the aristocratic idea that it be “by nature,” as Pindar<sup>141</sup> more than once proclaims: an explicit polemic against this conception becomes noticeable in Hippias.<sup>142</sup> However, despite the profound conviction that natural endowments constitute that which is decisive in the teachings of virtue, nevertheless under the blow of reality, on one hand one recognizes that the company of wicked people may bring the moral ruin,<sup>143</sup> on the other that education does not manage to render people wise<sup>144</sup>: the aristocratic, viewing the dispersion of the educational values that / were dear to him, ends up noticing that good natures easily becomes evil as much as that it is not

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<sup>140</sup> Now MAZZARINO, *Pens. st.*, pp. 324—325, reaches, by other means, the same conclusions: “the contradictions of Greek historical thought. . . ., in one way, . . . are truly the most consistent and innate characteristic of the aristocratic intellectualism of the Greeks. If there are two contrasted *Dikai* (as Aeschylus also thought: *Choeph.*, 461), there are also double “ways of reasoning.” The sense of the aristocratic Hellenism is somewhat in these aporias of pure reason, which made a miracle possible: that the aristocratic culture elaborated, that is, the same doctrine of democracy and progress—but also made possible the crisis of Greek thought in its entirety.”

<sup>141</sup> PIND., *Ol.*, IX, 100, *Pyth.*, I, 41 ff., *ne.*, III, 40 etc.

<sup>142</sup> *An. Iambl.*, I, 1 ff. (DK 89) to be identified with Hippias; cp. UNTERSTEINER, *An. I.*

<sup>143</sup> THEOGN., 35—36; cp. 305—308.

<sup>144</sup> THEOGN., 429 ff. For the interpretation of the passage cp. W. NESTLE, *Euripides*, Stuttgart, 1901, p. 175. See PIND. *Ol.*, VII, 30 ff.

possible to educate those who lack strong and natural ethical bases<sup>145</sup>: so one can see, in terms of education, the most contradictory results.<sup>146</sup> The undermining in the assessment of the social classes is such that the aristocratic feels dragged into doubting the bases of the ἀρετή [*arête*, excellence/virtue], placing in this way an authentic dramatic agony the problem of its teachability, even if then one does not want to admit its possibility, since, in the case of its occurring—imposed after all by the new history to the reluctant aristocrats—the aristocracy would have had to renounce its own conception of it.<sup>147</sup>

The political drama of an entire society becomes a tough gnoseological problem in the mind of the sophists.<sup>148</sup> But one should not forget that, nevertheless, this sophistic education presupposes the development of individual qualities rather than those inherited from one's lineage,<sup>149</sup> applied to the leaders above all, rather than the population at large, since the old aristocratic problem returns under new guise,<sup>150</sup> as in general the type of education in vogue in the fifth century was directed “towards the life of the nobles.”<sup>151</sup>

The social rather than cultural urgency of the educational [558] problem naturally determined a conflict between / an aristocratic education and a political-democratic conception, which was one of the determining causes of the contrast between *nomos* and *physis*,<sup>152</sup> whose theoretical roots had already been perceived by Pindar.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> THEOGN., 577—578.

<sup>146</sup> THEOGN., 161—164.

<sup>147</sup> Cp. THIMME, *op. cit.*, p. 74; cp. p. 117.

<sup>148</sup> For the respective doctrines of the sophists, Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias, cp. *Sophists*, ch. III, § 3, 3; ch. XI; ch. XV, § 7; ch. XVI, § 2 (end). For the opposite thesis of Gorgias, cp. ch. VII, § 5.

<sup>149</sup> Cp. CHIAPPELLI, *Sof.*, pp. 362 ff. and LOENEN, *Prot.*, p. 47.

<sup>150</sup> JAEGER, *Paid.*, I, pp. 430—431; also cp. E. MAIER, *Socrate* (Ital. transl.), Florence, 1943, I, p. 257.

<sup>151</sup> Cp. MARROU, *Éd.*, 70—71.

<sup>152</sup> JAEGER, *Paid.*, I, pp. 452.

<sup>153</sup> E. SCHWARTZ, in FRIEDLÄNDER, *Pl.* I, p. 330, note 2, p. 101, note 1.

## **E. Influence of the Aristocratic Crisis on the Constitutional Conceptions of Sophistry.**

Seemingly surprising, the numerous ideas of the social drama of the aristocracy placed before the speculative thought, which, almost without noticing, is under the stimulus of a world that is politically overcome<sup>154</sup> and that, however, forms itself according to original and necessarily ambivalent shapes. In fact it draws its meaning from a problematic given by the loss of a disintegration that does not want to crystallize as it is forced to travel many roads for the regeneration.

The aristocracy gave sophistry not only the themes that its own social drama postulated but also the themes of thought already elaborated by a particular social, political, and philosophical experience at one time. Numerous influences come from Pythagoreanism,<sup>155</sup> whose politics was definitely aristocratic.<sup>156</sup> One will more easily comprehend the reasons for these relationships between Pythagoreanism and sophistry, to which Augusto Rostagni has already called attention in a decisive study.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, the anomaly that had troubled—due to the contradictory presence of sophists with oligarchic tendencies right next to those flatly democratic, so that a considerable confusion and entanglement of ideas came to be, with the further aggravating circumstances that one can encounter conservative oligarchs and enlightened oligarchs,

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<sup>154</sup> The sophists' interest in the value of speech and in the very art of speech that is gracefully expressed has been determined, at least in part, by an aristocratic influence: see how Theognis (305—308) perceives the power that speech has of seizing what is relative in good and evil. Pindar feels the effectiveness of speech dominated by the fascination of art, which never fails and that, therefore, has a superior value to that of action (*Ne.*, IV, 71), sophistic *ἐπίδειξις* seems to draw its origins also (cp. GUNDERT, *op. cit.*, p. 110, note 20) from *αναφαινεσθαι νίκαν* (PIND., *Isth.*, IV, 71), *αποδεικνυσθαι ἀρετᾶς* (PIND., *Ne.*, VI, 47) proper of the aristocratic world.

<sup>155</sup> Cp. UNTERSTEINER, *Sophists, passim* (cp. Index *s.v.*: Pythagoreanism).

<sup>156</sup> Cp. ZELL.-MOND., I, pp. 413-414 (note). See also WUNDT, *op. cit.*, pp. 142 ff.

<sup>157</sup> A. ROSTAGNI, *N. C.*, pp. 148—201.

capable, overall, to demonstrate a truly effective freedom of spirit and a rationalistic attitude—will lose all its strangeness.<sup>158</sup> If sophistic speculation exercises its precise influence on the oligarchic-aristocratic constitution of 411<sup>159</sup> and on the thirty tyrants, one must, in the opposite direction, remember just how driven the enlightenment of the same aristocrats must have been [559], as evidenced by the attitude of an Aristophanes<sup>160</sup> or a Critias *vis-à-vis* religion.

All the constitutional drama of the second half of the fifth century is dictated by the very power of the political aristocratic *ethos*,<sup>161</sup> so sophistry, in the ambivalence of values that it more or less proclaims through its representatives, suffers an enigmatic agony of the polarities tyranny (or aristocracy)-democracy<sup>162</sup>; therefore, especially the more recent sophists fluctuate between one and the other of these two political conceptions.<sup>163</sup> The attack of a democratic Cleon against the minds, which govern the state less well compared to bunglers,<sup>164</sup> was launched, in reality, against sophistry and is entirely understandable if one bears in mind the complex and solid substance that this current of thought found itself placed opposite the aristocratic civilization almost naturally.

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<sup>158</sup> MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

<sup>159</sup> WILAMOWITZ, *A. u. A.*, II, p. 116; cp. NESTLE, *Weltansh.*, p. 118, and FRISCH, *ps. Xen.*, pp. 127 ff.

<sup>160</sup> NESTLE, *Weltansh.*, p. 116.

<sup>161</sup> Cp. JOHANNA SCHMIDT, *Ethos*, Borna-Leipzig, 1941, pp. 109 ff.

<sup>162</sup> Cp. JOËL, *Gesch. Phil.*, pp. 699—700.

<sup>163</sup> SCHMID, *Lit.*, III, p. 211.

<sup>164</sup> THUC., III, 37: cp. also SCHMID, *Lit.*, V, p. 84.

### 3. Origins of Sophistic Problems in the Political Wars of the Fifth Century.

The themes of the political and social life can be said to have been founded by the drama of the aristocracy, insofar as it has to set certain goals for itself in regards to the problem of a law to recognize the citizens, one that did not always flow logically from the traditions of that society.<sup>165</sup> Naturally, original possibilities remain influenced by the new forms that constitute themselves from past turmoil.

The problem of the individual was urgent in an era of political struggles and revolutions, that offer a clear path to the ingeniousness ready for a complete development, also because the choice of a party requires an analysis of reasons that justify an autonomous decision<sup>166</sup>: the democratic constitution favors θυμός [*thumos*, emotional impulses], that is the drive to independence, as recognize by Hippocrates in the *De aere acquis et logicis*.<sup>167</sup> /

The individual element, even if constrained in the limits already clarified, takes part with a constructive awareness [560] (one should remember, rather, the resigned disdain of Hesiod) in the face of a problem of the state: the favored form of constitution is that which most benefits, and the criterion of the useful may lead even to the indifference toward the subject<sup>168</sup>: one can, therefore, foresee, through these current ideas in Athens in the last ten years of the fifth century and the first few years of the century that followed, the beginning of law conceived as “defense . . . of a certain self-interest,”

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<sup>165</sup> On the problem of the crisis of the aristocracy, see the important pages of S. MAZZARINO, *Or. occ.*, pp. 233 ff.

<sup>166</sup> Cp. MEYER, *op. cit.*, pp. 399 ff 415, 522.

<sup>167</sup> Ch. XVI—XVII: cp. M. POHLENZ, *Hippokrates*, Berlin, 1938, pp. 17—18; 23—24.

<sup>168</sup> Cp. *Lys.*, 25, 8; 31, 7.

in a way that it appears reduced to economy.<sup>169</sup> Therefore the constitutional problem is an outcome of social life; the interest of everyone, consequently, turns to this for the practical repercussions that concern the individual citizens.

The practical and theoretical sensibility for the value of the constitutions had been aroused following a compound of concomitant phenomena. Notably, especially in the aristocratic environment, which needs to position itself within the political renewal, the constitutional problem stands out, almost under the scourge of an irritating agony: one might think of Pindar, a convinced aristocrat but who, at one time, was judged by the public opinion of his fellow citizens as a friend of the tyrants, while next to Hieron was accused of conflicting with them [the tyrants].<sup>170</sup> The episode goes beyond the person of the poet: it especially means that clear ideas are still missing regarding the constitutional problem.

Only at the dawn of the democracy of Cleisthenes, which settled once and for all the principle of *ισονομία* [*isonomia*, equal application of customs/law],<sup>171</sup> the notion / of constitution began to define itself in its possible varieties,<sup>172</sup> when from the appeased contradictions one reached the transition toward new forms.<sup>173</sup> But these constitutional forms, finally defined, did not immediately pose the specific problem of political programs and parties.<sup>174</sup> In fact, immediately following the ordeal of the Persian wars, which functioned as a barrier against every centrifugal force, the Athenian democracy, only once that the already problematic but nevertheless dominant figures of Themistocles

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<sup>169</sup> LABRIOLA, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>170</sup> Cp. GUNDERT, *op. cit.* 83—84. .

<sup>171</sup> HIRZEL, *Th.*, pp. 248 ff.; cp. SCHAEFER, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>172</sup> Cp. MAZZARINO, *Or. Occ.*, pp. 200, 234.

<sup>173</sup> Cp. LABRIOLA, *op. cit.*, p. 196; cp. p. 209.

<sup>174</sup> EHRENBERG, *Ost. etc. cit.*, p. 115

and Cimon had been eliminated, was shaken by “that turbulent, unequal, unstable trend” that was “characteristic until the middle of the fourth century.”<sup>175</sup> This situation, that went maturing and provoked upheavals [561] or concerns in the social environment, had to set, in peremptory terms, the problem of the relativism of government forms: what is each type of constitution worth? Should one return to the idealized constitution of the father or build one conforming to the postulates of reason?

The political struggles intensified: the contrast of factions causes the necessity for political doctrines and, in the conflict between the two, the practical insolubility concerning the problem of the best form of government<sup>176</sup> ends up being felt: the concept of profit dispels every theoretical essentialness inherent in any constitution.<sup>177</sup>

All the controversies that, starting at the time of the Peloponnesian War, were raised around the / problem of the forms of constitution,<sup>178</sup> both in terms of their essence and in relation to their genesis, have always been imposed by a condition of social life, that the serious external events had rendered particularly delicate. If the sophists place the study of the political fact, of the validity of laws, of the significance of constitutions, as unavoidable, this is due to the constitutional drama of Athens that, after the victory over Persia, had broadened the play of forces that moved its destiny. The incursion of new exigencies—for example, maritime politics<sup>179</sup>—seems to contribute in constituting, almost as though it were a natural organization, a particular type of government. The author of *Constitution of Athenians*, when, despite hating democracy, discovers its

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<sup>175</sup> DE SANCTIS, *ATΘIΣ cit.*, p. 410; cp. pp. 416—417.

<sup>176</sup> Cp. MEYER, *op. cit.*, pp. 522; 757; 758—759.

<sup>177</sup> Thus results also in THUC., VIII, 48, 5.

<sup>178</sup> Cp. NESTLE, *Weltansch.*, p. 123.

<sup>179</sup> Cp. [Xen.] *Πολ. Τ. Ἀθην.*, I, 11.

coherence, founded on effective reality, resolves a political event in a phenomenon of social origin. Sociality, then, insofar as it becomes a decisive factor that is pressing on the consciousnesses, even though they did not have, at the time, full awareness, became a political fact, that solicits a practice as much as a theory.

If, then, the sophists not only theorize upon the forms of government, in keeping with the demands of the social turmoil but also give answers in contrast among themselves, this creates an implicit proof that reality is contradictory: otherwise an identical intention would not have reached opposite conclusions. The [562] play of political factions relativizes, in time and space, the concept of truth and error<sup>180</sup>; so the struggle between Hellenics and Hellenics is seen in the dazzling light of its absurdity in the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes and in the *The Phoenician Women* (also known by the Greek title, *Phoenissae*) of Euripedes (cp. vs. 535 ff.). /

#### **4. The War.**

The problem of utility determines clearly by now the meaning of the war,<sup>181</sup> so with good reason one could say that, for the first time, during the Peloponnesian War, the economy constituted the generative power for this social phenomenon<sup>182</sup> and, we can add, from this was reduced to an acute state: it became a matter suffered by all and, therefore, to interpret. Sophistry that, for the most part, carried out its activity during this dramatic historical period, could not fail to notice the influence caused by the social life in its

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<sup>180</sup> Cp. PARETO, *op. cit.*, § 609, p. 265.

<sup>181</sup> Cp. THUC., VII, 57, 1.

<sup>182</sup> DE SANCTIS, *St. gr. cit.*, II, p. 198.

pathologic event of an armed conflict. And the problem attracted the attention of the sophists even more insofar as, for the most part, they were opposed to wars.<sup>183</sup>

When human conduct must feel determined by profit, then sooner or later it will become aware of becoming problematic, due to the relativism that the concept easily entails, and this occurs every time that it is of an economic sort. But utility is not the only origin for the dissolution of value caused by wars.

That justice, which, before the Persian wars, was founded on control over oneself and, therefore, was the “consequence of the individual temperament of each,” so that its violation “does not avoid the formidable measures on the part of the gods,”<sup>184</sup> begins to lose that / foundation which resulted from the political spirituality of the aristocrats<sup>185</sup> after the great national ordeal. I have already re-evoked, at the beginning of this inquiry, the problematic nature of the great political figures of the era, who operate according to criteria fleeing the traditional norms of right and wrong: this means that the war had [563] cast the premises for a reversal of values, so the ancient principles found themselves destined to the unavoidable doubts of a courageous discussion. The struggles of the parties had become a power that acted harshly in the internal politics and international relations, entailing that play of interests, which ended up coming to the formulation of new ideas. A little at a time these contrasts became more acute and, during the new war of the Peloponnesian, reached a spasm. This [circumstance] occurred especially in the Attica where the events of the military operations, as appears even in Aristophanes, created the clash between the inhabitants of the countryside, particularly

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<sup>183</sup> Cp. *Sophists*, ch. XIII, note 138 (Antiphon); chapter XV, § 8 (for Hippias): *an. Iambl.*, 7, 6, and 10, DK 89); ch. XVIII, § 7 (Alcidamas).

<sup>184</sup> U. E. PAOLI, *Studi sul process attico*, Padua, 1933, pp. 35—37.

<sup>185</sup> The inferences of Paoli (cp. previous note) depend above all on Solon and Theognis.

damaged by the war, and the inhabitants of the city: the former being conservatives while the latter progressives, were equally pushed by the bitterness of the war to radical positions: therefore the war can be considered responsible for that spirit of class and of party<sup>186</sup> that had to lead to necessary opposite political theories, of which the sophists made themselves representatives. The most immediate almost abstract contrast between laws and laws, uses and uses, dramatized itself in a social reality where the antithesis appears as the fundamental norm of everything and is brought to an exacerbated evidence of the narrow space of the *polis*,<sup>187</sup> favorable terrain to pinpoint opposites and indicate their incompatibility. / This class war that had inevitably exploded within the aristocratic regimes<sup>188</sup> had brought, with Pericles, to the triumph of the proletariat,<sup>189</sup> which had to provoke even the most paradoxical reactions within the adversaries.<sup>190</sup> In these conditions of high social tension that stirred itself on the axis of an unstable equilibrium, the theory presented itself spontaneously until reaching the ideal of Antiphon, who wanted the class wars to be appeased and abolished and also the clash between lineages to be eliminated, as the fatal one between the Hellenics and the barbarians.<sup>191</sup>

Therefore this anxiety of the universal, that reaches cosmopolitanism, seems to flow from the dramatic anguish of the war of the Peloponnesian.

The cosmopolitanism, which is in the very nature of sophistic mindset and that was theorized especially by Hippias and Antiphon, illustrates, due to the social demands of the Hellenics, a [564] very complex moment, to the point that not all the sophists could

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<sup>186</sup> POHLENZ, *Der. hell. M. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>187</sup> KAERST, *Hell.*, pp. 31, 34 ff.

<sup>188</sup> Cp. PLAT., *Resp.*, VIII, 551 D.

<sup>189</sup> DE SANCTIS, *ATΘIΣ cit.*, p. 421 ff.

<sup>190</sup> Cp. Xen., *Conv.*, IV, 30 ff.

<sup>191</sup> DK 87 B 44 I B, 1, 35; 2, 1 ff.

comprehend its greatness.<sup>192</sup> The antithesis Hellenics-Barbarians, which emerged with the founding of the empire of Darius,<sup>193</sup> had materialized with the Persian wars (490—479), definitely not earlier,<sup>194</sup> and a political problem had come with it, that is the opposition of tyranny, subjugated by Persia, and Hellenic democracy.<sup>195</sup> One can see, then, / how in Antiphon, under examination of the law that did not respond to the demands of a consequent *ισονομία* [*isonomia*, equality before the law] where the contrasts were overcome without any remainder, the problem of cosmopolitanism had to insert itself: the sophist seems to say that exactly the *ισονομία* in its absolute value, instead of causing the opposition Hellenics-Barbarians, as had actually occurred, had the contrary duty of appeasing it. The *ισονομία* has become the elimination of all the laws in order to recreate the spontaneous *physis* that, in human terms and universal sociality, is actually called cosmopolitanism.

A particular situation that had matured in the conscience of the Hellenic people, even with the contention of other social facts—such as “mercenarismo,” the mimicry of the Hellenics especially in foreign lands,<sup>196</sup> the society of the Metics, who caused a lively exchange of ideas,<sup>197</sup> the internationalism and the lack of concern for class differences, in the Eleusina religion,<sup>198</sup> the Delphic tolerance in front of foreign cults<sup>199</sup>—had to raise a social problem that reconnected to that κοινή [*koine*, common/shared/general] cultural

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<sup>192</sup> See, for example, the manner of Thrasymachus; CLEM., *Strom.*, VI, 16 [II, 435, 16 St.] = DK 85 8 2: cp. *Sophists*, ch. XVIII, § 2.

<sup>193</sup> MAZZARINO, *Or. Occ.*, pp. 67, 69, 72, 73, 81, 84, 99—100.

<sup>194</sup> MAZZARINO, *Or. Occ.*, pp. 50, 51, 183—184, 186; EHRENBERG, *Ost. etc., cit.*, pp. 102, 102—103, 111, 126, 128—129, 132.

<sup>195</sup> Cp. EHRENBERG, *Ost etc. cit.*, pp. 109 and 111; MAZZARINO, *Or. Occ.*, pp. 233, 237, 244, 246.

<sup>196</sup> ZELL.-MOND., I, p. 318.

<sup>197</sup> GLOTZ, *Hist. gr. cit.*, II, pp. 256 and 338.

<sup>198</sup> NILSSON, *Gr. Rel.*, I, p. 631.

<sup>199</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 597.

micrasiatic owed to the collaboration of Greeks and non-Greeks in the age of Aoidoi and in that which followed until Darius.<sup>200</sup> This κοινή [*koine*, common/general/shared], relived now as a new problem put forth by the social conditions caused by the Peloponnesian war which, exacerbating the class war, strives for the internal pacification and, consequently, the external one (one might think of the relationships which, during the war, on both sides were tied with the / Persia itself), sets itself up as a great idea that found its practical implementation as a consequence to the feat of Alexander.<sup>201</sup>

However, the problem of the Hellenic–Barbarian antithesis is to be thought [565] as dramatic in the cultural and social world of the whole fifth century, even if the demands of patriotism have lifted an uproar that rendered scarcely audible contrary voices. Nevertheless, when one re-listens to *The Persians* of Aeschylus, that from the clash have also offered an exact political and not racial interpretation, one will obtain the certainty that for an enlightened Greek such as Aeschylus, precursor of the sophistic δισσοῦς λόγος [*dissoi logos*, double argument/double logic],<sup>202</sup> Europe and Asia are a unit established by nature. But this union, in order to become true, requires the renunciation of the freedom of the individual.<sup>203</sup> One may, then, say that the cosmopolitanism that became a theoretical fact in the age of the sophists, who were determined by the social imperative of the class war, answered a problem that extended back to the time of the Persian wars. While the Hellenic patriotism celebrated its triumph, so much that in *The Persians* one can still hear the clear ring, in the same tragedy and before the Athenian

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<sup>200</sup> MAZZARINO, *Or. Occ.*, pp. 86–87.

<sup>201</sup> Cp. EHRENBERG, *Ost ecc. cit.*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>202</sup> Cp. W. KRANZ, *Stasimon*, Berlin, 1933, p. 67.

<sup>203</sup> W. PORZIG, *Die attische Tragödie des aischylos*, Leipzig, 1926, pp. 166–167, 171–172; cp. p. 61.

public, the insoluble difficulties of patriotism and cosmopolitanism,<sup>204</sup> of the individual and the universal, are discovered within the tragic consciousness of Xerxes.

But, even under another facet, the class war entailed, as its consequence, cosmopolitanism: the aristocrats, desiring not to participate in public / life, where the δῆμος [*demos*, the people] prevailed, abstained themselves from attending the assembly,<sup>205</sup> so with this abstaining they contributed in preparing cosmopolitanism.<sup>206</sup> Once more we encounter the aristocratic turmoil, which adds its particular mark to a complex social pattern.

The problems, which the war expresses with its agony and that sophistry picks up, entail a critical disintegration of values, from which, among others, visions of universal social experiences form themselves. Sophistry, despite its orderly relativism, as a rule flows into an empirical universal, which Protagoras had fixed in his *καινή δόξαν* [*kaine doxan*, common opinion/general or commonly accepted opinion).

## **5. Problems Posed by the Social Elements of Religion.**

The Persian wars unsettled traditional religiosity and as a result made it totally problematic. The sacred organization of the *polis*<sup>207</sup> faded when the wars saw that “religion and the gods had to subordinate themselves to the ideas of the human spirit” so as to favor “the freedom of the human spirit” and to completely fix the attention of the

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<sup>204</sup> Naturally, cosmopolitanism harmed the *polis* (cp. ZELL.-MOND., I, p. 390, note to p. 318) and weakened the original creative power of Hellenism; cp. U. WILCKEN, *Griechische Geschichte*, München u. Berlin, 1943, pp. 237—238.

<sup>205</sup> CROISET, *Dem. Ant. Cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>206</sup> LUCCIONI, *op. cit.*, pp. 121—122.

<sup>207</sup> Cp. POHLENZ, *Staat.*, p. 10.

people on the physical world<sup>208</sup>: religion became, then, a political event,<sup>209</sup> so that, for example, the Athenians made use of it on their Pan-Hellenic plan<sup>210</sup>: religiosity, under a political / point of view, colored itself then of rationalism<sup>211</sup> and started the process of its own disintegration.<sup>212</sup>

The denial of the transcendent was the material result of this critical movement in the area of religiosity that does not concern itself with the afterlife; which, according to the thought of Pericles, in a profane way conceives divine forms under aesthetic type<sup>213</sup>; which does not see, in the course of things, a secure stance of divine action in the face of sudden shifts of historical events (one might recall the doubts that Theognis already had)<sup>214</sup>; which no longer responds to the new needs and demands placed by the collapse of the ancient social and political order,<sup>215</sup> so as to not coincide with the postulates of an autonomous ethics.<sup>216</sup> During the pentecontaetia a true desecration of the sacred and, therefore, its resolution in the world of relativism, spreads.

However, even in an internal way, the religious phenomenon contradicts and dissolves itself. Be it sufficient to think about the double value of the sacred, which as a power can indeed operate for good as well as evil, without, moreover, having this duplicitous determination be at the root of the religious phenomenon<sup>217</sup>: this indifference of value, precisely in the religious phenomenon in its becoming, involved a peculiar

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<sup>208</sup> MEYER, *op. cit.*, pp. 423; 750—751; KAERST, *op. cit.*, II, p. 172.

<sup>209</sup> Cp. GLOTZ, *Hist. gr. cit.*, II, pp. 421—422.

<sup>210</sup> NILSSON, *Gr. Rel.*, I, p. 695.

<sup>211</sup> KAERST, *Hell.*, II, pp. 264—265.

<sup>212</sup> E. DUPRÉEL, *Sociologie générale*, Paris, 1948, p. 221.

<sup>213</sup> Cp. GLOTZ, *Hist. gr.*, II, p. 181.

<sup>214</sup> THEOGN., 133 ff.

<sup>215</sup> MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

<sup>216</sup> MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 785; cp. Wilamowitz, *Glaube cit.*, II, p. 138; cp. p. 182.

<sup>217</sup> Cp. F. PFISTER, *Die Religion der Griechen u. Römer*. Leipzig, 1930, pp. 121—122.

tragic moment of human knowledge that, in the face of such ambivalence, will never be able to decide. The dramatic Gorgian critique of knowledge takes off precisely from the anti-ethical ambiguity of reasons / that are also [567] sacred but transported in the atmosphere of analytic thought.<sup>218</sup>

The reason of an inextricable antithesis is, then, characteristic of the sacred and can be pursued in a yet more significant domain. The law is recognized as duplicitous in appearance: on one hand it is proclaimed as “holy and immutable,” while on the other as “a human work—secular, one could say—and consequently subject to change,” and the two opposites in practice appeared more or less confused.<sup>219</sup> This ambivalence, which constitutes the basis from which the relativism of the concepts lights up, draws one of its origins also from the double sense that θεσμός [*thesmos*, institution] as much as νόμος [*nomos*, law] can take of sacred law and secular law.<sup>220</sup> One can say that Greek experiences, in general, are always sacred and profane at one time: think of *physis*, a philosophical concept so important also in the sophistic age: and here, according to the testimony of Hellanicus,<sup>221</sup> *Physis* is identified with Adrasteia, the ancient pre-Hellenic goddess mother, determinant of the inflexible laws of existence.<sup>222</sup> The problematics of *nomos* and *physis*, in the mystery of the social conscience of the religious man, fluctuate vibrating towards those opposite poles, that sophistry had to make its own in the alternating inclinations, now in one sense, now in another.

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<sup>218</sup> Cp. *Sophists*, cap. V *passim*.

<sup>219</sup> GLOTZ, *Cité cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>220</sup> EHRENBERG, *Recht.*, pp. 114, 116 ff.; GLOTZ, *Cité cit.*, p. 163, recalls the prosopopoeia of the laws in *Critone*, to elucidate the high idea that a Greek has made of “the secular laws, almost deified.”

<sup>221</sup> FGH, 4 F 87 and OF fr. 54 (Kern).

<sup>222</sup> Cp. K KERÉNYI, *Die Göttin Natur*, “Eranos Jahrbuch” 14, 1946, pp. 78 ff., now in *Niobe*, Zürich, 1949, pp. 125 ff.

However, especially in the second half of the fifth century, / another religious fact contributed in posing urgent problems to thought. Greek religion now absorbs foreign religions that penetrate it starting in the age immediately following that of the Persian wars<sup>223</sup> and that are welcomed by the masses, while “the cultured social classes tend towards a rationalization and an elaboration of more universal concepts.” Both thus demonstrate “an unease and dissatisfaction for the old forms,” a “search for new arrangements.”<sup>224</sup> But, in the meantime, traditional values, even for this comparison of two forms of religiosity, undergo decisive blows, since the concepts of right, of true, etc., turn out to be, once again, problematic. The most direct resonance of such a religious movement, which could easily slide in aberrant forms of superstition, comes together in the *Interpretation of Dreams* by Antiphon [568] which is an expression of relativistic and rationalist mentality, at one time, in opposition with every philosophical way of thinking. We, however, care to point out how Antiphon, even in this case, feels the imperiousness of a problem posed by a social experience.

After all, the individualistic attitude of sophistry, which detached man from his ties to the *polis*, concurred with a social need to the point that, exactly contemporaneously, in Greek society the cult of Asclepius and that of Zeus Philios arise, so timely to satisfy the demands of the single individual isolated and indifferent to the gods of the *polis*.<sup>225</sup> / In general, one can say that Hellenic religion, in many ways, posed the problem of the individual: already the Homeric man “similar to a god” rises high

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<sup>223</sup> NILSSON, *Gr. Rel.*, I, pp. 787---789; GLOTZ, *Hist. gr. cit.*, pp. 423 ff.; WILAMOWITZ, *Glaube*, II, p. 222.

<sup>224</sup> ZELL.-MOND., I, p. 152.

<sup>225</sup> NILSSON, *Gr. Rel.*, I, pp. 762—767 and *Reflexe von dem Durchbruch des Individualismus in der griechischen religion um die Wende des 5. Und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* “Mélanges Cumont,” Brussels, 1936, pp. 369, 371—372; KAERST, *Hell.*, II, p. 80 ff.

above with his admirable creation in a free society<sup>226</sup>: personal initiative is crucial in the mysterious beliefs<sup>227</sup> so these, on Greek land, convert themselves in exaltations of man and in expression of intellectualism.<sup>228</sup>

The forms of religiosity in which the passionate stimulus constitutes that essence which is antiethical to reason have to say the least favored the elaboration of rhetoric and sophistic gnoseology. Rhetoric, in fact, owes a great deal, for the clarification of its stylistic forms (figures), to sacred poetry,<sup>229</sup> which had transformed them in the hands of the Hellenic religious society, ready, therefore, to transfer them in the sovereign domain of art. Analogously the pathetic impetus of the eloquence of some sophists may depend on the ecstatic passion of orgiastic cults.<sup>230</sup>

The above is as far as rhetoric goes. In addition, Hellenic religion implied a gnoseological theme. Already for the Hellenics and especially in the more ancient age “every word, once expressed, could become divinity.”<sup>231</sup> In fact language, “as the only mediator between god and men,” entails that “immediacy, which is worth as a premise of a genuine revelation. Language . . . is nothing other than the primordial / discovery by means of *logos*, which “has revealed the divine to humanity, since it gave the possibility of divinely [569] expressing the divine.” But for the Hellenics, “not the *logos* became meat, but the *logoi*,” and the gods were manifold.<sup>232</sup> The significance of *logos* was therefore given and developed in two senses: in the rationalistic way, which caused the

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<sup>226</sup> Cp. E. PETERICH, *Die Theologie der Hellenen*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 324.

<sup>227</sup> ZELL.-MOND., I, p. 162.

<sup>228</sup> JOËL, *Gesch. Phil.*, pp. 149—181.

<sup>229</sup> H. MEYER, *Hymnische Stilelemente in der frühgriechischen Dichtung*, Würzburg, 1933, p. 39.

<sup>230</sup> WUNDT, *op. cit.*, I, p. 345.

<sup>231</sup> Cp. H. USENER, *Götternamen*, Bonn, 1929.

<sup>232</sup> PETERICH, *op. cit.*, pp. 181—184.

contrast between unity and plurality that the *logos* implied to spring up to the speculative conscience of the Hellenics, so that it established itself in its own ambivalence; and in the naturalistic and metaphysical way, which made *logos* the gathering place of the most radical reality of things, and here the philosophical-religious etymology of the Greeks, who considering the word φύσει [*phusei*, by nature] believe that it expresses something on the essence, of which it pretends to be the name, as appears especially in Heraclitus and Aeschylus.<sup>233</sup> From the refractions of the many possibilities embedded in the nature of *logos*, what fixes itself in the speculation of the sophists is, on one hand, the Gorgian doctrine of *logos*, in its ambivalence, according to the developments of the *Helen* and the treaty *On Nature or On Non-Being*, that had to determine its persuasive effectiveness, conformant to the irrational way proper even of religious experience<sup>234</sup>; and on the other, the logical in-depth study of the word that, starting with its *physis* (etymology), resolves itself in the *nomos*, which should be recognized within it in its every single manifestation (synonymy): this the oeuvre of Prodicus.<sup>235</sup> /

The contradictory nature of words, under the gnoseological respect, was conquered also in the intensity of the political wars, which reversed the current sense that they demanded: this is lamented by Theognis (305—308) and, then, by Thucydides (III, 82, 4), who refers to the facts of Korkyra, that had reached a frenzy in that very year 427, during which Gorgias came to Athens for the first time. The political fact coincides, then, with the religious one to confirm the natural antitheses of *logos*.

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<sup>233</sup> Cp. HAOFFMANN, *Logik*, p. 16 and PORZIG, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>234</sup> Cp. DUPRÉEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 161, 242.

<sup>235</sup> Cp. UNTERSTEINER, *Prod.*, pp. 121—122 and *Sophists*, ch. XI, § 2. Cp, also PARETO, *op. cit.*, § 290, p. 136. For the development of the synonymic, a considerable influence was given also by the evolution of democratic life, which calls for a more exact knowledge of the value of speech (E. SCHWYZER, *Griech. Grammatik*. München, 1939, p. 33)

Hellenic religiosity wielded its influence on sophistry also following the decisive intermediary way of the tragedy, a social phenomenon<sup>236</sup> in its origins as much as in its expressions of the high Attic poetry. The Dionysian character of the tragedy, already in its most ancient form, had to ensure that its climax brought to the feeling of the [570] tragic and insoluble dissension inherent in the very gods and in men, since Dionysian religion reveals exactly the knowledge of the contradictions of the world.<sup>237</sup> From tragedy and from its religious-popular origins, the sense of the tragedy, typical of existence, had infiltrated itself in the awareness of the Hellenics: a problem, this one, essentially sophistic, to the point that the treatise of Gorgias *On Nature or On Not-Being* is to be considered and felt as the social experience of tragedy and of its poets, translated in ontological and gnoseological terms.<sup>238</sup> /

Another social phenomenon with a religious backdrop that had a noteworthy repercussion for sophistry is to be caught precisely in religion, insofar as it is the interpreter of the principle of authority that aims to obtain obedience and discipline from the people. Therefore, according to this system of thought, the state, which has to have had a genesis, represents itself as established by the Gods and demigods or heroes, representatives of the very first social revolutions, carried out in reality by men.<sup>239</sup> Thus are explained the different myths: of Protagoras, who in the genesis of the society sees the intervention of heroes and gods (even though, in the final analysis, his construction is

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<sup>236</sup> Cp. POHLENZ, *Der hell. M. cit.*, p. 405

<sup>237</sup> UNTERSTEINER, *Origins*, pp. 88 ff.; 117—138; 193 ff.; 199, 206; 251; 253—254; 265; 320; 494; 528 and *Myth*, pp. 174—177; 279 ff.

<sup>238</sup> Cp. *Sophists*, ch. VI.

<sup>239</sup> LABRIOLA, *op. cit.*, pp. 207—140; PARETO, *op., cit.*, § 103, p. 52; § 245, pp. 113—114. See also A. NAMIA, *Principi di sociologia e politica*, Rome, 1923, pp. 230—232 and, especially, E. DUPRÉEL, *op. cit.*, p. 219, which clearly represents how this authority, attributed by the intervention of a god, is not necessary for small social groups whereas it becomes inevitable in the case of a large population. Cp. also pp. 227 ff., where the same issue is analyzed from the believer's point of view.

substantially anthropological<sup>240</sup>) and of Critias, who gives an unscrupulously explicit view of the phenomenon, understood as resulting from a human intervention, with the most contradictory consequences.<sup>241</sup> While accepting the religious idea of a civilized life established by a superior being, in reality sophistry resolves it in an act of the human mind.

Sophistry has, therefore, been able to give a secular interpretation of certain religious phenomena, that draw their *raison d'être* from social life.

## **6. The Problem of *Techné*.**

I believe it appropriate to keep in mind yet another social fact that exercises considerable influences on the theoretical thought of sophistry. I want to allude to that widespread and certain establishment of the *technai*, that had had its beginning already in the sixth [571] century,<sup>242</sup> but that belongs exactly to the age of sophistry: in it workers are valued to the point that, precisely in this environment, in defiance of an aristocrat as Aristophanes, political men such as Cleon and Hyperbolus, who originate precisely from the world of the δημιουργοί [*demiourgoi*, craftsmen], can come forward and assert themselves..

This fact, sign of a tacit social revolution, had to create a gnoseological problem perceived by the sensitivity of those who stood amazed before this unprecedented event. In the mind of the aristocrat, a popular assembly composed of shoemakers, carpenters,

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<sup>240</sup> Cp. *Sophists*, ch. III, part III, § 2 b.

<sup>241</sup> Cp. *Sophists*, ch XVIII, § 4.

<sup>242</sup> Cp. HASEBROEK, *Soc.*, p. 240.

farmers, etc. had to appear as absolutely inept in judging political questions, if not even misunderstood.<sup>243</sup>

Thus was posed the problem of the gnoseological value of the arts: which one? How would their representatives be judged?

Even in this domain the answers of sophistry are anti-ethical. On one hand the devaluation of the arts is insinuated, as occurs in Protagoras, who demolishes its theoretical foundation, at least in the area of the individual experience.<sup>244</sup> Similarly, in / Antiphon, *techné* represent the human world of the relative vis-à-vis the absolute *physis*.<sup>245</sup>

But, on the other hand, the arts could have appeared so connected by a rational orderliness that they were judged the directive norm of all of life<sup>246</sup> and mark of progress, dependent upon their becoming: for this reason, Prodicus renders the history of civilization as founded on the steady discovery of the arts,<sup>247</sup> Hippias is the corypheus [chorus lead] of such an exaltation of them and, finally, Critias takes care of knowing the origin of the inventions.<sup>248</sup>

This social fact fully sweeps over the speculative zeal of the sophists, who foresee a theoretical problem in it, differently outlined for a solution. And in the contrast between those who glorified the arts and those who raised the *aporias* against them to limit their

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<sup>243</sup> Cp. Xen., *Mem.*, III, 7, 6—7; PLAT., *Prot.*, 319 CD.

<sup>244</sup> Cp. *Sophists*, ch. III, part I, § 2D; cp. part III, § 3, 5, and *Prot. Ant.*, 34—44.

<sup>245</sup> Cp. UNTERSTEINER, *Sophists*, ch. III, § 5.

<sup>246</sup> Cp. HIRZEL, *Th.*, p. 382.

<sup>247</sup> DK 84 B 5.

<sup>248</sup> DK 88 B 2.

absoluteness, the thoughtful and disconcerted voice of Sophocles rises unable to judge them.<sup>249</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

The search of an exterior, not philosophical genesis of sophistry has been able to demonstrate that this current of thought truly marks the expression of a specific historical climate, the character of which is determined precisely by social facts. By this, one does not intend to deny the existence of relationships with former and contemporaneous philosophical schools: we know, for example, that the treatise of Gorgias *On Nature or On Not-Being* is completely a fabric of argumentations aimed at reducing *ad absurdum* the principles of the most significant pre-sophistic schools. /

However the rigorously philosophical reasons often correspond to aspects of social life. And this is felt as much in the negative, relativistic part of sophistic thought as in the constructive, theoretical, and practical results. If one cannot talk of a systematic unity, that brings together the sophists, because, in reality, they are often in antithesis, or even in polemic among themselves, it is nevertheless natural to think of them as an emanation of a particular historical moment that was in crisis and, consequently, fragmentary in its complexity.

It has seemed that one of the exceptionally fruitful seeds of this crisis was to be discovered in the birth of the spirit of the Hellenic aristocracy, precisely in the moment in which its material splendor faded or, depending on the locations, extinguished itself forever. However, this contrast between reality and ideal dramatized aristocratic thought,

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<sup>249</sup> SOPH., *Ant.*, 332 ff.

making it multifaceted and sensitive to all the exigencies of social man. When suffering, man learns and comes to know himself; thinks and rises at times to a metaphysic, devoid of abstraction, because it proceeds parallel to particular and concrete human experiences. Humanism has prevented sophistry from abstracting itself into pure dialectic. Even the most universal forms of sophistic thought, even the most keen critical analyses always find themselves face to face with a specific social event, from which the sophists, however differently, have inferred an idea or an argumentation or have proceeded at the same time as this event.

The sophists, without meaning to be, were philosophers of [573] the history of their age, which they interpreted with a perfect accuracy.

I have not suggested to be carrying out an exhaustive investigation relative to every detail of the question. There are problems that I left out because their treatment would have excessively enlarged the present essay. My only intent was to pose the question in all its validity and track, particularly, the relationship between the social life of the aristocracy and the problematic of sophistry. The nucleus of this essay is constituted by a conference held at the “Institute des Hautes Etudes” of Brussels, and repeated at the Sorbonne respectively on April 29<sup>th</sup> and May 5<sup>th</sup> 1949. The present study was published for the first time in the *Studi di filosofia antica in onore di Rodolfo Mondolfo*, by V. E. Alfieri and M. Untersteiner, Bari, Laterza, 1950, pp. 121—180. Now it is republished by kind and cordial concession of the Laterza Editors.

## Chapter Four

### Analysis of Translation

In “*Le origini sociali della sofistica*” Untersteiner considers the social events in fifth-century Athens and the ways in which these enabled sophistry to develop. Although he briefly mentions some sophistic responses to the issues, the main thrust of his essay is the social component of the events that aroused sophistic speculation and answers.

Untersteiner identifies six main social issues—as evidenced by his detailed headings and subheadings—that contributed to the development of sophistry although the first serves more as an introduction and overview. The remaining five parts identify the crisis of the aristocracy, which receives the most expansive treatment in the essay, the war, religion, political struggles, and the problem of *techné* as the main issues sparking sophistic interpretation. First, I introduce each one in a brief summary of the thread running through his overall argument, allowing the reader a broader view of his discussion before delving into each part separately. Second, I review and contextualize the main facets of each section separately as it occurs. Third, I discuss the contribution that each of Untersteiner’s points makes, as well as their relevance, significance, and contribution to classical rhetorical theory. I also address key terms as they emerge.

Untersteiner begins the essay with “*La pentecontaetia come età dei problemi posti dalla vita sociale*” by pondering the pentecontaetia, Greek for “the period of fifty years,”

as the age that in which Hellenic social life presented the social issues that the sophists will undertake. The pentecontaetia refers to a phase within the Classical Period that spanned between the second Persian invasion of Greece in 480 and the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in 433 BCE. Although the designation is not common in English, Thucydides first used it to describe this age in which Athens dominated the Mediterranean and democracy flourished. I remain faithful to Untersteiner's use of the term. This opening part sets up his discussion by briefly touching on the events prior to the pentecontaetia and premises the core of his argument: namely, the events of the pentecontaetia were unprecedented and powerful to the point of requiring new ideas and solutions within politics and philosophy.

The crisis of the aristocracy appears as the most substantial component of Untersteiner's argument regarding the origins of sophistry. "*La crisi dell'aristocrazia determina una nuova spiritualità nel mondo ellenico*" markedly appears as the largest section of the essay, receiving more attention than any other by being further subdivided into five parts and discusses the crisis of the aristocracy as a leading factor in establishing a new sensibility in the Hellenic world. In this part, Untersteiner argues that this crisis was at the core of the changes that stimulated the emergence of sophistry. The issue of community plays a major role in this part of his argument, taking up the first two sections of this part. The first, "*Idea di collettività e sue conseguenze gnoseologiche,*" expounds on the idea of community and the gnoseological consequences that emerged from it. In the second section, "*Collettività e individuo nelle teorie dei sofisti,*" he explores the concepts of community and the individual within the theories of the sophists. In "*L'esperienza relativistica della società aristocratica, nel travaglio per la ricostruzione*

*dei propri ideali*” Untersteiner looks at the relativistic experience of aristocratic societies as they seek to reconstruct their ideals. The fourth section, “*Le aporie degli aristocratici nel problema dell’insegnabilità della virtù*” examines the difficulties faced by the aristocratic when the teachableness of virtue came into question. Untersteiner concludes the second part of the essay by analyzing the influence of these aristocratic crises on the constitutional conception of sophistry in “*Influsso della crisi aristocratica sulle concezioni costituzionali della sofistica.*”

The next two main sections discuss the various conflicts that occurred during the pentecontaetia and their significance to the development of sophistry. “*Spunti di problemi sofistici nelle lotte politiche del V secolo,*” examines the political struggles of the time as stimuli for sophistic concerns, while the next part looks at the more violent struggles of war in general, “*La guerra.*” The fifth part “*I problemi posti dagli aspetti della religione*” examines the issues that emerged from the social elements of religion, Finally, in Part Six, “*Il problema della tecnica*” deliberates on the issue of *techné*. This question is at the heart of discussions at the time, and can be seen as an intellectual struggle to which I will devote substantial room in my analysis below. The seventh and final part of the essay, “*Conclusione,*” offers a brief conclusion, as its title indicates. These issues comprise what Untersteiner views as instigating the rise and expansion of sophistry. I now turn to analyzing them in depth and discussing their implications for classical rhetorical theory.

Untersteiner begins his essay by positing that the work of the sophists was sparked by a number of social and historical events that occurred before and culminated during the pentecontaetia. The crises before, during, and after the fifth century BCE continually destabilized Hellenic social life. Untersteiner argues that these predicaments

imposed by social life were so numerous and momentous that they had an incredible influence on the Hellenes. These events prompted the poignant realization that reality is contradictory in a world that was formerly stable under the guises of tradition and myth. The variety of these crises vexed the Hellenes and had to be explained in order to be surpassed. These social shifts in the organization of Hellenic life altered the social dynamics in such a way as to have actively promoted the emergence of the sophists who answered the social needs of the Hellenes.

Untersteiner bases his argument on certain premises in place at the time. The Hellenics had a different view than the current concept of society. For one, they were deeply involved within the relational play between the “many” and the individual, an aspect that he discusses in depth in Sections A and B of Part Two. Also, the Hellenes, who had not viewed history as evolutionary, now saw the current affairs in contrast with social conventions as being next to nature.

Here Untersteiner addresses the very frequently discussed topic of *nomos* versus *physis*, although he does not refer to it as such and mentions it only in passing. The question of these two contrasting terms and their relationship did not originate with the sophists but receives persistent intellectual interest from the beginning of philosophic inquiry. *Physis* rather safely translates to nature, while *nomos* has no single English corresponding term and refers to laws, customs, and conventions. Related to the verb *nomizo*, which can mean to think, believe, or practice, *nomos* originally meant “what people (or a people) believe or practice—their customs, which, especially in early times, had the force of laws. . . . *Nomos* has a prescriptive force: it is not simply what is believed, but what is believed to be right, not just the ways of life a people practices, but

what it practices as the right way of life” (McKirahan 391). Before the existence of written law codes, custom and law were hardly distinct. The meaning of the word then broadened to cover official laws that were enforced by the state, retaining its prescriptive force (391). W.K.C. Guthrie devotes considerable attention to sophistic conceptions of *nomos* and *physis*, observing that “[n]aturally . . . different people had different *nomoi*, but, so long as religion remained an effective force, the devising mind could be the god’s, and so there could be *nomoi* that were applicable to all mankind” (55). Untersteiner touches on this issue because, around this time, law, customs, and conventions ceased to be considered as part of the fixed order of things. At this point in Hellenic history, “people wanted to know what made the law legitimate” (Shortridge 198). The sophists fulfilled this need.

Untersteiner continues his introductory premises by remarking that society also began to establish itself as an operating reality, though still lacking a scientific awareness. The crumbling of physical barriers among tribes, in addition, enables relationships of various types between social groups, relationships that make possible the sharing of new ideas. At this time, the unity of noble families weakened, and the full responsibility of individuals, as well as the struggle between political solidarity and the nobility and the expansion of commerce, produced economic unities and an inclination towards inquiry and judgment. The influx of metics further broadens this already rich cultural milieu. These basic premises created fertile ground for the appearance and flourishing of the sophists, who supplied answers for the myriad queries that appeared thereof. The fracturing of the noble families, introduced in this first part, is among the most decisive events of the issues which the sophists tackled.

Untersteiner argues that, while not perishing altogether, the aristocracy as a socio-political phenomenon ends in its former manifestation. After the collapse of Boeotian independence, a crisis sweeps over the aristocracy at least until the Battle of Chaeronea in 338BCE. What made this crisis particularly significant was the treatment it received from Pindar, who made it a spiritual matter by addressing the superseding of the Homeric idea. Werner Jaeger discusses this issue in depth, positing that Pindar, or the “voice of aristocracy,” tackles the “difficult problem” of deciding “how it sometimes happens that after a long succession of famous men the *areta* of a family disappears” (*Paideia*, Vol I, 215). While still set in the world of myth, the heroes of Pindar “lived and struggled in the immediate present” (216). The importance of this poet’s queries lies in the opening up of the new question of whether “the true virtue of man can be learnt, or only inherited by blood . . . thrust on him by the conflict of the aristocratic educational tradition with the new rational spirit” (218). His answer is that “[e]ducation cannot act unless there is inborn *areta* for it to act upon,” demonstrating “the deliberate resolve of the aristocracy to preserve its position at a time of crisis” (218—19). Untersteiner underscores this view by conceiving of it as a social foundation for the development of sophistry. I discuss the subject in more depth below, when Untersteiner addresses the issue in detail. Suffice here to say that Pindar expresses the “last agony of the aristocratic culture of Greece” (222). Untersteiner emphasizes this position.

Untersteiner continues Part One of his essay by addressing two decisive social issues in particular as having a bearing on the appearance of sophistry: the problem of human personality and that of constitutions, as he finds explained by Thucydides. Untersteiner suggests that two figures, in particular, demonstrate the issue of human

character: that of Pausinias, who was crucial during the Battle of Platea and the Greek victory over the Persians, as well as the head of the Hellenic League, and that of Themistocles, a new type of Athenian politician and general who distinguished himself during the initial years of Athenian democracy and was a populist supported by the Athenian lower classes, as well as conflicting with the nobility. He was not an aristocrat but an outsider who prided himself with his lack of polish and was instrumental in the second defeat of the Persians by anticipating their return and preparing the Athenians by building an unprecedented navy and strategizing the decisive victory in the straits of Salamis, without which, Greek civilization and values would unlikely have been reached. Jaeger identifies him as being the first to use the term foreign politics (390).

By calling attention to these two figures, Untersteiner mounts his case for the importance of the development of human character, for these two figures rose above the traditional roles permitted to individuals who were not of noble birth. Furthermore, he calls attention to two speeches: a speech given at the Congress of Sparta by the Corinthians and delegates of Athens in Sparta for other purposes that though speaking of Corinth with the outward purpose of dissuading Sparta from declaring war causes turmoil among her allies. Peter John Rhodes argues that this speech “stresses the Athenians’ ambition and contrasts their energy with Sparta’s slowness” (85). These two speeches had the effect of sparking the Peloponnesian War.

Untersteiner focuses on these two speeches to support his contention that they enabled the constitution and the social impact of a people influencing each other. This shift has an indelible distinguishing effect on the social intercourse of individuals, affecting the way they associate with one another and form social groups. Thus

individuals began to stipulate their social conditions, deciding them in a spiritual unity. This steady renewal of social affairs, many of which appeared for the first time, created problems that originated new ideas, political systems, and philosophical methods that stimulate new solutions.

The power of oratory and rhetoric thus becomes evident, for it provides the only way for individuals to manage the social experience they share and that affects them. One can clearly see, then, that the predicaments produced by the new organization of social existence necessitate novel methods of handling the necessities demanded in this period. This new need called for new measures provided by the sophists.

### **Crisis of the Aristocracy.**

Divided into five parts, the largest section of Untersteiner's essay presents the crisis of the aristocracy as providing a definite direction toward a new awareness in the Hellenic world. This section opens up one of the main points that Untersteiner formulates regarding the community-individual dichotomy. Here Untersteiner focuses in particular on the gnoseological consequences of community on the aristocracy. The term gnoseology, not common in English parlance, must be clarified in order to explicate this part of Untersteiner's argument.

More common in Italian rhetoric than in its English counterpart, gnoseology appears in place of epistemology. The definitions of both concepts as found in two leading dictionaries offer a good starting point for the discussion of the differences between the two terms. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "philosophy of cognition or the cognitive faculties." The *Unabridged Merriam-Webster* "the philosophic

theory of knowledge: inquiry into the basis, nature, validity, and limits of knowledge.” By contrast, the *OED* defines epistemology as “The theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge,” while the *Unabridged Merriam-Webster* had it as “the study of the method and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity; broadly :the theory of knowledge.” In Italian, according to *DeMauro Paravia* dictionary, *gnoseologia* denotes “*parte della filosofia che si occupa della natura e dei limiti della conoscenza umana | dottrina, teoria della conoscenza enunciata da un dato filosofo o da una determinata corrente di pensiero: g. empiristica, g. kantiana,*” meaning the part of philosophy that deals with nature and the limits of human knowledge, as well as the doctrine or theory of knowledge as stated by a particular current of thought, for example empiristic gnoseology, Kantian gnoseology. These definitions identify the basic shades of meaning between the two words.

Although both concepts denote philosophical theories of knowledge, the terms differ in the scope of their meaning. The basic distinction, I believe, lies in the grounds of knowledge covered by each term: epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge that deals with *episteme*,<sup>1</sup> which, according to the *OED* denotes “Scientific knowledge, a system of understanding,” and to *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, indicates “scientific or philosophical knowledge—wisdom” (Childers (97). *Gnosis*, on the other hand, means knowledge in a more general sense, and that is the area of gnoseology. Therefore, gnoseology includes epistemology under its broader definition, much like romanticism includes transcendentalism and Gothicism, so that not

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<sup>1</sup> In contemporary critical theory, particularly structuralist and poststructuralist, *episteme* has acquired a more expansive and complex meaning, which I do not explore because it is not relevant to the context being discussed here.

all gnoseology is epistemology in the same way that not all Romanticism is transcendentalism or Gothicism. This difference shows the realm of analysis of sophistry versus that of philosophy. However, although arguably for philosophy in traditional terms, epistemology is a kind of gnoseology. Another way of looking at this gradation is to think of it in these terms: gnoseology is to epistemology as enthymeme is to syllogism. While the premises of the syllogism are certain, those of the enthymeme, a rhetorical syllogism popularized by Aristotle, are not. Ultimately, the distinction lies specifically in Italy, where epistemology refers exclusively to that branch of gnoseology that addresses scientific knowledge, or even more distinctively, the philosophy of science. This differentiation also calls attention to the subtle nuances not only of different languages but also of the theories of knowledge of various cultures; I believe that the English speaking world would benefit from such a distinction and will develop this notion in Chapter Five.

In terms of the use that Untersteiner makes of the word, the relationship between the aristocratic man and his relationship with the community creates an idiosyncratic gnoseological situation. A regulated life with firm customs delimits the desires of individuals and, therefore, to the their self-actualization; however, individuals began to question tradition based on the social events that saw those of noble birth as fluctuating between innovatory self-determination and a yielding to community traditional roles. As the aristocrats lost their place as the sole members of the community, the role of the individual as a gnoseological and ethical entity became a problem. Werner Jaeger explains,

The Athenian state . . . made every free-born citizen of Athenian descent consider himself a member of the Attic community, and qualified him to serve it. This was simply an extension of the idea of kinship through blood, but now the community was composed of the members of one city, not the members of a few noble families. That was the only possible basis for the city-state . . . [placing] a new emphasis on individual personality. (287)

Because it comes into question, the social condition of individuals in this period can more accurately be described, or perhaps more accurately in Italy, as falling within the realm of gnoseology, occurring within the cognition of the individuals involved, who began questioning the aristocratic position as divinely ordained through lineage.

This challenging of tradition proves crucial to Untersteiner's argument because compliance with community beliefs gave way to a pioneering autonomy during this time. Relativism inevitably unleashed itself over the Hellenic world, for beliefs held onto for centuries were now being disputed, opening up a space for individual will, a space that proved threatening to and accelerated the degeneration of the aristocracy, as individual freedom diverged from the confines set by a universal concept.

As a result of the pervasive relativism, the aristocracy latched on to eternal ideas in a desperate attempt to retain its power. The values that the aristocracy recovered and exhorted do not translate easily in modern terms. Two fundamental political principles are the concepts of αἰδώς, or *aidos*, and δίκη or *dike*. Αἰδώς translates as reverence or respect for others; its meaning emerges from the personification of the goddess of shame, modesty, and humility. Albrecht Dihle explains that it can be defined as “a collective or

prospective conscience which persuades [hu]man to apply the moral standards of his[/her] society to a situation where he [or she] has to act” (23). This function can make it “the principal obstacle for any action whatsoever, since it makes a [hu]man aware and, perhaps, afraid of the ensuing reactions to his[/her] deed and of other discomforts that may possibly result from it” (23—24). Therefore, αἰδώς may prevent individuals from acting at all, despite their being obliged to do so, for it offers appealing justifications to remain inactive, supporting the “indolence and timidity of human nature” (24). Δίκη or *dike* loosely translated as justice, is usually considered the leading Greek virtue. Again, expressing the full worth of the concept proves beyond the scope of this dissertation and has been the subject of many studies in itself, among which Eric Havelock’s *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato*. These concepts, nevertheless, represent the basis of aristocratic society in opposition to νόμοι (*nomoi*), which can translate as law but that the Greeks used for “traditional customs” (Woodruff 114). The concept of νόμοι became the codeword for the common people. Broader still, the concepts of harmony and philanthropy were attitudes and motivations of great importance in aristocratic thought. Untersteiner assumes knowledge of these terms in his audience so he does not define them nor transliterate them. *Harmonia* expresses “the principle of natural division into ruling and ruled” (Wood and Wood 163). Untersteiner points out that these concepts share a social foundation based on a collective experience that evolves into an abstraction.

By expressing an eternal and therefore ideal essence of the human being, the aristocratic society generates a collective entity that serves as a creative force and a limit, both an inspiration and a constraint. Jaeger again explains,

Only at this stage of spiritual development are such problems as those of freedom and authority, or education for citizenship and education for leadership, conceived and answered, and only at this stage do they acquire their full urgency as moulders of men's destiny. They do not arise in primitive societies, in herd-communities, or family-communities where there is no conception of the power of the human mind. (288)

The community, therefore, is a social phenomenon in need of interpretation, an interpretation that the sophists alone would offer. The aristocracy latched on to anything at this point as a desperate attempt to retain its power.

Religiosity is one of the ways in which the aristocracy contributes to the consciousness of the community. Untersteiner points to Pindar once again, who as the champion of the political and ethical ideals of the aristocracy, was apt to imbue his work with Apollonism. This uncommon term refers to a one of two instincts, the other being Dionisism, and denotes a "state of the human mind," as Maximillian Mügge explains, on which the development of art, a "pure and direct [state] of Art," depends: "The Apollonian instinct is a sort of dream of beauty" (105). Michael Haar explains that it appeared in the "Greek post-Socratic decadence after Homer" (168). Haar develops this concept further and explains that in these states, art takes hold of the individual "as a force of nature," further adding that "the idea that Apollonism as 'will to measure, to simplicity, to submission to rule and concept' imposed itself on the Greeks after a long struggle: it had to be conquered and secured by them 'in the struggle against their own

Asiaticism,’ against the ‘taste for the measureless, for the complex, for the uncertain, for the horrible” (163). This notion fits naturally with Untersteiner’s contention that gods and heroes become ethical concepts of universal validity to which individuals should aspire and with which the aristocrats are naturally endowed. The individual can perfect himself within the universality of a type, yet Pindar proclaims that the universal is the aristocratic γένος (*genos*), the bloodline. This universal aristocratic γένος subsumed the many within unity, despite the dichotomy of the individual versus the community. However, under this conception, *arête* could not be carried out for it remained within the limits of the aristocratic world since the individual would have to act even without the support of the community.

The shift took time, for, as Untersteiner argues, the decline of the aristocracy was merely apparent. In fact, despite these innovative currents, the population was inclined towards ancient traditions that granted the aristocracy superiority and competence as the leaders of the people. The idea of equality, though alluring, did not seem to fall within the realm of the possible. Therefore, the aristocrats, by grasping onto certain eternal ideas, retained their power, reaching a paradoxical situation in which they effectively became the leaders of democracy on one hand while continuing to operate both as the official party and in secret societies on the other. Ian Worthington supports this view, stating that “[a]ristocratic families continued to use their family ties and friendships to gain influence, and thus continued to dominate politics” (256). The aristocracy, then, assimilates democracy in a new society that has a broadened circle of privileged individuals. However, the concept of community remains and expands from the aristocratic spirituality within the democratic epoch.

This notion of unity in the bloodline of a γένος survives notwithstanding the decline of the aristocracy due to a transformation. The relationship between human beings and their γένος extended to all people within a community, and the universal state replaces the Delphic and aristocratic universal. *Physis* becomes the primordial essence of human beings. The universal value of the community and the problem of individual abilities remain apparent to historians, such as Aristotle, but the collective ambition is wide enough not to be surpassed by any individual conception. The collective, then, ends up dimming individualism, although political struggles and the intensity of passions revive the issue which is hindered by the universal idea.

Untersteiner then touches on the role of war, to which he will devote an entire section later on in the essay, in presenting the problem of individual responsibility before the people, yet no open controversy emerged, for the individual remained within the universality of the community. Still in the second half of the fifth century, the aristocracy is suspicious of prominent characters, whose individualism is targeted by poets such as Phrynichus and Aristophanes and who are still conceived as “types.” Jaeger explains,

Greek reflection on the nature of education lays great stress on the concepts of τυπος [*typos*, type] and τυπων [*typon*, types], even when the spontaneous individual factor in this process is strongly felt, as by the sophists or by Plato. This concept is the heritage of the early aristocratic ideal of education. Needless to say, the content of the later Platonic ideal type of human personality differed greatly from that of the early aristocratic world; but the education process as such was still visualized in the same terms of moulding. (422)

Social life, then, for Untersteiner, fuels an interest in human typology, for features of this typology define the main forces that act in the complex world of humanity. Therefore, this age does not reach the overall concept of “character” although it identifies the elements that constitute it. The universal and the individual flounder, and aristocratic spirituality remains to be surpassed.

Untersteiner’s argument then points toward the shaping of individual autonomy that occurs at the origins of democratic thinking and, by extension, sophistry. This novel and explicitly political conception of the social order raised doubts and questions. Cynthia Farrar elaborates on this point, arguing that, “All personal qualities and aims were politicized and converted into properties of—or seen in relation to—the community as a whole. Aristocratic influence and values were expressed in democratic terms” (28). This gradual shift calls to mind the mythological types of human character that were being left behind at this point but that continued to live on in a more humanistic interpretation of social life. Untersteiner argues that sophistry developed because the sophists had to explain to the people what was happening, so this process played a huge role in the formation of the social foundation from which the sophistic movement emerged. Nevertheless, despite the apparent changes in historical terms, Untersteiner does not find significant psychological and gnoseological differences in the typology of Greek human existence.

## **Sophistical Theories Regarding Community and Individual**

Untersteiner explores the theories of the sophists regarding community and individual in the second section of his discussion of the crisis of the aristocracy. In this view, Protagoras tackles the contradictory between type and individual, between universal and particular human being, as a problem that needs to be resolved urgently by constructing a dialectic of human gnoseology based on the terms posed by social reality. As “the measure of all things,” the human being masters for him/herself the knowableness of reality contradictory as it may be. This gap can be closed through a relativistic phenomenism of the individual when the knower transforms experiences free of value into experiences with value. Therefore, the individual knower becomes the representative of the interest of the community, which is the total sum of individuals of certain category—doctors, farmers, orators, sophists, and others—united, gnoseologically speaking, by the coherence of relative knowableness of a definite experience. This revolutionary view posits that only the collective human being, the human being in general, the type is able to perfect the experiences of individual welfare.

As a result, in the evolution of civilization, the state of perfection is achieved when the life of the *polis* is held up by δίκη (*dike*, justice) and αἰδώς (*aidos*, mutual respect), ethical motivations that also make up the πολιτική ἀρετή (*politke arête*, political virtue) of the aristocracy, that bring individuals to unity. For Protagoras, then, all the expressions of life are contained within the paradigm of a universalizing leveling concept. Compared to the aristocratic position that had renewed the socio-political practice, Protagoras innovates because he transposes a compound of scattered and instinctive experiences into a coherent system, translating the social phenomenon of the

annihilation of individual for collective interest into a philosophical concept defined as the “major possibility for knowledge.”

The philosophical and rationalistic idea of community is a fundamental issue for other sophists such as Antiphon and Hippias. They theorize that the concrete actions of individuals become the universality of κοινὸί νόμοι (*koinoi nomoi*, common laws). This conception of universal laws, identical for everyone, is clear when the individual *physis* recognizes a universal and essential *physis* above itself, according to an anonymous treatise *Περὶ νόμοι* (*About Laws*). Such a rationalistic solution had to clash with all the difficulties of universal concepts and with reality that could not be reduced to conceptual uniformity, as felt by Lycophron in particular who must have critiqued the idea to deny it any possible ethics. As a result, the collective unity of individuals is an ideal more than a reality.

Sophistry concerns itself with typical characterology, which is always an expression of the universal. The *OED* defines characterology as “The science of character, esp. of its development, types, and individual differences.” Hippias, who took on the problem of character, extricates it from the good/evil antithesis, as does Prodicus with Heracles, which illustrates the education of Heracles (Ramelli 62). According to these two sophists, the character-type is created by that very antithesis, from which emerges the distinctly political typology of aristocratic spirituality.

For the sophists, however, the will determines the character of the individual, though in different ways. Albrecht Dihle examines the ideas that the Greeks held about human action, explaining that according to the Greeks,

. . . moral freedom is guaranteed by the free intellectual activity of the human mind, which leads, however, to a proper insight into the immutable laws that determine the whole of reality. On the other hand, awareness of one's own intellectual deficiency as well as of one's inescapable duty towards human affairs seems to be essential in free and responsible human activities. Apparently, man has to rely on the rational order of being and on his intellect, which is supposed to be able to evaluate, according to that order, the means and end of action. On the other hand, man has to be fully conscious of his own intellectual deficiencies, for he is doomed to become a part of that order through his action despite his inability to perceive the whole of reality. This universal dilemma was particularly strongly felt in Greece. (47)

Untersteiner points to Protagoras for an elaboration of this concept. For Protagoras, the stronger *logos* constructs, through an act of will, the ethical values of human community.

This view appears in a recent treatment of this sophist. In *Protagoras and the Challenge of Relativism*, Ugo Zilioli, fellow of the University of Parma, underscores the autonomy of the individual in the ethical life of the *polis*, arguing that "In the light of the understanding of Protagoras' perceptual relativism . . . the individual should be taken to be fully autonomous in his own relativistic knowledge" (103). Nevertheless, ultimately Protagoras views ethical rules as being "the mediated expression (through a communal discussion)" of the reaction of a group of people taking part in the debating process of an ethical matter (105). The will, to continue with Untersteiner, in the moment of decision, bolsters the high point of individual action for Gorgias, as well as Prodicus. Finally,

Critias renders the individual, according to his will, as imposing social ethics upon the universality of law. Therefore, despite their mixed solutions, the bearing of the will factor is common to all the sophists, political life having perceived its effectiveness, but it is also a difficult problem, necessary for the dictation of the universal both in the name of the community and of the individual.

Untersteiner concludes this section by stating that the fundamental attitude of aristocratic thought hinged on the community-individual alternative and therefore on its typical characterology. Due to its persistence within social and political practice, this attitude had to force itself on the speculative thought of the sophists, who created a universal concept of socio-political experience and rendered individual human attitudes effective as typical paradigms for individuals to function within social life.

### **Relativistic Experience of an Aristocratic Society Seeking to Reconstruct Its Ideals.**

One of the primary areas of congruity within sophistic thought lies within the relativistic dissolution of values. Hellenic humanism reached this conclusion in different ways.

Untersteiner touches on the relations of travelers who comparing Hellenic with barbarian laws and customs could not but reach the conclusion that what were once considered eternal and indestructible traditions held no value in any other place. Nevertheless, he considers this crucial influence to be a predominantly cultural rather than social phenomenon.

Untersteiner considers the social events, which caused great upheaval, to have been overwhelming, even to Pindar. Reason or the *νοῦς* (*nous*) becomes a problem under the thrust of political contrasts, ceasing to be absolute. With the advent of the democratic

order, the rational possibility of determining the truth of things within the realm of political experience disappears. As a result, positive law has no value.

The consequences of this theoretical position developed in two ways. The inflexible and unitary νόμος (*nomos*), on which the democratic struggle against the Persians had hinged and had met the fiercest opposition from the aristocracy, raised the doubt regarding the validity of aristocratic laws. According to Josiah Ober in his *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*, this event promoted the development of democracy. While no single cause can be provided, he asserts that experience of the Persian Wars “helped to hasten the evolution of the democratic order” (83). Furthermore, Untersteiner continues, the aristocrats were altering laws arbitrarily, molding them according to necessity yet claiming these laws as expressions of divine will. The relativism of customs and, by extension, the laws inherent within them, can be accepted, according to Pindar, since the revolutions of the time confirm it, as long as the divine continues to be recognized.

The discovery of the relativism of the law, so acutely felt and accentuated by the aristocrats, produced an additional result. If a law was variable within a people and between peoples, ethics also lost its foundation that human beings considered indisputable. W.K.C. Guthrie describes this time as one when people

. . . are entering a world in which not only sweet and bitter, hot and cold, exist merely in belief, or by convention, but also justice and injustice, right and wrong. Doubts about the order and stability of the physical world as a whole, and the dethronement of divinity in favour of chance and natural necessity as causes, were

seized upon by upholders of the relativity of ethical conceptions and became part of the base of their case. (59)

To grapple this difficulty, the aristocracy elaborates the concept of “unwritten laws,” which can be aristocratic laws of sacral origin as much as those laws valid for all people, founded on the universality of nature, as extended by the favored cosmopolitanism of the aristocracy. Untersteiner views this move against the relativism of the written laws as yet another attempt of the aristocracy to grasp on to conservative currents.

The sophists retrieved and offered nuanced interpretations for this social problem formulated by an aristocracy attempting to save itself, as evidenced in the doctrines of Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, and Antiphon. In particular, Untersteiner calls attention to the anxiety of a return to “the ancestral constitution” (*πάτριος πολιτεία* or *patrios politeia*) welcomed by Thrasymachus and proclaimed as valid by virtue of the divine nature. The sophistic age, in its moments of spiritual return to the aristocratic world, translates the ancient idea of unwritten laws according to an antidemocratic socio-political program. The relativism and the attempts to resolve it in a spiritual manifestation free of quarrels find their primordial schemes within the struggle of rearranging the aristocratic consciousness and ideals.

### **The Aristocrats and the Problem of Teaching Virtue.**

The teachableness of virtue is among the most demanding social problems faced by the sophistic age. This question was also raised by the aristocracy in crisis. The possibility of teaching virtue is antithetical to the aristocratic idea that virtue be “by nature,” as Pindar

often proclaims. Hippias offers an explicit polemic to this conception. Nevertheless, despite the deep conviction that natural abilities are decisive within the teaching of virtue, the recognition that bad company can bring to moral ruin and that instruction cannot make someone wise once again leads to the dispersion of educational values so dear to the aristocrats. The subversion of the value of social classes is such that the aristocrat began doubting the very foundation of ἀρετή (*arête* or virtue), placing, therefore, the problem of its teachableness in genuine dramatic turmoil, for admitting its possibility would place in question the very conception of aristocracy.

The political drama of an entire segment of society becomes a challenging genealogical problem in the thought of the sophists. However, Untersteiner reminds the reader that sophistic education, while based on the development of individual rather than inherited abilities, nonetheless applies primarily to the leaders of rather than the common people, so the former aristocratic problem returns in a new form, as, in general, the kind of education in vogue in the fifth century BCE was directed towards the life of the nobles. Catherine Osborne discusses this paradox, arguing that “the Sophists offered an expensive private education, yet the market for it thrived best in a democratic culture; they presented themselves as great facilitators of democratic procedures, yet their effect was to secure advantages for the well-to-do” (113). The social pressure of the educational problem caused a clash between aristocratic education and a politico-democratic conception, one of the shaping causes of the *nomos-physis* controversy.

The reaction to this controversy emerges as one of the most prominent contributions of the sophists, who according to Jaeger all taught political *arête* and were “the inventors of intellectual culture and of the art of education which aims at producing

it” (293). The role of the development of democracy once again emerges as crucial in the emergence of sophistry. The debates about whether virtue could be taught “were implicitly debates about whether the upper classes should have to share political power with lower classes” (Rawson 218). The way to political power in a democracy was based on rhetorical abilities.

### **The Aristocratic Crisis and Constitutional Conceptions of Sophistry.**

The stimuli provided by the social drama of the aristocracy within a politically won world are indeed numerous. The aristocracy supplied themes proposed not only by its social drama but also of thought already elaborated by a particular social, political, and philosophical experience of a former time. These influences emerge in Pythagoreanism, which was of sharply aristocratic politics. Thus, the contradictory presence of both oligarchic and democratic sophists loses its peculiarity.

Untersteiner considers the constitutional drama of the second half of the fifth century BCE to be fully driven by the power of the aristocratic political *ethos*, so sophistry suffers under the dichotomy tyranny (or aristocracy) versus democracy and especially the more recent sophists fluctuate between these two political conceptions.

### **Sophistic Problems in the Political Struggles of the Fifth Century**

Untersteiner finds that the social and political themes were set by the aristocracy because it had to deal with the problem of granting citizens rights that did not flow logically from the traditions of their society. Original possibilities remain, influenced by new forms established on the unrest of the past. The problem of the individual was pressing at the

time of political struggles and revolutions, which stimulate the inventiveness ready to evolve fully, also because political choices call for analytical consideration to warrant an autonomous decision. Democracy favors θυμός [*thumos*, emotional impulses, soul], which is the catalyst to independence, as Untersteiner finds in Hippocrates' *De aere aquis et locis*, which is often considered the earliest occurrence of the *nomos/physis* distinction.

Untersteiner points once again to the problem of the individual, this time in relation to the state. The favored constitutional form is the one that benefits the most, and the criterion of utility may lead to indifference. Here Untersteiner finds the beginning of legal principles conceived as benefitting a particular self-interest so that it appears reduced to economy. Therefore, the constitutional problem is an effect of social life that concerns all citizens. The notion of constitution began defining itself in its potential types only with the democracy of Cleisthenes, who definitively determined the principle of ἰσονυμία or *isonomia*.

*Isonomia* denotes equality in front of the law. Wood and Wood identify this concept as “the principle of political equality” (179). Josiah Ober calls it the “political slogan of Cleisthenes’ reform” (74). Possibly coined by Athenian aristocrats as an anti-tyrannical catchphrase, the term denotes “equality of participation in making decisions (laws) that will maintain and promote equality and that will bind all citizens equally” (75). *Isonomia* can be considered as the opposite of the political principle *harmonia*, which I defined above, and became the “expressive symbol of a democratic constitution” (Wood and Wood 163—64).

However, Untersteiner continues, these constitutional forms, though finally defined, did not immediately pose the specific problem of political programs and parties.

Sure enough, immediately after the Persian wars, the Athenian democracy was stirred once again by an unstable, agitated, and unequal trend until the second half of the fourth century. This situation presented the problem of the relativism of forms of government. The political struggles intensified. The contrast between political factions caused the need for political doctrines. Within their clashes, however, the problem of the best form of government found no solution, causing the perception of the practical insolubility regarding the best form of government. The concept of profit, utility, or usefulness thereby dissipated every theoretical essential inherent in any constitution.

All the discussions that, starting at the time of the Peloponnesian war, were raised regarding the problem of the forms of constitutions, both in terms of their essence and in relation to their genesis, were imposed by social conditions. The sophists take on as unavoidable the study of the political event, the validity of law, and the meaning of constitutions because of the constitutional drama of Athens, which, after its victory over Persia, had amplified the play of forces that affected its fate. The incursion of new needs, such as maritime politics, works to create a particular type of government, almost as though it were a natural organization. The author of the *Constitution of Athenians* resolves a political circumstance when he discovers the coherence of democracy despite hating it, according to Untersteiner. Because it turns into a decisive factor urging on consciousness, sociality becomes a political phenomenon that solicits a practice as much as a theory.

Untersteiner views not only the theorizing on the forms of governments but also their giving of contrasting answers of the sophists as implicit proof of the contradictory nature of reality. Otherwise, an identical intention would not have reached conflicting

conclusions. The play of political parties relativized the concept of truth and error. Untersteiner points towards Aristophanes and Euripides.

## **War**

The problem of profit or utility clearly demonstrates the meaning of war, so that for the first time during the Peloponnesian war, the economy formed the generative force of this social phenomenon, which also brought the economy to a critical condition—a matter suffered by all and therefore to be interpreted. Sophistry, which carried out most of its activity during this dramatic historical period, noticed the action produced by social life in its pathological expression of an armed conflict. The problem attracted the sophists all the more because they were, usually, opposed to wars.

When induced by profit, human conduct will at some point become problematic due to the relativism that the concept entails and that occurs when seen in economic terms. However, profit is not the only element of the dissolution of values due to wars. The justness that, before the Persian wars, was founded on self-control and was therefore the consequence of individual temperament, began to lose that base that originated from the political spirituality of the aristocrats. As he mentions earlier, Untersteiner recalls the problematic of great political figures of the time who act according to criteria that shun traditional norms of right and wrong. Further, the war had laid the premises for an inversion of values, and the struggles between parties had become a power that behaved harshly both in internal politics and international relations. This play of interests ended up resulting in new ideas. The culmination of these contrasts occurred during the Peloponnesian war, especially in Attica, where the military operations caused a clash

between the conservative people of the countryside and the progressive ones of the cities. Therefore, Untersteiner views the war as responsible for class spirit and party that led to opposite political theories, of which the sophists became the representatives.

Furthermore, the immediate, almost abstract, contrast among laws and among customs dramatized within a social reality in which antithesis appears as the fundamental norm, brought to an exacerbated obviousness by the narrow confines of the *polis*, an ideal location to pinpoint opposites and signal their incompatibility. With Pericles, the class war that had exploded fatally within aristocratic regimes had led to the triumph of the proletariat, which caused the most paradoxical reactions from the adversaries. In these conditions of high social tension and an unstable balance, theory appeared spontaneously until reaching the ideal of Antiphon, who wanted to see the class war to end, as well as the clash between lineages, such as the fatal one between Hellenics and barbarians.

Untersteiner views this universal anxiety that reached cosmopolitanism as emerging from the dramatic anguish of the Peloponnesian war. Cosmopolitanism—which is in the very nature of the sophistic mindset and that was theorized by Hippias and Antiphon—conveys a very complex moment for the Hellenics and their social needs, to the point that not all sophists were able to comprehend its importance. To support this view, Untersteiner points toward the Hellenic/barbarian antithesis that had originated under Darius with the founding of the Persian Empire and materialized with the Persian wars between 490 and 479 BCE. A political problem had emerged from this antithesis: the opposition between tyranny, which was subjugated by Persia, and Hellenic democracy. Untersteiner finds the issue of cosmopolitanism in Antiphon, who notes that the law did not correspond to the requirements of *ισονομία* or *isonomia*. *Isonomia*, which

Guthrie renders as “equality before the law” (126), required contrasts to be surpassed without residuals. The sophist seems to say that the absolute value of *isonomia* rather than cause the Hellenic-barbarian opposition, which had in fact happened, had actually assuaged it. *Isonomia* became the abolishment of all law to restore the natural *physis*, in terms of human and universal sociality, and can thus be called cosmopolitanism.

The implications of Untersteiner’s argument are still open to debate. While some scholars, such as Nestle, Havelock, and Guthrie, credit Antiphon with a full-blown theory of the unity, equality, and even brotherhood of all humankind, others stress the biological emphasis of Antiphon’s argument and are unconvinced of its cosmopolitanism implications. Gerard Pendrick, however, finds the cosmopolitanism of Antiphon’s argument hard to deny, for the argument “affirms the natural similarity of all human beings, while simultaneously devaluing the importance of cultural differences among them” (355). Therefore, Pendrick deems Antiphon’s Fragment 44 as “evidence for an embryonic form of cosmopolitanism in the later fifth century” (355). Untersteiner also holds this view.

A particular situation evolved in the consciousness of the Hellenics, despite the concurrence of other social events,<sup>2</sup> causing a social problem that reconnected to the cultural κοινή (*koinē*: common or shared), due to the collaboration of Greeks and non-Greeks in the age of rhapsodes and following until Darius. Κοινή refers to the cultural popular form of Greek that appeared in the fifth century BCE when Attic and Ionic started approximating each other and was not surprising given the power of Athens over the Ionians (Andrados 177). Untersteiner proposes that this κοινή, now relived as a

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<sup>2</sup> See Translation “The War” section.

question posed by social conditions caused by the Peloponnesian war—which intensified the class wars—aspired to internal, as well as external, peace, and established itself as a great idea that actualized only after Alexander.

However, Untersteiner views the Hellenic-barbarian antithesis as dramatic in the cultural and social world of the fifth century, even while patriotism caused an uproar that stifled contrary views. Cosmopolitanism amounted to a problem that occurred during the Persian wars and became a theoretical issue at the time of the sophists, who were determined by the social imperative of the class war. While celebrating the triumph of Hellenic patriotism, Aeschylus' *The Persians* also presents the unsolvable controversy of patriotism and cosmopolitanism, of the individual and the universal.

The class war entailed cosmopolitanism also in another way. The aristocrats refrained from attending the assembly, not wanting to participate in public life where the *demos* predominated, contributing to cosmopolitanism by means of this abstentionism. Once again, the aristocratic turmoil contributes to a complex social circumstance. Untersteiner concludes that the problems brought on by the war and picked up by the sophists cause a critical dissolution of values which create universal social experiences.

### **Problems Raised by Religion.**

The Persian wars unsettled traditional religion, making it utterly problematic. The religious organization of the *polis* faded when the wars made religion subordinate to the ideas of state so as to favor the freedom of the human spirit and fix the attention of the people on the physical world. Religion thus became a social issue, so, for example, the

Athenians used it in terms of their pan-Hellenic project. From the political point of view, religion becomes tinged with rationalism, beginning its dissolution.

The denial of the transcendent was the critical movement within religion that 1) does not concern itself with afterlife, 2) conceives divine forms in an aesthetic way, 3) faced with sudden mutations within historical events, does not see a safe divine line of action in the order of things, and 4) does not respond to the new needs that appeared after the collapse of the ancient social and political order. A true corruption of the sacred and, therefore, its outcome in the realm of relativism spread during the pentecontaetia.

Even internally, the religious phenomenon contradicts and dissolves itself. Untersteiner points to the double value of the sacred, which can certainly operate in both good and evil without making this twofold conclusion the foundation of the religious phenomenon. This lack of a standpoint toward religious values indicates a distinct moment in human knowledge. Gorgias' dramatic critique of knowledge starts in the antithetical ambiguity of reasons that are also sacred though transferred in the analytical sphere.

The circumstance of an unsolvable antithesis is characteristic of the sacred, but Untersteiner pursues it in what he considers to be an even more significant domain. The law is recognized as duplicitous: proclaimed as sacred and immutable on one hand, yet viewed as human or even secular on the other and therefore subject to change. These opposites were thus confounded in practice. This ambivalence, which forms the foundation of the concept's relativism, derives from the twofold meaning that both θεσμός (*thesmos*: institution) and νόμος (*nomos*: law) can take of sacred and secular law. Drawing on Ostwald, Ian Morris elucidates that *thesmos* "implied 'something imposed

by an external agency, conceived as standing apart and on a higher plane than the ordinary,' while the fifth-century word, *nomos*, implied something 'motivated less by the authority of the agent who imposed it than by the fact that it is regarded and accepted as valid by those who live under it'" (53). Untersteiner states the Greek experiences in general have always been sacred and secular in the past, illustrating with the account of Hellanicus, who identifies Physis with Adrasteia, the ancient pre-Hellenic goddess and mother, ordainer of the inflexible laws of existence. Sophistry took on the problematic *nomos* and *physis* that fluctuated within the social consciousness of the religious human being.

Particularly in the second half of the fifth century, another religious occurrence contributed in presenting urgent problems for sophistic thinking. Greek religion absorbed the foreign religions that percolated right after the Persian wars and which are welcomed by the masses while the upper classes were inclined to a more universal rationalization and elaboration. Both displayed dissatisfaction with old forms and a search for new resolution. Traditional values, however, due to this comparison of religious forms, suffered decisive blows, so the concepts of just, true, and others, once again proved problematic. Untersteiner finds the most direct reverberation of this religious movement, which could have easily slid into aberrant forms of superstition, in Antiphon's *Interpretation of Dreams*, which is an expression of a relativistic and rationalistic mindset, once again demonstrating the imperative that the sophists felt towards problems within social life.

Generally, Hellenic religion posed the problem of the individual in many ways. The Homeric human similar to a god soared high with his marvelous creations within a

free society. Because individual initiative is crucial in foreign beliefs, these convert to exultation of human beings and manifestations of intellectualism within Greek land.

The forms of religion, whose impassioned impetus created the antithesis to reason, to say the least favored the elaboration of rhetoric and sophistic gnoseology. Untersteiner asserts that rhetoric is indebted to sacred poetry in terms of the elaboration of its stylistic forms and rhetorical figures, transforming them within Hellenic religious society and transferring them into the supreme realm of art. Similarly, he attributes the pathetic impetus of eloquence of some sophists to the ecstatic passion of orgiastic cults.

Hellenic religion also suggested a gnoseological theme. Hellenics believed that every word could become a divinity, for language was viewed as the primordial revelation by means of the *logos*, which revealed the divine to humanity by giving humans the ability to express it. For the Hellenes, the *logoi* and the gods were many. The significance of *logos* thus developed in two ways: 1) the rationalistic way, which brought to the fore the contrast between unity and plurality implied by *logos*, so that its ambivalence became apparent; and 2) the naturalistic and metaphysical way, which made it the receptacle of the most radical reality of things. Here Greek philosophical-religious etymology, when considering the word *physis*, thinks it expresses essence, of which it claims to be the name, as seen in Heraclitus and Aeschylus. From the reflections of the multiple possibilities within the nature of *logos*, Untersteiner identifies two sophistic speculations. For one, the Gorgian doctrine of *logos*, in its ambivalence according to the developments in *Helen* and the treaty *On Nature or On Non-Being*, determined the persuasive effectiveness of *logos* in keeping with the irrational ways of religious experience. Scott Consigny addresses this very issue in *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist*,

stating that “Gorgias repudiates the project of apprehending the truth in *On Not-Being* though the artificial categories of the Eleatics. Insofar as we accept these categories as real, we will remain separated from true experience, for every rational account of objective truth is false or deceptive” (46). Untersteiner’s other example is the rationalistic close examination of Prodicus, which starting with the etymology of the word, its *physis*, turns *logos* into *nomos*, to be found in its every manifestation, read synonym. Schiappa develops this point, writing that “Prodicus emphasized correct speech (*orthoepia*)—a clear example of the new rationalistic approach to *logos*” (*Protagoras* 79).

Hellenic religiosity, then, exerted considerable influence on sophistry, also by way of tragedy, a social phenomenon in its origins as much as in its manifestation within high Attic poetry, which brought to the suffering of the tragic and the unsolvable dissension between human beings and the gods, since Dionysian religion displays the contradictions of the world. Swartz comments on this connection, stating that art “contributed to the spiritual and political life of the community,” an example of which is Greek tragedy, and that the purpose of catharsis was “to purge the emotion of an audience of its socially unhealthy elements and to reconnect the audience to the human condition, as defined by the status quo of the community” (25). To Untersteiner, however, tragedy and its religious-popular origins gave the Hellenes a tragic sense of existence, an essentially sophistic problem, and he considers Gorgias’ *On Not-Being* as the social experience of tragedy and of the poets in ontological and gnoseological terms.

Another social phenomenon with religious undertones is religion itself. As the interpreter of authority, religion aims to achieve obedience and discipline from the people. According to sophistic thought, the state, which had to have had a genesis,

presented itself as created by gods and demigods or heroes, representatives of the very first social revolutions but actually operated by human beings, as explained by Protagoras and Critias, who gives an unscrupulously explicit view of the religion, understood as a human intervention with the most contradictory consequences. Sophistry, then, has provided secular interpretations of religious phenomena derived from social life.

### **The Problem of *Techné***

The last issue that Untersteiner considers is the issue of *techné*, which exerted considerable influence on the speculative thought of the sophists. The widespread and certain spread of the *technai* had begun already in the sixth century BCE but that properly belongs to the sophistic age. At this time, workers were valued to the point that they could come forward and assert themselves as political men, as did Cleon and Hyperbolos, who are from the world of *δημοργοί* or *demorgoi*, which means craftsmen, or literally someone who works for the people, as indicated by its root *demo-*.

This event is a sign of a tacit social revolution, causing a gnoseological problem for those who stood astonished by this unprecedented occurrence. An assembly made up of shoemakers, carpenters, farmers, and the like, to the aristocrats appeared as completely incapable of judging political matters. Therefore, the question of the gnoseological value of the *technai* was raised, and in this domain the answers of sophistry are once again antithetical. Protagoras implies the devaluation of the *technai* by demolishing their theoretical foundation, at least in regards to personal experience. Similarly, in Antiphon, *technai* corresponds to the relativistic human world before absolute *physis*.

On the other hand, the *technai* may have appeared so connected by a rational orderliness that they were judged the governing guidelines of life and a sign of progress; therefore, Prodicus renders the history of civilization as founded on the progressive discovery of the arts, Hippias follows in kind exalting them, and Critias concerns himself with knowing the origin of inventions. The social situation takes over the speculative zeal of the sophists, who see a theoretical problem and once again tackle it in different ways.

### **Conclusion**

Untersteiner concludes that sophistry articulated the social conditions of its specific historical moment. While he acknowledges that the sophists offered contrasting interpretations, he considers them humanists and philosophers of their age, although their very humanism kept their way of thinking from becoming dialectic. Ultimately, he views the crisis of the aristocracy as most significant, offering the most fruitful site for sophistic thought. His closing sentence, in which he calls attention to the philosophical nature of the sophistic enterprise, is a distinct challenge to the early and middle—but not late—Plato. In *Phaedrus*, Plato's last dialogue, Plato gives the sophists some credit, especially Isocrates, who is sometimes included among the sophists, stating that, "There is something of philosophy in him." Untersteiner is advancing the same argument.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

“Whoever does not study rhetoric will be a victim of it.”

Ancient Greek wall inscription.

The general misrepresentation of the concept of sophistry and of the ideas undergirding the movement holds foreboding consequences for Western societies because they not only incorrectly represent the cultural and social role of sophistry but also do not acknowledge the power that sophistry and its main subject of instruction rhetoric provide to societies that deem themselves democratic. By definition, democracy calls on the people, the *demos*, to rule or at least contribute to ruling themselves through rhetorical participation. Not acknowledging the (proper) role of sophistry and the importance of rhetoric in contemporary social contexts denies citizens both the knowledge and the tools needed to participate actively within a democratic society. In this chapter I offer my view of sophistry in terms of its rhetorical and pedagogical value, including its implications for contemporary society, the university, and relevance to the composition classroom in particular. Untersteiner’s “new” chapter suggests that social conditions are a primary cause of human agency and the creation of social formations. Drawing on Untersteiner, I question current social conditions and the way in which contemporary rhetorical theory

and composition practice relate to these issues. Finally, I argue for a reintegration of selected sophistic practices in contemporary composition theory. In the process, I speculate upon the connections I see between sophistry and rhetoric and composition, positing the composition instructor as a potential modern-day sophist, or what remains possible after millennia of scorn begun by Plato.

### **Pedagogical and Rhetorical Value of Sophistry**

The sophistic movement suggests numerous distinguishing characteristics although it was never a coherent and organized movement as such. Despite the numerous differences among individual sophists, the sophists shared a number of characteristics that allow a modern day definition to be elaborated. Naturally, a distinction between “good” and “bad” sophists exists today as it did in antiquity. I address this differentiation before turning to the similarities that I deem valuable among the sophists.

Most human matters can be expressed and practiced in positive and negative ways. For example, drugs, food, knowledge, rhetoric, advertising, even water can be used or abused to produce positive or negative results. The work practiced by the sophists is no exception. Plato himself has Gorgias state, “[i]t is not the teachers who are bad, nor does this mean that the art is responsible or bad, but rather, I think, those who use it incorrectly. The argument would be the same in the case of rhetoric” (Dillon 61). The sophists put their *techné* to positive and negative uses. Gorgias, for instance, persuaded Athens to help his hometown, Leontini in Sicily, against its belligerent neighbor Syracuse, leading to the war that eventually weakened Athens. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg suggest that, “Perhaps this linkage of Sophistic rhetoric with dangerous

statecraft helped to discredit it in the eyes of later thinkers such as Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle, who lived amid the social and political turmoil that followed Athens's golden age, in which the sophists had dominated" (23). Aside from specifics, the sophists instructed anyone who could pay their high fees,<sup>1</sup> thereby positioning themselves as not distinguishing between those who would put sophistic *techné* to good or bad use. In addition, their epistemological relativism may be read as disregard for good practice. Nevertheless, the sophists also shared qualities, principles, and goals that can hold great value for the composition classroom today.

The sophists and sophistic rhetoric, as such, however, are neither formal nor definitive classifications. Then again, classifications in general are always somewhat suspect and often reconstructed upon reexamination. One scholar in particular has argued against the notion of sophistic rhetoric, calling it "a mirage." In this early argument, Edward Schiappa calls attention to the lack of unifying traits needed to form a sophistic coherent whole and the use of the word rhetoric as never having been used by the sophists, concluding that it is a "fiction . . . we can do without" (Schiappa "Oasis" 7—16). Although well-argued, this view did not take account of the similarities between and the pioneering contributions of the sophists. Schiappa himself has revised his position since, now positing "sophistic rhetorics" as a more useful and accurate denomination for the diversity of projects labeled sophistic (Enos 683). Andrea Greenbaum commends such "creative imaginings [for] allow[ing] contemporary scholars to critique certain notions of disciplinarity, since the discursive nature of sophistic discourse makes it a

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<sup>1</sup> Hakan Tell disputes this view in his recent article "Wisdom for Sale?" and contends that "factual details regarding fees and monetary rewards for instruction is very scant" (30).

creative theoretical tool in which to redefine and explore the epistemological boundaries of disciplinary structures” (2). These “creative imaginings” that are human categories, classifications, and constructs could all be called “fictions” created by communities of like-minded peers. Most philosophers, Richard Rorty among them, however, agree that we are manipulated by phenomenological forces that are quite “real.” For my purpose, I presuppose both human shared realities and a series of shared goals, qualities, and congruous objectives in the sophists’ teachings.

The most important issue for many sophists was their common goal of encouraging *arête* by sustaining certain practices and methods, which I explore below. Most scholars agree that the sophists created the conditions that may lead to virtuous results. The English rendition of this concept is virtue or excellence in political affairs. One of the primary requirements of political *arête* is rhetorical dexterity, by which I mean the ability to speak/write, think, and read critically, analytically, and evaluatively. Although the sophists did not use the word rhetoric to describe what they were teaching, they inevitably imparted rhetorical skills, regardless of the appellation used, for these are essential components of political *arête*. In order to be successful in political affairs, an individual must be skilled in arguing, have a sound understanding of, and think critically about political issues. The sophists teaching methods covered all these requirements, by focusing on helping students “to analyze cases, to think on their feet, to ask probing questions, to speak eloquently, and to pose counterarguments to an opponent’s case” (Herrick 37). All of these skills are part of rhetorical power. I use the word power deliberately to indicate the stakes that are at play in acquiring and having mastery of rhetoric, as I discuss below.

Other qualities shared by all sophists emerge clearly in numerous more accounts. These commonalities appear when one looks at those contributions that the sophists were the first to introduce. Werner Jaeger, in his seminal work on Greek *paideia*, for example, declares that sophists were the first to give “wide publicity and influence to the claim that *arête* should be founded on knowledge” (*Paideia*, Vol I, 289). Furthermore, Jaeger calls Isocrates, one if not the greatest educator in Western humanism, a sophist, asserting that Isocrates “defended sophistic education” and “was really a genuine sophist: indeed, it was he who brought the sophistic movement in education to its culminating point” (*Paideia*, Vol. III, 48). *The Cambridge Ancient History* includes a section on sophistic rhetoric, further judging the lectures and declamations of the most prominent sophists “as the most important single distinguishing mark of the Greek culture of this period” (Bowman et al 900). Even the authors of a traditional work as this one identify shared qualities among the sophists, identifying them as their status as public teachers, their fee-charging, and their public declamations (900—01). Omar Swartz offers a useful list of the commonalities among the sophist, identifying the following six qualities as being shared by all the sophists: the teaching of *arête*, the emphasis on rhetoric, the charging for their services, the eristic tendency of their teaching, the tendency to engage in displays of epideictic oratory, and their ability to perorate on any subject (68—69). Apart from the charging for their services, these qualities are all necessary for a citizen to engage fully in the political life of a democratic society. As I see it, the sophists encouraged political *arête* through rhetorical practice, the great forerunners of Isocrates.

The rhetorical value of sophistry is manifold but becomes of primary importance in a free society. A democracy entails free speech which requires rhetoric. That the

sophists, as teachers of rhetoric, appeared at the same time that democracy developed is no surprise, for the driving force of democracy, at least in theory, is the inclusion of all people in the political process. In order to participate, people must have the skills necessary to understand rhetorical power, for whether anyone likes it or not, rhetoric is omnipresent and pervasive, affecting every aspect of human interaction, particularly those aspects that can control the means of access. I contend that no aspect of human life and interaction is free of rhetoric. Friedrich Nietzsche, in his *On Rhetoric and Language*, advocates this position, proffering that,

[i]t is not difficult to prove that what is called ‘rhetorical,’ as a means of conscious art, had been active as a means of unconscious art in language and its development. . . . There is obviously no unrhetorical ‘naturalness’ of language to which one could appeal; language itself is the result of purely rhetorical arts. The power to discover and to make operative that which works and impresses, with respect to each thing . . . is, at the same time, the essence of language; the latter is based just as little as rhetoric is upon that which is true, upon the essence of things. Language does not desire to instruct, but to convey to others a subjective impulse and its acceptance. (21)

Rhetoric, then, is, consciously or unconsciously, a fact of human life, in which communication is in effect rhetoric. As Kenneth Burke has noted, rhetoric “is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation

in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (*Rhetoric* 43). In a tyranny or any other form of repressive political system, rhetoric, while still existing, becomes subjected to coercive force.

Every eligible individual began taking part in the political process when democracy emerged. To this end, G. B. Kerferd credits the sophists with “[producing] for the first time in history a theoretical basis for participatory democracy” (Kerferd 144). Several scholars consider democracy as a utopia, having never been realized, neither in its birthplace 2,500 years ago nor in the United States today, for now as then access to democracy restricts those who participate. Nevertheless, democracy is the current political organization of this country and does offer considerable opportunities, providing individuals with the possibility of self-determination, independence, and personal development. The challenge, then, lies in enabling individuals, particularly students, to recognize and employ these opportunities. Sophistry offers an approach for the epistemological—or gnoseological, to use Untersteiner’s terminology—questioning that could lead to transformation and innovation needed to take advantage of democratic opportunities more fully. Untersteiner’s essay addresses the continual questioning despite the different conclusions of the sophists on social issues as part of what makes them similar.

Historically, the value of sophistry in terms of pedagogy lies in its universalizing of education and leveling of human ability. Education before the sophists did not go beyond what in today’s terms would be primary school (Marrou 76). The sophists were the first to recognize the importance of higher education and human development, “the great forerunners . . . the first teachers of advanced education, appearing at a time when

Greece had known nothing but sports-trainers, foremen, and, in the academic field, humble school masters” (79). In fact, Marrou believes that the only thing the sophists had in common was their profession as teachers, the “first teachers of advanced education” (79). Jaeger goes as far as recognizing them as having founded pedagogy, indicating that “intellectual culture largely follows the path they marked out” (298). They did indeed revolutionize the way in which human beings in Western civilization viewed education by recognizing the power of each individual in shaping him/herself. “*La rivoluzione pedagogica,*” in Daniele Vignali’s words, “*del movimento sofistico, si origina quindi da una rivalutazione assoluta dell’educazione, a cui si riconosce, per la prima volta nella storia del pensiero occidentale, la possibilità di far nascere in individuo la virtù*” (57). Vignali presents the sophistic movement as a pedagogical revolution that stems from the absolute revaluation of education, which recognizes, for the first time in the history of Western thought, the possibility of inducing virtue within individuals. Education and the fostering of *arête*, therefore, run parallel in the contributions of the sophists.

Furthermore, their questioning of reality, which caused them to be maligned and calumniated by Plato and others with claims to absolute truth, resurface in postmodernist views of the last century or so. In terms of their ontological relativism, they were thousands of years ahead of their time. Two basic tenets of their thought, therefore, are the possibility of teaching *arête* and relativism. Even though the sophists conceived of *arête* as markedly political, as explicitly claimed by Protagoras, Vignali finds another equally important element in their education, asserting that while the majority of scholars agree in considering sophistic education to be almost exclusively political, he views it as having a twofold value: political and ethical (58—59). The ethical component of their

pedagogical practice relates to contemporary rhetorical and composition theory. Vignali and others make a cogent case for this added dimension to sophistic pedagogy.

In terms of pedagogical practice, the sophists added essential and concrete modifications to the revolutionary novelty of the possibility of teaching *arête*. Vignali lists four subjects at the heart of sophistic education: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, and general culture (62). These subjects, however, do not comprise the entire educational system of the sophists. According to Luigi Gallinari, all the teachings of the sophists aimed at the formation of two main human types: 1) the successful individual, able to excel in society and reach elevated political positions, and 2) the new sophist (30). The sophists sought to form an individual constantly striving towards self-improvement and socio-political achievement, an individual able to determine, by way of his/her capacities, the course of his/her life through intellect and words—in Vignali's words, an individual "*dotato di criticità di pensiero, antidogmatico, uno spirito libero abile nel parlare e quindi nel pensare e nell'agire*" (75). In other words, the sophists sought to create an anti-dogmatic individual equipped with critical thinking, a free spirit skillful in thinking and taking action. To do so, they aimed to instill a critical awareness and a sense of radical doubt toward knowledge and traditional values, clearing the way for their pedagogical practice, by refuting the rooted and dogmatic beliefs of their students (Vignali 74). These practices have a clear political relevance and importance within a democratic system. To add ethical dimension to *arête*, Vignali maintains that the sophists believed in an exact correspondence existed between thought, speech, and action, based on the "Anonymous Iamblichii" (77). Lastly, these pedagogical goals can be reached only

if the student has some sort of natural predisposition and a passion toward learning. Therefore, the sophists had to be able to foster a desire for learning in the student.

Achieving these goals, however, remains challenging. Untersteiner's essay explores the social conditions that initiated sophistic inquiry in classical Greece. Untersteiner argues that the critical social conditions created issues and raised questions so pressing that they had to be addressed in order to be surpassed. These conditions were groundbreaking and unprecedented to the point that they sparked an innovative consciousness which introduced an inquisitive mindset. The social conditions in twenty-first-century United States do not seem less urgent and pressing than those in classical Athens. I now turn to the major issues that Untersteiner identifies during the *pentecontaetia* and how these may relate to current social conditions.

### **Current Social Conditions and the (Sophistic) Composition Classroom**

One of the primary objectives of education in general and composition in particular should be to promote a questioning mindset within students—a kind of epistemological, gnoseological even, to use Untersteiner's term, self-reflexive turn. This kind of thinking enables individuals not only to question their social conditions but also to promote beneficial effects in terms of our multicultural postmodern condition. Bruce McComiskey speaks of Gorgias as an “ontological skeptic” and an “epistemological relativist” (34—35). These gnoseological concepts may help students achieve a questioning outlook toward social conditions and by extension writing. In terms of education, a questioning mindset helps students become critical citizens who can participate in the political process and perhaps enact change. In terms of composition, such a mindset is necessary

for critical thinking and analytical writing. Of the sophists' primary contributions to Western thought and pedagogy, a speculative attitude toward knowledge and the existing state of affairs ranks among the most revolutionary and useful approaches in a global social reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One way of fostering a questioning mindset within students is to examine the basic premises of Western civilization as a means of understanding both the current social conditions and the import of rhetoric and composition.

The ideas that appeared and circulated in Ancient Greece are by and large the bedrock of Western civilization, informing and characterizing their contemporary Western social manifestations in terms of science, politics, philosophy, literature, drama, art, and architecture. The achievements of our Greek progenitors continue to shape our Western world as paradigms we aspire to equal to this day. Although origins are inherently suspect, for they presuppose a particular view of the world, certain developments in Ancient Greece mark both a definite shift from former ways of viewing the world and the institution of the principles, values, and ideals still very much in place today. In line with this thinking, David Fleming states that teachers of composition “would do better to reconnect the word with its pedagogical past, where it referred to a complex and rewarding course of study whose end was the competent and sensitive rhetor” (173). Returning to these origins, therefore, can facilitate understanding and questioning of contemporary social situations while serving as a pedagogical tool within the composition classroom.

The study of the origins of Western civilization fits naturally within the composition classroom curriculum. For one, composition can be considered the modern-

day incarnation of rhetoric, which also originates as a systematic field of study in Ancient Greece. As with any field of study, revisiting the history of the subject helps the pedagogical process by contextualizing the present materialization of the subject. In particular, studying the inception of classical rhetoric serves the dual purpose of 1) exposing students to the historical events and circumstances that inaugurated Western civilization and 2) introducing the concept of rhetoric and its bearings upon human existence. That students are largely unaware of Greek history is to be expected; however, I find it curious, to say the least, that most students, and indeed most individuals, do not even know the basic meaning of the word rhetoric, except perhaps in a vague way and in its negative connotation, despite the intrinsic role of rhetoric within a democratic political system and the pervasiveness of rhetoric within human communities, particularly in those based on freedom of speech.

Indeed, I believe that this very unawareness lies at the root of the lack of questioning and examination of the social. By exploring the beginning of Western civilization particularly in relation to rhetoric, students can discover the roots of current social conditions and the power of rhetoric within society. These roots can expose themselves as assumptions that underlie the present. The importance of historical knowledge for the understanding of the present hardly needs explanation. Exposing students to the historical events of Ancient Greece favors the understanding of not only the circumstances that gave rise to rhetoric and but also the conditions that initiated many of the values and aspirations in place today, such as individualism and political equality. More importantly, perhaps, revisiting the historical social conditions can play a role in determining what is at stake in knowing rhetoric and its power. In order to understand

and question their social conditions, individuals in general and students in particular must be aware of the derivation of the present social organization. Because the ideas that developed at this time influence current social dynamics, I believe that exploring these historical origins of Western civilization particularly in terms of rhetoric should be part of the composition curriculum. This historical introduction and basic premise of rhetorical education includes the sophists and the role ascribed to them in Untersteiner's "*Le origini*" as questioners of social issues. Revisiting the social issues of Ancient Greece and the sophists' questioning of them may promote a similar approach to contemporary issues without inciting the common student resistance to composition.

Student resistance to writing instruction is a well-known phenomenon. Karen Kopelson calls attention to this tendency, arguing that "[a]s composition theorizing and teaching have evolved in more cultural-studies-based or 'critical' directions, student resistance has evolved from a rudimentary resistance to the writing course per se into resistance to the writing course as 'inappropriately' politicized" (116—117). Composition, more than any other course, she continues, "is expected by students to be without content, to involve little more than impartial instruction in the transferable and neutral skill of writing 'correctly'" (117). A composition course without content, however, in addition to being unattainable since rhetoric necessarily includes content, is also ineffective in terms of encouraging the type of civic engagement, or political *arête* that I am proposing. Kopelson argues that "overtly 'critical' pedagogical approaches may be especially ineffective, and even counterproductive, for the teacher-subject who is immediately *read* by students as belonging to any . . . marginalized constituenc[y]" (118). Although Kopelson discusses student resistance particularly in terms of "marginalized"

teachers, I extend her argument to include composition instructors calling for social questioning because many students consider instructors, especially composition ones, as bookish academics promoting their own liberal views.

Kopelson theorizes “an alternative critical pedagogy” that draws on the Ancient Greek “concept of ‘cunning,’ what the Greeks called *mêtis*” as a countermeasure for resistance (118, 130). This approach, which Kopelson labels the “performance of neutrality,” can become “a rhetorically savvy, politically responsive and responsible pedagogical tactic that . . . minimizes [student] resistance” (118). Drawing on classical rhetoric, its beginning in Ancient Greece, and the role of the sophists in questioning the state of affairs can serve as such a *mêtis* to advance student interest in contemporary issues and the thinking/writing process around these issues without inciting the common resistance students have toward composition.

The social issues that captivated the sophists and are the subject of Untersteiner’s essay may function as a pedagogical possibility for such questioning. Some of the social issues that Untersteiner describes are currently occurring in the United States. Untersteiner delineates several social events that took place during the pentecontaetia, positing them as stimulating the development of sophistry. More specifically, the falling of physical barriers between social groups, the expansion of commerce, and the incursion of metics or alien residents broadened the cultural milieu thereby generating new ideas as well as promoting new political and philosophical systems to address them. These social issues resemble many of the issues in the U.S. today: globalization and the World Wide Web not only dissolve barriers between cultures but also introduce new cross-cultural

ideas beyond physical borders. In Ancient Greece, however, they contributed to the dissolution, albeit partial and temporary, of the aristocracy.

The decline of the aristocracy is one of Untersteiner's most important explanations for the development of sophistry. When the aristocracy ceased to control the way in which the public imagination viewed individuals, new areas of freedom arose. The aristocracy responded by grasping on to traditional values and eternal ideas, which provided fertile ground for sophistic interpretation. Untersteiner argues that the preeminence of the collective interest decreased individualism, due to the universal ideas that impeded any autonomous gesture. The antithesis community-individual was a momentous issue in the age democracy appeared.

Jaeger underscores the importance of this issue, stating that "the relation between a great intellectual personality and the community in which he lived" as "the problem which ceaselessly exercised all philosophers until the city-state passed away," a problem that appeared when "the aristocracy of race had been displaced by the aristocracy of intellect" (289). This problem also receives extensive treatment in an outstanding study by Suzanne Keller on how a human community emerges. She posits the *polis* as the center of public life with the aim of attaining "a just society able to reconcile the contradictory tensions between individual ambition and collective goals" (17). Furthermore, Keller continues:

Not unlike two thousand years later, however, another prominent theme vied with the polis to create familiar and stressful contradictions: the theme of individual glory, as exemplified by the victors in athletic contests. These victors were a

source of pride, since they brought honor to the entire polis, and they were celebrated in song and story. Yet the contests also encouraged a self-aggrandizement and self-centeredness inimical to the sense of community. Eventually, the ‘fierce competition for public honor and a raw, undisguised drive for riches scarcely ever again equaled in ancient times’ came close to destroying the spiritual unity of the polis. (19)

This tension, as Keller announces, survives to this day. According to Jaeger, however, “the individual and the community fight their last battle” in Plato’s educational state (*Paideia*, Vol 1, xxvi). In Jaeger’s discussion of education in the perfect state, “[t]he ruling class is meant to serve the happiness of the whole community, and the happiness of the community can be ensured only if everyone does his own work and nothing else” (*Paideia*, Vol 2, 236). Individualism, in Plato, becomes “a new disease of personality” (336). By addressing the issue of community versus individual in Ancient Greece, composition instructors can create an opportunity for analysis of the current state of this ancient problem.

This analysis can be enacted in various ways. I turn to Kenneth Burke and his discussion in *A Rhetoric of Motives* regarding individuals being their own audience. He argues that,

[s]uch considerations make us alert to the ingredient of rhetoric in all *socialization*, considered as *moralizing* process. The individual person, striving to form him[her]self in accordance with the communicative norms that match the

cooperative ways of his society, is by the same token concerned with the rhetoric of identification. To act upon him[/her]self persuasively, [s/]he must variously resort to images and ideas that are formative. Education ('indoctrination') exerts such pressure upon him[/her] from without; [s/]he completes the process from within. If [s/]he does not somehow act to tell him[/her]self (as his[/her] own audience) what the various brands of rhetorician have told him, his persuasion is not complete. Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within. (39)

I quote at length because this line of reasoning exemplifies the consequence of rhetoric within the community-individual antithesis. In order to succeed, rhetoric must consider audience. As a result, individuals must partake in self-persuasion in order for values, beliefs, and eternal ideas—such as those the aristocracy latched onto when its power was threatened—to operate successfully.

Composition instructors can enable students to formulate correlations by turning to cultural studies. As discussed above, Vignali considers general culture as one of the four subjects of sophistic education. General culture is the object of analysis of cultural studies, which takes on every aspect of social conditions. Henry Giroux, as he extensively discusses in a number of books and articles, considers the media to be the strongest pedagogical force in our society, manipulating perception to maintain the current power structure. Students can analyze social matters such as the ones Untersteiner identifies as having generated sophistry. Individualism, community, and (current equivalents of)

aristocratic dynasties, among others, lend themselves to the kind of analysis composition asks of students.

While the aristocracy may seem an entity of the past, mammoth income discrepancies exist in contemporary society. Untersteiner argues that despite the innovative democratic currents, the people remained inclined toward ancient traditions and recognized the superiority and ability of the aristocracy as guides for the people. Thus, the aristocracy retained its power as the heads of the democracy. As an instance of *mêtis*, exposing students to the discrepancies and contradictions in Ancient Greece may trigger a similar analysis of our current state of affairs. To carry out such analysis and seek possible correlations, students can turn to investigating current social dynamics. Even a cursory glance at the social dynamics currently in place reveals a kind of postmodern aristocracy. These days, as James Berlin points out, we “speak of the income of the ‘bottom ninety percent’ of the population” (122). This type of aristocracy, however, proves particularly insidious, as concealed if not more so as that identified by Untersteiner in Ancient Greece.

Students can examine cultural industries to find representations of individualism and community and the role of the media in advancing cultural standards and democratic values. The role and purpose of the media within a democratic political system is paramount and an instance of general culture. The media are supposed to protect and advance democratic values. In a way, the media should pose questions regarding social conditions very much like the sophists did two and a half millennia ago. Michael McChesney has written extensively regarding the connection between democracy and the media, finding the media to be largely unsatisfactory. In *The Problem of the Media*, he

describes the current situation, stating that “around the globe media systems are primarily controlled by a small number of wealthy firms or individuals, who use their power to advance their political agenda” (224). In discussing the political nature of the problem of the media in democratic societies, he elucidates that “virtually all theories of self-government are premised on having an informed citizenry, and the creation of such an informed citizenry is the media’s province” (17). Without the possibility of non-commercially interested platforms, such as would have been the *agora* in ancient Greece, the voices of groups of thinkers such as the sophists have no chance of being heard; therefore, although such opinions are definitely occurring in a number of subcultures, they are certainly not broadcast and therefore cannot compete with those circulated by the mass media in our society. Students can thus compare the issues dealt with by the sophists as expressed by Untersteiner in a contemporary context.

I am arguing for a composition theory that takes account of current social conditions, that looks at our society critically, asking questions, as the sophists did, regarding the status of our social reality. By exploring the inconsistencies in our social condition and political situation, students develop an awareness that the media and a largely absent public sphere do not provide. This goal can be achieved in many ways, one of which is by analyzing historical circumstances and identifying the inconsistencies of the time to draw parallels to the present. Omar Swartz offers an example from the birthplace of our current political system:

[s]erious contradictions existed in Ancient Athens between its self-image and its behaviors. . . . [T]he purpose of pointing out these contradictions is not to laugh at

the people of the past or to condemn them from our ‘superior’ moral position. Rather, the point is to recognize that all societies have their contradictions and that our critical energies need to be spent on learning to recognize our own contradictions. We cannot go back and ‘improve’ the Ancient Greek society, nor can we ameliorate the suffering of its victims. What we *can* do is to recognize that the contradictions between our own self-images and our behaviors contribute to our own legacy of suffering. By acknowledging this point, we can direct our critical actions toward reducing the suffering that we have some control over.

(29—30)

I interpret this passage as pointing to the ethnocentrism (and ethnologies) inherent in everyone. The most anyone can do is to be aware of his/her own ethnocentrism. I find paradoxical that the views of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle have survived in conjunction with democracy, for these philosophers were explicitly opposed to democracy. Marrou goes as far as calling Socrates “the mouthpiece of the old aristocratic tradition” and at “the center of an anti-democratic clique” (91). These discrepancies can function as a springboard for students to question their own social conditions.

Rather than espousing one pedagogical theory over another, I propose a pedagogy that deploys any of them according to the aim of discourse, as envisioned by James Kinneavy and others. Exploding the either/or binary, I argue for both/and approach to composition theory, whereby each composition theory becomes useful based on the purpose the student rhetor has. More specifically, composition theory of Peter Elbow and other expressionists, rather than be embraced or rejected, becomes useful for assignments

in which the aim is expression of feelings. Likewise, a cognitivist approach becomes useful when the aim is referential, to borrow Kinneavy's term, in technical or scientific discourse, while the various socio-epistemic and rhetorical theories aid the invention of a persuasive aim.

### **Composition Teachers as Sophists**

The university, the humanities, English studies, and particularly rhetorical subjects such as composition and writing remain some of the few places in which individuals can practice and learn the rhetorical abilities necessary for them to be active members in a democratic society. The United States today not only considers itself the ultimate incarnation of democracy but also claims to wish this form of government among the purportedly less fortunate non-democratic nations, as made clear within the primary foreign policy interests of the U.S. However, as Omar Swartz argues,

If democracy has any rationale at all, it is that the more people who contribute to the logos, the richer our understanding will be of our political realities. This is one of the reasons why, functionally speaking, we cannot really characterize the United States as a 'democracy,' as there is not much of a commitment to competing logos. (Swartz 67)

I argue that the United States is not fulfilling most democratic ideals, and as modern-day sophists, composition instructors are among the few voices that can encourage students to

examine and question the existing state of affairs, both as a rhetorical/composition exercise and as an ethical/civic responsibility.

Critical literacy requires this type of questioning, for a society that ceases to be interrogative becomes passive to the representations presented by powerful media conglomerates. Ideas such as those of the sophists should be a central part of a democracy through the media. However, as the work of Robert McChesney reveals, the major role which the media should play within the realization of a democratic society remains extremely lacking. In ancient Athens, citizens would argue and persuade one another in favor of certain routes of action over others; in the U.S. today that role remains outside of the daily life of the vast majority of people. In ancient Athens, when “reality” came to be questioned, new answers emerged; in the U.S. today, “reality” is rarely questioned beyond the inner circles and conversations of academics and underground subcultures. The type of speculative discourse offered by the sophists is exactly what lacks in our democratic society today, particularly in the U.S., although other industrialized countries share this feature. The sophists can be viewed as public intellectuals and compared both to modern day university scholars and composition instructors. I argue for the importance of reestablishing the role of the public intellectual, both in the composition classroom and the society at large.

The sophists carried out myriad types of social questioning. Catherine Osborne maintains that the sophists “ask society to question its *raison d'être*, its political beliefs, its moral values, its religious beliefs, its educational system, its legal codes, and its codes of etiquette” (131). Untersteiner considers all these issues in his germinal essay, presenting them as the impetus behind the development of the sophistic movement. As

the originators of Western *paideia* and rhetoric, the goals of the sophists should coincide with those of composition teachers. Sharon Crowley discusses the similarities and differences between the sophists and teachers of writing:

Sophistic pedagogy bore one striking similarity to that of contemporary writing teachers in that the Sophists instructed their students in discursive practice rather than focusing on the pursuit of abstract knowledge for its own sake. . . . But the educational practices of the Sophists were markedly different from our own in one important respect: Modern teachers do not often think of themselves as professional participants in political or social issues. (“Plea” 330)

She argues, rather, that “those who are engaged in teaching discursive practice are always engaged in Sophistry; and, because of this, that they cannot escape the public aspect of their work” (330). Composition teachers in particular, as well as more generally teachers of English, should embrace this objective.

I agree with Berlin that English Studies “has a special role in the democratic educational mission” (54). A major way of enacting democratic principles necessarily falls in the hands of Rhetoric and Composition scholars and instructors as modern-day rhetoricians and sophists. Already in the mid-nineties, James Berlin noted that “Postmodernism in the academy has led to challenges in our understanding of the subject, language, epistemology, history, and the relations of all these to each other” (47—48). The shift he identifies is very similar to the one that occurred in classical Greece and which is discussed in Untersteiner’s essay in terms of the issues he identifies such as

individualism, gnoseology, and constitutional crises. Berlin goes further by discussing knowledge from a democratic political perspective:

knowledge is a good that ought to serve the interest of the larger community as well as individuals. . . . It must be situated, however, in relation to larger economic, social, political and cultural considerations. Students must learn to locate the beneficiaries and the victims of knowledge, exerting their rights as citizens in a democracy to criticize freely those in power. (52)

Similarly, Henry Giroux echoes this opinion, for him the goal of education in a democratic society is to impart “critical literacy” in our students. He argues that “[i]n a world marked by increasing poverty, unemployment, and diminished social opportunities, educators must vindicate the crucial connection between culture and politics in defending public and higher education as sites of democratic learning and struggle” (37). These issues increasingly continue to affect our students. Pedagogy, rhetoric, and democracy are interrelated concepts that comprise the current historical condition of the composition teacher and his/her work preparing students.

Henry Giroux argues that providing the knowledge, skills, and values to address the most pressing questions of our time is a vital element of this mission, corroborating the role of the sophists. He believes that in order to educate for “critical citizenship and civic courage,” the role of academics as engaged public intellectuals be reformulated (37). Similarly, Untersteiner considers the philosophy of the sophists as a “speculative mirror of the social forms of the human spirit” (552), arguing that the philosophical and

rationalist idea of community constitutes the fundamental problem for Protagoras and many other sophists. One way to achieve this modification in the role of composition instructors is to add sophistic rhetorics to traditional Aristotelian rhetoric. According to Jane Sutton “Aristotle reformulates rhetoric and renders it the art for preserving ‘what is’” adding that Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* “perpetuates and maintains the established order” (153). The sophists’ rhetoric, she continues, “is a complex way of thinking that integrates metaphor-possible-individualistic-generative-radical into rhetoric” which can lead to “the actualization of human potential” (153—54). As teachers of rhetoric, composition instructors should embrace this element of their sophistic ancestry.

The resemblance between the sophists and composition instructors today also lies in the place they occupy in society. Much in the same way that Plato and his followers attempted, successfully albeit, to soil the importance of rhetoric and its primary supporters, the sophists, the media in modern day U.S. do nothing to encourage citizen rhetorical education and participation in democratic practice. While many composition theorists argue that the composition classroom is not the place for politics, I contend that even though the composition classroom may not be an ideal site, it is one of the only sites for students to be exposed and instructed in this kind of necessary rhetorical preparation. Further, politics is always already present, whether it is acknowledged or not. As James Berlin persuasively argues in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*, “given the democratic political commitments of the United States, it is as impossible for us to separate literary and rhetorical texts from political life as it was for the citizens of ancient Athens” (xiii). Democratic states should not merely pay lip service to the words “freedom” and “liberty” but rather should “conceptualize these words in a

concrete freedom, one based in a mutual respect between human beings. In a democratic society, there is no room for racism, sexism, homophobia, a state religion, and a material inequality among social classes” (Swartz 30). Gerard Hauser adds that “Scholars and teachers of rhetoric can, indeed must, reclaim their birthright by reasserting the centrality of rhetoric to democratic life in the twenty-first century” (13). The composition instructor ought to promote the conditions of such political and civic engagement because of the role that rhetoric plays in the democratic system.

The goal for composition instructors is to recover, discuss, and encourage a sense of *arête* in a postmodern sense. For David Fleming, the aim of rhetorical training is “to become a certain kind of person, one who has internalized the art of rhetoric,” incorporating theory and practice but “subordinating both to the moral *and* intellectual development of the student, who is seen primarily as a future citizen in a community of free and equal citizens” (178—79). In this view, rhetoric is “inextricably involved in the character-forming project of education” (178). By encouraging students to be gnoseologically critical, composition instructors as sophists can contribute to promoting a postmodern *arête*. Being gnoseologically critical does not deny the existence of truth; rather, in McComiskey’s words, it calls attention to the “historical and empirical contingency of truth” (59). As most Sophists would argue, knowledge and truth mutate according to context and times.

Untersteiner’s contribution, like all others, may be questioned and superseded, revisited and appreciated, misunderstood and reinterpreted. Despite everything it may undergo, one constant remains, and that is that social conditions create truth/s. Everything changes, yet nothing changes. This apparent and inherent paradox encloses within itself

and discloses a truth that the sophists held dear. My main point is that what the sophists taught, rhetoric, is not in itself good or evil. Much like food, drugs, television, and any other substance or practice that can be abused, rhetoric comes to life and can be put to good or bad use. In itself rhetoric is nothing and everything: nothing for, as Socrates makes Gorgias admit in the *Gorgias*, it does not have a conventional subject of study; and everything for it covers every subject which one can discuss when using it, as well as its own theoretical underpinning. Undeniably, humans use rhetoric every day, for it is what drives human identity and community. The pedagogy I have sketched and the role of composition instructors as sophists aim to help students go from being unaware rhetors, understood as those who practice rhetoric, to being conscious rhetoricians, as in those who study and know rhetoric, so as to not be victims of it, for undeniably, those who know rhetoric in Western democracies, such as attorneys, advertisers, and politicians/speech writers, are rhetoricians who hold disproportionate power over those who do not know it. David Fleming argues that “[t]o revitalize rhetorical education, we need to recapture this focus on the language user as citizen” (184). I believe that the sophists and composition instructors as the sophists’ postmodern counterparts can and should take on this challenge.

By translating a treatise about the social origins of sophistry, I make a case for the reinsertion of this ancient profession and its primary principles into the composition classroom. Rhetoric and Composition scholars have a hefty mission in their hands, for not only do we teach young students who have many other concerns but also we teach a subject that has fallen into disregard and is not considered valuable by most students. Whatever one what may say about sophistry, whether one agrees with its tenets or not, a

form of thought or group of thinkers that challenges, educates, and most of all, perhaps, questions the current state of affairs is not only beneficial but absolutely necessary for a democratic society that fulfils even only the most basic elements of democracy. I hope that this dissertation will make not merely another contribution but a call for the revival of such thought in our composition classrooms and society.

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