

JOHN POULAKOS

NIETZSCHE'S RECEPTION OF THE SOPHISTS

This essay is part of a larger project concerned with the history of sophistical rhetoric. Treating our present understanding of the Greek Sophists as the result of several critical receptions from Plato to Lyotard, I examine Nietzsche's reception in light of the understandings he inherited from his predecessors and the treatment his reception has received in the hands of his successors. Why Nietzsche? At least from a theoretical point of view, Nietzsche is interesting because rather than simply adding yet another perspective on the Sophists to the total horizon of their critico-historical understanding he calls into question all the previous receptions, from Plato to Zeller, that were prevalent during his time. In so doing, he problematizes for us the theory of reception articulated by Hans Robert Jauss¹. According to Jauss, the proper understanding of a past work depends not only on the reader's thorough familiarity with that work but also on his/her acquaintance with all the criticism available from the time of the work's publication to the present. As will be shown, Nietzsche's reading of the Sophists renders this view highly problematic by insisting that a particular critical perspective is rarely an innocent gesture--more often than not it is suspect because it serves disciplinary as well as institutional interests. But if this is so, a reader's understanding of a work requires that (s)he go beyond the work and the criticism and inquire into the interests that they sought to serve. According to this line of thought, the history of a work's reception may not so much designate parameters within which the work may be properly understood as stand in the way of a reader's understanding of it. As such, a reader may be better off departing from rather than following the "tradition". Nietzsche is peculiarly qualified to address the perils of normatively controlled intellectual production because he broke away from the academic scene and the discipline of

¹ Hans Robert Jauss, Towards an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982,

philology². As one might expect, what he had to say about the interpretations of his predecessors and contemporaries has rendered many of their positions highly vulnerable. Because he has embarrassed the academic orthodoxy, whose ideological base is an amalgam of Platonism and Aristotelianism, he has been labeled a heretic and his thinking on the Sophists has been left out of account in the more recent commentaries of such prominent academic scholars of antiquity as Jaeger, Untersteiner, Havelock, Guthrie, Kerferd, and Rankin³.

Nietzsche's reception of the Sophists extends beyond what he actually said about them and includes his insights into the Hellenic culture, his remarks on classical rhetoric, and his critique of philology as well as morality. Of course, all these areas cannot be covered comprehensively in a short journal article. But even if space were not an issue, I would not attempt to be exhaustively thorough--such would amount to "a complete silencing of [Nietzsche's] personality"⁴. As he did in his Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, I will focus on those points in his work "which constitute a slice of personality and hence belong to that incontrovertible, non-debatable evidence which it is the task of history to preserve"⁵. But beyond my attempt to imitate Nietzsche's approach to the past, the points I have chosen to emphasize are warranted if one assumes that a) the Sophists' principal concern was rhetoric, b) rhetoric shapes and is shaped by the culture in which it is produced, c) sophistic rhetoric is, properly

²For a discussion on the ways in which disciplines control discourse see Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on language, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 215-37.

³ See Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, 3 vols., trans. Gilbert Highet, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.; Mario Untersteiner, The Sophists, trans. Kathleen Freeman, New York: Philosophical Library, 1954; Eric A. Havelock, The Liberal Temper of Greek Politics, London: Jonathan Cape, 1957; W.K.C. Guthrie, The Sophists, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971; G.B. Kerferd, The Sophistic Movement, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; H.D. Rankin, Sophists, Socratics and Cynics, Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1962), 25.

⁵ Ibid., 24.

speaking, an area in the field of classical philology, and d) rhetoric tells people what they should and should not do. In this paper, I submit that Nietzsche's reception is more persuasive than that of other commentators because, unlike them, he is loyal to antiquity, not to a specific discipline or to the institution of higher education. This means that instead of "studying and placing" the Sophists, he adopts and invokes them.

I

Because Nietzsche's reception of the Sophists came in the wake of the receptions of Hegel, Grote, and Zeller, and because what he has to say is not only an interpretation of some classical texts but also a response to the receptions of others, it is important to portray the tradition that preceded him. First Hegel. During Hegel's time, sophistry was "a word of ill-repute" signifying that "by false reasoning, some truth is either refuted and made dubious, or something false is proved and made plausible"⁶. Against this prevailing understanding, Hegel undertook "to consider . . . from the positive and properly speaking scientific side, what was the position of the Sophists in Greece." To do so, he proposed "to put [the] evil significance of sophistry] on one side and to forget it" (354).

According to Hegel, the Sophists represent a natural (logical) sequel to pre-Socratic thought. As such, he posits, they understood Anaxagoras' principle of nous (Notion) as thought and applied it "to worldly objects generally, and with it penetrated all human relations" (354). Now when the Notion is applied to actuality, the result is culture. The Sophists made culture "the general aim of education" (355) by teaching people to investigate rather than simply believe (356), "to exercise thought as to what should have authority for them" (357). For Hegel, the innovation of the Sophists lay in their attempt to move their contemporaries from mythos to logos. As such, they taught that critical thought is a better guide than the oracle, custom, passion, and the feelings of the moment (355-6).

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lectures in the History of Philosophy, 3 vols., trans. E.S. Haldane (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1892), 1:32. Page numbers of subsequent citations from Hegel's Lectures appear in the text.

Hegel argues that insofar as the Sophists were concerned with thought qua thought their culture was culture in philosophy; but insofar as they applied thought to the manifold world of actualities, their culture was also culture in eloquence. The philosophical aspect of their enterprise focused on what constitutes power "amongst men and in the State" (357) while the rhetorical aspect focused on the ways in which power can be acquired (358). Asserting that "[t]hat man is powerful who can deduce the actions of men from the absolute ends which move them," Hegel posits that the Sophists were "speculative philosophers" because they taught "what is the mainspring of the world." Their speculations led to a widespread consideration "of that which is involved in the moral world and which satisfies man." Before the advent of the Sophists, people are said to have been satisfied to conform to ordinary morality and "to obey law as an authority and external necessity." But sophistic teachings created in man the desire "to satisfy himself in himself, to convince himself, through his reflection, of what is binding upon him, what is his end and what he has to do for this end" (357). In this way, one's impulses and desires were construed as a source of power; and only inasmuch as one afforded them satisfaction could he become satisfied (357-8). For Hegel, the Sophists "taught how these powers could be moved in empirical man." Their instrument in this endeavor was rhetoric, which "teaches how circumstances may be made subject to such forces; it even makes use of the wrath and passions of the hearer in order to bring about a conclusion" (emphasis added). Thus, Hegel notes, "the Sophists were more especially the teachers of oratory." This means that they concentrated on eloquence, which seeks "to show the manifold points of view existing in a thing, and to give force to those which harmonize with what appears to me to be most useful; it thus is the art of putting forward various points of view in the concrete case, and placing others rather in the shade" (358). As masters of eloquence, the Sophists could keep in mind a wealth of categories (topoi) and turn subjects around and consider them from many angles (359). This enabled them "to say something of everything, to find points of view in all" (356).

For Hegel, the Sophists' lessons were founded on subjective rationalism, a doctrine that led to the realization that "everything could be proved" by means of arguments and counterarguments (369). However, he observes, because "arguments for and against can be found for everything" (368), the Sophists' students often tried "to

deduce any conclusion required by others or by themselves" (368-9). In light of this subjective appropriation of reason, nothing was secure (369) and everything was made uncertain. Hegel concludes that by activating the principle of subjectivity, the Sophists made a minor but necessary contribution to the history of philosophy: "On account of their formal culture, the Sophists have a place in Philosophy; on account of their reflection they have not. They are associated with Philosophy in that they do not remain at concrete reasoning, but go on, at least in part, to ultimate determinations" (371).

Against Hegel's idealist perspective, George Grote offered a positivistic account of the Sophists, grounding their emergence in the socio-political conditions of the latter part of the 5th century B.C. and explaining their activities in terms of the demands of the practical life of the time. Unlike Hegel, who sought to trace the development and discover the inner logic of Greek thought, Grote was more interested in the close examination of the available evidence, the warranted discernment of the relevant historical facts, and their accurate portrayal. Grote saw no grounds for the traditional equation of Sophist = immoralist. In his mind, Plato had overstated his case and "recent German historians of philosophy" were wrong to assert that Sophistic had "poisoned and demoralized, by corrupt teaching, the Athenian moral character. . ."⁷. Relying on the distinction between the contemplative and the active life, Grote points out that the Sophists, "who taught for active life, were bound by the very conditions of their profession to adapt themselves to the place and the society as it stood" (319). Moreover, they "ministered to certain exigencies, held their anchorage upon certain sentiments, and bowed to a certain morality, actually felt among the living men around them" (355). Refuting the German scholars, Grote writes that their argument made sense only insofar as there was some "proof that the persons styled Sophists had some doctrines, principles, or method, both common to them all and distinguishing them from others. But such a supposition is untrue: there were no such common doctrines, or principles, or method belonging to them [T]hey had nothing in common except their profession, as paid

⁷. George Grote, A History of Greece (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1942), 8:332. Page numbers of subsequent citations from Grote's History appear in the text.

teachers, qualifying young men 'to think, speak, and act' . . . with credit to themselves as citizens" (332-3). Grote linked the Sophists' instruction in rhetoric to the attempt "to multiply the number of competent speakers . . . and thus to create a public of competent hearers and judges" (320). Moreover, he defended them ingeniously against the charge that some of their students misused or abused rhetoric: "If they taught one ambitious man to deceive, they also taught another how to expose his deceit, and a third how to approach the subject on a different side, so as to divert attention, and prevent the exclusive predominance of any one fallacy" (320-1).

Combining Hegel's interest in the internally generated development of Greek thought and Grote's concern with the evidence from the past, Zeller argued that the Sophists represented a school of thought (Sophism) that changed the direction of philosophy. For Zeller, "Sophism is . . . a philosophy of civilization" whose "object is man as an individual and as a social being together with the culture created by him in language, religion, art, poetry, ethics, and politics"⁸. The Sophists differed from the philosophers of the past in that they "made no attempt to penetrate into the first causes of things," followed an empirico-inductive method, and had predominately practical ends in mind (77). Zeller credits the Sophists with the "systematic education of the young"⁹ but goes on to argue that "the great moral danger of the sophistical system of education" lay in its replacement of the pursuit of the truth with the study of persuasion (78). Zeller concludes that "Sophism had by its philosophic scepticism not merely thrown doubts on the possibility of science but by its relativistic theories and the thorough-going individualism of some of its members had shaken the existing authorities of religion, state and the family to their foundations. It had raised more problems

⁸. Eduard Zeller, Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy, trans. L.R. Palmer (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 76. Page numbers of subsequent citations from Zeller's Outlines appear in the text.

⁹. Unfortunately for Zeller, Aristotle is emphatic that a major weakness of the Sophists' educational practice was its unsystematic character. See Aristotle, On Sophistical Refutations, trans. E.S. Forster (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1978), 184a 1.

than it had solved" (92-3). Therefore, the Sophists must be faulted for not offering positive affirmations on the other side of their epistemological and moral denials. Similarly, their doctrine must ultimately be rejected because it is "superficial and one-sided in its nature, and unscientific and dangerous in its results"¹⁰.

II

In light of the above three pre-Nietzschean receptions of the Sophists, we are now in a better position to understand what Nietzsche has to say. But before proceeding, let us consider what he thought of Hegel, Grote, and Zeller. About Hegel he says: "Hegel's success against 'sentimentality' and romantic idealism was due to his fatalistic way of thinking, to his faith in the greater reason on the side of the victorious. . . . [In Hegel we find the] "will to deify the universe and life in order to find repose and happiness in contemplation and in getting to the bottom of things; Hegel seeks reason everywhere--before reason one may submit and acquiesce"¹¹. About Grote, this is what he says: "Grote's tactics in defense of the sophists are false: he wants to raise them to the rank of men of honor and ensigns of morality--but it was their honor not to indulge in any swindle with big words and virtues--" (WP, 429). Finally, this is what he has to say about Zeller: "[M]ost of the learned work done by university philosophers seems to a classicist to be done badly, without scientific rigour and mostly with a detestable tediousness. Who, for example, can clear the history of the Greek philosophers of the soporific miasma spread over it by the learned . . . labours of . . . Zeller? I for one prefer reading

¹⁰. Eduard Zeller, A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. II, trans. S.F. Alleyne (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1881), 504-5.

¹¹. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967). The Will to Power is hereafter abbreviated as WP.

Diogenes Laertius to Zeller, because the former at least breathes the spirit of the philosophers of antiquity, while the latter breathes neither that nor any other spirit"¹².

At face value, Nietzsche's unflattering remarks about Hegel, Grote and Zeller are intriguing pieces of historical gossip. But upon closer examination, they suggest, indeed they contain, telling aspects of his scathing critiques of the false glorification of philosophical reason, the empty promise of scientific history, and the degenerate practices of philology. Nietzsche does not see philosophical reason, as "an independent entity" but rather as "a system of relations between various passions and desires" (WP, 387). Reason for him is neither a thing-in-itself nor "the" defining faculty of human beings; rather, it is a conceptual tool man has devised to further his purposes. When he looks at the whole history of philosophy, Nietzsche sees it permeated with a falsehood according to which "beautiful feelings" are treated as "arguments" and "convictions" as "criteria of truth" (WP, 414). As he argues in The Will to Power, "The aberration of philosophy is that, instead of seeing in logic and the categories of reason means toward the adjustment of the world for utilitarian ends . . . one believed one possessed in them the criterion of truth and reality. . . . The naivete [here] was to take an anthropocentric idiosyncrasy as the measure of things, as the rule of determining 'real' and 'unreal': in short, to make absolute something conditioned" (584).

In light of these comments, it would seem that Nietzsche, who admits his "profound aversion to reposing once and for all in any one total view of the world" (WP, 470), would fault Hegel for giving us a totalized version of early Greek thought, a version, in which the Sophists are merely exponents of predetermined historical processes, or agents expediting the "progressive unfolding of the Universal Mind or Spirit."¹³ For our part, we may join Nietzsche and argue that the Hegelian view renders the Sophists impotent servants of a ceaseless movement toward an inevitable end.

¹². Friedrich Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator" in Untimely Meditations, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 186-7. "Schopenhauer as Educator" is hereafter abbreviated as SE.

¹³. George B. Kerferd, The Sophistic Movement (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6.

Nietzsche also objects to the positivistic ways of George Grote: "Against positivism" [which posits 'There are only facts'] "I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in-itself': perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing" (WP, 481). Before something can become a fact, a certain sense must be projected into it (WP, 556). Positivism, he says elsewhere, is brutal because it forgets what goes into the making of a fact and because it recognizes facts without becoming excited (WP, 120). If one can see that "the ascertaining of facts in general is fundamentally different from creative positing, from forming, shaping, overcoming, [and] willing" (WP, 605), one can easily fault positivism for disregarding the central role human impulses play in the determination of facts.

Clearly, Nietzsche does not accept much of Grote's method of investigation. Nor does he accept much of his conclusion, namely that the Sophists were not immoralists. On the contrary, he proposes that with the Sophists we have a blurring of "the boundary between good and evil" (WP, 427). More precisely, with them we arrive at a "very remarkable moment: the Sophists verge upon the first critique of morality, the first insight into morality:--they juxtapose the multiplicity (the geographical relativity) of the moral value judgments; --they let it be known that every morality can be dialectically justified; i.e., they divine that all attempts to give reasons for morality are necessarily sophistical . . .; they postulate the first truth that a 'morality-in-itself,' a 'good-in-itself' do not exist..." (WP, 428). For Nietzsche, "The Sophists are no more than realists: they formulate the values and practices common to everyone on the level of values--they possess the courage of all strong spirits to know their own immorality" (WP, 429).

Finally, Nietzsche wants nothing to do with Zeller because the latter exemplifies the spiritlessness of the typical scholar of philology. Generally speaking, Nietzsche regards the scholar as "the herd animal in the realm of knowledge--who inquires because he is ordered to and because others have done so before him" (WP, 421). The trouble with most scholars is that they are sober, weary, exhausted, and dried up; as such, they "can receive absolutely nothing from art [of which rhetoric is a special instance], because they do not possess the primary artistic force, the pleasure of abundance: whoever cannot give, also receives nothing" (WP, 801).

When looking at his profession of ten years, Nietzsche sees that "ninety-nine of a hundred should not be philologists at all"¹⁴. Most philologists are in their profession for the wrong reasons. Worse, the "majority draw up the rules of the science in accordance with their own capacities and inclinations; and in this way they tyrannize over the hundredth, the only capable one among them" (P, 3). Nietzsche bemoans the fact that "the inner purpose of philological teaching has been entirely altered; it was at one time material teaching, a teaching that taught how to live; but now it is merely formal" (P, 31). This state of affairs is especially sad because the proper study of antiquity offers us a unique opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the magnificent ideal of excellence supplied by the ancients. As far as Nietzsche is concerned, philology was meant for the rare few who have an affinity with the Greeks, who love the subject, and who approach it so as to understand their own age in terms of the best humanity has hitherto achieved. Sadly, however, the learned scholars of the classics have devised tight controls and strict methodological schemes that ultimately stand in the way of delighting in the study of the greatest epoch in human achievement. One grave consequence of this state of affairs is that "Classical antiquity has become a take-it-or-leave-it antiquity and has ceased to produce a classic and exemplary effect; a fact demonstrated by its disciples, who are truly not exemplary" (SE, 192). The same critique can be advanced against philosophy, a discipline encrusted by centuries-old institutional practices. To illustrate this point, Nietzsche compares Kant, the academic philosopher, and Schopenhauer, a free thinker: "Kant clung to his university, submitted himself to its regulations, retained the appearance of religious belief, endured to live among colleagues and students; so it is natural that his example has produced above all university professors and professorial philosophy. Schopenhauer had little patience with the scholarly castes, separated himself from them, strove to be independent of state and society--this is his example, the model he provides--to begin with the most superficial things" (SE, 137).

¹⁴. Friedrich Nietzsche, We Philologists, trans. J. M. Kennedy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 2. We Philologists is hereafter abbreviated as P.

Judging from Nietzsche's critique of his predecessors, the Sophists cannot be understood and appreciated in terms of the march of thought toward the One true philosophy, or in terms of the historical sociology of their activities, or in terms of the countless details philology has amassed about their life and thought. How then are they to be understood and appreciated? To answer this question, Nietzsche looks at the Greek culture with the eyes of imagination and stands awed: "When the Greek body and soul 'bloomed,' . . . there arose that mysterious symbol of the highest self affirmation and transfiguration of existence that has yet been attained on earth. Here we have a standard by which everything that has grown up since is found too short, too poor, too narrow" (WP, 1051). For Nietzsche, the Sophists are worthy of note and admiration because they grew out of a lively and fertile culture: "The Greek culture of the Sophists had developed out of all the Greek instincts. . . . And it has ultimately shown itself to be right: every advance in epistemological and moral knowledge has reinstated the Sophists." In other words, the Sophists are remarkable because they were true Greeks; by contrast, "when Socrates and Plato took up the cause of virtue and justice, they were Jews or I know not what" (WP, 428). On a more precise note, Nietzsche suggests that because the Greek culture had "an excess of powers at its disposal" it "constitute[d] a hothouse for the luxury cultivation" of great individuals like the Sophists, who owed their greatness "to the free play and scope of [their] desires and to the yet greater power that knows how to press these magnificent monsters into service" (WP, 933).

In his search for the characteristic mark of the Greek culture, Nietzsche finds that eloquence was "the breath of this artistic people"¹⁵. He also observes that "rhetoric [arose] among a people who still live[d] in mythic images and who [had] not yet experienced the unqualified need of historical accuracy: they would rather be persuaded than instructed"¹⁶. In this kind of culture, it is not surprising that "training an individual

¹⁵. Cited in Samuel Ijsseling, Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict, trans. Paul Dunphy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 107.

¹⁶. Carole Blair, "Nietzsche's Lecture Notes on Rhetoric: A Translation", Philosophy and Rhetoric, 16, 2, 1983: 96-7.

to excel in rhetoric was the ultimate goal. . . "17. Comparing the tragic age of the Greeks with his own, Nietzsche laments: "Anyone who seriously wanted to train in Germany as an orator... would find that school nowhere" (SE, 131). Because the contemporary scholars of antiquity have been seduced by scienticism and historicism, imitating the ways of the natural sciences and collecting facts for their own sake, "they have forgotten how to address other men" (P, 73). In a clearly sarcastic note, Nietzsche borrows from Wolf and says that "antiquity was acquainted only with theories of oratory and poetry... that formed real orators and poets, 'while at the present day we shall soon have theories upon which it would be as impossible to build up a speech or a poem as it would be to form a thunderstorm upon a brontological treatise'" (P, 60).

Nietzsche is not only critical of the demise of rhetoric in his own culture; he also states the case for classical oratory in the affirmative. In his own lecture notes for the rhetoric course(s) he taught at Basel, he demonstrates a thorough familiarity with the early rhetorical tradition. Treating rhetoric as a specific difference between antiquity and modernity, he notes that "the best application to which it is put by our moderns is nothing short of dilettantism and crude empiricism"¹⁸. For Nietzsche, rhetoric requires a proper disposition: "one must be accustomed to tolerating the most unusual opinions and points of view and even to take a certain pleasure in their counterplay; one must be able more or less to appreciate the art being applied." This customary tolerance and aesthetic pleasure were fully present in the Greek mind, which sought "to perceive all matters of the intellect, of life's seriousness, of necessities, even of danger, as play"¹⁹. After a brief discussion of Plato's intense dislike of rhetoric and preference for dialectic, Aristotle's definition of rhetoric (in which "even the legein [speaking] is not essential")²⁰. and the subsequent quarrel between rhetoricians and philosophers, Nietzsche puts forth his "sophistical" view of the art of discourse.

¹⁷. Cited by Ijsseling, 107.

¹⁸. Blair, 96.

¹⁹. Blair, 97.

²⁰. Blair, 101.

According to this view, there is no difference between natural and rhetorical language--all language is rhetorical. Dismissing the traditional view according to which rhetorical language is ornate and flowery whereas nonrhetorical language is unadorned and "natural", he explains that the reason ancient literature seems to us "rhetorical" is that "it appeals chiefly to the ear, in order to bribe it." By contrast, "our prose is always to be explained more from writing, and our style presents itself as something to be perceived through reading"²¹. The postulate that all language is rhetorical has a series of implications all of which point straight to the sophistical perspective: a) "the power to discover and to make operative that which works and impresses... is... the essence of language"²²; b) "language does not desire to instruct but to convey to others a subjective impulse and its acceptance"; c) the distance between language and the essence of things is as great as that between rhetoric and that which is true; d) "language is rhetoric because it desires to convey only a doxa [opinion], not an episteme [knowledge]"²³.

Taken by the aesthetic dimension of speech, Nietzsche spends considerable time on the figures and tropes, explaining that even though they are "considered the most artistic means of rhetoric"²⁴, they "are not just occasionally added to words but constitute their most proper nature"²⁵. This is so because language is an inadequate tool of representation and a poor index of the nature of things, including its own: "language never expresses something completely but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent to it [language]"²⁶. Nietzsche does not stop with the aesthetics of rhetoric; he also includes a discussion of the moral dimension of speech. In his mind, the aesthetic and moral complement one another as the listener wants to believe both

²¹. Blair, 106.

²². Blair, 106-7.

²³. Blair, 107. It will readily be recalled that all these implications are points of view Plato attributes to the sophistical rhetorician in the Gorgias.

²⁴. Ibid.

²⁵. Blair, 108.

²⁶. Blair, 107.

"in the earnestness of the speaker and the truth of the thing advocated"²⁷. Belief in the earnestness or sincerity of the speaker can be brought about by the appropriateness of the orator's language whereas belief in the truthfulness of his propositions can be secured by the clarity and purity of the speech. For persuasion to occur, both appropriateness and clarity in language must be exhibited. As he puts it, "Whenever the 'naturalness' is imitated nakedly, the artistic sense of the listeners will be offended; in contrast, whenever a purely artistic expression is sought, the moral confidence of the listener will be shaken. It is a playing at the boundary of the aesthetic and moral: any one-sidedness destroys the outcome"²⁸.

One would have thought that on account of his insights on classical rhetoric in general and sophistical rhetoric in particular Nietzsche would have earned a prominent place in the history of classical scholarship. However, ever since his quarrel with Wilamowitz²⁹ classical philologists, historians of Hellenic philosophy and rhetoricians have either ignored or patronized him³⁰. Consequently, Nietzsche's voice has been silenced. Given to the rigors required by the accepted methods of classical scholarship, and taken by the reductive monism of Plato, the majority of the scholars of antiquity have excommunicated one of their own because he dared question their unquestioned

²⁷. Blair, 114.

²⁸. Blair, 115.

²⁹. Condensing this quarrel, Lloyd-Jones writes: "Wilamovitz asked 'What can we do for philology?'; Nietzsche asked 'What can philology do for us?' To the classicists, with whom Nietzsche's standpoint has so much in common, the ancients had supplied a pattern, an ideal standard of excellence; for the historicists with their relativistic outlook no such thing could exist." Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Nietzsche and the Study of the Ancient World" in James C. O'Flaherty, Timothy F. Sellner, and Robert M. Helm, eds., Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 13.

³⁰. For an extensive discussion on the ways in which Nietzsche's work has been belittled by classicists, see William Arrowsmith, "Nietzsche on Classics and Classicists (Part II)," Arion, 2, no. 2 (Summer 1963), 5-27.

assumptions and because he saw greater truths in the rhetoric of the Sophists³¹. And even if it be granted that no scholar is obligated to take into serious account the views of his/her predecessors, most would agree that simply mentioning the work of a past colleague is harmless. Therefore, those classical philologists who have ignored Nietzsche can be at least faulted for not being thorough in a discipline that glorifies thoroughness.

The only exception is E.R. Dodds, who takes Nietzsche into account in the appendix, the supplement of his critical edition of Plato's Gorgias. Dodds argues that much of what Nietzsche says is espoused by Callicles, Socrates' third opponent in the Gorgias. As he puts it, "there can . . . be little doubt that certain of the most notorious of his own [Nietzsche's] doctrines were in some measure inspired . . . by the anti-Plato in Plato whose persona is Callicles"³². Of the various Nietzschean doctrines, Dodds stresses that of the will to power by saying that Nietzsche made 'respectable' Callicles' position, that is, "power belongs of right, not to casual majorities, and not to some specialized class of technicians, but to the man who is shrewd enough and bold enough to grasp it"³³. Beyond this formulation, Dodds sets out to substantiate the "peculiar historical link"³⁴ between Nietzsche and Callicles by pointing to the similar phraseology between some of the words attributed to Callicles and some Nietzschean views. While suggestive and even useful, these linguistic parallelisms are an argument for the historical continuity of an idea or the ironic frustration of Plato's wish, to eliminate the Sophists, by the Calliclean ghost as reincarnated in Nietzsche. In both cases, however, Dodds' scholarship misses the point. First, if Nietzsche's writings are interesting, they are so not because they coincide with Calliclean doctrines but because they constitute

³¹. In the classicists' hostile disposition toward Nietzsche, Arrowsmith sees an attempt "to cut Nietzsche down to professorial size or to render harmless by ridicule the most radical critique of classical scholarship ever made from within the profession." Arrowsmith, 5.

³². E.R. Dodds, Plato Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), 387.

³³. Dodds, 291.

³⁴. Dodds, 387.

"the most sustained, the deepest and most comprehensive criticism"³⁵ of the Platonic tradition. Second, insofar as Dodds links Nietzsche to Callicles, he leaves the inference open that Nietzschean doctrines are as vulnerable in the hands of Platonists as those of his "blood-brother"³⁶ in the hands of Plato. This inference, however, is unsafe because Nietzsche was not a convenient character in a Platonic dialogue and because he posed questions to which Plato's disciples have had no answers. Thus, if it be true that "Nietzsche laid himself more open than most to genuine misunderstanding", it is not so much on account of "his oracular and highly metaphorical style"³⁷ as on account of the fact that those who have misunderstood him have been faithful Platonists with no tolerance for the sophistical or the Nietzschean ways of rhetoric.

III

Since Hegel's reception, the Sophists have been studied in a light more abundant than Plato's perspective would admit. Even so, they have been forced to fit categories they could not have dreamt of. Nietzsche joined Hegel, Grote and Zeller and others in liberating sophistical rhetoric from Plato's stranglehold but, unlike them, he resisted placing it in the stranglehold of the dominant intellectual schemata of his age. Thus, he did not commit the error of taking the Sophists out of one philosophical trap and into another. Instead, he reinscribed their message onto the palimpsest of the history of rhetoric and specified its meaning for his culture. In so doing, he rendered the Sophists a force to be reckoned with not because they are intrinsically interesting but because what they had to say was especially poignant for the German culture of the late 19th century.

Beyond his familiarity with the Hellenic rhetorical tradition and his own culture, Nietzsche shows throughout his works that rhetoric is an immense power that requires

³⁵. George P. Grant, "Nietzsche and the Ancients: Philosophy and Scholarship," *Dionysius*, 3 (December, 1979): 10.

³⁶. Guthrie, 107.

³⁷. Dodds, 391, n. 1.

and yields a healthy and strong personality, a personality full of exuberant vigor and superabundant cheerfulness. Adopting the sophisticated point of view, he regards rhetoric as an artistic enterprise, sceptical of any and all institutional and disciplinary claims, and committed to freeing people from the chains of fear and convention. For his painful honesty and iconoclastic rhetoric he has been dismissed or marginalized by rigid philologists and dogmatic moralists alike. Yet he refuses to go away. In fact, like rhetoric itself, he is witnessing a renaissance among some post-modern thinkers who, like him, believe that the human world is Rhetorical, *All Too Rhetorical*³⁸.

Dr. John Poulakos is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communications at the University of Pittsburgh. He is currently completing a study of the changes in the conceptualization, function, direction and production of rhetoric in the period (5th-4th B.C.) extending from the Sophists to Isocrates.

³⁸. See Samuel Weber, *Institution and Interpretation*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987; Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985 (especially ch. 3, "A Thing Is the Sum of Its Effects"); Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; Paul de Man, "Nietzsche's Theory of Rhetoric," *Symposium* (Spring, 1974): 33-51.