POLUS, PLATO, AND ARISTOTLE

In the famous opening chapter of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle, in his analysis of σοφία, introduces the important concept ἐμπειρία, 'experience'. In the course of the discussion he cites the sophist Polus, 981ᵃ 1–5:

καὶ δοκεῖ σχεδὸν ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ τέχνῃ ὅμοιον εἶναι ἡ ἐμπειρία, ἀποβαίνει δ᾽ ἐπιστήμη καὶ τέχνη διὰ τῆς ἐμπειρίας τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐμπειρία τέχνην ἐποίησεν, ὥς φησι Πῶλος, ὀρθῶς λέγων, ἡ δ᾽ ἀπειρία τύχην.

W. D. Ross *ad. loc.* remarks, 'Polus was a well-known pupil of Gorgias, and this jingle is in Gorgias' style. *Polus makes the remark in Pl. Gorg. 448C*, but it is implied that it also occurred in his work on oratory (ib. 462B)' (emphasis mine).[1] As we shall see, the facts are somewhat more complex. I first cite some other distinguished authorities to set the problem in perspective. Radermacher (loc. cit., above n. 1) lists *Met.* 981ᵃ3–5 (ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐμπειρία – τύχην) as the fifth entry under Polus; he then states 'Fortasse ex Gorgia Platonis. Vide seq.' What follows, as the sixth entry, is *Gorg.* 448C; the speaker is Polus:

πολλαὶ τέχναι ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἰσὶν ἐκ τῶν ἐμπειριῶν ἐμπείρως ηὑρημέναι· ἐμπειρία μὲν γὰρ ποιεῖ τὸν αἰῶνα ἡμῶν πορεύεσθαι κατὰ τέχνην, ἀπειρία δὲ κατὰ τύχην. ἑκάστων δὲ τούτων μεταλαμβάνουσιν ἄλλοι ἄλλων ἄλλως, τῶν δὲ ἀρίστων οἱ ἄριστοι. ὧν καὶ Γοργίας ἐστὶν ὅδε, καὶ μετέχει τῆς καλλίστης τῶν τεχνῶν.

Werner Jaeger in his Oxford edition of the *Metaphysics* (1957) at 981ᵃ4 annotates 'cf. Plat. *Gorg.* 448C'. What he meant by this we learn from an article of his, where, in reference to this passage, he remarks, '... Aristotle is quoting Plato's *Gorgias* 448C but this time sides with Polus, who is mostly wrong'.[2] E. R. Dodds also, in his note at *Gorg.* 448C 4–9, states, 'That Aristotle attributes the doctrine of our passage to Polus need not, of course, mean that he found it elsewhere than in the *Gorgias*'. It thus appears to be a widely held view that Aristotle is not citing Polus's words from first-hand knowledge but is rather borrowing directly from the *Gorgias*, and specifically from p. 448C, when he 'quotes' Polus. This immediately entails a serious problem. What exactly did Polus say? For the passages in the *Gorgias* and the *Metaphysics* are by no means identical. What they have in common are the two contrasting pairs, ἐμπειρία ~ ἀπειρία and τέχνη ~ τύχη, the verb ποιεῖν, and μὲν γὰρ ~ δέ. But differences there are. Plato does not have Polus say that experience made art and inexperience chance, as Aristotle represents Polus as having said. Rather, the Platonic Polus says that experience makes 'our life to proceed in accordance with art', whereas inexperience causes it to proceed 'in accordance with chance'. For all the similarities of thought, that remains a different statement; to

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[1] For the little that is known about Polus see further W. Nestle in *RE* Band XXI.2, coll. 1424–1425, s.v. *Polos* 3 and E. R. Dodds in his edition of the *Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 11–12. The scant testimonia, true and false, that have survived can be found in Ludwig Radermacher, *Artium Scriptores (Reste des voraristotelischen Rhetorik)* = *Sitzb. Akad. Wien* 227 (1951), Abh. 3, 112–114.

[2] 'Contemporary Evidence on the Text of the First Chapters of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', *SIFC* 27–8 (1956), 152 = *Scripta Minora* II (Rome, 1960), p. 485.

assert, as scholars have, that Aristotle is 'quoting' Plato's *Gorgias* 448C is, at best, not entirely accurate. Notice also that Aristotle uses an aorist tense, ἐποίησεν, and Plato a present, ποιεῖ. This will be seen to be significant (below).

At this point it will be convenient to consider the other passage from the *Gorgias* which scholars have rightly compared with 448C, namely 462 B–C, where Polus and Socrates are conversing:

—P. Ἀλλὰ τί σοι δοκεῖ ἡ ῥητορικὴ εἶναι;
—S. Πρᾶγμα ὃ φῂς σὺ ποιῆσαι τέχνην ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι ὃ ἐγὼ ἔναγχος ἀνέγνων.
—P. Τί τοῦτο λέγεις;
—S. Ἐμπειρίαν ἔγωγέ τινα.

Thus, according to Socrates, Polus in a treatise (σύγγραμμα) stated that a certain 'thing' made art – a thing which, it turns out, is experience.[3] The direct statement which one may reconstruct from the *oratio obliqua* would be something like ἐμπειρία ἐποίησεν τέχνην. That is very close to the first part of Aristotle's version, *aorist tense and all*, and rather different from the phrasing of *Gorg.* 448C. If Aristotle is dependent upon Plato alone, one must assume that he started from 462 B–C and then, at least partially on the basis of ἀπειρία δὲ κατὰ τύχην in 448C, generated the second half of his sentence, ἡ δ᾽ ἀπειρία τύχην. That is not, I suppose, impossible, but it is surely too convoluted, especially when one reflects that Aristotle's phrasing, ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐμπειρία τέχνην ἐποίησεν, ἡ δ᾽ ἀπειρία τύχην is a concise and epigrammatic sentence which shows not the slightest trace of being the product of patchwork. By contrast, *Gorg.* 462B can be seen, *with the help of Aristotle's passage*, to be based on an epigrammatic saying, rather than being itself such. As regards *Gorg.* 448C, as Dodds (*ad. loc.*) correctly observes, 'its peculiarities of style mark it as either a quotation or a parody... parody is more likely in Plato than *verbatim* quotation.' In short, if Aristotle has patched together a sentence from two passages of the *Gorgias*, the resultant hybrid is in fact more neat and pointed than either of its originals, which is a very curious situation indeed. On the other hand, if one takes Aristotle at his word and accepts that he is quoting Polus himself, then we have recovered a *verbatim* quotation of Polus.[4] As a further gain we can identify and isolate some of the parody in *Gorg.* 448C5–7[5] and verify that in *Gorg.* 462B Plato is paraphrasing closely, if partially, the sentence which Aristotle, on the basis of independent knowledge, reproduced in full. The treatise by Polus which Plato represents Socrates as having read recently (462C: ὃ ἐγὼ ἔναγχος ἀνέγνων) really existed and Aristotle knew its contents.

There are other considerations which favour the view that Aristotle possessed direct knowledge of the historical Polus's work. First, observe that Aristotle quotes Polus with approval (ὀρθῶς λέγων).[6] This favourable judgement on the importance

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[3] Dodds interprets this sentence differently, contrary to most scholars and, in my view, wrongly. See the Additional Note at the end of this paper.

[4] Whether Polus expressed or omitted the definite article and whether μὲν γὰρ ~ δὲ are original must remain not quite certain. *Gorg.* 448C and *Met.* 981ᵃ4–5, taken together, support the genuineness of μὲν γὰρ ~ δέ. Aristotle could have added the articles himself because of the preceding context (the so-called anaphoric use of the article). Whether Polus wrote ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐμπειρία... ἡ δ᾽ ἀπειρία or ἐμπειρία μὲν γὰρ... ἀπειρία δὲ matters little.

[5] It is of course just possible, though unlikely, that at 448C the words ἐμπειρία μὲν γὰρ – κατὰ τύχην are a second *verbatim* quotation from Polus completely distinct from the one preserved by Aristotle and *Gorg.* 462 B–C. No one, so far as I can discover, has advocated this position.

[6] The words ὀρθῶς λέγων at *Met.* 981ᵃ4 are omitted in the Ab recension; for their genuineness here see W. Jaeger, loc. cit. (above, n. 2).

of experience is decidedly at variance with Plato's position in the *Gorgias* where a mere empiric 'knack' is derogatorily contrasted with a genuine art; see especially *Gorg.* 463B where Socrates remarks οὐκ ἔστιν τέχνη ἀλλ' ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή. Secondly, the very words ὀρθῶς λέγων make more sense if Aristotle is referring to an historical personage's actual words. After all Aristotle says simply 'as Polus says,' not 'as Polus says in the *Gorgias*'.[7] Here a telling detail of linguistic usage enters the picture.

According to the so-called 'Fitzgerald's Canon' Aristotle writes anarthrous Σωκράτης when he is referring to the historical Socrates and ὁ Σωκράτης when he is referring to the Platonic Socrates of the dialogues.[8] This distinction is of obvious importance both for the interpretation of Aristotle himself and for what he has to say about his predecessors. Now Aristotle's practice with the name Σωκράτης is no idiosyncrasy of his own but a specific application of normal Greek usage with the article. W. D. Ross states explicitly, 'The canon is on the whole confirmed very strongly by Aristotle's usage with other proper names'.[9] In our passage Aristotle writes ὡς φησι Πῶλος. *The omission of the article clearly shows that Aristotle is referring to the historical Polus.* Had he been alluding to the *Gorgias*, at a minimum he would have written ὡς φησι ὁ Πῶλος. A few parallels will suffice. *SE* 173ᵃ8 ... ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ Καλλικλῆς ἐν τῷ Γοργίᾳ γέγραπται λέγων. *GC* 335ᵇ10 ... ὥσπερ ὁ ἐν τῷ Φαίδωνι Σωκράτης. *De An.* 406ᵇ26 τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ ὁ Τίμαιος φυσιολογεῖ τὴν ψυχὴν κινεῖν τὸ σῶμα.[10] A particularly apt parallel occurs in the *EN*, p. 1140ᵃ17–20: καὶ τρόπον τινὰ περὶ τὰ αὐτά ἐστιν ἡ τύχη καὶ ἡ τέχνη, καθάπερ καὶ Ἀγάθων φησὶ 'τέχνη τύχην ἔστερξε καὶ τύχη τέχνην' [= fr. 6 Snell]. Here metre proves that we have a *verbatim* quotation from the historical Agathon. The article is absent precisely as in our passage – and for the same reason.[11] Clearly Aristotle has quoted the historical Polus's actual words here on the basis of his own learning; he is not dependent upon the *Gorgias*. This having been established, one may (as suggested above) then use the Aristotle passage to confirm that the *Platonic* Polus, in the two passages in question from the *Gorgias*, is paraphrasing the views of the *historical* Polus with reasonable accuracy.

This fragment of Polus preserved by Aristotle is actually of some historical interest. The conjunction of τέχνη and τύχη had, of course, become a commonplace in the sophistic period;[12] doubtless the jingle which the two nouns produced encouraged this. But Polus seems to be the oldest *extant* writer to bring together ἐμπειρία and τέχνη in this way. Whether he was the very first to have done so is unlikely, but clearly

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[7] Jaeger remarks that 'Aristotle is quoting Plato's *Gorgias* 448C *but this time sides with Polus, who is mostly wrong*' (above, n. 2, emphasis mine). As Jaeger means that Polus is 'mostly wrong' specifically in the *Gorgias*, this would entail a very forced interpretation of ὀρθῶς λέγων here.

[8] The usage is discussed in detail by W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. I (Oxford, 1924), pp. xxxix–xli. Compare also LSJ s.v. ὁ, ἡ, τό B.I.i.c.   [9] op. cit. (above, n. 8), p. xli.

[10] 'ὁ Τίμαιος = Plato's Timaeus. In accordance with Fitzgerald's canon ὁ T. is A.'s way of distinguishing a character in a book from an historical character.' W. D. Ross *ad loc.* R. D. Hicks, for example, renders ὁ Τίμαιος here by 'the Platonic Timaeus' and W. S. Hett by 'Plato's Timaeus.'

[11] I note in passing *Pol.* 1260ᵃ27–8: πολὺ γὰρ ἄμεινον λέγουσιν οἱ ἐξαριθμοῦντες τὰς ἀρετάς, ὥσπερ Γοργίας, τῶν οὕτως ὁριζομένων. Scholars tend to see an allusion to Plato's *Meno* here, despite the fact that Gorgias does not appear in that dialogue. In addition to commentators on the *Politics* see R. D. Hicks on Arist. *De. An.* 406ᵇ26 and R. S. Bluck on Pl. *Meno* 71E3. The absence of the article with Γοργίας ought to have given one pause. (Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokr.*[10] II (Berlin, 1960), p. 305 correctly print this sentence from the *Politics* as a fragment [18] of Gorgias.)   [12] See Dodds on *Gorg.* 448C 4–9 for some evidence and references.

the lapidary phrasing of his sentence was sufficiently memorable that it prompted Plato to parody it in the *Gorgias* and Aristotle to appeal to it in the *Metaphysics*, in his account of the origins of ἐπιστήμη and τέχνη. Unlike Plato who set in conscious opposition τέχνη and ἐμπειρία (perhaps for the first time),[13] Aristotle derived the one from the other. Now empiric observation was obviously of importance also for *medicine*, even if the full extent to which the conscious linking of ἐμπειρία and τέχνη had proliferated in medical circles in the fifth century is no longer discoverable. In this connection the sequel in the *Metaphysics* deserves to be noticed. The sentence immediately following the quotation from Polus goes: γίγνεται δὲ τέχνη ὅταν ἐκ πολλῶν τῆς ἐμπειρίας ἐννοημάτων μία καθόλου γένηται περὶ τῶν ὁμοίων ὑπόληψις (981ᵃ5–7). Then Aristotle gives an illustration; it is taken from medicine (disease and fevers, 981ᵃ7–12). This is not likely to be coincidence. Be that as it may, it is well known that a formal school of medical theory in time developed, the so-called Empiricist school.[14] The later Empiricists themselves derived their school from a certain Akron.[15] It is at least curious that Akron and Polus both go back to the same time and place, namely fifth-century Akragas. Michael Frede, in a survey of medical schools and theories, has written 'this debate within medicine also has to be seen against the background of another, much more general debate...Plato in the *Gorgias* makes Socrates criticize Polus' claim that rhetoric is the highest of all human arts, the master discipline, by arguing that rhetoric, at least as Gorgias and Polus conceive of it, is merely a matter of experience and knack or practice [*tribe*] and not an art [*techne*]. But there is good reason to believe that Polus himself did in fact hold the view that rhetorical knowledge is a matter of experience (Ar. *Met.* 981ᵃ4), and it is certainly no accident that two terms Plato uses here to discredit Gorgianic rhetoric, namely *empeiria* 'experience' and *tribe* 'knack' or 'practice', are both terms later Empiricists used in a positive sense.'[16] It would be absurd to pretend that Polus was a major figure, but he has earned his footnote in the history of Greek thought.

Additional note: E. R. Dodds' Interpretation of *Gorg.* 462B–C. At issue is the meaning of the words πρᾶγμα ὃ φῂς σὺ ποιῆσαι τέχνην ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι ὃ ἐγὼ ἔναγχος ἀνέγνων. Dodds ad loc. states: 'This is usually understood to mean "Something which you yourself in your treatise assert has created art", and is taken as a reference to Polus' speech at 448C, which is assumed to be a quotation from the treatise. But the assumption is doubtful... nor does Polus actually say at 448C that ἐμπειρία "created" τέχνη; nor does he himself recognize the alleged reference. Moreover, the position of the words ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι suggests that they qualify not φῂς but ποιῆσαι. But if so, ὃ can hardly be the subject of ποιῆσαι: we seem obliged to understand σὺ as the subject and translate... "Something of which you claim to have made an art in your treatise"...' If Dodds is correct, my assertion that Aristotle is quoting Polus himself in the *Metaphysics* (which of course does not mean that Aristotle was not also aware of the passages in the *Gorgias*) loses some of its support. But can Dodds really be right? The traditional interpretation of 462B (since the πρᾶγμα, as we have seen, is ἐμπειρία) yields a statement identical with Aristotle's: ἡ ἐμπειρία τέχνην ἐποίησεν; Dodds' interpretation is equivalent to ἐποίησα τὴν ἐμπειρίαν τέχνην. The Greek of 462C will admit of either rendering; it depends upon

[13] See on this W. Capelle, 'Zur Hippokratischen Frage', *Hermes* 57 (1922), 263–5.
[14] See, e.g. Ludwig Edelstein, 'Empiricism and Skepticism in the Teaching of the Greek Empirical School', in his *Ancient Medicine. Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein* (Baltimore, 1967), pp. 195–203.   [15] Gal. 14.683 Kühn; Plin. *HN* 29.5.
[16] *Galen. Three Treatises on the Nature of Science*. Translated by Richard Walzer and Michael Frede with an Introduction by Michael Frede (Indianapolis, 1985), pp. xxiii–xxiv.

whether one takes ὅ as subject accusative of ποιῆσαι or rather as direct object of ποιῆσαι with an unexpressed 'you' as subject of the infinitive. (Dodds' observation that the position of the phrase ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι argues against taking it with φῄς is beside the mark. Place ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι after φῄς σύ and it will be apparent why Plato did not place the words here. Place the full expression ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι ὅ ἐγὼ ἔναγχος ἀνέγνων after φῄς σύ and it will be more apparent. If any really object to the word order, it is an easy matter to place a dash after τέχνην and take the following words as a sort of afterthought: '...I mean in the treatise which I recently read.')

Here are what I take to be serious objections to Dodds' position: (i) Aristotle's statement at *Met.* 981ᵃ3–5. I have indicated above the difficulties involved in deriving Aristotle's phrasing exclusively from the two passages of the *Gorgias* and provided independent evidence which points rather to a direct quotation of Polus on Aristotle's part. If Aristotle is citing the historical Polus, this immediately refutes Dodds, for Aristotle's (and Polus's!) ἐμπειρία τέχνην ἐποίησεν leaves no doubt whatsoever how the Greek of *Gorg.* 462B is then to be interpreted. ὅ must be the subject accusative of ποιῆσαι. (ii) Even if one were to derive Aristotle's passage only from the *Gorgias* (which he surely knew), serious problems would remain. First, one must assume that Aristotle, the author of the *Rhetoric*, the spokesman of the Academy against major rhetoricians such as Isocrates, and a student of the history of earlier rhetorical treatises (compare, e.g. *S.E.* 183ᵇ17–35), *has misunderstood the Greek* at *Gorg.* 462B. For, if he is echoing only the *Gorgias*, his words ἐμπειρία τέχνην ἐποίησεν certainly go back to 462B rather than to 448C. While not impossible, this scenario is surely most improbable. (iii) Moreover, while Dodds is correct in observing that at 448C Polus does not actually say that experience *made* art, what he does say there clearly implies this. (Note especially the preceding sentence, 448B 4–5.) What is most difficult to explain away is the language...ἐμπειρία...ποιεῖ...κατὰ τέχνην at 448C. The presence of ἐμπειρία as *subject* of a form of the verb ποιεῖν, with τέχνη in the same clause, is so close to Aristotle's phraseology and to that of *Gorg.* 462B (as traditionally understood) as to make coincidence very unlikely. All three passages are stressing the importance of ἐμπειρία. (iv) Finally, on Dodds' interpretation Polus makes a very bold claim: 'I have made experience art.' Is it really probable that this derivative follower of Gorgias would have presumed to make such an extravagant boast? Aristotle for one did not think so. Nor, I think, did Plato.

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