

IX. Focusing of Arguments in Greek Deliberative Oratory

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Two different techniques of argumentation may be found in Greek deliberative oratory. One is that best seen in the speeches in Thucydides where orators tend to focus most of their attention on a single form of argument. Sometimes this is the just, sometimes the honorable, sometimes the possible, but in successful speeches most frequently the center of attention is the expedient, which is regarded as the real basis of policy.¹ A single one of these arguments is usually developed throughout a whole speech and only rarely are arguments combined.² Particularly are expediency and justice regarded as mutually exclusive. Thus in the very first debate in the work, that between the ambassadors of Corcyra and Corinth before the Athenians (1.32-43), the former expound a strict argument from expediency and are successful in persuading the Athenians to accept them as allies, the latter stress the demands of justice with equal intensity but less success. A still better example is the famous debate of book three (37-48) between Cleon and Diodotus over the proper punishment for the people of Mytilene after their attempted revolt. Cleon admits (39) that justice is a consideration but argues for expediency against it. Diodotus, who is the successful speaker and who is actually supporting the more humanitarian position, explicitly rejects justice as a basis of action and meets Cleon on his own ground of expediency (44). His line of thought is audacious, sharply focused, brilliantly vigorous. The rhetorical impact is greater than in any other formal speech in Thucydides, and the reason is this very rejection of justice and bald acceptance of reality.

¹ Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* (1358B.20-22) says that each of the three species of oratory has an appropriate *telos*. That of deliberative is the expedient.

² In addition to the examples cited below cf. 1.80-86 (Archidamus), 4.17-20 (Spartan representatives), 4.59-64 (Hermocrates), 6.9-14 (Nicias) and 6.82-87 (Euphemus), all of which stress expediency as does the Melian dialogue, 5.85-111. Justice appears to be the central topic in 1.37-43, honor in 2.60-64 and possibility in 1.140-44. The most notable combinations of arguments occur in the speech of the Mytileneans in 3.9-14 and of Hermocrates in 6.76-80.

A technique diametrically opposed to that of speakers in Thucydides is found in Isocrates, whose political pamphlets may for the moment be classified as deliberative speeches since they urge political action and, in the case of the *Areopagiticus* and *De pace*, adopt the form of an address to the assembly. Isocrates refuses to admit that there can be a conflict between self-interest, justice and honor; and in recommending a course of action he gives equal weight to a variety of arguments.³ Thus in the *Panegyricus* Athens' claim to leadership is just (20) and based on her honorable past (23), and the campaign against Persia would be honorable (179), just (181 and 183) and expedient (184). In the *Archidamus* the speaker denies that there is a conflict of self-interest and action that is honorable (11–15). The topic is perhaps most developed in the *De pace* (28–35). "Some men," Isocrates says (31–32), "have reached such madness that they suppose injustice to be blameworthy, but profitable and expedient for everyday life, while justice though estimable has no reward and can help others rather than those who possess it, but they who believe this do not realize that for gain, for glory, for right action, even for happiness nothing is so important as virtue." A similar synthesis of arguments of expediency, justice, honor and possibility characterizes the *Philippus*. If anything, Isocrates tends to deemphasize expediency and to establish a picture of Athenian national traditions which are more important than any temporary advantage. In the synthesis of arguments there is some loss of rhetorical vigor and intensity through diffusion of the readers' attention, but at the same time a gain in moral dignity.

It is very tempting to balance these two great Greek writers off against each other: to see in Thucydides' striking use of a single argument and especially that from expediency something of the character of the Greek mind in the fifth century. It has been shown⁴ that the speeches in Thucydides mirror the general stylistic traits to be expected of actual speakers at the time of the earlier part of the Peloponnesian War, though individual stylistic

³ This approach is recommended by the first chapter of the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, a rhetorical handbook in the sophistic tradition written about the middle of the fourth century.

⁴ By John H. Finley, Jr., "The Origins of Thucydides' Style" *HSCP* 50 (1939) 35–84; cf. also his *Thucydides* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1942) 250 ff. Other important discussions are those of A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* 1 (Oxford 1945) ad. 1.22, and Jacqueline de Romilly, *Histoire et raison chez Thucydide* (Paris 1956)

mannerisms had of course to be assimilated to Thucydides' own style. If the orators used the antithetical style of the historian, one is tempted to conclude that they also employed the same ruthless argumentation. This does not mean that the speeches in Thucydides are necessarily verbally very close to the actual speeches given in each case, but only that they are like what was, or might have been, given both in substance and in rhetorical technique. The hypothesis will be confirmed if we find, as we do, that contemporary authors do not usually combine arguments such as expediency and justice but focus on one or the other. Opposed to the argumentation of the speakers in Thucydides is the moral sensitivity displayed by Isocrates, whom Quintilian rightly called *honesti studiosus* (10.1.79). He wrote after the disasters of the Peloponnesian War and the rule of the Thirty, and perhaps the moral impact of Socrates and Plato had had time to work its way into the Greek conscience. However advantageous any course of action, in Isocrates' view it must coincide with justice and honor and be in accord with the traditions which had brought Athenians to their finest hours. The tribute to Isocrates at the end of Plato's *Phaedrus* (278E) becomes understandable in this sense as in part a recognition of the moral responsibility which Isocrates imposed upon an orator.

There is considerable evidence to support the generalization that Greek orators in the fifth century tended to focus on expediency or justice but not to combine the two. The only surviving bit of a fifth century deliberative speech is the fragment of Thrasymachus quoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Dem.*3, cf. Diels II³. 278–80). Only the prooemium is preserved, and there is no real argumentation; but the style is certainly vigorous enough and in no way inconsistent with the manner of thought of Thucydides' speakers. Furthermore, it is evident from Thrasymachus' remarks in the first book of Plato's *Republic* that an argument of pure expediency and disinterest in one of justice might be expected of him.

A second small bit of evidence is furnished by the Old Oligarch who contrasts the oligarchical admiration of justice and temperance with the people's interest in their own advantage (1.5).

180–239. The latter points out the formal and even verbal balance of the antithetical discourses which is probably beyond what was actually possible in debate, though one should not estimate Pericles as less of an orator than Homer was an oral bard. Early oratory used many of the techniques of oral poetry, and symmetry was one.

Third is the speech of Lysias and also the first speech of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*. The dialogue is set in the fifth century; and though the speeches are not deliberative in the political sense, they are protreptic. Both are directed solely to the topic of self-interest. The second speech of Socrates is hardly classifiable in this sense, but the psychological rhetoric outlined by Socrates (271D) implies something more than self-interest as a basis of persuasion; and we are specifically told (277E) that words about *justice* and beauty and goodness are what really count.

A fourth source of evidence is the speeches, also not deliberative, which carry the name of Gorgias. The *Encomium of Helen* is epideictic, the *Defense of Palamedes* judicial in form. Both are relevant here in that they focus exclusively on one argument, the honorable in the former case, the just in the latter, though it was clearly possible for Palamedes, who is represented as speaking before the Greeks at Troy in his own defense, to call upon them to acquit him in their own interests and with an eye to future benefits or for the honor of doing so. Fourth century orators often introduce the need for the jury to consider its own interest in making a decision; Gorgias does not.

A fifth source of information is the drama. In Euripides it is possible to find quite a number of speeches which focus attention on self-interest. In the *Medea*, for example, Creon acts in self-interest and Medea seems to accept the fact (271-336). She does not ask for justice or honor but simply for pity, and yet this sentimental appeal turns out to be based on expediency (368-69). In her discussions with Jason, Medea relies on lists of services which she has performed for him and thus on the way his alliance with her has been in his own interest. Jason throughout the play is guided by self-interest, and his cry for justice at the end (1405-14) is therefore all the more ironic. A somewhat similar use of services and recognition of self-interest may be found in the *Hecuba* in the debate between Hecuba and Odysseus (218-331) and again in Polymestor's defense (1132-82). There are a large number of scenes in tragedy which resemble court trials and in them much discussion of justice; there are very few scenes which really reproduce the circumstances of deliberative oratory. One, however, occurs in the *Heracleidae* (134-252), where the Argive herald addresses the Athenians in somewhat the spirit of an ambassador from the pages of Thucydides. He insists that it is to the interest

of the Athenians to expel the children of Heracles; Iolaus, their protector and Heracles' friend, replies that it is just and honorable to accord them refuge. The Athenians in their decision reject apparent self-interest in favor of justice.

This focus on self-interest is, however, marked only in the earlier plays of Euripides. In the plays from 415 or so on pure argument from expediency is lacking. Thus in the *Phoenissae* (probably produced in 409) in the debate between Polyneices and Eteocles (469–525) Polyneices argues for a division of the kingdom on the ground of justice. Eteocles refuses on the ground of self-interest but also on the ground of honor. The development is similar but less marked in Sophocles where in the *Antigone* (683–723) Haemon subtly tries to persuade Creon by an argument which is really that of self-interest; but in the much later *Philoctetes* that old sophist Odysseus insists (1247) that his actions are not only expedient but just, as in fact they are.

What this evidence seems to point to is some degree of abandonment of reliance on the bald argument of expediency in the latter half of the Peloponnesian War, perhaps because of the disastrous effects of such argument as used by Pericles' successors. Euripides always, even in early plays, presents self-interest as an argument used by villains for nefarious purposes, but Sophocles shows less opposition to it.

There is another source for this change in attitude toward argument which points toward the same time, and that is in Andocides. Andocides was exiled from Athens after being implicated in the mutilation of the herms and profanation of the mysteries in 415. He made a very badly-timed attempt to return sometime after 411 and delivered, in hopes of being forgiven, the speech known as the *De reditu*. He might have been forgiven the crime but not the speech. Andocides was not a professionally trained orator, and his knowledge of the conventions of rhetoric developed only gradually over the course of his career.⁵ This is his earliest extant speech and is particularly abrupt. What he does is simply to state the services which he has performed for the Athenian state and demand that the Athenians requite him. The speech assumes that Athens will take that action which seems in her own interest at the moment and ignores all moral or theoretical scruples. As in some of the other examples cited, benefits conferred here correspond to a

⁵ Cf. my article, "The Oratory of Andocides," *AJP* 79 (1958) 32–43.

kind of past self-interest. Andocides, it seems, was not aware of any change in Athenian public opinion. He delivered a speech which might well have succeeded a few years before when he had left Athens; for all its lack of elegance it has the directness of the Thucydidean orators. In its failure we can read some indication of the fact that directness, self-interest and services rendered were no longer the principal ingredients of successful oratory. When Andocides tried again after the amnesty of 403, he was subtler and more successful.

Fourth-century practice was generally to combine forms of argument. The single deliberative piece of Lysias (34) couples expediency with the honorable (6-7 and 11), and the speeches in Xenophon's *Hellenica* depart from the technique of Thucydides and follow the general pattern seen in Isocrates, who is clearly the most important orator of the age, both in terms of those he influenced and of those who reacted against him. Demosthenes belongs in both categories.⁶ His technique of argumentation in deliberative speeches seems to me to have developed through at least three phases. The earliest speeches show an attempt to combine arguments in the manner of Isocrates. For example, the speech *On the Symmories* aims at pointing out what is expedient and honorable and just (28 and 35), and the speech *On the Liberty of the Rhodians* shows the same characteristic: practicality, expediency and honor all point in one direction (2, 8 and 28).

On the other hand, with the orations against Philip a new vigor appears which is unlike anything in Greek oratory since the fifth century and which involves a return to focus on a single form of argument. In the *First Philippic*, which I believe to be the earliest,⁷ there is no question of weighing the relative expediency

⁶ Isocrates may have influenced Demosthenes in his literary approach to oratory, in his custom of publishing his speeches, in his historical sense of Athenian traditions, in specific passages like the beginning of the *Archidamus* and to some extent in his avoidance of hiatus. The two orators are closest together about the time that Isocrates wrote his *De pace* (355).

⁷ The dates of both the speech *On the liberty of the Rhodians* and the *First Philippic* are in doubt. In general I follow Werner Jaeger, *Demosthenes: the Origin and Growth of His Policy* (Berkeley 1938) who, though admitting the difficulty of exact dating (230, note 41), regards the Rhodian speech as similar to that *On the Symmories* and the speech *For the Megalopolitans* but "still far removed from the impassioned national feeling of the *Philippics*" (94). A good recent discussion of Demosthenic chronology is Raphael Sealey, "Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Some Demosthenic Dates," *REG* 68 (1955) 77-120.

of courses of action and of attributing to them justice and honor. It is assumed that Philip acts in his own interest and Athens must act in hers. Territory in the north is the prize of war, and the property of the careless belongs to those willing to toil and run a risk (5). Demosthenes so focuses Athenian interests that the question seems not one of advantage but of necessity, not the choice of a course of action but the adoption of the only possibility. His major point is that success is possible (2-12). All other rhetorical arguments are only accessory: Athens' failure to act will bring on her the deepest disgrace and will allow Philip to go unpunished (42-3); but no honor is promised Athens for action, and disinterested justice is not involved. It seems that Demosthenes' patience has been suddenly exhausted and the futility of expecting right to triumph in the course of nature has overwhelmed him.⁸

Succeeding speeches show a similar intensity. The *First Olynthiac*, for example, makes no mention of the honor or justice to be observed in helping Olynthus, only of the fact that it is to Athens' interest to seize the opportunity presented to fight Philip near his own home. "Those who do not use their opportunities rightly do not acknowledge if anything good has come to them from the gods" (11).

Finally, in the *Second* and *Third Philippics* Demosthenes takes a further step. It is always evident that his idea of expediency is not quite that of the fifth century politicians. First of all, expedient policy was not so evident in the bewildering fourth century as it had been a hundred years before. Secondly, the ugly principle that might makes right had lurked beneath the imperialism and aggrandizement of the age of Pericles. At the very least the focus on self-interest in speeches in Thucydides must be regarded as amoral. This was no longer acceptable, for the fourth century always demanded at least an appearance of justice, morality and rectitude. Demosthenes' rhetorical problem is thus to retain the ethical quality of the synthesis of arguments made by Isocrates and at the same time to recapture the vigor of concentration on expediency which we see in Thucydides. He found an answer in the concept of Athenian national tradition of which Isocrates had made some use and which goes back at least to Pericles' *Funeral Oration*. In the *Second Philippic* self-interest in the

⁸ On the circumstances of Demosthenes' change of attitude cf. Jaeger (above, note 7) 108.

old sense hardly seems to apply to Athens: Philip looks only to the immediately expedient, and most other Greek states are as bad; but Athens has the tradition of her past to demand her loyalty (7-10). Self-interest and expediency for her is thus primarily the maintenance of this tradition. The *Third Philippic* carries on this same spirit. Expediency and justice in the old sense are not discussed, yet the whole speech is concerned with the necessity of action in Athens' interest. Failure to act will inevitably bring disgrace for all that Athens has been, and the orator's vision of the national character is the point on which the whole speech focuses and under which all arguments are subsumed.

In conclusion, it seems to me that there are two techniques of argumentation in deliberative oratory in the classical period, that characterized by sharp focus on a single argument and that characterized by a synthesis of arguments. Historically three phases of development may be distinguished. In the fifth century there was a clear opposition between argument from expediency and argument from justice. This opposition had the advantage of imparting rhetorical vigor derived from concentration and from moral shock, but it became increasingly unacceptable. The opposite extreme, found in the late fifth and in the fourth century, was the attempt to see a synthesis of virtues recommending a course of action. This is most characteristic of Isocrates. Demosthenes joined rhetorical force, political realism and moral idealism in a concept of Athenian traditions whose preservation he equated with national self-interest. Many may question the wisdom of his policy, but it is impossible to withhold admiration from the rhetorical expression which he achieves.