

Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* is our first extant treatment of determinism (Saunders 1985; Hankinson 1998: 156). Gorgias is often understood as simply defending the argument for determinism (Barnes 1982: 530). However, I argue that Gorgias' object of attack is not the (more modern) notion of free-will, but the ancient Greek view that an individual was deemed responsible for an outcome by virtue of being the cause of that outcome. Gorgias' point is that if the notion of cause and effect is applied consistently and universally, the paradoxical result is that no individual can be deemed the cause of any attendant result, and that thus no one can be deemed responsible. Yet Gorgias is not arguing that determinism is a fact, but rather that responsibility cannot be established simply by the application of the notion of cause and effect. Like Hume later, Gorgias investigates an inconsistent social use of the concept of cause and effect.

Gorgias presupposes a "whole person" conception of responsibility (Williams 1993: 60-63) that understands the agent to be a distinct and sufficient entity that, by virtue of being *the* cause of an action, deserves the full rewards or punishments attendant upon a given action. Gorgias undermines this position by applying the notion of cause and effect in a rigorous manner, with the result that an agent is never a self-contained entity that can be said to be the complete cause of any subsequent result. He uses two general arguments to reach this conclusion:

- 1) *An individual is never the sufficient cause of an effect.* Whenever the full set of conditions that resulted in a certain outcome are investigated, some of these conditions will always be found outside of the individual. Even if it was Helen's desire for Paris that led her to Troy, she is not the sole cause of this desire, since her feeling required the presence of Paris' beauty to activate it (*Helen* 15-19).
- 2) *An individual is never the first cause of an effect.* Even when a particular element of the network of causation is found to reside wholly in the individual, this element can itself be found to have an antecedent cause outside of the individual. Hence, even when Helen is said to have caused something (desire in her suitors due to her beauty, *Helen* 4), the notion of agency is undermined because Helen's divine parentage has just been mentioned (*Helen* 3), giving the (antecedent, external) cause of her beauty.

Gorgias famously ends his work by calling it a *πράγμιον* (*Helen* 21). Part of the joke is that no one would have accepted his paradoxical conclusion, since the Greek contest system did not allow for such a view. This includes Gorgias, and indeed he continually asserts his own agency in the *Helen* itself. He is the one said to be rescuing Helen from infamy due to the attacks of the poets (*Helen* 2), and he certainly claims the *Helen* as his own work (*Helen* 21). Thus for Gorgias responsibility is not a given fact of a causal sequence, but rather an individual must take, or be attributed with, responsibility through verbal acts.

Finally, Gorgias' boldest suggestion in the work is that this attribution and acceptance of responsibility is a strictly necessary one if we are to have any identity at all. For Helen's complete lack of agency in Gorgias' encomium robs her in turn of any identity whatsoever (Porter 1993: 282; Cassin 1995: 75). If it is not the case that we simply are responsible for our characters and their products, Gorgias suggests that we must nevertheless take responsibility for

them. For if we do not lay claim to some segment of the causal chain, then all that is left is the causal chain itself, mute nature understood as the collection of all causes and effects.