

Silent No More: The Sound of the Voice in 4th Century Attic Oratory

There is a paucity of evidence concerning the sound of the voice in ancient oratory. We have extant speeches but little critical comment on the way in which they were delivered. However, by ignoring the sonic dimensions of a speech, a critical component of the performance is lost. Both in the ancient world and the modern world, it is not just what it is said but also the sound of the speech and speaker that make or break a speech. Aristotle, Theophrastus, Demosthenes and Aeschines are some of the few who make direct mention of the voice and vocal quality as a factor in rhetorical performance. Therefore, by studying these authors, it is possible to reconstruct to some degree what 4th century Greeks considered the ideal voice and vocal style.

It is necessary to focus on the biological writings of Aristotle as a background to his philosophical thought on the voice in order to understand how Aristotle and the orators of his era thought about it. Moreover Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica* discusses voice, delivery and style which (combined with the anatomical writings) creates a theoretical ideal for the voice and ideal speaker. Furthermore, Demosthenes and Aeschines use very specific language to deconstruct each other as speakers. The phrases that the two orators use of each other, echo what Aristotle says an ideal speaker should not do and by examining them a clear connection emerges between the theoretical ideal speaker and the failure to live up to this ideal on the part of the orators. Demosthenes and Aeschines also reveal a practical, pragmatic approach to the voice that, although informed by Aristotle's understanding, presents the ideal only obliquely. Additionally, Theophrastus uses language very similar to that of the orators and by analyzing the phrasing used in *Characters*, the anti-ideal speaker, which Demosthenes and Aeschines were trying to prove

the other to be, emerges. The focus of this discussion is therefore on the voice and style of the ideal speaker as described by Aristotle, Demosthenes, Aeschines, and Theophrastus.

The ancient authors mentioned shape our understanding of the primacy of vocal performance and style to the success or failure of rhetorical efforts and what the ideal voice and style would be. By carefully examining Aristotle thoughts on the voice in the *Ars Rhetorica*, *De Anima*, and *Poetica* among other works we can learn what the ideal sound of the voice was for the philosopher. Aristotle is only theoretical however, an ideal that orators should emulate. Comparing these conclusions to Demosthenes and Aeschines invective about one another allows this ideal to be held up against practical concerns of actual orators. Demosthenes and Aeschines reveal how each orator sounded, or at the very least, how each would like the audience to hear his opponent. Theophrastus offers further theoretical validation of what would be useful or powerful in creating a character for invective and thereby how voice and style could be used to tear down an opponent in a way that is more practical than Aristotle's ideal but still returns to the realm of the theoretical, an anti-ideal. These figures give us a path into the recovery of how a 4th century speaker would have and should have sounded. This is important to our understanding of the primacy of the voice in that period and helps us gain a greater understanding of the symphony of voices that would have been so important to the maintenance of Athenian democracy.

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