

## Prediction and Persuasion: the Rhetoric of Mindreading in Demosthenes' Early Deliberative Speeches

According to Demosthenes, the political orator has a special talent: he is able to explain and predict the behavior of foreign leaders and states (Dem. 18.172). In the idiom of contemporary cognitive theory, we might say that the orator's skill depends on Theory of Mind (ToM), also known as mindreading, mentalizing, and social cognition: the evolved human cognitive capacity to see other beings as possessing hidden but nonetheless legible mental states that inform their behavior (e.g., Goldman 2006). Although all Athenian deliberative and forensic oratory is heavily reliant on ToM, Demosthenes' early deliberative speeches contain particularly rich examples of explicit mindreading – cases in which the orator both reads other minds, endeavors to teach the technique, and encourages his audiences to engage in self- or first-person mindreading. This paper examines a few passages from Demosthenes' early political works to explore both how a ToM approach sheds new light on democratic rhetoric and decision-making and conversely, how democratic oratory sheds lights on ToM.

In the chess game of foreign affairs portrayed in Demosthenes' early speeches, strategy and policy recommendations hinge on mentalizing rhetoric and inferences. One of the hallmarks of the early speeches is their experimentation with justice and interest as intertwined motivational frameworks (Usher 2007). In many cases, moral motives are conveyed and disclosed through explicit first- or third- person mindreading claims. What is unusual about this, is the degree of explicitness with which Demosthenes endeavors to coach his listeners (and likely readers) in the ways of “moral” mindreading or social intelligence. For instance, in *On the Symmories*, he advises the Athenians to cultivate the

perception that their thoughts and actions are informed by a principle of justice in those imagined to be surveilling their behavior (Dem. 14.7). Leaving aside the issue of moral sincerity such passages raise, the important point for present purposes is the competence the orator seeks to inculcate: he advises his audience both to think about their own thoughts (metacognition) and to imagine themselves in other minds (reflective self appraisal) (Frith 2012).

In many cases, Demosthenes simply tells his audience what or how a foreign leader thinks or would think in response to a hypothetical scenario. For instance, in *On the Freedom of the Rhodians*, Demosthenes predicts how the Carian leader Artemisia would react if the Athenians helped the exiled Rhodian democrats restore their democracy (Dem. 15.11-12). This is the most explicit and detailed instance of mindreading by “simulation” - stepping into another person’s shoes and using one’s own system as a proxy to model their thoughts and behavior - in Demosthenes’ extant oratory (Goldman 2006). And, although Demosthenes highlights Artemisia’s status as a woman and “barbarian” elsewhere in the speech, the cultural distortions associated with these categories do not enter into his preview of her hypothetical thinking (at least not overtly). This raises the question as to what guides Demosthenes to choose a particular mindreading strategy. For instance, in the Rhodian speech, he employs both mindreading based on stereotypes or dispositional assumptions and imaginative projection or simulation for forecasting purposes (Dem. 15.11-12, 19-20).

Finally, the way Demosthenes’ simulates Artemisia’ response to Athenian intervention suggests that he was aware of the epistemic closeness or familiarity implied by the explicit simulation process; he shields the audience from directly thinking with

Artemisia by offering himself as a surrogate. Yet, while this maneuver clearly demonstrates the sophistication of Demosthenes' ToM rhetoric and understanding, the same passage also likely exhibits quarantine failure - the failure to shield his own beliefs and preconceptions from those projected onto Artemisia - a cognitive error especially associated with simulationist mindreading and one to which Aeschines would later claim Demosthenes was especially susceptible (Aes. 3.160).

In conclusion, while ToM rhetoric and reasoning is ubiquitous in Demosthenes' early political rhetoric, and while Demosthenes himself exhibits an intuitive grasp of key social cognitive processes, this probably says as much about Demosthenes as about the democratic cultural and institutional environment in which he operated. By providing a public context in which mass audiences could be directed to introspect, to justify their thoughts and actions, and coached in the ways of reading other minds, the democracy instructed citizens in the nature of action, cultivated their decision making capabilities, and inevitably promoted a culture of hungry mindreaders.

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