



The Rhetoric of Persuasion among the Sophists “Metaphor as a Model”

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Abstract:

The purpose of rhetoric science is to appreciate the meaning of literary work as an art and to apprehend its characteristics and to appraise the secrets of its beauty, it makes the receiver more enlightened through enjoying literary arts and influencing him and persuading him with clear methods. However, this purpose changed in Greek rhetoric during the fifth century BC, where a philosophical movement known as the “Sophist movement” emerged, aiming to persuade the receiver through methods of deception, dissimulation, and the use of tricks and verbal games in order to achieve their personal interests. Thus, metaphor became a means of persuasion and proof of false arguments, contrary to what it was known for. This is what we will try to clarify in this article, highlighting the concept of metaphor among the Sophists and the position of the receiver in the rhetoric of deception and falsehood.

Keywords: rhetoric, persuasion, receiver, Sophist movement, metaphor.

Introduction:

Greek philosophy is considered the cradle of Western philosophy and the first launch of Western philosophical thought. It addressed important issues and problems such as epistemology, ontology, ethics, and politics. Its great figures such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle became famous for their works in various fields and for their philosophical dialogues and debates, which had a profound impact and wide resonance in the society of that time.

However, the historical and political events witnessed in Greece during the fifth century BC allowed the emergence of a philosophical movement following the tension that existed at that time. This movement was called the Sophist movement, which became associated with the art of rhetoric. This movement sought to persuade others in a way that was not based on scientific or logical proof, i.e., what is believed to be true while it is not. In this sense, it became a symbol of fallacy, futile debate, wordplay, and concealing the truth.

So, what is the concept of this movement? And what methods did it use to persuade the receiver?

If the purpose of using metaphor is the ornamentation of expression, the beautification of style, and increasing the strength and clarity of meaning, then what purpose did the Sophists pursue in using it?

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1- The Concept of Sophistry:

“Sophistry in French Sophisme, in English Sophism, in Latin Fallacia. The origin of this term in Greek (Sophisma) is derived from the word (Sophos) meaning wise and skilled. Sophistry, according to philosophers, is deceptive wisdom, and according to logicians, it is reasoning composed of illusory premises. Its aim is to mislead and silence the opponent.” (1)

Thus, sophistry in this sense is a false reasoning based on deception, illusion, and misleading premises, whose aim is to confuse and mislead the opponent. It “originally referred to a teacher in any field of sciences and crafts, especially a teacher of rhetoric, but it later became a term of contempt in the time of Socrates and Plato, because the Sophists were disputants and deceivers, and they traded in knowledge (...) they used to move between cities seeking wealthy youth and charging them high fees, and this youth used to flock to them to acquire knowledge (...) attending their public speeches and private lessons, and they earned great wealth and reputation, but the Greeks considered it disgraceful that knowledge be bought and sold.” (2)

Among the famous examples of sophistry are the paradox of the arrow and the paradox of the heap of grain. “As for the paradox of the arrow, Aristotle summarized it [...] by saying:

- Every body occupying a space equal to its extension is at rest.
- The thrown arrow is a body that occupies (at every moment of its motion) a space equal to its extension.
- Therefore, the thrown arrow is at rest.

As for the paradox of the heap of grain, it is to ask your interlocutor to accept the following premise: every heap from which one grain is removed remains a heap, like a heap composed of fifty grains, for if one grain is removed from it, it does not cease to be a heap. Then you descend from heap to heap until you reach the heap composed of two grains, and you say: if the first premise is true, then removing one grain from this last heap must result in a heap of one grain, and this is wrong because it is a generalization of the first premise and its application to all heaps, even the heap composed of two grains.” (3)

The reader of these two examples finds a kind of deception and misleading, because their purpose is to silence the opponent and convince him with arguments that appear correct but are actually flawed, as they are based on generalized premises, making the results logically unacceptable.

Thus, the term sophistry refers to “a reasoning that appears correct but is actually flawed, whose aim is deception (4) and misleading the opponent in dialectical debates or public discourse. It is therefore a type of reasoning process carried out by the speaker that contains corruption in content or form which the interlocutor may not notice, thus falling victim to sophistical tricks and believing falsehood to be truth.” (5)

There are those who used the term fallacy as a synonym for sophistry, since “Averroes called sophistry fallacy and sophistical reasoning erroneous reasoning. It is worth noting that there was traditionally a distinction between sophistry and fallacy: namely, the intentional desire to mislead (in sophistry), while fallacy remains unintentional.” (6)

Sophistry is practiced deliberately (i.e., with an intentional desire to mislead), whereas fallacy is unintentional, as the person falls into error without intent.

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2- The Emergence of Sophistry:

Greek philosophical and literary books have extensively addressed the history of sophistry and its emergence. The rise of the Sophist movement dates back to the end of the sixth century BC and the beginning of the fifth century BC. Regarding its origin, Roland Barthes says: two Sicilian tyrants, Gelon and Hiero, in 485 BC, displaced populations and confiscated property in order to rebuild “Syracuse” and settle mercenaries. (7)

The two Sicilian tyrants had full control over the political, economic, and social situation of the country. Historical texts indicate that their rule was characterized by much oppression (...), which led to the emergence of a democratic movement against this situation that succeeded in overthrowing them. The indigenous population rose demanding the return of their stolen land, which required public courts where concerned individuals defended their rights and convinced ruling bodies of the justice of their cause by using all persuasive skills and techniques, which led to the emergence of this distinctive art in Greek culture. (8)

What occurred in Greece during this period of major changes at all levels played a significant role for the Sophists. Sophistry as a philosophical movement expressed this change and transformation in the form of interest in language, rhetoric, and oratory. From this perspective, it must be acknowledged that the Sophists were the first true founders of rhetoric. (9)

From this standpoint, sophistry is a philosophical intellectual movement of a social nature that emerged amid historical and political events in Greece in the fifth century BC. It defended itself by all means to achieve its personal goals and interests, employing deception, verbal tricks, and linguistic manipulation to persuade authorities and the masses on one hand, and to mislead the opponent and confuse him in political battles and debates on the other hand. Its goal was to teach citizens the virtues of attaining political leadership, wealth, and recovering their confiscated properties.

As for the method adopted by this movement in persuading others, it falls “within linguistic manipulation, or what is specifically called verbal manipulation and mastery of linguistic structures, (...) using deception and fraud with knowledge of logical rules and skill in their use in order to produce falsehood and lead the other into illusion and turn truth into illusion, deliberately achieving persuasion through amazement and astonishment.” (10)

What distinguished sophistry from other philosophical trends “is the reversal it introduced in the structure of logos (11) and discourse together. Before them, speech (...) was closely connected to myth, revolving around the harmony of the universe and praising the gods’ powers (...) but sophistry gave logos another meaning; speech became fluid, fluctuating, and different, after being unified with truth and sacred knowledge. It even became deceptive and misleading, enticing youth and misleading them. Speech no longer contained only truth but became a tool of persuasion and conviction, leading belief and assumption through various means without concern for truth and falsehood.” (12)

Sophistical discourse was called eristic discourse, which is “a discourse that appears to be dialectical discourse based on acceptable premises, without actually being so in reality.” (13) Its purposes can be summarized in five aims:

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“It is either to refute the interlocutor, or to force him into disgrace or something commonly considered false, or to make him doubtful, or to make him utter absurd speech leading to impossibility in meaning according to assumption. These five aims are those intended by the Sophists.” (16)

Among the most famous Sophists are: “Gorgias (485–380 BC), influenced by Empedocles, and Protagoras of Abdera (480–411 BC), inspired by Heraclitus. He rejected all absolute truth and accepted the principle of change; man, in his view, is the measure of all things.” (17)

Many philosophers opposed the Sophist movement and strongly criticized it. Plato was among the most prominent opponents of Sophist rhetorical method and their way of speech (...). He distinguished between two types of rhetoric: a bad one and a good one. The first is represented by Sophist speeches based on deception and illusion, while the second is represented by dialecticians and philosophers, which he called psychagogia, the only one capable of reaching truth. (18)

Aristotle also took a critical position and rejected Sophist thought and logic, considering their methodologies deceptive. He referred to these deceptions in his logical works (...) calling them sophistry and fallacies (...). In his work *Prior Analytics*, he stated that sophistical reasoning is based on false premises and called deceptive proof sophistry. (19)

Thus, the Sophists excelled in practicing sophistry and persuading others. In reality, rhetoric for them was “an experimental field in which they reflected their epistemological conceptions, as they sought to create a practical domain for their theoretical ideas that would embody their assumptions and give their perceptions a concrete character. Their concern was not to reach truth or sincerity, which Plato and those who followed him sought, but their ultimate goal was to find an audience that would adopt their opinions, which they considered as insignificant goods from which they gained money. If they succeeded in convincing it, this was their profit, as it was not their concern to search into existence and its mysteries, nor into metaphysical issues that do not serve the Greek people in those circumstances (...) rather, all that served their interest lay in attempting to improve this audience through lived reality, teaching it ways of adaptation and solving problems, away from philosophies that address only the elite and do not care about the concerns of the masses” (20).

3- Metaphor among the Sophists:

The Sophists relied on the practice of sophistry in their speeches to persuade their audience, so their language included rhetorical embellishments and figurative images, including metaphor, which is often “a rhetorical manifestation that enhances persuasion more than any ordinary speech, as it is more capable than reality of stimulating the receiver’s inclination toward conviction, because it has a high argumentative force and is one of the linguistic means used by the speaker to achieve his argumentative goals” (21). Thus, the Sophists used it in their speeches delivered to the masses, making it for them a means of persuasion and proof of their false arguments and corrupt reasoning.

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The concept of metaphor among the Sophists was associated with the concept of reification, but before discussing the concept of metaphor in the Sophist movement, we must first refer to the concept of reification and its uses among the Sophists.

3-1- The Concept of Reification:

“Reification / Hypostatization is to treat abstractions or relations as if they were concrete entities, or to attribute real existence to mental concepts or mental constructions” (22).

Thus, reification in this sense is making things and entities as if they are present before our eyes, dynamic, living, and having real existence in our minds.

The famous saying about reification is:

“He was afflicted by reification

so he went to dismantle his car engine, searching for the twenty horsepower which is the engine power” (23).

That is, a person believed that engine power, measured in horsepower, is a real entity inside the car engine, so he dismantled it searching for the twenty horsepower.

3-2- Reification in Sophists’ Uses:

The Sophists used reification as a fallacy, and the fallacy of reification is considered “one of the most important and most widespread fallacies. Entire philosophical systems, political, social and ethical doctrines, and scientific theories are based on this major fallacy. And while philosophers have absolute freedom to determine which things are considered real and which are not, it is not their right to transfer their reifications to other fields of research, causing disorder and confusion that cannot be avoided” (24).

Thus, the fallacy of reification in this sense was not dangerous only to literary and rhetorical sciences, but also to political, ethical, social, and scientific sciences, leading to disorder in information and confusion in concepts.

Reification is also found in pathological cases, such as the pathological condition called paranoia or paranoid schizophrenia, in which the patient “suffers from a firm belief that he is persecuted by his brothers, relatives, wife, neighbors, friends, and colleagues at work. There may be some slight persecution as a reaction to his aggressive behavior toward them (...) however, the patient does not regard persecution here as a mere description of their behavior, nor does he reduce it to their behavioral responses toward him; rather, he reifies persecution and becomes certain that there is a secret force behind these negative responses. Persecution for him is not merely a category of events under which others’ behavior toward him is classified, but rather an independent real entity that exists behind these behaviors and causes them in a hidden way. The brothers, relatives, wife, neighbors, and colleagues are only agents of this force” (25).

Reification then spread to include the field of superstition and magic, where it is used by fortune tellers and their clients. They reify “the concept of the future as if it were something that can exist in a censer, a cup, or a crystal ball, or as if it were a kind of country existing there where events take place that will be reproduced on this earth until their time comes. It is there, seen in a vague way in the palm of the hand, coffee grounds, and playing cards” (26). The client is

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left only to wait for news of the future and what he does not know about the details of his life, leading him into a cycle of the unknown, ignorance, polytheism, doubts, and suspicions.

3-2- Reification in Metaphor:

Reification has “its field in which it is used, intentionally and consciously, to serve truth and express reality. That is the rhetorical field as manifested in metaphor, figurative language, and personification, which are highly important linguistic means in literature and poetry” (27).

Thus, metaphor is one of the fields of the fallacy of reification, and reification, when far from fallacy, leads us to innocent metaphors. An example of this is what appears in the “Juha anecdote”:

“Juha wanted to get married, so he built a house large enough for him and his family, and he asked the carpenter to place the roof wood on the floor of the rooms and the floor wood on the roofs. The carpenter questioned him in astonishment and did not understand what he meant. Juha said: ‘Did you not know, my man, that when a woman enters a place she turns its upper part into lower? Turn this place now and after marriage it will be balanced’” (28).

This anecdote contains an innocent metaphor free of any fallacy, and “the truth is that reification is nothing more than the use of a metaphor, however, when it becomes a fallacy it takes metaphor too far, or takes us with it, until we forget that it is a metaphor and begin to believe that our abstract conceptual entities have the concrete properties that we have metaphorically attributed to them” (29).

An example of this is Hegel’s saying:

“The state is the divine idea as it exists in the present... it is the absolute power on earth; it is its own end and its own object, it is the ultimate end which has the highest right over the individual” (30). As if the state is a person or a present entity living with us, felt and sensed. Thus, Hegel’s statement is a reified metaphorical statement (31), because it made “the nation a supreme goal independent of the individual’s welfare and interest; meaning that there is a gigantic being that exists, becomes happy and miserable, becomes healthy and sick, called ‘the nation’, for which we sacrifice individuals and slaughter them as an offering to its majesty” (32).

Thus, the Sophists’ use of metaphor as a fallacy aims at deception, confusion, distortion, and manipulation of linguistic expressions to persuade the receiver through methods of falsification and deception. The use of figurative images, including metaphor, aims at “transmitting ideas and conveying information and bringing them closer to minds, allowing us to speak about new concepts unfamiliar to listeners within familiar old frameworks, based on a similarity between the unknown idea we want to clarify and the known idea they already recognize” (33). This is not what we find among the Sophists, whose aim in using metaphor was “to make it a source of knowledge rather than a tool of expression; for proving ideas rather than bringing them closer; for demonstrating them rather than using them as means of communication; for refutation rather than understanding” (34).

The reader of these two metaphors will notice the difference between each of them:

First metaphor: “Life is like a river, flowing like a joyful stream, then becoming a raging current, then finally weakening and exhausting until it disappears into the sea” (35).

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Second metaphor: “The republican system is a false and destructive system; because the king is the head of the state; and if you separate the head from the body, the rest of the organs will no longer perform their functions, and the whole body will die” (36).

In the first metaphor, life is compared through its three stages: youth as a joyful stream, adulthood as a raging current, and old age as a weak stream, and it is a metaphor that fulfills its purpose and serves it because the similarity is clear and logical, therefore it is called an innocent metaphor. In contrast, the second metaphor compares the republican system to a body and the king to the head of the state, which is a false analogy with no common ground between body and state, which is known as fallacious reification; hence metaphor among the Sophists is a form of fallacious reification.

Among other examples of fallacious reification mentioned by Dr. Mustafa Adel in his book (Logical Fallacies) is the reification of love:

Most people reify “love as if it were a ghostly entity that possesses the lover and keeps him awake and exhausted. Love is not a substance but a relation, not an entity but a harmony of two beings. And perhaps this reification is what makes the lover surrender to love and find no escape from its traps, thinking that the whole matter is a predetermined fate. Love has settled in his heart and dwelt in it, so how can he expel this resident?” (37).

In this reification, love residing in the lover’s heart is compared to a person residing in a house, as if the lover’s heart is a house containing this love. It is a metaphor in which the concept of love is replaced from an ontological essence to a relation of harmony between two beings that cannot be separated. This corresponds to what Al-Mutanabbi said:

“Among what harms lovers is that they
fell in love and did not know the world nor realize it.
Their eyes perish in tears and their souls
follow every ugly thing whose face appears beautiful” (38).

The reader of these two verses thinks that the poet is speaking about a lover of his beloved (the female), but this is not the intended meaning, because the poet here is speaking about another beloved, the true earthly beloved (the world), for which lovers have spent their lives chasing its pleasures, not knowing that it is transient and perishable.

This means that the world, this abstract concept in minds, was reified as a beloved woman, making it “a god that exists only in imagination. When he approaches it in reality, he is disappointed and struck by truth, and falls on the rock of reality” (39).

Among other examples of reified metaphor used by the Sophists we mention:

- 1- “Nature hates vacuum.”
- 2- “The aims of nature are always noble, therefore we should accept nature.”
- 3- “Only just laws cure the pains of society.”
- 4- “Industry is a danger to nature and society” (40).

“Nature hates vacuum” is a reified metaphor, because nature is compared to a human who hates vacuum, and in reality nature hates nothing. The second metaphor suggests that nature has aims, in addition to the fact that laws do not cure individuals, and societies by nature do not suffer. Likewise, “industry is not a thing, nor does it perform any action, and nature and society

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are not things to which anything is done. Some industries may cause harm to some natural things or some people in a society; however, treating any of these as entities, even collective entities, is a fallacy” (41).

The reader of these examples may understand them metaphorically without fallacy, but many people, when reading them, understand them as if they are similar to things, and here we fall into fallacy.

In sum, the Sophist movement succeeded “in influencing the receiver after acting upon him through persuasion and other means (...) it took him as an exploited element to achieve its goals and realize its objectives, so its concern for him was false, and its focus on him was merely a way to gain wide popularity for their ideas (...) had they adhered to truthfulness and transparency in communication, they would not have been able to influence the audience and convince it of what is false and erroneous, and thus rhetoric for them would necessarily take this deceptive path and be based on it; not as a denial of persuasive rhetoric introduced by Greek philosophers, but as a reinforcement of the goal of persuasion they sought” (42). In addition, their concept of metaphor and their linking of it to the concept of reification, which treats abstractions or relations as if they were concrete entities and attributes real existence to mental concepts and constructions, paved the way for many modern researchers in the field of metaphor, including George Lakoff, to establish a conceptual theory of metaphor and link it to mental concepts and cognitive structures.

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