Transactions of the American Philological Association 108 (1978) 175–185

PANATHENAICUS 74–90: THE RHETORIC OF ISOCRATES' DIGRESSION ON AGAMEMNON

WILLIAM H. RACE

Vanderbilt University

In the *Panathenaicus* Isocrates delivers a prolonged eulogy of Agamemnon (76–83), in particular praising him for having united the factious Greeks in an expedition against Troy. Whether one regards this praise of Agamemnon as a covert reference to Philip,[1] or sees it as a general expression of the political programme which Isocrates had espoused since at least the time of the *Panegyricus,*[2] its relevance to the speech as a whole is obvious, and it is paralleled by the other "digressions" on Theseus (*Helen* 29–37), Timotheus (*Antid.* 107–39), and Heracles (*Philip* 109–12).

[1]Taking his cue from a footnote in A. Schäfer's *Demosthenes und seine Zeit* III (Leipzig 1887) 6, Blass concludes that the digression in praise of Agamemnon certainly ("ohne Zweifel") involves a covert allusion to Philip, for otherwise it would be completely pointless [*Die Attische Beredsamkeit* II (Leipzig 1893) 321]. P. Wendland (referring to Schäfer's note as not having received deserved attention because of its brevity) appeals to the rhetorical device of the ἐσχηματισμένος λόγος to justify a detailed examination of veiled allusions to Philip ["Beiträge zu athenischer Publicistik des vierten Jahrhunderts," *NGG* (1910) 147–53]. Although Philip certainly dominated the thoughts of Greeks while this speech was being composed (342–339), he is nowhere mentioned by name in the speech and the content of the eulogy of Agamemnon can be paralleled in earlier compositions where Philip has no place. To restrict this general Isocratean theme to Philip alone is speculation. For other treatments, cf. G. Schmitz-Kahlmann, *Das Beispiel der Geschichte im politischen Denken des Isokrates, Philologus Suppl.* 31, 4 (1939) 53–55, and F. Zucker, "Isokrates' Panathenaikos," *Verh. Sächs. Akad. Leipzig* 101, 7 (1954) 12 and 17. For an illuminating discussion of *exempla* in Attic oratory, see L. Pearson, "Historical Allusion in the Attic Orators," *CP* 36 (1941) 209–29. Of interest is also S. Perlman, "The Historical Example, Its Use and Importance as Political Propaganda in the Attic Orators," *Studia Hierosolymitana* 7 (1961) 150–66, and K. Jost, *Das Beispiel und Vorbild der Vorfahren bei den attischen Rednern und Geschichtschreibern bis auf Demosthenes, Rhetorische Studien* 19 (1936).

[2]Cf. G. Norlin, *Isocrates* II (London 1929) 418: "It is commonly thought that Agamemnon is a masque for Philip of Macedon . . . The simplest explanation, however, is hinted at in §76. Agamemnon stood out in his mind as the first leader of all Hellas against the East—the first champion of the cause to which Isocrates dedicated his life." In *Panath.* 13 Isocrates cites as the theme of his earlier discourses ὁμόνοιαν τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ τὴν στρατείαν τὴν ἐπὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους (cf. *Paneg.* 3 and *Philip* 16). This is precisely what Agamemnon is praised for in section 77.

This digression is, however, embedded in "personal remarks" (74–75 and 84–90) which seem to show the orator in a state of confusion. In 74–75 he debates whether or not to digress at all, and after he finally does, his subsequent meditations go on at such length that he admits to having drifted completely off the subject because of the forgetfulness and prolixity of his old age (84–90). Blass refers to these sections as "leeres Gerede."[3] Jebb considers the digression to be one of the symptoms of the orator's exhaustion both by sickness and old age, concluded, as it is, "by the avowal that he knows not whither he is drifting."[4] Norlin notes, "The praise of Agamemnon here seems awkwardly dragged in."[5]

This prevailing uneasiness about the artistic decorum of the digression and of the personal remarks which surround it is caused, I think, in large part because critics have tended to take at face value whatever Isocrates says about his personal condition to the neglect of the rhetorical motives which inspire such remarks. Another example of this tendency concerns Isocrates' frequent references to his natural lack of a ready tongue and boldness (*Panath.* 9–10, *Philip* 81, *Epp.* 1.9 and 8.7). In each case it is important to note the rhetorical use to which he puts the topic. He wishes to set himself apart from the brash demagogues and appear as a thoughtful, mature, and careful advocate of the truth. Any biographical speculation is ultimately based on the text.[6]

And so, when he ends the digression on Agamemnon (88) by saying that he does not know where he is and seeks indulgence for his prolixity on the grounds that he is old, we should not be too quick to accept this explanation as fact (coming as it does from a master orator), but rather view it with as much scepticism as we do when Socrates tells us that he has a bad memory (*Prot.* 334c) or Pindar informs us that he has lost his way (*P.* 11.38–40). Yet Isocrates' statements are taken as personal confession and used to discredit his oratorical ability! It is the purpose of this article to examine the digression on Agamemnon in its larger context (74–90) by considering the rhetorical motives which inform it in order to show that *in terms of rhetorical practice* Isocrates is in complete control. However we judge the quality of this digression (and, ultimately, of the *Panathenaicus*

[3]Blass (above, note 1) 321. P. Wendland (above, note 1) 138 and 149 takes strong exception to this remark and in his sympathetic treatment of Isocrates takes the personal remarks seriously, but his justification of them does not take into account rhetorical motives.

[4]Jebb, *The Attic Orators* II (London 1893) 125–26.

[5]Norlin (above, note 2) 418. All translations of Isocrates in quotation marks are from his Loeb edition.

[6]For the political implications of Isocrates' "timidity," cf. G. Heilbrunn, "Isocrates on Rhetoric and Power," *Hermes* 103 (1975) 157 f.: "Isocrates' 'lack of daring,' then, is not so much an admission of weakness as it is an accusation of the Athenian democracy."

as a whole) we must at least try to understand Isocrates' intentions before criticizing the result.

The entire passage in question consists of the following divisions:

1. ἀπορία (*dubitatio*) (74–75)
2. encomium of Agamemnon (76–83)
3. *apologia* (84–87)
4. ἄφοδος (*reditus ad propositum*) (88–90)

One of the factors which complicates a discussion of the digression on Agamemnon is that it simultaneously fulfills two rhetorical purposes, one forensic and the other epideictic.[7] Beginning in section 39 Isocrates' intention is to praise Athens by comparing her with Sparta. After demonstrating the superiority of Athens on several counts with respect to her εὐεργεσία towards the Hellenes (42–69), he comes to what is perhaps the most shameful action in her history, the infamous treatment of Melos. In order to diminish the atrocity (μείωσις), he refers to the Athenian action as against "islets so small and insignificant that many of the Hellenes do not even know of their existence" (70). In contrast, the Spartans have laid waste the greatest cities of the Peloponnese (αὔξησις), cities which "deserved the greatest possible rewards from the Hellenes because of the expedition against Troy" (71). As examples he cites Messene-Nestor, Lacedaemon-Menelaus, and in climactic position Argos-Agamemnon (72). Here he pauses to laud Agamemnon in superlative terms:[8] "no one in all the world has ever undertaken deeds more distinctive, more noble, more important, more advantageous to the Hellenes, or deserving of higher praise" (73).

In this context the praise of Agamemnon corresponds to the use of digressions in forensic oratory, and although our sources for rhetorical theory are considerably later (viz. Cicero and Quintilian), they often reflect fourth century practice. According to Cicero, Hermagoras recommended employing a digression after the *reprehensio*.

[7]Although the *Panathenaicus* is, in its total intent, epideictic (it is, after all, a *laus Athenarum*), Isocrates incorporates many deliberative and forensic topics. The opening of the speech with its long *apologia* (5–34) is forensic in conception (as is the entire *Antidosis*), and the long dialogic section (200–265) is deliberative [cf. H.-O. Kröner, "Dialog und Rede: Zur Deutung des Isokrateischen Panathenaikos," *A&A* 15 (1969) 102–21]. One of the great achievements of Isocrates is his skillful combination of all three genera. Aristotle notes this combination at *Rh.* 3.17.10.1418a27–33 and then goes on to point out: "Epideictic speeches should be varied with laudatory episodes (ἐπεισοδιοῦν ἐπαίνοις), after the manner of Isocrates, who is always bringing somebody in." (J. H. Freese, Loeb tr.)

[8]The very form of this praise comes from the epideictic tradition. Cf. the Pindaric formula of superlative praise in the form of οὔ τις + comparative at *O.* 1.103–05, *O.* 2.93–95, *P.* 2.60 and Bacch. 3.63–66 and 8.22–25. Isocrates begins the formal encomium of Agamemnon (76) with a variation of this form.

> Hermagoras digressionem deinde, tum postremam conclusionem ponit. in hac autem digressione ille putat oportere quandam inferri orationem a causa atque a iudicatione ipsa remotam, quae aut sui laudem aut adversari vituperationem contineat aut in aliam causam deducat ex qua conficiat aliquid confirmationis aut reprehensionis, non argumentando, sed augendo per quandam amplificationem. (Cic. *Inv.* 1.97)

As can be seen from this statement, a digression in forensic oratory is outside the main issue (*a causa . . . remotam;* cf. *extra causam,* Cic. *Inv.* 1.27) and employs epideictic topics (*laus, vituperatio,* and *amplificatio*). In practice it is frequently a part of the commonplace of maligning the opponent's past conduct.[9] Here the *laus Agamemnonis* functions to magnify the past misconduct of the Spartans, and arouse indignation. Quintilian's discussion may also help to clarify the apparent impulsiveness of the digression.

> Ceterum res eadem et post quaestionem perorationis vice fungitur. Hanc partem παρέκβασιν vocant Graeci, Latini egressum vel egressionem. Sed hae sunt plures, ut dixi, quae per totam causam varios habent excursus, ut laus hominum locorumque, ut descriptio regionum, expositio quarundam rerum gestarum, vel etiam fabulosarum. Quo ex genere est in orationibus contra Verrem compositis Siciliae laus, Proserpinae raptus; pro C. Cornelio popularis illa virtutum Cn. Pompei commemoratio, in quam ille divinus orator, velut nomine ipso ducis cursus dicendi teneretur, abrupto quem inchoaverat sermone devertit actutum. (4.3.11–13)

What Quintilian particularly admires about the praise of Pompey in the (lost) *pro Cornelio* is the abruptness of its introduction: the mere mention of his name interrupted the course of the speech. Elsewhere Quintilian notes that a digression should be "of such a nature that we give the impression of having been forced from our proper course (*velut recto itinere depulsi*) by some uncontrollable emotion" (4.2.104, H. E. Butler, Loeb tr.).[10] In other words, it is decorous for a digression to appear spontaneous and motivated by strong personal feeling or conviction. This

[9]Cf. Aphthonius, *Progym.*, *Rh. Gr.* 2.33 Sp. for digression as part of the κοινὸς τόπος of attacking the opponent's past conduct (*locus a vita ante acta*) and *Prol. in Hermog.*, *Rh. Gr.* 4.13.14–18 W. For Demosthenes' use of the topic cf. *Mid.* 77 and the scholiast Ulpian's discussion *ad loc.* (Dindorf, ed., *Demosthenes* IX, p. 575).

[10]Cf. Quint. 4.3.5: *Erit ergo illi* [sc. *excursui*] *nonnumquam locus, ut, si expositio circa finem atrox fuerit, prosequamur eam velut erumpente protinus indignatione.* For examples much later than Isocrates, cf. Sallust, *Jug.* 4.9: *Verum ego liberius altiusque processi, dum me civitatis morum piget taedetque. Nunc ad inceptum redeo*; and Aristides, *Panath.* 35: ἀλλ' ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὥσπερ ῥεῦμα φέρων ὑπήνεγκεν βίᾳ· ἀναχωρεῖν οὖν ὅθεν ἐξέβην καιρός. To be "carried away" by the subject is an obvious (and effective) rhetorical tactic. Cf. also Dem. 18.211, and for a witty variation cf. Aristides, *Or.* 2.73 f.

is the effect which, I believe, Isocrates attempts to create in mentioning Agamemnon, as if in passing, a man whose very name will "interrupt" any serious discussion of virtue. The abruptness of the praise is calculated and Isocrates' *dubitatio* increases the dramatic and emotional effect of his *laudes*.

The *dubitatio* (74–75)

Having broken his *narratio* with resounding general praise of Agamemnon (deliberately surprising and hyperbolic to create interest), Isocrates claims to be in a dilemma (ἀπορῶ, 74), for he is torn between his duty to his new subject (αἰσχύνομαι, 74, suggests that his relationship to his subject is ethical) and possible criticism. If he just lets his superlative praise of Agamemnon rest, disbelief will surely remain (73), and the subject of Agamemnon's *aretê*, deeds, and reputation is too important (and too dear to the orator himself) (75) to let drop. On the other hand, there are great risks in digressions (ἔξω . . . τῶν ὑποθέσεων, 74 = *extra causam*); they seem to cause confusion and are frequently misused, *but many more* criticize their employment at all. The orator is afraid (δέδοικα, 75) that he too will be blamed for this digression. Nevertheless (οὐ μὴν ἀλλά, 75), he chooses (αἱροῦμαι, 75) in the face of such opposition to lend assistance to one who (like Isocrates himself, cf. *Panath.* 21) has not received deserved recognition.

This complex arrangment of topics is carefully contrived to portray the ἦθος of the orator and to highlight the forthcoming encomium, which is now assuming an epideictic (exemplary) function beyond its original forensic intention. The exact nature of the ethical appeal implicit in this passage (especially in the words αἰσχύνομαι, 74, and αἱροῦμαι, 75) will become clearer below; what is important to note is the careful (and conventional) way in which the orator builds up anticipation for his encomium. There is no need to dwell on the topic of ἀπορία in Attic Oratory, for it is very frequent. Creating an impasse in which a difficult choice must be made is at the very heart of drama, and is especially effective in revealing character. It is meant to draw the audience into the process of composing so as better to appreciate the orator's tact in handling the forthcoming subject.[11]

[11]Isocrates is especially adept at this *topos* and uses a variation of it at *Panath.* 22–25. Very instructive is the *aporia* at *Helen* 29 f. Isocrates has been praising Theseus at considerable length (18–28) (ostensibly in praise of Helen), but now that his theme has reached digressive proportions he is in a quandary as to how to proceed. His deliberations include many of the elements which appear in our passage (cf. ἀπορῶ, 29; ἔξω φερόμενον τῶν καιρῶν, 29; δέδοικα, 29; αἱροῦμαι, 30; and ἐπιτιμᾶν, 30), but the overall effect is quite distinct, even though a

Of a similar nature is Isocrates' appeal to his "fear," which (as an aspect of ὄκνος before the treatment of a theme) is common throughout rhetorical works, for it adds an emotional dimension and focuses attention on what is going to be said. For that reason it is frequently followed, as here, by a bold entry into the theme,[12] and the expressions οὐ μὴν ἀλλά and ἀλλ' ὅμως (86) frequently mark the moment of choice. Cf. *Panath.* 37, *Evag.* 11, *Peace* 15, *Paneg.* 8, *Ep.* 4.1 and many others; in particular ὅμως at *Antid.* 312 which occurs in a passage of great similarity to this one.[13]

At the end of this section the orator chooses to come to the aid of Agamemnon because he has "failed of the reputation he deserved." This motive, which might be called "righting the record," is also present in Isocrates' digressions on Timotheus (*Antid.* 101) and Heracles (*Philip* 109) (as well as in his praise of Helen and Busiris). The same motive occurs in Pindar's "digressions" on Ajax (*N.* 8.23–34) and Pelops (*O.* 1.36–89), and the reason behind it may lie in what Aristotle says about narrative in encomia at *Rh.* 3.16.3.1416b26:

> δεῖ δὲ τὰς μὲν γνωρίμους [sc. πράξεις] ἀναμιμνήσκειν· διὸ οἱ πολλοὶ οὐδὲν δέονται διηγήσεως, οἷον εἰ θέλεις Ἀχιλλέα ἐπαινεῖν (ἴσασι γὰρ πάντες τὰς πράξεις), ἀλλὰ χρῆσθαι αὐταῖς δεῖ.

The justification for narrating the deeds of such famous men as Agamemnon, Heracles, Theseus, Ajax, Pelops, etc. occurs when the speaker has something new or different to add to the well-known tradition. In this case, the audience is alerted to expect a novel treatment of Agamemnon.

The *apologia* (84–87)

After completing his *laus Agamemnonis* (in terms so firmly grounded in the epideictic tradition that there is no need here for rhetorical analysis), Isocrates pauses to defend the amount of time he has devoted to Agamemnon (this is, after all, supposedly a speech for an Athenian festival), and affirms that, contrary to the first impression, every item is essential to his argument (84–85). Not only that, but even conceding (for

---

similar rhetorical purpose is being served in both cases. For an excellent discussion of *aporia* and its relationship to *apologia* cf. E. L. Bundy, "The 'Quarrel Between Kallimachos and Apollonios' Part I: The Epilogue of Kallimachos's *Hymn to Apollo*," *CSCA* 5 (1972) 47, 58 ff.

[12]Cf. *Panath.* 137: δέδοικα . . . ὅμως δέ; *Peace* 81: δέδοικα . . . οὐ μὴν ἀποστήσομαι; *Ep.* 2.13 f.: δέδοικα . . . οὐ μὴν ἀλλά.

[13]Note the appeal to indignation (ἀγανακτῶ, 312) in order to expatiate on the subject. Pindar uses this form on several occasions; cf. *N.* 10.21, *I.* 5.51, and (with a change of address) *P.* 1.85. In *N.* 4.33–43, a passage of striking similarity to the passage under discussion, ἔμπα (36) has the same function. For the interpretation of this difficult text, cf. E. L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* I, *CPCP* 18 (1962) 3, note 11.

the sake of argument) that some might criticize his digression on grounds of literary decorum, he says: "I considered, however, that it would be less objectionable to be thought by some to disregard due measure (*τῶν καιρῶν ἀμελεῖν*, 85)[14] in this part of my discourse than to leave out, in speaking of such a man, any of the merits which belong to him and which it behoves me to mention (*κἀμοὶ προσηκόντων*, 85)." He then adds: "I thought also that I should be applauded by the most cultivated of my hearers (*τοῖς χαριεστάτοις*, 86) if I could show that I was more concerned when discoursing on the subject of virtue about doing justice to the theme than about the symmetry (*συμμετρίαν*, 86) of my speech." Although his reputation as a speaker might suffer, his primary concern has been for his subject: "Nevertheless (*ἀλλ' ὅμως*, 86) I rejected personal interests (*τὸ λυσιτελὲς ἐάσας*, 86) and chose (*εἱλόμην*, 86) justice instead." In order to show that this is no whim, but has always been his policy, he gives as an example his greater delight in his students' deeds than in their oratory, even though the latter is more to his own credit.

At issue here (and in the entire passage) is the *πίστις ἐν τῷ ἤθει τοῦ λέγοντος*, which Aristotle considers to be most persuasive (cf. *Rh.* 1.2.4.1356A4–13 and 3.17.12.1418A38–18B1). From *Poetics* 6 we know the close relationship of choice (*προαίρεσις*) and character (*ἦθος*) (cf. *Rh.* 2.21.16.1395B13 ff. and 3.16.8.1417A16–32). Also, in bestowing praise and blame we attest to our *ἦθος* (*Rh.* 1.9.1.1366A23–28 and cf. Xen. *Ag.* 11.4). That Isocrates was well aware of this is evident from his famous remarks in *Antid.* 276–80. Throughout the *Panathenaicus* Isocrates strives to portray his own character. The speech opens with his choices in literature and politics,[15] by which he wishes to show that since his youth he has been serious (*σπουδαῖος*) (*Panath.* 8, 15). His choice here in the digression is of the same stamp: when it comes to the *aretê* of Agamemnon (74, 84, 86) or

[14]*καιρός* frequently relates to quantity (especially in rhetorical contexts where length is at issue) and means the *right amount* in the given circumstances. It is one of several important normative words which define decorum in the arts. Cf. Plato, *Politicus* 284e, where he defines the second class of arts of measurement as *ὁπόσαι πρὸς τὸ μέτριον καὶ τὸ πρέπον καὶ τὸν καιρὸν καὶ τὸ δέον καὶ πάνθ' ὁπόσα εἰς τὸ μέσον ἀπῳκίσθη τῶν ἐσχάτων*. For examples in Isocrates, cf. *Philip* 110, *Helen* 29, *Panath.* 34 (*εὐκαιρία*). Cf. also D.H. *De Comp.* 22.98.12–99.2, *Dem.* 7, 42. For discussions, cf. H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, M. Hadas and J. Willis, tr., (Oxford 1975) 447 f., R. W. B. Burton, *Pindar's Pythian Odes* (Oxford 1962) 46–48, and Barrett *ad* Eur. *Hipp.* 368. For Isocrates' use of the word, cf. W. Steidle, "Redekunst und Bildung bei Isokrates," *Hermes* 80 (1952) 270–74. Bundy (above, note 11) 82, note 100, shows that *ἀκαιρία* in Isoc. *Ep.* 2.13 concerns "undue length" (he cites Dem. 60.6, *μῆκος ἄκαιρον*, as a parallel).

[15]Cf. *προηρούμην* (1), *προειλόμην* (9), *προαίρεσιν* (11), and *αἵρεσιν* (15). Demosthenes' *De Corona*, which also contains a justification of past conduct, similarly emphasizes choice and character. Cf., e.g., 109, 192, 201, 254, and 281.

the achievements of his students (87) he is willing to risk his own reputation and neglect his own interests in a just appreciation of their success. On Isocrates' serious ethical quality, cf. D.H. *Isoc.* 3-9 and *Dem.* 18, 22. Aristotle could almost have this speech in mind (he quotes Isocrates more than any other orator), when he discusses the ethical quality of narrative at *Rh.* 3.17.8.1417A16 ff., saying that the orator must speak, not from calculation (*ἀπὸ διανοίας*), but from (ethical) choice (*ἀπὸ προαιρέσεως*), and gives as an example: "But I wished it, and I preferred it (*προειλόμην*); and even if I profited nothing, it is better" (J. H. Freese, tr.). Aristotle then adds that one must go on to supply reasons for one's choice, or, "If you have no reason, you should at least say that you are aware that what you assert is incredible, but that it is your nature (*ἀλλὰ φύσει τοιοῦτος εἶ*)" (J. H. Freese, tr.). In Isocrates' case it may seem incredible that he would neglect his own interests, but when justice (*τὸ δίκαιον*, 86) is at stake, he habitually spurns selfishness.[16]

And in order to do justice to his theme, Isocrates is willing to forego symmetry. Like *καιρός* (above, note 14), *συμμετρία* (and other forms deriving from *μέτρον*; cf. *τῶν μετρίων*, 89) often refers to the proper amount. From its connotation of moderation also develops the sense of *small* amount. Cf. Longinus 33.1, where *τὸ σύμμετρον ἐν τοῖς κατορθώμασιν* = a *modicum* of success and carries a somewhat pejorative connotation (as does, perhaps, *συμμετρία* here in Isocrates). This entire chapter of Longinus (33, and cf. 36), which contrasts great writers who are willing to risk breaking the rules with mediocre perfectionists (Pindar is contrasted with Bacchylides), is very appropriate to this discussion. There are times when form must yield to content, when technical niceties must not be allowed to obscure the greatness of the theme, for there are sometimes greater requirements than pleasing proportions. In introducing the famous "digression" in the *Theaetetus* Socrates contrasts the leisure of philosophical discourse, which has no concern with being long or short, but only aims at truth (cf. *Panath.* 89), with forensic constraint, which allows no one to speak outside the issue (*ἐκτὸς οὐ ῥητέον*, 172d-e).[17]

[16]Isocrates praises Athens for making a similar choice at *Paneg.* 53: "Although we realized much more exactly than our rivals the consequences of such a course, we nevertheless preferred (*ὅμως ᾑρούμεθα*) to stand by the weaker even against our interests rather than to unite with the stronger in oppressing others for our own advantage (*τοῦ λυσιτελοῦντος ἕνεκα*)." Basically the "choice of Achilles," this topic is frequent in epideictic rhetoric; cf. Aristotle, *Rh.* 1.3.6.1358B38-59A5.

[17]Cf. also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12.38 and 7.127-32. In *Ep.* 9.26 Pliny argues in favor of taking risks in eloquence [citing, *inter alia*, the digression (*excessu*, 9) of Dem. 19.259 ff.] and aptly describes the mediocre perfectionist: *nihil peccat, nisi quod nihil peccat* (1). In medieval sermons, where ethical instruction is paramount, there is sometimes need to interrupt the

Precisely what Isocrates means when he appeals to the judgment of "the most cultivated" (τοῖς χαριεστάτοις, 86) of his audience is best explained by the definition of his "ideal" listeners later in the speech (*Panath.* 136, note the words ἄκαιρος and σύμμετρος in 135) as "those who . . . will not frown on the length of my speech . . . [and] those who, in preference to any other, will gladly listen to a discourse which celebrates the virtues of men and the ways of a well-governed state."

The *aphodos* (88–90)

The *dubitatio* heightened the dramatic impact of the digression on Agamemnon and the *apologia* stated the principles behind Isocrates' method of composition (and conduct in life); in sections 88–90 he effects the return (ἐπανελθεῖν, 88) to the catalogue of Spartan offenses. He begins it by "confessing" that he has been carried away (φερόμενος, 88) and does not know where he is, for by adding (προστιθέναι, 88)[18] argument to argument he has gotten completely away from his subject (παντάπασι πόρρω γέγονα τῆς ὑποθέσεως, 88). Although I can find no adequate parallel in Attic oratory for this "admission" of irrelevance, the rhetorical tactic is as old as Pindar. In *P.* 11.38–40, in order to effect the transition from the "digression" on Orestes to the victor, Pindar asks the rhetorical question:

ἦρ', ὦ φίλοι, κατ' ἀμευσίπορον τρίοδον ἐδινάθην,
ὀρθὰν κέλευθον ἰὼν
τὸ πρίν· ἤ μέ τις ἄνεμος ἔξω πλόου
ἔβαλεν, ὡς ὅτ' ἄκατον ἐννalίαν;

The ὀρθὰν κέλευθον (38) is the path of praise directly relevant to the *laudandus* and ἔξω πλόου (39) corresponds to the judicial expression ἔξω τῆς γραφῆς[19] and represents material apart from the main issue (πρᾶγμα, *propositum, causa*). The ensuing reminder to his muse of their contract (μισθός, 41) brings the poem back to the praise of the victor. The passage is,

---

narrative: *magis enim amanda est animarum aedificatio quam sermonis continuatio* [quoted by E. Gilson, *Les Idées et les Lettres* (Paris 1932) 143].

[18]Cf. προστιθέντες at *Antid.* 311. and προϊών at *Ep.* 2.13.

[19]Likewise in *N.* 3.27 ἐμὸν πλόον is the journey of the song to its *propositum* (opposed to the ἀλλοδαπὰν ἄκραν, 26 f.); cf. Bacch. 10.52: ἐκτὸς ὁδοῦ. The image of the journey or road (as an analogue of literary composition) is very common and suggested in the terms frequently used to describe digressions: παρέκβασις, διέξοδος, ἐκτροπή, ἐκδρομή, *digressio, excursus, egressus,* and *excessus.* Cf. L. Van Hook, *The Metaphorical Terminology of Greek Rhetoric and Literary Criticism* (Diss., Chicago 1905) 33 f. In introducing his digression in praise of Timotheus (*Antid.* 104) he assures his listeners that it is not ἔξω τῆς γραφῆς. Cf. the expression ἔξω τῆς ὑποθέσεως (*Panath.* 74, 161; *Areop.* 63).

in fact, an elaborate way of saying: *longius evectus sum, sed redeo ad propositum.*[20]

There are many reasons for considering Isocrates' return to his subject (88–90) of a similar nature. When one of the greatest rhetoricians of his time has carefully introduced and justified a digression, and then, in order to return to the subject asks indulgence for his forgetfulness and prolixity because of his age, and then can give a complete summary in a few words (89) before continuing his *narratio,* we ought to regard his remarks with an urbane smile. Add to this his claim that the speech has been more than three years in preparation and has been thoroughly discussed among his students. When, in accordance with his own instructions, we review his praise of Agamemnon, we can see that it is entirely relevant. In fact, the more he dwells on the dangers he faces in choosing to digress, the more we are meant to admire his character and appreciate his heart-felt succor (cf. *βοηθῆσαι*, 75) of Agamemnon, the man who had achieved in deed what Isocrates has always advocated in his speeches.

There remains his "confession" of senility. Everyone knows that in one sense his old age is an issue—he is, after all, a nonagenarian. But as in the case of his "timidity," we must also keep in mind the *rhetorical* motivation for the topic. He mentions his old age frequently (as early as the *Evagoras*) and uses it as an excuse for *praeteritio* at *Panath.* 55, *Peace* 141–45, and *Evag.* 73, whereas he uses it as a reason for writing in a plainer style at *Panath.* 3 f., *Antid.* 9, *Philip* 27–28, 149, and *Ep.* 6.6. To take these and other references (e.g., *Ep.* 9.16) to his old age as *literal* confessions of failing oratorical ability would be naive. At the end of the *Panathenaicus* (271) he assures us that he expects no indulgence for his age and is confident that those in his audience who prefer serious, philosophical discussions will appreciate this discourse and the long thought and preparation which went into it. His "forgetfulness" is patent irony.

In conclusion, I have attempted to account for many elements in this complex digression on Agamemnon as being aspects of rhetorical (and poetic) practice, and to show that its function is twofold. In forensic oratory such digressions serve mainly to arouse emotions (of, e.g.,

[20]Cf. Quint. 9.3.87, who cites this as an example of the *ἄφοδος*. For the force of *evectus sum,* cf. *φερόμενος* at *Panath.* 33, *Antid.* 320, *Helen* 29 and above, note 10. For later examples, cf. L. Arbusow, *Colores Rhetorici* (Göttingen 1963) 108. As in the Pindaric example, the *reditus ad propositum* can sometimes appear casual. For example, Menander Rhetor suggests these words to the orator who is effecting a transition from dealing with a god's (here Apollo's) *sedes* to praising his *virtutes* (*Rh. Gr.* 3.440.26–28 Sp.): *ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐκ οἶδα πῶς ἡ μνήμη τῆς χώρας παρήνεγκεν ἡμᾶς τῆς συνεχοῦς μνήμης τοῦ θεοῦ, διόπερ ἐπανακτέον πάλιν.* This (feigned) embarrassment (akin to *πόθεν ἄρξωμαι*; in exordia) is meant to enliven the speech, not to make a comment on the personal abilities of the orator.

indignation and pity) and to amplify. Just as Cicero uses his famous digressions on Proserpina and in praise of Sicily (*Verrines* 2.4.106 ff.; 2.2.2 ff.) to make Verres' actions more horrible by contrast, so here, in betraying the spirit of Agamemnon (as Isocrates portrays him) the Spartans are censured more effectively than they would be by a mere list of misdeeds, though the facts are certainly not omitted (cf. 91 ff.). In epideictic rhetoric digressions serve as models (*παραδείγματα*) which are persuasive in a illustrative way (leading to imitative action) not in an argumentative or strictly logical way. That Isocrates intended his digressions to be understood in this vein is clear from the conclusion to the digression on Heracles, when he urges Philip to imitate (*μιμήσασθαι*, *Philip* 114) the "spirit" of Heracles' *εὐεργεσία* towards the Hellenes (114–16).[21] The surrounding remarks are meant to amplify the encomium of Agamemnon and be *ethically* persuasive: we are meant to gain the impresssion that Isocrates is a man who is willing to break the rules, to face the criticism of the majority, and to take the hard road in order to lend assistance to those who have been denied their just deserts. In short, I hope to have shown that, whatever else we may think of it, the entire passage constitutes a sophisticated rhetorical showpiece which is meant to attest to the orator's personal character and set forth, in the encomium of Agamemnon, a paradigm for constructive political action.

[21]Cf. *Panath.* 137, where he concludes the discussion of his ideal auditors thus: "For if any should have the wish and the power to pattern their lives upon such examples, they might themselves pass their days in the enjoyment of high repute and render their own countries happy and prosperous." At *Antid.* 277 he defines the worthy writer as one who "will select from all the actions of men which bear upon his subject those examples which are the most illustrious and the most edifying; and, habituating himself to contemplate and appraise such examples, he will feel their influence not only in the preparation of a given discourse but in all the actions of his life." At the end of *Nicocles* (61) he provides the following advice: *μὴ μόνον ἐπαινεῖτε τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἀλλὰ καὶ μιμεῖσθε.* Herein lies the seriousness of epideictic literature.