Challenging the Antithesis
between Greeks and Barbarians

Part One: fragments of the Sophists

excerpted from:

The Greek Sophists
trans. by J. Dillon and T. Gergel
London, 2003
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linked in the public mind with Socrates. Among his followers are reported as being the playwright Euripides and the moderate oligarch Theramenes; and the youthful Xenophon is reported, in rather remarkable circumstances, as attending his lectures, probably in Thebes, and probably in the 410s (cf. §2 below).

A fragment from Prodicus, dealing with the gods:

21. Prodicus of Ceos says that 'the ancients accounted as gods the sun and moon and rivers and springs and in general all things that are of benefit for our life, because of the benefit derived from them, even as the Egyptians deify the Nile.' And he says that it was for this reason that bread was worshipped as Demeter, and wine as Dionysus, and water as Poseidon, and fire as Hephaestus, and so on with each of the things that are good for use.

(Sextus Empiricus, Against the Mathematicians IX 18 = B5, continued).
4 HIPPIAS OF ELIS

The dates of Hippias' life cannot be fixed with any accuracy, but he is generally regarded as being the youngest of the great sophists. In the longer of Plato's dialogues called after him, he represents himself as being 'much younger' than Protagoras (below, §7), so we may take it that he was an approximate contemporary of Socrates (i.e. born about 470 BC). Along with Protagoras and Prodicus, he figures in Plato's Protagoras, the dramatic date of which is shortly before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (c.433 BC). Like his fellow sophists, he seems to have been much in demand from his native Elis as an ambassador, and in that capacity visited many of the states of Greece, giving lectures and seminars at the same time. Plato, in the two dialogues bearing his name, presents him, albeit with heavy irony, as professing a wide variety of arts and sciences: mathematics, astronomy, music, linguistic science, literature, handicrafts and mnemonics (which last he seems to have been the first to develop in a scientific way), and this is confirmed from such other sources as we have. In the field of mathematics, he is declared by Proclus (below, §18) to have been the co-discoverer of the curve known as the quadratrix, which was used for the trisection of rectilinear angles and for the squaring of the circle. Very little of anything he wrote has survived, but we find mention of a Trojan Dialogue, an Elegy (for a boy's chorus from Messana in Sicily which was drowned) and a List of Olympic Victors. We have no idea when he died, though a reference to him in Plato's Apology (19E) - already mentioned in connection with Prodicus - implies that he was still alive in 399. However, there is a fleeting reference in the Church Father

Tertullian (Apology, 46) to his having been killed while organizing a plot against the state (presumably of Elis). If that has any substance (Tertullian is hardly a reliable source), he cannot have lived much past the end of the fifth century, or he would have been too old, one would think, for any active plotting.

A citation of Hippias from Plato's Protagoras, on human nature:

5. Very many of those present accepted what Prodicus had said. And, after Prodicus, the wise Hippias said, 'You men who are present, I think that you are all related and kinsmen and fellow citizens by nature, not by convention.' For like is related to like by nature, while convention, being a tyrant over men, forces many things on us which go beyond our nature. So it is shameful for us to know the nature of things (being wisest amongst the Greeks, and having gathered together for this very reason at the central assembly (prytaneion) itself of Greek wisdom and here, at the greatest and most blessed house within this city) and yet, like the most vulgar of men, to quarrel with each other.'

(Ibid. 337C–E)
5 ANTIPHON

An adequate treatment of Antiphon of Rhamnus, the only Athenian among the major sophists (apart from the ambiguous figure of Plato's cousin Critias, who will be dealt with below, ch. 7) is made difficult by uncertainty as to how many Antiphons we are actually faced with. The author of the Tetralogies and of certain forensic speeches, who can probably be identified with the anti-democratic politician who masterminded the establishment of the regime of the Four Hundred in 411 BC, and who was condemned to death and executed by the restored democracy as a result, has been distinguished by some from the author of the treatises On Truth and On Concord (which two treatises have also been thought by some to have different authors). But there are also in the picture the following: a good democrat who was executed by the Thirty in 403, and for whose daughter the orator Lysias wrote a speech; a tragic poet who fell foul of the tyrant Dionysius the Elder of Syracuse, and was executed by him (some time in the early fourth century); a diviner and dream-interpreter, who wrote a book on the latter subject; and an individual who set up a psychiatric clinic in Corinth (probably in the mid-fifth century). We are persuaded that at least the two 'main' Antiphons can in fact be accommodated within the same skin, despite the palpable differences in style between the forensic speeches and the Tetralogies and the On Truth or the On Concord. As we have seen in the case of Gorgias, a master of style can change his style to suit the subject-matter. As for the diviner and the psychiatrist, we have grave doubts that they can be accommodated, but many authorities accept them, so it seems best to include them, with due caution.

Our Antiphon, then, is an Athenian, son of Sophilus, of the deme Rhamnus. He is said by Caecilius of Caleate (reflected in the reports of Hermogenes of Tarsus, Pseudo-Plutarch, Philostratus, Photius and the anonymous Life prefixed to his speeches in the manuscripts, see §§2–4 below) to have been a little younger than Gorgias, which would seem to imply a birth-date in the early to mid-470s. He would thus be a slightly older contemporary of Socrates, with whom Xenophon represents him in conversation (Memoirs of Socrates I 6 = §9). His father ran a school, and is said to have been his first teacher. Though undoubtedly influenced in later life by Gorgias, Antiphon may be credited with being the pioneer of the art of rhetoric at Athens, both through his teaching and through his writings. He also seems to have pioneered the art of speech-writing, and his three surviving forensic speeches (which will not be included in this volume, as not being properly sophistic productions) have a claim to be among the earliest examples of Attic prose, while his three Tetralogies constitute a most interesting example of the tools of rhetorical instruction.

He was also active in politics, in the conservative interest, and became prominently involved in the anti-democratic coup of 412, which established the regime of the Four Hundred—which in turn led, as mentioned above, to his being executed by the restored democracy in 411.
22a. [Fragment A]

[Col. 2] . . . We recognize and respect the laws of nearby communities, whereas those of communities far away we neither respect nor revere. In this, however, we have become barbarized towards one another, whereas in fact, as far as nature is concerned, we are all equally adapted to being either barbarians or Greeks.

We have only to think of things which are natural and necessary to all mankind; these are available to all in the same way, and in all these there is no distinction between barbarian or Greek. For we all breathe out into the air by the mouth and the nostrils, and we laugh when we are pleased (col. 3) in our mind, or we weep when we are grieved, and we receive sounds with our hearing, and see by the light of our vision, and we work with our hands, and we walk with our feet . . .

(Papyrus Oxyrhynchus XI 1364)
Part Two: reflections on Euripides

excerpted from:

“Greek and Barbarians in Euripides’ Tragedies”
by Suzanne Saïd
pages 62-100 in Greeks and Barbarians
ed. by T. Harrison
New York, 2002
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It was the generation of the Persian Wars who really elaborated the Barbarian/Greek antithesis. The Greeks, sure of their own identity, had at that time contrasted a Europe with a passion for liberty to Barbarians who knew no middle ground between tyranny and slavery. Aeschylus, who fought at Marathon, in the Persians (the first of his tragedies that have been preserved for us) gives us the most perfect defence and illustration of this bipolar vision of the world. Euripides belongs to another era. He is the contemporary of the sophist Hippon, who claims that ‘from the point of view of nature, all men belong to the same family, the same house and the same city’ (Pl. Prot., 337 c). He could have heard Antiphon declare provocatively that ‘from the point of view of nature, all men are alike in every way, whether they are Greeks or Barbarians’ (DK 87 B 44 b 2). He doubtless knew the theories of the doctors who explained differences between Europeans and Asians by geographical situation or political regime, and was not unaware that, for supporters of the idea of progress, ‘the Barbarians were distinct from the Greeks only because they were at an inferior stage of evolution’. In its own way, his work testifies to this ‘crisis of meaning’ which is also a crisis of

† A foreigner resident at Athens. See further Vidal-Naquet, ‘The place and status of foreigners’.
‡ See for example the commentary of E. R. Dodds on l. 177 C. Segal, op. cit., p. 123, sees it more as an evocation of the mythical time of origins, when Greeks and Barbarians had not yet become clearly differentiated.
§ See O. Revedin, loc. cit., p. 92.

Sources

Greek identity. It tells us that the boundary dividing the Greek from the Barbarian and the civilised man from the savage can easily be crossed:²¹⁹ Greeks can always behave like barbarians and thus swing back to a Barbarism that is their past. And the better to express this, it seems to invent new words or give new meanings to those that already exist. Euripides is in fact the first of the tragedians to show us Greeks who, under the pressure of circumstances, have ‘turned savage’ (ὕπριήοις).²¹⁸ He is also the only one to show us Greek men, like Menelaus in Orestes, whose stay among Barbarians has ‘changed them into Barbarians’ (βαρβαροῦ).²¹⁰

¹⁸ This verb is not attested in Aeschylus. It appears for the first time in Euripides’ Electra (usually placed, for mythological reasons, between 240 and 247) according to Clytemnestra: ἔχοντας σάβαγον. I. 1031. To turn oneself into a savage (middle voice) is to cross the frontier that separates civilization from a state of savagery by committing a horrible crime (killing her husband) under the pressure of circumstances: in this case the abuses inflicted by Agamemnon on Clytemnestra. It is found again in Iphigenia in Tauris (l. 148): the heroine has been ‘turned savage’ (ὕπριήοις) by misfortune, or more exactly through the dreams (ἕν οὔκ ὀνείροις) that have announced the death of Orestes to her, and she thereby loses all pity for those she sacrifices. Lastly it is used three times in Orestes (dated 428): twice it is used in the middle voice (l. 226, 287) and refers to a physical appearance: the illness and lack of bathing have given the hero a savage air; it is used in the active voice (l. 616) and indicates a violation of the most sacred laws: Electra has ‘turned Orestes into a savage’ (᾿σαβάγοι), has filled him with hatred for his mother and spurred him to matricide. The word is attested in Sophocles only in Philoctetes (dated 409), in line 1321, in relation to a hero ‘reduced to a savage state’ (ὕπριήοις) by illness and isolation, to the point where he no longer wishes to hear good advice.
¹⁹ The only good use of ἰπριήοις attested in Sophocles, Antigone, I. 1002, is quite different. In fact it is applied to birds which ‘under the effects of a fatal and barbarised daze sharp cries’ (μοῦ κλαῖοντας όφθηριος καὶ βαρβαροῦς). The meaning of this difficult passage becomes clear as one recognises the inversion of a common comparison. The Greeks often likened the incomprehensible language of Barbarians to the tweeting of birds: F. Skoda, loc. cit., p. 112 ff, quotes Herodotus, II. 57; Aeschylus, Agamemnon, II. 150–25; Aristophanes, Frogs, II. 682–2, and Birds, I. 199ff. Tiresias, for his part, compares the incomprehensible language of birds killing one another to Barbarian speech (cf. schol. ad verb. ἰπριήοις ὄνομα εἴπερε).
and from:

_Inventing the Barbarian_
by Edith Hall
Oxford, 1989
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The historical reasons behind Euripidean characters’ attacks on Laconian mores or psychology are not difficult to define. In _Andromache_ and _Troades_, however, the poet seems to have gone out of his way to make his audience confront the unsatisfactory basis of the assumption that the barbarian character was generically inferior, to an extent which cannot be fully explained even by the redirection of his characters’ vitriol from the barbarian world to Sparta. It might be hoped that further illumination could be gained by examining the tragedians’ reflection of some of the more radical views circulating in the contemporary Athenian intellectual milieu. Illustration of the arguments used by the tragic poets in their exploration of the Hellene-barbarian antithesis has been adduced in this and the previous chapter from the fragmentary speeches of both Gorgias and Thrasymachus, and from many speeches and philosophical dialogues of the fourth century almost certainly reflecting arguments constructed by the sophists contemporary with the tragedians: most instances seem to have presupposed the superiority of Greeks over barbarians. The more ‘liberal’ views expressed by Socrates in Plato’s _Theaetetus_, and by the Xenophontic Hippias, are exceptional (see above, chapter 4, 3 and 4). But a few Euripidean passages where the antithesis of Hellene and barbarian is explicitly questioned have indeed been thought to reflect the views of the more radical sophists of the second half of the fifth century.

Hippias was perhaps the foremost ‘cosmopolitan’ of the enlightenment. He was well-travelled, claimed to have read literature in foreign languages (86 B 6 DK), and wrote a treatise entitled _The Nomenclature of Peoples_ which may suggest an interest in barbarian genealogies.

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43 On the nature and extent of the relationship between sophistic thought and tragic poetry see e.g. Bignone 1938, pp. 140–52; Pfeiffer 1976; J. H. Finley 1967, ch. ii.
(86 B 2 DK). In Plato’s Protagoras (337c-d) his words are probably to be interpreted as advocating the removal of the nomos of barriers between different cities. He is known to have written tragedies himself (86 A 12 DK), which supports the suggestion that he might have influenced the major tragedians. In Xenophon’s Memorabilia Hippia’s view that some laws are universal, and therefore divinely ordained for all mankind, points to a less Hellenocentric view of the unwritten laws than that taken by others. On the other hand, his advocacy of relativism, and defence of incest in foreign countries on the ground that some social practices are culturally determined, and therefore variable, may have informed the ageth of Euripides’ Aetost.

Hippia’s cosmopolitanism has been linked with a theme recurring in the fragments of Euripides, the anonymous tragic fragments, and in the comic poets, namely that all the world is home for a good man.44 A typical example is Euripides fr. 1047: ‘Every sky is open to the eagle’s flight, every land is his fatherland to a noble man.’ But how far-reaching are such statements? In asserting that a man’s homeland is wherever he happens to find himself, can the poets be considered to be truly admiring the cosmopolitanism of the Cynics or Stoics, or bridging the gap von nationalen Hellenentum zum weltbürgerlichen Hellenismus?45 The chauvinist world-view of tragedy assumes that the boundaries of decency are commensurate with the borders of Hellas, and the opinion of Hellas the only opinion that matters. Orestes claims to have helped ‘all Hellas’ by killing his mother; Menelaus is known by all the Hellenes’ to love his wife (Or. 565, 669). Furthermore, another variation on Hippia’s theme was expressed by Heracles in a lost play, in answer to a question about his place of origin (fr. adesp. 392): ‘I am Argive or Theban, for I do not claim to belong to any single place. Every Greek city is my fatherland.’ Now although Heracles did traditionally have two birthplaces, the second part of this fragment must raise the suspicion that the unspoken assumption in the other fifth-century expressions of similar sentiments was that by ‘every land’ was really meant ‘every Greek land’. It can be proven neither that such ideas truly called into question the orthodox assumption that barbarians were inferior to Greeks, nor that Hippia was the source of such sentiments.46 Our information about this sophist’s views on the non-Greek world stops tantalizingly short of any specific statement, and there is no reason to suppose, as some scholars have,47 that Euripides was indebted to him in his ‘Trojan plays’ produced in 415 BC, Alexander, Palamedes, and Troades, which come closer than any other extant fifth-century Athenian source to subverting the antithesis on a moral level of Greek and barbarian.

Scodel argued that alongside the topics of slavery, nobility, and intelligence, the opposition of Hellene and barbarian was one of the thematic continuities which lent to the plays (not a trilogy in the strict sense) ‘some trilogic unity’.48 In the extant Troades the Greek Helen is seen as the bane of both sides in the war and the Trojans are therefore portrayed as the innocent victims of Greek immorality; moreover, there is a positive transfer of ‘barbarian’ values to the Greeks.49 It is in Hecuba’s speech during her ageth with Helen that the Trojans are most conspicuously orientalized (969–1032), and this, argues Scodel, is because Hecuba is caricaturing the Greek view of the barbarian world, a view implicitly controverted by the dignity and nobility of the Trojans in comparison with the baseness of their conquerors: ‘the Greeks of this play do more than bring home a Helen who epitomizes Persian decadence. They are repeatedly characterized as stupid, cruel, impious, without self-control, cowardly, and servile. In fact, they are almost caricatures of barbarians’.50 In contrast, the Phrygian Hector, as defender of his homeland from Spartan aggression, was pre-eminent in the ‘Hellenic’ virtues of intelligence and courage (674). The great climax to which this line of thought leads is the murder of the infant Astyanax, an act denounced by Andromache in a famous paradoxical apostrophe where the Greeks are at last explicitly credited with behaving like barbarians: ‘O Greeks who have invented barbaric crimes’ (σ τα barbar exeurontes Hellenes kata, 764).

44 Instances of the theme are collected by Digeon 1970, pp. 130–1. It already occurs in a fragment attributed to Democritus (anthropoilakis pasē qai blast. pesalēs gar υπακοήs patros ho xeiropas kosmon, 68 B 247 DK). But see Diels’ warning, quoted by Kranz ad loc.: ‘Der Kosmopolitismus ist bereits bei Euripides ausgesprochen, aber die Form bei Dem. ist banal. Bedenken bleiben.’


46 It would be pleasant to be able to believe Plutarch’s anecdote in which Socrates claims to be a citizen neither of Athens nor of Hellas, but of the whole world (de Exilio 600c).

47 Nestle 1901, p. 365; see also Unterriner 1954, p. 252.


49 Ibid., p. 113.

50 Ibid., p. 114.