The First Sophistic
The origins of Greek oratory...

• Homer often refers to a hero’s ability to speak:
  • “Then uprose smooth-tongued Nestor, the facile speaker of the Pylians, and the words fell from his lips sweeter than honey” (Iliad i.247-48).

• Phoenix to Achilles:
  • “You knew nothing neither of war nor of the arts whereby men make their mark in council, and he sent me with you to train you in all excellence of speech and action” (Iliad 9.440-443).
The ability to speak well and utter sound judgement was an aspect of royalty:

“...Calliope, who is the chiepest of [the Muses], for she attends on worshipful princes: whomsoever of heaven-nourished princes the daughters of great Zeus honour, and behold him at his birth, they pour sweet dew upon his tongue, and from his lips flow gracious words” (Hesiod *Theog.* 80-84)
Aristotle

• 384 – 322 BC
• Born in Stagira, in the Chalcidice
• Son of a Physician in the service of the Macedonian court
• Moved to Athens in 367 to study at the Academy
• Left the Academy in 347
• Tutor of Alexander from 343
• Founded the Lyceum in 335
Persuasion...

• “...to a certain extent all people attempt to discuss statements and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others” (Arist. *Rhet* i.1).

• We must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to refute him” (Arist. *Rhet*. 1.12)
• “Of the mode of persuasion governed by rhetoric there are three kinds: the character of the speaker; the opinion of the audience, and the persuasive argument as proof” (Arist. *Rhet.* 1.2).

• “...when it is shown that, certain propositions being true, a further and quite distinct proposition must also be true in consequence, whether invariably or usually, this is called syllogism” (Arist. *Rhet.* 1.2.8)
Mnesiphilus

• Perhaps the founder of the Sophistic arts.
• \textit{Fl. ca 480 BC}  
  • “...a man who was neither a rhetorician nor one of the so-called physical philosophers, but a cultivator of what was then called ‘sophia’ or wisdom, although it was really nothing more than cleverness in politics and practical sagacity. Mnesiphilus received this ‘sophia,’ and handed it down, as though it were the doctrine of a sect, in unbroken tradition from Solon. His successors blended it with forensic arts, and shifted its application from public affairs to language, and were dubbed ‘sophists.’” (Plut. \textit{Them.} 2.4)
Zeno of Elea

- *Fl. ca 460 BC*
- A student of Parmenides and/or Pythagoras
- One of Pericles’ teachers and associates
- Possibly the originator of the Dialectic
- Famous nonsense – games of logic
  - The Stadium: The half-way rule means that no one can ever cross the stadium
  - Does he not anticipate Quantum Theory?
- Paradox of the Arrow
  - At any point in time it must be in a point in space – therefore it is not moving.
- None of his works survive.
The Sophists

• Rejected the Materialist presupposition
• Rejection of nomos
• Truth is a function of the dialectic
• Logos
  • Argument, story – without examination cannot be true
• Dissoi Logoi
  • Conflicting arguments
  • Truth is a result of the agona – the competition
• A well educated man must be able to argue
Protagoras of Abdera

• 481 – 411 BC
• Coined the term ‘Sophist’
• Ethical Relativism
• “Man is the measure of all things”
• Visited Athens in 445 and 430 BC
  • Composed the constitution for Thurii
• Plato, *Protagoras*
• “Whatever each city judges to be just and fine, these thing in fact are just and fine for it, so long as it holds these opinions.” (Plato *Theaetetus* 167c. 4-5)
Gorgias of Leontini

- A student of Empedocles
- Visited Athens in 427
- Taught the dissoi logoi for a fee
- Plato, *Gorgias*

**Criticism:**
- Aristophanes and Plato:
  - "...to make the weaker argument the stronger"

**Original:**
- "... make the weaker argument stronger"