

Introduction

The Ancient Concept of Kairos

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In ancient Greece, in the city of Olympia, a sanctuary to Zeus was erected at a site where the first Olympiad was held in 776 B.C.E. According to Pausanias, this site housed two shrines: “Quite close to the entrance to the stadium are two altars: one they call Hermes of the Games, the other is the altar of Opportunity. I know that a hymn to Opportunity is one of the poems of Ion of Chios; in the hymn, Opportunity is made out to be the youngest child of Zeus” (1935, 463). Opportunity is, of course, the god Kairos, who personifies a seminal concept in ancient Greek culture that was strategic to classical rhetoric, literature, aesthetics, and ethics.¹

Kairos is typically thought of as “timing,” or the “right time,” although its use went far beyond temporal reference,² as the essays in this volume demonstrate. A fundamental notion in ancient Greece, *kairos* carried a number of meanings in classical rhetorical theory and history,³ including “symmetry,” “propriety,” “occasion,” “due measure,” “fitness,” “tact,” “decorum,” “convenience,” “proportion,” “fruit,” “profit,” and “wise moderation,”⁴ to mention some of the more common uses.⁵ In some critical ways, *kairos* is similar to another master term, *logos*, in that both concepts generated many significant definitions and interpretations and carried strategic implications for historical interpretation. Although many ancient writers from various arts have capitalized on the richness of *kairos*, one ancient Greek in particular stands out for having built an entire educational system on the concept—and that is Isocrates, whose rhetorical *paideia* is structured upon the principle of *kairos*. Further, Isocrates’ personal code of living is based on *kairos*, as articulated in his many treatises suggests. I shall return to Isocrates later, in discussing how he articulates the importance of *kairos* to rhetoric, as well as a *modus vivendi*. Isocrates’ respect for the importance of *kairos* complements theories of *Kairos* outlined by Plato and Aristotle—both of which are explored in James L.

Kinneavy's essay; indeed, Isocrates' systematic treatment of *kairos* provides an important historical backdrop against which other theories in this volume may be contrasted.

Before turning to the importance of *kairos* in Isocrates' life and work, I would first like to sketch out its importance in the pre-Socratic traditions that influenced the development of ancient Greek thought. These influences, from literature, philosophy, and rhetoric as well as the medical arts and numerology, reveal how dominant and pervasive was the concept of *kairos* in antiquity. Let me begin by defining, tentatively, the concept of *kairos*.

Defining *Kairos*

As far as it has been determined, *kairos* first appeared in the *Iliad*, where it denotes a *vital* or *lethal* place in the body, one that is particularly susceptible to injury and therefore necessitates special protection; *kairos* thus, initially, carries a spatial meaning. In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, *kairos* takes on the sense of "due measure" or "proper proportion"; for example, Hesiod cites the overloading of a wagon, which can cause the axle to break. And Hesiod is probably the source of the maxim, "Observe due measure, and proportion [*kairos*] is best in all things" (Liddell and Scott). In time, *kairos* began to be distinguished from *chronos*, or linear time.⁶ John E. Smith differentiates these concepts as follows:

[W]e know that all the English expressions "a time to" are translations of the term "*kairos*"—the right or opportune time to do something often called "right timing." This aspect of time is to be distinguished from *chronos* which means the uniform time of the cosmic system, the time which, in Newton's phrase, *aequaliter fluit*. In *chronos* we have the fundamental conception of time as measure, the *quantity* of duration, the length of periodicity, the age of an object or artifact and the rate of acceleration of bodies whether on the surface of the earth or in the firmament above. (1986, 4)

Chronos, then, might be distinguished from the "right time" or good time (*eukairos*) and the "wrong time" to do something (*kakakairos*). Frank Kermodé characterizes the difference between *chronos* and *kairos* as that between chaos and orderliness (1970, 64); *kairos* is that point of time between a fictional beginning and an end, "a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (47). And in some cases there is time that is without opportunity (*akairos*), a concept that to my knowledge has been little explored.⁷ Prominent ancients such as Pindar, Theognis,

Solon, the Seven Sages (“Seal your word with silence and your silence with the *right time*,” “Nothing in excess”), Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Menander, the pre-Socratics, Pythagoras, some of the Sophists, Pericles, and many others use *kairos* to signify various meanings. *Kairos* is also a significant concept in the Bible, appearing hundreds of times in both the Old and New Testaments. The first words of Christ call attention to the importance of timing: “The time [*kairos*] is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:14). And who is not familiar with this passage from Ecclesiastes (popularized two millennia later by the Birds, a 1960s vocal group): “For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the sun: a time to be born and a time to die . . . a time to kill and a time to heal . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh.” *Kairos* was, and is, a seminal concept in numerous arts and discourses.

The concept of *kairos* became a normative principle in Greek poets and playwrights such as Hesiod, Theognis, Pindar, Aeschylus, Meletus, Euripides, and Menander. The history of *kairos* in the development of philosophy is equally important, particularly in the works of such pre-Socratics as Empedocles and Pythagoras as well as in the later philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, where it becomes a foundational term in the determination of ethics and aesthetics.⁸ It is in classical Greek rhetoric, however, that *kairos* became a truly dominant concept, particularly in its pre-Isocratean and pre-Aristotelian influences. *Kairos* plays a major role in the First Sophistic movement, especially in the works of Protagoras and Gorgias. The legacy of *kairos* continues in Aristotle’s taxonomy of rhetorical principles (as Kinneavy’s essay in this volume demonstrates), particularly with regard to proof and style; it also assumes major importance in Plato’s concept of a philosophic rhetoric and in Isocrates’ rhetorical *paideia*. In short, *kairos* was the cornerstone of rhetoric in the Golden Age of Greece.

We owe much of our understanding of *kairos* in the ancient world to twentieth-century Italian scholarship, much of which remains untranslated.⁹ Three scholars are particularly important for their examinations of pre-Socratic thought: Augusto Rostagni, Doro Levi, and Mario Untersteiner. In 1922, Rostagni published the most systematic and comprehensive treatment of the role of *kairos* in sophistic rhetoric, focusing on the influences of Pythagoras and, especially, Gorgias—whose early rhetoric drew upon the musician Damon’s claims that harmony and rhythm are linked to psychological moods and are capable of bewitching and persuading. The rhetor and musician, according to Rostagni, are exponents of a single, fully developed doctrine that grows out of the concept of *kairos*. Rostagni details the historical importance of Antisthenes, a disciple of Gorgias, whose *Peri lexeos e peri charakteron* outlines

the rhetorical doctrines of that period, particularly the influence of Pythagoras on the work of Gorgias.¹⁰ Pythagoras' abilities as a rhetor are characterized as *polutropos*—a key point of identification—because he demonstrates the special rhetorical ability to invent language appropriate to specific classes of listeners, the *logoi paidikoi*. This rhetorical ability demonstrates the art of *kairos* (and, significantly, predates Plato's assertion that philosophic rhetors must seek to know the "souls of the audience"). According to Rostagni, the various styles and manners of expression (*polutropia loguo*) aim at accommodating different audiences. If the discourse remains unchanged and unsuitable for a specific audience, it becomes *polutropon*, is rejected by the audience, and reveals *kakakairos*. Rostagni recounts Gorgias' *Peri Kairou*, which articulated the principle that the mutability of discourse is justified and required by the necessity of adapting to rhetorical circumstances and exigencies, which include the orientations of both speaker and listeners, the moment, the place, and so forth.¹¹ The "grasping of concepts" means to think in a particular way at a particular time, a function of epistemology. It is necessary, according to sophistic rhetoric, that a rhetor "scientifically" know the various forms of the discourse (*eide ton logon*), in order to avoid violating the rules of appropriateness (*ton kaiiron me diamartein*); to alter the discourse for convenience (*prepon tos holon ton logon katapoikilai*); and to choose forms that are harmonious with each other. All of these issues demonstrate the magnitude of *kairos*.

Rhetoric then, as an expression of *kairos*, became the center of education for many of the Sophists.¹² Rostagni outlines how Gorgias and Iamblicus both drew upon Pythagorean teaching, which is based upon the combined principles of *kairos* and *dikaion*. For Pythagoras, as well as for Gorgias, *kairos* touches upon the problematic issue of knowledge.¹³ To frail human perception, things exist in an uncertain, ultimately unknowable way; a veil of sense separates them, indeed, hides them from us. In accordance with *kairos*, therefore, we are compelled to maintain contrary perceptions, interpretations, and arguments: opposing arguments—the *dissoi logoi* of sophistic rhetoric—remain equally probable, and yet the mystery of *kairos* enables rhetors to choose one *logos* over another, making one and the same thing seem great or small, beautiful or ugly, new or old. Drawing upon ancient sources, Rostagni concludes that the cause and action of eloquence are part of a general theory of art, the intellectual center of which would lie in the greater part of Greece and in the school of Pythagoras:

Gorgias . . . glorifies the *magical* effects (*goeteia, psychagogia*) of *logos* and teaches and explains that the rhetor must know, scientifically, the ways to the soul, from which the speeches capable of *spellbinding* and *persuading* descend. He is a close friend of Damone from Oa who, during the same years, in a fictitious oration ad-

dressed to the Aeropagites, defends music, showing the secret affinities that link harmony and rhythm to various psychic moods, so that harmonies and rhythms are actually capable of molding human character. The rhetor and the musician are exponents of a single, already fully-developed doctrine which includes two different subjects. (1922, 149)

Along with Pythagoras, Gorgias (as a teacher of rhetoric) was an instrumental early figure in the theoretical development of *kairos*; yet it was Isocrates (considered by some, including Werner Jaeger, to be a Sophist) who offered the first systematic treatment of the theoretical and pragmatic importance of *kairos* to rhetoric and to social responsibility—the ultimate goal of Isocratean *paideia*.

In his 1923 treatment of *kairos* in classical Greek literature, “*Kairos* in Greek Literature,” Doro Levi points out the term’s etymological connections to “death,” “ruin,” “breast,” “the seat of spiritual life,” “to worry,” “to care for,” “to cut,” “to kill,” “to destroy.” In Homer, according to Levi, *kairos* usually means “mortal,” whereas in Theognis its meaning as “opportunity” begins to emerge, appearing later in the tragedies of Aeschylus. Passages from Euripides reveal the transition in meaning from Homer’s “mortal” to the sense of “decisive” or “opportune,” changes that occur in both verb and noun forms. From death or “truncation of life,” the meaning shifts to decision or “truncation of doubt.” Levi also examines instances of *kairos* in the Seven Sages, Thucydides, Democritus, and Pythagoras. In fifth-century literature, *kairos* evolves to represent the “best opportunity,” which is the essential opportunity to arrive at the “just measure” in conforming to whatever is necessary. It is this evolution of the term that so influenced Plato, who found in the literary uses of *kairos* a means to link together his concepts of ethics and aesthetics.

Levi’s groundbreaking 1924 essay, “The Concept of *Kairos* and the Philosophy of Plato,” examines *kairos* as an ethical and aesthetic concept in Plato, one that plays a significant role in shaping Plato’s notion of a “philosophic rhetoric.” Platonic aesthetics, according to Levi, is based upon principles of harmony, symmetry, and measure, while his ethics is based upon aesthetics, justice, and truth. Justice requires that citizens establish, within themselves, a harmony mirroring (and supporting) just relations within the state; thus, individuals must connect together the many conflicting elements of which they are made into a state of health or inner harmony. Central to Plato’s philosophy (and, arguably, one of Greek philosophy’s greatest insights), this conception of unity-in-plurality provides the connecting link between ethics and aesthetics; and it is a link provided by *kairos*. *Kairos* is thus the fusion of ethical and aesthetic elements. Concepts such as the “divine *logos*” can be understood only if one knows that conceptions of goodness and evil, life and death, and the cosmos can be known *exclusively* by the principle of proportion. Plato’s *Protagoras*,

according to Levi, reveals that *kairos* establishes the moral value of human actions. And in the *Philebus*, an indisputable premium is given to proper measure as the first quality of the One, which is the beautiful and the harmonious. Therefore, the first ethical principle in the Platonic system is the principle of proper measure, or *kairos*. The principle of proper measure is also integral to the emotions, especially love.

Love, according to Levi, is yet another Platonic theme delineated by the principle of *kairos*. In the *Phaedrus*, Lysias' oration prompts Socrates to articulate a doctrine of pure love, exemplified by his myth of the charioteer and the two horses. The charioteer, in an anterior life, had experienced the contemplation of the divine. Having fallen into the inferior world of the senses, he is attracted toward the celestial sphere. In this world, one may perceive only the beautiful. But after the reluctant horse is tamed, the bashful, timid lover follows the loved one as a god, allowing the supreme experience to take place: in the lovers' eyes is reflected the beauty which shines in the loved one. This experience leads one to perceive the essence of beauty (and its conjunction with the true and the good). Again, physical beauty alone is transmitted through the senses, and ideas (or ideals) of the good and the true cannot reveal themselves in appearances; only beauty remains in this domain. It is the memory of beauty, however, that inspires conceptions of the divine, thereby transporting the individual to a superior existence. The beautiful, therefore, provides a means of transcendence to the good. The identification of the beautiful with the good is a major issue in the *Phaedrus*, but what is significant is Levi's conclusion that *kairos* provides the connecting link between these concepts.

Kairos is clearly a complex, multidimensional concept and, as Eric Charles White points out in his seminal book, *Kaironomia*, there is much to learn from the ancients' treatment of the concept:

For Gorgias, *kairos* stands for a radical principle of occasionality which implies a conception of the production of meaning in language as a process of continuous adjustment to and creation of the present occasion, or a process of continuous interpretation in which the speaker seeks to inflect the given "text" to his or her own ends at the same time that the speaker's "text" is "interpreted" in turn by the context surrounding it. (1987, 14)

White thus emphasizes the uniqueness and unpredictability of each occasion, making it impossible for speakers to control discourse by planning or by previous theory. Since each discourse must be shaped in immediate response to the present occasion, instruction in *kairos* becomes virtually impossible. While theory, grounded in successful past discourse, provides models of right and wrong strategies, rhetorical theory cannot cast its net over the unforeseen, unpredictable, and uncontrollable moments. In a sense, then, every rhetorical act becomes a reinvention of theory as well as of the dis-

course itself. Another way of describing the shaping influence of the ever-emerging present occasion is to treat effective, *kairic* discourse as a mode of “improvisation” (White, 14).

Kairos was clearly a strategic concept in the intellectual arts of the ancient world, yet it is not until the time of Isocrates that we find its detailed expression in a full-scale program of rhetorical *paideia*. It was, indeed, the school of Isocrates that taught the importance of socially responsible living—that is, civic virtue—based upon rhetorical principles articulated in his *Antidosis*, yet echoed in Isocrates’ many other discourses.

Kairos and the Rhetorical *Paideia* of Isocrates

Despite his general neglect by historians of rhetoric in English studies, Isocrates (436–338 B.C.E.) was a rhetorician/philosopher of such significance that he has been referred to as the “father of the humanities” by scholars in classics, speech, and philosophy. As Werner Jaeger remarks, “historically, it is perfectly correct to describe him . . . as the father of ‘humanistic culture’” (1971, 46). Henri Marrou echoes these sentiments, describing Isocrates as the most important teacher in Greece’s Golden Age: “On the whole it was Isocrates, not Plato, who educated fourth-century Greece and subsequently the Hellenistic and Roman worlds” (1982, 79).¹⁴ What may be Isocrates’ most important historical contribution, however, is his articulation of the critical importance of *kairos* in rhetorical theory and practice.

Plato’s most detailed discussion of “philosophic rhetoric,” the *Phaedrus*, concludes with Socrates’ observation that Isocrates “has a nature above the speeches of Lysias and possesses a nobler nature; . . . something of philosophy is inborn in his mind” (279a–b).¹⁵ This reference hints at the connection between Isocrates’ “philosophy” (he does refer to himself as a cultural philosopher in *Against the Sophists*) and *kairos*. James L. Kinneavy has argued that Isocrates’ oration, *On the Peace* (355 B.C.E.), was a strategic discourse because of its timing and that it significantly affected the work of both Plato and Aristotle:

Plato, after this time, recognized two separate types of wisdom, one theoretical and one practical, and permitted Aristotle to teach rhetoric for the first time in the academy. More important, the speech, the situation, and the practical success of Isocrates’ school of rhetoric critically influenced the young Aristotle. It was at this time that Aristotle rejected the scientific ideal of Plato. (*Greek Rhetorical Origins*, 38)

Isocrates’ influence and reputation extended into the Roman world and beyond.¹⁶ Much of Isocrates’ success over nearly two millennia may be attributed to his formal system of rhetorical *paideia*, structured on the principle of *kairos*. Isocrates’ school was arguably one of the most influential schools in

Greek Antiquity, if not the predominant institution in the Golden Age of Greece. One of Isocrates' important contributions to rhetorical history is his conjoining of *phronesis* or "practical wisdom" and pragmatic ethics within the "situation" and "time" of discourse, an emphasis upon contexts that gives primacy to the kairic dimensions of any rhetorical act.

In spite of the attention given to *kairos* by twentieth-century historians, no one, to my knowledge, has offered a systematic articulation of the importance of *kairos* in the rhetorical/cultural system of Isocrates.¹⁷ The general neglect of *kairos* in Isocrates is surprising, given his importance in the rhetorical development of the Golden Age and the fact that *kairos*, in its terminological and conceptual forms, is ubiquitous in the Isocratean corpus. As a term, *kairos* appears nearly one hundred times in substantive, adverbial, and adjectival forms. In order to explore the importance of *kairos* in Isocrates' discourse, let me first summarize Isocrates' system of *phronesis* and pragmatic ethics, and then explore how *kairos* informs this code.¹⁸

Isocrates is quite explicit in several of his treatises about the goal of his rhetorical *paideia*, which is to serve the public good in multiple arenas of public and private discourse. Isocrates' program stresses a pragmatic "ethics." His system proceeds from the belief that, once students became familiar with certain rhetorical strategies—a weaving together of subject matter, invention, context, and "style"—they would be able to join the ranks of "philosophers" and become effective, socially responsible citizens. This conflation of rhetoric and philosophy prepared students for "community service." As Jacqueline de Romilly puts it,

For Isocrates . . . learning to speak well is learning to arrive at ideas and advocate values that will be endorsed and prove effective. This ability, moreover, will win for those who acquire it the esteem of their fellows; for the opinion of the community, which is the sole criterion of truth and goodness, is also the finest recognition for one who had proved worthy of it. (1985, 129)

This shift in emphasis is a remarkable rupture with earlier rhetorical schools and traditions, many of which limited their "art" to a concern for mechanical functions of speech. In contrast, Isocrates' theory of rhetorical philosophy is a process of seeking social "justice." It is a *modus vivendi*, an ontology that conjoins private and public activities.

Isocrates' notion of social justice was situated within the personal ethics of the rhetor, and Isocrates' system emphasizes a pragmatic personal ethics by which a rhetor's credibility is determined by the reputation he or she brings to the rhetorical situation. As he says in *Antidosis*: "[W]ho does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is

made by a man's life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words?" (1968, 278). Further, Isocrates postulates a symbiotic relationship between *phronesis* and effective discourse. Rhetoric cannot be successful without their conjunction and Isocrates' entire educational program is predicated upon the notion that rhetoric and practical wisdom are interdependent.

Although Isocrates' school was in direct competition with both Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, it is with Plato and his "divine" epistemology that Isocrates stands in sharpest contrast. The Academy attempted to train students to be dialecticians, the best of whom would be capable of leading the city-state. Isocrates' *paideia*, on the other hand, promoted the education of leaders in many areas—civic, military, and so forth—who would be, above all else, *pragmatic* thinkers and speakers capable of understanding the principle of *phronesis*, with a special emphasis on what is practical and expedient under *any* given set of circumstance—the principle of *kairos*. *Phronesis*, coupled with *kairos*, is integral to effective rhetoric and it must be part of a speaker's value system as it translates into social action:

[W]hile we call eloquent those who are able to speak before a crowd, we regard as sage those who most skillfully debate their problems in their own minds. And if there is need to speak in brief summary of this power, we shall find that none of the things which are done with intelligence [*phronesis*] takes place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom. (*Antidosis*, 1968, 257)

Practical wisdom, then, serves at least two functions: *phronesis* is necessary for the activation of a preliminary, "internal" dialectic which, in turn, gives rise to an "intelligence" that expresses itself in words *and* actions. This derived intelligence is based upon a rhetor's understanding of *kairos*. As Michael Cahn points out, "Isocrates underlines what the concept of *kairos* in itself already indicates: in rhetoric, a reliable correlation between rhetorical strategies and desired effects cannot be prescribed because the situational factor is paramount" (1989, 133). And it is precisely because a rhetor cannot anticipate every important situational circumstance that he or she *must* carry a flexible attitude into any given rhetorical situation.

In *Against the Sophists*, his earliest known discussion of rhetoric, Isocrates identifies attention to *kairos* as one of the most important characteristics of effective rhetorical discourse. One of the reasons for the general ineffectiveness of the Sophists, according to Isocrates, is their inability to recognize the kairic exigencies of particular discourses. They fail to consider *the right time* or make the *appropriate* adjustments in any given rhetorical situation. According to Daniel Gillis:

The opportune moment must be chosen for a particular treatment of a theme, the appropriate arguments for each of the historical events must be marshaled, and the actual arrangement of the words must be skillful. The object of all these elements forming good oratory is not the facile deception of the audience. (1969, 335–36)

In *Helen* Isocrates makes multiple references to the Sophists' lack of understanding of *kairos*, going so far as to accuse them of failing to measure intellectual distinctions:

[M]en have grown old, some asserting that it is impossible to say, or to gainsay, what is false, or to speak on both sides of the same questions, others maintaining that courage and wisdom and justice are identical . . . and still others waste their time in capricious disputations. (1)

Thus, *kairos*, like all preeminent terms in Greek rhetoric, encompasses practical as well as theoretical dimensions.

Isocrates exhorted other teachers of rhetoric to encourage their students to be mindful of the *kairos* of rhetorical situations. As de Romilly points out, "Isocrates had no faith in 'instant' formulas: after a discussion of the 'general themes used in speeches,' he moved on to exercises, which were always related to practical situations. The pupil had to learn to choose arguments befitting the occasion and arrange them in a complete speech" (1968, 130). An understanding of the importance of *kairos* as a *dynamic* principle rather than a static, codified rhetorical technique is integral to rhetorical success, as Isocrates argues in *Antidosis*: "[T]hose who most apply their minds to [discourse situations] and are able to discern the consequences which for the most part grow out of them, will most often meet these occasions in the right way" (1968, 184). One important step in meeting these occasions "in the right way" is to practice moderation in speech: "[W]hile we prize due measure [*eukairian*] and affirm that there is nothing so precious, yet when we think we have something of importance to say, we throw moderation to the winds" (*Antidosis*, 311). The rhetor must anticipate all exigencies, since he or she can never know the particulars of a discourse situation until actually situated within it.

For Isocrates, an understanding of the principle of *kairos* means that the rhetor remains accommodative—unlike some other philosophers and Sophists, who are bound by rigid laws and systems. As he says in *Against the Sophists*:

I marvel when I observe these men setting themselves up as instructors of youth who cannot see that they are applying the analogy of an art with hard and fast rules to a creative process. For, excepting these teachers, who does not know that the art of using letters remains fixed and unchanged, so that we continually and invariably use the same letters for the same purposes, while exactly the reverse is true of the art of

discourse. . . . But the greatest proof of the difference between these two arts [philosophy and rhetoric] is that oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion [*kairos*], propriety of style, and originality of treatment. (1968, 12–13)

The properly trained rhetor, unlike corrupt Sophists or facile philosophers, is able to modify his or her discourse according to circumstances and to meet the specific exigencies of each rhetorical situation, since each one involves a unique set of circumstances.

Isocratean rhetoric, like Gorgian rhetoric, stresses the importance of the particular moment or issue, rather than universals or ideals. In *Antidosis* Isocrates explains why he grounds his theory in practical situations. Teachers in his school are instructed to “set [students] at exercises, habituate them to work, and require them to combine in practice the particular things which they have learned in order that they may grasp them more firmly and bring their theories into closer touch with the occasions [*kairon*] for applying them” (1968, 184). These occasions often involve personal encounters. For example, Isocrates advises Demonicus (a wealthy young Cypriot) that he will best serve his friends if he is able to discern the *right time* to assist them: “You will best serve your friends if you do not wait for them to ask your help, but go of your own accord at the crucial moment [*kairois*] to lend them aid” (*To Demonicus*, 25). This emphasis on kairic thought and action in public and private activities is characteristic of Isocratean rhetoric.

In *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates outlines the importance of *kairos* to political diplomacy. In speaking of effective statesmen, Isocrates remarks: “[I]t behooves a man of taste not to indulge his resourcefulness when he has more to say on a given subject than the other speakers, but to preserve always the element of timeliness no matter on what subject he may have occasion to speak” (*Panathenaicus*, 34). In *Panegyricus* (7–9), similarly, Isocrates “adds that it is important in oratory to be able to make proper use of the events of the past, and *at the appropriate time* or *Kairos*” (Kerferd, 82). A significant number of references elsewhere stress the importance of *kairos* (as appropriate time) in rhetoric.

In his advice to Nicocles, Isocrates advises the King of Cyprus to measure his emotions and behavior against the exigencies of the situation: “Do nothing in anger, but simulate anger when the occasion [*kairos*] demands it. Show yourself stern by overlooking nothing which men do, but kind by making the punishment less than the offence” (*To Nicocles*, 23). A successful monarch, according to Isocrates, must exercise caution in speech and behavior and always be ready to capitalize on any given situation at the *right time*: “Keep watch always on your words and actions, that you may fall into as few

mistakes as possible. For . . . it is best to grasp your opportunities at exactly the right moment [*kairon*]” (*To Nicocles*, 33). In *Nicocles*, writing in the persona of King Nicocles, Isocrates offers advice on how a king’s subjects should conduct themselves. In this discourse, *kairos* plays a major role in justifying monarchical rule. Nicocles argues that those who live in monarchies are superior to appointed leaders because they “apply themselves to the state’s business both day and night, do not let opportunities pass them by, but act in each case at the right moment [*kairon*]” (19). Nicocles emphasizes the importance of virtuous behavior, claiming to have demonstrated his virtue to the populace:

[W]e ought not to test all the virtues in the same set of conditions, but should test justice when a man is in want, temperance when he is in power, continence when he is in the prime of youth. Now in these situations [*kairois*] no one will deny that I have given proof of my nature. (44)

Further, near the end of his address, Nicocles cautions his audience to observe prudence in economy, which is itself dependent upon the principle of appropriateness: “Do not think that getting is gain or spending is less; for neither the one nor the other has the same significance at all times, but either, when done in season [*en kairo*] and with honor, benefits the doer” (50). Such injunctions to pay heed to the principle of *kairos* are pervasive throughout Isocrates’ treatises of advice to monarchs and aspiring leaders.

Archidamus is yet another of Isocrates’ discourses in which a political conflict illustrates the importance of *kairos*. In this case, the Spartan assembly debates whether or not to wage war against Thebes over a land dispute. Archidamus III, son of ruling King Agesilaus, exhorts his fellow Spartans to battle. His speech is noteworthy for several reasons: it reflects Isocrates’ sympathy for Spartan policy (which is curious, considering Isocrates’ anti-Spartan sentiment in other of his discourses); it is a lively and forceful polemic, in spite of the fact that it was composed in Isocrates’ ninetieth year; and it relies heavily upon a sensitivity to *kairos*, both the speaker’s and audience’s. As other Spartans consider going to war over contested territory, Archidamus argues that the exigencies of the (rhetorical) situation permit him to ignore Theban legal claims: “I have not, it is true, recounted in detail our original titles to this land (for the present occasion [*kairos*] does not permit me to go into legendary history)” (24). In other words, the principle of *kairos* permits Archidamus to embrace the most advantageous of several competing *logoi*; in so doing he de-emphasizes the legal issues involved in other counterclaims while inflaming the passions of the Spartan council. Later in his address, Archidamus argues that *kairos* is a principle that guides men to do, not what they are entitled to do but, rather, what they should do:

Those who advise us to make peace declare that prudent men ought not to take the same view of things in fortunate as in unfortunate circumstances, but rather that they should always consult their immediate situation and accommodate themselves to their fortunes, and should never entertain ambitions beyond their power, but should at such times [*kairois*] seek, not their just rights but their best interests. (*Archidamus*, 34)

The decision to make war or negotiate peace with Thebes depends upon the expedient exploitation of particular political circumstances. Neither war nor peace is necessarily the “correct” choice; rather, the proper course of action is determined by taking advantage of time and opportunity. As Isocrates avers,

I know of many who through war have acquired great prosperity, and many who have been robbed of all they possessed through keeping the peace; for nothing of this kind is in itself either good or bad, but rather it is the use we make of circumstances and opportunities [*kairois*] which in either case must determine the result. (49–50)

An individual or group that best understands the kairic dimensions of any particular issue has a distinct advantage over an adversary. This message reverberates through many Isocratean discourses, particularly the *Antidosis*.

The “wise” or phronetic individual, according to Isocrates, must always be aware that he or she lives in a contingent universe: “[P]eople of intelligence . . . ought not to think that they have exact knowledge of what the result will be, but to be minded towards these contingencies as men who exercise their best judgment” (*On the Peace*, 8). In outlining a sequence of events necessary for peace between Athens and her enemies, Isocrates emphasizes that each step has a particular *kairos*: “I have already discussed most of the points which bear upon this question, not in sequence, but as each fell into its opportune place [*kairois*]” (*On the Peace*, 132). Isocrates considers the ability to act pragmatically the mark of educated persons—that is, of individuals “who manage well the circumstances which they encounter day by day, and who possess a judgment which is accurate in meeting occasions as they arise and rarely miss the expedient course of action” (*Panathenaicus*, 30–31). Isocrates’ central educational goal was the creation of just such a “citizen-orator,” a liberally educated person who could serve himself and others through intelligent speech in private discourse, in the assembly, and (if need be) in the law court. If these “public citizens” are of sufficient number and take it upon themselves to dedicate themselves to deliberative activity within the *polis*, the state has the potential to rescue itself from present evils and head off future dangers. In order for these citizens to govern effectively, however, they must be able to make decisions according to the exigencies of particular intra- and international situations. In *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates recounts the “opportunity” of earlier

invasions of Athens and the Athenians' successful "occasions" of resistance: "All these whom I have instanced, having invaded our country,—not together nor at the same time, but as opportunity [*kairoi*] and self-interest and desire concurred in each course—our ancestors conquered in battle and put an end to their insolence" (196). Such examples show how important the concept of *kairos* was to the military and cultural imperialism rampant throughout many of the Greek city-states.

Isocrates not only articulated the theory of *kairos*; he also practiced the *kairos* he found so lacking in others. In spite of the fact that Alcidamas attacked Isocrates for failing to practice *kairos*, the oration, *On the Peace*, distributed to members of the Athenian Assembly, successfully argued the futility of Athens and her allies pursuing a policy of hegemony. Also, *Antidosis* was a timely response to the charges made against Isocrates and his educational system. In spite of the fact that the discourse appears years after the actual lawsuit, *Antidosis* was disseminated as a rebuttal to the accusation that he, like Socrates, was a corrupting influence on the youth of Athens—a charge that could result in exile or death. And even in this discourse of self-defense, Isocrates notes that the principle of *kairos* determines which of his previous orations he is going to quote: "I am not going to quote from [*Against the Sophists*] my criticisms of others; for they are too long for the present occasion [*kairou*]" (194). In his many treatises and letters, Isocrates consistently emphasizes the importance of a rhetor understanding his or her audience and the varying circumstances of the occasion.

Perhaps Isocrates' emphasis on *kairos* is best summarized in *Panathenaiacus*—one of his most ambitious discourses, since undertaken and published when Isocrates was ninety-seven. In this treatise, Isocrates sums up the goals of his rhetorical *paideia*:

Whom, then, do I call educated? . . . First, those who manage well the *circumstances* which they encounter day by day, and who possess a judgement which is accurate in meeting occasions as they arise and rarely misses the expedient course of action; next, those who are decent and honourable in their intercourse with all with whom they associate, tolerating easily and good-naturedly what is unpleasant or offensive in others and being themselves as agreeable and reasonable to their associates as it is possible to be; furthermore, those who hold their pleasures always under control and are not unduly overcome by their misfortunes; . . . fourthly, and most important of all, those who are not spoiled by success . . . but hold their ground steadfastly as intelligent individuals. (30–32)

This pragmatic, personal, and socially conscious recapitulation of what it means to be "educated" encapsulates the principle of *kairos* in all its nuances: the importance of living by *phronesis* or "practical wisdom" (which is itself

based on an epistemology of probability) with, always, an intense awareness of occasion, audience, and situational context. Such is a life based on *kairos*.

In this volume, we have brought together essays that reveal the various historical meanings, developments, complications, nuances, and implications of *kairos*. Clearly one of the master concepts in the ancient world, *kairos* has critical resonance for today's world as well; indeed, the following far-reaching essays demonstrate how strategic and dominant this concept has been and continues to be. Excerpted here, Rostagni's seminal essay explores the importance of Pythagoras' treatment of *kairos* and its subsequent role in sophistic rhetorical theory. As an expression of *kairos*, rhetoric becomes the foundation of sophistic education. Further, for Pythagoras as well as for Gorgias, *kairos* touches upon the problem of human knowledge. Kinneavy analyzes and evaluates the critical functions of *kairos* in the rhetorical theories of Plato and Aristotle, pointing out the significance of *kairos* in Plato's analysis of the rhetorical addressee and in Aristotle's exposition of extrinsic appeals (particularly the *topoi*), as well as the significance of *kairos* to rhetorical *ethos*. Carolyn Eriksen Hill, applying Pythagorean and Gorgian theories of *kairos*, reconsiders the conflicts between product- and process-orientations in composition.

In his germinal essay comparing *chronos*-time with kairic time, John E. Smith examines the ways *chronos* and *kairos* differ in apprehending metaphysical and historical dimensions of reality. Yet *chronos* and *kairos* are not unrelated: *kairos* requires *chronos*, which becomes a necessary precondition underlying qualitative uses of time; when taken by itself, conversely, *chronos* fails to explain the crisis points of human experience—those moments, for example, when junctures of opportunity arise, calling for ingenuity in apprehending when the time is “right.” Reconceived as a unity of *kairos* and *chronos*, time thus furnishes an invaluable grid upon which the processes of nature and historical order can be plotted and, by such means, interpreted and understood. Amélie Frost Benedikt draws upon Smith's essay in her outline of an ethical system grounded in *kairos*; in addition, she examines various uses of *kairos* from sophistic sources to contemporary culture. My essay on the various meanings of *kairos* in the New Testament attempts to demonstrate how strategic the Greek concept was to the formation of Christian thought and narrative.

Richard Leo Enos investigates the role of *kairos* in the situational constraints of civic composition, particularly as writing in Greek society initially served as a technological aid to the more primary and pervasive functions of oral discourse. More specifically, Enos explores ancient Athenian archaeological and textual evidence that reveals inventional constraints placed upon

writing used in the service of preserving oral discourse. John Poulakos examines the importance of *kairos* in Gorgias' rhetorical compositions, particularly in the way *kairos* functions *within* rhetorical texts. In *Palamedes* and *Helen* especially, Gorgias offers a glimpse of his practical principle of *kairos*, exemplifying ways in which texts can be composed so as to give the impression of sensitivity to timeliness. Catherine R. Eskin explores the importance of *kairos* in the medical treatises of Hippocrates, examining the most well-known Hippocratic passages in terms of their technical emphasis on *kairos*. Hippocrates is especially interested in aligning *kairos* with experimentation, experience, incident, and phenomena, and he is opposed to any theorizing that is separated from these contacts. Thus, the situational dimension of *kairos* becomes critical to Hippocrates' scientific method. Joseph J. Hughes examines *kairos* in the Roman world, principally through the concept of *decorum*, which approximates *kairos* (but does carry quite the same panoply of meanings). Noting that Cicero is the primary exponent of *kairos/decorum* in Roman rhetorical culture, Hughes analyzes the movement of the concept in Crassus Orator's speech, *De Lege Servilia*.

James S. Baumlin explores the relationship between Ciceronian *kairos/decorum* and Renaissance rhetorical and ethical theory; in addition, he examines the various competing representations of time, as recorded in the age's popular emblem books. In a subsequent essay, he collaborates with Tita French Baumlin in analyzing the strategic function of *kairos* in Elizabethan revenge tragedy, particularly as it informs Hamlet's attempted revenge. As Baumlin and Baumlin argue, *kairos* plays a pivotal role in the age's crisis regarding the powers of human reason and the Humanist aspiration to master worldly fortune.

Gregory H. Mason, like Baumlin and Baumlin, finds *kairos* to be a strategic issue in the interpretation of literature. According to Mason, the neglect of *kairos*, of the qualitative dimension of time, has often skewed our culture's appreciation of the arts. In Japanese poetry, in contrast, the "haiku moment" denotes a *kairos* when a seemingly commonplace event inspires poetry. Like most lyric forms, the haiku is radically kairic, urging a sensitivity to experience that enhances the quality of each passing moment. Indeed, an aesthetic based in *kairos* demands that our culture reconsider its received notions of artistic form; otherwise, we remain haunted by Neoplatonic, anti-kairic, and static or "Ideal" criteria of evaluation. By means of such reassessment, Mason suggests we might learn to bring a more strongly temporal perspective to the entire spectrum of art (and of contemporary art in particular).

Roger Thompson argues for a theory of *kairos* that embraces both James L. Kinneavy's "right timing and due measure" and Paul Tillich's "eternal breaking into the temporal." Indeed, aligning Tillich's understanding of *kairos*

with Kinneavy's opens up several new avenues of interpretation. Framing a theory of *kairos* in spiritual terms allows one to reinterpret the rhetorical theories of both Plato and Augustine. It also provides a critical new means to interpret early and mid-nineteenth-century American literary and rhetorical texts—texts that often self-consciously assert their spiritual and/or theological import. Because American literary, rhetorical, and cultural history is permeated by a sense of divine urgency or mission, a theory of *kairos* that accounts for this divine mission offers a more sensitive means of exploration. In particular, Thompson examines Ralph Waldo Emerson's invocation of the "heroic" moment as prerequisite to "true" rhetoric, and places Emerson's conception alongside that of Plato and Augustine as embracing a *kairos* at once historical and transcendent.

The essays in this collection thus range beyond Gorgias to explore notions of *kairos* in Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, the New Testament, Renaissance iconography, Elizabethan drama, American Transcendentalism, and the Japanese haiku and tea ceremony. Beyond rhetorical theory (and praxis), the fields examined include theology, philosophy, ethics, the history of medicine, psychology, aesthetics, literary theory, and composition pedagogy. *Kairos* is considered in dynamic relation with other philosophical and rhetorical concepts—for example, with the competing temporalities of *chronos* and *aion* and the formal constraints of *prepon* or *decorum*. Though ancient Greek in origin, the concept's subsequent history is charted through Roman, Judeo-Christian, Renaissance Humanist, nineteenth-century American, and contemporary discourse; also duly noted is its vital presence in Eastern literary-aesthetic culture. As the essays in this collection thus attest, *kairos* remains a master concept cutting across ages, cultures, and disciplines. It is time now to turn to the essays themselves.

Notes

1. Limitations of space preclude discussion of all of these disciplines, but let me stress the importance of *kairos* for ethics. As Aristotle advises, "Know the critical situation in your life, know that it demands a decision, and what decision, train yourself to recognize as such the decisive point in your life, and to act accordingly" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.4.1096a32).

2. Eric Charles White explores antecedents of *kairos* that bring together two distinct notions of the concept: "*Kairos* is an ancient Greek word that means 'the right moment' or 'the opportune.' The two meanings of the word apparently come from two different sources. In archery, it refers to an opening or 'opportunity' or, more precisely, a long tunnel-like aperture through which the archer's arrow has to pass. Successful passage of a *kairos* requires, therefore, that the archer's arrow be fired not only accurately but with enough power for penetration. The second meaning of *kairos* traces to the art of

weaving. There it is the ‘critical time’ when the weaver must draw the yarn through a gap that momentarily opens in the warp of the cloth being woven. Putting the two meanings together, one might understand *kairos* to refer to a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved” (1987, 13). Significant here is the conflation of spatial and temporal metaphors.

3. I have found nearly one hundred scholarly articles and monographs examining *kairos* in classical rhetoric, literature, and philosophy. *Kairos* also plays a very important role in the work of the noted twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich, who has written several books and nearly a dozen articles on this concept. Tillich’s general understanding of *kairos* emphasizes its role in the contextualization of codified systems. What Tillich has done is to take Greek notions of *kairos* and distinguish them from *logos* which, for him, denotes timelessness, particularly *stasis* in customs and laws. *Kairos*, on the other hand, involves a qualitative, dynamic state of time. Tillich argues that it is *kairos* that brings general theory, law, or custom into an individuated *praxis* (in particular, see his “*Kairos and Logos*,” “*Kairos and Kairos*,” and “*Kairos I*”). Tillich’s approach to *kairos* would seem to have relevance to contemporary writing theory, particularly composition practice that is concerned with social and ideological contexts.

4. Gerhard Dellling notes that in the period after Hesiod, *kairos* took on positive tones. For poets and philosophers, *kairos* meant *sophrosyne* in the sense of “norm.” *Kairos* also came to mean “wise moderation” and that which is “decisive.” Gerhard Dellling writes, “*Kairos* takes on the sense of fateful. Basic to this concept is that *Moira* forces man to a decision by putting him in a specific situation” (1986, 455). Thus, he quotes Aristotle: “. . . Know the critical situation in your life, know that it demands a decision, and what decision, train yourself to recognize as such the decisive point in your life, and to act accordingly” (455).

5. There are more definitions of *kairos* than could reasonably be addressed in an essay of this length. William H. Race, for example, discusses nearly a dozen different meanings of *kairos* in Greek drama alone.

6. Chronos, as a Greek god, has an interesting lineage in regard to his grandson, Kairos. Zeus was the youngest son of Chronos, who was the youngest son of Heaven (Ouranos) and Earth (Gaea), who emerged from chaos, the Void that existed before there was anything (Kelman, 59). For an extensive discussion of the gods Chronos and Kairos, see Cook, “Appendix A: *Kairos*.”

7. In *To Demonius*, Isocrates advises his addressee to avoid behavior that is inappropriate or *akairic*: “[Y]ou must avoid being serious when the occasion is one for mirth, or taking pleasure in mirth when the occasion is serious (for what is unseasonable [*akairon*] is always offensive)” (31).

8. Ethical implications of *kairos* can be found much earlier, as in Hesiod’s description of a man who violates his brother’s wife as “acting against what is proper” (*parakairos redzon*) (*Works and Days*, 329).

9. There is, for example, a wealth of untranslated Italian scholarship related to many areas of antiquity housed in La Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, Italy.

10. Dale L. Sullivan, in a penetrating analysis of *kairos* in early Greek rhetoric, suggests that Gorgias departs significantly from Pythagoras in his views on *kairos*: “In [Gorgias’] *Encomium of Helen*, three meanings of *kairos* are apparent: poetic timing that produces connections and thus a special *logos*, a point of indecision encountered when competing opinions are presented, and a sort of irrational power that makes decision possible. We might call these respectively the *kairos* of inspiration, of *stasis*, and of *duna-*

mis, or power. The first *kairos* is located in the mind of the speaker, who forms a *logos* but does not yet express it; the second is in the audience who have not yet heard the *logos*; and the third is in the dynamic situation occasioned by the release of the *logos*" (1992, 318–19). This insightful semiotic explanation is reminiscent of Aristotle's configuration of the *pisteis*.

11. Alcidas, a student of Gorgias, contends that a speech given from a prepared text ignores the context in which it is given: "For those who work hard on a written text before a contest sometimes miss the right response [*ton kairon amartanousin*]: they either become hateful to their audience by speaking longer than is desired or they stop prematurely when the audience wants to hear more" (qtd. in Wilson, "Due Measure," 199).

12. The most detailed examinations of *kairos* in Gorgias are Augusto Rostagni, Mario Untersteiner, and C. J. De Vogel. For a discussion of *kairos* in Alcidas, see Vallozza, "*Kairos* nella retorica."

13. Pythagoras and his followers believed that numbers are mystical in nature and of cosmic significance, reflecting the natural order of things and the basic rhythms of life. Aristotle notes in his *Metaphysics* that Pythagoras equates *kairos* to the number 7; all human and cosmic events (birth, gestation, maturity, the orbit of the sun, and so forth) are governed by rhythms of seven and, therefore, of *kairos*. According to Paul Kucharski, Pythagoras taught that "*kairos* indicates the durations, or terms, or the times of fulfillment which clearly mark the generations, the growth, and the development of human beings" (143). In his analysis of the Pythagoreans, Wilhelm Roscher argues that Pythagoras and his followers identified *kairos* and health with the number 7: "it is the seventh day (of illness) that is decisive [*kairos*] because it marks the turning point [*krisis*] through which one passes, whether through amelioration or worsening of the condition [*thanatos*]" (qtd. in Kucharski, 147). According to De Vogel, *kairos* for Pythagoras involved appropriateness in the entire cosmic-ontological order (1966, 118). There is no question that *kairos* is a fundamental principle in Pythagoras' numerological explanations of human, natural, and supernatural events.

14. There has been some recent attention to the importance of Isocrates. Edward P. J. Corbett, for example, lauds Isocrates as "the most influential Greek rhetorician among his contemporaries" (596), while Kathleen Welch argues that Isocrates was a pivotal figure in the revitalization of Greek rhetorical culture: "The influence of Isocrates on the classical world was immense. His concept of Greek unity and his system of education based on rhetoric affected ancient Greek history and subsequently Roman culture" (362). Further, Tony Lentz contends that Isocrates was the earliest significant writer in ancient Greece: "Isocrates was the first individual who could be termed a 'writer' in the modern sense of the term" (123). And Brian Vickers identifies Isocrates as the first Greek to establish a permanent school for the teaching of deliberative and forensic discourse: "The pioneer who took the logical step of developing a school to train the Greeks for political and legal speaking, with a fixed school . . . was Isocrates" (1988, 9).

15. There has been much discussion over whether this praise is sincere or ironic. George A. Kennedy believes that this tribute "is probably an allusion to Isocrates' early association with and respect for Socrates compared to what Plato must have regarded as an un-Socratic and even un-philosophic philosophy subsequently pursued" (188). For other views, see Coulter, "*Phaedrus*"; Erbse, "Platons Urteil"; De Vries, "Isocrates in the *Phaedrus*"; Howland, "The Attack on Isocrates"; and Voliotis, "Isocrates and Plato."

16. In *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian names Isocrates "the prince of instructors, whose works proclaim his eloquence no less than his pupils testify to his excellence as a

teacher" (2.8.14). Cicero praises him as "master of all rhetoricians" (*De Oratore* 2.2.94) and cites him as an exemplary teacher: "He was a great orator and an ideal teacher . . . and within the walls of his school brought to fulness a renown such as no one after him has in my judgement attained" (*Brutus*, 32). Seventeen centuries later, no less a classicist than John Milton would call him (in Sonnet X) "Old Man Eloquent."

17. H. Wersdörfer, in his untranslated dissertation, examines the technical dimensions of *kairos* in Isocrates by contrasting the rhetorician's uses of ethical and aesthetic *kairoi*.

18. See Wilhelm Süss, *Ethos*, 18–24 for a discussion of the influence of Gorgias on Isocrates' treatment of *kairos*.

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