According to Gorgias, the traditional assessment of Helen as being a whore, and responsible for the death of thousands, is mistaken. In support of his rehabilitation of her, he proposes several arguments - or what look like several arguments, anyway. Choose any one of the arguments Gorgias makes in defense of Helen, and explain how it is supposed to work. How exactly do the arguments relieve her of responsibility and, if they do, for what do they relieve her of responsibility?

Shyamala Joshi

Gorgias’ Encomium to Helen is a persuasive text written to accomplish two goals. Firstly, to persuade his audience of the possibility that their long held popular view of Helen as being a whore and responsible for the death of many men could be incorrect. Secondly, to inform and convince prospective students of the power of persuasive argument.

Gorgias offers four possible defenses for Helen’s actions, I will address the argument he makes for persuasion – that she was “by words seduced”. Gorgias puts forth the idea that Helen may have fallen victim to Paris’ persuasive arguments to win her over. He claims that speech is a powerful tool and can be used for both well-intentioned and ill-intended ends on the listener. If Helen was swayed by the effects of a persuasive argument, then she should not be to blame for any wrongdoing.

The argument for persuasion can be applied not only to explain Helen's actions, but also to explain the popular perception of Helen as a whore, which has been passed down through history in the form of a poem – The Iliad. Gorgias makes the case that he regards all poetry as speech, and all speech as being capable of deceiving the audience to believe an argument for that which is more appealing over that which is necessarily truth. In this way, the Iliad itself could be seen as a form of persuasive argument.

Paul Jackson

Gorgias' "fourth cause in a fourth discourse" is the possible argument that I choose. In this piece, Gorgias describes men as those who are "lesser" than the gods and those whose "premeditation" cannot prevent the "predetermination" of a god. He brings up that if it was love for Alexander (Paris) which lead Helen to act as she did, then she is not responsible for the action that she took, for "love, a god, prevails over the divine power of the gods, [a lesser one would not] be able to reject and refuse it." Gorgias seems to refer to the personification of love in a Greek god of the time and not just a human emotion (perhaps Aphrodite or Cupid). Gorgias wishes to persuade the reader that Helen is relieved of responsibility for her actions due to her own persuasion by unavoidable and irresistible forces. If this is correct, Helen could be said to be relieved of being at fault for adultery (being a whore) and any other faults that are connected to her so-called betrayal.

Natasha Vargas

Gorgias proposes four different arguments as to why Helen of Troy should be considered relieved for her responsibility of being put to blame for causing the Trojan War. One point that he proposes is that it was fate that caused Helen to leave Sparta and move to Troy with Paris. According to Gorgias, Helen did what she did "by Fate's will and gods wishes and Necessity's decrees." Meaning, that it was pre-determined by the god's for Helen to go off to Troy with Paris. If Helen were living at home with her parents, not married or with children then she would have ended up in Troy with Paris one way or another. This proposal relieves blame of Helen by removing the blame from her and in turn placing it on to the gods. Gods are characterized as the highest power and what they will, therefore becomes. Gorgias provides proof by stating, " by nature the stronger force is not prevented by the weaker but the weaker is rued and driven by the
Ian Dugan

One of Gorgias' arguments in "The Encomium to Helen" is what I might characterize as the "divine argument", whereby the wishes of the gods and fate are held responsible for Helen's going to Troy. The "divine argument" operates thus on Gorgias' line: it is impossible for human premeditation to prevent a god's predetermination. A weaker force is by nature ruled and driven by a stronger force; the weaker follows the stronger. Therefore, since a god is stronger than a human being in force, wisdom and other ways, what the god or fate decrees is what will happen. If one takes this argument and applies it to Helen, then she went to Troy because the gods and fate predetermined that she was to go. If the cause for her going to Troy was already decreed, then she could not help or prevent it from happening, nor could she change it. If this is the case, then Helen is relieved of the responsibility of being a whore or for the death of thousands. She is not guilty of being a whore because the stronger force--the gods and/or fate already decreed that she was going with Paris; the decision was neither hers nor hers to make. Neither is she responsible for the death of thousands because, again, it was not her decision to go to Troy; she was "ruled and driven" by a force or forces stronger than she was; that is to say, she was forced and compelled by divine power to go to Troy. This leaves the fighting that occurs in her stead to the gods, fate, and/or human wills; they, not she, are responsible for the aftermath of her journey to Troy.

Karen Hazlitt

In the Gorgias writing, "Encomium to Helen" Gorgias blames the Trojan War on Paris and Helen running off together. Gorgias makes many arguments that are supposed dismiss blame from Helen. First he argues that it could have been force, then he speculates that it was the power of persuasion by speech, then he goes on to say that Helen was in love.

The most relevant of all the arguments is the third explanation, which argues that Helen was persuaded by speech. Speech is a very powerful tool, which can change many people's feeling and sometimes even make one deny or doubt a position they once held as true. Speech also evokes emotions in people, emotions that often make them act out in a peculiar way. And Later in his this explanation, Gorgias introduces witchcraft and drugs as being a good comparison to the persuasion of speech, to absolve Helen from the blame. Gorgias says that speech can have the same effects on the soul as drugs effect the body". If this comparison is taken as just, then, like someone who is under the influence of drugs, Helen under the influence of Paris' speech had no control of her actions. On the lines of witchcraft it is stated that Paris could have deceived Helen's opinions. Therefore Helen, went with believing everything he said as true and right.

If this was the way that it did, in fact take place, Paris manipulated Helen with his words and is to blame for her running off with him. Helen was not thinking in the right state of mind, but was deceived into believing that what he said was right. Through his words all her morals and ethics were abolished and he was able to persuade her into taking off.

Salvatore Giorgi

In his essay “Encomium to Helen”, Gorgias presents four arguments on why Helen should be stripped of her blame. Whether she was taken by god's will, forced, persuaded by Paris, or overcome by love, Gorgias demonstrates that in each situation it was because of the actions of others that she left with Paris. His first two arguments are his strongest and in turn are presented first, with little attention given to them. In ancient Greek society a mortal could not compete with the power of a god, just as a young woman would not be able to fend off
the attack of a full grown man. The second two, with the power of speech being the focus my attention, require more consideration.

Gorgias first sets up his argument by building up the persuasiveness of speech. “Speech,” he says, “is a powerful lord that with the smallest and invisible body accomplishes godlike works.” In this, Gorgias compares the power of speech to the will of a god, an argument which he has already discredited. Throughout his argument he continually makes reference to this, by labeling speech as “divine” or equating it with “the two arts of witchcraft and magic.” He also compares speech to the second case he presents, that of force being the reason Helen left for Troy. Gorgias puts forth that she “was carried away by speech just as if constrained by force.” According to this, once the mind and soul have been swept away by persuasion, the body follows. In addition Gorgias also appeals to the reader’s emotions. “It can banish fear and remove grief and instill pleasure and enhance pity.” With this he is brings Helen to the level of the audience and appeals to their everyday thoughts and experiences. Finally Gorgias tries to instill a sense of pity for Helen in the audience by explaining the power of false speech. In this he draws a comparison of the effects of speech to that of a drug. As if having the mind and soul under its control was not enough, the drug of speech then takes over the body.

By taking these steps, does Gorgias rid Helen of her guilt? How would any member of the audience fare against such conditions? When taken together with his other arguments and, especially, his eloquence, one finds it hard not to sympathize with Helen. This is the heart of the essay. Gorgias, by making an emotional impact on his readers, in turn shows how easily one can use speech to change the thoughts and actions of others.

Nicholas Mercado

In Gorgias work, “Encomium to Helen”, we see him working in rhetoric. In his writings, we see him piece together a strong argument for a week side. Perhaps his work, persuades or even fixes a image of Helen for the people of the time, when the story was told. One who might be persuaded could have placed blame on Helen for the deaths of thousands and “whorish” image that was brought upon her.

The argument, placing blame on the gods, is being used as directing Helen’s responsibility and claims away from her. Helen simply then cannot help herself or her actions. By using such a high power (the gods) as the source of the blame, no one believer in the gods can argue. For the people at the time of Helen, this use of rhetoric protects Helens good image.

The arguments that Gorgias presents relieve Helen of her responsibilities. Her position is in a realm of innocence. People are left told that it is her faith, disease, or others who the blame is on. There is never an instance where the blame is placed on her.

It is important to realize the audience and to whom this article is directed toward. To the people of our time, the image that the article would like to portray of Helen would be unjust. One could say that our understandings today and culture might be a reason to think that these arguments don’t stand. Today, one cannot say that they are not responsible for their actions or decisions they make.

Ketevan Abutidze

In the "Encomium of Helen", Gorgias attempts to prove Helen's innocence since she is blamed to be the cause of the Trojan War. In order to rescue Helen from the blame that was ascribed to her, Gorgias enumerates four possible "reasonable causes" for Helen's flight from home and hearth into the arms of the Trojan prince, Paris: "Chance and the purposes of the gods"; "if she was seized by force"; "speech that persuaded and deceived her mind"; or love that brought all this about".

While the four causes mentioned above have a parallel structure, each representing a force from which Helen's actions ineluctably follows, one can come up with a question: why is that, Gods and chance as well as the physical force are discussed only in one paragraph, whereas logos and passion receive five to seven? Does it
happen because they receive unequal treatment by Gorgias himself? Is any of them more or less important and reasonable? If this is so, then it's clear why Gorgias makes the emphases on logos - "speech is the powerful ruler and achieves the most divine feats with the smallest and least evident body. It can stop fear, relieve pain, create joy, and increase pity." It is here that Gorgias compares the effect of speech on the body with the effect of drugs.

From the perspective of the reader, it is possible to think that Gorgias is more concerned with making an influence the emotions of the reader then to relieve Helen of the blame. The argument discussed above, leads the reader to the idea, that a "magic of words" can outweigh the logic of a human being that is not a powerful argument which will relieve Helen of responsibility. On our terms, his argument may fail logically, yet nevertheless succeed rhetorically.

Kathleen O'leary

In Gorgias' Encomium to Helen, several arguments are made in her defense; each with it's own merits. One absolves her of free will, another places her in the role of victim, and a third suggests that she wasn't clever enough to understand that she was being sweet-talked into believing that the wrong decision was the right one. As valid as these first three arguments appear to be, the most effective is the fourth one. This argument is unique because it is the only one where Gorgias manages to shift the focus from Helen to his audience. He does this by first stating that, "... we see not what we wish but what each of us has experienced." That statement, along with Gorgias illustrations of all the different ways that people make decisions based on past experiences, encourages the audience to empathize with Helen and see themselves in her place.

The second way he succeeds at taking the focus off of Helen is with the statement, "But if love is a human disease and an ignorance of the soul it should not be blamed as a mistake but regarded as a misfortune." He didn't say that love was Helen's disease or an ignorance of her own soul, but a human flaw belonging to everyone. This point may be even more persuasive than the first made for this argument because even if he fails in getting his reader to empathize with Helen, he still manages to turn it around and show her not as a villain but as a fellow human being who shares the same shortcomings as everyone else.

This fourth argument is the most successful at relieving Helen of responsibility not because Gorgias was able to prove that she wasn't a whore, responsible for war and death, but because he was able to successfully argue that she didn't do anything that someone else (weaker or stronger) would not be equally capable of doing. As soon as someone sees themselves as possibly as guilty as the accused, they are much less likely to point fingers. Gorgias' fourth argument for the defense of Helen has left her accusers with not much of one themselves.

Ean Oesterle

Gorgias makes four arguments to his audience in the "Encomium to Helen" that look like reasonable enough arguments to relieve her of her responsibility. But in order to actually do that he would have had to convince his audience that Helen is really not a whore and that they have been wrong in holding this judgement of her. If this is in fact what he does, he does it by appealing to the audience's emotions. In the argument that speech can be so persuasive that it causes one to abandon their responsibilities, he starts out right away with which emotions speech provokes or suppresses. So the speech made by Paris in this case was so appealing to Helen that it made it acceptable for her to go away with him. This in itself is probably not enough to convince his audience that Helen is not a whore and that her actions were acceptable. He has to then also appeal to the audience's emotions in order to do the same to them what Paris supposedly did to Helen. This seems to be what he is concerned with in most of the persuasive speech argument. He mentions the danger that can come from convincing arguments, which turn out to be false, or merely opinion. If at any time the audience members have been wrongly persuaded, which they probably have, then they can identify with the power of speech. They can recognize that emotions can over ride logical thinking and cause one to respond irresponsibly. Does this relieve Helen of responsibility, probably not. But from the
audience's perspective, if there own emotions have been appealed to then maybe they will over look the fact that Gorgias is not necessarily making a logical argument and agree with what he is saying.

But if the audience is not convinced that Helen is not a whore, Gorgias' arguments still may have an effect. Gorgias makes a stronger argument for the power of speech then he does for the revival of Helen's reputation. The audience may think it reasonable that Helen was persuaded by speech, but that it does not necessarily relieve her of her responsibilities. All that it says is that one has to be careful of persuasive speech and also that it is a powerful thing to posses. This is probably something that parents will want to protect their children against. They will not want their own children to be persuaded into doing something that is against their sound judgement because of an appeal to their emotions. So whether or not Gorgias convinces his audience that Helen is not a whore seems to be beside the point. He is able to convince them that their children should be well trained in persuasive speech making, and this is his primary motive.

Maxwell Doggett

In “Encomium to Helen” Gorgias puts forth an argument which he alleges will relieve the infamous Helen of all blame placed on her for running away with Paris and thus causing the Trojan War. The first move he makes towards this end is to issue some criteria by which “Man and woman and speech and deed and city an object” should be judged worthy of praise, or worthy of blame. Bodies are worthy of praise if they are beautiful, souls if wise, actions if virtuous, and speech if it is truthful. According to Gorgias, if the opposite is true of the entity in question, not only is it not worthy of praise, but deserving of blame. On this line, the body is to blame if it is not beautiful, the soul if it is not wise, and so on. When stated explicitly, this understanding of blame sounds a bit peculiar, as if it is the effect which is solely accountable for itself, rather than its cause. Perhaps this is why it is not stated as explicitly as I put it. Gorgias merely points out that it would be a mistake to mix up the two (praiseworthy and blameworthy). In addition, as these criteria are relatively vague, in that they don’t provide any account of what exactly these praiseworthy qualities look like, it would be difficult to disagree. That being said, I will not dwell on this issue, but move on to Gorgias’ proposition which has been so eloquently translated.

The complexity of this proposition is what results in my first sentence describing an argument, while the forum question makes reference to several arguments. His proposition is four-pronged. He issues forth four distinctive, and possibly exclusice, as their seperation by the word “or” would suggest, “causes for which Helen’s voyage to Troy was likely to have taken place.” Here it is important to notice, firstly, the word likely, and secondly, that Gorgias offers no justification of why it is one of these four possibilities that is likely to be the cause. Though it is reasonable to believe that his audience might have accepted that the true cause of the voyage was indeed one of these four, the use of the word likely suggests that there are other possibilities. If enough evidence were to be found in support of another explanation—for example, that Helen was getting tired of Agamemnon because he was growing old and fat and bald, and never did anything to make her feel special anymore—then the entire argument would be rendered invalid. However, as I am now well into my forum response and have not yet identified “any one of the arguments” which I will attempt to explain, I am obligated to again set this issue aside in order to stay on task.

The one argument I would like to look at is the first potential cause Gorgias identifies. Put simply, both Fate and the gods are a stronger force than we mortals, and stronger forces control weaker ones. Therefore, if Fate and/or the gods wish to control us, we mortals lack the power to resist being controlled. If evidence could be gathered which would prove beyond a reasonable doubt that this was the case in Helen’s flight from her lawful husband, this argument would undoubtedly clear Helen’s name. Indeed, if one were to examine the classic texts which depict this event, it is not unlikely that they would find a great deal of evidence in support of this claim. However, in Gorgias’ “Encomium to Helen” no such evidence is provided. Instead, we find evidence to the contrary. For one thing, his basis for deciding whether something is worthy of praise or blame, as I pointed out before, places blame on the thing which is in question. Gorgias seems to support this view in his paragraph labeled “[Narration]” when he admits that “by her one body she brought together many
bodies of men greatly minded for great deeds.” In this passage, he
seems to be conceding that Helen is in fact responsible for the Trojan
War, and instead characterizes the war itself as something that is
perhaps praiseworthy. By doing this, he completely undermines his
argument that Helen is not, in fact, responsible for the war.

Allison Hauptman

In Gorgias' attempt to clear Helen's name of blame for the events of
the Trojan war, he reviews the common reasons for which she has been
said to have run away with Paris. He describes each of these reasons--
whether she left by the will of the gods, by force, after being persuaded,
or because she had fallen in love--in such a way as to demonstrate how
the situation was not within Helen's control. For example, in his argument
about the power of speech, he claims that it is the persuader who is in
the wrong, and describes the art of persuasion as one which can be
used to manipulate the emotions and thoughts of another individual. He
compares the effect of words on a person to the effect of drugs on the
body, claiming that a person can have no control over themselves in the
face of a persuasive argument, and that if Helen was persuaded by
speech to leave with Paris, she cannot be held to blame for her actions,
as she was under the influence of his convincing argument. Helen is,
according to Gorgias, no longer responsible for having left with Paris, but
instead, it is Paris' fault for convincing her to leave.

Whether or not this argument is a valid one is difficult to tell. Reading
Gorgias' words about how manipulated one can be by words, whether
true words or false, it is hard not to be cautious in taking Gorgias for his
word. For example, after Gorgias poses the question, "How many
speakers on how many subjects have persuaded others and continue to
persuade by molding false speech?”, it could in turn be said that he too is
'molding false speech', creating an argument out of false claims. With
this doubt in mind throughout his speech, it is impossible to tell how
truthful Gorgias is being, or if instead he is simply demonstrating how to
argue rather than what. If Gorgias is not in fact being truthful in his
argument, it is still possible that Helen has not yet been rid of
responsibility, as the support in her favor could be based on falsities.

Jacob Gable

Of Gorgias's four arguments used to absolve Helen of responsibility,
the third argument seems to be the most worthwhile to explore. This
third argument seeks to explain that Helen possibly was swayed by
persuasive speech. He offers this to the reader by fleshing out
examples of how speech has the power to move the mind and
overpower the body. When the argument is fleshed out, Gorgias first
uses the example of poetry. He uses negative examples, such as fear
and grieving to explain it's power on the soul. After this example he
goes on to equivocate witchcraft and magic, with persuasive speech
in it's ability to mould opinion, and thus deceive truth in listeners. He
next explains to the reader that since speech cannot not be reflected
upon in the same way that literacy can, and henceforth that people
cannot be aware of the past or the future while they listen, they tend
to rely on opinion while listening.

After offering these examples he goes on to make the connection,
that indeed it could be possible that Helen too, was carried off by the
persuasive speech of Paris. What is interesting and peculiar about
this jump in his argument, is that no solid fact has been offered that
this is indeed what happened to Helen. It seems that an important
question arises here. Could it not be argued that we are just being
offered Gorgias's opinion too. In that case the argument that he has
offered us would put him at just as much fault as Paris was in the
case of Helen. It would seem that if true details were offered here we
still would not be able to absolve Helen of her responsibility. Who is
the judge of whether Paris was using opinion or truth in his speech to
Helen? With this open ended question, one may not so easily settle
the debate on where responsibility lies in this argument.

Nicole Johnson

In book three, Helen has considered herself to be a whore. All the
men she had fought against each other for her and her wealth. In one
of the arguments it seems as if Gorgias is posing that the Gods have
forced themselves upon her because of her wealth and beauty. When
reading the Iliad, one may ask, if Helen was luring the Gods on,
should she still be wrong? Power says a lot about one's character. Someone such as a God has a lot of power over women. The Gods could have easily forced themselves on Helen.

It states in book three that Paris took Helen away with him and took her away from her husband. Helen could have been forced to go against her good judgment because Paris wanted her to. In the Gorgias text, it seems mostly that he is trying to persuade us to believe that Helen was assaulted sexually by the Gods. If the Gods are so powerful, it can make her come to the conclusion that she is a whore and that she is held accountable for the death of many men, which made her leave.

It can also be said that Gods had led her on by words that got to her. If she had gave in to what the Gods were saying then she could be partially responsible for falling for their words and as is states, falling in love. Gorgias makes it seem that speech is everything. Persuading to Gorgias can get anyone to do anything in their power. Gorgias say that whoever won someone over by their words are the one's who is held responsible or to blame, not Helen.

I don't feel that she should be held accountable for the death of the men she dealt with because she was fooled by words. The other fact is that she has irresistible beauty and she can't help that all the men want her. Whatever she was accused of is wrong because she doesn't have the power over the God's; they have the power over her.