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Self-advertising meta-poetics in Maximus of Tyre's 25th oration

Summary – While previous research in the second-century author Maximus of Tyre has primarily depicted him as an innocent follower of traditional authorities, this case-study aims to show that Maximus' discussion of the tradition serves his own proper self-presentation as a knowledgeable philosopher. Through a meticulous analysis of the thought processes in the twenty-fifth oration on the true beauty of speech, it becomes clear that Maximus is very aware of his own paradoxical position as a philosophical orator. In the end, he appears to advertise his own speaking practice as truly and typically philosophical.

(1.) It has been generally recognized that the relatively short orations of the Platonizing philosopher Maximus of Tyre have at least two characteristics that make a straightforward interpretation quite problematic. Firstly, Maximus often does not present us with a coherent and well-deliberated line of reasoning and rather opts for an associative mode of argumentation, which can probably be linked to the *extempore* nature of his speaking style (which is either genuine or simulated).¹ Secondly, scholars have found difficulties in detecting one authorial voice running throughout all of the Tyrian's speeches. Consequently, Maximus' adoption of different (and sometimes even opposed) philosophical *personae*,² combined with his overt preference for virtuoso rhetoric, has inspired many to regard him as a sophist rather than as a philosopher.³ However, this attribute does not correspond to his own thor-

¹ See G. L. Koniaris, *On Maximus of Tyre: Zetemata* (I), *ClAnt* 1 (1982), 111–113.

² For the persona of the philosophical preacher in Maximus, see M. B. Trapp, *Maximus of Tyre: The Philosophical Orations*. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, Oxford 1997, li-iv. See G. L. Koniaris, *On Maximus of Tyre: Zetemata* (II), *ClAnt* 2 (1983), 212–250 for a justification of Maximus' performance of different philosophical personae in his first speech. See however my refutation of Koniaris' arguments in J. Lauwers, *The Rhetoric of Pedagogical Narcissism: Philosophy, Philotimia and Self-Display in Maximus of Tyre's First Oration*, *CQ* 59 (2009), 596.

³ See, e. g., J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B. C. – A. D. 220*, Bristol 1977, 397 and J. Hahn, *Der Philosoph und die Gesellschaft. Selbstverständnis, öffentliches Auftreten und populäre Erwartungen in der hohen Kaiserzeit*, Stuttgart 1989, 96. Maximus is labelled a *Halbphilosoph* in A. Brancacci, *Rhetorike philosophousa*. Dione

oughly philosophical self-presentation. Moreover, it underestimates the importance of Maximus' urge to inscribe himself in the philosophical tradition and to claim (part of) the authority which this tradition possesses within the context of the Roman Empire.⁴

In the light of the aforementioned problems, it is worthwhile to take a close look at Maximus' 25th oration,⁵ in which he defines his views on rhetoric within a wider philosophical framework. Apart from Maximus' first programmatic speech, this oration probably contains Maximus' most 'meta-poetical' discourse, which makes it prime material for research in Maximus' own philosophical self-presentation, and the ambiguous role which rhetoric fulfils in this context.

The title given to Maximus' 25th oration by the manuscripts – 'That words which are consistent with one's actions are best' – only corresponds to Maximus' focus in the beginning of his speech. As both Puiggali⁶ and Koniaris⁷ have shown in their analyses of this speech, the order of the argumentation is rather associative and fairly difficult to reconstruct. Whereas Puiggali restricts himself to a broad overview of what Maximus says, Koniaris offers a careful reconstruction of the line of thought. However, Koniaris largely neglects the meta-poetical aspect of this speech, and therefore does

Crisostomo nella cultura antica e bizantina, Napoli 1985, 11 and T. S. Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht. Zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit*, München 1997, 120.

⁴ See, e. g., the recent studies by M. B. Trapp, *Philosophy in the Roman Empire. Ethics, Politics and Society*, Aldershot 2007 (with attention to a fairly large number of 'philosophical' authors, among them Maximus of Tyre) and L. Van Hoof, *Plutarch's Practical Ethics. The Social Dynamics of Philosophy*, Oxford 2010 (offering a demonstration of Plutarch's use of cultural authority as a philosopher vis-à-vis his public of upper-class readers). The authority of philosophers in the Roman Empire can also be observed in public imagery, as is illustrated in P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates. The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*. Translated by Alan Shapiro, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford 1995, 198–266.

⁵ According to the order proposed in H. Hobein (ed.), *Maximi Tyrii philosophoumena* (*Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*), Leipzig 1910, convincingly defended in Koniaris (above n. 1, 88–102) and commonly accepted in both recent editions of Maximus' text, viz. M. B. Trapp (ed.), *Maximus Tyrius: Dissertationes* (*Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*), Stuttgart 1994 and G. L. Koniaris (ed.), *Maximus Tyrius, Philosophoumena – ΔΙΑΛΕΞΕΙΣ* (*Texte und Kommentare*), Berlin-New York 1995.

⁶ J. Puiggali, *Étude sur les Dialexeis de Maxime de Tyr, conférencier platonicien du II^{ème} siècle*, Lille 1983, 375–384.

⁷ Koniaris (above n. 1, 114–120).

not contribute much to our understanding of the persuasiveness of this speech, which is something this paper aspires to add to the analysis.

Trapp's⁸ commonsensical position, viz. that the entire subject of the speech can be summarized under the heading 'what is the true beauty of speech?' can be considered as a sound starting point for my analysis. The theme is already central in the field of philosophy since Plato (e. g., in the *Phaedrus*), but especially for Maximus, who tends to address his audience in a direct monological style, the reconciliation of philosophy and rhetorical speech seems to be of paramount importance.

Before presenting my analysis of this speech, I would like to point out what aspects about Maximus' self-presentation and self-conception we can extract from a careful reading of this text. Firstly, I hope the analysis will sufficiently support the thesis that Maximus' definition of the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric is actually at the same time reflected in his own practice of speaking. As I already showed in my analysis of the first oration,⁹ Maximus is not only (or merely) using a distant analytical tone while speaking about philosophical problems, but consciously makes his own case part of the discussion, offering his own exemplary status as a powerful argument in persuading his audience that he is the man whose opinions can be trusted as truly philosophical. Consequently, we should not be surprised to find a correspondence between theory and practice in Maximus' discourse, even more so since such a correspondence is traditionally believed to be pivotal in the self-presentation of many philosophers.¹⁰ I therefore believe that the analysis of Maximus' intelligent intermingling of meta-poetical argument with his own personal involvement as a philosophical speaker can reveal that the text is not only an articulation of Maximus' personal opinion, but also a discursive speech act persuading Maximus' public of his own status as a proper philosopher.

A second point of attention is the place of the tradition in this oration. It is my belief that Maximus' frequent allusions to traditional examples and

⁸ Trapp (above n. 2, 206/207). See also the short discussion of this *dialexis* in M. Szarmach, *Maximos von Tyros. Eine literarische Monographie*, Torun 1985, 122/123.

⁹ Cf. Lauwers (above n. 2, 601): „Maximus' pedagogical narcissism not only generates the image of the ideal student, it also makes the speaker himself the perfect example, and, by consequence, the perfect teacher.“ The thematic resemblance between Maximus' first and twenty-fifth oration has already been detected in H. Hobein, *Zweck und Bedeutung der ersten Rede des Maximus Tyrius*, in: F. Leo (ed.), *Charites: Friedrich Leo zum sechzigsten Geburtstag dargebracht*, Berlin 1911, 201/202.

¹⁰ This aspect is strongly emphasized in the overview of ancient Greek philosophy in P. Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Paris 1995.

anecdotes are also an essential part of his self-presentation.¹¹ In this process, it is interesting to see how Maximus interprets and appropriates this tradition so that it bestows authority on his own practice. Moreover, we should not forget that Maximus' orations were probably designed so as to be persuasive for an audience that could only judge the coherence of Maximus' discourse on the basis of one single hearing. This may explain why Maximus did not necessarily feel himself submitted to the strict rules of coherent thought (hence the fairly audacious swifts in reasoning and interpreting). My analysis, which has the form of a linear commentary,¹² will expose how there are some logical gaps in Maximus' discourse, which may nonetheless have been disguised quite effectively for a public whose minds may to some extent have been swayed by the performer in front of them. By focusing on the communicational situation (of course, as reconstructed on the basis of the text) rather than on the text's internal structure, it is my hope to offer a welcome addition to Koniaris' minute logical analysis of the same oration.

(2.) Maximus starts his discussion of true beauty of speech with a couple of anecdotes which are part of the philosophical tradition, viz. the exempla of Anacharsis and Myson (§ 1) and Pythagoras (§ 2a). Both anecdotes value conciseness of speech and abundant deeds over deedless babbling. A superficial look at this introduction, with its lack of correspondence between form (Maximus' polished extrovert style) and content (the conciseness of philosophical speech), seems to expose Maximus' inability (or unwillingness) to live up to the values which his two examples proclaim. The beginning of the speech thus gives us no reason to assume that Maximus wants to do anything more than just allude to some ancient sources reporting on the relation between words and deeds.

This descriptive perspective gradually changes, however, in the next section of the speech. By invoking some comparisons with animals (2b–3), and by tacitly suggesting that these comparisons are a logical and self-evident addition to the previous stories, Maximus appropriates the moral of the first two anecdotes so that they appear to strengthen his own rhetorical

¹¹ An instructive case-study of Maximus' use of Homer is offered in J. F. Kindstrand, *Homer in der Zweiten Sophistik. Studien zu der Homerlektüre und dem Homerbild bei Dion von Prusa, Maximos von Tyros und Ailius Aristeides*, Uppsala 1973 (with a comparison with Dio Chrysostom and Aelius Aristides).

¹² However, since my own contribution is understood as an addition to Koniaris' analysis of this speech, I have deliberately analyzed only those passages of this oration which I considered worthy of more attention than given by Koniaris.

speaking style.¹³ Since eagles' and lions' strength can be recognized through their shriek or roar, Maximus concludes that human speech also reflects the strength of its user. This conclusion is still consistent with the moral of the previous two anecdotes, but the perspective has radically changed. Whereas a sage was praised by Anacharsis and Pythagoras for his moderate talkativeness and abundant actions, Maximus here establishes a connection between speech and character, in that strength will quasi automatically be converted from the former domain to the latter and *vice versa*.¹⁴ Maximus' ideal speaker, whose moral strength should be taken as an example for his audience, must apparently also be able to speak accordingly. Or better, his vocal strength will follow 'self-evidently' from his good character. Through a cunning reinterpretation of the two previous anecdotes, Maximus thus appears to have found a way to present his overtly rhetorical speaking style as characteristic of a true sage. In this process, his display of knowledge of these philosophical anecdotes and the analogies with the animals may probably have enhanced the public's trust in the speaker's general *paideia* and thus authorize Maximus' discourse.¹⁵

At the end of § 3, Maximus explains that his concept of strength is not merely 'sophistic', in that it does not honour the speaker who gains most approval from the masses. Here we see that Maximus' self-presentation is firmly built on his adherence to philosophy and on the dissimulation of his adherence to sophistry. Note that the typically philosophical disregard of the opinion of the masses is used to dissuade the audience to praise sophistic speech delivery.

(...) οὐ κατὰ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν λογισμούς, οἷς ἀπόχρη πρὸς ἔπαινον λόγου γλῶττα εὐτροχος, ἢ ὀνομάτων δρόμος, ἢ ῥήματα Ἀττικά, ἢ περίοδοι εὐκαμπεῖς, ἢ ἄρμονία ὑγρά.

¹³ For a careful analysis of how each simile appears to drift Maximus away from his starting point, see Koniaris (above n. 1, 115/116).

¹⁴ By establishing a connection between speech and character, Maximus here appears to follow a rhetorical rather than a philosophical approach (although he would in all likelihood assert that this is proper philosophy). For the close relation between physical appearance, verbal performance, and character in Second Sophistic speech delivery, see M. Gleason, *Making Men. Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton (New Jersey) 1995.

¹⁵ For the notion of trust in ancient rhetoric, see H. Yunis, *Transparency and Trust in Ancient Rhetoric and Poetics*, in: L. Pernot (ed.), *New Chapters in the History of Rhetoric*, Leiden - Boston 2009, 109–117.

“We should not, however, follow the reasoning of the masses for whom sufficient grounds to praise an utterance are furnished by a fluent tongue, and a rush of words, and Attic diction, and well-constructed periods, and elegant composition.”¹⁶

It may seem as if Maximus is actually warning his audience against the very speaking style which he himself is using at that moment. However, by stating that these characteristics are not bad *in se*, but only if they are taken as *sufficient* ground for praise, Maximus leaves the door open for a discourse which shares some of these characteristics with sophistic speech delivery, but which has also something extra to offer. If we may interpret this in line with his own self-presentation, Maximus appears to hope to be evaluated on the basis of other criteria than his sophistic-rhetorical abilities.

In the next paragraph (§ 4), Maximus impersonates a member of his audience and gives his imaginary opponent firm reply.

“Ποῖον οὖν ἔστιν τὸ ἐν λόγοις καλόν;” φαίη ἄν τις. Μήπω με, ὦ τάν, ἔρη, ὄψει γὰρ ἑαυτὸν ἐπειδὴν ἰδεῖν δυναθῆς.

“‘So what *does* constitute beauty of utterance?’, someone might ask. Do not ask that yet, sir; you will see for yourself when you are capable of it.”

This is quite an audacious argument. The audience’s conceptions are apparently not sufficient to make a distinction between good and bad rhetoric, and this is due to its own inexperience. Maximus suggests that his audience will be able to see these matters clearly as soon as it has acquired enough knowledge to do so (of course, the subtext being that Maximus *has already got* this knowledge, and the public can simply rely on Maximus’ experience for now).

In § 5, two arguments are realized at once, as they run together throughout the text. On the one hand, Maximus reinforces the remark that words should not merely amuse the senses, but that they should be useful for the listeners. Maximus’ philosophical outlook is once again opposed to the cheap hedonism of the common people. On the other hand, the fact that Maximus is the one who communicates these standards to his audience makes his speech self-evidently useful, and therefore also acceptable. Maximus thus seems to place himself above all these quarrels by presenting himself as someone who, unlike his audience, already has the knowledge to separate the good speakers from the bad ones.¹⁷

¹⁶ All translations of Maximus’ text are from Trapp (above n. 2).

¹⁷ On Maximus’ authoritative posture, see M. B. Trapp, *Philosophical Sermons: The „Dialexeis“ of Maximus of Tyre*, in ANRW 2.34.3 (1997), 1945–1976, at 1951. Schmitz

Interestingly, Maximus also uses some medical imagery to clarify the practices of the ideal speaker. This is no real surprise, as the metaphor of philosophy as a medical treatment is far from unprecedented in philosophical literature,¹⁸ but Maximus adds a small detail which, significantly enough, does not occur in most other philosophical accounts.¹⁹ Whereas the tradition compares philosophical treatment to a painful healing of the soul,²⁰ Maximus acknowledges the βραχεῖα ἡδονή of rhetoric to make the treatment a little easier to digest. Maximus seems to indicate to his audience that there is nothing wrong with enjoying rhetorical embellishment, as long as it keeps its focus on the uplifting content. In the end, Maximus' paradigm seems somewhat more accessible and less demanding than that of 'hardcore' philosophers such as the Stoic Epictetus, even though both are equally vigorously advertised as proper philosophy by their respective spokesman.

After these preliminary arguments, Maximus apparently feels free to offer his public some unconcealed advice on the evaluation of an orator (§ 6). After a comparison between bad oratory and idle cookery (a reminiscence of Plato's *Gorgias*²¹) and the rejection of both these practices, Maximus formulates the characteristics of the type of speech needed by himself and his listeners.

Ἡμῖν δὲ δεῖ λόγου ὀρθοῦ καὶ διανεστηκότος, μέγα βοῶντος, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῷ συνεπαίροντος ὑπὲρ τὴν γῆν ἄνω, καὶ ὅσα περὶ γῆν παθήματα, ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμημάτων καὶ φιλοτιμιῶν καὶ ἐρώτων καὶ ὀργῆς καὶ λύπης καὶ μέθης ἐχόμενα· ὧν συμπάντων κρεῖττονα χρὴ γενέσθαι τὸν τῷ φιλοσόφῳ λόγῳ συνανιστάμενον ῥήτορα ἀληθῆ.

"What we need is a style of utterance that stands straight and tall, calling out in a loud voice and raising our souls with it up above the earth and all the earthly sufferings that flow from pleasure and desire and ambition and lust and anger and grief and drunkenness. All these are things that the true orator who allies himself to philosophical argument must rise above."

(above n. 3, 223), using terminology and insights from S.R. Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*, New York 1983, describes Maximus' speeches as 'autoritäre Texte'.

¹⁸ The concept of philosophy as *Seelenheilung* has for example inspired the diligent analysis of this aspect in Plutarch's oeuvre in H.G. Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele*, Göttingen 1971. Maximus' own discussion of illness of body and soul can be found in his seventh oration.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Michael Trapp for pointing this out to me.

²⁰ See, e. g., Epict. 3, 23, 30.

²¹ Pl. *Gorg.* 462D–465E.

The content and the form of the speech here appear to fuse into one single message which Maximus wants to get across. One can well imagine how Maximus himself must have performed this sentence, standing straight and tall, with a loud voice. Beside the self-asserted tone of the entire statement, especially the treatment of the earthly passions, with its polysyndetic amplification, seems to be consciously designed so as to achieve rhetorical *grandeur*. In this sense, Maximus resembles the many sophists of his time, but by attributing this type of discourse to his philosophically inspired *logos*, he appears to surmount the latter's earthly preoccupations in favour of a higher destiny.

In the following sentences, Maximus extends the philosopher's action area to the Assembly, to the courts, to the festivals, and to the schoolroom, where he must not merely pursue the audience's approval, but rather true knowledge and wisdom.²² In passing, he also talks down the contemporary 'sophistic' practice of historical and legal declamation, which, according to Maximus, does not contribute to an orator's moral elevation. The fact that Maximus himself talks about philosophy instead of sophistic themes is presented as a sufficient reason to raise him above all suspicion concerning his use of embellished verbal discourse.

In conclusion, Maximus states that good rhetoric starts from a holistic training in a good *palaestra*. Only by giving it a place in an encapsulating (philosophical) education can a true orator distinguish himself from a mere flatterer.²³ On the basis of the above analysis, there can be only little doubt that Maximus saw his own practice as a proper method for such an all-encompassing training.

In the final paragraph of the oration (§ 7), the element of pleasure is discussed more extensively, as if it is an unavoidable side-effect of rhetoric which must simply be acknowledged despite its irrelevance as a criterion to separate good from bad speakers. However, Maximus only tolerates a certain amount of pleasure if it is in accordance with virtuous speech and conduct.

Τοιαύτης δέομαι ἡδονῆς λόγου, ἢ φυλάξει μὲν αὐτοῦ τὸ μέγεθος, οὐ προσθήσει δὲ τὴν αἰσχύνην· τοιαύτης δέομαι ἡδονῆς, ἣν οὐκ ἀπαξιώσει ἢ ἀρετῆ ὀπαδὸν αὐτῆ γίνεσθαι.

²² This extension of philosophy's action area echoes Maximus' assertion in his first oration that a philosopher's *logos* has to adapt itself to every aspect of communal life. Cf. Lauwers (above n. 2, esp. 597).

²³ For a more systematic treatment of the opposition between (truthful) friendship and (idle) flattery, see Maximus' fourteenth oration.

"I need the kind of pleasure in an utterance that will preserve its grandeur without the addition of anything shameful; I need the kind of pleasure that Virtue will not refuse to have as her companion."

Here again, Maximus' statements do not restrict themselves to the realm of theory, but they are also reflected in the concrete rhetorical form of the presentation. Embellished (Attic) language and argumentation (especially the rhetorical question at the very end), vivid imagery, and ample references to Greek culture all contribute to the pleasurable character of the final paragraph. The message to the audience seems to be that there is nothing wrong with enjoying Maximus' rhetorical *finesses* – this was probably what most of the listeners came for –, as long as they realize that the true power of Maximus' talent is situated in his philosophical wisdom.

(3.) With this analysis, I hope to have given insight in the complex methods through which Maximus aims to reconcile his own philosophical paradigm with the traditional authorities that ought to authorize his discourse. Power over a public of listeners is almost never something to be entirely taken for granted, especially in a context where there is only little institutional support for teachers in general and philosophers in particular, and this constantly forces public speakers to prove that the public listening to them has every reason to do so. Therefore, many declamations from this era have a self-advertising flair that should not be underestimated.²⁴ By introducing the element of the speaker's personal involvement in the analysis of Maximus' 25th oration, one can come to understand how the process of persuasion, which always relies on more factors than strictly logical and rational ones, must have taken place in the context of the Roman Empire, even if this type of discourse has generally enjoyed only little appreciation by modern students of philosophy. Perhaps one may go as far as to state that precisely those aspects which contribute to the modern disregard of Maximus' speeches – the lack of logical consistency, the preference for quick allusion over deep discussion, the search for (to our ears sometimes tasteless) rhetorical *amplificatio* – are the ones which give the speaker the freedom to reinterpret and appropriate the philosophical tradition in support of his own personal poetics.

²⁴ Cf. R. Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Princeton-Oxford 2001, 58: "These declamations, which rhetors used as self-promotion, gave students models of speaking and a way to evaluate and choose new teachers."

This conclusion is fairly different from that of Koniaris, who sees this oration as the result of a “stream of consciousness” produced by a “speaker preach[ing] as if in trance.”²⁵ Koniaris’ approach is symptomatic for the traditional interpretation of Maximus as a thoroughly conditioned speaker who is slavishly submitted to the tradition.²⁶ My own observations are an invitation to look beyond this one-sided picture and discover a different facet of this philosophical preacher, viz. his ability to use his knowledge of philosophical *paideia* to persuade his audience of his own canonized position within the philosophical field.²⁷

If my hypotheses are correct, the 25th oration has enabled us to formulate some conclusions concerning Maximus’ poetics of proper philosophy, which may prove to be somewhat different from the picture advocated by many other philosophers. It is a type of philosophy which does not necessarily need to shy away from rhetorical embellishments and *grandeur*, as those aspects may equally well illustrate the speaker’s greatness of mind. It is a type of philosophy which does not aim at a radical and painful healing of the soul, but rather allows a certain amusement to its practitioners. It is a type of self-centred philosophy, which is advocated by a speaker whose personal credibility largely depends on the consistency between his theoretical viewpoints and the form of his speaking style.

One last question which one may ask oneself is how Maximus could ignore the fact that his self-presentation as a philosopher is by no means unquestionable, as is already illustrated by the negative judgments by modern scholars. Part of the persuasiveness of his discourse is probably the self-asserted authoritative tone that manifests itself in his self-evident condemnation of the sophistic practices of the time. Regardless of the many difficulties in separating a true philosopher from a sophistic charlatan, he seems to place himself above these futile quarrels, and encourages his audience to acquire enough knowledge to question every speaker in front of them – except, of course, for Maximus himself.

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²⁵ Koniaris (above n. 1), 120.

²⁶ See, very illustratively, the discussion of Maximus in Schmitz (above n. 3, 220–225).

²⁷ For the first steps towards this appreciation, see M. Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner. Ihre Interaktion in der sophistischen Rhetorik der Kaiserzeit*, München 2000, 51, footnote 37.