

Sappho's Alleged Proof of Aesthetic Relativity

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IT HAS OFTEN BEEN HELD that Sappho's fragment 16.1–11 contains an argument or “proof” for the relativity of aesthetic evaluations, and sometimes a similar claim is made concerning lines 15–20.¹ However, there are competing interpretations, especially since the nature of Sappho's argument, if such it is, has seemed obscure.² These issues are, in a

¹ In the literature of the last sixty years, the claim that there is argument in Sappho 16 appears to be in D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955) 56; G. W. Most, “Sappho Fr. 16. 6-7 L-P,” *CQ* 31 (1981) 11–17, at 14; A. P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets* (London 1983) 285; P. duBois, *Sappho is Burning* (Chicago 1995) 105, and “Sappho and Helen,” in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho* (Berkeley 1996) 79–88, at 82; J. McIntosh Snyder, *Lesbian Desire in the Lyrics of Sappho* (New York 1997) 68; I. L. Pfeijfer, “Shifting Helen: An Interpretation of Sappho, fragment 16 (Voigt),” *CQ* 50 (2000) 1–6, at 3; G. O. Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 2001) 162–163; and C. Calame, *Masks of Authority*, transl. P. M. Burk (Ithaca/London 2005) 58–61.

² An issue as to whether a text contains an argument is that of whether its content is reasonably construed as a justification for some claim the author makes (or is reasonably interpreted as making, since conclusions may be “too obvious for words”). Sometimes what looks like argument is in fact something else, as when one gives an *explanation* or a *clarification* instead. Consider giving an example which is supposed to specify more precisely something one has said, rather than to establish its truth, as in “There is food in the kitchen; there are potato chips and nuts on the counter.” “There is food in the kitchen” would not normally be a conclusion in this sentence, at least in the context of hosts greeting guests (though it might be if uttered by a crime scene investigator noting the state of a house in which a murder has occurred). An important issue concerning Sappho 16 is whether the example of Helen is part of such a clarification, or part of an argument. Skepticism concerning the presence of argument in fr.16 is expressed by S. Des Bouvrie Thorsen, “The Interpretation of Sappho's Fragment 16 L-P,” *SymbOslo* 53 (1978) 5–23, at 9, 14, and J. A. Dane, “Sappho's Fr. 16: An Analysis,” *Eos* 69 (1981) 185–192, at 189. J. Winkler, “Gardens of Nymphs: Public and Private in Sappho's Lyrics,” in Greene, *Reading Sappho* 89–109, at

word, logical. Thus their assessment can benefit from use of the conceptual resources of modern logic. The fact that the poem was written before logic was invented is irrelevant, just as rhetorical studies of Homer are still in order, even though rhetoric as a discipline is post-Homeric. After surveying the most relevant recent literature on fr.16, I argue here that lines 1–11 are most plausibly understood as an instance of Inference to the Best Explanation, since only this reading adequately explains the reference to Helen's own beauty in lines 6–7.³ If I am right, Sappho's reasoning at this point has much in common with later argumentation in support of skepticism and relativism. I also attempt to show that there is an implicit argument of a different kind behind lines 15–20.⁴

οἱ μὲν ἰσπῆων στρότον, οἱ δὲ πέσδων,
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖσ' ἐπ[ι] γάν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἐ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὄ-
4 τω τις ἔραται.
πάγχυ δ' εὐμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ', ἂ γὰρ πόλυ περσκέθοισα

97, calls the lines “a charming parody of logical argumentation.” There is a helpful summary of some of the older literature in Thorsen.

³ Two points are in order here. Some of those who see no argument in fr.16, such as Thorsen, *SymbOslo* 53 (1978) 5–23, seem to be looking for a *deductive* argument, and of course do not find it. Inference to the Best Explanation is a kind of inductive reasoning, but it is argumentation despite that. See below for further clarification, and n.2 above. Second, it has often been pointed out that the opening of fr.16 is an example of priamel. The word has been used in different ways, but roughly a priamel is a series of comparisons, terminated or “capped” by something which is the most extreme in the series; cf. W. H. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius* (Leiden 1982) 7–17, 63–64. Fr.16 certainly exemplifies this pattern down to line 4, where Sappho's alternative is the climax. But this fact is irrelevant to the issues with which I am concerned here. A priamel is not an argument; it is a rhetorical device. The series need not justify the capping comparison as an argument would do. However, there is no reason why an element in a priamel cannot also be premise or conclusion. Thus the fact that there is a priamel in fr.16 does not answer the question as to whether argument is there as well.

⁴ The text used is that of E. M. Voigt, *Sappho et Alcaeus* (Amsterdam 1971).

κάλλος [άνθ]ρώπων Ἴλένα τὸν ἄνδρα
 8 τὸν []αριστον
 καλλ[ίτοι]σ' ἔβα ἵς Τροίαν πλέου[σα
 κωὺδ[ὲ πα]ίδος οὐδὲ φίλων το[κ]ήων
 π[ά]μ[παν] ἐμνάσθ<η>, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' αὐταν ...

It is difficult to translate without begging questions at two places in line 4, but the following should be uncontroversial:

Some, on the one hand, [say] a force of horse or foot soldiers,
 some say, on the other hand, a force of ships,
 is the most beautiful thing on earth (lit., the dark earth). I, on the
 other hand, [say]

it [the κάλλιστον] is that which one passionately loves.⁵

It is wholly easy to make this understandable
 to all. She who most surpassed
 the beauty of humans, Helen, her husband
 the [...] best
 Left behind, came sailing to Troy
 and neither child nor dear parents
 at all remembered, but she herself was led astray ...

A striking feature of the poem is of course the conflicting opinions about the most beautiful. Though the dispute could be construed as concerning the class which contains the most beautiful things, it is probably over the identity of the individual thing in question.⁶ That is, one claim is (for example) that the

⁵ There has been dispute as to how κῆν' ὅττω is to be understood; it may have the force of "whatsoever." See e.g., Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* 20, 56, and Thorsen, *SymbOslo* 53 (1978) 11. I translate "passionately loves" because something stronger than "loves" is plainly needed, and also something that is neutral as to whether sexual attraction is involved. Some people passionately love ships.

⁶ Three points are worth noting here. First, it would not seem that the beauty of sunsets, children's faces, and fleets, for example, are comparable in such a way that it can be sensibly claimed that one is superior to the other. But this seems to be the kind of dispute to which Sappho is responding. Second, it is sometimes said that Sappho is giving a *definition*; see, e.g., Snyder, *Lesbian Desire* 67, and Calame, *Masks* 58. Earlier literature on the definition theory is cited in Thorsen, *SymbOslo* 53 (1978) 11. There are many kinds of definition, however, and I find the use of the word unhelpful. Third, the phrase ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαιναν ("on the dark earth") is conventional, but its import seems to be that the conflicting opinions are about what is

force of ships which took Pittacus to Sigeum is the most beautiful, while another is that the land force he took with him is such. Sappho's own account of the most beautiful appears to be a comment on such conflicts, rather than the introduction of another competitor. Her language (especially the use of *τις*) does not sound like an introspective report; she seems to intend something stronger than an avowal of what is most beautiful *to her*. Rather, she appears to be making a general claim about what is most beautiful *to anyone*, as must be the case if she then attempts to prove what she says with the example of Helen. (One does not prove introspective reports.)

There is a problem about the significance of *ἔραται*, and a corresponding issue about the interpretation of Sappho's candidate for what is most beautiful. Is Sappho identifying the most beautiful with what one is passionate about, without the connotation of sexual attraction, or is she identifying it with objects of lust, as the standard meaning of the Greek would suggest? It is thus unclear whether *ἔραται* is to be understood in such a way that forces of ships or horsemen can be among its objects, or whether it has a narrower sense, on which they cannot. (Presumably one cannot lust after a fleet of ships, though it is less clear that one cannot lust after an army of horsemen.) Assuming that forces of ships and horsemen can be objects of *ἔραται*, it would seem to follow from Sappho's account that all the alternatives of lines 1–4 may be correct, if, say, the ships are loved by Charaxus and the horsemen are loved by Kleis. On the other hand, given a more restrictive sense of *ἔραται*, Sappho's alternative is actually incompatible with the truth of the other opinions. *Exclusivism*, as I shall use the term here, is the thesis that the initial military examples of lines 1 and 2 are excluded from the *κάλλιστον*.⁷ (The opposing view may of course

most beautiful "on earth," i.e., in general, rather than about the most beautiful in some kind. There are however some problems about this phrase; see L. Rissman, *Love as War: Homeric Allusions in the Poetry of Sappho* (Königstein 1983) 34–37.

⁷ "Exclusivism" roughly corresponds to what earlier literature has called "the correction theory," a term coined by Thorsen, *SymbOslo* 53 (1978) 9–11; it is opposed to "relativism," or what I have called "inclusivism."

be called *inclusivism*.)

Fortunately, for present purposes it makes little difference whether inclusivism is true or not. My reason for discussing this issue is that *Sappho's alternative is relativist on either theory*, a fact which has not always been appreciated in the literature.⁸ If inclusivists are correct, on Sappho's account the most beautiful is relative to whatever one is passionate about; fleets are the most beautiful to some, forces of horsemen to others, and so on. Nothing is the most beautiful without qualification; things are most beautiful relative to the (possibly non-sexual) passions of individuals. On the other hand, if exclusivism is true, the most beautiful will still be relative, but only in relation to what is sexually desired. Thus, given exclusivism Charaxus can truly say that Rhodopis is the most beautiful, if it is Rhodopis for whom Charaxus is passionately lustful, and Sappho can truly say it is Anactoria who is the most beautiful, if Sappho's sexual passion is directed towards Anactoria. (On the other hand, given exclusivism ships cannot be the most beautiful, even for Charaxus, no matter how passionate he is about things nautical, since ships, not being objects of sexual desire, are not the right sort of things to be superlatively beautiful. This may not be intuitively plausible, but it may still be Sappho's intent.) Inclusivism implies a broader, more tolerant relativism than does exclusivism, but both accounts imply aesthetic relativity, at least about what is most beautiful.

However, as I argue above, Sappho's account is relativist in any case. "Inclusivism" and "exclusivism" are better suited for avoiding muddle.

⁸ The issue of exclusivism vs. inclusivism has sometimes been misconstrued as one over relativism; see n.7. Exclusivism has usually been defended on the basis of linguistic considerations. Thorsen (*SymbOslo* 53 [1978] 11), for example, claims that the meaning of ἔρσται cannot be extended so as to include objects like ships and armies of horsemen. However, Rissman (*Love as War* 32–34) has pointed out that there are Homeric examples where the verb has the extended sense inclusivist interpretations require. The most important passages are *Il.* 9.63–64 and 16.207–208. One would think this would be the end of the linguistic argument for exclusivism, but see Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry* 162, who thinks the Homeric examples are intended to be "paradoxical." It appears that linguistic considerations are not going to conclusively settle this issue.

There has been an understandable tendency to interpret fr.16 as espousing relativism about beauty in general, or even about values in general.⁹ But all that we are told about is the κάλλιστον. Which items are superlative is obviously a more slippery and subjective evaluation than that of which items are standard cases. Fr.16 may make a claim about the superlatively beautiful, but go no further than that.

Lines 5 and 6 can be taken as containing premisses in an argument, the conclusion of which is given by 3 and 4. However, though σύνετον πόησαι πάντι τοῦτο can be glossed as “make it understood by all that this *is true*,” its import may be just “make this understood by all.” It is one thing to clarify a belief, and another to justify it; there is a difference between arguing that a claim is true, and explaining what it means. The example of Helen may be intended as a *clarification* of Sappho’s alternative, rather than a justification for it. Granted, as Hutchinson implies,¹⁰ γάρ in line 6 can be taken as a premise indicator, but explanatory or illustrative γάρ is common in ancient Greek.¹¹ Understood as clarification, Sappho’s use of the example of Helen has been regarded as a rejection of traditional or masculine values, at least so far as τὸ κάλλιστον is concerned.¹²

On most interpretations the reference to Helen’s unsurpassed beauty is problematic, and this is also true on the theory that the example of Helen is only a clarification. Helen’s beauty is apparently supposed to be of significance, but what does it add? How does it extend our comprehension of Sappho’s alternative? Helen’s leaving her family for love of Paris is obviously relevant to the illustration of “the most beautiful is what one passionately loves,” but it is difficult to see how *her* beauty is. Of

⁹ See, for example, Winkler, in Greene, *Reading Sappho* 97.

¹⁰ *Greek Lyric Poetry* 163.

¹¹ See J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*² (Oxford 1954) 58–59, and cf. Dane, *Eos* 69 (1981) 189.

¹² A number of commentators see Sappho as rejecting masculine values in favor of feminine ones. See, e.g., C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 1961) 182–183; M. Williamson, *Sappho’s Immortal Daughters* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1995) 167; and Winkler, in Greene, *Reading Sappho* 97.

course, it might be that the reference to Helen's own beauty is no more than an identifying tag, like a Homeric epithet, but it is an unsatisfying feature of the present interpretation that it leaves this matter unresolved.

I turn now to interpretations on which there is an argument in the first half of fr.16. According to these the example of Helen is intended to make it *more likely* that Sappho's alternative is true, or at least to get the hearer to accept it. The relationship between example and conclusion has been construed in different ways. Some commentators, Page for example, stress the fact that this is an appeal to a mythical exemplar.¹³ This is of course true, but the nature of the appeal is still rather mysterious. Snyder and duBois¹⁴ seem to hold that the relationship between the example and Sappho's alternative is that of confirming instance, or perhaps of inductive generalization. In Helen's case what was the most beautiful was that which was loved; so in every case what is most beautiful is that which is loved. The weakness of this argument from a single case¹⁵ is in sharp contrast to the confidence with which Sappho introduces the example: *πάγχυ δ' εὔμαρες σύνετον πόησαι πάντι τούτο*. Moreover, the relevance of Helen's own unsurpassed beauty is again questionable.

According to the theory of Glen Most,¹⁶ for Sappho Helen is a special kind of authority. He cites *Rhetoric* 2.23.12, where Aristotle discusses a rhetorical device which relies on authorities with whom it is shameful to disagree, such as the gods, one's father, or teachers. Appeals to such sources have little or nothing to do with the expertise of the authorities, and thus most such arguments will be fallacious. Supposedly Helen is cited as an authority of this type. No one should disagree, because it is unseemly to contradict her, at least so far as beauty is concerned. The point of the reminder about Helen's own beauty is perhaps that it is insolent to disagree about beauty

¹³ Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* 56.

¹⁴ Snyder, *Lesbian Desire* 68; duBois, in Greene, *Reading Sappho* 82.

¹⁵ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets* 285, notes the poor quality of such an inference. Calame, *Masks* 60–61, seems to favor a reading of this sort.

¹⁶ *CQ* 31 (1981) 13–15.

with the world's most beautiful mortal, or so the proponent of such an argument might allege.

As Most notes, Helen might seem a morally unsuitable source, but this problem is mitigated by the fact that her support is sought only as regards beauty, and not concerning behavior. A more serious problem is that Sappho seems to say that she is going to convince *everyone* of what she is saying. It is unclear that she can safely rely on widespread compunction at rejecting Helen's authority, even in the limited area of beauty. However that may be, the argument appears to be fallacious, since Helen's own beauty does not qualify her an expert on matters of beauty. This might of course still be Sappho's argument, but it is not the sort one would happily attribute to an author one likes.

Fortunately, there is a more attractive alternative. Consider once more the reference to Helen's own beauty, which is followed by reminders of what Helen gave up in leaving her husband. *Helen is superlatively beautiful, but Paris is the most beautiful to her.* The case of Helen is thus itself an example of differences with regard to what is *κάλλιστον*, as in the examples with which the poem opens. I argue that it is the conflict of these evaluations which is supposed to justify Sappho's alternative. The fact of disagreement about what is most beautiful, especially in Helen's case, is used to support an inference to the relativity of the most beautiful.

Arguments for relativity almost always begin with what initially seem to be conflicting appearances or beliefs. Often these are cases of opposed customs or cultural attitudes, as in the discussion of funerary practices in Herodotus 3.38. The Kallatians allegedly eat the bodies of their dead, and would be horrified to burn them; the Greeks burn the bodies of their dead, but would be horrified to eat them. The *Dialexeis* (*Dissoi Logoi*) contains a collection of examples of this sort.¹⁷

¹⁷ For a discussion, see J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Oxford 1982) 518–521 and 545–553.

Λακεδαιμονίοις τὰς κόρας γυμνάζεσθαι <καὶ> ἀχειριδῶτως καὶ ἀχιτώνας παρέρπεν καλόν· Ἴωσι δ' αἰσχρόν.¹⁸

For the Lakedaimonians it is good for young women to exercise without sleeves and creep about without shirts, shameful for the Ionians.

A relativist interpretation of such cases holds that the conflicts are only apparent; it is right for the Kallatians to eat their dead, and for the Greeks to burn theirs, and it is right for the young women of Sparta to go bare-armed, but not right for those of Ionia. According to this kind of relativism, such judgments are no more than social preferences, and there is no conflict between “going bare-armed is preferred in Sparta” and “going bare-armed is condemned in Ionia.” (Arguments for relativism are often still of this kind, as when anthropologists have tried to argue for ethical relativism on the basis of alleged moral differences among cultures.)¹⁹

The conflicting appearances are not always cultural, however, as at *Theaetetus* 152B, where Plato attributes an argument to Protagoras concerning cold. One person shivers in the wind, another does not; the conclusion is that coldness is a relative property. Whether what is at issue is appearances to groups or to individuals, the elements of such arguments are one or more examples of seemingly conflicting appearances or judgments concerning the presence of a property *F*, and the conclusion that *F*-ness is relative to persons, situations, or social entities. As Annas and Barnes point out,²⁰ ancient arguments for relativism (and sometimes for skepticism) are most fruitfully regarded as instances of Inference to the Best Explanation. Some relativist account is supposedly the best explanation for the alleged facts, and thus is probably true.²¹ Inference to the Best Explanation is

¹⁸ 2.9; T. M. Robinson, *Contrasting Arguments: an Edition of the Dissoi Logoi* (New York 1979) p.58 (90 D.-K.).

¹⁹ See R. Benedict, “Anthropology and the Abnormal,” *Journal of General Psychology* 10 (1934) 59–82, at 73.

²⁰ J. Annas and J. Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge 1985) 161–162.

²¹ In such inferences a great deal is left under the table. It is crucial, for example, that a better explanation than relativism is not simply that some of

a kind of non-deductive reasoning, modern discussions of which are descended from Charles Sanders Peirce's account of what he called "abduction":²²

The surprising fact, C, is observed;
 But if A were true, C would be a matter of course,
 Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.

As others have pointed out, inferences of this kind are common in mysteries, especially in the Sherlock Holmes stories.²³ For example in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Resident Patient" Holmes infers that more than one man was present in a room at the time of a murder, since the cigars smoked during the night have been cut in different ways, while one has been bitten. This fact to be explained, C, is "a matter of course," if A, the hypothesis that more than one smoker was in the room, is true. So probably, A is true. The inference is not deductively valid, since it is possible that the conclusion is false, even though the premisses are true (some one person may have started an odd collection of smoking materials, for instance). But in the circumstances Holmes' conclusion is the best explanation of the facts, and is thus probably true. Such inferences are common in everyday life and in the sciences, though their nature is still controversial.²⁴

the opponents are mistaken. What is involved in the concept of explanation is a major philosophical issue, especially concerning scientific explanation. Fortunately, for present purposes it matters little how the notion of explanation is filled in.

²² C. S. Peirce, "Abduction and Induction" (1901), in Justus Buchler, *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York 1940) 150–156, at 151. In this account of abduction Peirce does not take account of the complication that usually there will be any number of hypotheses which will explain the "surprising fact" C, and the inference should be to the *best* explanation. But more recent discussions of Inference to the Best Explanation have Peirce's abduction as an ancestor. His statement of abduction has the advantages of clarity and conciseness.

²³ Cf. T. A. Sebeok and J. Umiker-Sebeok, "You Know My Method: A Juxtaposition of Charles S. Peirce and Sherlock Holmes," in U. Eco and T. A. Sebeok, *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce* (Bloomington/Indianapolis 1988) 11–54, at 25.

²⁴ Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (London/New York 2004) 1–4.

It will be seen that arguments for relativity exhibit this same pattern. The surprising fact C is the apparently conflicting beliefs or appearances, but these are a matter of course if the hypothesis of relativity is true, and hence it probably is true. The appeal to the case of Helen in fr.16 can be read as an inference of this type. Helen is the most beautiful to others, but what is most beautiful to her is Paris. This seeming conflict is, in Peirce's words, "a matter of course," if the most beautiful is that which one loves, and that hypothesis is thus probably true.

Similarly, in *Theaetetus* 152B the wind is cold to the person who shivers, but not to someone else. If coldness is relative, it is understandable that one person finds the wind cold and another not, because of the differences among persons. In the same way, what is most beautiful is found to be one thing by one person, but not by another; this is explained, if the most beautiful is that which one passionately loves. Different people passionately love different things, and Sappho's alternative thus explains why different things are judged most beautiful.²⁵ If inclusivism is true, the initial examples of ships and horsemen may be intended as problematic cases similar to that of Helen. Given that the most beautiful is that which one passionately loves, we can see why some find ships most beautiful, and

²⁵ Explanation is often of contrasts, a fact of some importance in recent studies of explanation; see Lipton, *Inference* 33. On my account Sappho's argument is an example of what Lipton calls "contrastive inference." It may seem odd to pair Sappho and Semmelweis, but if I am right what they have in common is the use of the same pattern of inference. Semmelweis, in a classic piece of scientific detective work, explained why there was a sharp contrast in the mortality rates from childbed fever in two maternity wards. Doctors who had done autopsies were going directly to the high mortality delivery room without washing their hands, while this was not the case in the low mortality ward. Semmelweis hypothesized that "cadaveric material," present in the one ward and not in the other, was transmitted to women awaiting delivery, and that this caused the greater incidence of childbed fever. This hypothesis explained why the two wards differed in their mortality rates. Sappho explains the contrast between those who find Helen most beautiful and the opinion of Helen herself by the hypothesis that the most beautiful is that which is loved. The subject matter is different, but in both cases a hypothesis is inferred which accounts for the differences which are in need of explanation. Cf. Lipton, *Inference* 71–90.

some, horsemen, since some are passionate lovers of ships, and some are passionate lovers of horsemen.

If exclusivism is correct, the argument may involve more of the detail of lines 8–11. Helen apparently finds Paris most beautiful, not herself, and neither her child nor her parents, nor her husband. These differences are explained, if the most beautiful is that for which one has *sexual* passion. In that case the examples are intended to show not only that the most beautiful is relative to human caring, but also to sexual desire. Helen lusts after Paris, but not after herself, her child, her parents, nor, apparently, her husband. The resulting argument is of course riskier than the inclusivist one, since it argues for a stronger conclusion, and therefore may not give the *best* explanation.

These accounts cohere well with the text, and explain the relevance of lines 6–7. That Helen was of unsurpassed beauty to others, though she found someone else most beautiful, is a striking example of conflicting aesthetic evaluations, and is a suitable premise in an argument for relativism concerning the *κάλλιστον*. As we have seen, it is doubtful that any other account satisfactorily explains the reference to Helen's own status as the most beautiful, which on the present interpretation is *exactly* what Sappho needs to support her conclusion.²⁶ Moreover, on this reading Sappho's argument is respectable. Inference to the best explanation is a rationally acceptable pattern of reasoning, and it may even be a fact about the psychology of beauty that what people find superlatively beautiful are those things to which they are passionately attached. Sappho's con-

²⁶ It has been pointed out to me by an anonymous referee for this journal that the point of the reference to Helen's beauty may be that the world's most beautiful woman, who could have had anything she wanted, yet chose someone who was despised by others. I would find this account convincing if Paris had been proverbially *ugly*. Then the example of Helen would be one in which superlative beauty tracked love, even when its object was someone only a lover could find beautiful. As matters stand, with a Paris who is presumably good-looking (whatever his other faults), it is difficult to see how the proposed interpretation can explain the relevance of the example of Helen to Sappho's alternative. I am indebted to the same referee for further helpful and extensive comments.

fidence concerning her alternative is thus reasonable.

What, however, about the other putative proof in fr.16, concerning Anactoria?

. .] με νῦν Ἀνακτορί[ας ὀ]νέμναι-
 16 σ' οὐ] παρεοίσας,
 τᾶ]ς <κ>ε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
 κάμαρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω
 ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα κᾶν ὄπλοισι
 20 πεσδομ]άχεντας.

I am now reminded of Anactoria, who is not here.

I would rather see her lovely walk

and animated glowing face

than the chariots of Lydia and its soldiers with arms.

It has been thought by some that the examples of Anactoria and Helen play the same role. Both are either clarifications of Sappho's alternative, or part of an argument for it; see, e.g., Snyder (*Lesbian Desire* 68), for whom Anactoria is a second proof of Sappho's alternative. As in the beginning of the poem there is a comparison with the elements of a military force. But I do not think the lines concerning Anactoria are just a replay of the earlier argument. Supposedly the identity of the most beautiful as that which one passionately loves has already been established. Now we have lines 17–18, the import of which seems to be that Anactoria is most beautiful to the poet; her expression is animated, her walk is erotic, and so on. Sappho (or at least, the speaker in the poem) would rather see her than all the things other people find most beautiful. There is an unexpressed conclusion here, directed at Anactoria: *I passionately love you*. Logic and declarations of love are not incompatible; even without the last line, the conclusion of this argument would be obvious:

All that is most beautiful to Sappho is that which she loves,

Anactoria is most beautiful to Sappho,

So, Anactoria is that which Sappho loves.²⁷

The first premise is a consequence of Sappho's identification of

²⁷ This is a valid first figure syllogism. Pfeijfer, *CQ* 50 (2000) 5, has it that Sappho infers that Anactoria is the most beautiful, since Sappho loves her; I think this gets it backwards.

the most beautiful with that which is loved. Sappho's avowal of her preference for the sight of Anactoria appears to use the armament of Lydia as a representative example, the detail of which is unimportant. The point is that Sappho would prefer seeing Anactoria to seeing *anything else*, rather than that military spectacles are next best. The second premise is thus a reasonable interpretation of lines 17–20. It can hardly be an unintended coincidence that the conclusion validly follows. Sappho's composition is guided by a logical connection that could perhaps be felt, even if it could not have been articulated. If I am right, fr.16 is a love poem with an implicit profession of love for Anactoria, and thus her role is completely different from that of Helen. Even so, since the story of Helen concerns the most beautiful, it can remind Sappho of Anactoria.

If the conventional dating is correct, Sappho's life overlapped the beginning of the era of the Presocratics, and perhaps the significance of this intellectual background has not been sufficiently appreciated. Sappho espouses a limited relativism, and uses argumentation of a kind which turned out to be philosophically fruitful. Of course Sappho has a pre-eminent position in the history of poetry, but if I am right, she has a place in the history of Western philosophical argument as well.

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