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0521832640 - The Talking Greeks: Speech, Animals, and the Other in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato

John Heath

Frontmatter

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## THE TALKING GREEKS

When considering the question of what makes us human, the ancient Greeks provided numerous suggestions. This book argues that the defining criterion in the Hellenic world, however, was the most obvious one: speech. It explores how it was the capacity for authoritative speech which was held to separate humans from other animals, gods from humans, men from women, Greeks from non-Greeks, citizens from slaves, and the mundane from the heroic. John Heath illustrates how Homer's epics trace the development of immature young men into adults managing speech in entirely human ways and how in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* only human speech can disentangle man, beast, and god. Plato's *Dialogues* are shown to reveal the consequences of Socratically imposed silence. With its examination of the Greek focus on speech, animalization, and status, this book offers new readings of key texts and provides significant insights into the Greek approach to understanding our world.

JOHN HEATH is Professor of Classics at Santa Clara University. He is the author of numerous articles on Latin and Greek literature, myth and culture. His previous publications include *Actaeon, the Unmanly Intruder* (1992), *Who Killed Homer?* (with Victor Davis Hanson, 1998; revised edition, 2001) and *Bonfire of the Humanities* (with Victor Davis Hanson and Bruce Thornton, 2001).

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I wrote most of this book over the past seven summers. Each fall I have returned to classes, where the tolerant smiles and glazed eyes of my freshmen students quickly reminded me that the relevance of the Greeks can easily be lost on the uninitiated – and the scholar. I am fortunate to have spent my academic life teaching bright undergraduates who, with a little coaxing (okay – sometimes with a lot of coaxing), have often joined me in exploring these ancient texts. I thank them.

More pragmatically, I am grateful to two classical journals for permission to publish here revised versions of previously published articles. Part of Chapter 2 appeared as “*Telemachus pepnumenos*: Growing into an epithet,” in *Mnemosyne* 54 (2001) 129–57. Chapter 5 is largely based on “Disentangling the beast: Humans and other animals in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” in *JHS* 119 (1999) 17–47. The editors and anonymous referees involved in these publications were extremely helpful. Santa Clara University generously awarded two of my students summer grants to check references and help create the index. I am much indebted to the University and especially to Tom Garvey and Christine Lechelt.

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Finally, my greatest debt is to Emma, who arrived just when I was starting this book. Her intelligence and optimism are constant sources of inspiration, as well as proof that human nature is not determined entirely by genes. It would also be unforgivable for me not to acknowledge with affection Mel and Andi, whose joyful lives and unhappy fates have served as an impetus for my reflection on the duties we have to all conscious creatures, both articulate and silent.