

Metanoia and the Transformation of Opportunity

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When Kairos, the god of opportunity, passes by, Metanoia is left in his wake. At first glance, Metanoia is the embodiment of regret, a sorrowful woman cowering under the weight of remorse. However, there is more to the concept of metanoia than feelings of regret. This article looks to the long-standing partnership between kairos and metanoia as a way to better understand the affective and transformative dimension of kairos. The kairos and metanoia partnership can take shape as a personal learning process, a pedagogical tool, and a rhetorical device. Kairos and metanoia stimulate transformations of belief, large and small, that can advance personal understanding and lead to more empathetic responses. As such, this article argues for further exploration of the kairos and metanoia partnership in rhetorical theory and practice.

When the concept of *kairos* is personified as the Greek god of opportunity, he appears as a young, athletic man with wings on his feet and back that propel him swiftly forward. He often balances on a ball or wheel to illustrate his unpredictability and carries a razor to warn of the sharp nature of his entrances and exits. His most distinguishing feature, however, is his hair. As the god of opportunity approaches, his long forelock of hair is clearly in view, offering a brief moment in which the god can be seized. Even the slightest moment of hesitation and *Kairos* passes, leaving only the surprising view of the back of his head, bald and ungraspable. For thousands of years *Kairos* (or his Latin counterpart *Occasio*) has been featured in sculptures, paintings, and poems and has served as the inspiration for powerful metaphors appearing in literature from ancient to contemporary times. Yet upon close study, an often-neglected fact is revealed: the god of opportunity does not work alone.

A shadowy figure has followed *Kairos* for millennia. Her name is *Metanoia*, and she resides in the wake of Opportunity, sowing regret and inspiring repentance in the missed moment. Her voice emerges in Ausonius's poetry as the goddess who "exacts punishment for what has and has not been done, so that people regret it."

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She appears in a painting by Girolamo da Carpi and a sketch by Giorgio Vasari, both artists portraying *Kairos* and *Metanoia* as standing side-by-side, seemingly fused together. She makes another appearance with Opportunity, this time pedagogical, in a group of sixteenth-century drawings created to educate François d'Angoulême in the lesson of opportunity and regret. In addition to her relationship with *Kairos*, *Metanoia* also keeps company with Truth, sometimes in collaboration and other times in contrast. The most prolific depiction of the relationship between *Metanoia* and Truth appears in the *Calumny of Apelles*, the slanderous scene that became a Renaissance favorite, leading to a series of representations by artists such as Raphael and Botticelli. When personified, *Metanoia* often appears as a veiled and sorrowful woman, ever ready to accompany those who hesitate in moments of opportunity. Although the woeful *Metanoia* emerges as the most prominent portrayal, interpretations have ranged in age and expression, varying from a kind and angelic youth to a sharp-faced and vengeful old woman. Most often her face is difficult to discern as it is partially covered by a robe, veil, or her own hand. Regardless of the choices in representation, *Metanoia* portrays the promise of lament for those who miss opportunity. In what follows, however, I recast *metanoia* as an active emotional state in which reflection, revelation, and transformation occur and thus expand the opportunities available in the concept of *kairos*.

By exploring the connection between *kairos* and *metanoia*, I build on the work of scholars such as Dale L. Sullivan and Richard Benjamin Crosby, who both argue for a broader understanding of *kairos* and a wider recognition of its philosophical implications. In a recent article, Crosby urges scholars to keep pushing beyond the idea of *kairos* as a “situational response.” He explains, “For the most basic purposes of the *rhetor*, [*kairos*] is often simply interpreted as the right time, or opportunity, for rhetorical response” (262). Beyond the single opening or one-shot opportunity, Crosby argues that *kairos* carries an “inherent rhetorical power” capable of not only changing the mind but moving the soul (261). By examining *kairos* and *metanoia*, I seek to illuminate a new dimension of the “inherent rhetorical power” of *kairos*, particularly the power to move the soul to new belief. I argue that *metanoia* is the affective dimension of *kairos*—an unwieldy but ever-present force that has been largely neglected in rhetorical studies. The experience of *metanoia* involves a transformation that can range from a minor change of mind to a dramatic spiritual conversion. Such changes often lead to new belief, which then leads to new action. Whether the change occurs on a large or small scale, such pivotal moments can provide windows into the actions and beliefs of others.

Kairos and *metanoia*, most simply stated, represent opportunity and regret. But when *metanoia* is brought out of the conceptual shadows, “opportunity” and “regret” begin to expand rapidly. In order to discuss the potential for *kairos* and *metanoia* in rhetorical theory and practice, I begin by establishing the relationship between the two figures, providing an overview of their history together. After

exploring their historical connection, I focus specifically on *metanoia* to introduce the range of interpretations and applications of the concept. The second part of my discussion introduces pedagogical and rhetorical applications of the concepts, turning first to the question of agency in the *kairos* and *metanoia* partnership. More specifically, I examine whether or not *kairos* and *metanoia* can be deliberately “seized.” I conclude by discussing the role of belief in *kairos* and *metanoia*, looking first at the ways in which the concepts can create strong emotional connections and then shifting into the potential dangers that surface when those connections block communication. *Metanoia* has been a missing piece in conversations about *kairos*, but it is a piece that does not fit easily into place. In fact, the role of *metanoia* may spark more questions than answers. But if, as I argue, *metanoia* is the transformation that occurs in—and is bound to—the kairotic moment, then both the personification and the concept of *metanoia* deserve more attention in rhetorical studies.

Opportunity’s Companion

The *kairos* and *metanoia* partnership is often traced back to an *ekphrastic* epigram by the Roman poet Decimus Magnus Ausonius. The source of Ausonius’s epigram, however, dates back even further to an epigram by the poet Posidippus from *The Greek Anthology* (A.P. 16.275). Posidippus’s epigram, also *ekphrastic*, is based on Lysippus’s famous bronze statue of the god *Kairos* sculpted in the mid-fourth century BCE.¹ In the *ekphrasis*, a dialogue unfolds in which the *Kairos* sculpture provides a detailed description of his features to an unidentified interlocutor, explaining the meaning behind his stance, accessories, and hair. The only hint of *metanoia* in the Greek version of the poem comes after the interlocutor asks, “And why, in Heaven’s name, is the back of thy head bald?” To which the statue replies, “Because none whom I have once raced by on my winged feet will now, though he wishes it sore, take hold of me from behind.” The emotion encapsulated in the phrase “though he wishes it sore” offers an early glimpse of the *kairos* and *metanoia* connection. However, Posidippus’s epigram focuses primarily on the interpretation of *kairos* as a single, pivotal moment: the lone and often cruel god who appears in a swift moment of truth.

Shifting into Roman poetry, *Metanoia* accompanies the god of Opportunity in Ausonius’s epigram eleven, also referred to as *In Simulacrum Occasionis et Paenitentiae*. Ausonius’s epigram closely resembles the Greek version but with a few

¹Since the epigram is written in the *ekphrastic* tradition, a genre with a tendency toward exaggeration, the historical accuracy of the information may be questionable. According to Kay, however, Posidippus’s description of Lysippus’s *Kairos* can be considered the most accurate, as it is the earliest known account (written within a century of the sculpture) and subsequent descriptions “become more flowery and unconvincing the later their date” (98). Veracity of information aside, Posidippus’s epigram was undoubtedly a source of inspiration and information for artists and authors over many centuries.

significant changes. Most notably, Ausonius transforms the god *Kairos* into the goddess *Occasio* and brings the figure of *Metanoia* into the conversation:

“Whose work are you?” “I’m Pheidias, he who made the statue of Pallas, I’m his! And he made the Jupiter; I’m his third best piece! I’m a goddess!” “Which one?” “Opportunity, infrequent, and known to few.” “Why are you standing on a wheel?” “I can’t stand still.” “Why have you got winged sandals?” “I am very swift. Whenever I want, I hand over the good fortune which Mercury customarily creates.” “You cover your face with your hair.” “I don’t want to be recognised.” “But, good heavens, the back of your head is bald!” “So I can’t be caught as I make off.” “Who is the companion with you?” “Let her tell you.” “Please tell me who you are.” “I am a goddess to whom even Cicero himself did not give a name. I am the goddess who exacts punishment for what has and has not been done, so that people regret it. Hence my name is Metanoea.” “Now you again please, tell me what she is doing with you.” “Whenever I’ve flown away, she stays behind me. Those whom I’ve passed by hold on to her. You too, while you’re asking all these questions and procrastinating with your interrogation, will discover that I have slipped through your hands.” (Kay 97)

When *Metanoia* speaks, she identifies herself as a harbinger of punishment and regret, the price that must be paid when a moment is missed or seized incorrectly. In the epigram, Ausonius establishes the connection between *Occasio* and *Metanoia* by presenting them as companions in the prelude to opportunity. Once a decision has been made or missed, the two part ways, but before that crucial moment they stand together.

Both the Greek and Roman versions of the *Kairos* epigrams recur throughout art-work and literature, but artists have tended to draw on Ausonius’s version. According to James Hutton, “No theme from the Greek epigrams was better known or more often imitated than that of *A.P.* 16.275. . . . Doubtless the usual source of the modern imitations has been the Latin version by Ausonius” (383). Although there are certainly examples that follow the Greek epigram by portraying *Kairos* or *Occasio* in isolation, there is also a long tradition of depicting the *Kairos/Occasio* and *Metanoia* partnership in media such as bas-reliefs, paintings, emblem art, and medals. For example, the Cathedral of Torcello houses a bas-relief (circa 1008) that features both *Kairos* and *Metanoia*, depicting the outcomes of a seized as well as a missed opportunity. Also of note, Posidippus’s and Ausonius’s epigrams reemerge in Angelo Poliziano’s *Miscellanea* and Erasmus’s *Adagia*, thus securing a place for *Kairos* and *Metanoia* in the emblem tradition. Although the solo *Occasio* features most prominently in the emblem books, Jean Jacque Boissard’s emblem 26 (“*A tergo calva est*”) depicts both *Occasio* and *Metanoia*, with *Metanoia* portrayed as a vengeful woman with a whip. *Kairos* and *Metanoia* appear again, along with text from the epigrams, in a sixteenth century manuscript that Jean Michel Massing refers to as the *Speculum principis*, a collection of lessons created for a young François d’ Angoulême.

The intimacy of the connection between *Kairos* and *Metanoia* is vividly portrayed in Girolamo da Carpi’s painting *Chance and Penitence* (Figure 1). Da Carpi’s



Figure 1 Girolamo da Carpi, *Chance and Penitence*.

painting presents one of the rare instances where the god *Kairos*, not the goddess *Occasio*, accompanies *Metanoia*. Echoing Posidippus's epigram, the painting portrays *Kairos* as a beautiful young man standing on his toes, balancing on a sphere, and holding a razor delicately in his hands, with his trademark forelock clearly visible.²

²Da Carpi's painting also calls to mind the *Kairos* entry in Callistratus's *Descriptions*, a third or fourth century collection of short essays in which each piece focuses on a statue of a mythological character. Callistratus's provides vivid descriptions of *Kairos*, referring to the statue as "head to foot resplendent with the bloom of youth" (397).

In fact, Rudolf Wittkower argues that da Carpi's painting is subtly suggestive of the dialogic epigram genre in that *Kairos* seems to be silently engaging his audience in conversation. According to Wittkower, *Kairos* looks at the spectator "with his mouth half-opened, as if talking" and "[t]he forelock blows toward the spectator, but the feet are turned sideways on a ball in mid-air to ensure the impression that he passes by like the wind" (111). However, the added presence of *Metanoia* makes it clear that da Carpi is not directly depicting the Greek epigram.

Girolamo da Carpi's painting illustrates both the connection and the imminent division of *Kairos* and *Metanoia*. In the painting, *Metanoia* looks down, but her head turns toward *Kairos*, a gesture that suggests a close connection between the two. Her head points toward him and her body seems to be touching his, yet her feet are clearly pointed away from him, always ready to move in the opposite direction. Her facial expression is not one of anger or vengeance; instead, she looks reflective and also ready to engage the viewer. The sense that *Metanoia* shadows *Kairos* is conveyed through her shaded body that blends with his body and the dark background. In this portrayal, their close alignment makes it difficult to discern where one body ends and the other begins. But the highlighting of her face and foot make it clear that *Metanoia* is not simply part of *Kairos*; she is a distinct entity that is closely connected to him but all the time ready to separate and do her own work. The fact that her eyes are pointed at him suggests that her work is ultimately linked to him.

In a related example, Giorgio Vasari's sketch "*L'Occasione*" (Figure 2) presents *Occasio* and *Metanoia* standing back-to-back, their bodies seemingly fused together. Wittkower argues that Vasari's sketch "illustrates exactly the epigram by the Roman poet Ausonius" (110). In the sketch, *Occasio* is distinguished by her forelock, winged sandals, and the wheel on which she stands. As is true in da Carpi's rendition, *Metanoia* is a shadowy figure whose body touches *Occasio's*. *Metanoia's* features are difficult to distinguish, but her head is pointed downward and she stands on her toes, prepared to dart away from *Occasio*. Vasari's sketch, much like da Carpi's painting, vivifies the idea that *Occasio* and *Metanoia* are connected. In fact, the two bodies seem to be joined, though they are clearly separated at the feet, a detail that again signals their imminent movement apart. With their closely mirrored images, Vasari portrays *Occasio* and *Metanoia* as equals, two sides of the same coin. Though the images closely mirror each other, there is a clear distinction between light and dark in the image, which offers the possibility of a dialectical exchange between the two concepts. In da Carpi's painting, the two figures may be of equal size, but *Kairos*, from his place on the sphere, towers over *Metanoia* and makes her appear to be a smaller figure. In Vasari's rendering, however, the two figures are of nearly identical size and shape, suggesting that *Kairos* and *Metanoia* stand on equal ground. Importantly, in Vasari's sketch *Metanoia* demands as much attention as *Occasio*.

When personified, the message that *Metanoia* conveys most prominently through her facial expressions and posture is remorse. Her face is often cradled



Figure 2 Giorgio Vasari, *L'Occasione*.

in her palm or hidden behind a veil and her gaze tends to be pointed downward or off into the distance. But her hidden face and forlorn stare hold more than a suspended state of regret. Although she is not portrayed with the same swiftness as *Kairos*, a closer look at the concept of *metanoia* suggests powerful internal activity, movement on the level of the soul.

Changes of Mind and Heart

Although the elements of repentance, regret, reflection, and transformation are always present in the concept of *metanoia* to some degree, the experience can range in scale from the transformation of the soul to the rephrasing of a statement. *Metanoia* means afterthought (from *meta* meaning “after” or “beyond” and *nous* meaning “mind”), one that is fueled by feelings of repentance or regret. The afterthought, Kittel et al. explain, brings new knowledge and therefore creates a

“change of mind” that can affect the feelings, the will, or thought (978). Thus *metanoia* is a reflective act in which a person returns to a past event in order to see it anew. Such reflection often brings an emotional response, such as the regret of a failed attempt or the guilt associated with a poor decision, but regret and guilt are only part of the overall experience of *metanoia*. In fact, in *metanoia* the emotional response that comes with reflection is often a motivating force that leads to a transformation. According to Kittel et al., “By a penitent alteration of judgment, by reconsideration, e.g., by the correction of a mistaken view, the fool becomes a wise man” (980). Thus in this early interpretation, *metanoia* can be engaged in as a process, one in which reflection leads to recognition and ultimately to change. While the change that occurs is often referred to as a “change of mind,” Kittel et al. argue that *metanoia* “is seldom a function of the intellect alone” (978). Importantly, in the Liddell and Scott lexicon *metanoia* is described as a “change of mind and *heart*” (emphasis added 1115). Acknowledging the presence of the “heart” in *metanoia* highlights the mind-body partnership at work in the concept. In *metanoia*, mind and body, feeling and intellect, collaborate in creating new knowledge and perspective.

In a much different application of the concept, *metanoia* appears as a rhetorical device that can be traced back to ancient handbooks of rhetorical figures. In fact, Michael Leff points out the *metanoia* entry in P. Rutilius Lupus’s handbook of rhetorical figures, *Schemata Dianoeas et Lexeos ex Graecis Gorgiae Versa*, a book that he describes as “the earliest extant Latin handbook of figures,” circa first century BCE (273). Rutilius defines *metanoia* as a “scheme [that] customarily occurs when the person who is speaking refutes himself and in a subsequent statement changes what he first said” (274). In other words, the figure *metanoia* (also referred to as *correctio* or *reprehensio*) involves “qualifying a statement by recalling it and expressing it in a better way, often by using a negative” (Lanham 100). In *The Garden of Eloquence* Willard R. Espy provides the following examples of *metanoia* (spelled “metania”): “He played the man among his enemies, nay he played the Lion; he did beat them sore, nay he did flay the most of them, nay every one” (187). In Espy’s examples, *metanoia* occurs through the use of “nay” to pause, recall the phrase, and then amplify it. When *metanoia* is used as rhetorical figure, the emotional intensity of the repentance and regret are minor, the reflection is brief, and the transformation occurs as more of a revision. A “change of mind” clearly occurs, but the role of the heart is less prominent.

The elements of transformation and repentance become strongly amplified when *metanoia* takes on biblical significance. The concept of *metanoia* is often associated with the New Testament as an act of repentance that leads to spiritual conversion. Joseph Pathrapankal explains, “Metanoia and faith are the watchwords of Christian theology. . . . In fact, they are twin concepts and are fundamental for a correct understanding of the biblical message both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament” (3). The word *metanoia* does not appear in the Old

Testament, but there are references to *shūbh* (turning around, returning).³ In the Old Testament, *shūbh* is a call to return to Yahweh. The action of turning/returning from the verb *shūbh* is central to the message of *metanoia* espoused by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Whereas the Greek interpretation involves a return to a thought or experience, the New Testament *metanoia* calls for a turning (or returning) of the soul to God. Kittel et al. explain the intensity and permanence of the New Testament *metanoia*:

It demands radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turn from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience. . . . This conversion is once-for-all. There can be no going back, only advance in responsible movement along the way now taken. It affects the whole man, first and basically the centre of personal life, then logically his conduct at all times and in all situations, his thoughts, words, and acts. (1002)

Here the idea of a “change of mind and heart” returns, as *metanoia* affects the “whole man,” first on a personal level and then on a logical level. In other words, the initial, “radical” transformation occurs on a level of body and soul and then moves to the realm of the mind.

In the New Testament usage, once the individual has turned toward God—once *metanoia* has occurred—there is a set path to follow. However, the process of such a conversion does not come easily. Augustine’s *Confessions* provide an illustration of the experience of *metanoia*, detailing the painful journey of his conversion and the path that followed. Augustine has his first spiritual conversion at age nineteen when he encounters Cicero’s *Hortensius*. Of his experience with *Hortensius* Augustine writes, “It transformed my prayers to you, O Lord, and changed the character of my strivings and hopes. Vain aspirations it made, all at once, contemptible. I pined for a deathless wisdom with a churning of my heart I could hardly believe, and I ‘roused myself’ for a return to you” (45). In this declaration, his use of “transformation” and “return” speak to the biblical *metanoia* in which the soul turns toward God. Yet this passage again recalls the “mind and heart” aspect of *metanoia* in the way that Augustine has been passionately stirred toward the wisdom of philosophy. The experience with philosophy transforms his aspirations and sets him on a new path, though his movement along this path is often halted or slowed by regret, remorse, and guilt.

Augustine’s passionate encounter with philosophy leads to yet another important aspect of *metanoia*: the question of how an individual comes to knowledge. *Metanoia* appears in debates about whether or not true knowledge (in the Platonic

³According to Pathrapankal, “there is complete agreement among scholars that the word corresponding to the New Testament words *metanoein* and *metanoia* is the Hebrew verb *shubh*” (35). Pathrapankal goes on to explain that *shūbh* “is basically a verb of motion and movement: ‘turn, return, turn back, go back, come back’, all within the meaning of this verb” (35–36).

sense) can be learned, which then leads to a blurring of the line between *metanoia* and *anamnesis*. Alan J. Torrance, drawing on Kierkegaard, argues that there is a difference between *metanoia* and *anamnesis*, explaining, “Whereas *anamnesis* denotes the confirmation and ratification of the epistemic criteria immanently within us, *metanoia* denotes, by contrast, a profound transformation of the epistemic orientation of the whole person” (36). *Anamnesis*, then, is a recovery of innate knowledge, whereas *metanoia* is a gift of knowledge that comes from god. Edward F. Findlay conflates *metanoia* and *anamnesis* when he uses the term *metanoia* as “a ‘turn’ toward understanding characteristic of Plato’s liberated cave dweller” (146). In another example, Timothy O’Leary, drawing on Pierre Hadot’s *Exercices spirituels et la philosophie antique*, argues that the conversion Plato describes in *The Republic* is an example of *metanoia* (146). O’Leary points specifically to Book VII in which Plato describes turning not just the eyes but the entire soul toward “the brightest of realities” or “the Good” (518c). Both O’Leary and Hadot see this turning of the whole body/soul as a reference to *metanoia*. The discussion of *anamnesis* and/as *metanoia* leads to important questions about the role of agency in such moments of conversion. Often the concept of *metanoia* emphasizes the personal act of repentance and the transformation of the individual, but the influence of outside forces, such as a wise teacher or a divine presence, must also be noted. This question of agency within the concept of *metanoia* calls *kairos* back into the conversation.

When *metanoia* is understood in terms of either divine inspiration or *anamnesis*, context becomes vitally important, as the opportunities for action are revealed by an outside force (divine presence or trusted teacher) rather than discovered by the individual. However, after the opportunity is revealed, action must be taken, and after the initial action, subsequent actions will follow that then confirm or deny *metanoia*. Thus *kairos* and *metanoia* can be re-imagined in a way that returns agency to the individual and in fact makes action crucial to the revelation of *metanoia*. Through *kairos*, *metanoia* is made manifest. Even if *metanoia* is interpreted as a spiritual conversion inspired by divine forces or the recovery of immanent knowledge, the conversion cannot be made concrete until actions are taken that demonstrate the transformation. In other words, in order for the internal transformation of *metanoia* to become external, a person must make choices—and those decisive moments are *kairos*. *Metanoia* relies on *kairos* in that *metanoia* cannot be established unless a choice has been made or an action taken.

With individual action comes the question of whether *kairos* and *metanoia* can be practiced. The history and theory behind *kairos* and *metanoia* can be researched and debated, but can these concepts be learned and deliberately utilized? And *should* they be learned, particularly in a classroom setting? The concept of *metanoia* contains elements of belief, emotion, spirituality, repentance, and regret. It is not easily contained or quantified. Teaching *kairos* and *metanoia* poses many challenges, as the concepts tend to operate in non-rational, mind-body spaces that vary from person to person and moment to moment. Guidelines can be

established for navigating opportunity and learning from regret, but the concepts of *kairos* and *metanoia* lose their force when removed from the context of a specific moment of action. Yet, elements of *metanoia* are always present, to varying degrees, in both the learning process and the practice of rhetoric. The question, then, is how to approach the practice of such unruly concepts.

Learning From *Kairos* and *Metanoia*

For centuries the legend of *Kairos* has warned against passivity: a person must act in a single, decisive moment or suffer the consequences—the moment is quick, the suffering long. *Metanoia* has traditionally been interpreted as the consequence, but the “punishment” does not have to be interpreted as negative and the “suffering” does not have to be passively endured. When *kairos* and *metanoia* are approached as a learning process, *kairos* expands beyond the single, crucial moment of opportunity and into a longer view of human experience. In this longer view, *kairos* can be seen as a series of opportunities occurring over time, experienced with a range of exhilaration and regret. Rather than placing emphasis on isolated moments and available means, *metanoia* encourages broader consideration of the ways in which people move through experiences. More specifically, *metanoia* requires that a person look back on past decisions in order to move in a new direction. It calls for a larger process of re-vision in which a person is constantly revising and revitalizing understanding.

Recognizing the presence of *metanoia* in the kairotic moment creates new possibilities for the teaching and practice of rhetoric by reviving the realm of the missed opportunity as a viable space for action. If *kairos* is seized, a person is carried down the path of that particular opportunity, but if the moment is missed, the path(s) of *metanoia* remain—paths that bring opportunities richly variegated with reflection, regret, transformation, and repentance. In this revitalized space, the missed moment can be reconceptualized as a rhetorical and reflective tool. On one hand, *metanoia* invites the potential to rhetorically construct or strategically seize inopportune moments (*akairos*). On the other hand, and of more pressing concern in this section, *metanoia* offers an important form of reflection in which the emotional impact of a missed opportunity motivates a transformation of thought, advancing a rhetor’s understanding of the situation. Thus through such a learning process, painful as it may be, a rhetor becomes better prepared for the next moment of opportunity.

In order to approach *kairos* and *metanoia* as practices of reflection, a rhetor must become attuned to the presence of opportune and inopportune moments and practiced in their navigation. Utilizing *kairos* and *metanoia* requires a balance of trained skill and intuition, and as such the concepts are only partially teachable. In terms of trained skill, a person can study a variety of situations in advance to memorize patterns in responses, consequences, and behaviors. When Isocrates writes about the importance of training students in the tools that they will need

to navigate a variety of situations, he explains, “those who most apply their minds to [occasions] 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” (291). Similarly, in the *Phaedrus* Plato describes the ability to “say what type of man is susceptible to what kind of discourse” and then “tell himself, ‘That is the man, that character now actually before me is the one I heard about in school, and in order to persuade him of so-and-so I have to apply *these* arguments in *this* fashion’” (272). Learnable trends and techniques can assist in predicting behaviors and outcomes, thus aiding in the practice of *kairos* and *metanoia*. However, the body must be trained as well.

When *kairos* and *metanoia* are practiced together, they carry a corporeal element that exists beyond the purely cognitive or logical. Navigating opportunity incorporates intellectual lessons learned outside of the moment (through life experience or in a classroom), but acknowledging *metanoia*’s presence in the moment necessitates a bodily understanding of the situation, both in the immediate moment and the subsequent reflection. A person must be fully present as the moment unfolds, feeling his or her way through the elements of each situation, but he or she must also reflect on past/practiced skill, wisdom, and foresight. Such a balance of skill and intuition resonates with the concept of *mētis*. In *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant describe *mētis* as a “cunning intelligence” that involves the ability to “foresee the sudden changes in the wind, meeting cunning with cunning and spy out the fleeting opportunity to reverse the balance of forces” (225–226). Debra Hawhee also uses the concepts of maneuvering and navigation in her discussion of *mētis*, describing it as “the mode of negotiating agonistic forces, the ability to cunningly and effectively maneuver a cutting instrument, a ship, a chariot, a body, on the spot, in the heat of the moment” (47). Regardless of the name it is given, the practical application of *kairos* and *metanoia* insists upon strategic navigation, an approach in which the kairotic moment and the repercussions that follow are met with a balance of skill and intuition. *Kairos* and *metanoia*, when approached as a learning process, create a vast realm of opportunity/inopportunity in which moments seized or missed can lead to transformations of mind and heart.

Transforming Belief in Rhetorical Theory

Beyond the transformation that can occur on an individual level, the *kairos* and *metanoia* dynamic can be utilized as a rhetorical device to move an audience. Dale L. Sullivan’s theory of kairotic rhetoric offers a way to begin imagining the rhetorical use of the *kairos* and *metanoia* partnership, introducing another key element: belief. Sullivan describes kairotic rhetoric as belief-based rather than judgment-based, arguing that it stirs “supra-rational” intelligence by filling the mind with “a force that does more than address his or her intellect” (327). Such rhetoric draws on the powers of inspiration, imagination, and wonder. It is transcendental

and revelatory, with the goal of producing belief (*pistis*) rather than scientific or rational assent. Interestingly, Sullivan's article is one of the few places in contemporary rhetoric scholarship where *kairos* and *metanoia* are explicitly, though briefly, paired. Sullivan links *kairos* and *metanoia* to the role of audience in the acceptance or rejection of belief-based rhetoric. He explains that "truth, or the unveiled vision, can be resisted and that the most we can hope for is the audience's decision to believe" (329). While a rhetor may attempt to create a *kairos-metanoia* experience in an audience, the individual audience member must take what Sullivan refers to as a "leap of faith" in order to embrace the experience. Sullivan describes the crucial moment as "a *kairos* of decision" in which a yes or no decision must be made. He explains, "If the auditor's response is no, the vision begins to dissipate and is regarded as an *apate*. If the response is yes, then *metanoia* occurs" (327). The audience is presented with a vision, and there is a pivotal moment in which they can respond with either belief or skepticism.

Sullivan explicitly uses the term *metanoia* when discussing the final stage or end result of kairotic rhetoric. He describes the end result as a dramatic conversion or "a change of mind in which a new vision of life replaces and old one," and he uses New Testament *metanoia* as an example of such profound transformation (328). More specifically, he quotes 1 Corinthians 2:16 in which *metanoia* is described as "imparting 'the mind of Christ'" (328). Thus in Sullivan's argument, *metanoia* occurs when the suprarational vision is accepted through a decision to believe. Between the crucial, decisive moment (*kairos*) and the transformation of mind and heart (*metanoia*), exists the essential step of belief. Importantly, though, belief and transformation do not have to be relegated solely to the realm of religion or spirituality. Instead, responding to a suprarational vision with belief means embracing the mind-body intelligence of *metanoia*. Rhetorically speaking, such a response attends to the suprarational, the mind and heart, in kairotic moments. If audience members are to act in the moment and embrace the idea or vision that will lead to transformation, they must first believe.

Richard Benjamin Crosby illustrates how Martin Luther King Jr. enacts a version of kairotic rhetoric in his "Last Sunday Sermon."⁴ According to Crosby, King's rhetoric actively "suspends his audience, fills the intervening moment with divine insight, then impels them forward to godly action," a description that resonates with the *kairos-metanoia* experience of divine insight in a suspended moment of realization (278). In his analysis of the Sermon, Crosby argues that King transports his audience into a kairotic experience by first creating a poised pause, which then leads to recognition, and then into the discovery of a new realm that is removed from the logic of a larger myth. In the space of the poised pause, "one 'sees' (i.e., realizes) the exigence of a given situation" (273). Once the rhetor

⁴The sermon is also referred to as "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution," delivered March 31, 1968.

transports the audience into the new realm of pause, action can be taken to recognize or refuse a myth (277). King's rhetoric fills the minds of his audience with a new vision, one that is "suprarational" in its existence outside of the previously accepted logic, and one that requires a belief-based decision if action is to occur. Crosby points specifically to King's discussion of the "myth of time" in which oppressed populations of people are told to slow down and wait, as time will work everything out. Instead of waiting, King urges people to see time anew—to pause, recognize their power in the present moment, and act. In particular, Crosby argues that King's rhetoric aims at "shattering" the myth of chronological time, a myth that encourages people to submit to time as it marches steadily and irrevocably onward. King recasts time, presenting it as "never neutral" and instead as something that can be *used* constructively or destructively. He urges his audience to seize time, as "the time is always ripe to do right." As Crosby notes, the concept of *kairos* is present in King's reference to "ripe time," yet, Crosby explains, *kairos* plays a much larger role in the text as King creates kairotic experiences that transport his audience to new belief. The transformation and reflection that occur within the audience during such a kairotic moment creates a place for *metanoia* to enter the conversation.

While the *kairos-metanoia* dynamic is present in the larger operation of King's rhetoric, it also makes a thematic appearance in his warning against complacency and hesitation. In particular, the warning resonates with the legend of Opportunity and specifically with the message in Ausonius's aforementioned epigram (*In Simulacrum Occasionis et Paenitentiae*). In King's sermon, as in Ausonius's epigram, time must be actively embraced and used constructively, otherwise opportunities slip by. Both Ausonius and King warn against procrastination and "waiting on time." As *Occasio* explains in the epigram, "You too, while you're asking all these questions and procrastinating with your interrogation, will discover that I have slipped through your hands." The message in both pieces is to *act* on time and to intercept the path of opportunity; those who do not act must face punishment. In Ausonius's epigram, the consequences are delivered by *Metanoia*, the goddess who enacts punishment and regret for actions within the ambiguous realm of "what has and has not been done." Similarly, King's Sermon incorporates a wide-reaching call for repentance when he states: "And it may well be that we will have to repent in this generation. Not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say, 'Wait on Time.'" King too calls on his audience to repent for what has been done (vitriolic words and violent actions) and what has not been done (the appalling silence and indifference of those who wait). Both pieces warn against hesitation and complacency, ardently promoting the seizing of time.

Crosby's description of pause, recognition, and action in King's rhetoric provides an initial avenue for envisioning how *kairos* and *metanoia* might be employed as rhetorical devices. He shows how King is able to harness the powers

of *kairos* and *metanoia* to affect an audience, while still maintaining the complexity and power of each concept. Yet, maintaining the complexity and power of the *kairos-metanoia* experience often involves letting it unfold as a unique, personal revelation; therefore, even if the rhetor creates the experience, it would be difficult to understand or assess the impact on individual audience members. Much work needs to be done regarding the rhetorical role of *kairos* and *metanoia*, but, generally speaking, the concepts offer a new way to think about moments of transformation in rhetorical situations. Through a pause or opening created by the rhetor, an audience can be transported into a new realm of understanding.

While the experience of *kairos* and *metanoia* may serve to open new and exciting realms of understanding, it also has the potential to be dangerous in the context of rhetoric and communication. The experience of being transported into new knowledge, which is often a powerful, emotional experience, can serve to limit rather than expand knowledge. Such an experience, whether explicitly spiritual or not, can be so powerful that the resultant knowledge then blocks future communication or collaboration. The experience of *metanoia* is often difficult to assess, understand, and control. It can be considered beyond words and earthly logic, harbored in a spiritual space and guarded with intense emotion. As such, profound, spiritual conversion can firmly affix a person to particular views and beliefs, making productive argument and communication difficult. Taken another step, the *kairos-metanoia* experience can be understood as existing at the heart of some of the most passionately fought debates, as conversions or transformations of thought that are experienced as truth can create seemingly impenetrable walls between clashing ideologies. That said, the role of *kairos* and *metanoia* in rhetorical studies should be neither idealized nor vilified, but more closely examined.

In *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*, Sharon Crowley explores the tensions and roadblocks that occur in fundamentalist, belief-based rhetoric. In doing so, Crowley creates an opportunity to expand understanding of *kairos* and *metanoia*'s role in belief-driven disputes. First, she describes two types of conversion that resonate with the forms of the *kairos-metanoia* experience explored earlier: the single moment of epiphany and the reflective, transformative process. For the first, she draws on Stanley Fish's work *The Trouble with Principle* that includes a story about a Klansman who "was jolted out of belief by sudden awareness of a contradiction between an ideologic and a powerful emotion" (189). In addition to the "sudden awareness" scenario, Crowley also discusses conversion as a long and painful process. She cites the experience of Dan Baker who described conversion away from fundamentalist belief as an agonizing and extended process of tearing down and restructuring his beliefs (191). Regardless of the circumstances, the experience of turning toward or away from belief leaves an indelible impression, one from which fundamentalist views may emerge. As Crowley illustrates in her final chapter, the powerful emotional experience of the conversion can be crafted into a narrative and used as a rhetorical tool to

persuade a non-believer to convert. In this rhetorical application of the conversion story, the goal is to create a kairotic moment for another person, opening up a space for *metanoia* to occur. Although the reflective and transformative experience of *metanoia* can serve as a catalyst for expanded thought, Crowley's example of the conversion narrative points to another function of the metanoic experience, one in which complexity collapses into a more narrow, more singularly focused understanding.

Yet the concepts of *kairos* and *metanoia* can also offer a response to Crowley's call for "many more paths of invention" in situations of rhetorical impasse. If, as Crowley argues, "Rhetors cannot afford to ignore the values held by those whose beliefs they wish to change," then *metanoia* offers a way to begin understanding the roots of belief (200). More specifically, one way to approach contrasting beliefs is to dedicate empathetic understanding to the *metanoic* moment, seeking to contextualize the conversion narrative. When applied more generally, focusing attention on transformations of belief in any context can be a reflective process that helps a person better understand his or her position, as well as opposing positions. These transformations, or kairotic turning points, when located, offer concrete places to begin the kind of conversation Crowley advocates. When people identify the roots of "passionate commitments"—specific moments of conversion to belief, both their own and those of others—they create improved hope for more productive conversation. Therefore, *kairos* and *metanoia* can come into argument not only as an end goal (e.g., transforming another's opinion) but as an important part of the process that shifts conversation away from antagonism and toward dialogue.

Afterthought: Looking Back to Look Forward

In addition to her long-standing partnership with *Kairos/Occasio*, the figure of *Metanoia* is also linked to True Education. In the *Tablet of Cebes*, *Metanoia* plays a critical role in the individual's ascent to True Education and Happiness. The *Tablet* presents an allegory of life where figures such as Fortune, False Education, and the Vices all attempt, often successfully, to stall the individual's advancement with gifts, distractions, and distorted views of True Education. Amid the many temptations, *Metanoia* plays a pivotal part in the transition from false to true education. The journey, as explained in the *ekphrasis*, is broken into stages that are marked by three enclosed areas or levels, separated by high walls. *Metanoia* exists in the second enclosure among the poets and scholars, those who "claim to understand what they do not know" (Seddon 197). At this stage, the traveler is still vulnerable to Opinions, trapped in the delusion of False Education. The only way to move from false education to true education is through Repentance (*Metanoia*); she serves as the essential step or bridge from the second enclosure to the third where true education and happiness can be achieved. There is no hope for advancement, "unless they also take with them Repentance,

who can persuade them that they have not found Education, but False Education, by whom they are deceived” (197). In the *Tablet*, *Metanoia* is given a rhetorical role as the force that can persuade an individual to see more clearly and thus re-envision education.

In future conversations about the concept of *kairos*, rhetoric scholars and teachers must “take with them Repentance.” The opportunities for future exploration of *kairos* and *metanoia* in rhetorical studies are wide open and many. For example, *Metanoia* is most often portrayed as a female, concealed in some way and consumed by emotion. In many of the portrayals, her emotion appears debilitating, as it leaves her hunched over and submissive. Yet the voice of *Metanoia* in Ausonius’s epigram is not passive. When invited to speak, she asserts herself as “the goddess who exacts punishment” and creates regret. Sometimes she delivers her punishment aggressively with a whip, other times quietly from the shadows, but she always acts in moments of hesitation. Also, the female *Metanoia* is most often partnered with the female *Occasio* and not the male *Kairos*. Together, these goddesses are both foreboding and forgiving; they give opportunity and they take it away. The powerful dynamic between opportunity and regret is, to some degree, feminized, and thus the gender implications must be examined in more detail.

Metanoia also invites further conversation about the “suprational” as an important realm in which mind, body, emotion, and logic are blurred, leading to further investigation into the role of affect in rhetorical theory. In addition, uniting the concepts of *kairos*, *metanoia*, *anamnesis*, and *metis* contributes to the development of suprational rhetoric as a rhetorical theory, a theory that (as Sullivan explains) exists as an alternative to Aristotle’s *krisis*-based rhetoric. To more fully describe suprational rhetoric, these concepts and others require more detailed attention and expansion. For example, *kairos* and *metanoia* have also been partnered with *pronoia*, which adds foresight into the experience of opportunity and regret. The three figures, *Occasio*, *Metanoia*, and *Pronoia*, appear together in a limestone relief, dated around the third or fourth century, currently housed in the Cairo Museum. In this relief, *Occasio* flies forward on the back of *Pronoia*, leaving a dejected *Metanoia* behind them. The role of *pronoia* in the *kairos* and *metanoia* partnership, as well as in the larger theory of suprational rhetoric, offers yet another avenue for future work.

The rhetoric of opportunity and regret is pervasive, constantly motivating people to either act quickly or to avoid action. The clock is ticking, the moment is now, *this* is the turning point. But the rhetorical relationship between opportunity and regret offers much more, particularly in the largely uncharted territory of regret. The dichotomous approach to opportunity and regret forms a powerful rhetorical device that is constantly employed in sales promotions and motivational speeches, yet the most expansive opportunities for future work emerge when the dichotomy dissolves and the partnership between *kairos* and *metanoia* surfaces.

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