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## *Rhetoric*

### *AN OLD ART*

The idea of rhetoric is as old as civilization. It was systematized as an art in ancient Greece to implement democratic government, since successful citizenship required skill and sophistication in decision-making, reasoning, and speaking—all of which are parts of the rhetorical faculty. After establishment of the polis, the autonomous city-state, came gradual growth of popular government. Athens emerged as the model, with its great legislative Assembly flourishing in the fifth century B.C. In that city, all male citizens were allowed a direct hand in making laws, but enjoyment of democracy depended on effectiveness in speaking. Plaintiffs and defendants in court proceedings also needed rhetorical ability, for they were required to appear and plead their own cases. Other users of rhetorical processes were persons designated to speak on special occasions of the community, e.g., at funerals or festivals.

#### *Aristotle's Definition of Rhetoric*

The most noteworthy theory of rhetoric to come out of antiquity—albeit in the century after the flowering of democracy in Greece—was from Aristotle who said that rhetoric is the art or faculty of observing (discovering) in any given case the available means of persuasion.<sup>1</sup> Thus he found rhetoric related to finding the means—arguments, appeals, strategies—for building promising persuasive cases with audiences in situations as they arose.

#### *Enthymeme*

Aristotle emphasized *discovery* in his definition—*invention*, as the Romans later called it—and named the *enthymeme* as central in the rhetorical process.

Aristotle's enthymeme is a deductive structure which typifies human thought patterns and therefore is essential in the discovery of the “available means of persuasion.” And unlike the formal syllogism which deals in ab-

solutes, the enthymeme deals in probabilities—the typical kind of material found in legislative, judicial, and ceremonial speeches. A formal syllogism is grist for scientific or philosophic dialogue, e.g.,

Major premise: All men are mortal.

Minor premise: Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

But in the Athenian Assembly, deliberations were on debatable questions and ordinary recurring topics like war and peace, ways and means, defense, etc. Thus served the enthymeme, the practical mode of reasoning for addressing matters in *dispute*, for handling *unsettled* questions and *issues*. By definition, an issue is ipso facto an undecided matter, one on which the truth of neither side is established. Therefore, the better cases heard in public speeches were those judged to have the higher degree of probable merit or promise or comparable practicality. Moreover, unlike the learned ones with their syllogisms (“All men are mortal,” etc.), speakers in the legislature, courts, or on streets of the Agora, usually found it advisable to build their arguments with some part open or incomplete, allowing for audience participation in the formulation of thought. Enthymemes, therefore, often appeared with only two of the three syllogistic parts—or even one. As he gave his memorable funeral address, proud Pericles doubtless enjoyed full Athenian cooperation in “supplying” the basic and omitted premise of this enthymeme: Fellow Athenians, one reason for our greatness is that “we are originators, not imitators.” Pericles did not have to remind those people of the value of originality. He was safe in assuming that he and they shared it; therefore, he could leave the agreed upon major premise *unspoken* (“A great city is one valuing originality”). Talking in this way, Pericles invited audience participation in completing the point; speaker and listeners reasoned together, intimate in spirit. When cultural and social values are shared, speakers’ enthymemes are not as complete.

### *Style and Structure*

Orators learned, then, that enthymemes of three complete premises often were unnecessary for persuading audiences. In fact, a full stock of premises in an enthymematic statement could imperil the case, given possible listener impatience with redundancy or seeming condescension. In defense against Aeschines’ sweeping indictment of his entire career, Demosthenes pleaded for fair treatment. Formally laid out, one of his points (one enthymeme) can be cast as follows:

Major premise: Fairness requires that a living person be judged  
in comparison with his contemporaries, not the dead.

Minor premise: I am a living person.

Conclusion: Fairness requires that I be judged in comparison with my contemporaries, not the dead.

Here is the point in full, as he structured and expressed it to achieve his purpose:

You next call to my remembrance the great men of the past. You are right to do so. But it is not right, gentlemen, to take advantage in this court of the feeling which exists permanently towards the dead in order to examine me, living as I do among you, and compare me with them. No one can be unaware that there is always an undercurrent, deep or shallow, of envy towards the living, while the dead are immune from the dislike even of their enemies. In view, then, of the character of these gentlemen, am I now to be judged and assessed in comparison with my predecessors? I hope not. Justice and equity alike forbid it, Aeschines. The standard must be you yourself, or any other person still living who shared your policies.

Demosthenes' care in organizing and phrasing the elements of his argument contributed to his reasoning and its full effect.

### *Symbols*

Greek orators and theorists, including Aristotle, recognized the power of language in the rhetorical act. Ancient speech making offers an early demonstration of the function of symbols, of how humans use and react to particular meanings given to words—verbal symbols, but also the nonverbal: objects, facial expression and physical movement, dress, designs, etc. One can imagine the meanings that Greeks attached to the “Olympic Games” (as term or event experienced), a city called “Sparta,” and the word “arete.” The symbols of a culture—with their shared meanings—can have a tremendous impact on people of the culture. Influencing others requires selection and effective presentation of appropriate symbols. Demosthenes saw Philip II of Macedonia as a grave threat to Athenian security, and in speech after speech he warned that Philip was out to conquer Athens. But Demosthenes was not successful in causing the people to take arms against the Macedonian (not until too late). He shaped a spectre symbolizing clear and present danger, yet hard as he tried, he was unable to secure sufficient agreement on meaning in the symbol.

*The Audience*

Speakers of any age attempt to lay out their premises skillfully, adjusting form to inclinations of listeners. They embellish their lines of argument with words appealing to ideals and experience, to their listeners' sense of fair play and knowledge of human behavior. In so doing, they exemplify the finding of Aristotle that rhetoric is a popular art — audience-centered, practiced with awareness of the thinking and feeling of recipients. It is “the hearer, that determines the speech's end and object,” Aristotle said. In tackling problems of the community, the rhetor's art was in deciding, in choosing theme and thought, structure and style, all elements as dictated by purpose, yes, but also as influenced by audience and occasion.

So it is in democratic meeting places today. The exchange is dialectical, involving adaptation and give-and-take. While free to take issue (and formulate enthymemes) people seeking a hearing are influenced in their approach by situational realities and acceptance or denial by peers. Indeed, rhetoric is viable only when decisions of speaker and listeners are free.

Above all, rhetoric is an activity of *options*. The first choice has to do with goal and strategy: how to succeed in achieving one's purpose. The second choice is relational: how to treat the audience. The latter, as an ethical concern, brings up questions of fairness, integrity, and respect for others. Necessarily, the matter of adherence to moral and social values has always put heavy burdens on speakers who approach an audience and consider the nature of the relationship. From antiquity to the present, ethics and morality have had firm connection to rhetorical theory and practice. In fact, it was Quintilian, the first century Roman teacher, who defined the orator as “the good man speaking well” and who made that idea central in his monumental book on rhetorical training.<sup>2</sup>

Since freedom is related to vulnerability, the risks in addressing an audience in a democratic setting may be extraordinary, sometimes calling for great wisdom and courage. John F. Kennedy's book, *Profiles in Courage*,<sup>3</sup> brings to mind examples. Issues of freedom, risk, and action — all topics of that book — suggest another side to standards of citizenship as related to rhetorical activity. Whose responsibility is it that appropriate actions be taken in a democracy? It rests with those whose welfare and general happiness are at stake — the people, as members of groups or as individuals. They have the power in both a political and interpersonal sense. Given a rhetorical way of thinking, the people are the *audience*, the source of influence in a free society. In a subsequent chapter we shall start a discussion of the “good audience” and its essential role in the civics of living and relating. And again, whether referring to speaker or audiences, the dimensions of rhetoric are both practical and ethical.

### *The Appeal of Ethos*

Another observation of Aristotle that continues to carry much meaning is on proofs or appeals. Though wishing for sufficiency in rational appeal (logos), and yet acknowledging the force of emotional appeal (pathos) in rhetorical exchange, Aristotle, the good observing scientist that he was, had to conclude that very likely the most telling appeal was in *ethos*: in the rhetor's revealed character, wisdom, and good will — his credibility. Ethos is personal proof. One case in point is found in Winston Churchill's speech before the joint session of the United States Congress in December of 1941, just after the Pearl Harbor attack put America at war in the Pacific. He came to Washington to get assurance that the United States would continue to support the war in his part of the world: in Europe. A prominent feature of the address was his advantageous reference to his legislative and parental identity. "By the way," he remarked in the introduction, "I cannot help for reflecting, that if my father had been American — and my mother British — instead of the other way around, I might have got here on my own." That is ethos! — a brilliant revelation of shared personal substance — true kinship! Who can calculate the unifying effect of those few words on members of Congress whose heads had just been turned from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In that moment of high rhetorical drama and intimacy, the speaker's motives were revealed in audience response — and the listeners' motives in the speaker's choices of symbols and enthymemes. Such is the essential material of persuasion. The force of personal appeal cannot be overestimated.

### *Role as Strategy*

The ethos of rhetors is established by the words they use and the roles they assume in their meanings and varied interactions. Roles are indicators of identity that serve in reaching and affecting others. Everyone, as a rhetorical being, has a repertoire of roles, large or small. In a functional sense, roles are strategies selected and enacted to achieve goals. For example, if we were to reanalyze Winston Churchill's speech, we might be able to assess his effectiveness by taking into account the roles he assumed. Quite clearly, in reminding the American legislators of his American mother, he projected himself as *kinsman*. That is a vital role. Moreover, he was a fellow politician, a *brother*. That, too, can be an effective role. And everybody knew Churchill as *hero*. (Symbols and roles may come together.) Incidentally, in the months ahead, he was to become known and accepted by many as *savior* of the Empire. Certainly on that day in Washington, he acted as *promoter*, a role that may not have carried positive value for some members of the audience who saw him promoting his own cause.

All people, ordinary and great, have in stock numbers of learned and well-practiced roles. An example is the person who relies on a sense of humor and gets on by being *comedian*. That same individual might occasionally play the role of *adviser* with friends, *father* with younger employees at work, or *cheerleader* with a discouraged colleague. The roles chosen vary according to their availability to the person — whether a part of the person's repertoire, and according to the situation faced and the aim of the rhetor.

### *Intentionality*

As rhetorical creatures, we humans act with intention, i.e., with aim and purpose. The influencing of others is accomplished verbally and nonverbally, and it is the position here that messages invented — those of conscious design as well as those arising from below the level of consciousness — ordinarily will reflect the rhetor's feeling and intent. It is a fact that many statements are not truly deliberate, e.g., a nonverbal burst of laughter. Realistically, speakers cannot exercise complete control over all messages sent. Consider the kind of nonverbal statement that contradicts the verbal and thus confuses the receiver of the message, as in the case of a frown accompanying words that sound cheerful. Rhetorical miscues do occur. Momentarily out of touch with an audience, a rhetor may utter a counterproductive phrase or make a gesture that detracts from purpose. But that is not to deny intentionality. It is only to recognize the occurrence of rhetorical lapses, given human fallibility. Generally speaking, then, symbolic behavior is expressive of rhetorical intent.

### *Identification*

Churchill's speech before the Congress *brought speaker and listener together*. The process is identification. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle made some mention of this significant process, e.g., in regard to composition of the speech of praise. It is advisable, he said to "take into account the nature of our particular audience," and to be aware of those qualities esteemed by them: observe that "it is not difficult to praise the Athenians to an Athenian audience." But while suggesting the persuasive value of speaker-audience identification, Aristotle left development of the theory to future writers. Notable among those theorists is Kenneth Burke of this century who finds identification of rhetor and audience as both process and end.<sup>4</sup> To identify is to talk another's language. It is to discover and reveal *shared* properties — *common* attributes, values, needs, and feelings. The aim is to find consubstantiality, i.e., to acknowledge common "personal substance," the stuff that makes speaker and audience alike and facilitates intimacy and dialogue: a coming together. Taking this process into account, we can begin to understand a rhetor's motive and an audience's response.

To identify is to make reference, if one is Winston Churchill, to his mother's American birth and other shared interests: or if an ex-New Yorker to reveal the fact of one's New York City childhood when speaking to other ex-New Yorkers; or to locate common community interest while conversing with a neighbor. If people were not separate and distinct, there would be no gaps to bridge, no need for rhetorical action. But alas, we are not of one heart or mind. In great and ordinary interactions, people—all of us as individuals apart from others—strive to make connections. Hence, no human function or goal is more basic than achievement of consubstantiality, be it on grand or mundane level. The fundamental idea of rhetoric, then, can be expressed in terms of persons divided, purposefully seeking union, and finding available means through choice and design of enthymeme, fitting structure, and appropriate style. The rhetorical act is of people affecting others—selecting strategies, roles, places, and times to achieve their ends. Occasions of rhetorical interaction involve audiences of many or one and range from the most formal to the most intimate and personal.

### *Extending Aristotle*

In Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, we have the first treatment of a practical and *relational* dimension in the art, marking a significant departure from the idealistic position of his teacher, Plato. With the audience seen as a central, participating member, Aristotle's rhetoric becomes *rhetorical interaction*; the art of discovering available means of persuasion is deciding on enthymemes, yes—but also it is adapting to audiences. Aristotle's thought, as augmented over time, is the substructure for much modern rhetorical theory. Among the most significant authors of augmentation is Burke who worked up that profound idea of consubstantiality—of locating shared substance as the essential of any rhetorical exchange. New meaning emerged when we began to understand the process of people “being with” others and making their respective selves available in building enthymemes together. Then we saw the application of rhetoric to relationships. We found key conditions to be levels of reciprocity and mutuality in thought, feeling, and attitude. Theorists developed concepts like “confirmation-disconfirmation” to distinguish between productive and supportive messages and those which are not.<sup>5</sup> Trust and sharing of self and ideas became central. While it will be more apparent at a later point, we can conclude now that all communicative states are rhetorical, i.e., functional and instrumental, presented to affect an audience and dependent for success on their potential in bringing about identification. From this position, common attributes in all varieties of rhetorical activity become apparent, whether in references to Demosthenes in the Athenian Assembly, Churchill before Congress, a set of American parents talking over a problem on how to

deal with the kids, or the kids themselves interacting with each other in their relationships. Found in all exchanges of people are thoughts to be expressed, influence exerted, choices made, purposes and goals decided and pursued, language used—verbal and nonverbal, courage mustered, roles played, and perceptions of self and audience discovered. Rhetoric involves people in scenes and situations acting purposefully and strategically.

Burke extended the functional Aristotelian view with new social and psychological perspectives on motivation and the workings of human interaction. Conceiving of society as dramatic, Burke connected motivation to symbolizing. People are moved to act on others with their language, seeking consubstantiality. He theorized that as people reject hierarchy, as they move out of “their proper places” in society, they experience guilt. It is in response to inherent, eternal guilt, said Burke, that people act. They do so to redeem themselves. Guilt, then, provides motivation for action. As moral philosopher and psychological child of a classical psychoanalytic intellectual environment, Burke wrote of humans in conflict who, sensing their guilt and “pollution,” are driven to seek purification and redemption. Such are the bases of rhetorical motivation. This Freudian-informed interpretation served for decades. But of late it has become clear that Burke’s construct is not fully adequate in characterizing human purpose and rhetorical behavior in this day. These times require further augmentation in theory. Retain principles of Aristotle and Burke, yes, but to understand contemporary motivation, add *self psychology*.

#### HEINZ KOHUT AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SELF

Prominent among more recent departures from classical psychoanalytic theory is the well-established self psychology school, founded by Heinz Kohut.<sup>6</sup> Kohut discovered that while certain of Freud’s concepts, e.g. on the effects of drives in conflict with one another, served to explain behavioral phenomena apparent at the turn of the century, they do not suffice in addressing phenomena of behavior observed now. Children of Victorian households were intensely involved with family, servants, and others. The stimulation was constant and too great; conflicts resulted. Today, conditions are just the opposite. Adults are emotionally distant, and the family atmosphere is flat and sterile. Thus, children are understimulated.<sup>7</sup> Left to themselves, they feel disconnected, alienated.

Because “man is changing as the world in which he lives changes,” a new psychology must be adopted. Freud’s so-called “Guilty Man” acted to satisfy drives, while today’s “Tragic Man” acts to fulfill himself, to express the pattern of his individual self.<sup>8</sup> The former was susceptible to neurotic conflict, the latter to a pervasive sense of self-defectiveness. “If



guilt be the emotion of Freud's conflicted Guilty Man, shame . . . is . . . central to Kohut's Tragic Man." Shame is evidenced in self-deficit: humiliation, apathy, inner emptiness, isolation, and low self-evaluation — conditions stemming from "failure to live up to an ideal." Shame is the "hallmark of the defeated self."<sup>9</sup>

Guilt arises from transgression; shame from self-deficiency and "flaw in identity representation." The guilty seek forgiveness; the shamed — with their unattainable ideals — seek acceptance.<sup>10</sup> The modern result of failure in the quest of moral perfection or affirmation of ambitions — even among healthy persons — is guiltless despair — i.e., shame.<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting personal imperfection and incapacity, shame is a powerful motivator. It can act as an "internal trigger to the more socially discordant and observable expressions of rage and aggression," or to socially useful expressions of shortcoming and of dissatisfaction with oneself.<sup>12</sup> The career of Jim Jones and the events at Jonestown show how calamity might arise out of childhood injury and resulting shame. The case is discussed fully in Chapter five. On the socially useful side — the creative or heroic side — is the great leadership of Winston Churchill, who may have owned a "persistent, poorly modified grandiose self."<sup>13</sup> In acting on others, the usual motivation of both evildoer and hero is not guilt — not instinctual and biological conflict — but limitation of self.

#### *KOHUT AND BURKE*

This is the era of Tragic Man — the age of adverse narcissism, and if the psychology of Kohut and his many adherents is sound, a fundamental condition of people now is not guilt from transgression, but shame from defect — and therefrom are we moved to act and relate to others. Thus, the necessity of rethinking the parts of Burkeian theory that relate to foundations of behavior. Burke's human subject, guilty and polluted, seeks purification (through victimage and mortification) and redemption (forgiveness),<sup>14</sup> while the subject of Heinz Kohut, shameful and deficient, seeks justification of self (through aggression and withdrawal) and perfection (acceptance). The Burkeian subject is limited by inner conflict; the Kohutian by fragmentation of self. Thus in the seeking of conflict resolution or cohesion are they rhetorically motivated.

As guilt has given way to shame, behavior from "sin" has given way to solipsistic inquietude and forms of self-protective accommodation. Needless to say, the hound of guilt remains, but as shall be apparent in subsequent chapters, the exertions of self-criticism provide the driving force of this age. Therefore, rhetoric needs a new psychology, one fit for use in dealing with issues reflecting the tenor of these times: times bearing on material vs. spiritual values, individual interests vs. community interests,

and demands of the present vs. uses of the past.<sup>15</sup> Relevant and patently significant, self psychology and related compatible theory promises to be useful in rhetorical investigation—in understanding changes in personal epistemologies and modes of invention, world views, strategic behaviors, and rhetorical styles. Our psychology must be suitable to the current social psyche and cultural conditions. How would this psychology assist the study and criticism of rhetorical acts in this era? A psychological understanding of an enthymeme reflecting deficit, as opposed primarily to moral stricture, is of great value to students of contemporary rhetoric and public address. For example, one American politician's declarations, "You won't have Richard Nixon to kick around anymore," and "I am not a crook," are representative of the voice of injured narcissism, not guilt. Applied to rhetorical behavior, the newer theory facilitates investigation of the rhetor's motivations toward self-justification and keeping the pieces of self together. Mr. Nixon did not seek forgiveness; he was not Guilty Man.

In another case, it is likely that knowledge of the German nation's response to Hitler would be incomplete without benefit of insights on self-depletion in the people and their perceived failure to meet cultural and national ideals. A critic outfitted with an appreciation of self psychology might bolster Kenneth Burke's superb criticism of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.<sup>16</sup> While Burke is brilliant and convincing in his explication of the use of the Jew as scapegoat, another critic might come to important findings in exploring Hitler's use of the depressed German people ("self-objects," as Kohut would have called the interacting populace) to rediscover his—der Führer's—omnipotent self. Accordingly, the critic would explain the relationship of Hitler and the people as collusion in pursuit of similar ends. It was a self-deficient people with whom the self-deficient Hitler achieved that peculiar empathy: a resonance of injured self on injured self. Both shamed, they became united.

When presidential aspirant George Romney made his fateful trip to Viet Nam in the spring of 1968 and then admitted that he had been "brain-washed" by American generals there, he unintentionally committed political suicide. His was not an admission of guilt but a naive revelation that Americans translated as incompetence: the people concluded that he was not his own man. A simple error may be forgiven, but a sign of incapacity is not the same—not a discrete mistake to be excused. Romney's statement carried great implications and had indelibility, suggesting some deeper predisposition of the man. Once fully revealed and impressed, such an image is likely to persist, despite disclaimer.

The American public's sensing of presidential aspirant Senator Gary Hart's motivation from narcissistic injury<sup>17</sup> may have contributed significantly to his rejection in the presidential primaries of 1988. The central

issue was leadership, and Hart's haughtiness and aloof individuality—his self-defeating, *unrhetorical* "my-personal-life-is-my-own-business" message—detracted from positive traits. The dominance of personal code of conduct over social values gave evidence of rhetorical weakness and unpresidential character. Given the stakes and this subject's hauteur and defensiveness, the people were not forgiving. Gary Hart was Kohut's Tragic Man. But the main point is that his rhetorical story—and that of many others—would remain only partially told without utilization of the theory on motivation advanced by the self psychology school.

### EVERYONE A RHETOR

When thinking of users of rhetoric, we bring to mind names like Demosthenes, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, and men and women who are public figures of our day. But all persons are rhetors. All have statements to make and influence to exert. All have audiences to address: others who figure decisively in their respective rhetorical environments. All interacting persons face critical rhetorical questions and issues: on credibility, self-disclosure and intimacy, predictions on outcome, costs and rewards, constraints of audience and occasion, reciprocity, values, and norms, etc. To engage rhetorically, whether with hundreds or with but one other, is to take part in discovery, merger, give-and-take, and compromise. Rhetorical interaction involves use of agreed upon symbols, of shared meanings. In a metaphorical sense, it is "playing the game," i.e., recognizing commonly accepted rules; it is appreciating the conventions created for this world of people affecting people. To engage rhetorically is to affect others strategically with acquired roles, going for some gain with—and through—others, and necessarily constrained by *their* rhetorically behaving selves, as they of course, act in *their* own interests. This is a persuasive enterprise of mutual interest and self-interest. Sometimes an adventure and often quite ordinary, it is a civil and dialectical process of social interaction: society's most humane means of implementing essential checks and balances on behavior. Though, as Aristotle noted, violence and economic power can be used to accomplish certain ends. it is through rhetoric that culture is sustained.

### A PREVIEW

Now let us remind ourselves of the individual's first rhetorical experience. When does one first get involved with others rhetorically? Surprisingly, the answer is, *at birth*; the newborn infant's first involvement in rhetorical activity begins immediately. In one way or another, the foregoing theoretical discussion applies to the very first relationship, that of infant and parent. Parents have goals to gain, plans to accomplish, and persuasive things to

say—as does the infant, which soon becomes evident. Increasingly, week by week, parent-child interactions take on more obvious rhetorical shape, the character of which will have influence on all phases of the new one's entire life with others. That is the first topic of the next chapter.

From the discussion of the infant's earliest social life come a number of other vital topics. One is about the *self*—an individual's unique identity or being—and self-adequacy. A second topic is the *rhetorical imperative*, a conception characterizing the great quest for representation of self through others. The *rhetorical disposition* is another significant topic. Formed in infancy, this is the condition that individuals enjoy when narcissism—sense of self and personal motivating force—is favorable. Underlying this happy state is self-esteem: “the sense each of us has in varying degrees of being a worthwhile, valuable person.”<sup>18</sup>

The topic of Chapter three is rhetorical *indisposition*, the unhappy state—that of diminished potential in interaction with others, of motivation from unfavorable narcissism.

But first, the good part.