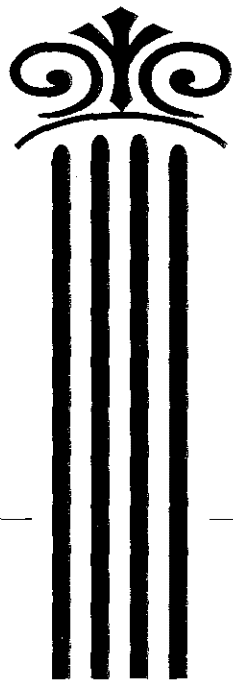


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S E C O N D   E D I T I O N

# ANCIENT RHETORICS FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDENTS

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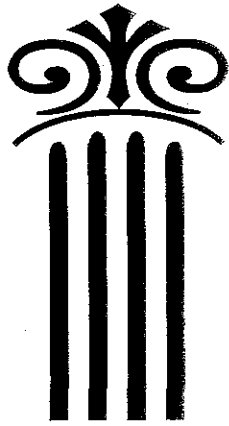
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# ANCIENT RHETORICS: THEIR DIFFERENCES, AND THE DIFFERENCES THEY MAKE

*For us moderns, rhetoric  
means artificiality,  
insincerity, decadence.  
Perhaps this is simply  
because we do not  
understand it and have  
become barbarians  
ourselves.*

—H. I. Marrou

WHEN AMERICANS HEAR the word **rhetoric**, they tend to think of politicians' attempts to deceive them. Rhetoric is now thought of as empty words, or as fancy language used to distort the truth or to tell lies. Television newspeople often say something like "There was more rhetoric from the White House today" and editorialists write that politicians need to "stop using rhetoric and do something." Many people blame rhetoric for our apparent inability to communicate and to get things done.

But that isn't the way **rhetoricians** defined their art in ancient Athens and Rome. In ancient times, people used rhetoric to make decisions, resolve disputes, and to mediate public discussion of important issues. An ancient teacher of rhetoric named Aristotle defined rhetoric as the power of finding the available arguments suited to a given situation. For teachers like Aristotle or practitioners like the Roman statesman Cicero, rhetoric helped people to choose the best course of action when they disagreed about important political, religious, or social issues. In fact, the study of rhetoric was equivalent to the study of citizenship. Under the best ancient teachers, Greek and Roman students wrote themes and speeches about moral and political questions that daily confronted their communities.

Ancient teachers of rhetoric thought that disagreement among human beings was inevitable, since individuals perceive the world differently from one another. They also assumed that since people communicate their perceptions through language—which is an entirely different medium than thoughts or perceptions—there was no guarantee that any person's perceptions would be accurately conveyed to others. Even more important, the ancient teachers knew that people differ in their opinions about how the world works, so that it was often hard to tell whose opinion was the best. They invented rhetoric so that they would have means of judging whose opinion was most accurate, useful, or valuable.

If people didn't disagree, rhetoric wouldn't be necessary. But they do, and it is. A twentieth-century rhetorician named Kenneth Burke remarked that "we need never deny the presence of strife, enmity, [or] faction as a characteristic motive of rhetorical expression" (1962, 20). But the fact that rhetoric originates in disagreement is ultimately a good thing, since its use allows people to make important choices without resorting to less peaceful means of persuasion such as coercion or violence. People who have talked their way out of any potentially violent confrontation know how useful rhetoric can be. On a larger scale, the usefulness of rhetoric is even more apparent. If, for some reason, the people who negotiate treaties were to stop using rhetoric to resolve their disagreements about limits on the use of nuclear weapons, there might not be a future to deliberate about. That's why we should be glad when we read or hear that our diplomats and their diplomats are disagreeing about the allowable number of warheads per country or the number of inspections of nuclear stockpiles per year. At least they're talking to each other. As Burke observed, wars are the result of an agreement to disagree. But before people of good will agree to disagree, they try out hundreds of ways of reaching agreement. The possibility that one set of participants will resort to coercion or violence is always a threat, of course; but in the context of impending war, the threat of war can itself operate as a rhetorical strategy that keeps people of good will talking to each other.

Given that argument can deter violence and coercion, we are disturbed by the contemporary tendency to see disagreement as somehow impolite or even undesirable. In 1995, the Congress and President of the United States illustrated what can happen when those who disagree over policy refuse to argue their way through that disagreement. The federal government was briefly shut down because Congress and the President could not agree on a budget. Government workers went without pay, national parks were closed, maintenance on buildings and roads was halted—all because political leaders stopped arguing about the issues that divided them.

It seems to us that Americans do not value disagreement as highly as ancient rhetoricians did. Our culture does not look at disagreement as a way of uncovering alternative courses of action. Americans often refuse to debate each other about important matters like religion or politics, retreating into silence if someone brings either subject up in public discourse. In fact, if someone disagrees publicly with someone else about politics or religion, Americans sometimes take that as a breach of good manners. This is so because we tend to link people's opinions to their identities. Americans assume that people's opinions

result from their personal experiences, and hence that those opinions are somehow “theirs”—that they alone “own” them. Hence, **rhetors** are often reluctant to engage in arguments about religion or politics or any other sensitive issue, fearing that listeners might take their views as personal attacks rather than as an invitation to discuss differences.

This intellectual habit, which assumes that religious and political choices are thoroughly tied up with a person’s identity, makes it seem as though people never change their minds about things like religion and politics. But as we all know, people do change their minds about these matters; people convert from one religious faith to another, and they sometimes change their political affiliation from year to year, perhaps voting across party lines in one election and voting a party line in the next.

The authors of this book are concerned that if Americans continue to ignore the reality that people quite naturally disagree with one another, or if we pretend to ignore it in the interests of preserving etiquette, we risk undermining the principles on which our democratic community is based. People who are afraid of airing their differences tend to keep silent when those with whom they disagree are speaking; people who are afraid of airing their differences tend to associate only with those who agree with them. In such a balkanized public sphere, both our commonalities and our differences go unexamined. In a democracy, people must call the opinions of others into question, must bring them into the light for examination and negotiation. In communities where citizens are not coerced, important decisions must be made by means of public discourse. Otherwise, decisions are made for bad reasons, or for no reason at all.

Sometimes, of course, there are good reasons for remaining silent. Power is distributed unequally in our culture, and power inequities may force wise people to resort to silence on some occasions. We believe that in contemporary American culture men have more power than women, white people have more power than people of color, and people who enjoy high socioeconomic status have more power than those who have fewer resources and less access to others in power (and yes, we are aware that there are exceptions to all of these generalizations). We do not believe, though, that these inequities are a natural or necessary state of things. We do believe that rhetoric is among the best ways available to us for rectifying power inequities among citizens.

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## ANCIENT ATTITUDES TOWARD RHETORIC

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The people who taught and practiced rhetoric in Athens and Rome during ancient times would have found contemporary unwillingness to engage in public disagreement very strange indeed. Their way of using disagreement to reach solutions was taught to students in Western schools for over two thousand years, and is still available to us in translations of their textbooks, speeches, lecture notes, and treatises on rhetoric. Within limits, their way of looking at disagreement can still be useful to us. The students who worked with ancient teachers of rhetoric were members of privileged classes for the most part, since Athens and Rome both maintained socioeconomic systems that were manifestly unjust to

many of the people who lived and worked within them. The same charge can be leveled at our own system, of course. Today the United States is home not only to its native peoples but to people from all over the world. Its non-native citizens arrived here under vastly different circumstances, ranging from colonization to immigration to enslavement, and their lives have been shaped by these circumstances, as well as by their gender and class affiliation. Not all—perhaps not even a majority—have enjoyed the equal opportunities that are promised by the Constitution. But unfair social and economic realities only underscore the need for principled public discussion among concerned citizens.

The aim of ancient rhetorics was to distribute the power that resides in language among all of its students. This power is available to anyone who is willing to study the principles of rhetoric. People who know about rhetoric know how to persuade others to consider their point of view without resorting to coercion or violence. For the purposes of this book, we have assumed that people prefer to seek verbal resolution of differences rather than the use of force. Rhetoric is of no use when people determine to use coercion or violence to gain the ends they seek.

A knowledge of rhetoric also allows people to discern when rhetors are making bad arguments or are asking them to make inappropriate choices. Since rhetoric confers the gift of greater mastery over language, it can also teach those who study it to evaluate anyone's rhetoric; thus the critical capacity conferred by rhetoric can free its students from the manipulative rhetoric of others. When knowledge about rhetoric is available only to a few people, the power inherent in persuasive discourse is disproportionately shared. Unfortunately, throughout history rhetorical knowledge has usually been shared only among those who can exert economic, social, or political power as well. But ordinary citizens can learn to deploy rhetorical power, and if they have the chance and the courage to deploy it skillfully and often, it's possible that they may change other aspects of our society as well.

In this book, then, we aim to help our readers become more skilled speakers and writers. But we also aim to help them become better citizens.

## SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MODERN AND ANCIENT RHETORICS

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The great age of ancient rhetorics dictates that there will be differences between them and modern thinking about rhetoric. One such difference is that ancient rhetoricians did not value factual proof very highly, while **facts** and **testimony** are virtually the only proofs discussed in modern rhetorical theory (see the chapter on **extrinsic proofs**). Ancient teachers preferred to use arguments that they generated from language itself and from community beliefs. They invented and named many such arguments, among them **commonplaces**, **examples**, **conjectures**, **maxims**, and **enthymemes** (see the chapters on stasis, commonplaces, and on rhetorical reasoning).

Another difference is that ancient rhetoricians valued opinions as a source of knowledge, while in modern thought opinions are often dismissed as unim-

portant. But ancient rhetoricians thought of opinions as something that were held not by individuals but by entire communities. This difference has to do with another assumption that they made, which was that a person's character (and hence opinions) were constructions made by the community in which she lived. And since the ancients believed that communities were the source and reason for rhetoric, opinions were for them the very stuff of argument.

A third difference between ancient and modern rhetorics is that ancient rhetoricians always situated their teaching in place and time. Their insistence that local and temporal conditions influenced the act of composition marks a fairly distinct contrast with modern rhetoric's conventional treatment of rhetorical occasions as if they were all alike. For example, modern rhetoric textbooks insist that every essay display a thesis. Ancient teachers, on the other hand, were not so sure that every discourse has a thesis to display. For example, people sometimes write or speak in order to determine what alternatives are available in a given situation. In this case they are not ready to advance a thesis. And if a rhetor has a hostile audience, after all, it might be better (and safer) not to mention a thesis at all, or at least to place it near the end of the discourse (see the chapter on arrangement).

A last difference between ancient and modern rhetorics has to do with ancient teachers' attitudes toward language. Modern rhetoricians tend to think that its role is limited to the communication of facts. Ancient rhetoricians, on the other hand, taught their students that language does many things. Marcus Tullius Cicero, who was an extremely skilled and influential speaker in the days of the Roman Republic, asserted that the ends of language use are to instruct, to delight, and to move. But the point of instructing or delighting audiences is, finally, to move them to accept or reject some thought or action.

### *Just the Facts, Please*

From an ancient perspective, one of the most troublesome of modern assumptions about the nature of argument goes like this: if the facts are on your side, you can't be wrong, and you can't be refuted. Facts are statements that somebody has substantiated through experience or proved through research. Or they are events that really happened, events that somebody will attest to as factual. Facts have a "you were there" quality—if the arguer doesn't have personal knowledge of the facts, she or he is pretty sure that some expert on the subject does know them, and that they can be looked up in a book. Here are some examples of factual statements:

Water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

The moon orbits the earth.

Timothy McVeigh was convicted of blowing up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on April 19, 1995.

These are facts because they can be verified through experience or by means of testimony. Individuals can test the accuracy of the first statement for



themselves, and all three statements can be confirmed by checking relevant and reliable sources.

No doubt the importance given to facts derives from the modern faith in empirical proofs, those that are available to the senses: vision, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. During the nineteenth century, rhetoricians came to prefer empirical proofs to all the other kinds outlined in ancient rhetoric. After 1850, American rhetoric textbooks began to reduce the many kinds of evidence discriminated by ancient rhetoricians to just two: empirical evidence and testimony. Both of these kinds of evidence have the “you are there” quality: empirical evidence derives from someone’s actual sensory contact with the relevant evidence; testimony involves somebody’s reporting their acquaintance with the facts of the case. During the twentieth century, rhetoric textbooks enlarged testimony to include accounts by persons recognized as experts or authorities in specialized fields of study. The modern reverence for facts and testimonies explains why students are often asked to write research papers in school—their teachers want to be sure they know how to assemble empirical evidence and expert testimony into a coherent piece of writing.

There are some problems with the modern reliance on empirical evidence. For one thing, it ignores the possibility that the evidence provided by the senses is neither reliable nor conclusive. People are selective about what they perceive, and they continually reconstruct their memories of those perceptions, as well. Moreover, people don’t always agree about their sensory perceptions. An ancient rhetorician named Protagoras pointed out that a blowing wind could feel cold to one person and hot to another, and that honey tasted bitter to some people although it tastes sweet to most.

Perceptions, and thus testimony about them, can also be influenced by an observer’s perspective. The National Football League used to resort to the instant replay, where the referees watched video tapes of a controversial play taken from several different angles in order to decide what penalties to assess. Even though professional referees are trained observers of the game, sometimes they simply cannot see whether a defensive player used his arms illegally, or whether a receiver managed to keep his feet within bounds as he caught the ball. Sometimes this lack of perspective extended to the television cameras, as well. In other words, instant replay was little better at resolving disagreements about violations than were the referees. The NFL has now abandoned instant replay, but periodic calls are made for its return.

This example highlights the even more interesting observation that the facts of the physical world don’t mean much to anybody unless they are involved in some larger **network of interpretation**. In football, the relevant network of interpretation is the rules of the game. Without these rules, the exact placement of a player’s arm or the exact point at which his feet touched the ground lose their relevance. (Sometimes football players suddenly switch to a network of interpretation that allows them to read an arm in the face as an act of aggression. When this happens, referees have to stop the game until its more usual network of interpretation can be restored.)

Here’s another example that demonstrates that facts are not very interesting or persuasive unless they are interpreted within a network of interpretation:

geologists point to the fossil record as evidence which supports the theory of evolution. They point to boxes and crates of mute, stony facts—fossilized plants and animals—as evidence that species have evolved over time. But the fossil record itself, as well as the historical relationships that geologists have established among fossils from all over the world, is a network of interpretation. That is, geologists have read a series of natural objects in such a way as to construe them as evidence for a huge natural process that nobody could actually have witnessed. If you want to object that a fossil is a fact, please do. You are quite right. Our point is that it is not a very useful (or interesting) fact apart from its interpretation as a fossil, rather than a rock, and its location within in the network of interpretation called evolutionary theory. Using another network of interpretation, we can read the fossil as a bookend or a doorstep.

Ancient philosophers understood the usefulness of empirical facts quite differently. Early Greek thinkers were skeptical about the status of phenomena, the name they gave to the facts of the physical world—stuff like trees, fossils, rocks, honey, cold winds, and the like. They argued about whether such things existed at all, or whether they existed only when perceived by the human senses. Most agreed that human perception of the facts of the physical world necessarily involved some distortion, since human thoughts and perceptions and language are obviously not the same things as physical objects like rocks.

Perhaps because of their skepticism about the nature of facts, ancient teachers of rhetoric were equally skeptical about the persuasive potential of facts. Aristotle wrote that facts and testimony were not truly within the art of rhetoric; they were *atechnoi*—"without art or skill"—and hence extrinsic to rhetoric. In Aristotle's Greek, a *techne* (art) was any set of productive principles or practices. Extrinsic proofs were not developed through a rhetor's use of the principles of rhetoric, but were found in existing circumstances. Aristotle defined an extrinsic proof as "all such as are not supplied by our own efforts, but existed beforehand" (*Rhetoric* I ii, 1356a). Such proofs are extrinsic to rhetoric, then, because no art is required to invent them. A rhetor only has to choose the relevant facts or testimony and present them to an audience.

Because facts are relatively mute in the absence of a relevant network of interpretation, rhetors seldom argue from a simple list of facts.<sup>1</sup> Today, practicing rhetoricians invent and use a wide variety of nonfactual arguments with great effectiveness. Take a trivial illustration: many detergent advertisements are arguments from *example*. Advertisers show a smiling woman folding a pile of sparkling clean clothes which she has washed with their product. They assume that the vividly presented example will make people reason as follows: "Well, that woman used 'Burple' and look at how clean her clothes are. If I use 'Burple,' my clothes will be clean, and I'll be happy too." The advertisers hope that viewers will generalize from the fictional example to their own lives, and draw the conclusion that they should buy the detergent. There are no facts in this argument, and yet it is apparently persuasive, since detergents continue to be advertised in this way.

Rhetors who rely only upon facts and testimony, then, place very serious limits on their persuasive potential, since many other kinds of rhetorical argument are employed daily in the media and in ordinary conversation. These

arguments are invented or discovered by rhetors, using the art of rhetoric. Aristotle described invented arguments as *entechnoi*—"embodied in the art" of rhetoric. This class of proofs is **intrinsic** to rhetoric, since they are generated from its principles.

In rhetoric, intrinsic proofs are found or discovered by rhetors. **Invention** is the division of rhetoric that investigates the possible means by which proofs can be discovered; it supplies speakers and writers with sets of instructions which help them to find and compose proofs that are appropriate for any rhetorical situation. The word *invenire* means "to find" or "to come upon" in Latin. The Greek equivalent, *heuriskein*, also means "to find out" or "discover." Variants of both words persist in English. For instance, the proclamation "eureka!" means "I have found it!" The Greek word has also given us "heuristic," which means "an aid to discovery."

A **proposition** (Latin *proponere*, "to put forth") is any arguable statement put forward for discussion by a rhetor. A **proof** is any statement or statements used to persuade an audience to accept a proposition. Proofs are bits of language that are supposed to be persuasive. Ancient rhetoricians developed and catalogued a wide range of intrinsic rhetorical proofs, most of which relied on the rhetor's knowledge of a community's history and beliefs. The Older Sophists contributed the notions of commonplaces and **probabilities**. Aristotle contributed enthymemes, examples, **signs**, and maxims, and Hermagoras of Temnos is credited with the invention of **stasis theory** (for more information about these ancient rhetoricians, see the last chapter and the appendices of this book).

Aristotle discriminated among three kinds of intrinsic rhetorical proofs: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. These kinds of proofs translate into English as ethical, pathetic, and logical proofs. Ethical proofs depend on the rhetor's **character**; pathetic proofs appeal to the emotions of the audience; and logical proofs derive from arguments that reside in the issue itself. Our words "logic" and "logical" are derived from the Greek *logos*, which meant "voice" or "speech," to early Greek rhetoricians. Later, *logos* also became associated with reason.

Here is a hypothetical example of an argument in which a rhetor uses both intrinsic and extrinsic proofs. An astronomer appears before the city council of Ourtown to argue that the city should consider passing a "dark sky" ordinance which would reduce the amount of light emitted into the night sky by streetlights and billboards. Current light levels from these sources interfere with astronomers' ability to observe the night sky through their telescopes, mounted on a hill in the center of Ourtown. The astronomer's association with science gives her a strong ethical appeal, since scientists are generally respected in our culture. She can also make an emotional appeal by reminding her audience that human-made lighting interferes with the ordinary person's ability to see the moon and stars clearly, thus decreasing their enjoyment of the night sky. In addition, there are a good many logical proofs available to her in the issue itself. She can reason from **cause to effect**: "city lighting causes so much interference with telescopes and other instruments that the quality of observational work being carried out at the nearby observatory is diminished." Or she can reason from **parallel case**: "a dark sky ordinance was enacted in Othertown and the quality of astronomical observations has improved enormously there. The same

thing will happen in Ourtown if we install a dark-sky ordinance here.” In this argument the astronomer relied on only one fact: that current light levels from the city interfered with her ability to make astronomical observations. Interested citizens could contest even this statement (which the ancients would have called a conjecture), since it was produced by the astronomer and obviously serves her interests.

Ancient students of rhetoric practiced inventing a wide variety of intrinsic proofs while they were in school. By the time they finished their education, strategies of invention were second nature to them, so that whenever they were called on to construct a speech or to compose a piece of written discourse, they could conduct a mental review of the inventional processes. This review helped them to determine which proofs would be useful in arguing about whatever issue confronted them. The means of inventing rhetorical proofs can still provide rhetors with an intellectual arsenal from which they can draw whenever they need to compose. Anyone who becomes familiar with all of the strategies should never be at a loss for words.

### *That's Just Your Opinion*

There is another category in popular notions about argument that deserves our attention. This is the category called “opinion.” People can put a stop to conversation simply by saying: “Well, that’s just your opinion.” When someone does this, she or he implies that opinions aren’t very important. They aren’t facts, after all, and furthermore, opinions belong to individuals while facts belong to everybody. Another implication is this: because opinions are intimately tied up with an individual’s thought and personality, there’s not much hope of changing them without changing the person’s identity. To put this another way, the implication of “Well, that’s your opinion” is that Jane Doe’s opinion about, say, abortion, is all tied up with who she is. If she thinks that abortion is murder, well, that’s her opinion and there’s not much we can do about changing her mind.

The belief that opinions belong to individuals may explain why Americans seem reluctant to challenge one another’s opinions. To challenge a person’s opinion is to denigrate that person’s character, to imply that if he or she holds an unexamined or stupid or silly opinion, he or she is an unthinking or stupid or silly person. Ancient teachers of rhetoric would find fault with this on three grounds. First, they would object that there is no such thing as “just your opinion.” Second, they would object to the implication that opinions aren’t important. Third, they would argue that opinions can be changed. The point of rhetoric, after all, is to change opinions.

Ancient rhetoricians taught their students that opinions are shared by many members of a community. The Greek word for common or popular opinion was *doxa*, which is the root of English words like “orthodoxy” (“straight opinion”) and “paradox” (“opinions alongside one another”). Opinions develop because people live in communities. A person living alone on an island needs a great many skills and physical resources, but has no need for political, moral, or social

opinions until he or she meets up with another person or encounters animals since politics, morality, and sociality depend upon our relations with sentient (thinking) beings. (Today, some rhetors include animals and even plants in the category of sentient beings.) Equipped with the notion of shared opinion, we can see that Jane's opinion about abortion is probably not just hers. Rather, she shares it with a good many other people—her parents, most likely, perhaps some other family members, the members of her church, and some of her friends. But she also shares her opinion with thousands of people whom she has never met—with everyone who believes, as she does, that abortion is murder. Given the current popularity of this particular belief, it is hard to say that Jane's opinion is “just hers.”

If we locate opinions outside individuals and within communities, they assume more importance. If a significant number of individuals within a community share an opinion about abortion, it becomes difficult to dismiss that opinion as unimportant, no matter how much we like or detest it. Nor can we continue to see opinions as unchangeable. If Jane got her opinion about abortion from somebody she knows or something she read, she can modify her opinion when she hears a different opinion from somebody else. Communication researchers have discovered that people generally adopt the opinions of people they know and respect. Our opinions are likely to change when we lose respect for the people who hold them, or when we meet new people whom we like and respect and who have different opinions.

The modern association of facts with scientific investigation, and opinion with everything else, draws on a set of beliefs that was invented during the seventeenth century in Europe. Science was associated with empirical proofs and rational problem solving, while non-scientific methods of reasoning came to be considered irrational or emotional. It was also during this period that the modern notion of the individual emerged, and the popularity of this notion convinced us that each person was an intellectual island whose unique experiences rendered his or her opinions as singular. The modern distinction between reason and other means of investigation keeps us from realizing how many of our beliefs are based in our emotional responses to our environments. Indeed, our acceptance of our most important beliefs—religious, moral, and political—probably have as much to do with our desires and interests as they have to do with rational argument. The reason/emotion distinction also keeps us from realizing how often we are swayed by appeals to our emotions, or, how difficult it is to distinguish between a purely rational appeal and a purely emotional one. And the notion of the unique individual makes it difficult for us to see how many of our opinions are derived from the beliefs that we share with other members of our communities.

We believe that rhetorical reasoning, which is used in politics, journalism, religious argument, literature, philosophy, history, and law, to name just a few of its arenas, is fully as legitimate as that used in science. And even though it uses appeals to community opinion and to emotions, if it is done responsibly, rhetorical reasoning is as valid as the reasoning used in science. In fact, scientific reasoning is itself rhetorical when its propositions are drawn from beliefs held by the community of trained scientists.

### *On Ideology and the Commonplaces*

We suggested earlier that networks of interpretation—the way people interpret and use the facts—have persuasive potential, while facts by themselves do not. Postmodern rhetoricians use the term **ideology** to name networks of interpretation, and that is the term we use for such networks in the rest of this book.

An ideology is a coherent set of beliefs that people use to understand events and the behavior of other people; they are also used to predict events and behaviors. Ideologies exist in language. They are sets of statements that tell us how to understand ourselves and others, and how to understand nature and our relation to it as well. Furthermore, ideologies help us to assign value to what we know—they tell us what is thought to be true, or right, or good, or beautiful in a community.

Each of us is immersed in the ideologies that circulate in our communities once we begin to understand and use language. Hence ideologies actually produce “selves”; the picture you have of yourself has been formed by your experiences, to be sure, but it has also been constructed by the beliefs that circulate among your family, friends, the media, and other communities that you inhabit. You may think of yourself as a Christian, or a Jew, or a New Ager, or an atheist. In each case, you adopt a set of beliefs about the way the world works from some relevant community (in the last case, you may have reacted against an ideology or ideologies). Even though identities are shaped by ideologies, they are never stable because we can question or reject ideological belief. As we have suggested, people do this all the time: they undergo religious conversion; they adopt a political stance; they decide that UFO’s do not exist; they take up exercise because they have become convinced it is good for them. Often, it is rhetoric that has brought about this ideological change. Ideology is the stuff with which rhetors work.

We mean no disrespect when we say that religious beliefs and political leanings are ideological. Quite the contrary: human beings need ideologies in order to make sense of their experiences in the world. Powerful ideologies such as religions and political beliefs help people to understand who they are and what their relation is to the world and to other beings.

Ideologies are made up of the statements that ancient rhetoricians called commonplaces. The distinguishing characteristic of a commonplace is that it is commonly believed by members of a community. These beliefs are “common” not because they are cheap or trivial but because they are shared by many people. Commonplaces need not be true or accurate (although they may be true, and they are certainly thought to be so within the communities that hold them). Some commonplaces are so thoroughly embedded in a community’s assumptions about how the world works that their accuracy goes unexamined. Here are some examples of commonplaces that circulate in American discourse:

Anyone can become President of the United States.

All men are created equal.

Everyone has a right to free speech because speech is protected by the Constitution.

Outside of the communities that subscribe to them, commonplaces may be controversial. If you disagreed with us when we asserted earlier on that “men have more power than women,” your disagreement should alert you to the presence of a commonplace that is accepted in some community to which we belong but not in the communities with which you identify. In a case like this, the commonplace is contested. Contested commonplaces are called **issues** in rhetoric, and it is the point of rhetoric to help people examine and perhaps to achieve agreement about issues.

Most people probably subscribe to commonplaces drawn from many and diverse ideologies at any given time. It is also the case that our ideological beliefs may contradict one another, since they are only partially conscious. For instance, Jane’s religious beliefs may teach her that abortion is murder, but this belief may contradict her liberal politics which teach her that women have the right to determine whether or not they wish to carry a pregnancy to term. Thus Jane’s ideology potentially contains a contradiction. Ideology is seldom consistent with itself. In fact, it may be full of contradictions, and it may (and often does) contradict empirical evidence as well. For example, the commonplace which affirms that “Anyone can become President of the United States” overlooks the reality that all presidents to date have been white men. Americans maintain this commonplace because it is for some reason important to them to do so.

### *Rhetorical Situations*

Ancient rhetoricians defined knowledge as the collected wisdom of those who know. In ancient thought, knowledge was not supposed to exist outside of knowers. Teaching and learning began with what people already knew. People talked or questioned each other, and worked toward new discoveries by testing them against what was already known (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I, i). Ancient rhetoricians assumed that anyone who wanted to compose a discourse had a reason for doing so that grew out of his life in a community. Young people studied rhetoric precisely because they wanted to be involved in decisions that affected the lives of their family, friends, and neighbors. Students of ancient rhetoric did engage in a good deal of practice with artificial **rhetorical situations** taken from history or literature or law (the rhetorical exercises were called **progymnasmata** and **declamation**). However, this practice was aimed at teaching them something about the community they would later serve, as well as about rhetoric. In other words, they did not study rhetoric only to learn its rules. Instead, their study was preparation for a life of active citizenship.

A rhetorical situation is made up of several elements: the issue for discussion, the audience for the discussion and their relationship to the issue, as well as the rhetor, her or his reputation, and her or his relation to the issue. Rhetors must also consider the time and the place in which the issue merits attention (see chapter 2).

Ancient rhetoricians defined issues as matters about which there was some disagreement or dispute. In other words, nothing can become an issue unless someone disagrees with someone else about its truth or falsity or applicability or

worth. Issues do not exist in isolation from the people who speak or write about them. Because of its emphasis on situatedness, on location in space and time, and on the contexts that determine composition, ancient rhetorical theory differs greatly from many modern rhetorical theories which assume that all rhetors and all audiences can read and write from a neutral point of view. The notion of objectivity would have greatly puzzled ancient rhetors and teachers of rhetoric.

Quintilian underscored the importance of rhetorical situations to composing when he suggested that students should consider

what there is to say; before whom, in whose defence, against whom, at what time and place, under what circumstances; what is the popular opinion on the subject; and what the prepossessions of the judge are likely to be; and finally of what we should express our deprecation or desire. (IV 1, 52–53)

Rhetors who are at a loss for something to say or write can begin by thinking about the communities of which they are a part: their families, relatives, and friends; their street, barrio, town, city, or reservation; their school, college or university; groups they belong to; their country or nation, and even the world, these days. What issues are currently being debated in those communities? With which members of those communities do they disagree? On what issues? How do they feel about those issues? Are there policies they would advocate or reject? How will the community respond to their propositions? Answers to these questions usually provide plenty of stuff to write or talk about.

To become adept at invention is not easy. Invention requires systematic thought, practice, and, above all, thoroughness. But careful attention to the ancient strategies for discovering proofs will amply repay anyone who undertakes their study and use. Hermogenes of Tarsus wrote that “Nothing good can be produced easily, and I should be surprised if there were anything better for humankind, since we are logical animals, than fine and noble *logoi* and every kind of them” (*On Style* I, 214). In other words, to invent proofs is essentially human. But invention also has a less lofty, more practical aim: rhetors who practice the ancient means of invention will soon find themselves supplied with more proofs than they can possibly use.

## LANGUAGE AS POWER

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Many modern rhetoric textbooks assert that language is a reliable reflection of thought. Their authors assume that the main point of using language is to represent thought because they live in an age which is still influenced by notions about language developed during the seventeenth century. In 1690, John Locke announced to the Western world that words represent thoughts, and that the function of words was to convey the thinking of one person to another as clearly as possible. The assumption that language is transparent, that it lets meaning shine through it, is part of what is called a **representative theory of language**. The theory has this name because it assumes that language *re-presents* meaning, that it hands meaning over to listeners or readers, clear and intact.



Ancient rhetoricians were not so sure that words represented thoughts. As a consequence, they had great respect for the power of language. Archaic Greeks thought that the distinguishing characteristic of human beings—what made them different from animals—was their possession of *logos*, or speech. In archaic Greek thought, a person's *logos* was her name, her history, everything that could be said about her. Another word for *logos* was *kleos*, "fame" or "call." Thus, to be *en logoi* was to be taken into account, to have accounts told about one, to be on the community's roster of persons who could be spoken, sung, or written about. Any person's identity consisted in what was said about her or him. Someone's name, or tales told about her or him, defined the space in which she or he lived out her or his life.

In keeping with the archaic Greek emphasis on language as the source of knowledge, an ancient teacher called Protagoras taught that "Humans are the measure of all things." By this he apparently meant that anything which exists does so by virtue of its being known or discussed by human beings. Because knowledge originates with human knowers, and not from somewhere outside of them, there is no absolute truth that exists separately from human knowledge. Moreover, contradictory truths will appear, since everyone's knowledge differs slightly from everyone else's, depending on their perspective and their language. Thus Protagoras taught that at least two opposing and contradictory *logoi* (statements or accounts) exist in every experience. He called these oppositions *dissoi logoi*.

Another teacher, named Gorgias, apparently adopted Protagoras' skepticism about the relationship of language to truth or to some absolute reality. In his treatise on the nonexistent, Gorgias wrote: "For that by which we reveal is *logos*, but *logos* is not substances and existing things. Therefore we do not reveal existing things to our neighbors, but *logos*, which is something other than substances" (Sprague 1972, 84). In other words, language is not things, and language does not communicate things or thoughts or anything else. Language is not the same thing as honey or fossils or cold winds; nor is it the same as thoughts or feelings or perceptions. It is a different medium altogether. What language communicates is itself—words, syntax, metaphors, puns, and all that other wonderful stuff. Philosophers are mistaken when they argue that justice or reality exist; they have been misled into thinking that justice or reality are the same for everyone by the seeming unity and generality of the words "justice" and "reality."

Ancient rhetoricians were aware that language is a powerful force for moving people to action. Gorgias went so far as to say that language could work on a person's spirit as powerfully as drugs worked on the body. He taught his students that language could bewitch people, could jolt them out of their everyday awareness into a new awareness from which they could see things differently. Hence its persuasive force. As he said, language can "stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity" ("Encomium to Helen," 8). If you doubt this, think about the last time you read a book that moved you to tears, or saw a commercial that induced you to buy something, or heard a sermon that scared you into changing your behavior.

The ancient rhetorician named Isocrates argued that language was the ground of community, since it enabled people to live together and to create cultures ("Nicocles," 5–9). Communication was the mutual exchange of convic-

tions, and communities could be defined as groups of human beings who operate with a system of roughly similar convictions. For Isocrates, language was the *hegemon* (prince, guide) of all thought and action. He pointed out that language makes it possible for people to conceive of differences and to make distinctions such as man/woman or good/bad. It also allows people to conceive of abstractions such as justice or reality.

The Greek notion of *logos* was later translated into Latin as *ratio* (reason), and in Western thought the powers that were once attributed to language became associated with thinking rather than with talking or writing. Cicero blamed the philosophers for this shift:

[Socrates] separated the science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking, though in reality they are closely linked together. . . . This is the source from which has sprung the undoubtedly absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain, leading to our having one set of professors to teach us to think and another to teach us to speak. (*De Oratore* III xvi, 60)

The notion that thought can be separated from language began with the philosopher Socrates, who was the teacher of Plato, who was in turn the teacher of Aristotle.

In one of his treatises on logic, Aristotle wrote that “spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words” (*On Interpretation*, 16a). This passage made two important assumptions: that mental experiences are independent of language, and that the role of language is to symbolize or represent mental experiences. The passage also suggested that written words are representations of spoken words, as though speech is somehow closer to thinking than writing. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle wrote that style and delivery—the rhetorical canons having to do with expression—were secondary to the substance of an argument (1404a). Even though it was necessary to study style and delivery because these forms of expression were persuasive, according to Aristotle the first prerequisite of style was clarity, which implied that whatever thoughts were being expressed should be immediately apparent to readers (1404b).

Here Aristotle expressed his subscription to a representative theory of language. The notion that a style can be clear, that language allows meaning to shine through it without distortion, makes sense only if language is thought to re-present something else. Naturally enough, philosophers are less interested in the rhetorical effects produced by language than they are in using language to say what they mean, as clearly and exactly as possible. That’s why they prefer to argue that language somehow represents thought or reality. However, this argument presents a problem to rhetoricians, since the representative theory of language implies that some piece of language can be found that will clearly express any thought. So, if a piece of language is not clear to an audience, anyone who subscribes to this model of language must blame its author, who either had unclear thoughts or was unable to express them clearly. The only other possible explanation for misunderstanding is that the audience has not read the language carefully enough or is for some reason unprepared to understand it.

Aristotle also assumed that composers can control the effects of language—that they can make language do what they want it to do, can make readers read in the way they intended. Furthermore, Aristotle’s attitude about clarity seriously underestimated the power of language. People who assume that it is “the thought that counts” must also assume that language is the servant of thought, and hence that language is of secondary or even negligible importance in the composing process. This attitude sometimes causes teachers to blame unintelligible compositions on a student’s faulty thinking, when the difficulty might be that the student’s language had more and different effects than intended.

Ancient teachers never assumed that there is only one way to read or interpret a discourse. Audiences inevitably bring their ideologies, their linguistic abilities, and their understandings of local rhetorical contexts to any reading they do. Contexts such as readers’ or listeners’ experiences and education or even the time of day inevitably influence their interpretation of any discourse. This is particularly true of written discourse, which, to ancient ways of thinking, was set adrift by authors into the community where people could and would read it in as many ways as there were readers (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275). Today, however, people sometimes think that texts can have a single meaning (the right one), and that people who don’t read in this way are somehow poor readers. This attitude is reinforced by the modern assumption that the sole purpose of reading is to glean information from a text, and it is repeated in school when students are expected to take tests or answer a set of questions about their reading in order to prove that they comprehended the assignment.

But people do many things when they read a text for the first time, and determining what it says is only one of these things. When you read any text, especially a difficult one, you simply can’t find out what it says once and for all on your first trip through it. You can’t consume written words the way you consume a cheeseburger and fries. When written words are banged up against one another, they tend to set off sparks and combinations of meanings that their writers never anticipated. Unfortunately, writers ordinarily are not present to tell readers what they intended to communicate.

Sometimes unintended meanings happen because written letters and punctuation marks are ambiguous. There are only twenty-six letters in the English alphabet, after all, and just a few marks of punctuation in the writing system. So most of these letters and marks must be able to carry several meanings. For example, quotation marks can signify quoted material:

“Get lost,” he said.

But they can also be used for emphasis:

We don’t “cash” checks.

Or they can be used to set off a term the use of which a writer wants to question:

To call Bill Clinton a “liberal” is to strain credulity.

The meanings of words differ, too, from person to person and from context to context. Indeed, the meanings of words are affected by the contexts in which they appear. In current political discourse, for example, the phrase “family values” means very different things to the people who use it, depending on whether they subscribe to conservative or liberal or some other ideology. Because people are different from one another, they have different responses to the same discourse.

When we listen to someone speaking, we have several contextual advantages that readers do not have. If we misunderstand a speaker, we can ask her or him to repeat herself, or to slow down. But our chances of misunderstanding spoken language are also decreased by the fact that we can see, hear, and interact with the person who is speaking. Thus we can support our interpretation of the meanings of words with our interpretations of facial and bodily gestures and the loudness and pitch of voice. Too, we are usually acquainted with people who speak to us, while often we do not know writers personally. And even if we don’t know speakers well, we do understand our relationships to them. If a speaker is my mother, rather than my teacher or boss or aerobics instructor, I can rapidly narrow down the range of possible meanings she might convey when she commands me to “Shape up!” All of these kinds of contexts—physical and social—help us to interpret a speaker’s meaning.

But these contexts are not available in any writing that is composed for an audience of people who are not known to the writer. So writers have to guess about the contexts that readers will bring to their reading. Usually those contexts will be very different from the writer’s, especially in the case of a book, like this one, that introduces readers to a new field of discourse. Our experience as teachers has taught us that our familiarity with rhetoric and its terminology often causes us to take some of its fundamental points for granted. When we do this in a classroom, students can ask questions until they are satisfied that they understand. But readers cannot do this. So, even though we have tried very hard to make the contexts of ancient rhetorics clear in this book, people are bound to understand our text differently from each other and perhaps differently from what we tried to convey. Ancient rhetorics were invented by cultures that have long since disappeared, and that is one potential source of differential understanding in this particular text. But writers always fail to match their contexts with those of readers, and this kind of differential understanding is universal. It arises simply because writers can only imagine readers—who they are, what they know.

To put all of this another way: writers always fail to put themselves precisely in their readers’ shoes. This potential for differential understanding is not a curse, as modern rhetorical theory would have it. Rather, it is what allows knowledge to grow and change. The ancients understood this, and that’s why they celebrated copiousness—many arguments, many understandings.

Because ancient rhetoricians believed that language was a powerful force for persuasion, they urged their students to develop *copia* in all parts of their art. *Copia* can be loosely translated from Latin to mean an abundant and ready supply of language—something appropriate to say or write whenever the occasion arises. Ancient teaching about rhetoric is everywhere infused with the

notions of expansiveness, amplification, abundance. Ancient teachers gave their students more advice about invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery than they could ever use. They did so because they knew that practice in these rhetorical arts alerted rhetors to the multitude of communicative and persuasive possibilities that exist in language.

Modern intellectual style, on the other hand, tends toward economy (from Greek *oikonomia*, a manager of a household or state, from *oikos*, house). Economy in any endeavor is characterized by restrained or efficient use of available materials and techniques. Of course, the modern preference for economy in composition is connected to modern insistence that clarity is the only important characteristic of style. People who bring modern attitudes about clarity and economy to the study of ancient rhetorics may be bewildered (and sometimes frustrated) by the profuseness of ancient advice about everything from invention to delivery.

They also miss an important aspect of ancient instruction: that messing around with language is fun. Composition need not be undertaken with the deadly seriousness that moderns bring to it. Moderns want to get it right the first time and forget about it. Ancient peoples, on the other hand, fooled around with language all the time. The Greeks sponsored poetry contests and gave prizes for the most daring or entertaining elaborations on a well-known theme. Romans who lived during the first centuries CE held rhetorical contests called declamations, the object of which was to compose a complicated and innovative discourse about some hackneyed situation involving pirates or outraged fathers. The winner was the person who could compose the most unusual arguments or who could devise the most elaborate amplifications and ornamentations for the old theme.

As you work through the chapters in this book, we hope you will compose a lot of discourse in response to the examples and exercises. You won't be able to use everything you compose in finished pieces of writing. Some exercises are just for practice, while others help you increase your understanding of the rhetorical principles you are studying. If this seems like wasted time and effort, remember that everything you compose increases your copiousness—your handy supply of arguments, available for use on any occasion.

## EXERCISES

1. Look around you and listen. Where do you find people practicing rhetoric? Watch television and read popular newspapers or magazines. Jot down one or two of the rhetorical arguments you hear or see people making. Politicians are good sources, but so are journalists and parents and attorneys and clergy and teachers. Do such people try to support their arguments with facts? Or do they use other means of convincing people to accept their arguments?
2. Think about a time when you tried to convince someone to change his or her mind. How did you go about it? Were you successful? Now think about

a time when someone tried to get you to change your mind. What arguments did the person use? Was he or she successful?

3. Try to answer this question: What counts as persuasion in your community? Here are some questions to start from: Think of a time when you changed your mind about something. How did it happen? Did somebody talk you into it, or did events cause you to change the way you think? How do the people you know go about changing their minds? How does religious conversion happen, for example? What convinces people to stop smoking? How do people get to be racists, or become convinced they ought to stop being racist? How does a president convince a people that they ought to support a war? Make a list of arguments that seem convincing in these sorts of cases.
4. What positions do you take on issues that are currently contested in your communities? This exercise should help you to articulate what you think about such issues.
  - a. Start with this question: what are the hotly contested issues in the communities you live in (the street, the barrio, your home town, the university you work in, the reservation, the state, the nation?) Make a list of these issues. (If you don't know what these issues are, ask someone—a parent, teacher, or friend—or read the editorial and front pages of a daily newspaper, watch the local and national news on television, or access news sources on the internet.)
  - b. Pick two or three issues and write out your positions on them. Write as fast as you can without stopping or worrying about grammar and spelling. Use a word processor if you have access to one and are a fast typist, or write by hand if that is more comfortable for you. At this point you are composing material for your use only—so don't worry about neatness or completeness or correctness; write to discover what you think about these issues. Write for as long as you want to, but write about each issue for at least fifteen minutes without stopping.
  - c. These writings should give you a clearer view of what you think about a few urgent issues. Let them sit for awhile—an hour is good but a couple of days is better. Then read them again. Now, rewrite your thoughts on one or two issues; select issues that you can comfortably discuss with other people.
  - d. Give what you've written to someone you trust; ask him or her to tell you what else they want to know about what you think. Listen carefully, and take notes on the reader's suggestions. Don't talk or ask questions until the reader finishes talking. Then discuss your views on the issue further, if your reader is willing to do so.
  - e. If your reader said anything that modifies your views, revise your writing to take his or her responses into account.
  - f. Keep these writings, as well as your original list of issues. You can repeat this exercise whenever you wish to write about an issue or when you are asked to write for a class.