

Public Relations Ethics: Contrasting Models from the Rhetorics of Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates

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□ *As a relatively young profession, public relations seeks a realistic ethics foundation. A continuing debate in public relations has pitted journalistic/objectivity ethics against the advocacy ethics that may be more appropriate in an adversarial society. As the journalistic/objectivity influence has waned, the debate has evolved, pitting the advocacy/adversarial foundation against the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, which seeks to build consensus and holds that an organization itself, not an opposing public, sometimes may need to change to build a productive relationship.*

A similar battle between adversarial advocacy and symmetry occurred during the emergence of rhetoric in the Athens of the 4th century B.C. Plato and Aristotle favored adversarial/advocacy rhetoric, whereas Isocrates favored a symmetrical rhetoric. Four criteria of comparison of those rhetorics are examined: success of the respective schools, success of the respective graduates, the evaluation of later Roman rhetoricians, and the impact on the future of education. History shows that Isocrates's symmetrical rhetoric clearly was more effective than its adversarial/advocacy rivals. Recent studies of the two-way symmetrical model concur, indicating that it may well be the most effective foundation for public relations ethics.

The significance of a study of rhetoric in Athens is not entirely historical. However indifferent we may be to Protagoras and Gorgias, we live in a world of journalists, publicists, advertisers, politicians, diplomats, propagandists, reformers, educators, salesmen, preachers, lecturers, and popularizers.

—E. L. Hunt (1925/1990, p. 161)

One can hardly get through a single day without being exposed dozens of times to some form of persuasive discourse, the main concern of rhetoric. It is not too much to claim that rhetoric is the art that governs those human relationships that are conducted in the medium of spoken and written words.

—Corbett (1984/1990b, p. 164)

Although critics sometimes compare public relations to the oldest profession, it is, in fact, relatively young. The Publicity Bureau, considered the first ancestor of modern public relations agencies, opened in 1900 (Cutlip, 1994). In 1923, Edward Bernays and Doris Fleischman first used the term *public relations* to describe their fledgling business (Bernays, 1965). The earliest incarnation of the modern Public Relations Society of America was the National Association of Publicity Directors, founded in 1936 (Cutlip, 1994).

Compared with journalism and advertising, the relative youth of public relations can be seen in its struggle to define itself. Before offering his own definition of the profession, Harlow (1976) found and studied almost 500 definitions of public relations. Small wonder, then, that public relations also wrestles with professional ethics. The Public Relations Society of America adopted its first Code of Professional Standards in 1950 (Guth & Marsh, 2000). However, neither that code nor the ethics code of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), founded in 1970, has stilled a continuing debate over “the development of a specifically public relations ethical philosophy” (McBride, 1989, p. 5).

In this article I review the current debate over foundations for public relations ethics. More important, in hopes of offering a solution, I examine a similar controversy over the emerging art of rhetoric in Athens in the 4th century B.C.

Definition of Terms

Harlow’s (1976) near 500 definitions suggest the difficulty of defining public relations. In this article, I use a recent, succinct summary of several definitions: “Public relations is the management of relationships between an organization and its publics” (Guth & Marsh, 2000, p. 10). Hunt and Grunig (1994) identified four models of such management:

- The *press agency/publicity* model, which focuses on gaining favorable media coverage by fair or foul means.
- The *public information* model, which focuses on the dissemination of objective, accurate information to parties that request it.
- The *two-way asymmetrical* model, which focuses on researching targeted publics to gain compliance from them.
- The *two-way symmetrical* model, defined later in this section.

In 1992, the IABC Research Foundation, after a 7-year study, concluded that the most effective model of public relations—that is, the model that best advanced organizations toward their expressed goals—was two-way symmetrical public relations (J. E. Grunig & Grunig, 1992). The foundation provided this definition for the model:

Two-way symmetrical describes a model of public relations that is based on research and that uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics...(J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 18). With the symmetrical model, both the organization and the publics can be persuaded; both also may change their behavior. (J. E. Grunig & White, 1992, p. 39)

Unlike the other models of public relations, two-way symmetry seeks win-win relationships and incorporates the willingness of an organization to change to nurture an important relationship.

Like the phrase *public relations*, the term *rhetoric* eludes easy definition. In addressing the significant diversity among different rhetorics, Miller (1993) declared, "We can start by admitting that the rhetorical tradition is a fiction, and a rather strained one at that" (p. 27). Therefore, in this article I define rhetoric broadly. According to Corbett (1990a), rhetoric is "the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience is made up of one person or a group of persons" (p. 3). Such a definition fits well with the four models of public relations.

Review of Literature

Perhaps the clearest early statement of the continuing debate over "the development of a specifically public relations ethical philosophy" (McBride, 1989, p. 5). McBride contrasted public relations' "dominant yet dysfunctional" (p. 5) adherence to journalistic ethics with Bernays's "alternative ethic ... drawing from more similar professions of paid advocates"(p. 15). Because the journalistic ethic means disregarding the consequences of communications (p. 10), McBride championed Bernays' advocacy foundation, which "offers more promise for ethical progress" (p. 6).

The beginnings of the decline of the journalism/objectivity foundation can be seen in a Wetherell (1989) study that found that although the journalism-inspired public information model was the second most-practiced model (behind, unfortunately, press agency), it ranked last in order of preference among practitioners (J. E. Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Despite its decline, however, the journalism/objectivity foundation persists largely for two reasons:

- Veneration for Ivy Lee's 1906 Declaration of Principles (Guth & Marsh, 2000), in which Lee pledged "to supply the press and the public of the United States prompt and accurate information"(p. 64). Olasky (1987), among others, noted the irony of the profound impact of the declaration despite Lee's many deviations from even a moderately strict interpretation of his own words.

- The location of public relations programs within schools of journalism, some of which “have added a course or two to existing sequences in journalism and advertise them as bona fide programs in public relations” (Ehling, 1992, p. 457).

The seminal application of the advocacy foundation is Barney and Black’s (1994) “Ethics and Professional Persuasive Communication.” Barney and Black (1994) held that persuasive communication functions in an adversarial society that, although it cannot condone untruths, must accept the delivery of selective truths by public relations practitioners:

An adversarial society assumes that spokespersons with alternative views will emerge to balance the advocate. If that doesn’t work, some will argue the journalist or some other consumer advocate, motivated by an objectivity and stewardship ethic, will assure some balance in the public messages.

The reality is that there is no guarantee in the court of public opinion that adversaries will square off. Yet, just as a lawyer has no obligation to be considerate of the weaknesses of his opponents in court, so the public relations person can clearly claim it is another’s obligation to provide countering messages....

In an adversary society, truth is not so important as the obligation of opposing counsel to create scenarios that conflict with those of their opponents. (pp. 241, 244)

Five years later, Barney and Black (1999) still classified public relations practitioners as “an adversary group” (p. 67) and concluded that “persuasion needs a body of moral discussion that will provide the moral foundation on which realistic persuasion ethics structures can be built” (p. 67).

More recently, Guth and Marsh (2000) rejected the objectivity/advocacy bifurcation and called the conflict a “misleading ethics debate” (p. 167):

The entire objectivity-versus-advocacy debate seems to be based on a misleading question: Are public relations practitioners objective communicators or are they advocates? What if the answer is “none of the above”? Many practitioners respond to the debate by saying that public relations practitioners are, first and foremost, relationship builders.... Sometimes relationship building calls for delivering unpopular truths, either to a public or to the organization itself. And sometimes relationship building involves being an advocate—even if that means advocating the viewpoint of an important public within your own organization. (pp. 170–171)

Guth and Marsh viewed this neither/nor-both/and approach as being the most consistent with two-way symmetrical public relations (p. 169).

Indeed, an increasing focus on communitarianism within public relations is shifting the debate from journalism/objectivity versus advocacy to

two-way symmetry versus advocacy—or, better said, two-way symmetry versus two-way asymmetry. Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) clearly rejected asymmetry in their communitarian view of public relations:

Our theory is that public relations is better defined and practiced as the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community. Only with this goal as a primary objective can public relations become a full partner in the information and communication milieu that forms the lifeblood of U.S. society and, to a growing extent, the world. (p. xi)

K. A. Leeper (1996) added that businesses' increasing focus on "quality, social responsibility, and stewardship" (p. 163) argued for a communitarian foundation for public relations ethics. Finally, Culbertson and Chen (1997) demonstrated that communitarian public relations is a form of the two-way symmetrical model. Although not directly a communitarian philosophy, Habermas' discourse ethics have been offered as a foundation for public relations ethics (J. E. Grunig & White, 1992; R. Leeper, 1996) and have been shown to be closely linked to the two-way symmetrical model (R. Leeper, 1996).

With the IABC Research Foundation's endorsement of "the idealistic social role" (J. E. Grunig & White, 1992, p. 53) as a foundation for effective public relations, the debate in public relations ethics clearly has shifted from an analysis of the merits of journalistic objectivity to a comparison of the relative merits of advocacy/asymmetry and symmetry.

Baker (1999) offered a five-level schema to "capture, systematize, and analyze patterns of thinking about an ethical justification of professional persuasive communication practices (public relations, advertising, marketing)" (p. 69):

- *Self-interest* model: "Look out for number one.... Professional persuaders may use society for their own benefit, even if it is damaging to the social order" (p. 70). In the argot of public relations, this is an asymmetrical model.

- *Entitlement* model: "If it's legal, it's ethical.... The focus is on rights rather than responsibilities" (p. 70). Again, in public relations, this would be an asymmetrical model. Baker places Barney and Black's (1994) advocacy/adversarial society foundation in this model.

- *Enlightened self-interest* model: "One serves one's self-interest by ethical behavior.... Businesses do well (financially) by doing good (ethically)" (p. 70). This is a symmetrical public relations model.

- *Social responsibility* model: "Focus is on responsibilities rather than rights.... Corporate citizens have a responsibility to the societies in which they operate and from which they profit" (p. 70). In public relations, this is a symmetrical model.

- *Kingdom of ends* model: With this model's name taken from Kant's categorical imperative,

Individuals and corporations take responsibility to promote and create the kind of world and society in which they themselves would like to live. ... Individuals treat others as they would wish to be treated and as others would wish to be treated. (p. 70)

This, of course, is a symmetrical public relations model.

Baker (1999) concluded with a call for additional research: "One area of inquiry might be to explore if and how the [five] baselines correspond to standard measures of moral reasoning" (p. 79).

Statement of Purpose

Given this uncertainty over ethical foundations—part of what Pearson (1992) called the "confusing and contradictory present" of public relations—in this article I examine a similar debate over the nature of rhetoric in 4th-century B.C. Athens. I particularly examine advocacy/adversarial/asymmetrical rhetoric versus symmetrical/relationship-building rhetoric with the aim of seeing which ethical foundation fared better.

Classical Rhetoric's Search for an Ethical Foundation

A glib response to public relations' search for a resolution of the advocacy-versus-symmetry debate would be to say that time will tell. But perhaps time already has told. The Athens of Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates (400–300 B.C.) wrestled with developing an acceptable ethical framework for a new art of discourse called *rhetoric*. The comparison is not farfetched: Public relations scholars have long recognized the debt of public relations to Greek rhetoric. In his history of public relations, Cutlip (1994) held that "persuasive communication is as old as Plato's *Republic*" (p. xi). L. A. Grunig (1992) noted that Aristotle is "often considered the first public relations practitioner" (p. 68). In his college textbook *The Practice of Public Relations*, Seitel (1998) wrote that the ethical quandaries of public relations may well have begun with the practice of Greek rhetoric in the 5th century B.C. (pp. 25–26).

Rhetoric was born and flourished in a relentlessly adversarial society. In the decades just before Isocrates's birth in 436 B.C., the city-states of Greece had united in the Delian League to counter the continual threat from Persia. The internal squabbles and rivalries that undermined the Delian League led to the Peloponnesian War, which paralleled the first third of

Isocrates's life. That war, in turn, led to the reemergence of Persia as a threat, which ended only when Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, united Greece through conquest—defeating even Athens in 338 B.C., the year of Isocrates's death. Within Athens itself, Socrates and his student Plato were refining the truth-seeking method known as *dialectic*, “a rigorous form of argumentative dialogue between experts” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990, p. 29). Even philosophical truths, it seemed, required adversarial relationships—which could, indeed, become dangerous. At the conclusion of Plato's dialectical *Gorgias* (trans. 1925/1975), Callicles scarcely disguised his threats that accurately forecast the trial and execution of his opponent, Socrates. Half a century later, Aristotle left Athens for a decade to avoid a similar fate. The search for an ethical foundation for rhetoric thus transpired in a decidedly adversarial society.

In his *Phaedrus*, Plato (trans. 1914/1928) foreshadowed Baker's (1999) analysis of ethical foundations by outlining three models of rhetoric. In his earlier *Gorgias* (trans. 1925/1975), Plato bitterly attacked rhetoric for its immorality, for its being “some device of persuasion which will make one appear to those who do not know to know better than those who know” (459C). In the *Phaedrus* (Plato, trans. 1914/1928), however, Plato offers an ethical framework for an acceptable rhetoric. Ostensibly about lovers, the three speeches in the *Phaedrus* establish, as shown by Weaver (1953), three possible ethical frameworks for rhetoric: “What Plato has succeeded in doing in this dialogue ... is to give us embodiments of the three types of discourse. These are respectively the non-lover, the evil lover, and the noble lover” (p. 6).

- The *non-lover* model: This ironic model is introduced when Socrates repeats a speech by Lysias, who maintains that the best lover is one who does not actually love his partner. Therefore, his actions (the lovers of the dialogue were exclusively male) are disinterested; the relationship is not worth striving for. Weaver (1953) maintained that Plato equates this relationship to “semantically purified speech” that “communicates abstract intelligence without impulsion. It is a simple instrumentality, showing no affection for the object of its symbolizing and incapable of inducing bias in the hearer” (p. 7).

This model corresponds to the public information model of public relations, in which organizations deliver objective information to publics that request it. The organization makes no other attempt at relationship building; thus, the model is often ineffective for public relations. Plato's Socrates is so ashamed of repeating a speech that denies the holiness of human relationships that he covers his head as he speaks the words. Plato clearly rejects the disinterested non-lover model as an ethical foundation for rhetoric.

- The *evil-lover* model: This model encompasses the rhetoric that Plato condemned in the *Gorgias*. The evil lover, Weaver (1953) wrote, creates a relationship in which he seeks superiority:

He naturally therefore tries to make the beloved inferior to himself in every respect. He is pleased if the beloved has intellectual limitations because they have the effect of making him manageable.... In brief, the lover is not motivated by benevolence toward the beloved, but by selfish appetite.... The speech is on the single theme of exploitation. (pp. 10–11)

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This is the two-way asymmetrical form of rhetoric, a form that promotes advocacy and selective truth. Weaver concluded, “This is what we shall call base rhetoric because its end is the exploitation which Socrates has been condemning” (p. 11).

- The *noble-lover* model: This, of course, is the model that Plato offers as the framework for an ethical rhetoric. The noble lover strives to improve his beloved. In the words of Plato (trans. 1914/1928), noble lovers “exhibit no jealousy or meanness toward the loved one, but endeavour by every means in their power to lead him to the likeness of the god whom they honor” (253C).

As we shall see, Plato accepted the noble-lover model, with, perhaps, surprising results. Aristotle rejected the noble-lover model in favor of the evil-lover model. Isocrates rejected the solutions of both of his contemporaries, opting instead for a new definition of the noble-lover model.

Three Schools of Athenian Rhetoric

Though a proliferation of sophists in Athens from 500 B.C. to 300 B.C. meant a proliferation of different rhetorics, at the height of rhetorical studies in the 4th century B.C. there were three main schools: that of Isocrates, founded in 393 B.C.; that of Plato, founded in 385 B.C.; and that of Aristotle, founded in 335 B.C. Aristotle earlier taught rhetoric in Plato’s Academy (Welch, 1990, p. 127). Isocrates (436–338 B.C.) lived long enough to joust with each of his great competitors. Each, as Clark (1957) noted, taught a profoundly different kind of rhetoric:

From the beginning, there were three characteristic and divergent views on rhetoric. There was the moral philosophical view of Plato.... There was the philosophical scientific view of Aristotle, who tried to see the thing as in itself it really was, who endeavored to devise a theory of rhetoric without moral praise or blame for it. There was, finally, the practical educational view of the rhetoricians from Isocrates to Cicero to Quintilian. (pp. 24–25)

A brief expansion of Clark's assessment will underscore the profound differences among the three rhetorics.

Platonic Rhetoric

As seen in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato rejected rhetoric unless it was in the service of absolute truth. Rhetoric, he believed, should be the exclusive province of philosophers who, through dialectic, had discovered divine, ultimate truths that predated creation (Kauffman, 1982/1994). The enlightened few were then to use rhetoric to lead the unenlightened masses toward those truths—much as the wise, experienced, noble lover was to lead his young protégé “to the likeness of the god whom they honor” (Plato, trans. 1914/1928, 253C). Two problems with Platonic rhetoric, however, have impeded its progress over time: the near impossibility of ascertaining absolute truth and the rhetoric's aggressive intolerance of opposing viewpoints.

Plato's insistence on unshakable knowledge of absolute truth as a prerequisite to rhetoric is, in the words of Jaeger (1944), “repulsive to ordinary common sense” (p. 57). Indeed, in the *Gorgias* (Plato, trans. 1925/1975, 503B), Socrates can name no one, past or present, capable of such insights, though Plato surely thought both himself and Socrates to be such worthies. E. L. Hunt (1925/1990) concluded, “The ideal rhetoric sketched in the *Phaedrus* is as far from the possibilities of mankind as [Plato's] Republic was from Athens” (p. 149).

Plato's intolerance of dissent has drawn far more critical fire than his demand for knowledge of absolute truth. Plato is “one of the most dangerous writers in human history, responsible for much of the dogmatism, intolerance, and ideological oppression that has characterized Western history,” wrote Kennedy (1994, p. 41). Because the Platonic philosopher had, through dialectic, gained knowledge of absolute truth, dissenting opinions were worse than irrelevant; they were dangerous and were to be quashed. Kauffman (1982/1994) labeled Platonic rhetoric “totalitarian and repressive” (p. 101), and Black (1958/1994) maintained that it is a form of “social control” (p. 98). E. L. Hunt (1925/1990) concluded that although Platonic rhetoric promoted goodness, it was “goodness as Plato conceived it” (p. 133).

Two millennia of critical response, thus, have found Platonic rhetoric to be based on an impossible prerequisite and to be dangerously asymmetrical. Apart from his categorization of the possible moral foundations for rhetoric, Plato's greatest contribution to persuasive discourse may have been forcing Aristotle and Isocrates to define and refine reactionary, real-world rhetorics.

Aristotelian Rhetoric

Aristotle, of course, was Plato's student. He heard his master's ideas on rhetoric, rejected the absolute truth foundation, and became, which may initially be surprising, the greatest proponent of evil-lover rhetoric—in other words, of the asymmetrical, adversarial, selective truth discourse that Barney and Black (1994) offered as a logical foundation for modern public relations. Aristotle's (trans. 1954) rejection of the noble-lover framework is immediately apparent in his definition of rhetoric: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (1355b). Rhetoric, therefore, is not the tool of absolute truth; it is for persuasion in any given case. Kennedy (1994) explained this amoral rhetoric by comparing it to Aristotle's "dispassionate" analyses of plants and animals (p. 56). For Aristotle, rhetoric was simply another topic for his fertile mind to analyze, organize, and put to use.

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Aristotle's greatest distance from Platonic rhetoric, and his clearest embrace of the evil-lover model, came in his discussions of using deception to lead an audience to a conclusion that may not be true and may not be socially beneficial. This, indeed, goes beyond selective truth into absolute falsehood. For example, Aristotle (trans. 1954) taught that *ethos*, the belief-inducing character of the speaker, need exist only in the speech—not, necessarily, in reality (1356a). *Logos*, strategic appeals to the audience's intellect, can include "wanton falsification in epideictic [ceremonial]" speeches (Wardy, 1996, p. 80). *Pathos*, strategic appeals to an audience's emotions, also can favor appearance over reality:

The aptness of language is one thing that makes people believe in the truth of your story: their minds draw the false conclusion that you are to be trusted

from the fact that others behave as you do when things are as you describe them; and therefore they take your story to be true, whether it is so or not. (Aristotle, trans. 1954, 1408a)

Wardy (1996) labeled this last deception “a rampant instance of Plato’s worst nightmare” (p. 79)—of rhetoric in the service not of absolute truth, but of falsehood.

Aristotle’s analytical amorality was not lost on Cicero (trans. 1990), who, in *De Oratore*, had Crassus wonder if orators truly are capable “in Aristotelian fashion to speak on both sides about every subject and by means of knowing Aristotle’s rules to reel off two speeches on opposites sides on every case” (iii, 21). E. L. Hunt (1925/1990) noted that in *On Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle classified logical fallacies with the purpose of enabling the rhetorician to better use them (p. 157). Like Kennedy (1994), E. L. Hunt concluded, “Aristotle’s was a scientific and not a moral earnestness.... He is concerned with rhetorical effectiveness and not with moral justifiability” (p. 156).

Isocratean Rhetoric

Gwynn (1926/1966) wrote of the “radical contrast between the ideals of Plato and Aristotle, and the ideal expressed by Isocrates” (p. 48). The differences between Isocratean rhetoric and the rhetorics of his great contemporaries are, indeed, striking. Isocrates clearly rejected Plato’s non-lover and evil-lover models, but instead of opting for the remaining version of the noble lover, he crafted a new definition of that third category, one that is much more symmetrical than Plato’s “uncompromising” (Jaeger, 1944, p. 70) rhetoric. Gillis (1969) maintained that *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates’ first articulation of his school’s philosophy, “is a declaration of war, nothing less” (p. 321) against rhetoric designed “to win cases, not necessarily to serve the truth” (p. 329). According to Poulakos (1997), Isocratean rhetoric is “a rhetoric of unification” (p. xii); Isocrates “made a concerted effort to dissociate manipulative rhetoric from his educational program” (p. 24).

Isocrates’s (trans. 1928–1945/1986–1992) distance from Plato can be seen in his disbelief, as stated in the *Antidosis*, in the possibility of discovering absolute truth:

For since it is not in the nature of man to attain a science by the possession of which we can know positively what we should do or what we should say, in the next resort I hold that man to be wise who is able by his own powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course. (271)

Because Isocratean rhetoricians seek unification and consensus—and because they cannot be certain of a divinely ordained best course of action—they consider the interests and arguments of others in a debate.

Isocrates (trans. 1928–1945/1986–1992) clearly did so in his letter *To the Children of Jason*: “I myself should be ashamed if, while offering counsel to others, I should be negligent of their interests and look to my own advantage” (p. 14). This clearly is not the asymmetrical, totalitarian rhetoric of Plato’s noble lover.

Isocrates’ distance from Aristotle can best be seen in his concept of *ethos*. Although Aristotle, again, believed that only the appearance of character created during the speech mattered, Isocrates (trans. 1928–1945/1986–1992), in the *Antidosis*, took a much more comprehensive view:

The man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character; no, on the contrary, he will apply himself above all to establish a most honourable name among his fellow-citizens; for who does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man’s life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words? Therefore, the stronger a man’s desire to persuade his hearers, the more zealously will he strive to be honourable and to have the esteem of his fellow citizens. (278)

Far from being an adversarial evil lover whose sole motivation in studying rhetoric is to find the successful means of persuasion, the Isocratean rhetorician seeks to attain goals by building relationships in which both parties win. As Castle (1961) summarized

[Isocrates’s] aim was to discover a new ideal that would inform the study of rhetoric with moral purpose and at the same time preserve its practical relevance to political action.... For Isocrates rhetoric is a culture of the mind; it is the poetry of the political world, through whose study men are made better men by a humane and general culture (*paideia*). (pp. 56–57)

Castle’s (1961) focus on “practical relevance to political action” (p. 56) is important, for Isocrates was not a wishful idealist who believed a deferential decency would triumph in all disputes. Instead, Isocrates reinvented Plato’s noble lover, crafting a moral, symmetrical, practical rhetoric for the rough-and-tumble world of Athenian and Greek politics. Kennedy (1963) noted that Isocrates wove morality into the fabric of broader rhetorical strategies:

Sharp focus on a single argument and especially argument from expediency is apparently characteristic of fifth-century deliberative oratory. Toward the end of the century it began to be abandoned in favor of a synthesis of arguments.... In no Greek orator is moral synthesis of arguments so much developed as in Isocrates. (p. 183)

Isocrates' motivation to infuse rhetoric with morality may have been his realization, born of enlightened self-interest, of the persuasive value of true integrity (Welch, 1990, p. 123). Whatever his motivation, however, the results of his philosophy are clear and dramatic: As Marrou (1956) declared, "In the hands of Isocrates rhetoric is gradually transformed into ethics" (p. 89).

If it still seems that Isocratean morality (and consequently this article) strays too far from the grim realities of persuasion in a volatile, adversarial environment, we must remember that during Isocrates's life Athens constantly battled external enemies and that, internally, bitter litigation was virtually a way of life. Isocrates began his career in rhetoric as a speechwriter for litigants. His *Antidosis*, the clearest statement of his philosophy of rhetoric, begins with a fictionalized response to a real lawsuit that he lost. The word *antagonist*, in fact comes to English from Greek, with its root of *agon*, or *conflict*. Isocrates's great English translator, George Norlin (Isocrates, 1925–1945/1991), consistently lauded his subject's unwavering devotion to morality in rhetoric—yet Norlin also asserted that Isocratean rhetoric effectively functioned in the turbulence of Athenian society: "[Isocrates] was in reality a political pamphleteer, and has been called the first great publicist of all time". By almost all accounts, Isocrates developed a moral, functional rhetoric. However, compared with the competing rhetorics of Plato and Aristotle, how did it fare in what Burke (1969) more recently called "the Wrangle of the Marketplace" (p. 23)?

The Triumph of Isocratean Rhetoric

My challenge now is to compare the relative, respective effectiveness of the rhetorics of Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates. My questions, in brief, are these: In the adversarial society of 4th-century B.C. Athens, did one of these unique rhetorics outperform the others? And, if so, which: one of the asymmetrical rhetorics of Plato and Aristotle or the symmetrical rhetoric of Isocrates? Although no established criteria for such a comparison exist, it seems logical to compare them by what they have in common:

- A school with, consequently, a reputation.
- Graduates of the schools.
- The evaluation of classical Roman rhetoricians, who could survey the whole of classical Greek rhetoric.
- The possibility of shaping future (post 4th-century B.C.) education.

These four criteria do not, of course, directly measure the success of symmetry versus asymmetry. However, as the scholars cited previously—Gillis (1969), Poulakos (1997), Castle (1961), Kennedy (1963), and Marrou

(1956)—noted, symmetry infuses Isocratean rhetoric; any triumph of Isocratean rhetoric is de facto a triumph of symmetry. However, because we cannot directly measure the success of symmetry or asymmetry per se, we are left to measure what we can: the more concrete embodiments of the competing rhetorical philosophies such as schools, graduates, and the written opinions of Roman rhetoricians and modern historians.

The Schools

Following the lead of Cicero (trans. 1878/1970), who in the *Brutus* pronounced, “[Isocrates’s] house stood open to all Greece as the *school of eloquence*” (8), historians have given the laurels in this category to Isocrates. Of the three schools, Clark (1957) wrote

In Greece of the fourth century B.C. there was a three-cornered quarrel among the leading teachers concerning what it takes to make a successful speaker. From this quarrel Isocrates (436–338 B.C.) came out triumphant.... For forty years Isocrates was the most influential teacher in Athens. (pp. 5, 58)

Ample critical commentary supports Clark’s judgment. Freeman (1907) asserted that “Isokrates was [rhetoric’s] greatest professor” (p. 161). Gwynn (1926/1966) said that Isocrates reigned “high above other teachers of rhetoric” (p. 48). Isocrates’s reputation among students outstripped that of Plato (E. L. Hunt, 1925/1990, p. 147) as well as that of Aristotle (Corbett, 1990b, p. 167).

Venerated as Plato’s fabled Academy may be, scholars of higher education generally agree that Isocrates’ school was more influential in ancient Athens than the Academy. Marrou (1956), who clearly felt more loyalty to Plato (p. 79), grudgingly conceded

There is no doubt that Isocrates has one claim to fame at least, and that is as the supreme master of oratorical culture.... On the whole, it was Isocrates, not Plato, who educated fourth-century Greece and subsequently the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. (p. 79)

Significantly, Beck (1964, p. 300) and Gwynn (1926/1966) believed that the success of Isocratean education and rhetoric ultimately persuaded Plato to alter both his philosophy of rhetoric and of an ideal, truth-seeking curriculum. Gwynn (1926/1966) wrote

In the *Laws*, his last attempt to win Athenian opinion for his social and political theories, Plato outlines a programme of educational studies very different from the earlier programme of the *Republic*. Metaphysics are no longer mentioned; and the study of mathematics is reduced to that elementary acquaint-

tance with abstract reasoning which even Isocrates would have considered desirable. This is a direct concession to public opinion, made by the most haughtily aristocratic of all Athenian philosophers: a concession, too, which must have been largely due to the success of the Isocratean programme. (pp. 50–51)

There is, thus, compelling evidence that Isocrates had the most effective, influential, and popular school.

The Graduates

As with the three schools of Athenian rhetoric, the most dramatic assessment of the three teachers' students comes from Cicero (trans. 1878/1970): "Then behold Isocrates arose, from whose school, as from the Trojan horse, none but real heroes proceeded" (ii, 22). Cicero's contemporary, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (trans. 1974), agreed: "[Isocrates] became...the teacher of the most eminent men at Athens and in Greece at large, both the best forensic orators, and those who distinguished themselves in politics and public life". In his *Institutio Oratio*, Quintilian (trans. 1920/1980) wrote, "The pupils of Isocrates were eminent in every branch of study" (iii, 1), adding that "it is to the school of Isocrates that we owe the greatest orators" (xii, 10).

Among more recent critics, Jebb (1911) echoed Cicero's praise of Isocrates's students and added an anecdote about a 4th-century B.C. oratorical competition:

When Mausolus, prince of Caria died in 351 B.C., his widow Artemisia instituted a contest of panegyric eloquence in honour of his memory. Among all the competitors there was not one—if tradition may be trusted—who had not been the pupil of Isocrates. (p. 877)

Although Aristotle had not yet opened his school at the time of this competition, he certainly was teaching rhetoric in Plato's Academy.

In specific comparisons between the abilities of his students and those of his rivals, Plato and Aristotle, Isocrates again prevails. Jaeger (1944) said that there "was no near rival" to the quality of Isocrates' students; of Plato's students, Jaeger said, "Most of them were characterized by their inability to do any real service to [the state] and exert any real influence upon it" (p. 137). Of Aristotle's students, E. L. Hunt (1925/1990) wrote that Aristotle's school "seems to have been productive of little eloquence" (p. 132). Jebb (as cited in Johnson, 1959) added that "Aristotle's school produced not a single orator of note except Demetrius Phalereus; the school of Isocrates produced a host" (p. 25). (Jebb did attribute Isocrates' success

more to his insistence on performance than his actual philosophy of rhetoric.) In short, most scholars, past and present, concur with Freeman (1907): "The pupils of Isocrates became the most eminent politicians and the most eminent prose-writers of the time" (p. 186).

Reputation Among Classical Roman Rhetoricians

We already have seen something of the preference of Rome's greatest rhetoricians—Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Quintilian—for Isocrates. Their praise of him was effusive, and their preference for his rhetoric, as opposed to those of Plato or Aristotle, was pronounced. In *De Oratore*, Cicero (trans. 1878/1970) labeled Isocrates "the father of eloquence" (ii, 3) and "the Master of all rhetoricians" (trans. 1990, ii, 22). In the *Brutus*, Cicero (trans. 1878/1970) wrote that Isocrates "cherished and improved within the walls of an obscure academy, that glory which, in my opinion, no orator has since acquired. He...excelled his predecessors" (8). Dionysius (trans. 1974) praised Isocrates's "unrivalled power to persuade men and states" (9). Quintilian (trans. 1920/1980) called Isocrates "the prince of instructors" (ii, 8), and he assigned a higher rank to no one.

Modern critics agree that Isocrates, not Plato or Aristotle, inspired the central rhetorical theorists of classical Rome. Too (1995) wrote that "Scholars in Antiquity and in the Renaissance regarded Isocrates ... as the pre-eminent rhetorician of ancient Athens" (p. 1). Katula and Murphy (1994) asserted that "Isocrates' school is largely responsible for making rhetoric the accepted basis of education in Greece and later in Rome. His is the chief influence on the oratorical style and rhetorical theory of Cicero" (p. 46). Welch (1990) noted Isocrates' primary influence on both Cicero's and Quintilian's characterizations of the ideal, moral orator (p. 123).

This preference of the Romans for Isocrates is significant, for the Romans, like the Greeks, lived in an adversarial society. Cicero's (trans. 1990) *De Oratore* is redolent with references to what one speaker in that work called "our political hurly-burly" (i, 18), a phrase that foreshadows Burke's (1969) modern "Wrangle of the Marketplace" (p. 23). *De Oratore* (Cicero, trans. 1990), in fact, is a sustained argument in which Crassus, Cicero's persona, debated the nature of rhetoric with polite but firm adversaries who literally label him "an antagonist" (i, 20). Even his adversaries agreed, however, that Roman society is exhaustingly competitive. Antonius, for example, confessed to being "overwhelmed by the hunt for office and the business of the Bar" (Cicero, trans. 1990, i, 21). Not as fortunate as Crassus in his adversaries, Cicero was murdered by his rivals for power, and "his hands and head—which had written and spoken so powerfully—were nailed over the rostrum in Rome" (Bizzell &

Herzberg, 1990, p. 196). In such a society, Cicero and Quintilian could not afford ineffective rhetoric. Their clear preference for the symmetrical rhetoric of Isocrates is its most compelling endorsement.

Influence on Consequent Education

Isocrates' school, more than those of Plato and Aristotle, developed a comprehensive, liberal education, the goal being to prepare orators to think clearly in a variety of disciplines and to have historical and literary examples readily at hand. "[Isocrates] preached that the whole man must be brought to bear in the persuasive process" said Corbett (1990a), "and so it behooved the aspiring orator to be broadly trained in the liberal arts and securely grounded in good moral habits" (p. 542). The historical impact of this fusion of liberal studies and rhetoric has been profound and unequalled. "There is no doubt that since the Renaissance [Isocrates] has exercised a far greater influence on the educational methods of humanism than any other Greek or Roman teacher," said Jaeger (1944, p. 46).

Marrou (1956)—who literally apologized for praising Isocrates over Plato (p. 79)—once again conceded that history has favored the ideals of the practical, symmetrical Isocrates over the philosophical, totalitarian Plato:

It is to Isocrates more than to any other person that the honour and responsibility belong of having inspired in our Western traditional education a predominantly literary tone.... On the level of history, Plato has been defeated: posterity has not accepted his educational ideals. The victor, generally speaking, was Isocrates. (pp. 79–80, 194)

Like Marrou (1956), E. L. Hunt (1925/1990) had mixed feelings regarding the triumph of practicality over speculative philosophy, but he too accorded the victory to Isocrates. "Whether for good or ill, the conception of the aims and purposes of the American liberal college, as set forth by the most distinguished modern educators, is much closer to Isocrates and Protagoras than to Plato" (p. 135). Corbett (1989), however, was not quite so guarded in his praise. "[Isocrates] might very well be canonized as the patron saint of all those, then and now, who espouse the merits of a liberal education" (p. 276).

When the merits of the rhetorics of Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates are compared using the four touchstones of school influence, quality of graduates, influence on Roman rhetoricians, and impact on history, we see that the rhetoric of Isocrates was, by far, the most successful, powerful, and influential rhetoric of the adversarial society that was classical Greece.

Conclusion

Isocrates created a moral, symmetrical rhetoric that proved to be more effective, immediately and historically, than its asymmetrical rivals in classical Greece. Were we to cast it as an ethics foundation for modern public relations and place it into Baker's (1999) schema, it would, at worst, be an enlightened self-interest model and, at best, a social responsibility model. Both models rank higher than the entitlement model, in which Baker located the advocacy/adversarial society model as articulated by Barney and Black (1994). As Baker (1999) said, "The structure [of the schema] implies that each successive baseline represents a higher moral ground than the one preceding" (p. 69). One possible—indeed probable—conclusion, therefore, is that an effective, achievable ethics foundation for public relations need not function at the relatively low level of the advocacy/adversarial society model.

Recent studies, in fact, support what Isocrates demonstrated and, 2 millennia later, the IABC Research Foundation posited that two-way symmetrical public relations, with its idealistic social role, is the most effective model of public relations. Deatherage and Hazleton's (1998) survey of the Public Relations Society of America members concluded that practitioners who use two-way symmetry build more productive relationships than those who do not. In summary, public relations need not be adversarial. It need not adopt an ethics of asymmetrical advocacy. It can, instead, function admirably (in the several senses of that verb phrase) by following the foundation of Isocratean rhetoric: "to form a genuine 'we' out of diversity" (Poulakos, 1997, p. 3).

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