

CHAPTER 21

THE RHETORIC OF ARISTOTLE

Outline

- I. Introduction.
 - A. Aristotle was a student of Plato's who disagreed with his mentor over the place of public speaking in Athenian life.
 - B. Plato's negative view of public speaking was based on his assessment of the Sophists.
 - C. Aristotle saw rhetoric as a neutral tool with which one could accomplish either noble or fraudulent ends.
 1. Truth is inherently more acceptable than falsehood.
 2. Nonetheless, unscrupulous persuaders may fool an audience unless an ethical speaker uses all possible means of persuasion to counter the error.
 3. Speakers who neglect the art of rhetoric have only themselves to blame for failure.
 - D. Although Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics* are polished, well-organized texts, the *Rhetoric* is a collection of lecture notes.
 - E. Aristotle raised rhetoric to a science by systematically exploring the effects of the speaker, the speech, and the audience.
- II. Rhetoric: making persuasion possible.
 - A. For Aristotle, rhetoric was the discovery in each case of the available means of persuasion.
 - B. In terms of speech situations, he focused on civic affairs.
 1. Forensic speaking considers guilt or innocence.
 2. Deliberative speaking considers future policy.
 3. Epideictic speaking considers praise and blame.
 - C. Aristotle classified rhetoric as the counterpart of dialectic.
 1. Dialectic is one-on-one conversation; rhetoric is one person addressing the many.
 2. Dialectic searches for truth; rhetoric demonstrates existing truth.
 3. Dialectic answers general philosophical questions; rhetoric addresses specific, practical ones.
 4. Dialectic deals with certainty; rhetoric considers probability.
- III. Rhetorical proof: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.
 - A. The available means of persuasion are based on three kinds of proof.
 1. Logical proof (*logos*) comes from the line of argument in the speech.
 2. Ethical proof (*ethos*) is the way the speaker's character is revealed through the message.
 3. Emotional proof (*pathos*) is the feeling the speech draws from the hearers.
 - B. Aristotle focused on two forms of logical proof—enthymeme and example.
 1. Enthymeme is the strongest of the proofs.

- a. An enthymeme is an incomplete syllogism.
 - b. Typical enthymemes leave out the premise that is already accepted by the audience.
 - c. Lloyd Bitzer notes that the audience helps construct the proof by supplying the missing premise.
 - d. The enthymeme uses deductive logic—moving from global principle to specific truth.
2. The example uses inductive reasoning—drawing a final conclusion from specific examples.
- C. *Ethos* emphasizes the speaker's credibility, which is manifested in intelligence, character, and goodwill.
1. Aristotle was primarily interested in how the speaker's *ethos* is created in a speech.
 2. The assessment of intelligence is based on practical wisdom and shared values.
 3. Virtuous character has to do with the speaker's image as a good and honest person.
 4. Goodwill is a positive judgment of the speaker's intention toward the audience.
 5. Aristotle's explication of *ethos* has held up well under scientific scrutiny.
- D. Although skeptical of the emotion-laden public oratory typical of his era, Aristotle attempted to help speakers use pathos ethically.
- E. Aristotle catalogued a series of opposite feelings, then explained the conditions under which each mood is experienced.
1. Anger vs. mildness.
 2. Love or friendship vs. hatred.
 3. Fear vs. confidence.
 4. Shame vs. shamelessness.
 5. Indignation vs. pity.
 6. Admiration vs. envy.
- IV. The five canons of rhetoric.
- A. Invention—in order to generate effective enthymemes and examples, speakers draw upon both specialized and general knowledge known as topics or *topoi*.
 - B. Arrangement—Aristotle recommended a basic structure.
 - C. Style—Aristotle emphasized the pedagogical effectiveness of metaphor.
 - D. Memory—this component was emphasized by Roman teachers.
 - E. Delivery—naturalness is persuasive.
- V. Critique: standing the test of time.
- A. The *Rhetoric* is revered by many public-speaking teachers.
 - B. Nonetheless, clarity is often a problem with Aristotle's theory.
 1. The enthymeme is not defined precisely.
 2. The classification of metaphor is confusing.
 3. The distinctions between deliberative and epideictic oratory are blurred.
 4. The promised organizational structure is abandoned.
 - C. Some critics are bothered by Aristotle's characterization of the audience as passive.
 - D. Others desire more discussion of the rhetorical situation.

Key Names and Terms

Aristotle

An ancient Greek teacher and scholar whose *Rhetoric* represents the first systematic study of public speaking.

Sophists

Early Greek speakers and teachers of public speaking whose training was practically useful yet underdeveloped theoretically.

Forensic Rhetoric

Judicial speech centering on accusation and defense.

Deliberative Rhetoric

Political speech centering on future policy.

Epideictic Rhetoric

Ceremonial speech centering on praise and blame.

Logos

Logical proof, which comes from the line of argument in the speech.

Ethos

Ethical proof, which comes from the speaker's intelligence, character, and goodwill toward the audience as these personal characteristics are revealed through the message.

Topoi

The general and specific stock arguments marshaled by speakers to persuade an audience.

Enthymeme

An incomplete version of a formal deductive syllogism that is created by leaving out a premise that is already accepted by the audience or omitting an obvious conclusion.

Pathos

Emotional proof, which comes from the feeling the speech draws from the hearers.

Lloyd Bitzer

A retired rhetorician from the University of Wisconsin who argued that the audience helps construct an enthymematic proof by supplying the missing premise.

Canons of Rhetoric

Previously defined in the public rhetoric introduction, they are the principal divisions of the art of persuasion established by ancient rhetoricians: invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory.

Invention

The speaker's "hunt" for arguments that will be effective in a particular speech.

Principal Changes

This chapter was previously Chapter 20. Griffin has clarified Aristotle's view of the use of the emotions in rhetoric and has updated the *Second Look* section. Otherwise, with the exception of minor changes, this chapter remains the same.

Suggestions for Discussion

This chapter is crucial to students' understanding of public discourse, and—through retrospective sensemaking, as it were—it may shed additional light on theories of influence such as the elaboration likelihood model.

In discussion, we believe it is important to emphasize the stunning comprehensiveness of Aristotle's treatise. Of course Aristotle does not cover it all. Emphasizing production, he tells us little about prediction, and his passive construction of the audience is theoretically limited. Nonetheless, he integrates state-of-the-art knowledge of logic, psychology, politics, law, and (arguably) ethics to create his theory of persuasive communication. Who else—in his era or any other—can say the same?

Griffin's discussion of "I Have a Dream" effectively illustrates most of the Aristotelian principles he sets forth in the chapter. We respectfully disagree, though, with his suggestion that King uses few examples of discrimination. When King declares, "We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one," he is inductively supporting his claim that further protest is necessary by providing specific examples of discriminatory practices currently endured by African Americans. Similarly, he refers to "for whites only" signs and the lack of voting rights. And King's dream features examples illustrating the ideal toward which we should strive, such as the image of children holding hands.

Because of space considerations, Griffin was compelled to limit his discussion of style to an explication of metaphor. Nonetheless, Aristotle's advice on other stylistic matters is noteworthy, particularly with respect to the upcoming *Ethical Reflections*. In general, Aristotle recommends clarity achieved through a middle style: "let the virtue of style be defined as 'to be clear' . . . neither flat nor above the dignity of the subject, but appropriate" (221). This middle stylistic path clearly corresponds with his ethical "golden mean," thus demonstrating broad coherence in Aristotle's thought.

Aristotle's discussion of *ethos* does not fully account for the power of speakers who rely on shock, charisma, or dynamism. We return to this point in the "Exercises and Activities" section of the next chapter, but it may be useful to discuss this issue with students when considering Aristotle. Have them supply examples of speakers whose *ethos* (plural for *ethos*) are powerful, yet nonAristotelian (various politicians, preachers, military figures, and so forth).

It may be worth discussing the implications of Aristotle's ambivalence about pathos, which suggest his concerns about the emotions of the crowd, the *demos*. (See also Essay Question #7, below.) The potential "bad" news here is that our great Greek predecessor may have been less democratically inclined than we've liked to imagine him. His advice about deliberation may have been aimed more at the ancient equivalent of the boardroom or advisory council than the mass of rank-and-file voters. Not entirely unlike his teacher Plato, Aristotle may have had considerable disdain for the kind of decision making that included average people, as well as the discourse that is designed for them.

One historian of ancient rhetoric has suggested that a good way to conceptualize Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is as the first rhetoric website, a site designed to describe public discourse with hundreds of links to other works written by Aristotle, other treatises on rhetoric, contemporary oratory, drama, poetry, and other subjects. By logging on to the *Rhetoric*, a student of rhetoric becomes connected to a multitude of cultural artifacts related the art of oratory in ancient Greece. In this sense, Aristotle can be seen not only as a great thinker, but as rhetoric's first webmaster.

Sample Application Log

Jill

In my Fundamentals of Oral Communication class we were taught these exact methods in giving speeches. To fully relate this to Aristotle's tactics, I will tell of my persuasion speech. I gave a speech on eating disorders and how the media encourages eating disorders in women. In my invention or construction of my argument, I showed how statistics of eating disorders had risen from the past to now. I also showed examples of advertisements with skinny models which the youth of our day and women of our day expect themselves to look like. With these examples, I failed to show a contrast of advertisements of the past or possible advertisements of the future. I did show that through using perfect bodies in advertisements, we had glorified this part of our nature over other more important things. In my arrangement, I gave an interesting story to catch the audience's attention, then I shared that I had credibility because I had struggled with an eating disorder and so had my sister and best friend. I stated my purpose to make my audience aware of the effect of the media and to stop the glorification of perfect bodies. I did not reveal my main point at the end, rather I ended with examples of what we could do. My style contained vivid examples with the actual advertisements and stories of those who had suffered. I spoke in everyday language, but failed to create fresh metaphors. I spoke candidly, which was easier by not memorizing my speech—this contrasts with Aristotle's encouragement of memory. It's amazing that Aristotle's speech techniques are still being taught in classrooms today.

Exercises and Activities

Griffin ably condenses this theory, but we recommend vivifying his account with additional modern examples similar to "I Have a Dream," thus demonstrating the enduring value of Aristotelian concepts. A wonderful illustrative example is Nixon's "Checkers Speech," one of the most successful political orations of the twentieth century. Nixon, then a candidate for the vice presidency, marshals explicit appeals to *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* as he defends his reputation and blasts the Democratic ticket. The speech, originally published in *Vital Speeches of the Day* (October 15, 1952), 11-15, is readily available on video and in print. (For an Aristotelian analysis of Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet," see our treatment of Chapter 22, below.)

Some of the most famous examples of public rhetoric have been produced by military leaders preparing troops for battle. These speeches—both real and fictitious—usually demonstrate the great motivating power of *pathos*. The opening scene of the movie *Patton*

provides such a speech, and two stirring orations are featured in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, which is readily available on video. Courtroom oratory is also rich—some particularly good cinematic sources are *Amistad*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, and *Inherit the Wind*. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* mixes legal rhetoric with themes of social justice, romance, and friendship. *Julius Caesar* and *Malcolm X* feature issues of politics and political power.

In addition to supplying further examples of speeches for analysis yourself, you can encourage or require your students to bring their own. Challenge them to find elements of Aristotelian rhetoric in a wide variety of genres of discourse, from rock lyrics to poetry to art. Students are particularly pleased when they rediscover popular culture through an Aristotelian lens.

To supplement the *Questions to Sharpen Your Focus* provided in the text, you may wish to consider posing the following queries to develop class discussion:

1. What are some modern examples of Sophists and sophistical practice?
2. In what ways does the textbook your department assigns for public speaking follow or diverge from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*?
3. Is the average college lecture rhetoric or dialectic? How about the average textbook? How about *A First Look at Communication Theory*?
4. How does religious oratory fit into Aristotle's tripartite classification of speeches?

When Em Griffin teaches this chapter, he makes a point of working through specific enthymemes and syllogisms with his class. He maintains—and we agree—that students cannot adequately comprehend these structures by simply reading the chapter; they must be parties in the construction of specific examples. His advice—and again we agree—is to use an example or examples beyond those provided in the chapter. To vivify the global example he employs in the chapter, Griffin shows the video of King's "I Have a Dream" speech to his class. We cannot but approve.

Further Resources

Three general resources on Aristotle's rhetoric and its context are George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 82-114; Thomas Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, 13-17; Janet M. Atwill, "Aristotle," *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, 26-30. Sonja Foss discusses and exemplifies "Neo-Aristotelian criticism" in the third chapter of *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Discussions of the enthymeme include John T. Gage, "Enthymeme," *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, 223-25, and "The Reasoned Thesis: The E-word and Argumentative Writing as a Process of Inquiry," *Argument Revisited; Argument Redefined: Negotiating Meaning in the Composition Classroom*, 3-18; Jeffrey Walker, "The Body of Persuasion," *College English* 56 (1994): 46-65. Walker's essay is particularly relevant because it pulls examples from Barthes' essay "The World of Wrestling," which is featured by Griffin in Chapter 25. Also in the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, see Nan Johnson, "Ethos," 243-45; Joseph Colavito, "Pathos," 492-94; George E. Yoos, "Logos," 410-14; John T. Kirby, "Greek Rhetoric," 299-306. For an empirical study of the goodwill component of ethos, see James C. McCroskey and Jason J. Teven, "Goodwill: A Reexamination of the Construct and its

Measurement," *Communication Monographs* 66 (March 1999): 90-103. For a recent critique of Aristotle, see Jasper Neel, *Aristotle's Voice: Rhetoric, Theory, and Writing in America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994). Thomas Farrell's study *The Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) demonstrates the relevance of Aristotelian principles to contemporary culture. For further analysis of King's rhetoric, see Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Words That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Richard Fulkerson, "The Public Letter as a Rhetorical Form: Structure, Logic, and Style in King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 121-36. In his thorough anthology, *American Rhetorical Discourse*, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1995), Ronald F. Reid provides an authoritative text of and useful commentary on King's speech, "I Have a Dream" (777-83). If you're looking for other arguments by King for analysis, I heartily recommend two pieces written for white audiences representing formidable rhetorical challenges: "A Letter from Birmingham Jail," which Griffin includes in the *Second Look* section; and "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," a speech delivered to the Fellowship of the Concerned in 1961, which is anthologized in *Contemporary American Speeches: A Sourcebook of Speech Forms and Principles*, 2nd ed., ed. Wil A Linkugel, R. R. Allen, and Richard L. Johannesen (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1969), 63-75. For further discussion and reinterpretation of sophistic rhetoric, see Edward Schiappa, "Sophistic Rhetoric," and J. Clarke Roundtree, "Sophist," *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, 682-86; Edward Schiappa, "Gorgias's Helen Revisited," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (August 1995): 310-24; Edward Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Susan Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS are not included in online version of Instructor's Manual