

## Introduction

This volume is intended to introduce students and general readers to the theory and practice of political rhetoric. In a traditional liberal arts education, rhetoric formed the third and last part of the trivium, as it was called, preceded by grammar and logic. But just as the study of grammar and logic seems to be on the wane today, so the study of rhetoric no longer enjoys the status it once did – though we hope that it will regain its rightful place.<sup>1</sup> For we regard the study of rhetoric as crucial to the conduct of a decent deliberative politics: citizens need to be equipped to stand before their fellows, express themselves clearly, and try to persuade enough of them that this or that policy ought to be enacted or rejected. Many in modern democracies, it is true, decry the advent of “sound bites,” the ubiquity of slick, focus-grouped blather, and the reduction of complex policy questions to 280 digitized characters, all in sharp contrast to serious political discourse. It’s a fair point. But who is willing to do something about it? And *how* to do something about it? Where might we begin to learn about the fundamentals of that art meant to guide and clarify and elevate speech, the art of rhetoric?

We hope that this book will offer some such beginning for those readers who are concerned about the health of democratic practice today and who may even wish to do their part to improve it. We hope too that the book will offer some assistance to those who are interested more generally in the art of speaking well, regardless of the subject matter. Collected here, then, are some

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the decline of rhetoric in modern times – and a vigorous defense of rhetoric – see Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). For general histories, see James A. Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and George Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

of the greatest or most prominent examples of the art of rhetoric, ancient and modern, homegrown and foreign, examples that bear on both its theoretical foundations and practical applications.

As readers will soon discover, the proper definition of rhetoric is a matter of debate. For now, we may call it simply the art of persuasive speaking. It seems certain that, for so long as human beings have gathered together in communities of a kind, they have tried to persuade their fellows by means of speech or argument – to recommend, warn, praise, or condemn. In other words, human beings have long engaged in something that resembles the practice of rhetoric. Only gradually, however, did they bring to this natural activity the self-conscious attempt to understand it and refine it, just as carpenters and potters only gradually developed the rules and practices that constitute their respective arts. The art of rhetoric was born on that day when someone sought, not just to argue a point, but to reflect on the peculiar demands of argument, of speech-making, as such; rhetoric as an art was born when someone tried to figure out the general rules that might guide any speaker in the almost limitless variety of concrete circumstances. The statesman-orator Cicero, for his part, suggests that the art of rhetoric as a distinct field of study was discovered at some point in the fifth century by two Greeks who lived, as it happened, in Syracuse, Corax and Tisias by name.<sup>2</sup> From that distant point there follows a long line of illustrious figures who concerned themselves with the theory and practice of rhetoric: Thrasymachus, Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Quintilian – all of whom are represented in this volume.

Since we are recommending not only the study of rhetoric but also the practice of it, we should confront at the outset a serious problem with it. For anybody concerned with rhetoric is forced to admit that an odor attaches to the thing. To say of a speech that it is “heavy on rhetoric” is not a compliment; “highly rhetorical” does not generally mean “excellent.” But the core of the problem with rhetoric is not that it may encourage empty puffery or windbagery, for this listeners can usually detect, by its eye-glazing effects, and so judge it for what it is. The core of the problem is instead this: rhetoric is necessarily concerned with persuasion – with convincing others of something and hence with changing their minds – but it is not necessarily concerned with the truth. Rhetoric must persuade but it need not teach. More sharply stated, what is true, just, and good need not be persuasive, and what is persuasive may well be false, unjust, and bad. Or, as Aristotle put it, quoting some lines of the tragic poet Euripides:

But if in fact it is possible among mortals  
 To make false pronouncements persuasively,  
 You ought to believe the opposite, too,  
 That mortals are often not persuaded by truths.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore* 1.20.91 and *Brutus* 46. Aristotle mentions the rhetorical art of Corax at *Art of Rhetoric* 1402a17.

<sup>3</sup> *Art of Rhetoric* 1397a17–19, quoting Euripides’ (lost) *Thyestes*.

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Precisely if it is elevated to the level of an art, rhetoric amounts to a loaded gun, and loaded guns can be used for ends vicious as well as virtuous. To clarify this important point, we may cast a glance at the earliest extant dispute about rhetoric, namely, the stinging criticisms leveled against it by Plato's Socrates and the defense of it by Plato's greatest student, Aristotle.

Plato treats political rhetoric chiefly in the *Gorgias*, the dialogue named after the most celebrated rhetorician of Greek antiquity. When Socrates is asked to define rhetoric, he does so by means of a somewhat complicated schema that compares the genuine arts that treat both body and soul, on the one hand, to the sham ones that only pretend to do so, on the other. Sophistry is the sham art or “knack” corresponding to the genuine art of legislation, which develops or strengthens the soul in its health (just as the genuine art of physical training develops or strengthens the body in its health); and rhetoric is the sham art or knack corresponding to the genuine art of justice, which, chiefly in the form of just punishment, returns the soul to health from sickness (just as the art of medicine returns the sickly body to health).<sup>4</sup> According to Socrates in the *Gorgias*, then, sophistry and rhetoric belong together as flim-flam “arts” that falsely claim to tend to the well-being of the soul; neither so-called art is what it appears to be or accomplishes the great good that it promises. Rhetoric in particular, Socrates says, persuades by means of flattery while teaching nothing. And Socrates does not blush to give this tough take on rhetoric in the presence of Gorgias himself.

Aristotle addresses Socrates' criticisms in effect (if not quite by name) at the outset of the *Rhetoric*. In fact the authentic title of that work – *Art of Rhetoric* – is already a challenge to Socrates: rhetoric properly understood is an “art” (*technē*) and no mere trial-and-error “knack,” let alone a sham. And where Socrates maintains that rhetoric is a “counterpart” (*antistrophē*) to nothing more elevated than fancy cookery, which may flatter our bodies to the detriment of our health, Aristotle maintains in the first sentence of his *Rhetoric* that it is the “counterpart” (*antistrophē*) to dialectic, itself a branch of the science of “analytics” or logic.<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle does of course acknowledge a problem with rhetoric or at any rate with its reputation. Yet this problem he traces initially to the pernicious influence of certain “technical writers,” whom he does not stoop to name. These technical writers, oddly enough, have neglected the technical part of rhetoric, namely the “proof” (*pistis*) together with its “body” or core, what Aristotle famously dubs the “enthymeme” or rhetorical syllogism.<sup>6</sup> Rather than elaborate on these terms at the outset, however, Aristotle instead sketches the matter

<sup>4</sup> See Part I, Chapter 1, for the text of the *Gorgias* discussed here.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Plato, *Gorgias* 465d7–e1 with Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* 1354a1. For what follows, we rely in part on the discussion in Robert C. Bartlett, “Interpretive Essay,” in *Art of Rhetoric* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 214–18 and 274.

<sup>6</sup> *Art of Rhetoric* 1354a13–16 and context.

with which these writers *are* concerned, to the detriment of rhetoric: how to manipulate to your advantage the passions of the judges or jurors, including their anger, envy, and pity. To “warp the juror” in this way, Aristotle says, is “as if someone should make crooked the measuring stick he is about to use.”<sup>7</sup> Here Aristotle takes his bearings by “well-governed cities,” which prohibit everyone involved in judicial proceedings from introducing anything extraneous to the case, such as passionate appeals would be: if all cities were so governed, the authors of technical treatises “would have nothing whatever to say.” “Correctly posited laws” should define all that can be defined in judicial matters and so leave the fewest possible things for the juror to decide – or for the rhetorician to manipulate. Aristotle is critical also of the emphasis the technical writers place on judicial rhetoric, to the neglect of political speech-making especially, despite the fact that “the same method” applies to both kinds of rhetoric and that political speech is “less pernicious” and even “nobler” than is the judicial, which is largely in the service of private concerns.<sup>8</sup> The failings of “the writers,” then, are not only theoretical – the neglect of the proof and rhetorical syllogism – but moral or political too. Hence Aristotle’s opening defense of rhetoric takes the form of a defense of correct laws, “the legislator,” and a public-spirited political discourse. Rhetoric properly conceived can and should aid all of these.

Aristotle does not rest content, however, with an explanation of the source of rhetoric’s bad reputation. He also sketches the legitimate uses of rhetoric that together constitute a positive case for it. First, “what is true and what is just” are naturally superior to their opposites, but they can for all that be defeated in debate, “and this is deserving of censure.” Rhetoric’s task, then, is to come to the assistance of the truth and of justice so that they win out. Something of the character of that defense is broached in Aristotle’s second argument, for he contends that, even if someone makes an argument that accords with “the most precise science,” it would in the case of some people be “impossible” to persuade them.<sup>9</sup> The limits of science, or the limits of the capacity of some to grasp the teachings of science, mean that the rhetorician must come up with speeches or arguments (*logoi*) that rely on what is “commonly available” or readily acceptable to a given audience, as distinguished from the dictates of science: rhetoric must be able to persuade in the absence of teaching. This much Aristotle concedes to Plato’s Socrates. Such a concession implies that the defense of the truth just mentioned might need to be more rhetorical than true in some cases. If rhetoric is itself a science (or art), then it would include the precise knowledge of the limits of precise knowledge to bring about persuasion. What may be more, Aristotle will eventually concede that the manipulation of the passions, which he had initially criticized, is in

<sup>7</sup> *Art of Rhetoric* 1354a25–26.

<sup>8</sup> *Art of Rhetoric* 1354b22–28.

<sup>9</sup> *Art of Rhetoric* 1355a24–29.

fact a key part of rhetoric, and in his justly famous account of the passions in Book 2 of the *Rhetoric*<sup>10</sup> he offers practical advice on how to rouse or quell a given passion – anger, envy, and pity included.<sup>11</sup>

Aristotle adds to these arguments a third, that rhetoric is useful because it can teach us to “persuade others of opposites” – that justice is good *and* that justice is bad, for example. Rhetoric equips us to argue two sides of the same question. Aristotle adds, however, that this skill should be acquired, “not so that we may do both – for one must not persuade others of base things – but so that it not escape our notice how the matter stands and how, when someone else uses arguments unjustly, we ourselves may be able to counter them.”<sup>12</sup> Hence Aristotle’s case for the responsible use of rhetoric includes an acknowledgment of its disturbing power. For to say that skilled rhetoricians can “persuade others of opposites” amounts to saying that they can make “the weaker argument the stronger,” a claim that people were “justly disgusted by” when they heard the sophist Protagoras make it.<sup>13</sup> The problem with rhetoric is then not limited to the distortions imposed on it by “the technical writers,” but inheres in the power of the art itself. Yet, to repeat, we must never exercise that capacity to persuade others of opposites. Instead, an able defense of “what is true and what is better by nature” requires that we see the arguments against them leveled by others in order to parry them. To take an example from Plato, his *Republic* would not be the defense of justice that it is, were it not for the arguments of Thrasymachus – the rhetorician Thrasymachus – which forced on Socrates and his friends a deeper inquiry into justice. The very wish to defend “what is true and what is better by nature,” or what is just, compels us to try to understand these things as they are.

Aristotle also adds as a fourth reason to study rhetoric: that it allows one to defend not only justice but also oneself. For if it is a “shameful thing” not to be able to defend ourselves with our fists, isn’t it all the more shameful to be incapable of doing so with *logos*, with speech or reason, which is to a greater degree our own than is the body? In this way Aristotle takes up the question of the rhetorician’s own good: rhetoric does redound to the benefit of the

<sup>10</sup> Consider, e.g.: “Aristotle investigated the *pathe* [passions] in the second book of his *Rhetoric*. Contrary to the traditional orientation of the concept of rhetoric according to which it is some kind of ‘discipline,’ Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* must be understood as the first systematic hermeneutic of the everydayness of being-with-one-another.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ed. and trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Consider *Art of Rhetoric* 1354a16–18 with 1380a2–4 (on anger); 1380b29–33 (on gentleness); 1382a16–20 (on friendly feeling and hatred); 1383a8–12 (on fear); 1385a34–b1 (on gratitude); 1387b16–20 (on pity); and 1388a25–29 (on envy). Consider also 2.1, end: it is essential to understand how the angry are disposed, and with whom, and at what sorts of things, for “if we should grasp one or two of these, but not all of them together, it would be impossible to foster anger in another, and similarly in the case of the other [passions].”

<sup>12</sup> *Art of Rhetoric* 1355a29–38.

<sup>13</sup> *Art of Rhetoric* 1402a22–27; consider also, e.g., Aristophanes, *Clouds* 112–115 and Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 23d6–7.

rhetorician – but only in a manner that permits someone to avoid a shameful weakness or vulnerability, presumably in law courts and the like.<sup>14</sup>

To summarize, Aristotle defends rhetoric as being crucial to the conduct of a decent deliberative politics: rhetoric is a counterpart of the science of dialectic; it deserves to be called an art and hence involves real knowledge; and it fulfills functions at once necessary and noble by helping us give voice to our concern for what is good and bad, just and unjust, noble and base. Aristotle also confronts the fact that rhetoric permits those who have mastered it to persuade others without strictly speaking teaching them anything – just as Plato’s Socrates had argued – and so it may well be more “effective” than decent. Aristotle deplores the unjust use of rhetoric, which means that he cannot deny the possibility of it, as little as he can deny that appeals to the passions of the audience do indeed form a part of the art of rhetoric. Instead, he exhorts students of rhetoric to employ well or justly the very skills his treatise seeks to refine.

Someone more impressed by the technical refinement than the moral exhortation could, it is true, use the art of rhetoric to learn to manipulate an audience, for his or her own ignoble purposes, by appealing to an existing prejudice, for example, or rousing a dormant passion. But there will be rhetoric with or without the careful study of it, just as there will always be those who prefer their own good to the common good; and Aristotle, for one, does what he can not only to make rhetoric deserving of the title “art” but also to yoke its practice to decent ends. And isn’t it better for us to know that – and especially how – rhetoric can be misused, as a prophylactic against our becoming its dupes? How else to become savvier “consumers” of rhetoric than by studying its devices and stratagems? As for Socrates, or Socrates together with Plato, they were in truth master rhetoricians who could do as they wished with any interlocutor<sup>15</sup> and who deployed their prodigious talents to make of philosophy a way of life deserving of respect. To see that this is so, one only needs to read the end of the *Gorgias*, with its awesome and moving account or myth of the afterlife; the critique of Gorgian rhetoric proves not to constitute a critique of all rhetoric. Just as Aristotle was alive to the dangers of rhetoric but promoted its (responsible) use nonetheless, so Socrates was harshly critical of rhetoric but made use of a (philosophic) rhetoric nonetheless: his very criticisms of rhetoric bear the stamp of the rhetorical.<sup>16</sup> There is more agreement than first appears between Plato’s teacher and his greatest student on the necessity, and the risks, of rhetoric. We too endorse the study of rhetoric in our time, not because it cannot be misused but precisely because it can be. *Caveat auditor.*

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<sup>14</sup> Consider Plato, *Gorgias* 486a4–d1, 508c4–d3, and 521c3–8.

<sup>15</sup> Consider Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.14.

<sup>16</sup> Consider in this regard Devin Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato’s Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice, and the Philosophic Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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This volume is divided into two main parts. Part I is devoted to the theoretical question of what rhetoric is, and it addresses that question by having recourse to some of the greatest authorities of Greek and Roman antiquity: Plato's Socrates, Aristotle, Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian. Part II offers a rich array of political speeches that are grouped thematically. Hence the book as a whole strives to treat both the theory and the practice of rhetoric in a reasonably synoptic way.

After its survey of the classical foundations of rhetoric, Part I turns to consider the three principal kinds of rhetoric according to Aristotle, a division that may have been supplemented but has never been superseded in the study of the subject. First, *deliberative rhetoric* issues in speeches of exhortation or dissuasion, either to pursue or to shun a given course of action, and is most concerned with questions of some future good (advantage) and future harm (disadvantage). Any speech in a deliberative assembly would qualify. Second, *epideictic rhetoric* (also called “display” or “ceremonial”) issues in speeches of blame or praise – a funeral oration, for example – and is most concerned with what is noble and base. And although epideictic speeches may deal with any time period, with past acts or future consequences, Aristotle contends that it deals mostly with the here-and-now. Finally, *judicial rhetoric* (or “forensic”) issues in speeches of accusation or defense, deals with questions of justice and injustice, and is most concerned with the past: did the defendant commit an unjust act on the date in question? Here we include both Aristotle's discussion of each of the kinds of rhetoric together with political speeches meant to exemplify them.

Part I takes up next Aristotle's classic accounts of the three kinds of “proofs” or “modes of persuasion” (*pisteis*) that characterize all rhetoric: those that speak to the passion of the audience, or *pathos*; those that establish the good character, or *ethos*, of the speaker; and finally the speech qua speech, the *logos*, with the persuasive powers peculiar to it as a matter of (rhetorical) logic. Part I concludes with a brief treatment, again following Aristotle, of matters of diction or style (*lexis*) and its rhetorical effects.

Part II is devoted entirely to political speeches. We focus on political occasions when rhetoric is especially important, limiting our choices to speeches dealing with two ongoing political movements in the United States (Civil Rights and the Women's Movement); speeches addressing political crises or dealing with urgent matters of war and peace; speeches made in the context of peaceful changes of political leadership; and finally, mindful of the fact that rhetoric also plays a powerful, if disturbing, role in tyrannies and authoritarian regimes, we have included examples of such speeches. Accordingly, although many of the speeches in this volume are rightly celebrated as peaks of the art of rhetoric, not all can be considered great because also good: they may in some cases be notorious or ugly or perfidious and so exemplify the power of rhetoric in its repellent forms. Moreover, in attempting to keep the scope of our book in bounds – it could easily be three times its present length – we limited ourselves

to *speeches*, as distinguished from, say, private communications, newspaper editorials, or Supreme Court cases, and to *political* ones broadly understood. In most instances, the speeches were actually delivered, live or through an electronic medium, to an audience; the main exceptions to this are the selections from Shakespeare (although even these are of course routinely delivered to live audiences).

The works collected here are of course only an introduction to the extraordinary range of political speeches. But we hope that setting forth the theoretical principles of rhetoric as exemplified by actual speeches will serve as invitation to further reading and reflection.

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According to Aristotle, who is our touchstone in the matter of rhetoric, a human being is by nature the political animal *and* the rational animal, that is, the only animal naturally possessed of articulate speech or reason, as the relevant Greek term (*logos*) can be translated. Yet these two apparently different definitions of a human being are but sides of the same coin. Because we alone among the animals are able to express not just pleasure and pain but also “the advantageous and the harmful and hence also the just and the unjust,”<sup>17</sup> we alone among them are also capable of forming the communities that have at their core our shared moral convictions, expressed in speech, about matters just and unjust: political communities properly speaking. Human beings are by nature the political animal because we are the only animal equipped with *logos*. If it is somewhat misleading to say on this ground that a human being is by nature the *rational* animal, since so few of us can often claim that high title for ourselves, it is probably better for now to split the difference between the two meanings of *logos* – “speech” and “reason” – and say that we are by nature the *rhetorical* animal. To try to lessen the gap between our speech and our reason, to hone our words so that our passions or actions become more aligned with our reason, is one compelling incentive today to undertake the study of the art of rhetoric.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a14–15.



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PART I

WHAT IS RHETORIC?

## I

## Classical Foundations

I. SOCRATES' ACCOUNT OF RHETORIC:  
 PLATO, *GORGIAS* 463A–C, 464B–465D<sup>1</sup>

In the course of a lengthy and sometimes heated conversation with the famous teacher of rhetoric, Gorgias of Leontini, and his two admirers, Polus and Callicles, Socrates is at one point asked to state frankly his own view of what rhetoric is. What follows is the core of that view, which Socrates does not hesitate to state before acolytes of rhetoric in general and of Gorgias' version of it in particular.

Socrates: Well, in my opinion, Gorgias, [rhetoric] is a certain practice that is not characterized by art [*technē*] but rather belongs to a soul that is skilled at guessing, is courageous, and is naturally clever at associating with human beings. And I call the core of it flattery. Of this practice [of flattery] there are in my opinion many other parts, one of these being the art of fancy cooking, which is held to be an art but, as my argument has it, is not an art but the product of experience and a knack. I call rhetoric a part of this too, as well as cosmetics and sophistry, these four parts being related to four things [...]

So now, I'll try, if I can, to set forth more clearly what I mean. There being two things of concern [namely, body and soul], I say there are two arts belonging to them. I call the art that pertains to the soul "politics"; as for the art pertaining to the body, I can't give you one name for it in this way, but I do say that, while the care of the body is one, there are two parts to it: physical training, on one hand, and medicine, on the other; and that, in the case of the political art, the art of legislation is comparable to physical training, and justice is the counterpart to medicine. Now each of these two shares something with the other, since they are concerned with the same thing – medicine has something in common with physical training and justice with legislation – but nonetheless they differ somewhat from one another. So these are four, and they always exercise their care, some of them as regards the body, the others the soul, and with an eye to what's best.

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Robert C. Bartlett, for this volume.