

The Cycle of Rhetoric

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The definition of rhetoric is a question that has plagued humans for centuries. Though many people have attempted to write a definition about the broad concept of rhetoric, this paper will present a circulation of a theoretical and practical illustration of rhetoric. The Greek philosopher Aristotle considered rhetoric a means to persuade; Plato a means to find truth; and for Quintilian it was “The good man speaking well.” Despite the different views between the philosophers themselves, it can be said that they all agreed that rhetoric is a form of communication. Rhetoric is effective communication that uses various elements with the purpose of persuading an audience. In rhetoric, connecting and engaging with the audience is a form of persuasion. Throughout this process of persuasion, rhetoric can be seen through overcoming resistance and objections to a thesis or main idea. Collaboration is key to progress; it requires people to agree on a course of action so that it may flourish. Since conflict will always be a part of human interaction, due to differing opinions, rhetoric becomes an asset to human evolution.

Aristotle claimed that approaching an argument using *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* was the most effective way to persuade the audience. Quintilian argued that a rhetor must have an in-depth knowledge of what he is discussing. To achieve this knowledge, Aristotle's teachings provided a framework that leads to an argumentative approach that supports a thesis. Additionally, Aristotle presented techniques to effectively deliver a message to a specific audience in a particular situation. He emphasized the importance of five ingredients that work synergistically to present an effective discourse: 1. Invention - quality of content, 2. Arrangement - order of ideas, 3. Style - the character of the speech, 4. Delivery - voice and body language, and 5. Memory - fluency, a perceived confidence. The choices made on these five areas are conscious decisions with the purpose of causing an effect on the audience. In addition to these choices, he has to be clear about the purpose of his discourse, know his audience, and use the

appropriate genre to deliver the message. To be successful in his quest, the rhetor seeks external elements such as kairos. To many, kairos is a window of perfect opportunity that presents itself only so often. The rhetor needs to be in the right place, at the right moment, and with the right message.

Thus far, we have discussed rhetoric from the rhetor's perspective, the practice of rhetoric. Rhetoric, from the rhetorician's point of view, is the analysis of the effectiveness of the rhetor's text. The method used by rhetoricians to criticize texts was fairly the same until the last half of the 20th century. Due to the change of values and communication media, new methods were developed to analyze texts by magnifying the underlying messages; they are called rhetorical perspectives.

The Neo-Aristotelian perspective was the perspective used during the thousands of years that rhetoric has been practiced. It helps the rhetorician discover persuasive strategies in discourse, based on Aristotle's five canons. The Narrative Perspective focuses on the moral of a story. The Dramatistic perspective focuses on the justification of breaking rules of living. The Marxist's perspective focuses on the understanding of who dominates and who is subdued. Finally, the Feminist perspective focuses on the gender roles in terms of appropriateness and desirability. These four perspectives were deemed necessary to address the changes in social dynamic. The Illusion of Life Perspective focuses on the role of music and lyrics in persuading an audience, the Visual Pleasure Theory Perspective focuses on the influential role of visual images, and the Media-Centered Perspective focuses on the media persuasive effects. These three perspectives handles the influence that communication media has on delivering a message.

Whether it is in the form of an opinion, an argument, or an idea, rhetoric is the means by which communication is enhanced to increase the chances of achieving the expected

result, persuasion. History shows that though rhetoric can have various definitions, the common truth is that rhetoric is for the purpose of effective communication.

An extraordinary depiction of some of the elements of rhetoric is demonstrated in a three-minute video called “The Most Honest Three and a Half Minutes of Television ever” by James Boudier. The title itself includes Plato’s usage of truth to present his message. How kairotic! This video, which has had 5,917,260 views in nine months, presents the speech given by one professor to an auditorium full of college student in America. The first two minutes of the speech is captivating enough to leave the American audience with eyes wide open and jaw dropped. Thus, pathos was effectively manifested in the viewers. This might have been due to many reasons, but specifically, the speaker’s aptitude, attitude, and character in delivering his speech.

For some first time viewers, the message itself might have not been clearly understood, but because the speaker presented it with such confidence, power, and authority, it is more likely that his viewers concurred with his message, as seen in the number of “likes” marked in the video. Again, the speaker made a keen representation of the use of pathos by capturing his audience’s attention from the beginning of his speech. This is yet another example of pathos; that emotional connection. Prior to analyzing the logic, credibility, and content of a message, the emotional connection must be present at the beginning of it all. This is a vivid example of the basis of rhetoric.

The speaker’s response to one student’s question about why he thought America was the greatest country in the world by contradicted the responses of the previous speakers, the majority. Even though his response was contradictory and unexpected, it was the most substantial response out of the other two speakers, in terms of rhetorical concepts. Referring to

Protagoras's promise in making the weaker argument stronger, rhetoric is being able to support the views most people do not see. The speaker argues the credibility of the common response, which was because America provides freedom, diversity, and opportunity. He also supports his opposing argument by using numerous facts from his memory. The fact that his speech was not based off written notes made his message that much convincing to his audience at the moment.

Rhetoric must include logic (logos) when presented through a concrete medium. The speaker's use of diction, which included upscale language combined with a few cuss words, logically and actively communicated his message to his audience, which is a broad one. Rhetoric encompasses the ability to use diction to persuade an audience. The emphasis the speaker made on certain words, pauses in other phrases, the change of velocity between the first two minutes of his speech and the last minute was also a rhetorical strategy of diction and style in persuading his audience to think about his message.

The speaker transmitted his message with such power and will, as if he had wanted to express his thought on this matter for far too long. Rhetoric is aimed to specific groups of people. It is safe to say that this speaker was speaking to Americans, specifically, to the government, to college students, and to those in some sort of power. A student in a large room full of other students and professors asked the question. He found the perfect timing to speak his thoughts and responded; perfect kairos! He spoke the right thing at the right time and the right way.

In addition to the elements discussed, this speech depicts the stasis theory of rhetoric, as well. The stasis theory would analyze factual concepts, basis, quality, and policy. The speaker presented a message with statistical and historical information to support why America is not the greatest country in the world. The speaker used logos (Aristotle) to persuade his audience through reason. Specifically, the speaker used deductive reasoning to back up a rhetor's claims

(Perkins). According to Plato, he also used the proper method of rhetoric by disproving his opponent's claims using honest facts (Ciesielski). Aristotle deduced that using at least one of these categories would produce a successful argument, through persuasion, which is the ultimate goal of effective communication.

If we analyze the speech through the eyes of Quintilian, “the good man speaking well,” we could argue that it was a successful speech. The speaker’s use of diction, which included upscale language combined with a few cuss words, logically and actively communicated his message to the audience. The emphasis the speaker made on certain words, pauses in other phrases, the change of pace between the first two minutes of his speech and the last minute was also a rhetorical strategy of diction and style in persuading his audience to think about his message. Referring to Protagoras’s promise in making the weaker argument stronger, rhetoric is being able to support the views most people do not see, negating the popular assumption that we are the greatest country in the world was an effective way of attracting the audience attention.

## References

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