

The History of Rhetoric and Modern Rhetorical Analysis

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Introduction

Rhetoric, the *ars bene dicendi*, has fascinated mankind since its emergence and development in the 5th century B.C. Its history resembles a voyage through the sea with many highs and lows, times in which the art of rhetoric was studied by everyone, but also times when the art became discredited. In the ancient Greek world rhetoric witnessed its first golden age, although already from its very beginning famous personalities such as Plato and Socrates criticised its shallowness and superficiality. Another period of prosperity came with the time of the Romans who studied the art of the Greek masters and developed and adapted it according to their needs. Downfalls of rhetoric alternated with its heydays while of course the rhetoric of demagogues massively damaged the reputation of the art. This characteristic of rhetoric as a double-edged sword, however, is shared with almost all other sciences and arts. Knowledge and therefore also rhetorical abilities can be used or abused.

The concept of rhetoric

The concept of rhetoric has, since its origin in antiquity, been discussed heatedly, revised many times and quarrelled about fiercely. From its first days of existence it has evoked very diverse reactions. In antiquity, supporters of the *ars bene dicendi* considered rhetoric to be the supreme art a human can ever acquire. Critics, on the other hand, saw in rhetoric an extreme danger to moral values, truth and justice, and they feared that trained rhetoricians could easily manipulate their audiences. Plato even fought intellectual wars over the question whether rhetoric is a philosophy or an art in itself. Even today rhetoric is a controversial topic: everyone knows politicians who promise a great deal during their election campaigns and make people believe their messages with the help of rhetoric, but after the elections they will not keep their word. If the word *rhetorician* is looked up in *Langenscheidt's English-German Dictionary* or in the online dictionary *Leo* we find that the German translation for rhetorician is *Redner* but also *Schönredner* and *Phrasendrescher*. The last two terms clearly have a negative connotation, which shows that there is also an awareness of the negative aspects of rhetoric. Rhetoric, like many other arts or sciences, can be used as well as abused, depending on the integrity of the user. Aristotle defends the use of rhetoric in his famous work *On Rhetoric* in the following way: “In addition, it would be strange if an inability to defend oneself by means of the body is shameful, while there is no shame in an inability to use speech; [1355a] the latter is more characteristic of humans than is use of the body” (Kennedy

1991:35). Rhetoric also has a certain element of complicity: it can be magniloquent, charming, forceful or devious. But whatever style, register or strategy is chosen, it always tries to involve the receiver of the message who ideally becomes an accomplice of the speaker. At a certain point the audience becomes active, adopting (again ideally) the message of the orator and in doing so, helping him to enforce his ideas and plans (Nash 1989:1; 197).

The term *rhetoric* itself originally stems from the Greek word *rhetor* which means as much as orator or speaker. The rhetor is a person who has acquired the theory and technique of the art of oration, which already implies that the principles of rhetoric can be learned. Nevertheless, a successful rhetorician needs, besides his acquired skills, certain innate abilities which will be discussed later on (Wächter 1996:29).

As a single definition of the phenomenon of rhetoric would not do justice to the numerous facets of rhetoric and the various concepts which have been elaborated since Greek antiquity, four different concepts will be provided:

- (1) Unter ‘Rhetorik im weiteren Sinne’ ist die von jedem am sozialen Leben aktiv beteiligten Menschen geübte ‘Kunst der Rede überhaupt’, unter ‘Rhetorik im engeren Sinne’ (‘Schulrhetorik’) die ‘seit dem 5. Jh. V. Chr. als lernbarer Unterrichtsgegenstand ausgebildete Kunst der (besonders vor Gericht gehaltenen) Parteireden’ zu verstehen. (Lausberg 1982:13)

In this statement, Lausberg creates the concept of *rhetoric in the broader sense* (as opposed to *rhetoric in the narrower sense*), claiming that everyday-conversation is a form of rhetoric.

- (2) Kennedy, on the other side, believes that rhetoric is something abstract such as energy which becomes manifest through language but also through other signs: “Rhetoric, in the most general sense, is the energy inherent in emotion and thought, transmitted through a system of signs, including language, to others to influence their decisions or actions” (Kennedy 1991:7).

- (3) Plato, known as a fierce critic of the Athenian rhetoric of his time, draws a very different picture of rhetoric. In his dialogue *Gorgias* he does not acknowledge rhetoric to be an art because of its deceiving and flattering nature:

Polus: Then what, in your opinion, is rhetoric?

Socrates: A thing which, as I was lately reading in a book of yours, you say that you have made an art.

Pol. What thing?

Soc. I should say a sort of experience.

Pol. Does rhetoric seem to you to be an experience?

Soc. That is my view, but you may be of another mind.

Pol. An experience in what?

Soc. An experience in producing a sort of delight and gratification.

(<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/gorgias.html>)

(4) Ueding, when investigating Gorgias' argumentation, finds out that Gorgias came to a similar conclusion on the definition of rhetoric as Aristotle. He compares rhetoric with a weapon which is used for self-defence: „Die Rhetorik ist also nach Gorgias eine Streitkunst, eine Waffe; sie wird benutzt, um auf Menschen zu wirken, sie zu beherrschen. Er erkennt, dass die Rhetorik sowohl zu guten als auch zu schlechten Zwecken zu verwenden ist...“ (Ueding 1976:20-21)

The history of rhetoric

Presumably the oldest reference to rhetoric, or rather eloquence, can be found in Homer's epic poems. The heroes in Homer's epics recognise and make use of the power of speech, being aware of its potential and considering it as one of the greatest of human excellences (Dixon 1971:7). Vickers claims in his work *On Rhetoric* (1988) that Aristotle refers to and quotes from Homer about forty times. The references to Homer by Aristotle but also by Roman rhetoricians show that Homer's epics were analysed in detail in search for rhetorical activity. A quotation from Cicero's *De Oratore*, in which Socrates' separation between rhetoric and philosophy is criticised, demonstrates Homer's awareness of the importance of oratory:

the same system of instruction seems to have imparted education both in right conduct and in good speech; nor were professors in two separate groups, but the same masters gave instruction both in ethics and in rhetoric, for instance the great Phoenix in Homer, who says that he was assigned to the young Achilles by his father Peleus to accompany him to the wars *in order to make him 'a speaker of words and a doer of deeds'*. (3.15.57; *Iliad*, 9.443) (my italics) (Vickers 1988:3-4)

Homer is said to have been 'master of all the emotions, tender and vehement alike'. This means that he already distinguished between the three styles of speech: plain, middle and grand style. Instinctively, he also observed rhetorical devices such as exordium, narration, proof and refutation, peroration and all the ornaments of speech. His works were obviously so full of rhetorical devices that the majority of writers on the principles of rhetoric have worked through them in search for examples (Vickers 1988:3-4).

It is reported that rhetoric, as a distinct art, was born in the 5th century B.C. in the Greek towns of Sicily and emerged in answer to a social need. Tyrants, who had ruled until about 463 B.C., had illegally seized property. Civil proceedings began in order to recover the rights of the claimants, drawing on the help of Corax and his pupil Tysias, who elaborated the first rule-based methods handling judicial disputes. A rhetorician was then, in the original sense, a

man who advised on the most efficient way of presenting a legal case. Corax and Tysias also provided the first definition of the rhetorician: artificer, or producer, of persuasion (authors on rhetoric differ in their assumptions which of the two can be credited with the first definition of rhetoric). Gorgias, another citizen of the Greek province in Sicily who is said to have been taught by Tysias, finally introduced rhetoric to Greece. In 427 B.C. he travelled to Athens to request Athenian help and greatly impressed the Greek with his eloquence. Gorgias arrived in Athens at a time when changes in Athenian politics and law took place which in consequence allowed more direct involvement of Athenian citizens with community decisions. These circumstances provided a fertile ground for a rapid acceptance and development of rhetoric. Gorgias came to be known as a Sophist, a rhetorician who travels from town to town making public displays of his rhetoric abilities, attracting students who would pay for their education. He held the belief that a speaker need not concern himself with the truth of the subject he is speaking about. Socrates and Plato, but also Isocrates condemned this attitude, criticising it as moral irresponsibility. Isocrates (436-338 B.C.) regarded himself as one of the Sophists, but he did not see himself simply as a teacher of rhetoric. He felt that some of his fellow-teachers promised more than they could achieve. He claimed a higher role for rhetoric which was nobler than that of mere persuasion and preferred to call his teachings *philosophia*. Plato understood this claim as a direct attack on the science of philosophy, and an intellectual war between rhetoric and philosophy was triggered off. Plato responded to Isocrates' attempts at lifting rhetoric to the level of philosophy with his works *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*. The latter is a dialogue, in which Socrates, the mouthpiece of Plato, eloquently attacks Isocrates' and Gorgias' concept of rhetoric. Socrates states that 'a skill so indifferent to truth and morality' is unworthy to be called an art.

In 393 B.C., a few years before Aristotle founded his academy, Isocrates was the first rhetorician to open up a school in which he trained the Greeks in political and legal speaking. With this school he distinguished himself clearly from other Sophists who so far travelled from city to city. The graduates of Isocrates' school were almost all outstanding personalities of their time such as general Timotheus, the historians Theopompus, Ephorus and Nicocles, as well as the king of Cyprus. The rhetorical system of Isocrates was based upon three fundamental elements: nature, training, practice. After the creation of Isocrates' school, many similar institutions were founded in the ancient world while his influence on education lasted until the period of the Renaissance in Europe (Dixon 1971:2-12; Vickers 1988:6-10, 149-150).

The founders of schools of rhetoric soon acquired wealth and honour as their students were greatly attracted by the promise of success in civic life and by the ideal of upholding liberty. Furthermore, involvement in politics was highly esteemed in ancient society, since it meant that individuals overcame their self-centredness and worked for the common good (Vickers 1988:7). Schlüter claims that Isocrates educated up to 100 scholars at the same time who each paid a fee of 1000 drachms. This would amount to a yearly income of about 255646 € It is also said that Isocrates received 20 talents for an eulogy on the tyranny and on the duty of its subjects to obedience, which amounts to the value of more than 100 kilos of silver (Schlüter 1977:16).

About 300 years after Aristotle founded his academy, Roman rhetoricians started contributing works on the art of rhetoric. Among the most famous were Cicero and Quintilian. Cicero's *De Inventione* and the anonymous *Rhetorica ad C. Herennium* (which was ascribed to Cicero until the late 15th century) became the most popular books on rhetoric in Antiquity, as more manuscripts of the two works survived than of any other classical text on rhetoric. Both texts are mere *technai*, books used by scholars to learn rhetorical skills. They both contain brief and coherent explanations of the main rhetorical doctrine, the three kinds of oratory, the five stages of composition and the parts of speech which will be listed later on. However, the books were read for information and not for stimulus and distinguished themselves clearly from Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, which covered a very wide scale of human issues. In *De Oratore*, Cicero's other major work on rhetoric, Cicero also tried to cover a much wider scope and assigned a great number of different topics to the competence of rhetoricians. The only problem, compared to Aristotle, was that Cicero only claimed the wide competences of rhetoric but did not demonstrate them. Aristotle, on the other hand, could give many practical demonstrations of the relevance of rhetoric in the fields of politics, law, ethics, psychology and criminology. Cicero's *De Oratore* is one of the few classical rhetorics written in the form of a dialogue. He incorporated many famous Roman orators in his work in order to create a historical dimension. This also manifests his desire to be once named along with the great personalities of rhetoric. In his dialogue, he clearly tried to emulate Plato's dialogues, but neither in setting nor in characterisation could he outdo or even rival him.

Quintilian's most famous work is his *Institutio Oratoria*, which presents rhetorical strategies in courtrooms in much more detail than any other classical rhetorician. His work soon became an indispensable guide to Roman legal practices (Vickers 1988:29-38; Dixon 1971:21).

Rhetorical modes, genres and figures

The following terms shall partly explain in more detail different characteristics of rhetoric and the way rhetoric can be used. The parts of speech will later on be often drawn upon in the analyses of the speeches, as they help to structure a speech and to lay open the strategy of the speaker. The functions of speech will also be found in the analyses, attempting to explain why a political speaker makes certain statements at a certain time and in a certain way.

Genres of rhetoric (Aristotle):

(Dixon 1971)

<i>judicial rhetoric:</i>	oratory of the law courts; rhetoric of legal prosecution and defence
<i>deliberative rhetoric:</i>	the audience is asked to judge an action in the future
<i>epideictic rhetoric:</i>	praise or denunciation of an individual or institution

The parts of a speech:

(Götttert 1991)

<i>exordium:</i>	introduction
<i>narratio:</i>	description of circumstances
<i>argumentatio:</i>	argumentative part, justification
<i>peroratio:</i>	conclusion

Stages of Composition:

(Götttert 1991)

<i>inventio:</i>	invention of ideas
<i>dispositio:</i>	structuring of ideas
<i>memoria:</i>	memorizing of speech
<i>elocutio:</i>	verbal presentation of ideas
<i>pronuntiatio:</i>	delivery of speech

Artistic modes of persuasion:

(Kennedy 1991)

<i>Ethos:</i>	persuasion derived from the character of the speaker
<i>Pathos:</i>	persuasion derived from the emotion awakened by a speaker in an audience
<i>Logos:</i>	persuasion derived from true or probable argument

Functions of speech:

(Götttert 1991)

<i>Movere:</i>	move the passions
<i>Docere:</i>	teach
<i>Delectare:</i>	delight

The styles of speech:

(Vickers 1988)

<i>plain style:</i>	commonplace matters are to be discussed simply
<i>grand style:</i>	lofty subjects are to be discussed impressively
<i>middle style:</i>	topics between plain and grand style are to be discussed in a tempered style

Rhetorical figures:

Rhetorical figures are figures of speech which are used to enhance the effect of what is being said. The list below provides a few examples of rhetorical strategies some of which will be found in the analytical part of the thesis.

alliteration:	repetition of the same sound beginning several words in sequence
apostrophe:	a sudden turn from the general audience to address a specific group or person or personified abstraction absent or present
anacoluthon:	lack of grammatical sequence; a change in the grammatical construction within the same sentence
anadiplosis:	the rhetorical repetition of one or several words; specifically, repetition of a word that ends one clause and is also used at the beginning of the next.
anaphora:	the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or lines.
antithesis:	opposition, or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction
assonance:	resemblance or repetition of vowels
asyndeton:	lack of conjunctions between coordinate phrases, clauses, or words
cacophony:	harsh joining of sounds
chiasmus:	two corresponding pairs arranged not in parallels (a-b-a-b) but in inverted order (a-b-b-a); from shape of the Greek letter chi (X).
consonance:	resemblance or repetition of consonants
climax	arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of ascending power. Often the last emphatic word in one phrase or clause is repeated as the first emphatic word of the next
ellipsis:	omission of a word or short phrase easily understood in context.
epistrophe:	ending a series of lines, phrases, clauses, or sentences with the same word or words.
euphemism:	substitution of an agreeable or at least non-offensive expression for one whose plainer meaning might be harsh or unpleasant
hyperbole:	an exaggeration used for emphasis or effect
irony:	expression of something which is contrary to the intended meaning; the words say one thing but mean another

litotes:	deliberate understatement, especially when expressing a thought by denying its opposite.
metaphor:	implied comparison achieved through a figurative use of words; the word is used not in its literal sense, but in one analogous to it
metonymy:	substitution of one word for another which it suggests.
oxymoron:	apparent paradox achieved by the juxtaposition of words which seem to contradict one another
paradoxon:	an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, but that may yet have some truth in it
paraonomasia:	use of similar sounding words; often etymological word-play
personification:	attribution of personality to an impersonal thing
simile:	an explicit comparison between two things which is often introduced by 'like' or 'as'
synecdoche:	understanding one thing with another; the use of a part for the whole, or the whole for the part (a form of metonymy)
list of three:	combination of three items
zeugma:	two different words linked to a verb or an adjective which is strictly appropriate to only one of them

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