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Sophist, Aristotle, and Stoic: Three Concepts of Ancient Rhetoric

Rhetoric lost favor in the intellectual and educational circles for a time, and is currently experiencing a resurgence. To fully explore this useful communication style in current practice and development, a comprehensive understanding of past theory and practice merits attention. Current philosophical thought postulates that only one form of rhetoric was utilized. After careful examination and research, philosophical thought may be expanded to include a minimum of three widely used forms of rhetoric: Sophistry, Aristotelian, and Stoicism. Ancient Rhetoric did not exist in the singular, but in the plural. In truth, there were, and continue to be, three conceptions of ancient rhetoric. One of

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An article written by Piotr Jaroszyński, using the same theme, was published in a journal in Polish in which Professor Jaroszyński is the editor-in-chief, entitled: “Three Ancient Concepts of Rhetoric: Sophists, Aristotle, Stoics”. Specific publication information is as follows: *Człowiek w kulturze* [Man in Culture], publication year: 2018, volume number 28, Editor-in-chief: Piotr Jaroszyński: <http://www.czlowiekwkulturze.pl/>. Piotr Jaroszyński, “Trzy starożytne koncepcje retoryki: sofisci, Arystoteles, stoicy.”



them, the first form of rhetoric, however, was not respected as a true rhetoric, since it identified rhetoric with sophistry. The second form of rhetoric was of Aristotelian origin, giving a space for what is plausible, since what is necessary belonged to science. The third one was the idea supported by the Stoics, who stressed eloquence and morality as indispensable for rhetoric. These three ideas were invented one after another; they did not appear at the same time. Sophistry emerged in the fourth and fifth century BC. Aristotelian rhetoric developed between 322 and 347 BC, and the Stoics' rhetoric emerged less than 100 BC.

Rhetoric, as developed by the ancient Greeks in the mid-fifth century BC, became so popular, well-known, and utilized, that it became a fixed element in the educational canon of the Western world. Rhetoric, although a very necessary part of an educational curriculum, lost favor and importance for a period of time, and then began to reemerge in today's programs of study. Due to this re-emergence, the types of rhetoric used, their relative importance, and the application of necessary principles gains momentum in educational importance. Controversy continues to surround the relative importance of this interesting principle, and the specific training program that could benefit from its implementation.

The attractiveness of rhetoric lasted for centuries due to the well-known and perceived benefits of its practice. Rhetoric provided a means to formulate an effective speech, based upon the transfer of knowledge from a master educator. Students utilized its methodology to present an effective and well-designed paper. Both Aristotelian and Stoic rhetoric taught the principles of thinking and speaking logically, with correctness, and focusing upon the beautiful. Sophistry, on the other hand, allows for speech that may convince and manipulate, without respecting the truth and the correctness of what is conveyed. It may be argued that sophistry as a form of rhetoric was rejected in Antiquity, and by current philosophers, not because it was rhetoric, but because of the negative connotation it could bring to the subject. The ethics

involved is questionable, and in truth, when practiced, is considered to be logically and morally wrong. Sophistry is important to know about, for these very same reasons, so that the reader or listener is aware of it. It could even be argued that such well-known historical figures as Lenin and Goebbels were able to manipulate and persuade the general populace through such unethical means of persuasion as sophistry. In George Orwell's famous book entitled "Animal Farm", "pigs" may also be described as using sophistry.

When examining rhetoric in its historical sense, we return to the historical figures. This is itself not an easy task. A system is sometimes named according to its creator, and sometimes the title is generated from the central concepts, the number of supporters, or whether it is labeled due to the custom. In this study, central philosophers, or philosophical approaches, are examined. Gorgias and Isocrates were linked with Sophistry, which in the beginning had negative and positive attributes. Isocrates was a positive figure, a person who was not cynical about the power of the word. Plato and Socrates were not affiliated with any particular school of rhetoric. Instead, they discussed it, focusing on its merits and its pros and cons. Their views were central in our examination of rhetoric in Antiquity. Socrates was an educator, he thought and he discussed, his views were not presented in written form. Following the death of Socrates, his student Plato put some of his ideas into writing. Plato preferred the written form of dialogue. Plato started his own philosophy, putting forth his own ideas, while continuing to promote some of Socrates' teachings. Plato is well known for Plato's dialogues. The opinions of Plato and Socrates, historically, are incorporated as one. Both, in general, evaluated the theory and practice of rhetoric. They carefully considered the meaning of words and views from the perspective of truth. In their discourse, they discoursed with young and intelligent people, people who were enthusiastic about the power of words. Their influence brought about the beginnings of the dispute regarding the emphasis and role of words and

concepts in the educational system. Plato disputed the negative aspects of sophistry, including the cynicism of the power of the word, especially if rhetoric was to utilize sophistry. He ignored the positive attributes of sophistry, positive because it was the Sophists who initiated and spread the meaning of the word, and literature. Plato was looking only for the necessary and everlasting truths, which rhetoric cannot reach, since it is concerned with opinion. Aristotelian rhetoric stemmed from the thinking of Aristotle. Aristotelian views rejected the negative methods of the Sophists, focusing upon the positive aspects of rhetoric. They limited rhetoric to an opinion that was logically correct. Proponents of Stoicism were Cicero, Quintilian, and Seneca. The contribution of the Stoics is the addition of ethical discourse. There was no one or restricted process for describing something as being rhetoric, or not. There was not one form of rhetoric, but three, all for different reasons.

In current practice, between the three forms of rhetoric, research into the classical and Aristotelian forms merits attention. Sophists were not doing rhetoric but sophistry, which is a negation of true rhetoric, due to its lack of attention to the truth. At its inception, sophistry was treated as rhetoric. Both Plato and Aristotle rejected sophistry as a form of rhetoric. Aristotle presented reasons why sophistry may not be considered as a form of rhetoric. He went on to say that rhetoric, when properly conceived, is very useful, and he gave a proper way of understanding true rhetoric as a means for philosophical debate, and as a means for testing knowledge and learning.

Historically, the canon of education included rhetoric as one of the three main courses of study, the “trivium”. The other two central focuses of education included old grammar and logic. Contemporary grammar focuses upon a theory of correct speech. Greek grammar was more interested in excerpts from the best writers, one of whom was Homer. The field of logic, as studied in the Middle Ages, included the formal rules of definition, judgments, and syllogistic reasoning.

Rhetoric is currently lacking in many fields of study. An interest is growing in the re-implementation of the Classical, Aristotelian, and Stoic rhetoric. A unique program in applied rhetoric so understood was implemented in 2018, and continues to exist, at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The department of philosophy there hosts an integrated curriculum which begins at the baccalaureate level and progresses to the doctorate level. Due to their intellectual power, the three forms of rhetoric are viewed at this university as an indispensable element of education and subsequent practice.

Disciplines where rhetoric could be further implemented include law, journalism, philosophy, and in the seminary. Fragments of rhetoric theory and practice are taught in the seminary, including vocal projection and homiletics. On the other hand, various para-rhetorical courses are taught to professionals working in politics, journalism, and as public spokesmen. These are courses that were developed, derived from professionals in these fields, in order that students would learn the skills required in public speaking and the art of persuasion. They are, however, just courses, which do not provide deeper knowledge or skills in what had traditionally been encompassed by the name “rhetoric,” in any of its three traditional forms.

While an interest in returning rhetoric to the educational curriculum is growing, especially as an element of the “trivium”, and even more so as a major university field of study, the debate regarding its merit continues. In some circles, it is met with much resistance. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the ideology of the state system and functional literacy. It is possible for students to learn to speak and think at some higher level. A system of education may achieve this goal when it teaches classes in classical rhetoric, through education that supports the classical literature of Homer, Virgil, or Dante. On a personal level, as a university professor of philosophy, I, Professor Jaroszyński, continued to encounter intelligent students who could barely read and write. I found a solution to this dilemma, and discov-

ered the effects to be amazing, as students developed proficiency in speaking and writing. I solved this problem by writing a book of classical rhetoric for the modern student (co-authored with my father). This book was based upon the works of Aristotle and Cicero on rhetoric. It incorporated the ways of the theater. The co-author of this book was both an instructor of rhetoric and acted professionally in the art of drama. This information was included as part of a university program in which I taught.¹

Rhetoric remains very much a necessity in every form of human education, including the humanities. The object of every kind of education is, after all, the human person. The human person needs to be introduced into the kingdom of the culture of language and the words it employs, if that person, is, as a person, able to master language and the words it employs. This may be accomplished in a responsible way, and at an appropriate level. The human person then may develop further into specialized areas of practice. These specialized careers may include management and business, for example. The primary consideration is the development of the whole person first, and then the specialized area of practice, the career, develops.

The restoration of rhetoric to its deserved place in education and culture is supported by many, yet it continues to be controversial. Those who argue its merit, and oppose its implementation, perhaps do so from a level of misunderstanding. Returning to the rhetoric of antiquity, the beginnings, in its historical sense, is indicated. A clarification of rhetoric in its development, just what rhetoric in reality was meant to be, and the types of rhetoric that were used, may be a starting place. Determining what rhetoric was meant to be in its classic understanding requires discussion and argumentation. The question to be answered is

¹ Czesław Jaroszyński and Piotr Jaroszyński, *Kultura słowa. Podstawy retoryki klasycznej* [Culture of the Word. The Basis of Classical Rhetoric], (Szczecinek: Fundacja Nasza Przyszłość, 2008).

only deceptively simple. Two definitions of rhetoric that are imprecise and fundamentally in error, include: “art of persuasion by means of words” or “using words in a decorative and florid manner that is, however, devoid of substance.” If one were to base their arguments against rhetoric upon such concepts, rhetoric would not be restored to its due place, neither in education nor in culture.

In examining rhetoric in its historical sense, questions to be explored include: How did the ancients understand rhetoric? Was there one or multiple concepts of rhetoric? If there were more than one, in what theories and practice did they differ? If rhetoric gains approval in the educational spheres, and if it is returned to the mainstream curriculum, to which rhetoric would programs return to?

Philosophers of our present generation may argue that there was one notion of rhetoric in Antiquity. This tends to be a dominant form of thinking today. Various authors, *en bloc*, argue that differences between forms of ancient rhetoric are secondary, and emerge from questions of emphasis. However, it may be argued that this definition is oversimplified. The true rhetoric in Antiquity is complex. What is fascinating is that, after a thorough research of this subject, there were at least three essentially different concepts of rhetoric in Antiquity.² Another fascinating discovery of the researchers is that in Antiquity these different forms of rhetoric were not known to each other. Careful reconstruction of initial forms of rhetoric is required in our modern times and thinking, in order to understand, and make hypotheses, about these differences.

The Sophists were the first to appear historically, and may therefore be referred to as the creators of rhetoric. The Sophists were credited with discovering that rhetoric in itself, the “use of words”, may be a

² Just as there was not one concept of philosophy in Antiquity, neither was there one concept of rhetoric. To speak, then, of one notion of philosophy or one notion of rhetoric is highly imprecise.

powerful tool, a tool that could be used as an extraordinarily effective means of persuasion. Gorgias, considered to be a founder of Sophism, was a Sicilian philosopher (483–375 BC). He was famous for saying “the word is a powerful ruler” (“logos dýnastes megas eastín”). The written or spoken word can create: “achievements [that] are superhuman.” As illustrations of that power, Gorgias stated that well-formatted words: “stop fear and... remove sorrow... create joy and... augment pity.”³ The power of words as expressed by Gorgias restricts their impact and discussion to emotional states, although in general the Sophists’ ambitions were markedly greater. We know of some of the Sophists’ ambitions through the writings of Plato, who was critical of the Sophists. When examining rhetoric in antiquity, we must return to the dialogues of Plato, to gain perspective about how the Sophists understood rhetoric, and how Plato judged them.

According to the Sophists’ understanding and interpretation of rhetoric, the word would be effective in managing any topic, through the power of persuasion and through an appropriate use of words. According to Gorgias, there is no subject upon which a speaker would be unable to speak to a crowd more convincingly than any other expert.⁴ Sophists postulated that a speaker, without knowing a subject, could be better than somewhat knowledgeable in that field.⁵ Sophists argued that rhetoric should serve as an effective tool which could be used with representatives of the most diverse professions, the most diverse social classes, as well as with the masses. Those subjected to

³ Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, edited and translated by Douglas M. MacDowell (Bristol, UK: Bristol Classical Press, 1982), 22–25.

⁴ “... for there is no subject on which a rhetorician would not speak more persuasively, than any other craftsman, before a crowd”. Plato, *Gorgias. The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 459B.

the power of words would include the physician, the slave, the student of gymnastics, the judge, and uneducated crowds.⁶ The Sophist believed that their form of rhetoric would be able to influence both the feelings and emotions of the listener, as well as convictions stemming from knowledge.

Plato's critique regarding Sophist rhetoric was not systematized. For this reason, his polemic towards Sophist views requires careful reconstruction. Plato held that the power of the word in the Sophists' understanding had dimensions affecting the particular (those to whom the word was directed), as well as universal dimensions (the object brought about by the word). Sophists were making wide and sweeping claims regarding rhetoric and the power of the word, asserting that anyone could be convinced of anything. Plato objected to this viewpoint. He answered that one must have a real knowledge about the subject in question in order to convince. He argued that, through the use of rhetoric without such knowledge, the Sophists would only serve to cheat uneducated listeners.

Plato viewed the aspirations of the Sophists, as represented by Gorgias, to be prideful and dangerous. Platonic Socrates plunged with all seriousness into problems that were emerging from the claims of the Sophists. The aspirations of the Sophists were far-reaching. Their viewpoints had implications for not only rhetoric but could also shake the foundations of the culture that was emerging, a culture in which scientific knowledge played an important role. The Sophists' approach could devalue learning in general, and the sense of philosophy as a whole. By affording an enormous rank to words not grounded in real and true knowledge, both education and truth become meaningless. The Sophists could bring about a situation in which the desire to acquire academic knowledge would become redundant. People would

⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 452E–453A.

start to choose to become a persuasive Sophist, rather than study to acquire academic knowledge. Being cognizant of these dangers, Platonic Socrates seriously devoted their attention to these emerging problems, in order to resist the dangerous aspirations and pride of the Sophists as represented by Gorgias.

Socrates attempted to argue against Gorgias' platform in a step-by-step manner, focusing upon topics including: the expertise of the rhetorician, the use and misuse of flattery, morality and virtue, ethics, and the value of the human person. Socrates responded to the assertions of the Sophists. He made a strong distinction between those who could be influenced using the type of rhetoric a Sophist may use, and those who could not. Because the rhetorician is an expert in the art of persuasion, the people who possibly could be influenced through the use of rhetoric may be a crowd of people, or someone who is not educated in the subject at hand. He went on to describe rhetoric as a communication tool which would not be effective in persuading an expert. An expert would be unlikely to succumb to the rhetoric used by the Sophist, who is not familiar with or does not have a thorough understanding of the subject.⁷ The Sophist may attempt to win the approval of a crowd through flattery.⁸ Plato was strongly opposed to rhetoric being used for this purpose. He described the use of flattery as a weakness of the Sophist, stating: But both the crowd as well as one's self should avoid as worthless a rhetoric whose persuasiveness depends on flattery.⁹ Ethically and morally, flattery used as a tool of persuasion can only be described as unacceptable, as a vice and not as a virtue. For Plato, the highest value of human life included truth, the good, and the beautiful. The rhetoric of the Sophists did not defend truth, it did not contribute to knowledge or the wellbeing of the populace. For the

⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 459A.

⁸ Flattery, translated from the Greek word "kolakeia".

⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 527C.

Greeks, an essential question regarding the ultimate fundamentals of a whole civilization included the value of truth in the context of the meaning of human life. Truth was to be valued and worthy of serious argumentation. Truth was not to be taken lightly, nor was it to be used as a game. As the Greeks perceived themselves to be creators of civilization, ethics and morality were a high priority. Plato defended truth as one of the highest values of human life. Later, Aristotle tried to defend realism, against Plato's idealism.

Plato defined rhetoric as the ability to speak convincingly.¹⁰ In Plato's ongoing critique of the Sophists, Plato made a distinction between a truly wise person, one who is knowledgeable, and someone who instead through persuasion is capable of concealing ignorance to appear well-informed. A Sophist who uses rhetoric to make an impression that he knows something he does not, attempting to suggest knowledge in an area of ignorance, does not represent the truth.¹¹ This Sophist may appear to have wisdom only.¹² Plato differentiates knowledge, education, and learning from the limitations of a false premise of knowledge as promoted by the Sophists. He prevented rhetoric in its true sense from being wrongly understood because of Sophist plat-forms.

A strong proponent of rhetoric in the field of knowledge, Plato continued his discourse regarding the role of rhetoric and its place in culture. He argued against the Sophists' methods of persuasion and the concealing of ignorance, using familiar comparisons as a means of demonstration. He drew attention to the proper care of the body, using concepts of gymnastics (physical care and fitness) and medicine

¹⁰ To speak convincingly in Greek: "technē proseipontes". Plato, *Sophist. The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton, 1971, 222CD.

¹¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 233C.

¹² The actual Greek words used: appear: "phainontai" and wise: "sophoi".

(health expertise including nutrition) to illustrate his point. The Sophists, he argued, were only pseudo-health experts. A false pretence of fitness and health, cosmetics, and other forms of decorating the body could only bring about a beauty which is exterior and artificial. Natural and real beauty are interior states arising from true fitness and healthy regimes. Gymnastics and medicine focused on physical health and beauty. A moral rhetoric focused upon law, justice, and proper care for culture; sophistry focused upon legislation and politics. Plato utilized the concepts of opposites to negate the Sophist methods of pretending to be what they were not, and the use of deception. The false is a poor substitute for what was true and good. He compared gymnastics to law, and medicine to justice. Gymnastics and medicine represented care of the body, and law and justice served to care for the soul.¹³ Abilities and practices that are beneficial for humanity include medicine, gymnastics, legislation, and justice. Cosmetics, false cooking experts, sophistry, and rhetoric only seem to be beneficial; they may be appealing, yet their value is deceptive.¹⁴ Plato viewed rhetoric as a form of flattery. He believed rhetoric functioned in a similar fashion to what he referred to as cookery. Cookery serves to make food taste good, when in fact it is undesirable.

In examining the writings of Plato, he did not appreciate the rhetoric of the Sophists. It is questionable whether or not Plato made a distinction between the positive aspects of rhetoric used during the times, or whether he had a jaded view of rhetoric because of sophistry. When rhetoric is viewed from the lens of a Sophist, it is not highly regarded. Similarities between approaches and characteristics do exist. Information based on real knowledge is to be admired and is benefi-

¹³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 465A–C.

¹⁴ Greek terms referenced include: (cosmetics) “kommotiké”; (cooking) “opsopouké”; (sophistry) “sophistiké”; (rhetoric) “hretoriké”; (medicine) “iatriké”; (gymnastics) “gymnastikén”; (legislation) “nomothetikén”; (justice) “diazocine”.

cial. False knowledge only seems to be based on real knowledge. Often, sophistry, because of its lack of morality, may not have been supported by Plato as being a true form of rhetoric. The rhetoric of the times may have only considered the objects of legislation and justice. It is important to be aware of sophistry methods, and the negative connotation surrounding them, in order to not be tempted to implement this form of rhetoric, or to be misled because of it.

The words “Sophist” and “rhetorician” in Greek do not have, in themselves, a pejorative meaning. Instead, they are used to define a different aspect of the same activity, which is the process of speaking. The rhetorician is a speaker who delivers a public speech.¹⁵ And the sophist is someone who has knowledge and ability to be both wise and clever.¹⁶ Knowledge and cleverness express themselves through the ability to speak, and speaking deals with that which one knows and of which he is capable. A person may have the ability to speak with both knowledge and cleverness, both important aspects of communication. Because Plato assigns negative characteristics to both knowledge and cleverness, neither rhetoric in itself nor sophistry elicit his recognition. Plato’s critique of rhetoric and sophistry ignored their learned, cultural and educational value. Perhaps as a philosopher, he rejected rhetoric, and considered those who used it to be merely “learned specialists”. Approximately forty years following the death of Plato, Aristotle was born. Aristotle approached rhetoric from a different perspective than did Plato, defending its merits. In his analyses, Aristotle differentiated

¹⁵ Greek: “hretoreuo”. In its original Greek, this word referred to speech, or speaking, in its general sense. Later the meaning narrowed, it meant the ability to speak as a form of art. The rhetorician was a speaker, someone who delivered a public speech.

¹⁶ Greek: “sophizo”. The word initially referred, in general, to the ability to have knowledge, any knowledge. Later this word referred to knowledge and cleverness, with qualification, it took on a negative connotation. The sophist was considered to be someone who had the ability to be both wise and clever.

rhetoric from sophistry, assigning rhetoric exclusively positive characteristics, and Sophistry exclusively negative ones. In order to understand the process by which Aristotle recovered rhetoric, we must first see how the philosopher characterized scientific understanding.

Aristotle was interested in exploring the concept of “truth”. He differentiated scientific understanding from opinion. Scientific understanding requires for its object something that is necessary, permanent, and general. Scientific knowledge is always true. Opinion refers to whatever is contingent, mutable, and concrete: that which is ever-changing. Opinion may be true or false. For example: it is not always true that Socrates speaks, sometimes he may be silent. The word he used for this object of opinion in Greek is “*doksa*”.¹⁷ It may be possible for scientific knowledge and opinion to both be true. For this to occur, we would understand truth in the classical, traditional way, the state of “knowing” which conforms with the state of things.¹⁸ Aristotle used different terms to differentiate scientific truth and the truth of opinion. He referred to scientific truth using the Greek word “*alétheia*”, and the Greek word “*éndoksos*” referring to the truth of opinion.¹⁹ An accurate translation of the word “*éndoksos*” is difficult and may present a trap in translation. It is sometimes translated to refer to “probability”, which does not seem to be Aristotle’s intent. The actual Greek word refers to opinion. It does not refer to truth nor to probability. Aristotle explains more precisely what he intended opinion to mean. Opinion (“*doksa*”) is an agreed upon conviction, recognized by most people, among all or most philosophers, or by the most distinguished and famous.²⁰ Because

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by William D. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), VI, 3.

¹⁸ In Latin, the words used are “*veritas est adequation rei et intellectus*”.

¹⁹ The Greek word *endoksos* does not, however, contain the same relationship to truth as the word “probability”, but to opinion (“*doksa*”).

²⁰ Aristotle, *Topics*, translated by Paul Slomkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1997), I 1.

opinion can take many forms, not all are to be disqualified. There is no necessity for opinion to be true, although it may be. In order for opinion to be true, it must be shared by everyone, or shared by a select group, and not contain elements which are inconsistent or in conflict. According to his metaphysics, Aristotle distinguished between potency and possibility. Contemporary ontology neglects that which has the power to influence opinion, favouring the concept of possibility instead.

Aristotle's arguments had important consequences not only for rhetoric, but also for the future of the humanities. His arguments paved the way for the rehabilitation of rhetoric, refuting the theories of both the Sophists and Plato. Aristotle explained that opinion (*éndoksos*) so understood is in the domain of two skills: dialectics and rhetoric. Opinion in itself does not belong to the art of debate or argument. The universality of an opinion (*éndoksos*) is merely apparent in the case of eristics: judgments treated as universally admitted are not in reality universally acknowledged.²¹ Since eristics and sophistry share much in common, the paths of dialectics and rhetoric diverge from those of sophistry and eristics. How may dialectics be differentiated from rhetoric?²² The three functions of dialectics include: it trains the mind, facilitates contact with people, and helps philosophy.²³ Dialectics remains on the level of a certain possibility in such mental operations as proving or disproving some judgment, accusation, or defense. Dialectics neither has persuasion as its object nor does it seek to persuade. Rhetoric is an antistrophe.²⁴ For example, it forms its own fulfillment of dialectics.²⁵ Rhetoric contains what dialectics does.

²¹ Aristotle, *Topics*, I 1.

²² "Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectics." Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), I.1.

²³ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 2.

²⁴ The Greek word: "antistrofé".

²⁵ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 1.

Regarding their object, both rhetoric and dialectics cover a broad range and are not limited to one particular object.²⁶ Rhetoric may undertake the same operations as dialectics. A new element, however, appears in rhetoric which does not appear in dialectics: persuasion.²⁷ Beyond intellectual exercises, rhetoric concretely aims “to convince”.²⁸

Rhetoric for the Sophists was used to convince the listener to share in the speaker’s views, to create a conviction in the listener.²⁹ Because this was Plato’s understanding of rhetoric, he was opposed to it. When we characterize “rhetoric” today, we most often define it as the art of persuasion.

Aristotle approached rhetoric in a subtler manner than Plato did. He factored into his arguments opinion and scientific judgment. In discussing opinion, he considered the characteristics of persuasion, necessity, and compulsion. When comparing these to scientific truths, he factored in the characteristics of persuasion, understanding, and the person’s educational knowledge. Regarding opinion and rhetoric: when someone deals with an opinion, that opinion need not be recognized as true, it is an opinion in as far as the opinion may be true. Opinion differs from necessity, as necessity is what cannot-not-be. For example, two plus three added together can only be five, it cannot be anything else, it cannot-not-be five. When necessary judgments are used to serve as material for persuasion, they are to be treated as possible judgments. What is necessary is also possible. Compulsion also differs from opinion. Compulsion inadequately represents situations in which opinion is present. Opinion in itself must be free. Compulsion is what one accepts by force. Scientific judgments contain necessary truths. However, when a scientific judgment is treated as an opinion,

²⁶ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 1.

²⁷ Translated from the Greek word: “peithó”.

²⁸ Translated from Greek term: “pithanós”.

²⁹ “peithous demiourgós”. Plato, *Gorgias*, 453A.

that scientific judgment is to be evaluated along with methods of understanding the characteristics of persuasion. A person's ability to understand, a person's level of education, a person's ability to judge, evaluate, and process information, are all critical factors involved in evaluating whether or not the information presented may fall into the category of persuasion. Aristotle said that not everyone has the capacity to understand in order to recognize a scientific truth as truth.³⁰ An understanding of scientific knowledge is developed and acquired through study, and through a capacity to assimilate information.

Rhetoric aims to persuade. The rhetorician seeks to find the best argument for the specific conversation, searching constantly for an argument or kinds of arguments that may seem correct and appealing to the listener. When the correct argument is found, that argument becomes persuasive. Rhetorical persuasion is a matter of uncovering what might be convincing about a given subject to a given interlocutor.³¹ The outcome of rhetorical persuasion cannot be foreseen; one can even fear that someone will remain unpersuaded. It is always possible that the recipient, for whatever reason, may not be convinced. The listener always remains within the context of freedom to choose. Although arguments may be appealing to the listener, they may not be. But rhetoric, as Aristotle explains, suffices even if someone cannot be convinced. We should try to persuade someone in the same way that we would try to heal someone, even if that person is hopelessly ill. The obligation of curing someone is not dispensed with because of a state of hopelessness. Likewise, unwillingness to be convinced does not dispense the rhetorician from the

³⁰ Aristotle points out that even if one acquires great skill in the art of rhetoric, it might not suffice to convince some people, because to be able to grasp certain arguments requires education, which some people lack. Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 1.

³¹ οὐ τὸ πείσαι ἔργον αὐτῆς, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἰδεῖν τὰ ὑπάρχοντα πιθανὰ περὶ ἕκαστον (*ou to peisai ergon autes, alla to idein tauparchonta pithana peri ekaston*), Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 1.

effort of trying to convince someone over and over again.³² The rhetorician is advised to continue with efforts to persuade. This work is not about medicine in health. As an aside however, we confirm the importance of not only persuading, but also “healing,” to continue healing approaches even if someone seems to be very sick. Contemporary eugenics says if there is not too much hope of survival, we should not care for such a person. But Aristotle said: no—we should try at any price. Regarding rhetoric, Aristotle said it is important to try to heal, again and again. The rhetorician operates neither on the level of the necessary because it is necessary, as science is necessary, nor on the level of the merely possible, as logic may be merely possible.

The rhetorician’s goal is to persuade. Rhetorical persuasion focuses upon two subjects, according to Aristotle: the rhetorician and the listener. The professional rhetorician requires the ability to discover what can be convincing with regard to any subject.³³ The challenge is to search and employ orderly and methodical form to the arguments being presented. The rhetorician hopes to use convincing arguments that the listener will consider. A specialist is distinguished from an amateur according to the skills and methods employed, and the ability to use appropriate arguments. The amateur attempts to find appropriate arguments by accident, usually by relying upon feelings. Whether an argument is offered by a professional or amateur, the result is not wholly foreseeable. It is not known with certainty whether the listener will accept the arguments as being correct and convincing.

The task of the skilled rhetorician is to find the most appropriate verbal arguments for a given listener. In order to do this, the rhetorician must be capable of using various verbal methods of persuasion to

³² Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 2.

³³ ἔστω δὴ ἡ ῥητορικὴ δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρησαί το ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν (esto de he hretorike dunamis peri hekaston ton theoesai to endechomenon pithanon). Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 1.

convince the listener. The desired task of the listener would be to carefully consider the information being presented. The rhetorician cannot convince somebody. The deciding role when it comes to being convinced belongs not to the rhetorician, but to the person being persuaded. The listener is free to choose, and has the decisive role, about whether or not to be influenced. The listener will now have at his disposal the arguments previously unknown to him and as advanced by the rhetorician. Speaking more precisely, the rhetorician makes arguments. The decisive role belongs to the one contemplating what is presented, who may or may not acknowledge and accept agreement of the arguments. The listener chooses whether to be or not to be convinced. There is no necessity to be convinced. The possibilities for the use of rhetoric are immense. If the results of persuading arguments could be easily foreseen, rhetoric as an art form of persuasion could develop into a technology of persuasion. This technology, called sociotechnics, could become the most popular and effective means of communication in our modern democracy.

Consider again Plato's negative view of rhetoric as contrasted with the later works of Aristotle who supported it. The Sophists assigned to rhetoric a full range of possible persuasiveness. They incorporated into their repertoire persuasive statements that could be independent of an argument's truth and correctness, or of the argument's falseness or incorrectness. This was the Sophists' understanding of rhetoric. Plato disliked this attribute of the Sophists, thereby causing him to reject rhetoric in its entirety. Plato did not recognize a difference between sophistry and rhetoric in general. He did not believe rhetoric would be capable of convincing anyone of anything completely. Aristotle agreed with the Platonic critique of rhetoric, but he directed his disagreement towards the Sophists' misuse of a positive tool of communication. He resolved to redeem the positive aspects of rhetoric.

Aristotle identified a sphere in which rhetoric, even with its limited possibilities, could be a form of art and a necessary form of communi-

cation. Rhetoric could be useful while not serving to abuse the art. Communication regarding human affairs and human behavior belonged to the sphere of an art form. Rhetoric served as a necessary form of communication, appearing in human discourse in the form of opinions.³⁴ Aristotle listed three types of speech within the limits of such discourse. The types of speech more adequately subject to rhetorical persuasion include judgments, counsels, and descriptions. The speaker may be able to find the best arguments, arguments that for the listener would be persuasive and correct.

The Sophist, Platonic, and Aristotelian concepts of rhetoric differed, yet did agree on some ideas. The Sophist concept erased boundaries between itself and rhetoric to its own benefit. Because Plato identified rhetoric with Sophism, he discounted rhetoric's value. Aristotle was able to prove that rhetoric was different from Sophism, dialectics, science, and everyday speech. Aristotle made a huge contribution to the culture of the word and thought. He was able to prove that rhetoric could have a role. This was a great methodological achievement for Aristotle. The Sophists, Plato, and Aristotle were united in reducing rhetoric to the category of persuasion through the help of words. Both Plato and the Sophist believed it was a persuasion to which the listener passively submits. Aristotle differed here. For Aristotle, the rhetorician advanced a conviction of reason. The decisive role in choosing whether or not to be convinced belonged to the listener. The recipient of the argument chooses whether or not to be convinced through the use of reason. It is the listener's role to recognize whether a given opinion is true or correct, or false or misleading, and to decide whether he wants or does not want to be convinced.

It may be argued that the understanding of rhetoric differed fundamentally between the Sophists, Plato, and Aristotle. We therefore can-

³⁴ The Greek term used for human behavior was "prattómena". Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, I. 2.

not speak selectively of one concept of rhetoric in Gorgias, Plato, and Aristotle, reducing their differences solely to whether or not they accepted or rejected it. A central difference in these philosophies centred around the person who it was hoped would be persuaded. Questions to consider included the status of the listener, a desire or not to be persuaded, whether or not this listener was required to and must submit to persuasion, and how much individual will and free choice was to be considered a factor.

Sophist rhetoric aimed to persuade, regardless of the method used. Aristotelian rhetoric focused more upon creating good arguments, allowing the listener to determine whether or not the arguments were to be accepted or rejected. The Stoic, a third concept of rhetoric, existed in Antiquity more than two centuries after the time of Aristotle.

The Stoic school of philosophy strove to further develop the concepts of rhetoric developed by the Greeks, subjecting rhetoric to significant modifications. The contribution from the Stoics was to advance at minimum three closely connected concepts of rhetoric.

Quintilian, a Roman Stoic pedagogue and rhetorician, put forth the first Latin expression, “*ars bene dicendi*”. To speak and use rhetoric well is a virtue and an art. The Latin word “*bene*” has two meanings: to speak properly using correct rules, and, to speak truthfully and honestly. Rhetoric, for Quintilian, could thus be defined as the virtue to make a speech that was well-composed, moral, and honest and sincere.

Quintilian’s second concept in Latin was “*bene dicendi Scientia*”. Similar to his first definition, he substituted the word *Scientia* for art. *Scientia* in Latin comes from *scire*—to know, and *Scientia* in English would represent the fields of knowledge including philosophy, mathematics and rhetoric. Art may refer to ability and the knowledge of how to make something, while *Scientia* refers to a field of knowledge. Both definitions are complimentary.

The third concept of Stoic rhetoric was put forward by the Roman Stoic philosopher, Cao the Elder, “*vir bonus—dicendi peritus*”. Virtue

comes from Latin “virtus”, and “virtus” from “vir”. Vir is a man who is strong because of, but not limited to, physical, psychological, moral, and intellectual strength. The source of this force is inherently in our nature, and then it is methodologically strengthened by proper education. Through our desire and will, we can perfect that natural ability, through education, to reach the highest of skills. For example, one may have a talent for singing. That talent could be perfected through exercise, proper training and education, and the direction of a master. According to Cato, all areas of human life become dependent upon us. Skills need to be perfected in order to reach a virtue. Speaking and writing can reach perfection through talent, training, desire, and persistence, in order to obtain a virtue. This third concept of rhetoric is not an abstract “virtue”, but about a concrete virtue, a good, honest, and sincere person, who is able to speak the truth. In summary, the Stoics advanced at least three closely connected concepts of rhetoric: “ars bene dicendi” (Quintilian); “bene dicendi Scientia” (Quintilian); and “vir bonus dicendi peritus” (Cato the Elder).³⁵ All three definitions have similarities, but differ in some aspects or accents. These three definitions were later combined into one concise definition by the Christian writer Isidore of Seville. He defined (Stoic) rhetoric as the ability to speak well in public matters with the purpose of convincing one of the just and good.³⁶

In each of the three Stoic definitions of rhetoric, the word was included in them all. The three elements included the person who uses communication as an art and a science, following moral principles.

³⁵ Mirosław Korolko, *Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny* [The Art of Rhetoric] (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), 39, 42–44.

³⁶ *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, 1911 (Oxford: Clarendon Press. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, edited and translated by Stephen A. Barney, with collaboration of Muriel Hall. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), II, 1–3.

Both the person, and science, were able to permanently act according to the rules, to speak³⁷, and good³⁸. To speak referred to the ability to formulate a sentence in the form of a judgment, which could then be qualified as being true or false. Good had two meanings. Firstly, good as proper to the art of speaking, formulated in a way a judgment should be expressed. The receiver would be able to understand and evaluate whether or not the argument was true or false, because the speaker was able to formulate ideas allowing judgment to be expressed clearly. This skill in communication was an art. Secondly, good in that communication that is sincere is moral.

The definitions of the Stoics are too broad and lack an essential component of rhetoric. The Stoic definition lacks persuasion as a key element of rhetoric. Persuasion is an art, an art of the word, characterized so efficiently though Greek rhetoric. One may speculate on the reasons why persuasion was missing from the Stoic definition. It may have been obvious to the Stoics that the purpose of the rhetoric speech was to persuade. Another possibility could be because the Stoics shared a moral intellectualism which says that what is really recognized as good and true would be impossible to reject.

Many challenges with the Stoic understanding of rhetoric are apparent. When one considers the status of the speaker, the terms were too general. A person is the subject of various activities as part of the culture he creates, not just in rhetoric. References to the person in the definition of rhetoric add nothing to it. Likewise, art is not precisely differentiated from science. Differentiating what is necessary (science) from what is probable (rhetoric) is not mentioned. Finally, the notion of “good” is too broad. “Good” appears in each definition, with slightly different and imprecise meanings. The definition of “good” may have a moral or a technical meaning. The moral definition may refer to

³⁷ To speak: “dicendi”, which comes from “dicere”.

³⁸ Likewise present are words deriving from “bonum” (“good”): “bene”, “bonus”.

a truthful and good person, who differs from a misleading sophist. A moral definition may also be used as a purely technical definition. Good art or science may refer to the capacity of speaking that has been mastered at a high level of competency.

In summary, the Stoic definition of rhetoric is simply too broad. It leaves out what was most characteristic of Greek rhetoric, including the object, means, and purpose of persuasion. The object of persuasion is that which is probable. The means of persuasion includes the *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. *Logos* refers to an argument that uses logic or reason. *Pathos* is the quality that evokes sadness or pity. *Ethos* refers to the beliefs and aspirations of a culture, era, or community. The purpose of persuasion is to educate the listener in order to allow that person to make the right choices. The Stoics understood rhetoric to belong to the broadly conceived art of speaking, including the culture of the word.³⁹ In terms of the Stoic definition, we would only be able to know that we are dealing with rhetoric through particularization. We would be required to make it clear that we are discussing rhetoric through the following activities: to know that the object is probable, that there are specific forms of persuasion, and finally what it is that is probable.

As we carefully consider and evaluate the three types of rhetoric discussed in this article, Sophist, Aristotelian, and Stoic rhetoric, it becomes apparent that each form of rhetoric is different and unique, with their own set of beliefs, definitions, and methods. We certainly cannot identify Sophist rhetoric with Aristotelian rhetoric, nor Stoic rhetoric with either Sophist or Aristotelian rhetoric. We have, therefore, not one, but three concepts of rhetoric in the culture of Antiquity.

What was unique in the Stoic definition, when compared with the Sophist and Aristotelian versions, was the addition, and the emphasis, of the moral implication of rhetoric. Neither the Sophist nor Aristotelian versions referred to this. Words that could “imply” the

³⁹ In Latin: “*oratoria*” or “*eloquentia*”.

importance of the moral involvement in the use of rhetoric were present in the Aristotelian approaches. These words “bene”, and “bonus” could have had a moral implication, although that is suspect. Well-known in Stoic philosophy was the emphasis towards using rhetoric ethically, hence, the presence of a moral dimension to rhetoric could be surmised.⁴⁰ Considering the terms “ethics” and “morality” further, it is a question of language and meta-language. The original words derived from different languages, ethics, from Greek, and “mos” and “mores” from Latin. Both words refer to a custom. Ethics was based not upon duty, but upon a tradition that was followed by the group a person belonged to. Later, morality referred to the real good or evil, and ethics to different systems of what was supposed as good or evil. As language continued to evolve, morality became understood as a real good or evil in relation to every human being. Ethics became an accepted word that referred to a system of what is good or evil based upon some theory. We may have a common belief or acceptance of human morality when a person is respected as a person. Further, morality is considered to be a value that may either be good or bad, regarding a person’s activity and deeds, while ethics is considered to be a theory or system or moral acts. Different beliefs, theories, and approaches regarding the definition of ethics, about what is good and what is bad, were proposed by philosophers including Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, Epicurus, Kant and Hegel. The Stoics emphasized the addition of ethics (and presumed morality) to be considered in the warning against the misuse of words. Sophists, politicians, and judges allowed themselves the latitude to misuse words in order to create the effect of convincing someone. The truth, falsehood, or legality of the method used was irreverent to the Sophists. The Stoics removed the reproachful posture of the Sophists, they gave to rhetoric a moral dimension.

⁴⁰ Georges Rodier, *Études de philosophie grecque* [Studies in Greek Philosophy], (Paris: J. Vrin, 1969), 302–306.

In following the differences between the Sophist, Aristotelian, and Stoic definitions and practices further, the Stoics' definition of rhetoric was inadequate. The Stoics did provide a practical significance in their approach to rhetoric that served to oppose the Sophists. Aristotle provided a definition of rhetoric that was markedly more precise and universal.

In summary, three main concepts of rhetoric were present in Antiquity. These approaches evolved beginning with the Sophists, followed by the Aristotelian, and then the Stoics. All three approaches used words in common, yet as concepts they are essentially different. Rhetoric, according to the Sophists, is the art of persuasion through the assistance of words, independent of the truth. For Aristotle, rhetoric is the art of finding true or probable arguments with the purpose of persuading the listener. Aristotelian rhetoric hopes that the recipient will agree with the carefully designed arguments through careful consideration and free choice. The Stoics viewed rhetoric as eloquence possessed by a morally good rhetorician, who does not employ lies or deceit, nor exploits the culture of the word towards evil ends.

Through careful consideration of the arguments as presented above, the three concepts of rhetoric cannot be mechanically combined together under one title. To assign one concept to the definition of classical rhetoric is inadequate when describing rhetoric in its historical sense. Each of the three aforementioned schools of rhetoric is based upon different philosophical systems. Aristotle used the word "rhetoric". Stoic rhetoric possesses a great didactic value. Sophist rhetoric may be discounted by many as not being a true form of rhetoric, instead calling it "sophism". It is concealed today behind various types of manipulation.

Exploring and evaluating the merits of these three forms of rhetoric of Antiquity is worthwhile within the confines of the culture of the word and of logic. All three types of rhetoric hold a uniquely educative and formulated power, both positive and negative. Positive, if used in

a good and proper way, following acceptable rules. Negative, if the use of rhetoric is coercive and manipulative. One encounters today manipulative argumentation, often seen in political or media debates. These types of methods employed are referred to as being sophist, and not rhetoric. The practice of rhetoric today divorces itself from arguments that are not considered to be true and just, that which is called Sophist fallacies.

Knowledge of the use of verbal persuasion, which takes its force from the word alone, is missing from the curricula of secondary and academic education. Generation after generation have been missing an essential element in the training of the important and useful skill of rhetoric. Rhetoric training became substituted by “*sensu largo*” manipulation, used to not only influence word, but image and sound as well. “*Sensu largo*” is a Latin expression, commonly used in texts of differing languages, some time ago. It refers to an expression that was not to be taken precisely, but instead to be interpreted in a general way. It was not used to refer strictly to manipulation per se, but instead as a term to mean “more or less”.

Rhetoric has an etymological root in speech.⁴¹ The use of rhetoric implies using the “Art” of speech, which is proper only to the human being. An inclination to speak is natural for every human being. The ability to speak well and to speak the truth is an effect of virtue. This virtue is developed through proper education. The Greek word, rhetoric, indirectly suggests speaking in the most perfect way, something to be accomplished. The word in itself does not embrace the properties of good and true speech.

There is, unfortunately, no neutral sphere in the area of speech. When rhetorical education is missing in the curriculum, most of the weaknesses or even fallacies of communication come to the fore. Readiness to speak is proper to every human being. From the Sophists’

⁴¹ The Greek term: “*hreo*”.

understanding of rhetoric, one can learn that the effectiveness of speech cannot be identified with rightness.

From the Aristotelian understanding of rhetoric, one learns that not every scientist or philosopher should neglect the value of the word, true by what is contingent, or by its potency to be realized. The Stoics added the dimension of honesty as an important component of human speech, accepting that it may miss, on occasion, the aspect of truth. All three conceptions of rhetoric, when properly understood, have the capacity to profit and enrich the culture of the word, the way in which humans live. Each has something to add to the human dimension of language and persuasion.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank John Grondelski, who provided a partial draft translation of the original text from Polish to English. That text was used as a working model in writing this current article. This article benefited from the advice of Curtis Hancock on some matters of English usage.



Sophist, Aristotle, and Stoic: Three Concepts of Ancient Rhetoric

SUMMARY

This study examines the concepts of rhetoric used in ancient times, using a process of research based upon “Interpretivist Research Philosophy”. Common thinking among rhetoricians and philosophers in general argues that one concept of rhetoric was utilized. This paper argues that there were at least three concepts of rhetoric known in Antiquity. Each was unique in its own right and contributed to what was to be a new body of knowledge. Research conclusions stem from a study of the works of ancient authors, including Plato and

Aristotle, and from schools of philosophies, including the writings of Stoics and Sophists. The reviewed literature supports the thesis presented in this paper that at least three concepts of rhetoric were known and used.

Keywords: rhetoric, Sophists, Aristotle, Stoics, persuasion, antiquity

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