

*Classical Origins of  
Public Speaking*

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When, how, and why did people become speakers and listeners? Spoken words do not leave traces in the earth or in stone, or lasting impressions in the air. There are no fossils, no natural history, for the spoken uses of language. Consequently, we must reconstruct the early story of speaking and listening by using our imaginations and drawing upon what scientists can tell us about prehistoric humanity. Through the time machine of informed imagination, we can rush back through the blur of thousands of years until we come onto a scene that must have been typical.

It is night on the savannas of Africa, and huddled around a campfire that provides warmth and protection against the darkness beyond are some forty creatures who have human form. The campfire may have been the original site of civilization. It provided a time for conversation, an exercise period for the new and dawning power of speech. Through speech these early persons could exchange and build ideas, interpret the experiences of the day and learn from them, and plan for the experiences of the morrow. They also could settle disputes, and tell stories that would remind them of heroic accomplishments. In other words, around these ancient campfires humans would first practice forms of public conversation that the Greeks later identified as basic types of public speaking: **forensic speech**, which deals with judgments of past behavior in search of justice; **deliberative speech**, which debates plans for future action; and **ceremonial speech**, which celebrates the actions, traditions, and values of group life.

Before we leave this ancient scene, let us toss another log on the blaze and consider a few more features of our communication nature, as revealed in the faces that huddle close together around the protective fire. *We have evolved as social beings, dependent for our survival and well-being on the quality of words that pass among us in public speech.* The key to our social nature is our eyes. Did you ever consider the way our eyes are placed in our heads? If we were intended to be entirely self-sufficient, the placement of our eyes would hardly make sense. In that case, we

would have a band of vision that extends around our heads, providing us information from every direction. What we have developed instead is *telescopic vision*, that offers us only partial access to our environment, just that part in front of us. Within that narrow range telescopic vision does make it possible for us to focus with great precision and intensity on whatever objects interest or concern us. But the price of this precise but partial focus is that behind us and to the sides of us, we are blind, ignorant, and vulnerable.

How could humankind ever have survived with such an uneven capability of vision in such a threatening and uncertain world? The answer is obvious: humans could survive only by coexisting in groups, in which different individuals could focus simultaneously in different directions and relay cries of warning or opportunity to other group members. Archaeologists confirm that early hominids lived in bands of 30 to 50 creatures. They were social creatures who had to communicate to survive.

Early humans were also toolmakers, and our evolution can be traced in the quality of the tools we invented to shape our environment. *But the greatest technology we ever devised was the communication symbol, which allows us to talk about things when they are not actually present.* Communication symbols stand for objects, actions, qualities, relationships, and connections, and are combined into an integrated system called **language**. *The miracle of language is that it enables us to introduce order, meaning, and purpose into our lives.* Language makes it possible for us to control our environment, not just react to it. It makes intelligence effective. Like other animals, we can signal each other with cries of warning or pleasure, but we humans go beyond signal communication in our ability to discuss objects when they are far away in space or time. This symbolic communication even allows us to talk about dreams and goals that exist *only* in a world beyond sensations, a world we have made out of values and ideas. The communication symbol, exchanged in conversations around the many campfires of our lives, multiplies our capacity to learn about our past, to remember the lessons we have learned, and to set up plans and directions to plot our future.

Because it can make wisdom effective in public speeches, the communication symbol is vital to leadership. Clearly, the communication symbol has empowered our species. And it follows that the more proficient we become in using symbols, the more empowered we may be in our public and private lives.

## Developing the Theory of Public Communication

As our campfire vignette suggests, humans were practicing public speaking long before they began thinking about it as a practical art form. Public speaking was a natural response to their needs, and as they developed the gift of speech, early humans began to add the *sapiens* (meaning “wisdom”) that would justify their eventual designation as *homo sapiens*. When did they first begin to reflect upon this power of words, and why did they develop conceptions of their own ability to speak?

To answer this question, we must return on our trip through time until we arrive at a rugged, mountainous land (now called Greece) about three thousand years ago.<sup>1</sup> Just as the campfire is tied inextricably to earliest civilization, so are these Greek mountains connected to early speculation about speech and to the ongoing human condition that communication tries to relieve. The mountains of Greece always divided that ancient land, making it both difficult and valuable to communicate successfully among peoples. But then, don’t we humans often build our own mountains between ourselves and others that make communication hazardous and hard to achieve?

The great Homeric poems reflect the fascination of these early Greeks for the spoken word. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are filled with speeches, often given on the eve of battle. The heroic Odysseus is described admiringly as a man who can “talk his way out of troubles,” a man “clever with words.” This admiration for speech would carry over into a quest to understand the power and mystery of communication, producing that body of thought we now call **rhetorical theory**. The motive behind such theory was *the desire to harness the power of the communication symbol so that it might be more productive, and useful rather than harmful to society.*

Besides their natural curiosity, the Greeks were driven by one other great motivator, the gradual growth of the power of ordinary citizens to control their own destinies. This process was especially important in Athens, which became the center of a brilliant civilization. During a series of wars the common people received political concessions and wealth in return for risking their lives as soldiers. As Athens grew in power, trade developed, and new money flowed in to counterbalance the power of the old aristocracy. More power distributed among more people brought new opportunities and responsibilities for self-government. In that heady time all things seemed possible, even the distant dreams of

justice and freedom. But to reach those dreams would require direct, constant participation in civic life and the creation of institutions that would make public communication effective.

It was natural, for example, that people who were coming into new economic and political power would want to own their own land. As old systems of land ownership began to break down and disappear, arguments over who owned the rights to land were constant. In earlier days such disputes might have been settled by force; to their credit, however, the Greeks developed the idea of trial by jury to settle such disputes. We may take the legal system for granted, but to the early Greeks it was a wondrous invention, bringing justice to their lives. The price of such justice was that ordinary citizens had to learn to speak and represent themselves before these courts. There were no attorneys in those days. During the so-called Golden Age of Greece citizens might have to address juries as large as five hundred persons. If the picture provided by the playwright Aristophanes (in *The Wasps*) rings true, these were turbulent, noisy crowds that often shouted questions and challenged speakers. To speak before them might make bungee-jumping seem tame! The fortunes of the Athenians, even their lives, might well depend on their ability to speak under such conditions. Therefore, they placed great value on instruction in speech.

Self-government also meant that the Athenians had to participate personally in the assemblies that determined public policies and established laws. Just as they had no lawyers, they also did not elect representatives. They themselves assumed the responsibilities of speaking and listening, debating, deliberating, and deciding on the policies and plans that would govern their lives. Nowhere in place or time have the duties of public communication been felt more keenly by ordinary citizens.

Despite all the problems they encountered, the people grew as human beings as they assumed these responsibilities. It was as though the magnitude of the challenge made them grow from within, and this expansion of the spirit was one of the key factors in that outpouring of creativity and genius in all fields of art and knowledge during the Golden Age.

To answer our question, it was the Greeks who first reflected systematically upon the power of speech, and they did it both to satisfy their curiosity and to meet deep communal and political needs. For them, instruction in speech was both a pleasure and an overwhelming necessity. How they accomplished it is the story of the rest of this chapter.

## The Work of the Sophists

To meet these educational desires and needs, a group of teachers called “sophists” offered the first instruction in public speaking. “Sophistry” now denotes clever, deceitful speech, suggesting that some of these teachers did show, as Plato charges, “how to make the worse appear the better cause.” It was their bad fortune that Plato’s unflattering portraits determined how they would be remembered for eternity. In his own time, however, Plato himself was regarded as a sophist, in direct competition with many of those whom he ridiculed. “Sophist” originally meant “man of wisdom,” and it is in this spirit that we wish to consider the sophists’ work. Many of them made significant contributions to the theory of human communication, in addition to helping make democracy work. In the following pages we will consider how five of these sophists enriched the heritage of rhetoric.

### Corax (and Tisias)

As noted earlier, land disputes were a major subject of legal disputes in ancient Greece. These disputes developed early, and with special ferocity, on the island of Sicily. The sophists who were there at the beginning of these disputes were Corax and his student, Tisias, who wrote a lost treatise on forensic speaking. We know of their work through stories and quotations by others. Land disputes in ancient Greece were often murky, the records disputed, the facts hard to determine. Corax observed that since certainty is hard to attain in disputes, speakers must seek to establish probabilities and to reconstruct plausible accounts of reality, creating an impression of the likelihood of truth.

Much of what we know of Corax and of Tisias is hearsay, and some of that is mildly humorous. The name, “Corax,” was unfortunately close to the Greek word for crow (*korax*), suggesting that the sophist must have suffered all his life from bad puns. One story, which also illustrates the methods of probability at work in the courts, concerns a suit that Corax allegedly brought against Tisias, charging that the student had refused to pay for his instruction in public speaking. When the grave Corax stood before the jury, he argued: “I will build today a formidable case, which should merit your verdict. On the other hand, if Tisias seems more convincing, this only proves that I have taught him

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well and deserve my fee, expensive though it may seem." When the crafty Tisias stood to respond, he said: "I will lay before you such a convincing array of proofs that you cannot help but award me the verdict. On the other hand, if I seem incompetent, and Corax is more persuasive, this only proves the probable worthlessness of his instruction. That too should earn your vote in my favor, because I should not have to pay for bad teaching."

It is said that the jurors, drinking wine in the Greek sunshine and jeering as the orators spoke, simply hooted both of them out of court. Legend has it that one heckler shouted: *kakou korakos kakaoo* ("Bad eggs are all you are likely to get from a bad crow!").

As unkind as legend may be to the memory of Corax, Aristotle takes him seriously enough to criticize his approach to probability in some detail.<sup>2</sup> The topic of probability, grounded as it was in a quite pragmatic situation, nevertheless suggested to later sophists that objective truth may always be difficult if not impossible to find. What we take to be the truth, the meaning we find in things, is often the product of our own symbolizing.<sup>3</sup> Reality is often the projection of our own interpretations, expectations, and fantasies. This idea continues to resonate in contemporary philosophical disputes about the relationship between discourse and reality and the limitations of scientific investigation.

A second major contribution of Corax was that he developed a four-part pattern for the arrangement of forensic speeches:<sup>4</sup>

1. *Introduction*, in which speakers conciliate listeners and establish identification with them;
2. *Narration*, in which speakers tell their stories of disputed events clearly and vividly in order to convey an impression of reality;
3. *Argument*, in which speakers interpret the meaning of these events, imputing good and bad motives as appropriate, and presenting proofs to support their interpretations;
4. *Conclusion or peroration*, in which speakers summarize the main points of the cases, paint the consequences of favorable or unfavorable decisions by the juries, and plead for favorable verdicts.

Corax seems to have been an astute, practical observer. He left ideas of lasting value behind him, especially this notion that

speeches should have a strategic pattern of development. You will find much in your text about the importance of effective form and how to achieve it in various speech situations.

## Gorgias

Gorgias, an orator who could hold crowds spellbound with his eloquence, brought the new art of public discourse from Sicily to Athens, where both he and it quickly became the rage. Gorgias remains interesting to us for two reasons: first, his skepticism about truth and knowledge, and second, his emphasis on verbal artistry.

As a skeptic, Gorgias followed in the tradition of Corax, who found truth to be elusive and who taught orators to create instead the *appearance* of truth. For Gorgias, the uncertain nature of truth in land disputes was a metaphor for the status of truth in general; truth was at best, he thought, a shadow, an appearance, an illusion. Gorgias argued (1) that truth, if it exists, is divine and infinite, outside place and time. But (2), if truth does exist in this way, then it is impossible for humans to know it, for we exist within space and time. So (3), if we cannot know truth, then we cannot possibly communicate about it.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to observe the parallels between Gorgias and modern philosophers such as the Existentialists, who emphasize the meaninglessness of our lives unless and until we create the meaning. But unlike the despair in which such thinking appears to end, Gorgias saw positive, even heroic implications. He felt that through words, people can create a community of values, ideals, and purposes. Against a background of nothingness, Gorgias insists on the human power to build reality through the resources of language. Words become the torches we hold up against the darkness that surrounds our lives. Gorgias went on to examine the power of words, and founded that branch of rhetorical study known as *style*, presented in more detail in Chapter 10 of your text.

Gorgias's approach to word power raises serious questions. If there is no objective reality against which we can test the accuracy and honesty of many words, then language may be used to deceive us. Contemporary scholars have identified certain forms of linguistic power to which we may be especially vulnerable. Such words may command us by their connection with our values, as

in "Progress demands that we go forward with this plan."<sup>6</sup> Other powerful words seem licensed by our political faith to give fateful orders; for example, "We must be willing to die to defend *freedom* and *the American way*."<sup>7</sup> Still others associate with natural experiences that move all humans, such as, "This plan will carry us out of the *darkness* of today into the *light of tomorrow*."<sup>8</sup> Words undeniably have the heroic potential Gorgias portrayed, but they also can betray us. As students of public communication, we must learn how to identify the one form of usage and guard against the other. And for this recognition we owe a considerable debt to Gorgias.

### Protagoras

Protagoras follows in the skeptical tradition of Corax and Gorgias. If truth is unknowable and meaning is but a construction of our own symbols, then, concluded Protagoras, "Man is the Measure of all Things." This memorable statement summarizes the sophistic point of view while it celebrates our capacity to create a world of values and judgments. Therefore, it also heralds the philosophical and ethical tradition of *humanism*, which places humanity at the moral center of the universe. Humanists concentrate on how to improve peoples' lives and how to enhance and enlarge their moral and spiritual natures.

Protagoras had to confront a serious problem: If truth is humanmade through communication, then truth must also be an uncertain, precarious product. It must change with time and circumstance and be subject to errors of prejudice and logic. If this is so, how can we have any confidence that the truth we are accepting at the moment is justified? To answer this troubling question, Protagoras suggested the discipline of **debate**, which tests all claims to truth against competing claims in open encounters before audiences qualified to decide which is superior and inferior. Since debate reveals errors of information, logic, and argument, then debate can help improve our thinking. Truth claims that can survive such rigorous challenge are most worthy of our trust. Thus skepticism had found its method, its means of dealing with the problem of redefining truth as a human invention. For Protagoras, no truth claim was sacred, above the possible indignity of refutation.

Protagoras had his critics, both in public and in intellectual life. Many suggested that he was a heretic, since he encouraged, or at least tolerated, debates about the divinity of the gods. Socrates charged that Protagoras emphasized winning debates over any truth-values they might have. But the sophists answered that the prevailing point of view in disputes *was* the truth, and that debate disciplined the process by which truth was discovered.<sup>9</sup>

Despite such criticisms, the students of Protagoras enjoyed many benefits from his instruction. He made education exciting, filled with conflict and color. On a deeper level, he taught students the virtues of caution and tolerance. If truth was humanmade and fallible, then one must be very careful before committing to a side in conflict. If people often differ in their perceptions of issues, and "right" and "wrong" are products of a point of view, then one should be more broad-minded in understanding the commitments of others. Those educated in the tradition of Protagoras recognize that truth is elusive—you cannot capture it like fireflies in a bottle. Right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood, rarely line up on opposing sides, and choices are often not simple and easy. Rather, contending sides usually have their own versions of truth and morality. The difficulty of choosing between them is that we must reject and lose the values and virtues of the one even as we endorse the values and virtues of the other.

One problem with the skeptical attitude toward truth is that it can discourage us from making *any* deep commitment to a point of view. We can develop the disease of indecision. Another problem is that debate can lead us to see only two sides of an issue, those that are most clearly in conflict. This two-valued orientation can cause us to ignore or overlook other options that might bridge the opposing sides and gain the advantages of both. For example, in the debates between industrialists and environmentalists, what may be needed is an option that would emphasize *protecting the environment as an industry*, devising technology to counteract the ravages of humankind. If we are too emersed in the debate perspective, we might miss that kind of creative option.

Despite such problems, the ideas of Protagoras have enriched our culture. The discipline of debate is built into our democratic political systems and into all intellectual systems that value inquiry and discourage blind conformity to ideas. Protagoras taught us to discipline verbal conflict so that it might become productive and helped us manage the responsibilities of freedom.

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## Thrasymachus

Different sophists reacted in different ways to the central insight that truth outside any human agency is essentially unknowable. In contrast to Protagoras, who sought to perfect the human way of constructing truth, Thrasymachus framed an ethical response. If humans cannot enjoy divine truth, they should emphasize personal power. Powerful people, thought Thrasymachus, enjoy lives of influence and fulfillment.

In pursuit of power, Thrasymachus offered his students practical instruction. Rather than focus on the content of speeches, he emphasized the impression speakers make in their presentations. He especially stressed the importance of a pleasing rhythm in vocal patterns, suggesting also that those who *sound* confident and knowledgeable, whose voices are commanding, and whose gestures are dramatic, usually succeed before audiences. He also emphasized stirring and engaging the emotions of listeners, an important key to rhetorical power. While such techniques are often criticized, ethically sound, well-conceived messages often seek to *move* listeners, in addition to courting their rational consent. Speakers must often overcome a certain inertia in listeners: even when audience members are convinced, they may not wish to act. At that moment, lessons drawn from the tradition of Thrasymachus may be quite useful.

Thrasymachus also contributed to the growing interest in style. He may have explored the concept of what we now call the **trope**, that is, a powerful figure of speech that can give distinction and originality to the spoken word. Tropes like the metaphor (“Her words *flamed* with feeling”) or the synecdoche (“The *tongue* is more powerful than the *arm*”) can make ideas more memorable and influential. Modern literary and rhetorical scholars have extended and deepened the concept of the trope. For example, Kenneth Burke has identified certain “master tropes” as major ways of presenting subjects.<sup>10</sup> The metaphor “flamed” in the above example gives us a unique perspective on how the speaker spoke by using new and surprising language instead of an expected word. By using parts to represent the whole, the synecdoches “tongue” and “arm” illustrate a complex idea, the comparative strengths of eloquence and of physical force in most situations. More than devices of decoration and impressiveness, Burke noted, such tropes are the molds of our creativity. Thrasymachus had discovered a very rich concept for exploration as he sought to enhance the power of speakers.

## Isocrates

While Thrasymachus sought personal power in place of truth, Isocrates found a loftier alternative. Isocrates wished to build an ideal society among the Greek peoples he loved. He wanted his students to think not so much of personal gain as of the contribution they might make to civilization through the wisdom and selflessness of their words. His attitude toward the civic power of speech is indicated eloquently in the following quotation:

\* Because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of the wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish.<sup>11</sup>

It followed that those who spoke well would be the natural leaders of society.

In pursuit of his civic vision, Isocrates built the most influential school of his day, one that became the prototype for many practices in the modern university. For example, he screened his students carefully with respect to natural ability. Because speaking before the Athenian courts and assemblies was so stressful, Isocrates also required that his students demonstrate courage and vocal strength. He expected them to stay with him for three or four years of intense training. They would get a liberal arts education, which included a knowledge of Greek culture as well as theories of writing and speaking. He required students to write themes applying the principles they had learned, and he criticized them closely, from the ideas they developed to the wording they used. He also worked with them on presentational skills, drilling them until the idea of addressing the difficult Greek audiences would hold no terror for them. Finally, he would take them into the marketplace to present “recital” speeches before live audiences. No doubt some stumbled over this last barrier, but others would step into leadership positions in the state. Then Isocrates could watch with pride as his prize students helped enact his vision of a greater Greece. Old Man Eloquent, he was called. He knew that the Greece of his day was a miracle, and that it was worth spending one’s life to make a contribution to its quality. That was his answer to the tragic condition described by the sophists.

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"HOW TO  
WIN FRIENDS &  
INFLUENCE  
PEOPLE"

## The Sophists in Overview

\* The five sophists we have considered can all be viewed in response to the central idea that humans make their own truth.

Corax recognized that probability, not absolute truth, must be the goal of the speaker in an uncertain world and showed how forensic speeches should be artfully arranged. Gorgias emphasized our creative, even heroic, capacity to create a world of meaningful values and goals. He emphasized the importance of words as tools to build a universe of shared meaning. Protagoras confronted a problem central to the sophistic position: in a world of relativistic truth, how can we know whom to trust, or whose version of truth to accept? His answer was the discipline of debate, deliberately confronting contending claims to see how well they stood up under the ordeal of verbal conflict.

Thrasymachus believed that if all truth was transitory and changing, then humans could enjoy only the power of their own abilities with words and the success they might achieve. He emphasized presentational skills and impressive language that could arouse the emotions of listeners. Isocrates emphasized communal over individual values, teaching the power of speech so that his students might become leaders of the Greek world. Of the five considered, he was the greatest educator, leaving a heritage of excellence to challenge all teachers who would follow. His influence can be seen in the idea of the modern university, especially in its emphasis on liberal arts education as the foundation of all knowledge.

Through the work of these and other sophists, a body of knowledge on public communication began to accumulate. It was in need, however, of some master intellect who would organize it, fill in its empty places, and shape its overall meaning. That master intellect was Aristotle, and his treatise is called *On Rhetoric*.

## Aristotle's Ideas on Public Communication

Aristotle wrote the *Rhetoric* around the middle of the fourth century B.C. near the end of the Golden Age. Thus he had the advantage of all the theoretical work that had been done during the century before and was in an ideal position to complete, integrate, refine, and place in perspective those ideas about human communication.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of the *Rhetoric* merely as an advanced expression of the work of the sophists. Aristotle began with a premise fundamentally different from that of sophistic rhetoric. He was not especially concerned with the existence or nonexistence of ideal truth, nor was he interested in public communication's work in constructing the meaning of life. Rather, Aristotle had the mind of a scientist, asking questions such as "What can we learn by observing life around us?" It is this spirit of inquiry and curiosity that breathes through the *Rhetoric*. And by the quality of his perceptions and interpretations, Aristotle lifted the study of communication until it became the serious subject for learning and research that it remains today.

## Definition of Rhetoric

Rather than focusing on problems such as how to organize a speech or make a more effective presentation, Aristotle starts with the nature of the mind as it encounters problems of communication. "Let Rhetoric," he wrote, "[be defined as] the ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion."<sup>12</sup> \*  
 With this definition Aristotle posed a considerable intellectual challenge for public communicators. The capacity to see the available means of persuasion in each case may imply: *Def. of Rh.*

1. that speakers must understand the nature of persuasion, including all techniques, processes, or proofs that might advance it;
2. that speakers must understand their own cultures, including the myths, legends, faith, or prejudices that can affect specific controversies;
3. that speakers must understand the general needs and susceptibilities that persuasion can satisfy;
4. that speakers must understand the immediate pressures, fears, dreams, and hopes that motivate particular audiences who must decide specific cases;
5. that speakers must know the extent to which they enjoy the trust, respect, and liking of their listeners;

6. that speakers must know all the details of cases, and the range of possible strategies that might be used both for and against different positions on them;
7. that speakers must understand their own strengths and weaknesses as communicators, recognizing which techniques, proofs, arguments, or appeals are suitable in light of these abilities and limitations;
8. that speakers must understand the strengths and limitations of the communication media of their time. For example, in our contemporary culture, should political candidates with limited budgets buy large amounts of radio time or small amounts of television time to present their messages? Should candidates choose to speak on radio or television, or should they emphasize written messages in newspaper ads? Such questions would have been "Greek" to Aristotle, but nevertheless come up when we consider the enduring and expanding applications of his definition.

Aristotle's definition not only implied the wide range of rhetorical knowledge needed but also suggested the many ways public communicators could improve their abilities, from learning more about the times in which they lived to developing the strength and variety of their voices and gestures. The definition anticipates the position that the Roman speaker and writer Cicero would strike some three centuries later in his classic treatise *De Oratore*. There Cicero describes ideal speakers as those who are broadly conversant with the knowledge and culture of their times as well as adept in the arts of oratory.

Finally, Aristotle's definition leads to the study of rhetoric as a critical as well as a productive study. The critic can ask how well certain speakers apply the available means of persuasion in particular cases. All in all, the definition suggests that the study of public speaking should aim at developing an educated sensitivity to what is possible and not possible in specific communication situations.

### Forms of Rhetorical Expression

As Aristotle studied the public communication around him, certain major forms of rhetorical expression seemed obvious to him.

His classification system, exhaustive for his time, is still useful today, despite the many changes since his era. Aristotle described three basic forms of public communication: forensic speaking, which was used in the courts; deliberative speaking, which was used in the assembly; and epideictic speaking, which was used during ceremonies. All of these forms are related to the presentation of time.

*Forensic Speaking.* The speaking that took place in the Athenian courts sought to reconstruct the past in search of justice. As we learned from the sophists, speakers would "tell the story" as they saw it, relating events that might influence the jury's decision. They supported their narratives with evidence, proofs, and arguments designed to make the jury believe them. They would also expound on the characters of those involved in the disputes. For example, to support charges of wrong-doing, speakers would depict the accused as persons capable of committing such crimes. To support pleas of innocence, defendants would reveal their own characters in a sympathetic light, making it seem improbable that such fine citizens could have committed the alleged deeds. Because actual events often could not be recovered in any objective way, all the jury had to go on were these subjective stories, which offered sharply opposed accounts of what had happened.

As speakers struggled to convince juries, Aristotle observed that they often used a form of reasoning he called the **enthymeme** (or rhetorical syllogism). The enthymeme applied deductive logic in the dusty world of passionate, contending persuasions. Put in its simplest form, the enthymeme starts with a **major premise**, some general belief or conclusion, even prejudice, that the jury already accepts, such as, "People always want more of a good thing" or "You can't trust Macedonians." The first of these examples demonstrates what Aristotle called a **universal topic of argument**, a belief held presumably by all persons. The second example demonstrates a specific or **special topic of argument**, held only by the people within the culture represented by the jury. Speakers, Aristotle observed, sometimes don't even have to mention or reinforce the major premise. They can simply assume that it exists already, embedded in the minds of their listeners and ready to be activated in support of an argument.

The second step of an enthymeme was to establish the **minor premise**, some specific statement or claim that relates to the major premise. In the examples offered, a speaker might say,

“Hector saw the gold and wanted it” or “Hector is a Macedonian.” Usually the minor premise would be stated and often would be the point of dispute. Was the gold actually there, and, if so, did Hector see it? Were there other things on Hector’s mind besides gold? Was he indeed a Macedonian, and if so, were there trustworthy Macedonians one might mention that would form exceptions to the prejudice and weaken its force? There was good reason to dispute the minor premise, for if it stood, and if the major premise was accepted without question, then the **conclusion** must follow: “Hector stole the gold” or “You can’t trust Hector.” Aristotle saw correctly that the enthymeme is typically the center of contention in forensic rhetoric.

*Deliberative Speaking.* Speaking that occurs in the assembly—the legislature, town meeting, or executive board room—seeks to mold the future. Deliberative speaking is a creative form that encourages control of our lives through careful planning. For example, the question “How can we sustain and rebuild the world’s forests?” could prompt deliberative speaking to design a useful plan.

We noted that the reasoning used in forensic speaking is largely deductive, drawing conclusions from the connections between general and specific premises. In contrast, the reasoning used in deliberative speaking is mainly inductive; that is, people make decisions about which plans to adopt largely by considering what has already worked. Inductive reasoning surveys a range of relevant previous experiences and draws conclusions on the basis of that information. This is why Aristotle identified the **example** as the technique most essential to deliberative speaking. If you wished to recommend a worldwide reforestation plan, you might cite similar plans in West Virginia, Montana, and Oregon. These examples would serve as models from which you could draw both caution and encouragement.

It is clear, Aristotle remarked in a slightly cynical spirit, that when people reconstruct the events of the past they can indulge in the luxury of moral judgments. But when they think of designing the future, they emphasize instead the twin criteria of expediency and practicality. “Will the plan work?” and “Can we afford it?” are the kinds of questions deliberative speakers ask. Nevertheless, Aristotle thought, deliberative speaking deserved more honor and attention than it had received in his day. The past has already moved on, but we can control the future.

*Ceremonial Speaking.* Possibly the least satisfying part of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is his treatment of **epideictic speaking** that takes place during public ceremonies. He remarks rather sourly that the function of such speaking is to exhibit the orator’s skill. He mentions no other social significance for it.

Now, in the spirit of Protagoras, let us consider a sharply opposing view, the possibility that ceremonial speaking may actually be the most vital of these forms. We begin by considering the importance of social ceremonies, especially of historic moments such as Pericles’ *Funeral Oration* or Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address* or even, occasionally, of our own presidential inaugural addresses. *The business of these significant rituals, we maintain, is that they define the social fabric, the vital values, dreams, and myths that create a sense of community.* Such speaking spans time as it seeks to describe the ongoing community. Thus Pericles explained—for all time to come—what it meant to be an Athenian. Lincoln defined the American political dream of government “of the people, by the people, for the people,” leaving his own deep imprint on our values and redefining the spirit of the American Constitution for succeeding generations.<sup>13</sup> The transcendent importance of such speaking is that it can establish the **master premises** by which people live, evaluate the past, and map their futures. Therefore, ceremonial speaking can provide the foundation for deductive argument in forensic and deliberative speaking and in this sense can be the most important form of public address. Without successful ceremonial speaking, the people remain divided, and there is no sense of shared heritage to light the way into the future.

As we noted earlier, Aristotle somehow missed this deeper significance of ceremonial utterance. Perhaps it was because the sophists, many of whom were not Athenians and were therefore banned from speaking in the assembly, often concentrated on this form and excelled in it. Isocrates especially, whose excellent school was in direct competition with Aristotle’s, developed masterful model ceremonial speeches. Whatever the reason for this unusual and atypical insensitivity, Aristotle did identify the technique most characteristic of such speaking. It was, he said, the **image**, the ability to paint vivid pictures of vice and virtue, heroism and villainy so colorfully that they remain etched in the minds of listeners. We know now that these images are more than just verbal pictorial art; rather, they are moral pictures that help bring home the nature of the social contract. Just as the Statue of Liberty expresses the idea of liberty in concrete form,

they are icons that can give to vital abstractions the sense of living reality.

*Aristotle's Forms as Functions.* There is one other important point we should not miss about Aristotle's classification of the forms of speaking. While for him these remained separate kinds of speech, it is easy to see how the forms often work together within a single speech as integrated functions. Thus we may judge the past, direct the future, and celebrate social identity, all within the same speech. Enthymeme, example, and image can reinforce one another. As you listen to speeches in class, be alert for these interacting forensic, deliberative, and ceremonial elements.

### A Theory of Proofs

What is it that strengthens enthymemes, validates examples, and authenticates images when they are under attack? What makes a speech credible? Aristotle found answers to these questions in his theory of proofs, which you will find explained in greater detail in Chapter 14 of your text. Here we will simply introduce an important contribution of the *Rhetoric*.

*Logos (substantive proof).* One important way to make claims credible is to support them with logical and substantive proofs, based on factual evidence and expert testimony. *Logos* was the source of proof preferred by Aristotle, because he wished to encourage public address as a rational enterprise among thinking people. Such proof, he said, originates in the speech itself.

*Ethos (personal proof).* A second vital form of proof, *ethos*, originates in the perceived character of the speaker. Is the speaker someone who is trustworthy, knowledgeable, and likeable? If so, the speaker's word may be enough to prove the point. Though logicians often classify such proof as a fallacy (*argument ad hominem*), Aristotle recognized that the character of the speaker is a legitimate concern. In our time, when the facts are often complex and hard to determine for ourselves, and when television brings speakers "up close and personal" for our inspection, the importance of *ethos* has been magnified several times.

*Pathos (emotional proof).* The third form of proof, *pathos*, grows out of the feelings of listeners. Aristotle discusses at some length how speakers can engage people's emotions successfully, developing in effect a practical psychology. Thus he refined and developed the line of thinking we encountered in Thrasymachus. Contemporary scholars have explored the emotional depths of audiences in great detail. To accommodate their findings we suggest in Chapter 14 a division between proofs that activate personal emotions (such as anger, fear, and shame) and those that tap into group or social emotions (patriotic feelings connected with legends, traditions, faiths of the culture). We call the latter *mythos*, maintaining the parallelism of Aristotle's classification.

The range and breadth of Aristotle's observations on the nature of proof remain valid and will be useful as long as humans themselves remain essentially unchanged.

### Beyond Aristotle

This brief account only begins to suggest the depth and wisdom of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. For example, his emphasis on the consideration of listeners in the design of persuasion pointed up the importance of audience analysis and adaptation, long before Donald C. Bryant's memorable description of rhetoric as the "adjustment of ideas to people and of people to ideas."<sup>14</sup> The influence of the *Rhetoric* has spread across the centuries.

An immediate impact was that Aristotle's work set the agenda of contributions by the Roman rhetoricians. For example, Cicero's description of rhetoric as "an art made up of five great arts" seems a logical extension of the *Rhetoric*. Cicero identified these arts as (1) *invention*, the discovery and selection of ideas, themes, and lines of argument for a speech; (2) *arrangement*, placing these ideas in the most advantageous order; (3) *style*, expressing these ideas in the most effective language; (4) *memory*, filing these ideas away in the mind according to a system so that they can be easily recalled; and (5) *delivery*, bringing the ideas to life before audiences. Cicero's approach would remain the dominant theme of rhetorical education for many centuries. Additionally, the Roman educator Quintilian was influenced by Aristotle's account of *ethos*, such that he even defined the orator (in the sexist language of his time) as "a good man skilled in speaking."

Beyond the Roman period, we can only sketch some of the exciting developments that would follow in the spirit of Aristotle. We could devote a chapter, for example, to the story of how Christianity, under the guidance of St. Augustine, took over these pagan ideas, which began in such an atmosphere of scepticism about divine truth, and put them to work for the conversion of souls and the propagation of the new faith. In the Middle Ages we could show how the study of rhetoric joined grammar and logic to form the center of liberal arts education. And we cannot even begin to suggest the revolution in human communication that would come with the Renaissance and on into the modern era. All we can say is that with the help of many theorists, practitioners, and educators, especially during the Greek period, humanity had ventured a long way from the campfire. But we still must use words to light fires against the darkness that somehow always threatens our extinction.

### Plato's Challenge

Before leaving the classical era, we must consider an ethical challenge to rhetoric posed by Aristotle's teacher, Plato. It is said that the young Plato was an attractive, popular person who seemed destined to play an important part in political life. His early dialogue, *Gorgias*, may represent a personal struggle between a political career and the life of a philosopher. In that dialogue, the private life of the philosopher wins out over the public life of the politician, and in the process Plato comes to some depressing conclusions about public communication. The only reason Plato can see for wanting to be a politician is that one might make some contribution to public life by elevating the souls and minds of people. But, Plato observed, people in general don't want to be improved. They prefer speakers who flatter them, who make them comfortable in their ignorance, and who articulate their prejudices and desires. Plato also believed that people are generally incapable of making good, farsighted decisions, especially when they must give up some short-term advantage. They even resent and reject those who try to make them confront such decisions. Therefore, politicians must be either quite cynical or quite limited, perhaps both. They must be willing to play the role of panderer, not teacher, and must be able to sleep well at

night after uttering words that reinforce evil attitudes or invite unwise decisions.

These considerations led Plato to assume an undemocratic, elitist posture. Freedom of speech for him was inconceivable. Its sole result would be simply to unleash the great beast (which is how he pictured public opinion). According to Plato, people must be controlled, not liberated. Words like "liberty" and "equality," which have become almost sacred in the Western tradition, would have repelled him. Power must be reserved for the few, the enlightened philosopher-kings, not distributed among the people. With this dark vision, Plato had no choice but to reject a public life and public communication itself.

Later in his life, Plato revisited the subject of rhetoric in his dialogue, *Phaedrus*, and his views seem to have moderated. In the later dialogue Plato concedes that there can be a more noble speech when it is informed by philosophy and when it tries to lead people gradually toward knowledge. Plato compares this process to an ideal love relationship, in which the lover seeks to lift the beloved toward a better life. The speaker must be content with small gains, for the process of evolving toward divine knowledge must be slow indeed. But at least rhetoric has a positive role to play and is pictured in a cooperative not adversarial relationship with philosophy. At the heart of rhetoric, Plato says, is an understanding of people, of what they know and are capable of knowing, and of how to move them successfully from the one state to the other.

Despite the beauty of the *Phaedrus* and the loveliness of its vision, there remain some serious problems. For one thing, Plato continues to place people in a rigid class structure in which some are clearly superior and others inferior. The dream of equality that later would inspire Lincoln at Gettysburg remains foreign to him. Moreover, despite the cooperative roles he finds for philosophy and rhetoric, the former remains superior to the latter: first one must find the truth (philosophy), then communicate it to others (rhetoric). This introduced a kind of class snobbery into the tradition of knowledge as well. Moreover, such a view may be deluded as well as arrogant, because it suggests that philosophers may not be susceptible to rhetoric themselves as they seek knowledge. Many contemporary scholars would dispute that assumption.

Despite such limitations, Plato does leave us with a formidable ethical challenge. Can we build a credo for public communication that captures the ideal of loving speech painted in the *Phaedrus*

without the troubling elitism of that vision? Can we—in our own practice—combine both rhetorical skills and ethical sensitivity? Can we, for example, respect the responsibility and right of listeners to form their own judgments in light of the evidence and conclusions we put before them? And can we remember that our public speaking participates in creating that symbolic environment in which we all must live, and especially remember our personal responsibility not to pollute that environment with ill-informed and exploitive speech? These are questions we should remember as we develop our knowledge and proficiency in public speaking.

### Terms to Know

forensic speech	universal topic of argument
deliberative speech	special topic of argument
ceremonial speech	minor premise
communication symbol	conclusion
language	example
rhetorical theory	epideictic speaking
style	master premises
debate	image
two-valued orientation	logos
trope	ethos
enthymeme	pathos
major premise	mythos

### Discussion

1. What are the limitations and advantages of our tendency to live among groups? Can we reconcile this impulse with our political emphasis on individualism?
2. What would be the effect of requiring today's citizens to present their own cases in court? Would you favor such a system?
3. National Issues Forums, an organization allied with the Kettering Foundation, promotes a return to the "town meeting" concept of democratic self-government, encouraging more

direct participation in the formation of public policy. Some politicians have advocated a nationwide system of electronic town meetings to encourage similar participation. Do you favor more direct participation by citizens in government? Does the representative system we have developed serve our needs adequately?

4. Explain the charisma enjoyed by the words "progress," "freedom," and "the American way." Can you think of other words or phrases that enjoy unusual persuasive appeal? How do we guard against abuses of such power?
5. Observe a congressional policy debate on the C-Span network and note the process by which defects in logic and evidence are uncovered. Do the speakers feature criteria of expediency and practicality? Do they emphasize inductive reasoning and the use of example? Which of the contending sides prevails, in your opinion, and why? Does the debate reveal the truth? On the basis of your study, do you agree with Aristotle's analysis of deliberative speaking?
6. Thrasymachus thought speakers gained power by emphasizing presentational skills and impressive language over content. Do you agree? Might this rule vary from situation to situation? Explain.
7. Study a ceremonial speech celebrating some event, either local or national. Can you detect the process of building social meaning? Does the speaker promote certain master premises? What images does the speaker depict?
8. Think of our most recent national election. Would Plato's critique of public communication apply to what you saw and heard during the campaign? How might we improve the quality of campaign discourse?

### Application

1. Study a recent controversy and form an inventory of "the available means of persuasion" on the opposing sides. Use the eight kinds of knowledge implied by Aristotle's definition

of rhetoric as a checklist. Assume you must give a speech favoring one of these sides to an uncommitted audience. Which of these "available means" would you use, why, and how? Present your inventory and your speech plan in class.

2. As the early Greeks learned, arguments over land ownership and use can become quite heated and complicated. Attend land-use hearings in your community and observe the disputes that arise. Does the topic of probability play a major role in the opposed arguments? Do other rhetorical elements, such as enthymemes, examples, or images, play a role in the arguments? Report your observations in class.

### Notes

1. Both Chinese and Egyptian sages in even more distant times had written "wisdom books" containing practical advice about when to speak and when to be silent. For a discussion of such books, of which *The Maxims of Ptahhotpe* is an example, see Michael V. Fox, "Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric," *Rhetorica* 1 (1983): 9-22. Also see Robert T. Oliver, "The Rhetorical Tradition in China: Confucius and Mencius" *Today's Speech* 17 (1969): 3-8; and Beatrice K. Reynolds, "Lao Tzu: Persuasion Through Inaction and Non-Speaking," *Today's Speech* 17 (1969): 23-25. Despite such earlier books of advice, it was the Greeks who elevated the subject to one of central intellectual and educational importance.

2. Book 2.24 of *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 210.

3. See the discussion in John Poulakos, "Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 215-26.

4. Bromley Smith in his essay, "Corax and Probability," *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* 7 (1921): 13-42, concludes that Corax probably named five parts of the oration. However, George Kennedy mentions four such parts (*On Rhetoric*, pp. 257-58). Here we follow Kennedy's interpretation, although this does little to change the substance of the overall pattern Corax apparently identified.

5. See the discussion by Bruce E. Gronbeck, "Gorgias on Rhetoric and Poetic: A Rehabilitation," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 38 (1972): 27-38.

6. Richard Weaver, "Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric," in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), pp. 211-32.

7. Michael Calvin McGee, "The Ideograph: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 1-16.

8. Michael Osborn, "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53 (1967): 115-26.

9. Edward Schiappa has pointed out that there was no consciousness of a tension between "truth" and "victory" until Plato invented the term "rhetoric" after the time of Protagoras, thereby also creating a sense of opposition between rhetoric and philosophy; see "Rhetorike: What's in a Name? Toward a Revised History of Early Greek Rhetorical Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 3.

10. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 503-17.

11. *Antidosis*. 254. *Isocrates*, trans. George Norlin (New York: Putnam, 1929), 11:327.

12. Here we follow the Kennedy translation, *op. cit.*, of Book 1.2, p. 36.

13. Garry Wills, "The Words that Remade America: Lincoln at Gettysburg," *The Atlantic* 269 (June 1992): 57-79.

14. See his "Rhetoric: It's Functions and Its Scope," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39 (1953): 401-24.