

HOAX LANGUAGE RHETORIC AND HATE SPEECH AS A PRINCIPLE REPRESENTATION OF DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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Abstract:

On the Internet, when you search for deceptive rhetoric or rhetoric hoax, you'll get more than two million hits for either one. That volume of hits is an echo of what we've heard all our lives---that Rhetoric is associated with deception and trickery, even though the college experts try to reassure us that the discipline of Rhetoric is really neutral. Fact is, though, most of what the public knows about Rhetoric is a hoax, especially as regards the origins, the history, and the confusion over Rhetoric in academic circles.

Keyword: Hoax, Hate Speech, Democracy, Language, Pop Culture,

Introduction

The Origins of Rhetoric

Most people, even school teachers, think the history of Rhetoric began in Greece with Aristotle but it didn't. In 427 A.D., sixty-year-old Gorgias, a sophist from the Greek colony of Leontini, in Sicily, brought Rhetoric to Athens. He settled in Athens and popularized rhetoric by offering public demonstrations of his skill in public speaking, which was his way of marketing his trade to anyone who wanted to learn to speak as he did.

One of his most apt students, Isocrates, learned the trade and became "the most influential teacher of rhetoric in Aristotle's time" (*On Rhetoric*, Kennedy, George A., New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 13). Why wasn't Aristotle "the most influential teacher of rhetoric" in his own time? Because he had his own personal brand of Rhetoric, and he taught it *only* to students in his small, private school in Athens, called the Lyceum. And his Rhetoric, really more of a collection of notes gathered over the years than anything else, was not

published in his lifetime (384-322 B.C.) and was basically unknown outside his small, private school.

In fact, not only was Aristotle's *Rhetoric* unknown in his own time, it was largely unknown and untaught throughout the ages. According to George A. Kennedy---a universally praised scholar of ancient Greek culture and a highly esteemed translator of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*---Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was "obsolete as a school text" throughout most of history (*On Rhetoric*, p. 308).

Discussion

The History of Rhetoric

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* became obsolete because, first of all, it was lost in Asia Minor for about 200 years after his death in 322 B.C. out of circulation, out of usage, out of sight, out of mind. During that time, probably because it had no real competition, the Rhetoric of Isocrates flourished and became established as the major well-spring for progress in the art of Rhetoric. Also during that lost time, three very popular major features were added to Isocrates's Rhetoric that were never developed in Aristotle's version:

- **stasis**

(contributed to Rhetoric by Hermagoras of Temnos around 150 B.C.; a systematic series of questions used to develop the central issue in court cases)

- **tropes**

(one of two major divisions in figures of speech, see below; using words in a way that their normal meaning is replaced with something else, such as, "today the White House issued a statement"---as we know, the White House *building* did not issue the statement; *irony* is another example, such as when a sarcastic students says, "Yeah, I just *loooove* grammar")

- **figures of speech**

(the Stoic philosophers of Athens added these to Rhetoric somewhere between 250 and 100 B.C.; figures of speech are divided into two main categories: *schemes* and *tropes*; *schemes* change the ordinary or expected pattern of words,

such as, "My voice teacher, a real looker," which uses the scheme of *apposition* or *renaming*; and *tropes* change the general meaning of words, as discussed in the entry just above).

Scholars throughout history considered these three Rhetorical features as extremely important and studied and discussed them extensively. So they paid little attention to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which did not have them, after it was found and 'published' around 80 B.C. Then, around 190 A.D., Alexander of Aphrodesias published a commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and scholarly interest revived a bit.

However, throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the principal texts on Rhetoric were not Aristotle's, but two books that were based largely on the Rhetoric of Isocrates and its accompanying three supplementary features discussed above. These two books were *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*Rhetoric for Herennium*), of unknown authorship, and *De Inventione* (On Invention), written by Cicero (106-43 B.C.), the great Roman philosopher, politician, and rhetorician.

The modern academic and philosophic interest in Aristotle's approach to Rhetoric is often traced to the publication of philosopher Kenneth Burke's book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, which was published in 1950. Since then, many other books have investigated and expounded upon Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and more people today are reading and studying it than did so in all the rest of history combined.

So the public perception that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is the Rhetoric that was handed down and taught widely in schools throughout the ages is quite wrong. This hoax has been perpetuated by well-meaning but poorly educated textbook writers.

The Confusion Over Rhetoric in Academic Circles

Now, wouldn't you think that the actual bedrock principles of Rhetoric, the fundamental principles, would be pretty well-known and established after 2,500 years? And you would also think that an encyclopedia dedicated to collecting and explaining all the important parts, patterns, processes, purposes, and perspectives of Rhetoric would clearly identify and discuss them, right? Well, take a look at what the Preface says in the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford Press, 2001):

*[this is] our effort to abstract rhetoric as far as we could... and to endeavor to search for its principles. "Search for its principles"? Immediately following that eye-opener is this: We recognize the **paradox**, in view of what we take rhetoric to be. It is **nearly impossible either to abstract a temporal cause from its effects** or to look anew at a subject anchored in but not confined to an ancient tradition. But the attempt to do so, we believe, sets this work apart from other recent publications such as the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*.... [my bolding]*

I'm not even going to attempt to work out the "paradox" reasoning. But I wonder: Am I reading too much into this? Is Rhetoric as hard to define, is it as unstable and as unclear in what its old principles are and in what its new principles are, as this encyclopedia makes out? Let's try another encyclopedia dedicated to Rhetoric---there's only one other. Looking at the Preface to the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition* (New York: Garland, 1996), we find:

*... [this encyclopedia] provides **an introduction** to rhetoric, including the major periods and personages, concepts and applications. Rhetoric... is becoming **ever more difficult to locate in a conceptual framework**... **many theorists are reconceptualizing rhetoric in its own terms**. [my bolding]*

This encyclopedia of rhetoric "provides an introduction to Rhetoric"? *Only an introduction*? It doesn't go beyond identifying the very basic parts, pieces, and patterns of Rhetoric? Plainly, this encyclopedia is not claiming to be thorough and comprehensive, claiming that it covers only the basics, "an introduction." After 2,500 years of discussions and arguments about what Rhetoric is and what it is not, surely there should be more than just "an introduction" to Rhetoric in an encyclopedia dedicated to it!

Is a more comprehensive version, which goes beyond this "introduction," in the works or being planned? No mention of that.

Furthermore, "Rhetoric... is becoming ever more difficult to locate in a conceptual framework...." What?!!! There's that "paradox" sort of difficulty, again, as confessed by the first encyclopedia we discussed.

Maybe it would have been helpful to explain what "conceptual framework" means. Perhaps it has something to do with identifying an overall pattern that organizes all the concepts of Rhetoric---"ever more difficult to locate," even now?

The fact that "many theorists are reconceptualizing Rhetoric "in its own terms" clearly implies that theorists have *not* been conceptualizing Rhetoric in its own terms, for some reason. Why might that be?

Let me take a shot at it---Perhaps it is because Rhetoric has so very many disorganized parts and pieces, without a clear hierarchical pattern of connections, that it's literally impossible to pin it all down into an organized pattern. In short, "rhetoric can mean nearly anything" (Professor George Pullman of Georgia State University; conference, What is the New Rhetoric? in Sydney, Australia, 2005) that an 'expert' wants it to be and says it is. Given what I've shown, here, that seems a decent interpretation of what was said in the prefaces to those two encyclopedias.

So Rhetoric is definitely fair game for being compared to the saying, "You can't see the forest for the trees." Rhetoric has so many hundreds of devices and isolated concepts ("trees"), yet it has no clear, overriding principle ("forest") to hold them all together in a plainly recognizable pattern. Way back in 1663, the poet and satirist Samuel Butler said what many had said for centuries in more general ways and captured the spirit of this perennial confusion and uncertainty about Rhetoric with his famous, oft-quoted criticism:

For all a rhetorician's rules teach nothing but to name his tools.

Cute little saying, but Samuel Butler was serious. And so was Herbert Spencer (a *very* influential English philosopher of the Nineteenth Century, in Europe and America, in both literature and Rhetoric) when he said in his 1852 essay, "The Philosophy of Style,"

The maxims contained in works on composition and rhetoric are presented in an unorganized form. Standing as isolated dogmas---as empirical generalizations, they are neither so clearly apprehended, nor so much respected, as they would be were they deduced from some simple first principle. My take on what Spencer was saying is this:

The many rules for writing and public speaking are not organized. If they were organized under a single, simple, powerfully unifying principle, then the rules of composition and rhetoric could be clearly understood, taught, and learned.

A much more modern Rhetoric authority, the late Professor Wayne C. Booth of the University of Chicago, plainly agreed but went a little further than Spencer when he said, Where is the theory, where are the practical rules for ensuring that this talk will not only grab you, as the Madison Avenue rhetoricians say, but keep you grabbed and send you away determined to behave differently? (*The Essential Wayne Booth*, Wayne C. Booth & Walter Jost, University of Chicago Press: 2007, p. 69)

Booth's point was that modern writing texts don't provide a comprehensive theory or practical rules for writing or speaking to a specific audience (neither did Aristotle's), and that Aristotle's Rhetoric couldn't fulfill our modern needs for "a rhetoric of the symposium, of the conference room," or of other modern situations that were not even imaginable in ancient Greece.

Furthermore, there's been a whole host of Rhetoric authorities over the last one hundred and fifty years who have been simply clamoring for a "New Rhetoric"---because, like Booth, Spencer, and Butler, they see that Rhetoric simply can't handle the diversity, depth, breadth, and uniqueness of modern times. These authorities include a number of academic heavyweights: I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Wayne C. Booth, W. R. Winterowd, Francis Christensen, James L. Kinneavy, E. D. Hirsch Jr., Andrea Lunsford, Lisa Ede, Richard Lanham, Reed Way Dasenbrock, C. H. Knoblauch, and Lil Brannon.

So confusion reigns among modern encyclopedias dedicated to Rhetoric, and academic authorities have been complaining about the failings of Rhetoric for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. And they are all clamoring for something new-----because the old Rhetoric just isn't good enough anymore.

The Hate Speech Manifesto

The Western societies we live in today are socially, ethnically, and culturally diverse. Like most people, I believe the only way such a society can maintain its diverse nature is by being more tolerant and inclusive in regards to people from different backgrounds, cultures and also free speech and freedom of expression. In fact, the legal system protects the fundamental rights of each individual and also against any kind of hateful content that causes harm to us.

Keeping these assertions in consideration, the willful dissemination of hatred - of what today's issues going on in the world definitely fall under - is untenable under our current understanding of hate speech and what is considered unjust.

My central argument is not focused on censoring public discussion but on censoring hate and offering equal respect and avenues for all marginalized, stigmatized, and oppressed groups and what is best for our society. Thus, open hateful content not only causes dissemination of hate but the destruction of an inclusive society.

There is no doubt that freedom of expression is the foundation of democracy. In fact, an individual's imagination and ability to express ideas and opinions makes us come closer to the truth and ensure a democratic society. However, certain limits need to be placed because with freedom of expression comes responsibility. Generally, hate speech is destructive not because of it being offensive, but because it silences the members of the minority group. For instance, when all Muslims are generalized as "terrorists," they feel damaged and threatened because they no longer feel a sense of belonging and part of a public debate.

Another example is of how there are stereotypes attached to Black people being "criminals" or Indigenous women being a victim of rape, sexual abuse, and violence because according to our so-called "hero" Christopher Columbus, "they are barbaric or inhumane." This kind of hate speech convinces not only members of the larger community on how to view the target group but how the target group should view themselves. Therefore, the concern is not how such hateful content and speech on the Media or elsewhere harms an individual, but how the entire community and society is affected with a climate and aura of pure hatred.

The logic and understanding behind hate speech and hatred content being problematic is that having the right to insult or offend certain religious beliefs and certain cultures inhibits the right to practice religion, inhibits the right to "blend in" a multicultural society, and inhibits the opportunity to create an inclusive society. If we can consider free speech and freedom of expression as core fundamental rights, shouldn't we consider freedom of religion, conscience, and thought as fundamental rights too? To ensure a democratic society? For a brief moment, let us assume that freedom of speech includes the right to offend. Yet, we should wonder if our

compliance to celebrate "the right to offend" also extends to us reaching out in compassion to those who are offended or marginalized.

Although it may not seem offensive to an outsider, they still give rise to understandable fear and insecurity. Hate speech and content against a particular group of people or race gives rise to consequences such as retaliation and violence. A thought-provoking point, therefore, is that the freedom to offend is not applied equally, but targets again and again communities that are already ostracized.

It is important to understand that when we talk about fairness and equality, we should keep in mind that with fairness comes the idea of being sensitive to other people's differences. These differences play an essential role in shaping an individual's identity. Differences include culture, language, and religion. When it comes to free speech, equality, and expression, majority and the ones in power have the privilege to practice it. I believe that free speech should also be used as a tool by the minorities to shed light on injustice and that equality is the right way for them to augment their freedom and privilege they deserve.

However, the notion of free speech and freedom of expression is violated when it comes to a certain group of people. This double-standard nature of freedom of expression and speech is visible when controversies and global issues arise. When we talk about the concept of co-existence we should inherit and meet halfway when a conflict is seen arising, not add fuel to the fire that already burns bright.

We should not forget the purpose: which is focused on what is best for our society. By applying the difference approach (which is accepting and respecting people's culture, religion, and other differences), we are helping to understand why a particular practice or value is essential to a group's identity. Instead of asking the question of whether or not a particular group of people or individual has a right to practice a particular right or not and whether or not those practices violates a right or not, the difference approach weighs the history and scrutinizes the significance of a particular tradition or cultural/religious practice.

It is important for the public to keep their biases and cultural misinterpretations aside about a particular group or race and expose problems by focusing their attention on how to understand, interpret, and assess identity-related claims. The main concern should be about

fairness, justice, and equality - which each and every single individual/group is entitled to (freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion, conscience, and thought).

Conclusion

Add to all that, the 2002 report from the National Education Association that only one in five high school seniors can write well enough to do college work. No wonder the National Commission on Writing (NCW) declared in 2003 that there's a crisis in teaching writing in America! But what did the NCW recommend?

The NCW practically demanded more time, more people, and more money be poured into the same old, ineffective writing instruction, without any basic changes to the fundamental principles that determine how writing is taught! (And, of course, what is taught in writing textbooks and writing classes across America is all based on Rhetoric. Rhetoricians are proud to point this out, by the way.) They want to spend a whole lot more money, time, and people on the same old thing that isn't working? As they say on Sesame Street, "What's wrong with this picture?"

One last very telling point---Is there a final test that would either prove or disqualify Rhetoric as the basis for teaching writing?

Yes, there is. It's called the **What if** test, and here it is:

What if an essay or some other written work has all the pertinent forms of Rhetoric used perfectly in it?

And **what if** it isn't new to the readers?

If the reading audience DOES already know the ideas and is familiar with the presentation, then what's the point of that writing? Without being new, it has no audience. At the very least, it will be oppressively boring to readers.

If it's a book intended for public distribution, it won't see the light of publishing day--- people don't put out good money for old news, and publishers know that very well. Ditto for poetry, short stories, essays, and especially journalistic articles, opinions, and editorials.

And the Rhetoric of Isocrates, the Rhetoric of Aristotle, the Rhetoric of Cicero, the Rhetoric of Quintilian, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, James L. Kinneavy's *Theory of Discourse*--- not one of them develops a step-by-step process for generating the astonishingly simple but amazing ignored concept of **What's** new to the reader We don't need a New Rhetoric. We need a Rhetoric of Newness.

In conclusion, I believe that the values of free speech and freedom of expression are misunderstood. They are regarded as intrinsic and instrumental in nature because of our individualistic understanding of them as opposed to a collective understanding. By adapting to the difference approach and also the idea of social consensus, we will be enhancing an inclusive environment. By including the people who are the subject of the debate (whether they are Muslims, Non-Muslims, Jews, Christians, etc) we aim for respectful tackling of controversy - an approach in which we do not make enemies.

Therefore, it is important to note that public discourse is not just about what is fair and what is true, it is also helps us develop our preferences and choices. These preferences are not prosaic and dominant in nature but dependent on public debate which is inclusive of all majority and minority. As a result, we should be able to observe how hate, in its pure form, does nothing but disintegrate the vulnerable member's of the society's dignity and does not serve to further the ambitions of freedom of expression and speech.

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