

Vancouver School of Theology

Spring 2010

HOM 612/712: Rhetoric in the Public Square: Communication in the Ancient and Contemporary World

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Rhetoric took its shape in the ancient polis as a tool to persuade, to instruct or to delight. Public speaking was by nature a community event and communities were, and are, shaped by the rhetoric they hear. This course is a consideration of the rhetorical skills of persuasion as practiced in the ancient and contemporary world. People of goodwill who wish to help shape the future of the community may also wish to learn and practice the skills of oral communication in order to participate more effectively and more responsibly in today's version of the public square. Many of the skills of oral communication translate well into writing and into the use of media.

These skills are, however, potentially dangerous as persuasion may easily degenerate into manipulation. Hence, awareness of the techniques of persuasion may allow students to recognize and resist attempts at unwanted persuasion and manipulation in our society. This also means that we must face the reality that we too may succumb to the temptation of manipulation, a temptation that strengthens as rhetorical skill is gained. The Roman scholar Quintilian defined rhetoric as "a good (person) speaking well." We shall also, therefore, give attention to the ethics of rhetoric.

This course is not primarily a history of rhetoric nor a consideration of the relationship of rhetoric and various philosophical categories though the instructor will address a number of these matters briefly. The operating assumption in the course is that there is at least some validity in Augustine's famous "rhetorical" question, "Would anyone dare maintain that truth should stand there without any weapons in the hands of its defenders against falsehood?" The purpose of this course is to enable students to identify and to practice, if not the "weapons," the skills of effective oral and, to a degree, written communication in public settings. It will be useful for candidates for ministry as a development of their preaching skills and also for students aiming for other degrees who may wish to participate in the contemporary version of the public square and its interchange of ideas.

**Requirements:** Seminar participation, readings, listening to and viewing tapes, short spoken or written assignments and one prepared speech.

**Competence Objectives:**

In completing this course a student will be able to:

1. Identify and define key rhetorical terms and concepts
2. Identify the key factors in a rhetorical situation that must be considered by a speaker.
3. Identify and give examples of common logical fallacies used in public debate
4. Demonstrate the ability to compose a brief and cogent argument on a subject of public debate.

5. Demonstrate the ability to tell a story and link it to an issue in public debate.
6. Demonstrate the ability to prepare and deliver a speech on an issue in public debate

## **Assignments**

Students will be expected to attend all classes and to take part in various in class activities, games and debates.

1. An analysis of a rhetorical situation in which the student might speak (instrument of analysis supplied by the instructor)
2. Letter to the editor. Students will be required to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper in response to an article in that journal. The letter will be evaluated according to its rhetorical competence, logical soundness and its effectiveness. Extra credit if it is published!
3. Definitions test. Students will be required to define briefly and accurately five key rhetorical terms. The answers will be judged both on their accuracy and effectiveness in communication.
4. "Three logical fallacies" assignment. Students will create and speak in class brief arguments that exemplify common logical fallacies, identify the fallacy in question and state clearly why their argument is, in fact, fallacious. Extra credit will be given if a listener might actually believe the fallacious argument and if a valid argument in support of the same point is created.
5. A story. Students will find or compose a story, speak it in class and link it effectively to a subject of public debate.
6. A speech. Students will prepare and deliver in class a speech on a subject of public debate suitable for the situation specified in assignment 1.

## **Required Texts**

Edward P. J. Corbett, Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* 4<sup>th</sup> edition  
Stephen Farris, *Stories and Storytelling* (unpublished manuscript by the instructor.)  
A Course reader of rhetorical resources (provided by the instructor)  
Both the latter resources will be available for the cost of Xeroxing.

## **Other Useful Texts**

Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*

Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*

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Alec Fisher, *Critical Thinking: An Introduction*

Jay Heinrichs, *Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About the Art of Persuasion*

Robert Jacks, *Just Say the Word: Writing for the Ear*

Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd edition

D. Q. McInerney, *Being Logical: A Guide to Good Thinking*

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments* 4<sup>th</sup> edition

Jamie Whyte, *Crimes Against Logic: Exposing the Bogus Arguments of Politicians, Priests, Journalists, and Other Serial Offenders*

A number of websites provide definitions and examples of common fallacies. Though we will use the names and definitions supplied in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, you may find a number of these sites useful.

<http://www.nizkor.org/features/fallacies/>

<http://www.logicalfallacies.info/>

<http://www.fallacyfiles.org/index.html>

### **Some Ancient Works on Rhetoric**

Aristotle *Art of Rhetoric*

See the *Loeb Classical Library* vol. XXII of Aristotle's works.

See <http://www2.iastate.edu/~honey1/Rhetoric/>

Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* translated, with an introduction, by D.W. Robertson, 1987.

See <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/ddc.html>

Cicero, *Rhetorical Treatises*

The standard edition is the five volumes in the *Loeb Classical Library*

An English translation can be found online at Parts of a work long attributed to Cicero at

[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Rhetorica\\_ad\\_Herennium/1\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Rhetorica_ad_Herennium/1*.html)

Plato, *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*

These may be found in any collection of Plato's works.

See <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/gorgias.html> and <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* (English) *Institutes of Oratory* in the *Loeb Classical Library*, *The Orator's Education* An older English translation is available online at

<http://honey1.public.iastate.edu/quintilian/index.html>