

History of Public Speaking

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Learning Objectives:

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the historical events that led up to democracy and recognize persuasion and public speaking as art forms in Athens, Greece.
- Describe the nature of public speaking in Athens during the 5th century B.C. and the role it played in a democratic society.
- Apply Plato's approach to dialectics and logic, and explain Aristotle's descriptions of rhetoric and public speaking.
- Describe the Roman Republic's adoption of rhetoric to public speaking, and Cicero's influence on the Roman Republic and public speaking.
- Describe the relevance of Quintillion's influence on the Roman Empire, rhetoric, and public speaking.
- Recognize the impact that St. Augustine, Christianity, and the Middle Ages had on rhetoric and public speaking.
- Clarify the roles that the Renaissance, Rationalism, and the Humanists had on the rebirth of rhetoric and public speaking.
- Explain the role that Classical rhetoric and the advent of psychology in the 18th and 19th centuries, known as the Modern Period, had on public speaking.
- Describe the influence of the Elocutionary Movement on public speaking, and the restoration of public speaking in the United States.

Chapter Outline:

- Introduction
- Ancient Greece
- The Roman Republic's Adoption of Rhetoric
- The Middle Ages
- The Renaissance
- The Modern Period
- Conclusion
- Review Questions & Activities

Introduction

The art of public speaking was practiced long before the Greeks wrote about it in their treatises more than 2,500 years ago. For Greek men, it was a way of life, a way of being, just like football and baseball are to us today. We attribute today's field of communication to the ancient Greeks because they were the first to systematize the art of public speaking, which they called "rhetoric."



The art, or use of public speaking, is quite different today than when it was practiced by the Greeks, and then the Romans. There was a time that didn't have multimedia—television, radio, internet, movies, newspapers, and the like—for getting their messages to the masses. Instead, the Greeks and Romans informed, praised, or persuaded people the old-fashioned way—through discourse—otherwise known as the oral tradition. That meant speaking face to face with their audience.

What we know today as the art of public speaking has undergone a number of changes since the days of Pericles, Cicero, and Quintilian. Public speaking brought us through the Middle Ages, experienced a rebirth as a result of the Renaissance, redefined to conquer and explain the known and unknown, interpreted to perform theatrics, and finally, along this historical path from the ancient Greeks and Romans, the art of public speaking was reinvented to accommodate the electronic age of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

So what is public speaking? Has it really changed since the days of the Greeks and Romans, St. Augustine, and Descartes? No, the concept of public speaking hasn't changed; it has basically remained the same. However, as the field of communication transitioned from one era to another, so did the understanding of public speaking.

This chapter is meant to give you, the reader, an accurate and detailed history of how the art of public speaking came into existence beginning with the ancient Greeks and Romans. We will learn how the Greeks came to develop the art and then were followed by the Romans who codified and refined public speaking. After the fall of the Roman Empire, we will see how public speaking was kept alive by just a few individuals until the Renaissance, when documents, or extants (which are treatises and writings that survived history), were discovered in Italy, and the approaches, both scientific and Humanistic, that defined the art of public speaking came about. Finally, we visit the latter part of the 19th and 20th centuries to understand contemporary public speaking.

“God, that all-powerful Creator of nature and architect of the world, has impressed man with no character so proper to distinguish him from other animals, as by the faculty of speech.” – Quintilian

Ancient Greece

The Rise of Democracy:

In order to understand what contemporary public speaking is, we first must understand the genesis of public speaking. We begin with the Greeks and rhetoric. **Rhetoric**, as defined by Aristotle, is the “faculty of discovering in the particular case all the available means of persuasion.”¹⁴ For the Greeks, rhetoric, or the art of public speaking, was first and foremost a means to persuade. Greek society relied on oral expression, which also included the ability to inform and give speeches of praise, known then as epideictic (to praise or blame someone) speeches. The ability to practice rhetoric in a public forum was a direct result of generations of change in the governing structures of Attica (a peninsula jutting into the Aegean Sea), with the city of Athens located at its center. The citizens of Athens were known as Athenians, and were among the most prosperous of people in the Mediterranean region.

“Speech is the mirror of action.” – Solon

It was in the Homeric Period, also known as “The Age of Homer,” between 850 B.C. and 650 B.C., that an evolution in forms of government from monarchy to oligarchy, and tyranny to eventual democracy, began in ancient Greece. Homer was the major figure of ancient Greek literature and the author of the earliest epic poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey. In the year 630 B.C., the last tyrant of Attica, Ceylon, seized the Acropolis, which was the seat of government in Athens, and established himself as the ruler of all Attica. He didn't rule for long. Ceylon was overthrown within weeks by farmers and heavily armed foot soldiers known as hoplites. Many of Ceylon's followers were killed, and the few that escaped death fled into the mountains. Thus, Athenian democracy was born.

In 621 B.C., the citizens of Athens commissioned **Draco**, who was an elder citizen considered to be the wisest of the Greeks, to sort their laws into an organized system known as codification, because until that time, they simply remained an oral form of custom and tradition and weren't written like the laws of today. Draco was concerned only with criminal offenses, which until this time had been settled through blood feud (an eye-for-an-eye type of revenge between families) or rulings by the King. Draco established courts, complete with juries, to hear cases of homicide, assault, and robbery. By conforming the codes for criminal offenses into standards of practice, Draco began the tradition of law, where cases were decided on clearly enunciated crimes and penalties determined by statute rather than by the whims of the nobility. His laws helped constitute a surge in Athenian democracy.

In 593 B.C. Draco's laws were reformed by Solon, an Athenian legislator, who introduced the first form of popular democracy into Athens. Solon's courts became the model for the Romans and centuries later for England and America. Murphy and Katula argued: "It is with Solon's reforms that we mark the unalterable impulse toward popular government in western civilization."¹³¹ The Athenian period of democratization included legislative as well as judicial reform.

It was during the reign of **Pericles**, from 461 B.C. to 429 B.C., that Athens achieved its greatest glory. Some of these accomplishments included the installation of a pure democracy to maintain, a liberalized judicial system to include poor citizens so that they could serve on juries, and the establishment of a popular legislative assembly to review annually all laws. In addition, he established the right for any Athenian citizen to propose or oppose a law during assembly. Pericles' achievements far exceeded those mentioned. Because of his efforts, Athens became the crossroads of the world—the center of western civilization—and with it came the need for public speaking.

"Persuasion is the civilized substitute for harsh authority and ruthless force," wrote R.T. Oliver.¹³² Oliver said that the recipients of any persuasive discourse must feel free to make a choice. In a free society it is persuasion that decides rules, determines behavior, and acts as the governing agent in human physical and mental activities. In every free society individuals are continuously attempting to change the thoughts and/or actions of others. It is a fundamental concept of a free society. Ian Harvey suggested that the technique of persuasion is the technique of persuading free people to a pattern of life; and persuasion is the only possible means of combining freedom and order.¹³³ That combination successfully achieved is the solution to the overriding problems of our time. Rhetoric (persuasion), public speaking and democracy are inextricable. As long as there is rhetoric, and public speaking to deliver that message, there will exist democracy; and as long as there is democracy, there will exist rhetoric and public speaking.

"I believe that the will of the people is resolved by a strong leadership. Even in a democratic society, events depend on a strong leadership with a strong power of persuasion, and not on the opinion of the masses." – Yitzhak Shamir

The Nature of Rhetoric:

Pericles' democracy established the need for training in public speaking. Greek assemblies debated old and new laws on a yearly basis. The courtrooms that Solon reformed now bristled with litigation. Pericles' juries numbered between 500 and 2,000 people, so speaking at a public trial was similar to speaking at a public meeting. And to speak at a legislative assembly required serious, highly developed, and refined debate, because at stake generally were issues of peace and war. Murphy and Katula stated that the Athenian citizens realized that their very future often depended on their ability to speak persuasively.^[5] Public speaking was an Olympic event where the winner received an olive wreath and was paraded through his town like a hero. Thus, Athens became a city of words, a city dominated by the orator. Athens witnessed the birth of what we know today as *rhetoric*.

To say that rhetoric played an important role in Greek and Roman life would be an understatement. The significance of rhetoric and **oratory** was evident in Greek and Roman education. George Kennedy^[6] noted that rhetoric played the central role in ancient education. At about the age of fourteen, (only) boys were sent to the school of the rhetorician for theoretical instruction in public speaking, which was an important part of the teaching of the sophists. Public speaking was basic to the educational system of Isocrates (the most famous of the sophists); and it was even taught by Aristotle.^[7]

Dialectics and Logic:

It is important to note that rhetoric and oratory are not the same, although we use rhetoric and oratory synonymously; nor are rhetoric and dialectic the same. Zeno of Elea (5th century B.C.), a Greek mathematician and philosopher of the Eleatic school, is considered to be the inventor of dialectical reasoning. However, it is Plato, another Greek philosopher and teacher of Aristotle, and not Socrates, that we attribute the popularity of dialectical reasoning. **Dialectic** can be defined as a debate intended to resolve a conflict between two contradictory (or polar opposites), or apparently contradictory ideas or elements logically, establishing truths on both sides rather than disproving one argument. Both rhetoric and dialectic are forms of critical analysis.

Among the most significant thinkers of the fifth century B.C. were the traveling lecturers known as **sophists**. They were primarily teachers of political excellence who dealt with practical and immediate issues of the day, and whose investigations led in many instances to a **philosophical relativism**. Unlike Socrates and Plato, the sophists believed that absolute truth was unknowable and perhaps nonexistent, especially in the sphere of forensics and political life, where no universal principles could be accepted. Courses of action had to be presented in persuasive fashion. Unlike the sophists, Socrates taught that truth was absolute and knowable and that a clear distinction should be made between dialectic, the question and answer method of obtaining the one correct answer, and rhetoric, which does not seem interested in the universal validity of the answer but only in its persuasiveness for the moment. Plato developed this criticism of rhetoric to such an extent that he is the most famous and most thorough-going of the enemies of rhetoric. Plato preferred the philosophical method of formal inquiry known as *dialectic*.

The Rhetorical Approach:



“In making a speech one must study three points: first, the means of producing persuasion; second, the language; third, the proper arrangement of the various parts of the speech.” – Aristotle

Aristotle wrote that rhetoric is the faculty of discovering in the particular case all the available means of persuasion. He cited four uses of rhetoric: (1) by it truth and justice maintain their natural superiority; (2) it is suited to popular audiences, since they cannot follow scientific demonstration; (3) it teaches us to see both sides of an issue, and to refute unfair arguments; and (4) it is a means of self-defense. For Aristotle, rhetoric is the process of *developing* a persuasive argument, and oratory is the process of *delivering* that argument. He stated that the “authors of ‘Arts of Speaking’ have built up but a small portion of the art of rhetoric; because this art consists of proofs alone—all else is but accessory. Yet these writers say nothing of enthymemes, the very body and substance of persuasion.”^[8]

Aristotle said that rhetoric has no special subject-matter; that is, it isn’t limited to particular topics and nothing else. He claimed that certain forms of persuasion come from outside and do not belong to the art itself. This refers to, for example, witnesses, forced confessions, and contracts that Aristotle said are external to the art of speaking. He considered these to be *non-artistic* proofs. Aristotle identified what he considered to be *artistic* proofs which must be supplied by the speaker’s invention (the “faculty of discovering” that Aristotle used in his

definition of rhetoric); and these artistic means of persuasion are threefold. They consist in (1) evincing through the speech a personal character that will win the confidence of the listener; (2) engaging the listener's emotions; and (3) proving a truth, real or apparent, by argument. Aristotle concluded that the *mastery* of the art, then, called for (1) the power of logical reasoning (logos); a knowledge of character (ethos); and a knowledge of the emotions (pathos).

In summary, Plato had opposed rhetoric to dialectic; Aristotle compared the two: both have to do with things which are within the field of knowledge of all men and are not part of any specialized science. They do not differ in nature, but in subject and form: dialectic is primarily philosophical, rhetoric political; dialectic consists of question and answer, rhetoric of a set speech. Both can be reduced to a system and thus are properly called "art."

"Rhetoric is the art of ruling the minds of men." – Plato

Aristotle became the primary source of all later rhetorical theory. Eventually, the dispute between rhetoric and philosophy in the time of Aristotle had ended in a compromise in which philosophy accepted rhetoric as a means to a goal. The rhetoric of not only Cicero and Quintilian, but of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance, and of modern times, is basically Aristotelian.

As Athens declined in power, a new force emerged, the Roman Republic. The Senate was the only permanent governing body and the only body where debate was possible. In order to debate, one had to know the persuasive art of rhetoric and oratory, or public speaking.

Greek rhetoric appeared in republican Rome in the middle of the second century B.C. The teachers of rhetoric were Greek, and they taught in both Greek and Latin. Eventually Roman teachers were produced. The remarkable thing about Roman rhetorical theory, wrote Murphy and Katula,¹⁴ is that it appeared for the first time in its fullest form around 90 B.C., with very little direct evidence as to how it developed into its completed form. Sometime after Aristotle, writers refined and identified the subject of rhetoric into five parts—Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery. These five canons are still a part of public speaking in education today. Two Romans stand out as quintessential figures of Roman rhetoric, Cicero and Quintilian.

Cicero's Influence:

Marcus Tullius Cicero was born on January 3, 106 BC and was murdered on December 7, 43 BC. His life coincided with the decline and fall of the Roman Republic, and he was an important participant in many of the significant political events of his time. He is considered to be the greatest of the Roman orators, and was, among other things, a lawyer, politician, and philosopher.

In Cicero's Rome, the government eventually came under the control of a well-trained ruling class. Legal training became an integral part of this ruling class. Roman rhetoric provided rules for all forms of oratory; however, legal speaking became the primary emphasis of textbooks.

Cicero is noted for writing the *De Inventione* when he was about twenty years old. It is important because it gives us insight into the general nature of rhetorical instruction in the first century B.C. And later in life, as a more mature individual, he wrote the *De Oratore*, which he compared and contrasted to the *De Inventione*. Cicero's contributions to the theory of oral discourse included the belief that the orator must have a firm foundation of general knowledge. Cicero believed that the perfect orator should be able to speak wisely and eloquently on any subject with a dignified, restrained delivery. Corbett wrote that "Cicero felt that the perfect orator had to be conversant with many subjects. In order to invent his arguments, the perfect orator must have a command of a wide range of knowledge."²¹ Cicero despised the shallowness of orators who depended exclusively on perfect diction and elegant words that lacked substance. His ideal person was the philosopher-statesman-learned orator who used rhetoric to mold public opinion.

"It is not by muscle, speed, or physical dexterity that great things are achieved, but by reflection, force of character, and judgment." – Marcus Tullius Cicero

Cicero firmly held that oratory was more than legal pleadings or a school subject. Cicero considered oratory to be the highest form of intellectual activity and an instrument indispensable for the welfare of the state. In addition, he combined the three functions of the orator to the three levels of style. He was able to provide his colleagues with a broad interpretation of **Atticism**, and he revived the best of the Greek theoreticians and practitioners of oratory. It can be said that Cicero was an idealist. As a student of Greek rhetoric, he encouraged his contemporaries to practice the same ideals, ethics and standards of the past. His primary focus was to adapt Hellenic (ancient Greece) doctrine to the needs of Rome. During Cicero's time, Rome had become a place where the free expression of ideas was no longer tolerated. The government had been corrupted.

Quintilian's Influence:

Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (A.D. 35–95) was a celebrated orator, rhetorician, Latin teacher and writer who promoted rhetorical theory from ancient Greece and from the height of Roman rhetoric. His work on rhetoric, the *Institutio Oratoria*, is an exhaustive volume of twelve books and was a major contribution to educational theory and literary criticism. Many later rhetoricians, especially from the Renaissance, derived their rhetorical theory directly from this text.

"The mind is exercised by the variety and multiplicity of the subject matter, while the character is molded by the contemplation of virtue and vice." – Quintilian

During the hundred years plus which elapsed between the death of Cicero and the birth of Quintilian, education had vastly spread all over the Roman Empire, with rhetoric as the most important part of education. But by Quintilian's time²², the popular trend in oratory was not rhetoric in the traditional sense, rather it was called "silver Latin," a style that favored ornate embellishment over clarity and precision. During this time rhetoric was primarily composed of three aspects: the theoretical (contemplating new rhetorical methods), the educational (teaching students the five canons), and the practical (courtroom and political speeches).

Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* may be read as a reaction against this trend; it advocated a return to simpler and clearer language. Gwynn wrote that Quintilian adopted Cicero's oratory prowess as the model for this return to rhetorical tradition; because during the previous century, Cicero's far more concise style was the standard.^[4] Quintilian disliked the excessive ornamentation popular in the oratory style of his contemporaries (silver Latin). Quintilian believed that deviating from natural language and the natural order of thought in pursuit of an over-elaborate style created confusion in both the orator and his audience.

Much of this work dealt with the technical aspects of rhetoric and the *Institutio Oratoria* stood—along with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Cicero's writing—as one of the ancient world's greatest works on rhetoric. According to Barrett,^[5] he organized the practice of oratory into five canons: *inventio* (discovery of arguments), *dispositio* (arrangement of arguments), *elocutio* (expression or style), *memoria* (memorization), and *pronuntiatio* (delivery). This thorough presentation reflects his extensive experience as an orator and teacher, and in many ways the work can be seen as the culmination of Greek and Roman rhetorical theory.

Quintilian emphasized the value of rhetoric as a moral force in the community. "My aim," said Quintilian, "is the education of the perfect orator."^[6] Since the function of the orator is to advance the cause of truth and good government, Quintilian said he must by definition be a good man morally and not just an effective speaker. According to Gwynn this was a revolutionary doctrine in the development of rhetoric: Aristotle saw rhetoric as morally neutral, a human tool whose moral character resided in the speaker not the art.^[7] Quintilian saw rhetoric as a means for a better self-governing society; to make moral goodness integral to oratory.

How does Quintilian's perspective on rhetoric compare to Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero? Plato defined rhetoric as a philosophy rather than an art, an unnecessary tool. Plato was concerned more with the truth than Quintilian, while Aristotle believed that rhetoric was "finding the available means of persuasion." Quintilian challenged this definition because he felt that Aristotle had omitted the fact that anyone, not just the learned, can persuade. To Quintilian, rhetoric was "the good man speaking well."^[8]

Quintilian's system of rhetorical education aimed at the creation of the ideal Roman orator: a virtuous, efficient, courageous, eloquent man. His goal was to prepare an orator-philosopher-statesman who could combine wisdom with persuasion for the sake of regulating the state. It was this insistence on the intellectual and moral training of the aspiring orator that made Cicero and Quintilian the two most potent classical influences on rhetorical education in England and America.

From the death of Quintilian (about A.D. 100) until the fall of the Roman Empire (A.D. 410), very little was contributed to the rhetorical doctrine. A Greek cultural movement in the second and third centuries A.D. (although some sources place this movement during the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.) called the "Second Sophistic," was centered in Athens.^[9] However, the art of oratory focused more on excessive performance (delivery) and professional speech making rather than the art of intellectual development. There isn't a total gap between Quintilian and medieval rhetoric. This period produced works by Victorinus, who wrote a systematic commentary on Cicero's rhetoric, Aquila Romanus, Fortunatianus, and Sulpitius Victor. They

are mentioned because they reflect the type of rhetorical education common to the third and fourth centuries and provide a bridge between classical and medieval rhetoric.

The Middle Ages

“A thing is not necessarily true because badly uttered, nor false because spoken magnificently.”
– Saint Augustine

St. Augustine:

The Middle Ages (400–1400 A.D.) followed the Second Sophistic movement, wrote Foss,¹⁴ and during this period, rhetoric became aligned with preaching, letter writing, and education. As Christianity grew in power, rhetoric was condemned as a pagan art; many Christians believed that the rhetorical ideas expressed by the pagans of classical Greece and Rome should not be studied and that one’s belief in Christian truth brought with it the ability to communicate that truth effectively. St. Augustine had been a teacher of rhetoric before converting to Christianity in A.D. 386, and is considered to be the only major thinker on rhetoric associated with the Middle Ages. Rhetoric played a role in education in the Middle Ages as one of the three great liberal arts. Along with logic and grammar, rhetoric is considered part of the trivium of learning, similar in function to the West’s three R’s of reading, writing and arithmetic today.



Christianity:

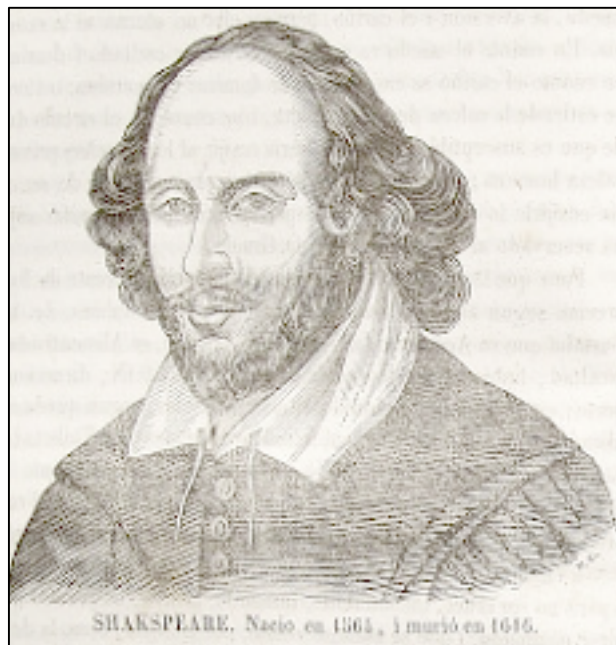
The clearest bridge to the Middle Ages, according to Murphy and Katula,¹⁵ is found in the *De doctrina christiana* of Saint Augustine (354–430 A.D.). Augustine divided his work into four books. The first three deal with “sign,” or “that which is used to signify something else.”¹⁶ For example, language was for Augustine a set of conventional signs which human beings agree to show each other to convey ideas and feelings. He posited that the world itself is a sign of God.

Augustine argued that human beings needed to know the nature of signs in order to understand the language of the Bible, and then needed to understand rhetoric in order to explain the Christian message, and then teach it to others. He believed every Christian was obligated to spread Christ's message (e.g. Matthew 18:20), thus, rhetoric became an obligation to every Christian.

His influence prevailed, and the Christian Church adopted the Ciceronian rhetoric as a guide to preachers. Saint Augustine is sometimes called "the last classical man and the first medieval man." With respect to rhetoric, Foss et al.,^[4] stated that this is certainly true, and it is possible to see him an agent of communication from one age to another.

The Renaissance

The end of the Middle Ages was witnessed by the birth of the **Renaissance** (1400–1600), and with it the rise of Humanism, a movement that brought such thinkers and writers as Petrarch, Francis Bacon, Albertus Magnus, Joseph Webber, Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare, Thomas More, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Kant. This emergence also produced the great discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton. In architecture, it brought about the revival of the classical style. And in the fine arts it inspired new schools of painting in Italy, such as Raphael, Leonardo, Bellini, Michael Angelo, Giorgione, and the Flemish school in the Netherlands.



The Renaissance is the name of the great intellectual and cultural movement of the revival of interest in classical culture that occurred in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. The Renaissance began in Italy as a major revolt against an intellectually barren medieval spirit, and especially against scholasticism, in favor of intellectual freedom. A hunger developed for all things classical. Greek scholars were encouraged to travel to Italy. Florence became the cradle of

classical revival. Latin classics were in demand. Libraries were built. And schools for the study of Greek and Latin in their classic forms were opened in Rome and other major cities.

The Humanists:

The second period of the Renaissance produced a continued passion for classical study, which was later coined “Humanism” in 1808 by a German educator, F.J. Niethammer, to describe a program of study distinct from scientific and engineering educational programs. Of all the practices of Renaissance Europe, nothing is used to distinguish the Renaissance from the Middle Ages more than Humanism as both a program and a philosophy.

The Humanists began by rediscovering lost Latin texts, rather than searching for classical Greek extants. The two most important classical authors of the Renaissance were Cicero and Quintilian, not Aristotle or Plato. Petrarch spearheaded the rediscovery of Cicero; and one of the texts he found, the *Brutus*, a handbook on rhetoric, became one of the most important books in the Renaissance. Quintilian later became the basis of the Humanistic education curriculum. The most important influences on Petrarch were Cicero and Augustine. He took from Cicero the principles of composing Latin and much of his philosophy; and from Augustine he derived his ideas about the relationship of the human to the divine. Throughout the Renaissance, the single most important author, classical or otherwise, during the entire Humanist movement is Cicero.

“Love is the crowning grace of humanity, the holiest right of the soul, the golden link which binds us to duty and truth, the redeeming principle that chiefly reconciles the heart to life, and is prophetic of eternal good.” – Petrarch

Interested in the human world as constructed through language, rather than the natural world, the Humanists focused on the human epistemologically. They emphasized the world of human culture and language, believing in the power of the word not only because it gives those with a command of it special advantage in daily interactions, but because of its inherent capacity to disclose to the world of humans. The Italian Humanists believed rhetoric, not philosophy, to be the primary discipline because it is through language that humans gain access to the world.^[1]

A second trend in rhetoric also began during the Renaissance — a trend that dominated the theories of rhetoric to follow. Rationalism, represented by the work of Peter Ramus (1515–1572) and René Descartes (1596–1650), sought objective, scientific truths that would exist for all time. Foss et al., wrote that, “Not surprisingly, the rationalists had little patience for rhetoric: while poetry and oratory might be aesthetically pleasing, they were seen as having no connection to science and truth.”^[2]

Howell (1956) claimed that Ramus was a French scholar who made rhetoric subordinate to logic by placing invention and organization under the rubric of logic and leaving rhetoric with only style and delivery. Ramus argued that invention should not be an intellectual process governed by contingencies, as Aristotle or Cicero would have it. He presented invention as a rhetorical procedure that must conform to the theory of logic. He successfully argued that rhetoric must be concerned with the canons of style and delivery only. Ramus’ identification of rhetoric with style launched a denigration of invention that lasted for centuries.^[3] (Virtualology.com, 2007).

René Descartes is one of the most important Western philosophers of the past few centuries. During his lifetime, Descartes was just as famous as an original physicist, physiologist and mathematician. But it is as a highly original philosopher that he is most frequently read today. He attempted to restart philosophy in a fresh direction. For example, his philosophy refused to accept the Aristotelian and Scholastic traditions that had dominated philosophical thought throughout the Medieval period; it attempted to fully integrate philosophy with the “new” sciences; and Descartes changed the relationship between philosophy and theology. Descartes believed that in order to reach certain knowledge, the foundations of thought provided by others had to be abandoned. He was willing to accept only that which would withstand all doubt. He rejected truths established in speech or in the course of social or political action. Language became only a means of communicating the truth once it was discovered, not a powerful sphere in which human life emerges. ^[4]

“I think; therefore I am.” – Rene Descartes

The Modern Period

Dominated by the rationalism instituted by Descartes and Ramus, modern rhetoric continued to promote the importance of science and philosophy over rhetoric. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was a prominent figure of the modern period. He was concerned with the lack of scholarly progress during the Middle Ages and sought to promote a revival of secular knowledge through an empirical examination of the world. His definition of rhetoric suggests his effort to bring the power of language under rational control, “. . . the duty of rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will.”^[5] Bacon, then, advanced the scientific approach to the study of rhetoric that would support the three trends of modern rhetorical thought.

The three trends in rhetoric that characterized the modern period are—epistemological, belletristic, and elocutionist. **Epistemology** is the study of the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. Epistemological thinkers, such as Bacon, sought to change classical approaches in terms of modern developments in psychology. They attempted to understand rhetoric in relation to the psychological process and contributed to the development of a rhetoric premised on human nature.

The Epistemological Tradition:

George Campbell (1719–1796) and Richard Whately (1758–1859) exemplify the best of the epistemological tradition. Campbell authored *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776). He drew on Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian as well as faculty psychology and empiricism (experience of the senses) of his times. Faculty psychology attempted to explain human behavior in terms of the five faculties of the mind—understanding, memory, imagination, passion, and will—and Campbell’s definition of rhetoric was directed to these faculties. Campbell distinguished three types of evidence—mathematical axioms, derived through reasoning; consciousness, or the result of sensory stimulation; and common sense, an intuitive sense shared by virtually all humans.^[6]

“As one may bring himself to believe almost anything he is inclined to believe, it makes all the difference whether we begin or end with the inquiry, ‘What is truth?’” – Richard Whately

Richard Whately published *Elements of Rhetoric* in 1828. His view of rhetoric was similar to Campbell's in its dependence on psychology, but he shifted from Campbell by making argumentation the focus of the art of rhetoric. He is also known for his analysis of presumption [of innocence] and burden of proof, which paved the way for modern argumentation and debate practices. The epistemologists combined their knowledge of classical rhetoric and contemporary psychology to create rhetorics based on an understanding of human nature. By doing this, they introduced audience-centered approaches to rhetoric and pioneered the way for contemporary investigations with audience analysis.

The Belles Lettres Movement:

The second direction rhetoric took in the modern period is known as the belles lettre movement; the term, in French, literally means "fine or beautiful letters." This is a departure from both the rationalists and elocutionists because this form of literature valued the aesthetic qualities of writing rather than any informative value it may have. The scope of what was considered to be rhetoric broadened to include all of the fine arts of the period, poetry, music, drama, gardening and architecture, along with oral discourse, writing and criticism.

Hugh Blair is best known for his advocacy of the belletristic movement. He was a Presbyterian preacher and occupied the Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh. He had a number of publications, but his most well-known was the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, which was based on his lectures. *Lectures* is important because it drew on the works of Cicero and Quintilian and combined them with the modern works of Addison and Burke to become one of the first whole language guides. Blair's theories were founded in the belief that the principles of rhetoric evolve from the principles of nature.

"Gentleness corrects whatever is offensive in our manner." – Hugh Blair

The Elocutionary Movement:

The **elocutionary movement**, the third rhetorical trend of the modern period, reached its height in the mid-eighteenth century. Before the Elocutionary Movement most scholars of rhetoric quickly assimilated the Latin *elocutio* (style) with the English word elocution. However, by the eighteenth-century scholars more accurately began to regard elocution as the Latin *pronunciatio* (delivery). This change in association gave rise to the Elocutionary Movement, a movement that focused primarily on delivery. Although there are many theorists associated with the Elocutionary Movement, the most widely publicized is Thomas Sheridan. Sheridan was an Irish actor and educator of elocution. He wanted to reform the educational system of Britain to correct the serious neglect of rhetorical delivery-elocution. This belief not only involved the voice, but also incorporated the entire person with facial expressions, gesture, posture and movement.

"He steps on stage and draws the sword of rhetoric, and when he is through, someone is lying wounded and thousands of others are either angry or consoled." – Pete Hamill

However, the elocutionists of this period regarded themselves as rhetoricians and their work as rhetoric. There were a number of reasons why the movement flourished. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, an increasing number of professions required the skill of public speaking. As a result, a needed change from style to delivery developed in response to the poor delivery styles of contemporary preachers, lawyers, and other public figures.

Foss et al.^[3] explain that like the epistemologists, the elocutionists were concerned about contributing to a more scientific understanding of the human being and believed that their observations on voice and gesture—characteristics unique to humans—constituted such contribution. The elocutionists also sought to determine the effects of delivery on the various faculties of the mind, thus continuing the link with modern psychology.

The practices the elocutionists promoted eventually led to their demise. Toward the end of their success the public began to see rhetoric as empty, insincere speaking that hid beneath the mask of sophistication. It declined as a subject matter of study and of teaching. As college curriculum became more diverse and specialized, new departments were formed that did not include rhetoric as a multidisciplinary art; rather, instruction was generally limited to departments of English—until a major shift again occurred in the development of rhetoric in the United States in 1910. In 1914 a new association, the Speech Communication Association, was formed in the United States by a small group of public speaking teachers who wanted to restore the rich qualities and scope that were once attributed to rhetoric. Today, this organization is called the National Communication Association.

Conclusion

We have explored a brief history of rhetoric, the basis for persuasion, from the time of Aristotle to the beginning of the twentieth century. This exploration is by no means complete, but it is intended to provide you with a particular understanding about rhetoric. From Aristotle to Saint Augustine, we see that rhetoric served a threefold purpose: first, it was a tool designed to develop and cultivate one's mental faculties in order to be a "good citizen" who could serve the state well. And serving the state well-meant having the ability to think well and to discover and develop sound arguments. Second, it gave a person the oratorical skills necessary to convince a decision-maker or decision-making body, that they should adhere to a particular argument. And third, all of this could only be attained if one had moral fiber—ethos—in both thought and character. These conditions were seminal for the classists in their pursuit of advancing the art of rhetoric. Eventually, new thoughts and trends distorted, altered, and at times, removed these conditions. The Greeks and Romans held one's character to the highest degree, and no man could be rhetorically successful if they did not possess this quality.

Rhetoric brought us through the Middle Ages and St. Augustine as a unifying figure. The Renaissance gave us a rebirth of the Greek and Roman classical art of public speaking, a new breath for public discourse and education, and the emergence of *humanist* and *rational* thinkers. And we have learned that the art of public speaking was, for a short time in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, used as a means for entertainment.

Today, persuasion has taken many forms, with rhetoric being just one of these forms. We know that people will say and do most anything to get their way, whether that be in politics, sales, religion, or advertising, and whether what they attempt to do is ethical or not. As you continue to read this on-line text, remember one fundamental premise: that public speaking, ultimately, is all about affecting human behavior; about getting people to do something they normally would not want to do. The key to public speaking is effectively answering the question, “How do I create a message that will connect with my audience?”

“The design of Rhetoric is to remove those Prejudices that lie in the way of Truth, to Reduce the Passions to the Government of Reasons; to place our Subject in a Right Light, and excite our Hearers to a due consideration of it.” – Mary Astell

Review Questions & Activities

Review Questions:

1. What historical events gave rise to Athens establishing democracy for its citizens?
2. Who was Draco, and what did he do in Athens?
3. Under whose reign did Athens enjoy its greatest glory, and why?
4. Who was Plato, and what form of inquiry did he advocate?
5. Who was Aristotle, and what is he most noted for?
6. What did the Romans borrow from the Greeks and how did they improve upon it?
7. Why was Cicero considered to be the greatest Roman orator?
8. What did Quintilian contribute to the art of persuasion?
9. What role did rhetoric play in education in the Middle Ages?
10. The Renaissance gave birth to the Humanists and Rationalists. Can you describe the differences between the two and name two representatives from each and their contributions to persuasion?
11. What is the “epistemological tradition” and who best represent this movement?

Activities:

1. Create two teams of at least three students per team. One team will represent the dialectical approach to problem solving and the other team will represent the Aristotelian rhetorical tradition. One team will attempt to explain how a problem is solved and conclusions arrived at through the dialectical approach, the other through the rhetorical approach. The problem to be solved will be created by student consensus.
2. The Humanists and Rationalists viewed persuasion from differing perspectives. Students should form teams that represent each perspective, choose an issue, then argue or advocate for their side using each perspective, and then compare the process of problem-solving to see how they arrived at their conclusions.

3. Review the approaches that Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian held toward rhetoric, then identify and compare and contrast the similarities and differences between them and how these differences advanced the art of public speaking.