Readings in Rhetoric

COMM 5320

Fall 2011

Wednesdays, 6:30-9:00 p.m.
Hellems 77

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Overview

This course provides an introduction to rhetorical thought in historical perspective. It emphasizes major theoretical writings in the Western tradition, considered from the horizons of the revival of rhetoric as an intellectual discipline in the 20th and 21st centuries. We will orient ourselves initially through contemporary thinking about rhetoric writ larger—via disciplinary problematics, history, and human culture. We then move through a series of major perspectives and historical conversations on rhetoric: through Aristotle and his modern philosophical relative, Marx; through Aristotle’s rivals the sophists and Plato, and ongoing battles fought through their names; through one particularly trenchant neo-sophistic critic of Plato’s, Nietzsche, and his deconstructionist and Foucauldian heirs; through Cicero, Isocrates, and the humanist ideal of eloquence and select critics of it from the Renaissance into the 20th century (read after considering the post-humanist critiques, to change the traditional order and critical burdens); and then ending by reading from the fertile work of Kenneth Burke, the most influential of the 20th century rhetorical thinkers, who helps us wrap up our pluralistic conversation.

We only have one semester, so our attention is necessarily selective. Major thinkers are absent from the syllabus, or represented only in the briefest passing: among them Quintilian, Augustine, Hugh Blair, George Campbell, Richard Whately, Heidegger, I.A. Richards, Wayne Booth, and Stanley Fish. We’ll look briefly at comparative rhetoric, but we basically ignore both non-Western rhetorics and the Judeo-Christian and other religious traditions. We take advantage of feminist openings in rhetorical history and theory, but the bulk of the writings are authored by white men of privilege near their societies’ cultural centers (true even of critics of those centers). That said, we still cover a good deal of ground, and the course is designed to provide students with a solid foundation in Western rhetorical thought.
The class is reading-intensive and text-centered. In addition to introducing a substantive body of thought, it also aims to cultivate arts of reading, discussion, and high-level critical thinking. My role is to orchestrate our discussions in such a way that readings are illuminated, opinions shared, and productive thinking advanced. I’ll ask you to provide summaries and raise discussion questions to substantively move those processes along. I also see the class as a way to help you learn skills that will be useful when you take your graduate exams. To that end I’ll give midterm and final essay exam questions and follow with one-on-one discussions/oral defenses of them. Finally, I’d like to help you find points of connection between questions and texts in the class and ongoing research interests you have, something we’ll probably best do through office hours or coffee together.

Rhetoric provides a potentially universal interpretive frame. In a world understood as socially constructed, one can make the case that everything has rhetorical dimensions. To learn about rhetoric, then, is to be drawn into a way of thinking that can be applied to any subject matter or social practice. Since its formal invention in 4th-century BCE Greece, \textit{rhetoric} has been a social practice and intellectual topic connected with all the big questions and processes of human life: persuasion, conviction, politics, truth, community, difference, ethics, emotions, identity, communicative interaction, and power, among much else. We aim to enter that conversation through close reading, attending to competing understandings and applications over time, and inquiring about how they might speak into our own moment in history.

\textbf{Course Requirements and Evaluation}

Three requirements, each worth one-third of the final grade:

1. \textbf{Participation in weekly discussion}: read and prepare carefully, provide short oral summaries of designated readings, raise discussion questions for the class, share and respond productively to other people’s opinions, venture efforts to synthesize thinkers and texts, listen well

2. \textbf{Take-home midterm}: 8-10 page essay and one-on-one discussion/oral defense of it. Takes place the week of October 5-12

3. \textbf{Take-home final}: 8-10 page essay and one-on-one discussion/oral defense of it. Takes place the week of December 7-14

\textbf{Required Texts}


A few books for students of rhetoric to think about investing in


George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Secular and Christian Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) [highly instructive, scholarly overview of rhetoric from the classical era through the 18th century; includes a chapter on Judeo-Christian rhetoric as well]


Course Schedule

INTRODUCTION
August 24: What is Rhetoric? Traditional Understandings
Peter Dixon, Rhetoric (London: Methuen & Co, 1971)
Thomas O. Sloane, Preface and Synoptic Outline of Contents, pp. ix-xii, 799-804 in

August 31: Rhetorical Theory Today—Views at the Turn of the 21st century
Inquiry,” pp. xiii-xxxv in his Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in
James Arnt Aune, “Coping with Modernity: Strategies of 20th-Century Rhetorical
Theory,” pp. 85-109 in Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt H. Wilson, and Rosa A. Eberly,
eds., The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009)
Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Modern Rhetoric,” pp. 498-508 in Thomas O. Sloane,
John Bender and David E. Wellbery, “Rhetoricality: On the Modernist Return of
Rhetoric,” pp. 3-39 in Bender and Wellbery, eds., The Ends of Rhetoric: History,
Walzer, and Janet M. Atwill, eds., The Viability of the Rhetorical Tradition
Cheryl Glenn, “Mapping the Silences, or Remapping Rhetorical Territory,” pp. 1-
17 in Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the
Renaissance (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997)
George A. Kennedy, “The Comparative Study of Rhetoric,” pp. 1-7 in
Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction (New
Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler, Introduction and “The Rhetoric Culture Project,”

ARTS AND PRACTICES: ARISTOTELIAN AND MARXIAN IMPULSES
September 7: Back to the Source—Aristotle on Rhetoric
New York: Oxford University Press (Kennedy’s Introduction, then focus on Book I
(all), Book II, chs. 1, 20-23; Book III, chs. 1-2, 7, 12-13; and the Introduction to
Dialectic from Aristotle’s Topics included in the Appendix)
Wendy Olmsted, “The Rhetorician: Demagogue or Statesman? Plato’s Gorgias and
Aristotle’s Rhetoric, pp. 10-24 in her Rhetoric: An Historical Introduction (Malden,
Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” Philosophy and Rhetoric 1.1 (1968), 1-14
Resource for Further Reading: Arthur E. Walzer, Michael Tiffany, and Alan G. Gross,
Rereading Aristotle’s Rhetoric (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press,
2000), 185-226.
September 14: Aristotle in Dark Times: Thomas Farrell and his Interpreters

September 21: Marxian Praxis and Other Materialist Views of Rhetoric

QUESTIONS OF LOGOS AND TRUTH: SOPHISTS AND PLATONISTS
September 28: Sophists and Neo-Sophists
Michael Billig, “Protagoras and the Origins of Rhetoric,” pp. 61-80 in *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*

October 5: Platonic Responses to the Sophists
Plato, *Gorgias*, 447a-461b (http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Gorgias) and *Phaedrus*
BRINGING IT TOGETHER, PART I: Midterm Exams
October 12: Oral Defenses of Midterm Essays

Take-home midterm questions will be distributed at the end of class on Wednesday the 5th, due-date TBA. Students will then follow up with individual oral exams scheduled for Wednesday (and perhaps Thursday) of the following week.

NIETZSCHEAN TURNS: LANGUAGE AND POST-HUMANIST SUBJECTS
October 19: Contra Plato on Truth and Language: Nietzschean Deconstructions
Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context” (1971) as rpt. w/ an introduction in Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present (Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 1990), 1165-1184.

October 26: Foucauldian Turns
Michel Foucault, excerpts from The Archeology of Knowledge (1969) and “The Discourse on Language” (1971)
Barbara Biesecker, “Michel Foucault and the Question of Rhetoric,” Philosophy and Rhetoric 25.4 (1992), 351-364

ELOQUENCE AND THE CICERONIAN TRADITION
November 2: Education and Eloquence in Isocrates and Cicero
Isocrates, “Against the Sophists” and “Antidosis” (excerpts)
Cicero, *De Oratore*, translated as *On the Ideal Orator*, James M. May and Jakob Wisse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): read the translators’ introduction (3-55) and Book 1, sections 1-101 (57-80)

November 9: Eloquence and Its Critics in the Renaissance and After
Renaissance Ciceroonians (all in Rebhorn): George of Trebizond (27-34), Philip Melancthon (97-110), Thomas Wilson (173-182)
Logic, Simplicity, and Science as Counter-Ciceronian Alternatives (in Rebhorn): Peter Ramus (152-160), Michel de Montaigne (218-222), and Francis Bacon (261-272)

Anti-and Pro in the Early Modern Era:

Transcendentalist Romantic Eloquence:
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Eloquence” (1847)

November 16: Rhetorical Humanism Revived

November 23: Thanksgiving Break

KENNETH BURKE’S NEW RHETORIC IN THE CONTEXTS OF THE COURSE
November 30: Kenneth Burke’s New Rhetoric
Originally published 1950
December 7: Burke in the Semester’s Barnyard
Review your notes and readings from the semester, and look back at the August 31 readings that launched our exploration of rhetorical theory in history. Be prepared to discuss Burke in relation to those August 31 readings as well as the major sections of the course that followed.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER AT THE END
Final exam to be distributed in class December 7. Due date TBA. Oral discussion/exam will follow during finals week, scheduled individually.