TEACHING ARGUMENT IN THE COMPOSITION COURSE

Background Readings

Timothy Barnett

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Preface

To teach students to argue knowledgeably, thoughtfully, and ethically is to equip them to participate effectively in the formal institutions of a large democracy as well as in smaller organizations, such as religious groups, school boards, or community action projects. Therefore, instructors using this book are encouraged to help their students learn to think of argument not as a method of confrontation, but as an engaged form of symbolic action (to borrow from Kenneth Burke) useful for solving problems with others.

The essays in this volume suggest that argument is a comprehensive and challenging form of writing, and that teaching such writing involves helping students to develop a variety of abilities. For example, students must learn to evaluate their own reading, writing, and thinking processes as well as the processes of others; to question personal and cultural assumptions about simplistic binaries such as right/wrong and good/bad; and to consider how cultural difference affects argumentation. Such efforts in the classroom can reconnect argument to rhetoric, a discipline with deep ties to philosophy and one heavily invested in the relationship between theory and practice. They can also help students understand that argumentation, at its most effective, is a process of working with others toward greater understanding, rather than a competitive game that one either "wins" or "loses" — and that every argument, no matter how simple or polarized, is subject to multiple viewpoints and a variety of resolutions.

Readers will note that certain theorists — Aristotle, Stephen Toulmin, Chaim Perelman, and Carl Rogers — figure prominently throughout this book. These theorists are the ones most often cited by argument textbooks in general (and, in particular, by the Bedford/St. Martin's argumentation textbooks this resource supports: *Current Issues and Enduring Questions* by Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedau, *Everything's an Argument* by Andrea Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz, and *Elements of Argument* by Annette T. Rottenberg). Even the most oft-cited theorists, however, are interpreted in various ways in this text, and none are final authorities on the subject of argument. Many of the selections in this book question and reformulate the dominant ideas espoused by the theorists mentioned above, even as they use them to build new theories of argument. In this way, *Teaching Argument in the Composition Course: Background Readings* supports a central tenet of argumentation theory: the importance of recognizing the influence of

theories from the past while also questioning the cultural, historical, and individual assumptions that guide all theories of argumentation, no matter how dominant.

I have divided this book into two main sections: "Major Theories of Argumentation" and "Teaching Argument." This is not to suggest that teachers should separate the theory and history of argument from classroom practices. They should instead draw on the theoretical essays from the first section of the book to stimulate thought about general philosophies of teaching and to create specific classroom assignments and practices. At the same time, readers should understand the essays in the "Teaching" section of the book in light of the historical and theoretical perspectives that inform them. In this way, they will be able to adapt the powerful writing assignments in this section for a variety of student populations.

Finally, to orient readers and provide contexts for understanding the readings, I have written introductions to both parts of the book and headnotes for each selection. I have also prepared a bibliography that should help readers extend their investigations into the literature and theory of argument.

Two additional, editorial notes: In a few of these readings, the authors use the formerly traditional masculine referent pronoun 'he'. This usage has been left unedited to maintain the integrity of the originals but should not be considered an endorsement of sexist language. Also, the original citation style has been maintained for each essay. Therefore no one bibliographic method unifies the book, although the majority of the essays use either the MLA or APA styles.

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I would like to thank the faculty members and students with whom I worked on my doctorate at the Ohio State University, and who have given me so much. In particular Andrea Lunsford, as a scholar and person, continues to inspire me in all that I do; I would like to acknowledge her role as my primary mentor and teacher. I thank my colleagues at Northeastern Illinois University — particularly the English Department, the CAC, my book group, and the many faculty interested in

writing — for all their support and talent. They provide extraordinary models of clear, insightful thinking and teaching every day.

Many students have shared their writing, wisdom, and lives with me over the past eleven years, and I thank them for contributing a great deal to this book and to all my thinking about writing. Finally, I owe a great deal to my friends and family who have had to hear about this project for almost a year, and who have always believed in me. Without them, little else matters.

I want to dedicate this book to current and future students, especially Adam, Sarah, Clara, George, Griffin, and the newest Barnett on the way. I hope that they will help create a world that values communication and difference in ways we only dream about today.

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CHAPTER

1

Some Classical Influences on Argument

There is some debate over the exact dates of the classical period of rhetoric, but most scholars focus on the Greek and Roman era from the sixth century B.C.E. to the third century C.E. The classical period began with the rise of the Greek Sophists, a group of philosopher-educators, and includes the work of such notable figures as Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, and Quintilian, all of whom have had an immeasurable impact on the study and production of argument in Western culture.

In fact, it is not an overstatement to note that most of the primary issues under consideration in argumentation theory today (in composition, speech communications, legal studies, and other disciplines) were first broached in such texts as Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias,* Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* Cicero's *De Inventione,* and Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory.* Plato's work is perhaps best known for its disparaging critiques of rhetoric, while Aristotle's, Quintilian's, and Cicero's works offer highly theorized and pedagogically useful ways of dealing with rhetorical issues such as imitation and audience analysis. Classical rhetoricians have also provided such lasting concepts as the canons of speechmaking — invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery — which have been adapted to the writing process and continue to be the object of analysis and debate today.

As this legacy suggests, the dominant intellectual movements and figures in the West have regularly "rediscovered" classical ideas about persuasion and adapted them to different time periods and changing cultures. Medieval rhetoricians such as St. Augustine, for example, depended on the ideas of Cicero to adapt rhetoric to an emerging Chris-

tian culture. Similarly, Renaissance rhetoricians such as Erasmus patterned the idea of the humanist intellectual on a classical model, insisting that students read original texts in Greek and Latin and that they study ethics, civic responsibility, and literary forms and texts, all staples of a classical education. In contemporary composition studies, Edward P. J. Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student,* originally published in 1965, was the vanguard text proclaiming composition's intellectual, ethical, and pedagogical links to the Greeks and Romans. Since the 1960s, Corbett's text has been embraced by teachers eager for a philosophically rich system to help them teach argumentation and explore composition's deep roots in the Western intellectual tradition.

In addition, the twentieth century has seen an increased interest — after many years of neglect — in the Sophists, in part because postmodernism has raised questions about the construction of knowledge and the nature of objectivity that also concerned these early educators. The Sophists included philosophers such as Gorgias, who believed that language was central to knowledge construction and that knowledge and human nature were, at least in part, dependent on context. The Sophists were particularly skeptical of any claims to absolute knowledge that came from religion or early efforts at science. The Western tradition has historically emphasized Aristotle's concerns with empirical truth and Plato's belief in metaphysical truth over Sophistic beliefs in contingent truths, and, as a result, many Sophistic texts have been lost and their ideas minimized. However, as Sophistic ideas have increasingly been seen to support contemporary rhetorical theory (by scholars such as Sharon Crowley and Susan Jarratt), this attitude is slowly changing.

The revival of Sophistic thought has been only one component of a general renewed interest in the relationship between classical rhetoric and contemporary argumentation theory and pedagogy. The differing philosophical, ethical, and political beliefs of the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, and others have offered scholars opportunities to explore historically competing notions of rhetoric. For instance, scholars such as Jasper Neel continue to debate Plato's attitudes toward rhetoric and writing (which have traditionally been characterized as negative) and the significance of these attitudes to contemporary theories of language. In addition, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede have defended Aristotle's comprehensive scheme of rhetoric as appropriate to our time in spite of critiques that Aristotle promotes an agonistic rhetoric aimed at persuading a passive audience by any means necessary. More recently, Cheryl Glenn, Lunsford and others have explored the contributions women such as Aspasia have made to the classical tradition, offering new opportunities for considering how male-dominated scholarship has defined the Western rhetorical tradition.

Debates such as these suggest that classical rhetoric must continue to receive careful attention from scholars, teachers, and students. Though today's cultural and political contexts are extraordinarily dif-

ferent from those of the early Greeks and Romans, we face similar challenges. Early Greece saw a movement from a tribal system to a system of city-states that explored the possibility of government run at least somewhat democratically (rather than by kings or unquestioned rulers). The new economic and governmental systems necessitated the development of new forms of rhetoric, which were distinctive elements in the rise of Athenian culture and the eventual formation of the Roman Empire. Early Greek rhetoricians were also responding in part to a rise in alphabetic writing, which changed early cultures' ways of understanding themselves, knowledge, and the idea of communication. Though Eric Havelock's ideas about the impact of literacy have been rigorously (and rightfully) interrogated, there is little doubt that the rise of writing in the classical era created new possibilities for the development of education and knowledge and signaled a pivotal moment in intellectual history.

Like the early Greeks and Romans, we live in an unstable political time, symbolized dramatically by the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the destruction of the Berlin Wall in the last decades of the twentieth century. We also are witnessing a dramatic change in the ways we gather and disseminate information. In fact, some scholars (such as Jay David Bolter and George P. Landow) contend that computer technology is contributing to an epistemological shift similar to the one brought about by the early rise of literacy, a shift resulting in changes to the way we understand authorship, textuality, audience, and citizenship. As contemporary cultures reconfigure themselves in a "new world order"; deal with changing communication technologies; witness the rise of "free" trade, "open" borders, and a growing gap between rich and poor; and consider the possibilities and perils of English as an international language, we must consider how to use rhetoric in a changing world. If contemporary individuals and communities are to help shape a culture in flux, it is imperative that teachers and students foster appropriate and theoretically sound notions of rhetoric. Such work will depend on our ability to look carefully at the successes of the classical rhetoricians and to consider why and how even these extraordinarily sophisticated rhetorics failed, for example, to sustain the best elements of Athenian and Roman cultures.

Classical rhetoric will not provide every answer to contemporary questions about rhetoric. However, since rhetoricians such as Gorgias, Aristotle, and Cicero asked questions about persuasion and culture that we continue to ask today, and since the schemes they created to answer these questions are still fundamentally useful in the twenty-first century, contemporary argument teachers need to be acquainted with the Greeks and Romans. More than anything else we need to be reminded of our most basic debt to Cicero, who wrote that "the one point in which we have our very greatest advantage over the brute creation is that we hold converse one with another, and can reproduce our thought in word. Who therefore would not rightly admire this faculty, and deem it [their] duty to exert [themselves] to the utmost in this field, that by so doing

[they] may surpass [humans] themselves in that particular respect wherein chiefly [humans] are superior to animals?" (*Ad Herennium,* 204). If, as Cicero believed, the ability to recreate our thoughts in words is the primary attribute separating humans from "brutes," then it would seem that teaching students to argue effectively, ethically, and humanely — often considered the highest form of language use — is an appropriate way to extend the legacy of the classical rhetoricians to the twenty-first century.

NOTE: The classical rhetoricians mentioned here, as well as many others, have all contributed greatly to contemporary writing instruction. However, the figure most often called upon in argument textbooks and in contemporary theories on argumentation is Aristotle, and it is for this reason that his work is emphasized in the following section (as well as other parts of this book). For further understanding of the classical era and the multiple ways it has influenced argumentation theory and writing instruction, readers should refer to the section in the bibliography titled "Classical Argumentation — And Its Updates" (p. 454).

From *Rhetoric,* Books I and II

Aristotle (translated by W. Rhys Roberts)

Although he was born approximately 2,400 years ago, Aristotle's influence on the theory and practice of rhetoric remains powerful. For Aristotle, rhetoric was intimately connected to argument, a connection made concrete by his famous definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (p. 5).

Aristotle's Rhetoric *— which most experts believe to be a collection of teaching notes and which, in part, may be a compilation of student notes from his lectures (Bizzell and Herzberg, 144)* — was one of the first texts to codify many of the fundamentals of persuasion. Following are just a few Aristotelian principles that have influenced twentieth-century argumentation theory:*

1. *In-depth audience analysis is critical to the success of argument. Aristotle's work makes clear the importance of intimately understanding individual and cultural psyches and building on an audience's already established beliefs in order to effect persuasion.*
2. *Rhetoric is especially important for political (deliberative), legal (forensic), and ceremonial (epideictic) events.*
3. *The enthymeme (or rhetorical syllogism) and the example are the most important vehicles for applying logic to situations that depend on probabilities rather than on absolute fact.*
4. *The canon of invention is essential to the rhetorical process.*

* See bibliography for all parenthetical source citations.

While Aristotle's influence has been extraordinary, his work has also been critiqued for fostering a masculinist and exclusionary notion of rhetoric with a "win-at-all-costs" attitude. Such critiques (from feminist, Rogerian, multicultural, and other scholars) deserve ongoing and careful consideration because there is no doubt that Aristotle was exploring the potential of rhetoric for only a select group of upper-class men. Aristotle's comprehensive scheme of rhetoric, however, needs to be understood in all its complexity (as Lisa S. Ede and Andrea A. Lunsford demonstrate in their essay, "On Distinctions Between Classical and Modern Rhetoric") since his ideas have had an impact on virtually every textbook and scholarly work on argument in Western culture, whether in composition, rhetoric, speech, law, or other fields.

The following selection includes excerpts from Books I and II of the Rhetoric. *These selections include many of Aristotle's most influential ideas on rhetoric (including those listed above) and suggest the kind of interdisciplinary analysis that successful teachers of argument continue to demand today. Readers interested in further exploration should read Aristotle's entire work, including the complete* Rhetoric, Nichomachean Ethics, Poetics, *and* Topics.

From Book I

Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject matter; for instance, medicine about what is healthy and unhealthy, geometry about the properties of magnitudes, arithmetic about numbers, and the same is true of the other arts and sciences. But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects.

Of the modes of persuasion some belong strictly to the art of rhetoric and some do not. By the latter I mean such things as are not supplied by the speaker but are there at the outset — witnesses, evidence given under torture, written contracts, and so on. By the former I mean such as we can ourselves construct by means of the principle of rhetoric. The one kind has merely to be used, the other has to be invented.

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: This is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of this character before he begins to

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speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgments when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile. It is towards producing these effects, as we maintain, that present-day writers on rhetoric direct the whole of their efforts. This subject shall be treated in detail when we come to speak of the emotions.[1] Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question.

There are, then, these three means of effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions — that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited. It thus appears that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies. Ethical studies may fairly be called political; and for this reason rhetoric masquerades as political science, and the professors of it as political experts — sometimes from want of education, sometimes from ostentation, sometimes owing to other human failings. As a matter of fact, it is a branch of dialectic and similar to it, as we said at the outset.[2] Neither rhetoric nor dialectic is the scientific study of any one separate subject: Both are faculties for providing arguments. This is perhaps a sufficient account of their scope and of how they are related to each other.

With regard to the persuasion achieved by proof or apparent proof: Just as in dialectic there is induction on the one hand and syllogism or apparent syllogism on the other, so it is in rhetoric. The example is an induction, the enthymeme is a syllogism, and the apparent enthymeme is an apparent syllogism. I call the enthymeme a rhetorical syllogism, and the example a rhetorical induction. Everyone who effects persuasion through proof does in fact use either enthymemes or examples: There is no other way. And since everyone who proves anything at all is bound to use either syllogisms or inductions (and this is clear to us from the *Analytics*[3]), it must follow that enthymemes are syllogisms and examples are inductions. The difference between example and enthymeme is made plain by the passages in the *Topics*[4] where induction and syllogism have already been discussed. When we base the proof of a proposition on a number of similar cases, this is induction in dialectic, example in rhetoric; when it is shown that, certain propositions being true, a further and quite distinct proposition must also be true in consequence, whether invariably or usually, this is called syllogism in dialectic, enthymeme in rhetoric. It is plain also that each of these types of oratory has its advantages. Types of oratory, I say: For what has been said in the *Methodics*[5] applies equally well here; in some oratori-

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cal styles examples prevail, in others enthymemes; and in like manner, some orators are better at the former and some at the latter. Speeches that rely on examples are as persuasive as the other kind, but those which rely on enthymemes excite the louder applause. The sources of examples and enthymemes,[6] and their proper uses, we will discuss later.[7] Our next step is to define the processes themselves more clearly.

A statement is persuasive and credible either because it is directly self-evident or because it appears to be proved from other statements that are so. In either case it is persuasive because there is somebody whom it persuades. But none of the arts theorize about individual cases. Medicine, for instance, does not theorize about what will help to cure Socrates or Callias, but only about what will help to cure any or all of a given class of patients: This alone is its business: Individual cases are so infinitely various that no systematic knowledge of them is possible. In the same way the theory of rhetoric is concerned not with what seems probable to a given individual like Socrates or Hippias, but with what seems probable to men of a given type; and this is true of dialectic also. Dialectic does not construct its syllogism out of any haphazard materials, such as the fancies of crazy people, but out of materials that call for discussion; and rhetoric, too, draws upon the regular subjects of debate. The duty of rhetoric is to deal with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts or systems to guide us, in the hearing of persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning. The subjects of our deliberation are such as seem to present us with alternative possibilities: About things that could not have been, and cannot now or in the future be, other than they are, nobody who takes them to be of this nature wastes his time in deliberation. 1357ª

It is possible to form syllogisms and draw conclusions from the results of previous syllogisms; or, on the other hand, from premises which have not been thus proved, and at the same time are so little accepted that they call for proof. Reasonings of the former kind will necessarily be hard to follow owing to their length, for we assume an audience of untrained thinkers; those of the latter kind will fail to win assent, because they are based on premises that are not generally admitted or believed.

The enthymeme and the example must, then, deal with what is in the main contingent, the example being an induction, and the enthymeme a syllogism, about such matters. The enthymeme must consist of few propositions, fewer often than those which make up the normal syllogism. For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; the hearer adds it himself. Thus, to show that Dorieus has been victor in a contest for which the prize is a crown, it is enough to say "For he has been victor in the Olympic games," without adding "And in the Olympic games the prize is a crown," a fact which everybody knows.

There are few facts of the "necessary" type that can form the basis of rhetorical syllogisms.[8] Most of the things about which we make deci-