

## Chapter 1 : Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell

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A Richards Stephen Toulmin Virginia Woolf The second major challenge to the rhetorical canon and to a rational paradigm has been that of voice; who gets to speak and whose rhetoric is considered significant or even gets labeled as rhetoric. Going back to the classical period, you remember that public oratory was considered the scope of rhetoric. And you also know who traditionally hold positions of power that would grant them access to the public speaking contexts—primarily white, wealthy men. This obviously left out a lot of people: An Afrocentric and feminist perspective offer two responses to this challenge. An Afrocentric position seeks to include linguistic elements from African languages as well as the Black experience in America into the scope and understanding of rhetorical processes. A feminist perspective looks at the ways in which women and other groups have been similarly left of the scope of rhetorical discourse and attempts to uncover the patriarchal biases in language and restore them with more egalitarian principles. Understanding Rhetorical Criticism[ edit ] In the second half of this chapter we would like to discuss a close associate to rhetorical theory—rhetorical criticism. To explain this exciting subdiscipline we will discuss the scope of rhetorical criticism, the purpose of this method, the kinds of knowledge produced, and the relationship between rhetorical theory and criticism. We will conclude with examples of how rhetorical criticism seeks to answer contemporary socio and political concerns. Rhetorical criticism is an epistemology or way of knowing many scholars find effective in coming to an understanding about the communication process and the artifact under study. An artifact or text is simply the thing that the critic wants to learn about. Artifacts can be, for example, speeches, songs, sermons, films or works of art. Think about a speech you have heard that was very moving and inspirational. Or perhaps a visit to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D. Or maybe you are a fan of the show South Park. So, what is going on with this show that allows it to contain some of its racial message? These are the types of questions that rhetorical criticism can answer. Scope While there is general agreement among rhetorical scholars that criticism is an appropriate method of study, there are differing opinions about why and how it contributes to an overall understanding of rhetoric. Depending on the rhetorical critic, the assumptions about rhetorical criticism vary. As a way of uncovering some of the various assumptions scholars bring to this method of inquiry, we will look at the various definitions of criticism and rhetoric and what is considered within the scope of rhetorical criticism. We can begin to see the relationship between rhetorical theory and criticism when we examine the beginnings of criticism. Pay attention to the shared qualities and assumptions. In an early essay on rhetorical criticism, the study of rhetoric was limited to that of speakers and speeches, and included a number of points to which the critic should attend: With this broad agenda for critics, Wichelns failed to provide them with a method to accomplish these goals. His essay was influential in that it led to an exclusive focus and assumption that criticism was to be centered on oral rhetoric. Hopefully, you can see how this parallels the focus of rhetoric in the classical period. Other scholars tried to fill in some of the gaps of this early essay. Ewbank tried to broaden the scope in by performing "case studies" where the critic wrote from personal experience derived from witnessing the speech. Hunt said the critic should be focused more on values and less on performance of a work. He wanted critics to make value judgments but gave no definition of such. Bryant was the first person to question the exclusive focus on "great" individuals. He wanted a focus on social forces or movements and thought forces and figures should be studied together. Booth expanded rhetoric to include novels, plays, editorials and songs. Of the more recent critics, Cathcart says "rhetoric is used. Of criticism he says it is "that special form of communication which examines how communication is accomplished and whether it is worthwhile. Criticism is thus the counterpart of creativity" 3. Such messages are designed to change the listener or the situation in some way, presumably to solve the problematic situation. This implies that the rhetor knows how to solve the problem and believes that he or she has the best solution. Thus, for Cathcart, a rhetor comes to the problematic speaking situation with his or her solution based on what he or she believes the audience needs to resolve the conflict. Criticism is

used to assess whether the rhetor was successful in persuading the audience to accept the solution and the strategies used to gain such acceptance. Black in *Rhetorical Criticism*, defines rhetoric as, "discourse that aims to influence" Criticism then, "is a discipline that, through the investigation and appraisal of the activities and products of men, seeks as its end the understanding of man himself. Here, Black offers and suggests a broader scope than Cathcart. Rhetoric is not limited to solely problematic situations; thus, it does not assume that the rhetor has a solution for the audience. Like Cathcart, he assumes the rhetorical goal is to influence and persuade and is concerned with the strategies that are most effective; scholars look at "what he says and how he says it" Many other critics assume the intent to persuade as the natural goal of rhetoric and focus on the strategies for doing so. Brock and Scott claim rhetoric may be defined as the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols" 6. By reading about the various definitions and assumptions of rhetorical criticism we hope you can begin to see a relationship between some of the early definitions of rhetorical theory as persuasion and how that impacted the development of rhetorical criticism. Or Not to Persuade? The definitions offered by Foss, however, suggest at least two different assumptions. She defines rhetoric as "the action humans perform when they use symbols for the purpose of communication with one another" 4. Like other theorists and critics, Foss is concerned with symbolic action, however, she does not assume that the sole purpose of those symbols is to persuade others. Rhetoric may be intended to persuade, but it may also be "an invitation to understanding": At other times rhetoric may be used for self-discovery, to bring people together, or entertainment. With the focus on communication as understanding rather than persuasion, Foss offers critics a broad scope for the study of rhetorical discourse. Foss defines criticism as "the process of systematically investigating and explaining symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes" 7. Like other critics she wants to understand strategies or processes, but she does not assume that she can understand "man," rather she wants to understand rhetoric and how humans use it. From her definitions, we see that Foss approaches rhetorical criticism with two assumptions that differ from other scholars. First, she does not assume that the role of the rhetorical critic is to judge the effectiveness of the speaker or discourse: Second, she does not believe that the critic must possess knowledge of the motives of the communicator. In her perspective, this is not necessary because, regardless of intent, a message has been transmitted and produces an effect upon the audience. The goal is to uncover the meanings that are produced; not necessarily the intended meaning. Purpose While scholars debate the purpose of rhetorical criticism, the arguments fall into one of two categories: While, this may be an oversimplification in some cases, it is useful for our purpose here. Those who see rhetorical criticism as a means of judgment are concerned with articulating the effectiveness of a text or artifact and the strategies that contributed or detracted from its overall success. How effective was President Bush, for example, in persuading the American people and the world that we should go to war with Iraq in his State of the Union address in January ? Those concerned with understanding may be concerned with comprehension and appreciation of the artifact itself and how that knowledge contributes to an understanding of rhetoric and rhetorical processes. Full Throttle, offer an empowering feminist voice or does it reinscribe a traditionally feminine image? Both questions can be answered by rhetorical criticism: Currently, the collective opinion seems to be moving in the direction of understanding as the purpose of rhetorical criticism. We see that Foss is less concerned with judgment as she is with comprehension as suggested in her above definitions of rhetoric and criticism. She sees a direct and explicit correlation between the criticism of an artifact and an understanding of rhetorical theory: The overall goal is to contribute to our effectiveness as communicators. When we know and understand how rhetoric works we are able to critique the rhetorical choices of others and make effective rhetorical choices for our own communication. The aim for the individual is to be rhetorically effective in a given situation by understanding the communicative options available to him or her. Other specific purposes can include artistic, analytic, and ideological. Leff describes the artistic critic as one who sees the text as art and wants to foster an appreciation in the reader The purpose is for the reader to understand and therefore, appreciate the art form. The analytic critic sees the text, such as advertisements or political campaigns as an object of study and seeks the means to comprehend. Feminist and ideological criticism seek the emancipation of all human potential and exposes how that potential is being silenced by the existing ideologies. What Can We Learn? Through these methodological

process critics come to a greater awareness about the variety of communication options open to us in a given situation. This awareness helps us to be effective communicators. Conversely, discovering what is ineffective in a discourse teaches us what not to do when we communicate with others. By uncovering hidden meanings in a text we learn how various messages are produced and their effects. This can help us decipher how we may want to respond in a given situation: Criticism also helps us learn about a specific text. When we can identify a text with pervasive effects, rhetorical criticism can inform us as to how and why that text is so effective. Thus, rhetorical criticism enables scholars to learn more about their own communication strategies, the study of rhetoric, and the specific artifacts that interest us. The Relationship Between Theory and Criticism[ edit ] Many critics are concerned with the relationship between theory and practice and how an understanding of one contributes to the other. In this way theory and criticism are mutually interdependent: Criticism must be informed by method so others can see why and how we reason about quality i. Campbell says the purpose of criticism is to contribute to the modification and application of theory Criticism helps us see gaps in theory and the limits of knowledge so we may ascertain social significance of discourse. If there is a gap in theory criticism helps us create a new one. If you remember back to the chapter on theory at the beginning of the text we talked about theory as an idea of how something works. Current Uses of Rhetorical Theory and Criticism[ edit ] By now you should have a clear understanding of what rhetorical theory and criticism are and the uses they serve for the discipline as well as the world outside academia. We would like to conclude this chapter by detailing some of the current issues and questions occupying rhetorical scholars.

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*This book covers criticism of the persuasion that surrounds us in daily life; speeches at political conventions, editorials in newspapers, essays in magazines of opinion, debates in Congress, state legislatures, and political campaigns, and all of the efforts by which protesters and reformers justify their views.*

At a minimum, we would expect a rigorous examination of the following: Equally rigorous and systematic remarks about the differences between poetry and other art forms, such as music and painting, would be in order, as would reflection on the relation between orally delivered poetry indeed, if we are to include performance, poetry that is in one way or another enacted and poetry communicated through the written word. And yet Plato clearly thought that something of enormous importance hangs on his assessment of poetry, something that goes significantly beyond getting the details of the subject pinned down in a philosophically respectable fashion. The scope of the quarrel, especially in the Republic, also indicates that for Plato what is at stake is a clash between what we might call comprehensive world-views; it seems that matters of grave importance in ethics, politics, metaphysics, theology, and epistemology are at stake. The praisers of Homer treat him as the font of wisdom. And since Homer shaped the popular culture of the times, Plato is setting himself against popular culture as he knew it. He is addressing not just fans of Homer but fans of the sort of thing that Homer does and conveys. The critique is presented as a trans-historical one. It seems that Plato was the first to articulate the quarrel in so sweeping a fashion. It is not easy to understand what Plato means by poetry, why it is an opponent, whether it is dangerous because of its form or content or both, and whether there is much of ongoing interest or relevance in his account. These questions are complicated by the fact that Plato was not or, not primarily thinking of poetry as a written text read in silence; he had in mind recitations or performances, often experienced in the context of theater. Television and movie actors enjoy a degree of status and wealth in modern society that transcends anything known in the ancient world. When we turn to the second theme under consideration, viz. What do philosophers have to say about rhetoric? Generally speaking, very little qua philosophers. Like all reflective people, philosophers dislike rhetoric as it is commonly practiced, bemoan the decline of public speech into mere persuasion and demagoguery, and generally think of themselves as avoiding rhetoric in favor of careful analysis and argument. Consequently, philosophers, especially in modernity, have had little to say about rhetoric. By contrast, Aristotle devoted a book to the topic. And Plato struggles with rhetoric—*or* sophistry as it is sometimes also called, although the two are not necessarily identical—repeatedly. We recall that Socrates was put to death in part because he was suspected of being a sophist, a clever rhetorician who twists words and makes the weaker argument into the stronger and teaches others to do the same. What is it about? Once again, the question is surprisingly difficult. It is not easy to understand why the topic is so important to Plato, what the essential issues in the quarrel are, and whether rhetoric is always a bad thing. These were rhetorical, but were they merely rhetorical, let alone sophistical? These remarks prompt yet another question. However interesting the topics of poetry and rhetoric may be, when we read Plato, why group them together? Few people today would imagine that there is any interesting relation between poetry and rhetoric. Yet Plato himself associates the two very closely: Thus Plato provides our warrant for investigating the topics together. This linkage between poetry and rhetoric is of course controversial, and will be discussed below. The present essay will confine itself to just four dialogues, the Ion, Republic, Gorgias, and Phaedrus. I shall look for connections between our four dialogues, though I do not believe that our chosen texts present a picture of poetry and rhetoric that is altogether unified indeed, this could not be claimed even of the Republic taken by itself. The debate about which assumptions are best is an ongoing one, but not germane to the present discussion. Further, it is not the case that the views Plato puts into the mouth of his Socrates are necessarily espoused by Plato himself; they may or may not be those of Plato. Since Plato did not write a treatise in his own voice, telling us what his views are, it is impossible to know with certainty which views he espouses at least on the basis of the works he composed. In several cases, one of which will be examined in the final section of this essay, it seems reasonably clear that Plato cannot be espousing without qualification a view that his Socrates is endorsing. With these principles firmly in mind,

however, I shall occasionally refer as I already have to Plato as presenting this or that view. For as author of all the statements and drama of the dialogues, he does indeed present the views in question; and on occasion it is convenient and simpler to say he is advocating this or that position for example, the position that there is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry. He is a performer but not a stage actor. Ion is depicted as superb at making the Iliad and Odyssey come alive, at communicating their drama to his audience and at involving them intimately. As he puts it in the dialogue that bears his name: But Ion thinks himself capable of yet more, for he also claims to be an expert in explaining what Homer means. He does not permit Ion to actually exhibit his skills as a rhapsode, and instead insists that he engage in give-and-take about the abilities Ion claims to possess. As both reciter and exegete, the rhapsode has no exact analogue today. Nonetheless, the implications of the Ion are broad; while Ion is not a poet himself, he bears important traits in common with the poet. Essentially, he attempts to show that Ion is committed to several theses that are not compatible with one another, unless a rather peculiar, saving assumption is introduced. Ion claims that he is a first rate explicator of Homer; that he is a first rate explicator only of Homer, and loses interest as well as competence if another poet such as Hesiod is brought up a3â€”4, b8â€”c2; c4â€”8 ; and that Homer discusses his subjects much better than do any other poets d4â€”11, a4â€”8. This seemingly commonsensical point is asserted by Socrates at the start c1â€”5 , and happily accepted by Ion. For example, Homer talks a great deal about how war is waged; as an expert on Homer who claims that Homer spoke beautifully about that subject in the sense of got it right , Ion must be in a position to explain just how Homer got it right and how Hesiod, say, got it wrong, as a series of simple analogies show. If you can knowledgeably e10 pick out a good speaker on a subject, you can also pick out the bad speaker on it, since the precondition of doing the former is that you have knowledge of the relevant subject matter. Let us recapitulate, since the steps Socrates is taking are so important for his critique of poetry it is noteworthy that at several junctures, Socrates generalizes his results from epic to dithyrambic, encomiastic, iambic, and lyric poetry; e5â€”a7, b7â€”c7. Further, Homer himself must have understood well that about which he speaks. Given that he discusses the central topics of human and godly life c1-d2 , it would seem that Homer claims to be wise, and that as his devoted encomiasts we too must be claiming to be wise d6-e1. But claims to wisdom are subject to counter-claims the poets disagree with each other, as Socrates points out ; and in order to adjudicate between them, as well as support our assessment of their relative merits, we must open ourselves to informed discussion both technical and philosophical. It is but a step from there to the proposition that neither Ion nor Homer can sustain their claims to knowledge, and therefore could not sustain the claim that the poems are fine and beautiful works. In passage after passage, Homer pronounces on subjects that are the province of a specialized techne art or skill , that is, a specialized branch of knowledge. But neither the rhapsode nor Homer possesses knowledge of all or indeed perhaps any of those specialized branches generalship, chariot making, medicine, navigation, divination, agriculture, fishing, horsemanship, cow herding, cithara playing, wool working, etc. Ion attempts to resist this by claiming that thanks to his study of Homer, he knows what a general for example should say d5. So Ion, and by extension Homer, are faced with a series of unpalatable alternatives: They could continue to defend the claim that they really do know the subjects about which they discourseâ€”in the sense of possess the techne kai episteme of them, i. Yet if they do defend that claim they will be liable to examination by relevant experts. They could admit that they do not know what they are talking about. This admission could be understood in several ways: To this might be added the claim that the poets and their exponents know the nature of the cosmos and of the divine. In the Republic Socrates in effect allows them comprehensive claims to knowledge along those lines, and then attacks across the board, seeking to show that the poets have got it wrong on all important counts. So when Ion claims that Homer speaks beautifully about X, he just means that Homer speaks beautifully in a rhetorical sense even though he Homer does not necessarily know what he is talking about. By extension, the poet would on this interpretation make the same claim about himself. This would seem to reduce them to rhetoricians, which in effect is what Socrates argues in the Gorgias, with the further proviso that rhetoric as popularly practiced is not even a techne. It consists in the thesis that Ion recites and Homer composes not from knowledge but from divine inspiration. Neither knows what he is saying, but is nonetheless capable of speaking or composing beautifully thanks to the divine. They are like the worshippers of Bacchus, out of their

right minds b4â€™6. This creative madness, as we might call it, they share with other Muse-inspired artists as well as prophets and diviners b7-d1. The spark is generated by the god, and is passed down through the poet to the rhapsode and then to the audience. This simile helps to answer an important question: It would seem that the audience is transformed by the experience in a way that momentarily takes them out of themselves. Perhaps it does not leave them as they were, for their understanding of what properly elicits their grief or their laughter would seem to be shaped by this powerful experience, an experience they presumably repeat many times throughout childhood and beyond. None of this would matter much if superb poetry left us unmoved, or in any case as we were. One problem is indicated by the last few lines of the dialogue, where Socrates offers Ion a choice: How easy it would be to confuse divine and human madness to borrow a distinction from the Phaedrus a5â€™c4! And not all of the contenders for the prize Ion has won could be equally worthy of promotion to divine status. For Plato, this means that they must be held accountable. This would mean that they are required to engage philosophy on its turf, just as Ion has somewhat reluctantly done. The legitimacy of that requirement is itself a point of contention, it is one aspect of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. It turns out that philosophic guardians are to rule the polis, and the next question concerns their education e2. The concern in book II is very much with the proper education of a citizen, as befits the project of creating a model city. The poems are taken as educational and thus broadly political texts; persuasion see c7 of a class of the young is very much at stake. The young cannot judge well what is true and false; since a view of things taken on at early age is very hard to eradicate or change, it is necessary to ensure that they hear only myths that encourage true virtue d7-e3. Thus while the critique of poetry in book II and beyond is in this sense shaped by the contextual concerns, it is not limited to them. The scope of the critique is breathtaking. Along the way Socrates makes yet another point of great importance, namely that the poets ought not be permitted to say that those punished for misdeeds are wretched; rather, they must say that in paying a just penalty, bad men are benefited by the god b2â€™6. Socrates is starting to push against the theses that bad people will flourish or that good people can be harmed. The cosmos is structured in such a way as to support virtue. The concern now is squarely with poetry that encourages virtue in the souls of the young. Courage and moderation are the first two virtues considered here; the psychological and ethical effects of poetry are now scrutinized. The entire portrait of Hades must go, since it is neither true nor beneficial for auditors who must become fearless in the face of death. Death is not the worst thing there is, and all depictions of famous or allegedly good men wailing and lamenting their misfortunes must go or at least, be confined to unimportant women and to bad men; e9â€™a3. The poets must not imitate see c3 for the term gods or men suffering any extremes of emotion, including hilarity, for the strong souls are not overpowered by any emotion, let alone any bodily desire. Nor do they suffer from spiritual conflict c. He does so in a way that marks a new direction in the conversation.

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