CoR Workshop 4: Reason and Reasoning (2 July 2018)

University of Birmingham

Introduction to the Network (Henriette van der Blom and Alan Finlayson)

1. Henriette van der Blom is a Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Birmingham and is the Principal Investigator for the Crisis of Rhetoric network. Van der Blom's research on Cicero led her to think more broadly about political speech, which resulted in the establishment of the Crisis of Rhetoric network. Alan Finlayson is a Professor in Political and Social Theory at the University of East Anglia and is the Co-Principal Investigator for the Crisis of Rhetoric network. His research analyses how people think and communicate about politics, and uses rhetoric to understand what political actors are doing.

2. The Crisis of Rhetoric workshops encourage the audience to participate in the discussions and to help generate lessons. The theme of the fourth workshop (in a series of six) was "reason and reasoning", in which participants discussed the meaning of the term 'rhetoric' in relation to rational argument and the devices speakers use to persuade their audience. This workshop built on the findings of the first, second and third workshop. Summaries of these workshops can be found on the network website: www.birmingham.ac.uk/cor

Session 1: Logos in historical perspective (Rita Copeland)

3. Rita Copeland is Professor of the Humanities and Professor of Classical Studies, English, and Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania (US). Her research focuses on medieval literature (English, Latin, French), education and intellectual culture in medieval Europe, and the history of rhetoric from ancient to early modern. She is currently writing a study of the emotions and rhetoric in the Middle Ages.

4. Rita Copeland discussed the meaning of *logos* and 'rhetoric' in the Middle Ages, arguing that rhetorical reasoning meant the use of enthymeme (an argument in which one premise is not explicitly stated, usually building on an assumed knowledge/understanding/notion in the audience) and set it within the intellectual culture of the period.

5. The intellectuals of the Middle Ages inherited a small group of Ciceronian treatises and speeches, which meant that rhetorical education was aimed at epideictic (praise/blame speeches). It was considered that logic (in the philosophical sense) or dialectic provided real proofs, but the meaning of logic is not what we call *logos*, and rhetoric was considered inferior to logic because it dealt 'only' with the probable and not with proofs. Therefore, rhetorical reasoning was often studied as an extra and counterpoint to dialectic. Our oratorical sources from this period consist of sermons, not political speeches.

6. In the late 13th century, Aristotle's works were rediscovered and translated into Latin; we have over 100 manuscripts extant. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* focused thinking

about rhetoric into the structure of logos – ethos – pathos (logical argument – argument from character – emotional appeal), which is still used today. Aristotle's first post-Classical commentator, Giles of Rome (1247-1316), produced the most important commentary (c. 1272). He argued that 'rhetoric' provides a different, not lower, kind of proof from dialectic: rhetoric concerns moral matters (dialectic speculative matters), rhetoric needs to consider passions (dialectic can ignore passion), the audience of rhetoric is very diverse and outside the academic inner circle (dialectic is used within this circle), the instruments of rhetoric are enthymeme and *exempla*, and rhetoric concerns particular matters (not universal matters addressed with dialectic). Giles of Rome describes rhetorical reasoning as 'a rough dialectic' (*grossa dialectica*), which speaks to crowds by giving outlines and broad pictures. In this way, Giles of Rome is providing a new and very positive view of rhetoric.

7. Giles of Rome underscored the value of teaching rhetoric to sons of *principes* and nobles because they had to explain things to subjects (in his *De regimini principum* c. 1277). Thus, Giles see rhetoric as a form of dialectic, and one which is necessary. He introduces enthymeme as *the* rhetorical device: a syllogism dealing with persuasion, not absolutes, but still dealing with reason.

8. The discussion following the presentations included consideration of rhetoric's distinction in relation to dialectic and the modern colloquial meaning of rhetoric as 'spin', of Aristotle's terminology (rhetoric is what we use to deliberate and argue a decision, in a situation we can control), the change of the meaning of rhetoric over time, that the ancient rhetoricians/orators thought that ethics (moral matter) was an inseparable part of any type of speech, the difference between modes of reasoning ('rhetoric' versus 'dialectic'/'logic') and the subject matter discussed, the importance of identifying the community addressed in the discussions of rhetoric (e.g. Giles of Rome was an unapologetic monarchist but nevertheless advocated the importance of the prince addressing the common people and getting them on board), the audience of Giles of Rome's work *De regimine principum* (a descriptive work but not an outright guide) which were owned by many princes and 'elite' (merchant) households and the ideas of which were picked up (e.g. the notion that the good ruler takes counsel and the tyrant does not). We also discussed the fact that the definition of rhetoric depends on when and where you are, and that the contestability of rhetoric as a concept goes back to the ancient Greek strife between philosophers and sophists. The discussion then moved on to enthymeme: it relies on the audience's pre-knowledge, and whether it is a constructive argument posing an intellectual challenge or just a hook to get the audience on board. It was argued that enthymeme can be used to manipulate an audience but also allow the orator to skip steps in a boring analysis and move straight to the central idea communicated. The professional speechwriter among us explained that their role is not necessarily to deliver reasoning to the speaker but rather to discover and channel their opinion in a clear and persuasive manner, with the aim of either changing minds or reinforcing ideas already valued in the audience. We discussed the idea that enthymeme makes rhetoric into a social theory because it outlines a way to create and use preconceptions within a community and thereby, through enthymeme, discover those preconceptions and underlying values of that

community. Finally, we talked about the orator's legitimacy to speak and whether there has been a change in that (assumed) legitimacy: if the right to speak is not to be assumed, then the orator needs to spend time justifying their role with the consequence that the speech is about the speaker and the validation of them through logos and ethos. It was argued that this change may indeed have happened but it is not a change from ancient to modern times, but perhaps rather a change within modern times itself.

Session 2: Rhetoric, deliberation and citizenship (Christian Kock)

9. Christian Kock is Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Copenhagen (Denmark). His research focuses on argumentation and political debate, rhetorical analyses of political speech and citizen reaction to political debate. He has recently completed an experimental study of college students' reactions to Danish political debate.

10. Christian Kock focused his talk on a definition of rhetoric, the societal benefit of teaching deliberation in schools, and the identification of a crisis of rhetoric. Christian Kock defined rhetoric as not just a tool for persuasion but also a tool for action in the sense that it rests on factual premises (what the world is) and on value premises (what is good and bad). Isaiah Berlin's concept of 'value pluralism' (the existence of several values which might collide because they belong to different dimensions between which no natural law can regulate which value is the better) helps to explain, for example, Brexit: when we argue about Brexit, we argue not about what is most probable, but about what we want and think is the best decision. Christian Kock then argued the inseparability of pathos from logos in rhetoric: because political action is about choice (not between true or false), political reasoning must include both emotional appeal and logical argument, and this emotional appeal must be judged on a case-by-case basis.

11. Christian Kock then argued for three actions: the teaching of rhetoric in schools, the media to report more responsibly, and politicians to use rhetoric well. This argument led to a discussion of citizens as deliberators: modern media often consider citizens/voters as predestined in our opinion based on socio-political background and what policy might benefit their own local community, but this risks throwing away citizens' ability to change their mind, the public's ability to engage in debate, and the deliberation itself. Instead of this problematic way of putting citizens into boxes, 'rhetorical citizenship' should be taught, practiced and promoted: citizens should have the right to speak, to be listened to, to access participation and they should know and respect the standards of political participation, keep themselves informed and keep thinking about political questions for themselves. Therefore, and with reference to Philip Melanchthon who argued that rhetoric is for all and a pedagogical project, children should be taught to receive and participate in public debate (cf. the Crick Report, 1988).

12. Christian Kock illustrated this idea through a recent experimental study he conducted on College-level students (average age of 21), in which they were asked to assess in real time and subsequently a political debate between two

opposing (Danish) politicians. The findings showed that young people are indeed more sceptical of political polities than previously, but also that they are not alienated by politics itself but rather by politics as practiced by traditional political parties. In the study, the participants expressed disapproval of hostile and arrogant behaviour of politicians, of debaters addressing opponents' policies and not own, of debaters talking about the past rather than the future, of 'broken promises' used as argument, of interrupting debaters, of evasive answers, and of using 'strawman' arguments (an intentionally misrepresented proposition that is set up because it is easier to defeat than an opponent's real argument). The study participants would have liked more discussion about debaters' own ideas, the future and concrete proposals, more mutual recognition and more proper argumentation. Christian Kock argued that the participants wanted to be rhetorical citizens, that there is a crisis of rhetoric and that the public is annoyed with it.

13. The discussion following the presentation included consideration of the Danish political and media contexts of the study (coalition governments, often in minority, is the norm in Danish politics and there is a plurality of 'voices' from many different parties even if they are often positioned in two blocks; Danish journalism adopts much from UK political journalism (e.g. Newsnight, reports taken from the BBC) and Danish political debate is influenced by US presidential elections), of the possibility of deliberation without exclusion and disagreement and of the possibility of reasonable (as opposed to unreasonable) disagreement, defined by a set of criteria. The discussion also touched on topics which are used rhetorically as symbols of popular sovereignty (e.g. the National Health Service in the UK) to argue that opponents are not good citizens; the counter to this tendency is the promotion of political debates on *standpoints and their reasons* to facilitate a real deliberative debate. One participant questioned the study presented by Christian Kock by arguing the naturally increasing conservatism in people over their lifetime and by referring to results discussed in Crisis of Rhetoric workshop 2 (Deborah Cameron's and Sylvia Shaw's study *Gender, Power and Political Speech*, 2015) of audience perception of SNP politicians and gender not aligning with reality: can the perception of the College students be taken as reflecting reality? We were also challenged to persuade politicians of the benefits of our work (especially us who are supposed to be experts of rhetoric). In response, it was suggested that the media prefer the antagonistic political debate because it is entertaining, and that part of the problem lies in the notion that voters want politicians to be morally better and different from themselves. We discussed the possibilities of different media formats to report political debate, the problem of political intolerance of public failure (e.g. Bill Clinton; counter-example Danish PM (1962-1968) Jens Otto Krag justifying change of policy by saying that 'one has a standpoint until one takes another', 1967), and the influence of political advisers being out of step with current expectations of politicians and their speeches. We will come back to this question in the next workshop (Crisis of Rhetoric workshop 5 on 'Media rhetoric'; September 2018). The final comment argued the separation of different modes of rhetoric: a national rhetoric which needs to address a multiplicity of values and ideas, risking becoming bland in views and lacking rational argument, and a more local rhetoric, especially within political movements where logos (rational argument) can be found because the debate is limited to a community with a shared set of values.

Session 3: Critical questioning and argumentation (Nick Turnbull)

14. Nick Turnbull is Lecturer in Politics at the University of Manchester. His research focuses on the philosophy of rhetoric by investigating how rhetorical concepts can be integrated into political studies, analysing the use of questioning in political debate, and employing the concept of problematology.

15. Nick Turnbull discussed philosopher Michel Meyer's theory on questioning on rhetoric and on rhetoric as a negotiation of distance. According to this theory, the distance between two questioners influences the rhetoric needed to negotiate this distance, including the application of ethos and pathos. Meyer argues that there are four types of argument of increasing distance between two questioners, with four operators: 1) equivalence, 2), modification, 3) addition, 4) negation: the moderate argument (2) is the most effective for bridging the distance between questioners (cf. M. Meyer, *What is Rhetoric*, 2017).

16. Applying this theory helps to explain the crisis of rhetoric as the movement towards more 'ad hominem' (attacks on the person rather than argument) arguments because we are in increasingly unequal communities: when citizens see and experience the inequality, the distance between citizens becomes smaller and conflicts increase. Globalisation has resulted in smaller distances (not just geographically) and therefore increasing problematisation in politics: problematisation of accepted arguments, problematisation of issues/political ideas (the questioning of experts and their legitimacy to speak), information overload (subtle arguments drown among the easy answers), reduction of distance between elite and citizens, leading to 'increased democracy'. Nick Turnbull argues that this is indeed a crisis of rhetoric because when populists get the power, the real debate is lacking.

17. Nick Turnbull went on to discuss populism as a rejection of ideology (normative but not ethical), a rejection of discourses of cosmopolitanism and globalisation (people react against the reduction of distance brought about by globalisation), and a rejection of dispassionate leadership ('the Westminster Bubble', 'inside the Beltway'). Ex. of MEP Nigel Farage questioning EU President van Rompuy in the European Parliament (24 February 2015): 'Who are you? I'd never heard of you. Nobody in Europe had ever heard of you.' In effect, Farage was challenging the distance between leader and the people led. In a populist-political reality, 'ad hominem' attacks on powerful populists do not work (e.g. Berlusconi and Trump); rather, their power needs to be challenged. In conclusion, Turnbull argued that managing the distance in political debate is more important than the rhetorical argument.

18. The discussion following the presentation focused on the role of enthymeme in Meyer's theory and whether time is a factor (e.g. voters' experience of a lack of a future) as well as distance: Meyer argues that the further the distance you need to travel, the more enthymeme can help. At a time of high problematisation, meaning is challenged and time is implicated: the past moves closer and the future

moves further away. Moreover, physical closeness and ideological distances creates conflict and emotional heat. Therefore, the more information (e.g. advent of the internet), the more disagreement is created. The discussion moved on to the disciplinary applications of Meyer's theory because his distance model aligned with models of language, and indeed Meyer's theory was an attempt to take on Linguistics and to make Rhetoric the new Humanities and a social theory. We also discussed the meaning of 'a question', Meyer arguing that a question is a response to desire, and one participant connected the dots by saying that the non-expressed element in enthymeme is perhaps the very thing which needs to be questioned. We talked about politics and questions (whether politics need to ask what the question really is, need to provide an answer to several questions (e.g. Brexit), or need to provide several questions (and answers)), about the possibility of using enthymeme in a community of no shared values, and where the question theory leads: it leads to promises and beliefs, and it is clear that asking questions is *not* always a good idea in politics. Rhetoric is about problematisation and not about asking questions.

Closing Discussion and 'Next Steps'

19. The closing discussion focused on identifying key findings of the workshop: enthymeme as a rhetorical device, as a thinking tool and its relation to 'dog-whistle politics' (political messaging employing coded language that appears to mean one thing to the general population but has an additional, different, or more specific resonance for a targeted subgroup). It was argued that the blurring in enthymeme is both an attempt to bring people together and a more negative way of excluding others. It is clear that enthymeme is joined by other ways of using implication rhetorically (e.g. George W. Bush's implicit association of Saddam Hussain with 9/11), and that the uses of these can be judged positively or negatively (as 'manipulative'). We also discussed the position of enthymeme in political discourse and political science and its relation to truth-claims.

20. A comment about a highly evocative poster of Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1988, posing as a matinée idol of the 1920s-1960s, and the visual power of images challenged the project and group to consider the power of images at the next workshop on media rhetoric. We also considered the 'language' of visuals, including the language of narratives (e.g. Blue Planet's narrative about plastic pollution of the oceans sparking a political sea change regarding the environment and use of plastic in the modern world), and the impact of intentionally provocative expressions on Twitter, aiming to prove that liberalists are authoritarian. Clearly, the genre of polemic is the anti-enthymeme.

21. Finally, the closing discussion ended by encouraging the Crisis of Rhetoric group of participants (across all events) to continue the debate beyond the project.