

## **The Crisis of Rhetoric: Renewing Political Speech and Speechwriting**

### **Workshop 3: Ethos**

#### **Notes for Speakers**

**Goals of the Workshop:** The aim of the workshop is to enable reflection on two things. The first is the *concept* of ethos – its history, meaning, development and applicability to the present day. The second is the *practice* of ethos – the ways in which orators and others have created an ethos in and through rhetoric and what they have achieved (or hoped to achieve) in doing so. There will of course be different ways of approaching these topics and, doubtless, some disagreement; that is to be welcomed and explored.

There is a third dimension to this. Our overall focus is on the ‘crisis’ of rhetoric, and behind our discussions will be a concern with diagnosing what is happening in politics today. One way of thinking about the seeming crisis of traditional political authority and the rise of populist figures might be in terms of ethos – the inhabiting of a character by politicians and their projection of a collective character onto audiences and bodies politics.

In leading and stimulating discussion on these issues there is no need to prepare a very specific paper but you may want to draw on and discuss examples from work you have done. We are hopeful that the day can develop into a reflective and easy-going exchange between all speakers and participants with the sessions building on and responding to each other.

**Timing:** The schedule allots 75 minutes for each session. We suggest that you prepare to speak for 15-20 minutes so that there is plenty of time for questions, responses and discussion.

#### **Content:**

**Concepts:** Of particular interest for this workshop is the way in which our different disciplines *conceive* of ethos. What are the different things we ‘see’ when we look at ethos or character of leadership performance? What are the ways in which ethos has been conceived and what can the concept help us do today?

**Practices:** Ethos is above all a practice – in some ways a bodily practice governing how political actors appear in public. What is important here and what should we attend to when investigating and assessing these practices? What can we learn from different fields and methods? How might we think about the change in practices of constructing, disseminating or performing ethos, especially in light of constitutional and technological shifts?

**Politics:** All of this is of especial interest because it concerns politics – the exercise and distribution of power in a polis, the organization of collective affairs, and the formation and implementation of policy. What is the political work of ethos: is it something to be downplayed on the grounds that it is an irrational basis for action, something to be tolerated as an inevitable part of the messy world of politics, something to be feared as a locus of conflict and sectarianism or something to be celebrated as part of what imparts meaning and, indeed, character to politics?

**Crisis:** Is there a crisis of rhetorical ethos? If there is how might we think about responding to it? Can ethos be saved?

We invite speakers to reflect on these questions in a general way while also affording specific insight into ways into studying and assessing the 'crisis' of political speech. If there are examples from your work then we'd certainly like to hear about them and discuss them with you.