
A sophistic rhetorical approach to public relations

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This article introduces a thesis that understanding rhetoric properly will lead to the best way of understanding public relations properly. It acknowledges but then critiques Robert Heath's advocacy of the rhetorical paradigm. It also acknowledges the more critical contributions to the rhetorical theory of public relations of Jacquie L'Etang, Øyvind Ihlen, Andrej Skerlap and Lee Edwards. However in declining to favour the approaches of any of these authors it argues that no writers have so far revealed the true significance of a proper application of the notion 'rhetoric' to the field of public relations. The claim will be that if the true relevance of the fields of public relations and rhetoric to each other is fully recognised the stature of public relations would be raised to a considerable extent beyond current thinking.

The approach of this article is premised on the observation of classicist Werner Jaeger:

Before them [the sophists] we never hear of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic: they must therefore have invented them. The new *techne* is clearly the systematic expression of the principle of shaping the intellect, because it begins by instruction in the form of language, the form of oratory and the form of thought. This educational technique is one of the greatest discoveries which the mind of man has ever made: it was not until it explored these three of its activities that the mind apprehended the hidden law of its own structure. (Jaeger, 1947, p. 314)

What Jaeger is saying here, and what scholars of discourse, let alone scholars of public relations seems to miss, or to muddle with obscure postmodern-speak is that: we are rhetoric! What in common parlance is called 'civilisation', or contemporary culture, consists of rhetoric and the companions of rhetoric. What we might call post-literate culture as opposed to pre-literate culture *is* rhetoric and the counterparts to rhetoric. Culture is not *influenced* by rhetoric. It simply *is* rhetoric. The failure to recognise this simple fact is at the heart of the subjectivist muddle which so many theorists get themselves into when they try to write in this area. Clear-sighted writers such as Jaeger and people like Stephen Toulmin, Chaim Perelman and Alasdair MacIntyre understand this. However modernist hubris, that is post-Enlightenment intellectual hubris, tends to blind many others to this fact of how we exist intellectually. Mainstream theorists fail to see that every person in every nook and cranny of what is generally regarded as civilisation exists as a combination into one substance of how language is codified, how persuasive communication operates, and how 'logic' operates.

I am using the term 'logic' here in the common, everyday sense of that word, i.e. what we think to be 'logical' in our everyday existence. I am not pursuing 'logic' in some rarefied specific philosophical sense. In the common sense of how we operate in the world our 'logic' is received, seen and conveyed in the context of the other two aspects of the 'techne triumvirate' or 'trivium' – codified language (grammar) and persuasive communication (rhetoric). The main cause of the inadequacy of the understanding of this phenomenon: i.e. the main inadequacy in the understandings of us, is the modern, as well as the postmodern habit of always trying to

separate things into their components and then reifying these bits as if they were real things themselves. Just as you can't properly study living human beings by chopping them up, you can't properly understand thought by seeing it as separate pieces.

Contemporary thought is a holistic *techne* invented and constructed over millennia with regard to will, memory and forgetting, and the range of emotions from love to hate; amusement to anxiety. This construction was particularly boosted in the era of the very astute ancients who are referred to above. But it is no secret. Everyone who tries to manage 'how we see things' such as business leaders, trade unionists, politicians of every stripe, campaigners of every motivation know this, if only intuitively. But this 'knowing' of people, this knowing of who us and them are fundamentally and how we can be influenced fundamentally is the meat and drink of the contemporary rhetorician - today's public relations practitioner.

The implication of this article is that nonetheless the fundamentality of this 'getting people to see things in a particular way' - of influencing their common sense 'logic' is generally missed when public relations theorists try to conceptualise their practice. I suggest contemporary practitioners need to take a leaf out of the book of what the original sophists rather than the later academicians and politicians meant by rhetoric. My thesis is that after the sophists, thought or 'we' were 'established' as it were in our *techne* - our *modus operandi* of the fundamental aspects of human being - that is of intellectual *being* in the world, the realisation of how we had been *constructed* in that way, diminished. Instead human intellectual construction was assumed. It was the less philosophical, more vocationally oriented rhetoricians who came after the sophists - the speech-smiths, the orators and crafters of oratory who Plato attacked - those who predominantly only tinkered with the phenomena Jaeger refers to above, who now claim the title. My suggestion is that theories which inherit that partiality - that reification

of bits of how we think - need to be transcended.

This is the 10-year update which I offer to my original *PRism* article: 'Changing vistas in public relations theory'. The 2003 article had five section headings:

1. J. Grunig's emphasis on the symmetrical
2. The rhetorical theory approach to public relations
3. Public relations as relationship management
4. Public relations as engendered practice
5. Community interests, change and empowerment through public relations.

Referring to the above list it seems to me that 10 years later most teachers of public relations would maintain the usefulness of Grunig's four models as an initial framework for explaining this subject - irrespective of controversies over notions of 'symmetry' and 'Excellence'. The section under subheading three would also still seem to be a sound choice with relationship management a frequently mentioned theory. But it is the rhetorical approach which I will argue now stands out as by far the most important of the above. In fact I will argue that the rhetorical approach subsumes all the other headings.

The 'Introduction' section written by Robert Heath in Heath, Toth and Waymer (2009) is perhaps currently the most widely read explanation of the importance of rhetoric to public relations. Heath (2006) also contains a detailed discussion of the theoretical approaches which fit in with the rhetorical. Both of these sections of writing share the imperative to produce a viable, ethically defensible intellectual perspective on public relations. This imperative is the *raison d'être* of all serious attempts at theorising public relations and was implicit in my 2003 article. It is the imperative to provide a basis upon which public relations can be seen as both a genuine profession and as a legitimate academic subject. To this end Heath uses the rhetorical approach to show how public relations has a vital role as the ethical persuasive communication which is necessary for the maintenance of a healthy society and democracy. Heath's work is widely

respected. However this article is a critique which might be called: the fundamental alignment of public relations properly understood with rhetoric properly understood. That is, it is a critique with the ambition of identifying rhetoric as such with public relations as such. It is a critique which identifies ethical persuasive discourse as intrinsically prerequisite to any conceivable form of what might be referred to as civilised society rather than as prerequisite only to the more agreeable forms of civilisation. It is a critique about the organisation of perspectives on reasoning which are in line with Aristotle's suggestion that: "Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic." (Aristotle, 2001, p. 179)

In other words, in any process of understanding, facts cannot be separated from how facts are put. Facts and how they are expressed is an inseparable unit when it comes to understanding. Of course one can apply all sorts of scientific analyses and exegeses to facts... but ... doesn't that just prove the point? Facts only *mean* things in context. The way facts, particularly social facts, are put, or in the reverse, the way facts can be analysed as having been put, that is the linguistic codes and the persuasive settings in which they are delivered, 'colours' or perspectivises how they are received, how they are understood.

Heath separates public relations from rhetoric. For Heath rhetoric is an activity in society which has a tradition which provides a theory. This is a theory which is applicable both to rhetoric per se and to public relations. The thesis here however is that while it may initially be useful to separate notions of how ethical persuasive communication works for analytical purposes, it is a mistake to enshrine or reify this separation. Such separation objectifies 'rhetoric' as theory and 'public relations' as what is to be theorised. I suggest that the realisation that they are the same thing is a more productive way of getting nearer to the reality of both. In my view all that public relations is is a major contemporary form of rhetoric just as oratory was a major form of rhetoric in the past. I say

this in full recognition of all the complexities of contemporary public relations practice – its planning, its research base, its multiple digital channels, its ethical and legal codes and so on. Making a good speech is not simple either! My argument will imply that much of what other authorities on the public relations/rhetoric nexus write about is clouded by lack of historical perspectives. For instance I suggest that passages such as this one from Jacques L'Etang suffer from the bias by which rhetoric was stripped of its status of rhetoric per se and instead turned into a set of overwhelmingly dialectical notions:

Rhetoric, however it is defined, is important to public relations at both technical and theoretical levels and impacts upon both the practice and the interpretation of public relations. (L'Etang, 1996, p. 117)

In the chapter from which this quote is taken titled 'Public relations and rhetoric', L'Etang explains post-modern theoretical approaches within the umbrella of rhetorical theory. I suggest this has the unfortunate side effect of continuing to confuse what rhetoric actually is. Such theorisation militates against rhetoric's correct identification as a practice synonymous with public relations practice. Public relations is separated out as the 'thing' with rhetoric made the way of conceptualising the thing. I suggest that an unclouded understanding of rhetoric reveals how public relations – that is public relations properly revealed as a key expression of contemporary rhetoric – is one of the essential components of any sort of civilisation. It is a component of the contemporary apprehension and consequent manifestation of 'the hidden law of the structure of the mind' – as Jaeger might put it. In cooperation with grammar, public relations marshals contemporary 'logic'. As such it is an inescapable essential component of contemporary culture, whether for good or for bad.

Similarly to L'Etang, Skerlap in an article which admittedly more gives an overview of rhetorical approaches than critiques them, suggests:

[When]...different genres of public relations discourse have to be deployed. Rhetoric and discourse analysis can elaborate further on these crucial aspects of public relations. (Skerlep, 2001, p. 181)

Again there is an avoidance of the perspective that it is the public relations activity as rhetoric which *is* the genre of persuasive communication. Somehow the way perspectives on logic – logic in the sense suggested above – are formed can be analysed through the prism of some sort of external exegesis. This approach de-emphasises that it is the public relations activity itself which needs to be examined for its effect on perspective. It is public relations as the mode of persuasive communication working with language codes and dialectic which influence understanding in terms of a triumvirate *techne*. There is no need to acquit public relations of responsibility in the sense of reifying it as a separated component of a body on a slab which can be examined forensically for any signs of life as it were ‘after the fact’ of dialectic!

Here is Ihlen in similar mood:

Although much public relations research has been devoted to instrumental purposes...studies have also illustrated how public relations rhetoric works to promote particular ideologies. (Ihlen, 2011, p. 457)

For the purposes of the present perspective this is like talking in a kind of oxymoronic manner of the sort: the flying flight of a plane keeps it in the air; eating things which one eats is very satisfying; writing writing produces things to read.

Here is Edwards also separating rhetoric from public relations:

One of the reasons for advocating a rhetorical approach is that...it provides a valuable, functional argument for public relations’ boundary spanning role. (Edwards, 2011, p. 535)

By contrast to the above separatist analytical approaches Heath can be said to see

public relations *as* rhetoric. But Heath’s approach seems to only borrow the notion that public relations can be *seen* as rhetoric (rather than *be* rhetoric) in order to conjure up a special status where public relations becomes a sort of universal salve which enhances society. That is Heath applies a kind of gloss of rhetoric to public relations activity which somehow converts and promotes, or perhaps decorates public relations so that it joins the rank of a benign activity. The main problem with this application I suggest is that Heath sees rhetoric as only the top strata of civilisation. Figuratively speaking he sees rhetoric as the first so many hundred kilometres of the Earth’s crust. He does not see rhetoric as going all the way down to civilisation’s core. Quoting Kenneth Burke, Heath writes:

Rhetoric’s role in unsettled matters, Burke noted, rests on the fact that society is a marketplace of ideas, facts, values and policies: “the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Marketplace, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counter pressure, the Logomarchy [battle of words], the onus of ownership, the War of Nerves, the War.” For this reason Burke concluded that democracy institutionalises “the dialectic process, by setting up a political structure that gives full opportunity for the use of competition to a cooperative end.” (Heath, Toth, & Waymer, 2009, p. 24)

In his earlier chapter: ‘Rhetorical enactment rational’ (Heath, 2000) Heath celebrates the way individuals are able to live in liberated communities because of rhetoric:

Rhetorical enactment meets that requirement. It is the “communal” or “communitarian” aspect of discourse. Through communication, people form communities that liberate individuals through mutually beneficial interests and shared meaning. (Heath, 2000, p. 50)

So in other words the use of persuasive communication enables individuals and groups to organise and win better political and

economic circumstances. They are able to do this by creating and channelling discourse into negotiations which are powerful enough to subsume materially based authoritarianism. But surely the presumption here is that separate from rhetoric there is already a 'marketplace' which pre-exists. Separate from and before rhetoric there is already an established sphere where compelling ideas are brought to contest against other seductive notions. Similarly there are unexplained pre-existing circumstances in some sort of sphere of life which people need to be liberated *from*. In both instances for Burke and Heath rhetoric stands outside this pre-existence. In the first extract notions which have been presented persuasively – that is rhetoric – are *brought* to the market to battle and win discursive wars. In the second extract rhetorical enactment – that is, an external technique is *applied* to a pre-existing sphere in order to bring about liberation. What is not explained is how the marketplace itself and its rules, as well as the original non-liberation of individuals, have been pre-existently brought about and maintained. Are not these prior elements of social organisation also largely rhetorical constructs? Could they not already be the results of multiple elements of culture and ideology which have crystallised as social process through some sort of fundamental management which ordains what it is correct to think – or in the terms of this paper: what is commonsensically 'logical'? For instance even today some people are loyal monarchists, i.e. staunch subscribers to, and believers in, inequality. Similarly, often contrary to critical, rational perspectives, hundreds of millions, maybe billions of people subscribe to a range of religions for their perspective on what the world is. In the USA it appears that millions, certainly a large number, are convinced of the right and advisability of ordinary citizens to own and carry lethal weapons – weapons which sometimes possess mind-boggling levels of firepower. For many, legally owning an arsenal which could wipe out a small town is apparently 'logical'. Even more worrying some strands of apparent 'logic' allow

hundreds of millions to ignore or even deny arguments that the environment, and thus the social world as we know it, is on a path to destruction through climate change. Are not these pre-existing circumstances – these 'logics', these spheres in which Heath's notion of rhetoric is purported to trade and work its liberating magic – already rhetorically constructed? Does not rhetoric already pervade everything human including, to paraphrase 1., 3., 4., and 5. above: whether people or organisations relate symmetrically or not; how people perceive and manage their relationships; how gender is thought about; how communities are imagined and structured? Even Heath's use of Burke points to this glaring contradiction, this lacuna in his argument. The anomaly is in the implication that there is rhetoric on the one hand and that on the other hand there is an unproblematic social world which is bereft of, or antecedent to, the constant tensions of persuasive communication. This prerequisite problem with Heath's argument is hinted at when Heath quotes from a personal letter which Kenneth Burke wrote to novelist Malcolm Cowley: 'As Burke asked, "How can a world with rhetoric stay decent, how can a world without it exist at all?"' (Heath et al., 2009, p. 10). This quote points to the totalising notion of rhetoric as a vital part of the *techne* which, as the sophists knew, forms us. What Burke implies, but Heath and other theorists fail to grasp is that there can be no civilisation, good or bad, without rhetoric. This contrasts with Heath's implication that there *can* be civilisation without rhetoric. For Heath it is just that civilisation without rhetoric will not be a very civilised civilisation. The implication which I am drawing for our diverging views of public relations here is that Heath suggests public relations – *qua* rhetoric *aids and improves society*. I on the other hand suggest that rhetoric *qua* 21st century persuasive practices, including public relations, just like the work of rhetors in other eras, *creates* society. If my argument is the correct one this gives a different order of importance to public relations including its practice and its scholarship. Setting the sophists aside for the

moment here is another approach to making this argument:

Ramus

The dominance of reason since the Enlightenment has eclipsed and produced a false impression of the hitherto millennia-old importance of rhetoric. Rhetoric was taught as one of the essential thirds of the ‘trivium’ – rhetoric, dialectic and grammar; i.e. persuasive communication, reasoning and the codification of discourse. These three disciplines were the legs of the three legged stool on which western civilisation rested for centuries. Below I explain how the downgrading of rhetoric and the current unconscious over-reliance on what is generally taken to be rationality or ‘logic’ in the common sense of the word, has dangerously dimmed understandings of the human condition. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) has a good summary of what rhetoric is and of its importance in his: *The Advancement of Learning*:

...the duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will. For we see reason is disturbed in the administration thereof by three means – by illaqueation or sophism, which pertains to logic; by imagination or impression, which pertains to rhetoric; and by passion or affection, which pertains to morality. And as in negotiation with others, men are wrought by cunning, by importunity, and by vehemency; so in this negotiation within ourselves, men are undermined by inconsequences, solicited and importuned by impressions or observations, and transported by passions. Neither is the nature of man so unfortunately built, as that those powers and arts should have force to disturb reason, and not to establish and advance it. For the end of logic is to teach a form of argument to secure reason, and not to entrap it; the end of morality is to procure the affections to obey reason, and not to invade it; the end of

rhetoric is to fill the imagination to second reason, and not to oppress it; for these abuses of arts come in but ex oblique, for caution (Bacon, 2010, pp. 182-183).

In other words morality and the ways facts are presented have a major role in shaping thought. Thought is not formed by logic alone.

For Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679):

Rhetorick is an Art consisting not only in moving the Passions of the Judge; but chiefly in Proofs. And that this Art is Profitable...It consisteth therefore chiefly in *Proofs*; which are *Inferences*: and all *Inferences* being *Syllogismes*, a *Logician*, if he would observe the difference between a plain *Syllogisme*, and an *Enthymeme*, (which is a *Rhetoricall Syllogisme*;) would make the best Rhetorician. For all *Syllogismes* and *Inferences* belong properly to *Logick*; whether they infer truth or probability: and because without this *Art* it would often come to pass, that evil men by the advantage of natural abilities, would carry an evil cause against a good; it brings with it at least this profit, that making the pleaders even in skill, it leaves the odds only in the merit of the cause. Besides, ordinarily those that are Judges, are neither patient, nor capable of long *Scientificall proofs*, drawn from the *principles* through many *Syllogismes*; and therefore had need to be instructed by the *Rhetoricall*, and shorter way. (Hobbes, 1906)

A syllogism is the attempt to arrive at irrefutable conclusions by the logical progression of statements of apparently clear facts. An enthymeme is reasoning where one of the statements presumes prior understandings and thus is vulnerable to charges that it is not irrefutable. What Hobbes is essentially saying is that people do not usually base their understanding on lengthy, perfect explanation. We may presume that we think rationally. But most of the time we operate in terms of the multiple assumptions in the discourses which are the foundations of our culture. By

discourses here we mean mental constructions which are formed and expressed by language and other cultural forms. In practical terms when thinking about something we nearly always have no option but to think in shortcuts. We interrogate our largely culturally formed ways of perceiving in order to mentally seize onto the most expeditious depiction of what seems to be the case. That is we reason *enthymematically* rather than *sylogistically*. On a day-to-day basis we do not reason as if we were in a scientific or social scientific laboratory. Instead we reason by making reasonable assumptions. Nobody is equipped or has time to always seek ultimate scientific truths about everything we encounter every day, about everything we think every day, about everything we do every day. Hobbes is saying that for this reason it would be a mistake to always privilege impractical levels of attaining the ultimate, unassailable scientific truth while neglecting to equip ourselves with the understanding of and the skilful operation of the enthymematic level. The enthymematic level is that aspect of the operation of culture which is properly known as rhetoric. As the argument develops below it should become clear that it would be a mistake to ignore or, as has been the case post-Ramus *ridicule* this powerful art. A culture which forgets or tries to ignore that it has been constructed rhetorically is a culture which is inviting the mendacious, the stupid, or the downright evil to take control of its 'logic'.

Another Enlightenment figure Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715-1780) stresses the way people's thought is partly formed by human passions in addition to calculated logic. Emotional appeal is represented by 'pathos' in the trilogy: ethos, logos and pathos – character, logic and emotion. Ethos, logos and pathos are described in Aristotle's analysis of rhetoric in his still useful handbook: *The art of rhetoric* or *Rhetoric*. Bonnot de Condillac writes:

The influence of the passions is so great that without it the understanding is virtually at a standstill, so much so that for lack of passions there is barely

any intellect left. For certain talents they are even absolutely necessary. (Bonnot de Condillac & Aarsleff, 2001, p. 69)

Despite this acknowledgement of the ways rhetoric shapes thinking, a tendency to eclipse the usefulness and prestige of rhetoric had already begun before the above Enlightenment authorities were born. A major opponent of rhetoric was Peter Ramus (1515 – 1572). As Walter Ong (1912 – 2003) explains:

Dialectic and rhetoric have been intertwined at least from the time of the Greek Sophists till our present day, and when Ramus decrees that they must be disengaged from one another...he engages some of the most powerful and obscure forces in intellectual history. (Ong, 2004, p. 270)

Ong explains that the Ramist tendency stripped rhetoric of substance. The pre-Ramist rhetorical curriculum which Bacon, Hobbes and Bonnot de Condillac would have recognised understood rhetoric to include:

- *Inventio*: Invention or discovery of innovative expression – that is the manufacture, the creation of discourse. This is tantamount to the production of culture and thus the facilitation of ways in which it is possible to think.
- *Dispositio*: Disposition, that is judgement about the arrangement of elements of the discourse so that it has the most, or certain types of discursive meaning and effect.
- *Elocutio*: Style of persuasion e.g. argumentative, emotive, or poetic.
- *Pronuntiatio*: Oratorical delivery – performance in terms of voice and gesture. Like Elocutio, Pronuntiatio contextualises how the invented and arranged discourse is emitted and received. These latter two elements thus contribute to the discourse. They play a part in how the mind is invited to think.
- *Memoria*: Memory including understanding how memories dim and how they can be rekindled as well as mnemonic devices. This element is to do with the art or science of how to play on people's memories.

Ong (2004, p. 4) argues that Ramus distorted the work of Cicero (106-43 BCE), as well as Renaissance humanist Rudolph

Agricola (1444-1485) and others, to privilege dialectic, that is logical reasoning, or what we might now call the *scientific approach*, over rhetoric. Aristotle (circa 384-322 BCE) had previously decreed them *counterparts* to the conveyance of understanding:

Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic...all men engage in them both after a fashion. For all men attempt in some measure to conduct investigations and to furnish explanations. (Aristotle, 1991, p. 66)

Ong tells the story about how Ramus moved *inventio* and *dispositio* out of the procedures of rhetoric into those of dialectic. This meant that judgement of how facts were to be put – *disposition* – now became an abstract logical process rather than an admittedly fallible but many-faceted and highly regarded human argumentative process. Similarly actual, concrete, uninvented *facts* – the kind of presumed real facts that Heath might be argued to rely on for his pre-existing marketised world – had to be *found* instead of discursively created (*inventio*). Abstract, detached, notionally *scientific* procedure was privileged over the more discursive as the producer of inter and intra human depictions of reality. So, for example the notion of a ‘market’ was allowed to attract stature as a harder to dispel concrete reality. It was a ‘more-real’ thing, not a ‘less-real’ ephemeral figure of speech which would be much easier to challenge and discourse about. At the same time the essential human characteristic of remembering, which is an omnipresent dimension of the ways we think and fail to think every day, was forgotten and largely remains forgotten. It was subsumed by privileging written and other forms of recording which now largely stand in for human memory. The Enlightenment saw the vast expansion of vernacular and scholarly scientific writing. This startling revolution in communication technology was allowed to overwhelm the importance of the ways humans organically record and organically forget. Ong (1982) remarks on the downgrading of this element of rhetoric which involves a failure to acknowledge that

the mind does not operate like a congealed text. The implication again is that scientific, or as critiques might call them: *scientistic* advances have made redundant or superseded traditional, human discursive practices. The downgrading of *memoria* is perhaps one of the least understood and most important aspects of the dismantling of rhetoric proper. Its removal from the field of discussion obscures the point that whatever the external-to-the-mind recording of facts, the mind’s comprehension of all facts remains an active organic process of decay, rejuvenation, conjugation and evolution on a second-by-second and year-by-year basis. The disappearance of *memoria* detracts from and tends to make two-dimensional philosophical discussion about the *will* and habit. Charles Sanders Peirce writes extensively on the role habit plays in forming and maintaining our logics (Peirce, Weiss, & Hartshorne, 1974). With the Ramusian revolution these formerly obviously discursive, pliable, tangible human qualities become reified into theoretically solid entities. It is as if butterflies have been captured, pinned and exhibited as frozen artefacts alienated from their ever-changing nature.

Ong explains that Ramus and his tradition collapsed rhetoric into *Elocutio* (style) and *Pronuntiatio* (performance) only. These are epiphenomena which rely on *inventio* and *dispositio* for their substance. This is the usually dismissed and often despised or ridiculed style and performance... the ‘spin’, which is contrasted to the dialectical facts of the case. Three centuries ago rhetoric lost status as the element which advocated the best case for how the facts could be. It fled the field in the face of the advance of sure and unchallengeable Enlightenment factuality. We became the products of a culture where truth was delivered ideoscopically, that is by specially equipped scientific and social scientific experts rather than cenoscopically, that is in balance to discourses which might make science bow to other ways of deciding what was right (Deely, 2008, Peirce, 1955). It is this eviscerated, impotent version of rhetoric which sits scorned in the back seat while sure factual science drives a world which is an

antonym of egalitarianism towards its non-environmental future. We are all passengers of the current version of rhetoric, the current style in which facts are presented, the style and presentation with which popular notions of public relations are synonymous.

It is beyond the scope of this article to expand much further about how rhetoric properly understood might be appropriately repatriated into mainstream academia. However we can point to those working in that direction. Some of the most important authorities for what is being claimed about rhetoric in this article are: Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001; Jarratt, 1991; Herrick, 2005; Skinner, 1996; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Perelman, 1982 and of course Ong, 2002 and 2004. There are also Alasdair MacIntyre's 1984 critique of post-Enlightenment ethics and Stephen Toulmin's imperative to: '...counter the current widespread disillusion with the agenda of Modernity, and salvage what is still humanly important in its projects,' (Toulmin, 1992, p. xi). However glimpses of the remains of the pillaging of rhetoric can be seen out of the corner of the eye as it were in 19th and 20th century authorities of the post-modern. For instance Nietzsche's *Friedrich Nietzsche on rhetoric and language* (Nietzsche, Gilman, Blair, & Parent, 1989); Eagleton's *A small history of rhetoric* (1981); Barthe's *The Old Rhetoric: An aide memoire* (1994) as well as in Derrida's occasional references to rhetoric (Derrida & Kamuf, 1991). These are all postmodern writers, or in Nietzsche's case a forerunner of the postmodern, who seem to be involved in some sort of intellectual immune response to the pathogenic effect of the Ramist legacy. This is a pathogen which still infects modernist writers such as Habermas.

Habermas

Habermas's post-Ramus, anti-rhetoric faith in Enlightenment logic is underlined by his stern words on the alleged post-modern reincarnation of rhetoric in the literary theory of Derrida:

If, following Derrida's recommendation, philosophical thinking were to be relieved of the

duty of solving problems and shifted over to the problem of literary criticism, it would be robbed, not merely of its seriousness, but of its productivity... Whoever transposes the radical critique of reason into the domain of rhetoric in order to blunt the paradox of self-referentiality, also dulls the sword of the critique of reason itself. (Habermas, 1990, p. 210)

Habermas is wedded to modernist reasoning and the primacy of dialectic over rhetoric. In contrast to his Enlightenment-sceptical Frankfurt School forerunners Horkheimer and Adorno he prioritises rationalisation as opposed to discursive processes (see Outhwaite in Habermas & Outhwaite, 1996). For instance he suggests that if media workers are allowed professional autonomy, their reason, that is dialectic, will steer them to behave rationally for the common good:

...political communication in the public sphere can facilitate deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies only if a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments and if anonymous audiences grant a feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society...As an essential element of the democratic process, deliberation is expected to fulfil three functions: to mobilize and pool relevant issues and required information, and to specify interpretations; to process such contributions discursively by means of proper arguments for and against; and to generate rationally motivated yes and no attitudes that are expected to determine the outcome of procedurally correct decisions. (Habermas, 2006, p. 416)

So for Habermas in public affairs, 'truth' has to be obtained through: 'proper arguments' by 'detached' 'anonymous' people who 'generate rationally motivated yes and no attitudes'. This all sounds a bit like the logical operations of a computer. It is to do with detached discourse, discourse which is not tainted by human feelings generated from involvement in what is

being referred to. *Inventio*, *Dispositio*, *Elocutio*, *Pronuntiatio* and *Memoria* have been taken out and replaced by abstract logical processes. Ramus would have approved. Implicit in Habermas and other modernists there is another fundamental consequence for rhetoric which we might call the apparent automation of morality. This is an automation which estranges character and emotion, that is the ethos and pathos elements of rhetoric, away from logos. This is an estrangement which again collapses rhetoric down to the idea that understanding emerges from pure reason alone. The phenomenon is dealt with by MacIntyre (1984) in his paradigm-shifting book: *After virtue*.

MacIntyre

MacIntyre has a critical view of the way modern philosophy approaches ethics. The nub of *After virtue* is that, contrary to what some Enlightenment philosophers would have us believe it is not 'natural' for people unshackled from oppression to fall into a reverie of higher conscience which inclines them to love their neighbours in ways conducive to a better society. It is not 'natural' to behave civilly. In concert with Nietzsche, MacIntyre argues against the myth that society freed from the repressive and distorting ideology of antiquated empires – the *anciens regimes* – would 'return' to a presumed golden age where 'the general will', 'the rights of man', utilitarian and other humane concepts would come to the fore. MacIntyre says this presumption was one of the biggest mistakes of modern philosophy. He argues that the Aristotelian-based morality of older times was more rational and sound. Aristotelianism was built on the observation of people over millennia. This was an observation which viewed people as always part of a communal project and as always needing to define themselves in terms of the success of this project. MacIntyre thus classifies Aristotle's notion of morality as bound up with teleology – that is morality formed by communal discourse which orients people towards certain cooperative ends. MacIntyre explains that in ancient Greece for example: "...the virtues find their place not

just in the life of the individual, but in the life of the city... the individual is indeed intelligible only as a politikon zoon [a political animal], (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 150)."

MacIntyre contrasts this ancient identity of morality involving concrete communal imperatives to the abstract internal circumspection of Enlightenment philosophers. For instance Kant (1724–1804):

...my conviction is not *logical*, but *moral* certainty; and since it rests on subjective grounds (of the moral sentiment), I must not even say: *It is* morally certain that there is a God, etc., but: *I am* morally certain, that is, my belief in God and in another world is so interwoven with my moral nature, that I am under as little apprehension of having the former [God] torn from me as of losing the latter [moral nature]. (Kant & Meiklejohn, 1991, p. 530)

In a similar vein Hume (1711-1776) says:

In all men the principles of humanity give a general approbation of what is useful to society, though in different degrees in different men... When the natural philanthropy of men is not prevented they prefer the happiness of society and virtue. (Hume, Selby-Bigge, & Nidditch, 1975, p. 367)

Here is Rousseau (1712-1778) in similar mood:

When our natural tendencies have not been interfered with by human prejudice and human institutions, the happiness alike of children and of men consists in the enjoyment of their liberty... The liberty which preserves a man from vice would be united with the morality which raises him to virtue. (Rousseau, 2004:Bk II, p. 57)

It is the abstract introspection of these rationalisations that MacIntyre attacks. For him they are not considering human virtues in terms of a telos – an ongoing purpose of the sort required to keep civilisation thriving. MacIntyre is frustrated that this introspection can lead to nonsensical actions which can still be classified as morally 'good'. His argument

can be interpreted as underlining the point that the Enlightenment indeed separated rhetoric from dialectic in the sense here of separating character (ethos) from intelligent reasoning (logos):

According to Aristotle then excellence of character and intelligence cannot be separated... for Kant one can be both good and stupid; but for Aristotle stupidity of a certain kind precludes goodness. Moreover genuine practical intelligence in turn requires knowledge of the good, indeed itself requires goodness of a kind in its possessor: ‘...it is clear that a man cannot have practical intelligence unless he is good’ (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a37). (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 155)

The moral rhetoricians

The moral nature of rhetoric is particularly underlined by St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) who was a professor of rhetoric besides being a main pillar of Western Christianity (Augustine, 1952). The example of Augustine underlines the point that for many centuries truth as perceived by the church was sacred. I.e. the ‘Word’ was tied to particular ethical conventions. But the inseparability of rhetoric from moral practice goes back much further than that. Two and a half millennia ago Isocrates (BCE 436–338) a famed rhetorician contemporary of Plato wrote:

...there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish. For this it is which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust and things base and honourable; and if it were not for these ordinances we should not be able to live with one another. It is by this also that we confute the bad and extol the good. (Isocrates, Norlin, & Van Hook, 1928, pp. 6-7)

Isocrates’ wisdom is reflected down the centuries in the words of other famous rhetoricians such as Cicero (BCE 106–43) and Quintilian (ca. 35–96). The link between sound morals and oratory – a major vehicle of rhetoric is remarked by Quintilian:

...he who would answer my idea of an orator must be a good man...no man, unless he be good, can ever be an orator... It is of importance that an orator should be good because, should the power of speaking be to support an evil, nothing would be more pernicious than eloquence alike to public concerns and private, and I myself, who as far as it is in my power, strive to contribute something to the faculty of the orator, should deserve very ill of the world, since I would furnish arms not for soldiers, but for robbers. (Quintilian, 2001, p. 413)

The lesson of the ancient rhetoricians is that we are not persuaded by people if they have poor character even if they speak with the utmost rationality and instil deep emotion in us. Morality is intrinsic to how communication helps us to form our thought. I join with others who have written in the same vein in respect of public relations. But I extend the point to say that this confluence is another piece of evidence that rhetoric and public relations both understood properly are identical.

Conclusion

So what has all this discussion of rhetoric and philosophy got to do with a 10-year retrospective on how I previously outlined important theories of public relations? It has this relevance: I offer these ideas and critique as my contribution to the development of theoretical thinking about public relations. This is a critique which recognises the increasing interest in the rhetorical approach, but which warns against a mistaken modernist application of rhetoric. The article has argued that public relations would benefit from the restoration of the prestige and understanding of the millennia-old art of rhetoric. But it explains that a considerable effort is required if rhetoric and thus public relations is to be understood properly. It warns against adoption of the modernist approach to rhetoric such as that exhibited by Heath and the post-modernist approach of others. The article has explained rhetoric’s original misinterpretation at the time of Plato and its further dismantling by

Enlightenment ideas. It argues that a theoretical approach towards rhetoric by public relations scholars must be holistic, it cannot be partial and selective. There needs to be recognition that all of discourse – that is all of the codes by which people think – is what differentiates civilisation from animal existence. There needs to be recognition that all of the ideas in people’s heads are what humanity is and that rhetoric is an inseparable part of what puts all of these ideas into people’s heads. It is a mistake to attribute the ideas in people’s heads to logical processes alone. It needs to be recognised that rhetoric, whatever it has been called down the centuries, is a vital part of anything that can be called ‘culture’ or ‘civilisation’. Rhetoric never went away. But Ramusian and Enlightenment thinking eviscerated and distorted the intellectual base of the last significant understanding of this integral facet of how we are. This is the devastated intellectual situation which contemporary persuasive communication inherits today. Public relations and related activities as the most important vehicles of contemporary rhetoric are in urgent need of a reclamation of this understanding. The reclamation is needed to inform and better understand the work of the hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of women and men who presently engage in the largely opaque, but vitally important counterpart to dialectic. These people work in public relations, public affairs, media advice, opinion editorial production, corporate communication, think tanks, advertising, opinion research, customer relations, event management and so on. These knowledge workers, and our attitude to them, albeit unconsciously, subscribe to a post-sophist, post-Enlightenment ideology. This ideology marginalises the status as well as the understanding of their work. Neither these practitioners nor the more culpable related academics sufficiently recognise the civilisation-affecting consequences of the persuasive communication work being carried out. This ‘professional’ work is ‘accredited’ by ethical codes aligned to the pathological assumptions of Ramus and to varieties of the

subsequent post-Enlightenment rationalist strains of thought. It is time that intellectuals woke up to this industrial-scale amoralising of contemporary putatively ‘civilised’ thought. This is the context in which all five of my picks for public relations theory 10 years ago should now be read. I suggest it is no longer sufficient to think in simplistic asymmetrical model terms, let alone symmetrical terms. It is no longer sufficient to list and count relationship aspects and dimensions. Where notions of ‘gender’ and ‘community’ come from needs to be more fundamentally investigated. But maybe that is a job for my article in another 10 years.

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