

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Southern Political Science Association

Politics, Speech, and the Art of Persuasion: Toward an Aristotelian Conception of the Public Sphere

Author(s): Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos

Source: *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Aug., 1999), pp. 741-757

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Southern Political Science Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2647826>

Accessed: 21/12/2009 15:47

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press and Southern Political Science Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Politics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Politics, Speech, and the Art of Persuasion: Toward an Aristotelian Conception of the Public Sphere

Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos
New School for Social Research

This paper argues that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a valuable source for contemporary theorists of the public sphere. Thus far, these scholars have failed to recognize that Aristotle's discussion of the art of rhetoric contains important elements of both rational/deliberative and agonistic models of the public sphere. Aristotle recognizes that persuasive political speech is reasonable, passionate, and reflective of the character of the speaker.

After presenting a reconstruction of Aristotle's arguments concerning (1) the content of persuasive public speech and (2) its role in political deliberation, I discuss areas of agreement and disagreement between Aristotle and the two most influential representatives of rational/deliberative and agonistic models of the public sphere: Jurgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt. The paper's conclusion refers to the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of rhetorical speech in order to illustrate the advantages of Aristotelian persuasion over rational/deliberative and agonistic forms of public speech.

To presuppose that classical thought is simply the voice of truth which one may not question and go behind seems to me to be a mistake. . . . Understanding demands that one enter into conversation with the classical texts and their thoughts in a living language. One must remain conscious that it is a conversation between today and then . . . one comes thereby to recognize the dialectic of repetition as well as the dialectic of understanding. (Hans-Georg Gadamer 1993)

Introduction

In his discussion of Hannah Arendt's concept of power, Jurgen Habermas accuses Arendt of tying her own theory of communicative action too closely to the "Aristotelian concept of praxis" (Habermas 1983, 174). Habermas goes on to argue that "[t]he concept of communicatively engendered power developed by Arendt can be made into a sharp instrument *only if it is dissociated from the theory of action inspired by Aristotle*" (179; emphasis added). However, contra Habermas, it is not at all clear that Arendt is basing her theory of action on an Aristotelian model. Indeed, in *The Human Condition* Arendt lumps both Plato and Aristotle into what she refers to as "the Socratic school," and accuses both philosophers of

I thank Nancy Fraser, Leah Bradshaw, Rainer Forst, Ronald Beiner, Dushan Kolundzic, Judith Swanson, Shaun Young, Barbara Syrrakos, Marios Constantinou, and Jeffrey Wengrofsky for their thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

wanting to “turn against politics and against action” (Arendt 1958, 195). According to Arendt, Plato and Aristotle establish the tradition that subordinates practice to contemplation; it is this hierarchy that she wishes to challenge (Arendt 1958, 14; Zuckert 1983, 185).¹ Seen in this light, Arendt’s glowing description of the agonistic era of the polis is more in tune with Achilles than Aristotle.

If Arendt’s model of communicative action is *not* based on an Aristotelian conception, we are justified in inquiring into whether such a model exists. As I shall endeavor to argue in this paper, Aristotle does present us with a guide to conduct in the public realm that has hitherto been ignored by public sphere theorists. A close reading of *The Rhetoric* reveals that Aristotle’s conception of right conduct in the public sphere has much in common with both Arendt’s and Habermas’ normative models. That said, there are also important differences among the three theorists. Unlike Habermas, Aristotle does not limit the content of political speech to rational truth claims. Neither does he argue that deliberation in the public sphere should lead to a rational consensus. Instead, Aristotle argues that political speech should bridge the gaps between the public and private spheres, passions and reason, individual interests and the common good, equity and law. Political speech is by its very nature reasonable, passionate, and reflective of the character of the speaker. Conversely, in marked contrast to Arendt, Aristotle does not draw a sharp distinction between the private and public realms. Rather, as Mary Nichols has pointed out, in the content of Aristotelian political speech “we find the complex interplay of particular and universal elements that for Aristotle characterize political life” (Nichols 1987, 663).²

The paper is structured as follows. I begin by noting some possible objections to using Aristotle as a source in contemporary deliberations on the public sphere. I believe that objections based on Aristotle’s views on women and slavery are warranted, but should not preclude us from using his normative ideal as a starting point for further theorizing. Following this I reconstruct Aristotle’s argument in *The Rhetoric*, emphasizing those elements that I believe should be of particular relevance to public sphere theorists. Given the breadth of Aristotle’s treatise and the limits of this paper, I focus specifically on his discussion of (1) the content of persuasive political speech and (2) its role in political deliberation. I then go on to discuss areas of agreement and disagreement between Aristotle, Habermas, and Arendt. Finally, I point out why I believe Aristotelian persuasion is potentially superior to both agonistic and rational/deliberative types of public speech. I briefly refer to the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.’s use of rhetorical speech to flesh out this argument.

¹ This argument is explored at length in Bradshaw 1989.

² This point is also made by Zuckert (1983, 185): “[I]t is not true, as Arendt claims, that the *polis* is characterized by a sharp distinction between public and private. On the contrary, Aristotle shows that the regime (*politeia*) shapes and so infuses all aspects of private life, especially the family—not through totalitarian controls, of course, but rather by praise and blame expressed either in legislation or mere opinion.”

Why Aristotle? Why Rhetoric?

Some may object to using Aristotle as a source for public sphere theorizing. After all, are not Aristotle's views on women and slavery at variance with the idea of an inclusive public? In response, I would agree that we do need to acknowledge a number of fundamental differences between contemporary moral and political perspectives and those of the ancient Greeks. For one, there is no question that a sexual identity is not, and ought not be, the basis for a naturally given social identity (Robinson 1995, 54). Nor should we paper over the fact that ancient Greek democracy crowned a socioeconomic system built on slavery. In short, many of Aristotle's views concerning slavery, gender, and the valorization of Greek culture over that of other peoples are deeply troubling. In spite of all this, it would be a mistake to deny that Aristotle does have important things to say about political discourse and its function in a well-ordered society. This does not mean that we should accept his ideas, or those of any philosopher, uncritically. Rather, as Gadamer suggests, we should enter into a dialogue with Aristotle, taking from him ideas that illuminate contemporary questions (1986, 6). For Aristotle's insights are neither precious heirlooms, handed down from generation to generation, nor the irrational musings of a reckless misogynist; they constitute a body of work that we may explore to help make sense of our own social and political conditions.³

Given the centrality of speech in both agonistic and rational/deliberative conceptions of the public sphere, it is surprising that contemporary theorists have not discussed the use of rhetoric more extensively.⁴ This neglect is all the more surprising when we consider that political legitimacy is closely related to the problem of getting people to listen to and accept what is said (Paine 1981, 9). To his credit, Aristotle recognized that rhetoric is a potential ally in our struggle to define the appropriate ends of political life. His defense of rhetoric, however, has been obscured by its denigration by other philosophers. Both Plato and Kant serve as good examples of what I am referring to. Plato equates rhetoric and political speech, broadly speaking, with flattery. He argues that truth can only be disclosed in private conversations, not in the public sphere. Both politics and rhetoric should therefore be abandoned in favor of Socratic philosophy, which alone has access to the truth (Vickers 1988, 90).⁵ Plato's disdain for rhetoric is

³For examples of such an approach see Nussbaum 1990; Beiner 1992, esp. chaps. 3 and 4; and Salkevar 1990.

⁴For notable exceptions see Young 1996 and Pangle 1992, 128–30.

⁵In the *Apology*, Socrates states that the truly just man has no need of rhetoric. Truth is the sole concern of the *philosopher*, as well as his or her only means of persuasion. The use of rhetoric is therefore linked to the willful distortion of the truth. Socrates claims that his speech consists solely of "the whole truth . . . not beautifully spoken speeches like theirs [the politicians], adorned with phrases and words (17b-c)." See Plato 1984, 64.

shared by Kant and is clearly expressed in section 53 of his *Critique of Judgment*. According to Kant, rhetoric

can be recommended neither for the bar nor the pulpit. For where civil laws, the right of individual persons, or the permanent instruction and determination of men's minds to a correct knowledge and a conscientious observance of their duty is at stake, then it is below the dignity of an undertaking of such moment to exhibit even a trace of the exuberance of wit and imagination, and, still more, of the art of talking men round and prejudicing them in favor of anyone. . . . Further, the simple lucid concept of human concerns . . . [exerts] . . . a sufficient influence upon human minds to obviate the necessity of having recourse here to the machinery of persuasion, which, being equally available for the purpose of putting a fine gloss or a cloak upon vice and error, fails to rid one completely of the lurking suspicion that one is being artfully hoodwinked. (Kant 1952, quoted in Beiner 1983, 99)

Plato and Kant both accentuate rhetoric's ability to delude and "hoodwink" unsuspecting listeners. They would prefer that political discourse be couched in language that appeals primarily to an audience's reason, as opposed to their passions and appetites. Aristotle is cognizant that rhetoric can be used to promote private interests at the expense of the truth. This recognition of rhetoric's potential for harm is the driving force behind his attempt to subordinate private, purely self-interested rhetoric to a public realm of discourse (Nichols 1987, 661). By offering a complex conception of public speech that appeals to reason as well as human passions and emotions, Aristotle defends rhetoric against claims that it is simply flattery, or worse still, an artful cloak for injustice. Perhaps even more importantly, Aristotle's fusion of reason, emotion, and performance also provides us with a unique alternative to both agonistic and rational/deliberative conceptions of the public sphere.⁶

Ethos, Pathos, and Logos: The Elements of Persuasion

In the first sentence of *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle states that "[r]hetoric is the counterpart of dialectic" (1354a). Dialectical reasoning seeks to discover general truths from common opinions.⁷ Rhetoric allows us to communicate these truth claims to others (1354a5). Aristotle claims that treatises on forensic (legal) and epideictic (ceremonial) rhetoric typically fail to recognize rhetoric's affinity to dialectic. Consequently, they say nothing about enthymemes (1354a15), which make up the "body" of truly persuasive speech (1354a5). Enthymemes are rhetorical demonstrations that resemble syllogisms in that they approximate logical deductions. Aristotle argues that enthymemes, like syllogisms, appeal to the listener's "natural instinct for what is true" (1355a15–20, 22). Hence, notwithstanding Plato's claims, rhetoric appeals to our faculty of reason and has the

⁶ For a comparison of agonistic, liberal/proceduralist, and rational/deliberative conceptions of the public sphere, see Benhabib 1992.

⁷ For a discussion of the relation of dialectic and rhetoric, see Arnhart 1981 and McCabe 1994.

potential to communicate the truth. Aristotle's position on this point is nicely captured by Larry Arnhart:

True rhetoric is the "counterpart" not of "cookery" but of dialectic. It is not an artless "knack" for persuading people; nor is it a collection of sophistical devices using emotional appeals for distracting audiences or for deceiving them with specious reasoning. Rather, it is a mode of argument, an art of reasoning that consists of "proofs" (*pisteis*) as conveyed through the enthymeme. . . . Like many other beneficial instruments, rhetoric can be harmful if misused. But the virtuous speaker can be trusted to apply it properly, and the commonsense judgments of men as expressed in common opinion can be depended upon in most cases to restrain the speaker who would misuse it. (Arnhart 1981, 34)

Aristotle notes that three elements enter into the ability to persuade: (1) the speaker's character (*ethos*), (2) the audience's emotions (*pathos*), and (3) the rationality of the speech's arguments (*logos*) (Beiner 1983, 87). Persuasive speech must present the right impression of the speaker's character, work on the audience's emotions, and prove the truth of the statements made. In Aristotle's words:

It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. . . . Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of persuasive argument suitable to the case in question. (1356a10–20, 25)

In short, Aristotle holds that political speech should engage both the rational and nonrational elements of the listener's soul (Nussbaum 1996; Wardy 1996, 63). It is not enough that one's argument be demonstrative, the speaker should also put his or her audience in the proper emotional state: "since rhetoric exists to affect the giving of decisions . . . the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, in the right frame of mind" (1377b20–25). As Ronald Beiner points out, this entails the exercise of practical wisdom or *phronesis*. The ability to "show oneself to be a man of moral purpose, to be aware of how emotion interacts with judgment, and to choose the most effective enthymemes, arguments, style, language, delivery, and arrangement of speech is to achieve in rhetoric what the man in possession of *phronesis* achieves in acting with practical wisdom in a given situation of choice and action" (Beiner 1983, 88).

Speech, Deliberation, Judgment

Aristotle argues that deliberative or political rhetoric should be the primary concern of citizens, because it deals with their essential interests (1354b30, 21).⁸

⁸ Aristotle's emphasis on the political dimension of speech is stated clearly in *The Politics*: "[S]peech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and the unjust. For it is peculiar to man as compared to other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things of this sort; and a partnership in these things is what makes a household a city" (1253a10–15).

He notes that its neglect has led many to mistakenly conflate its form and intent with that of forensic and epideictic rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric is unique in that it appeals both to the listener's private interests and the business of the community. It "is nobler . . . than forensic [rhetoric] not only because it aims at a general or public end but also because it must address a greater variety of private interests and concerns" (Nichols 1987, 663).

Political speech is future oriented; that is, it involves recommending one of a number of policies or courses of action. Its subject matter spans the full range of domestic and international issues: ways and means, war and peace, national defense, imports and exports, and legislation (*The Rhetoric* 1359b20).⁹ Aristotle notes that in a democracy, citizens share some responsibility in deliberating on these issues. Deliberation, moreover, is often immersed in controversy (1391b7–20). Orators on either side of a debate use persuasive speech to influence their audience's decision. This joining of speech and deliberation links rhetoric to politics and constitutes the nexus of Aristotelian democratic will formation. Aristotle recognizes that in a democracy processes of judging and of arriving at moral knowledge are ideally collective in nature.¹⁰ Indeed, in Book 3, chapter 11, of *The Politics*, he plainly states that the judgment of a broad group of citizens may be superior to that of a few wise individuals.¹¹ The extent to which a proposition withstands the critical scrutiny of other minds determines its validity:

[T]hat which would be judged, or which has been judged, a good thing, or a better thing than something else, by all or most people of understanding, or by the majority . . . or by the ablest, *must be so*; either without qualification, or in so far as they use their understanding to form their judgment. This is indeed a *general principle, applicable to all other judgments also*; not only the goodness of things, but their essence, magnitude, and general nature are in fact just what knowledge and understanding will declare them to be. (*The Rhetoric* 1364b11–15; emphasis added)

According to Aristotle, then, contending truth claims and rival conceptions of the good life are contested, and ultimately settled, in the public sphere. He states unambiguously that this is a "general principle" applicable to "all judgments." However, it would be false to claim that Aristotle holds political discourse in the same esteem as do Habermas or Arendt. Aristotle qualifies his position by pointing out that by its nature, political deliberation deals with differences of opinion over varying senses of the good in uncertain circumstances. Its truths are there-

⁹ In *The Politics* Aristotle states that in democracies, "[t]he deliberative element has authority in matters of war and peace, in making and unmaking alliances; it passes laws, inflicts death, exile, confiscation, elects magistrates and audits their accounts" (1298a1–5).

¹⁰ This point is made with great clarity and precision by Johnstone (1980, 13).

¹¹ "For because they are many, each can have a part of virtue and prudence, and on their joining together, the multitude, with its many feet and hands, and having many senses, becomes like a single human being, and so also with respect to character and mind" (1281b1–15).

fore provisional rather than universal (1357a30–35). Deliberation and judgment on transcendent or universalizable goods is reserved for philosophers. This tacit distinction between philosophical and political judgment is more obvious when we note that while Aristotle discusses the components of practical wisdom at length in *The Rhetoric*, he never equates it to philosophical wisdom, or *sophia*. Indeed, rhetoric is deemed a *practical art* inasmuch as its subject matter is grasped intuitively rather than contemplatively (1356b–1357a5). In this sense, Aristotle retains the Platonic conception of a transcendent good, accessible to philosophers and not bound to any single society or culture. Unlike Habermas, he rejects the claim that truly universalizable norms can be apprehended intersubjectively through rational discourse. For Aristotle, philosophical contemplation remains both separate from and superior to political deliberation.

Aristotle does, however, praise the good rhetorician for his or her exercise of public (as opposed to philosophical) virtue. The public speaker's virtue is manifested in his or her good sense, good moral character, and goodwill. These qualities capture the audience's trust and distinguish him or her from sophists, who claim that personal goodness adds nothing to a person's power of persuasion (1356a10). Aristotle's distinction between rhetoric and sophistry lets us set critical standards for conduct in the public sphere. It is based on the recognition that political speech and action can result either in virtue or depravity (1355a30–1355b5). Good public speakers, as opposed to reckless sophists, persuade their audience to adopt the best means available. In some cases, this may lead to noble actions that transform society and improve its citizens in the process. In the right political hands, rhetoric "can be a powerful force for good, counteracting distorting feelings and emotions to move a city toward genuine *eudaimonia*" (Reeve 1996, 203).

Aristotle, Arendt, and Habermas on the Public Sphere: A Short Exchange

Although a detailed comparison of Aristotle, Arendt, and Habermas is impossible in a paper of this length, a brief outline of the similarities and differences in their positions is within our range. I shall enlist the aid of Nancy Fraser's schema for evaluating alternative conceptions of the public sphere to conduct my comparison. Fraser's framework is organized around the following set of questions: (1) Who participates in public deliberations? (2) What is the subject matter? (3) How do participants in deliberation speak to one another? (4) Where is the site of communicative exchange and deliberation?¹² Since Aristotle does not provide us with precise answers to some of these questions, my suggestions for where he might stand will doubtlessly be open to differing interpretations.

¹²Nancy Fraser introduced and elaborated on this schema in a series of seminars entitled "Rethinking the Public Sphere," held at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research in the fall of 1996.

Who Participates?

Aristotle, Habermas, and Arendt are in agreement on this point: all citizens of a democratic community are entitled to participate in the political process. For Habermas, deliberation requires “the inclusion of all parties that might be affected” (1992, 449; see also Habermas 1989). Arendt states that “everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by *everybody* and has the widest possible publicity” (1958, 50; emphasis added). Elsewhere she notes that humanity’s gift of speech results in a plurality of unique beings, who by their very status as humans are entitled to self-expression (1958, 176). Deeds and speech punctuate the monotony of life; indeed, they are the essence of what Arendt calls “the wonder of human life.”

For Aristotle the question of who is included depends on the type of regime under consideration. Clearly, in a democracy all citizens are formally entitled to participate in deliberation (*The Politics* 6.1317a40–1318a10). As noted above, Aristotle argues that the deliberative competence of “the many” may be superior to that of either a single ruler or a clique of would-be sovereigns (*The Rhetoric* 1365a). That said, Aristotle implies that particular individuals are likely to be more persuasive than the majority of their peers (see *The Politics* 3.1281a1–10, 1281b1–20, and *The Rhetoric* 1365b20–1366a5–15). The truly persuasive speaker’s superior character, delivery, and knowledge of the political world place him or her in the forefront of political deliberations. Hence, while in a democracy all are given the opportunity to speak, deliberate, and judge, very often an exemplary individual well versed in the art of persuasion will be singled out as the representative of a particular program or ideal.

Here we may note an interesting parallel between Aristotle’s exemplary rhetorician and Arendt’s heroic public speaker. In both models, the formal equality of all participants enables the most gifted political types to reveal themselves in the public sphere. In other words, formal equality of all does not quash the unique capacities of particularly gifted individuals. Rather, it is the essential factor that allows for the exercise of *phronesis*, on the one hand, and agonistic self-display, on the other. Margaret Canovan captures this quality by noting that “‘politics’ as originally invented in the Greek *polis*, continual talk among citizens, provided one model of the way in which the human capacity for action could be to some extent tamed and made manageable, and in which human distinctiveness and spontaneity could find a stable institutional form” (1992, 143; see also Beiner 1997, 116–17).

What Is the Subject Matter?

Here we detect some important differences in the three philosophers’ accounts. Arendt would prefer that a host of “private” matters be exempted from the public sphere. Indeed, all subjects relating to the household and material production (work, labor) are to be excluded. Love, reproduction, and even good

deeds are also to be kept out of the public sphere.¹³ Habermas' model is more open and inclusive than Arendt's. He notes that the lines separating public and private realms are fluid and openly contested (1995, 129). Habermas does, however, argue that debates over what constitutes the "good life" for human beings should be bracketed. The classical notion of a distinctly human end or perfection is rejected. In Habermas' words: "The insight that the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and the true life can be preserved today only on the ruins of an ontology" (1971, 317).¹⁴

Aristotle's position is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, unlike Arendt, he does not draw a sharp line separating public and private matters. Aristotle contends that politics is in large part framed by debates over private interests, such as wealth and its redistribution (1354b30, 21). And, like Habermas, he too holds that *political* ideas of the good are culturally bound and, therefore, open to question. On the other hand, Aristotle would vigorously deny that human beings lack a common *telos* rooted in their potential for moral virtue. Indeed, the good rhetorician's speech is effective precisely because she or he possesses *some* understanding of the good. In the words of Gerald Mara:

Although a knowledge of justice and injustice can only be achieved through discourse, the adequacy of that knowledge is not determined solely by its meeting the demands of the communicative context. In addition, it must be an accurate picture of the natures of just and unjust things, which can, in a way, be perceived. In Aristotle's terms, a knowledge of these natures can allow us to distinguish between more and less adequate speeches about justice (1985, 1045).¹⁵

How Do Participants Speak to One Another?

As noted above, Aristotle claims that to be persuasive, public speech must transcend reason, or *logos*, and engage the audience's emotions. The speaker should also convey a positive character, worthy of respect and trust. Aristotle would likely agree with Iris Marion Young that "[t]hrough rhetoric the speaker appeals to the particular attributes or experiences of the audience, and his or her

¹³For an intriguing discussion of Arendt's division of the public and private realms, see Honig 1992.

¹⁴Habermas' position on this point is nicely summarized by Thomas McCarthy: "To suppose that the questions of the good life dealt with under the rubrics of classical ethics—happiness and virtue, character and ethos, community and tradition—could be answered in general and by philosophers is no longer possible. Questions of self-understanding and self-realization, rooted as they are in particular life histories and cultures, do not admit of general answers; prudential deliberations on the good life within the horizons of particular lifeworlds and traditions do not yield universal prescriptions" (1994, 46). See also Habermas 1996b, 24.

¹⁵Habermas' rejection of Rousseau's demand that citizens be imbued with morality further illustrates the gulf that divides his theory from Aristotle's. For Habermas, morality is not a specifically human attribute. Rather, "the burden of proof shifts from the morality of citizens to the conduciveness of specific processes of the democratic formation of opinion and will, presumed to have the potential for generating rational outcomes, of actually leading to such results" (1992, 446).

own particular location in relation to them” (1996, 130). Rhetoric is essential because even “[t]he most elegant and truthful arguments may fail to evoke assent if they are boring. Humor, wordplay, images, and figures of speech embody and color the arguments, making the discussion pull on through desire” (130–31).

Similarly, Eric Voegelin notes that the Aristotelian

speaker must conform to popular opinion in general and . . . must pay special attention to the variants of opinion in his concrete audience. . . . As a general rule, whatever is esteemed as noble by the audience must be treated as such by the speaker, for in popular opinion what is esteemed and what is noble is practically the same. (1957, 361)

While Voegelin’s interpretation is faithful to the text, we should clearly note that Aristotle does not hold that a speaker should *lower* his or her standards of morality in order to succeed. This would bring rhetoric down to the level of sophistry. Rather, the good public speaker must aim his or her speech to appeal to that which is best in the community.

Arendt’s conception of an agonistic, performative mode of public speech is related to Aristotle’s. Arendt argues that the very act of stepping into the public sphere’s glare reveals the actor’s “qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings” (1958, 179). Arendt also agrees with Aristotle’s position on the centrality of character in effective communication. Indeed, the distinction between “objective” discourse and the revelatory nature of public speech is a false one: “most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent” (182).¹⁶ In short, Arendt’s championing of performance, storytelling, and agon suggests that her conception of deliberative speech embodies many of the proposals Aristotle advances in *The Rhetoric*.

In marked contrast to both Aristotle and Arendt, Habermas argues that speech should be founded on reason and defended through rational argumentation. Participants in communicative exchanges “assume that only the force of the better argument may hold sway” (Warnke 1995, 127). Speech is therefore limited to “making assertions and giving sober reasons for them, with the logical connections among them clearly spelled out” (Young 1996, 130). Habermas also argues that deliberative speech should aim at promoting rational consensus on universalizable norms. Persuasion is simply not enough: “[a]rgumentation can exploit the conflict between success-oriented competitors for the purpose of achieving consensus so long as the arguments are not reduced to *mere means of influencing one another*” (Habermas 1990, 160; emphasis added). Conversely, Aristotle’s more modest claim recognizes that consensus may be achieved not out of reasoned agreement, but by appealing to an audience’s sense of pity or indignation (1385b10–1387b). Even then, consensus may be impossible. Often the best that can be hoped for is that we “discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow” (1355b10).

¹⁶Elsewhere Arendt likens praiseworthy political action to virtuosity, “an excellence we attribute to the performing arts . . . where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence” (1968, 153).

Where Is the Site of Exchange and Deliberation?

While Aristotle does not provide us with a direct answer to this question, we may assume that he would agree that in a democracy, deliberation can occur wherever two or more citizens are gathered. Similarly, the Habermasian model holds that “the public sphere comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms of action engage in a practical discourse, evaluating their validity” (Benhabib 1992, 87). Aristotle would probably also accept Habermas’ idea of weak and strong publics.¹⁷ Like Habermas, Aristotle recognizes that the exchange of arguments alone is not likely to lead to legislative action. Citizens have to channel their claims through the regime’s institutions if they are to realize their objectives (*The Rhetoric* 1365b25).

Arendt’s conception of the public sphere differs from both Habermas’ and Aristotle’s in that she insists on the primacy of open, face-to-face communication between citizens. While she too does not designate a precise physical location for communicative exchanges, she states that public spaces emerge only whenever and wherever citizens act in concert. Public spaces are sites of “common action coordinated through speech and persuasion” (Benhabib 1992, 78). Like the ancient Greek agora, the Arendtian public sphere brings people together while preserving their unique identity (d’Entrèves 1992). It creates a shared space where citizens gather to differentiate themselves through their words and deeds (Arendt 1958, 52). The recognition of individuals’ greatness by their contemporaries and future generations produces a temporal immortality that, in turn, forms the the basis of a “common world.” The instrumental quality of the Habermasian and Aristotelian models is all but absent in Arendt’s account. Indeed, Arendt holds that modern mass society precludes the creation of a truly public world by blurring the lines separating the public and private realms. Contemporary “society” is little more than a troubling amalgam of individual isolation and artificially induced sameness. “In both instances, men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others [and] of being seen and heard by them” (Arendt 1958, 58).

Conclusion: Rhetoric’s Role in the Public Sphere

This paper’s brief analysis of Aristotle’s thoughts on public speech and deliberation will hopefully have illustrated that the gulf separating his position from our own is not as wide as some would have it. While Aristotle’s suggestions fall short of a comprehensive theory of the public sphere, I believe we may be able

¹⁷ According to Habermas, weak publics are vehicles of public opinion, uncoupled from the formal decision-making bodies of government. “Taken together, they form a ‘wild’ complex that resists organization as a whole” (Habermas 1996a, 307). Strong publics, on the other hand, are formal entities, such as sovereign parliaments, that seek out cooperative solutions to practical problems; strong publics justify “the selection of a problem and the choice among competing proposals for solving it” (ibid.). In short, strong publics are “a locus of public deliberation culminating in legally binding decisions (or laws)” (Fraser 1997, 90).

to approximate something like an “Aristotelian public sphere” by building on the foregoing discussion.

Since one of the strengths of contemporary public sphere theory lies in its melding of normative concerns and empirical realities,¹⁸ it is fitting that this paper should conclude with some reflections on the use of rhetoric in “the real world.” Few would dispute the claim that white supremacy’s hold on the American South during the 1940s and 1950s was virtually all encompassing. Indeed, if one were ranking public spheres according to their propensity for violence and impenetrability, the South would rate highly.¹⁹ With this in mind, the accomplishments of the civil rights movement take on staggering proportions. As David Chalmers has noted, the 10 years separating the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act witnessed a revolution in American race relations (1991, 17). For our purposes, it is worth noting that along with the tremendous courage and indomitable will of the movement’s members, persuasive speech lay at the very heart of the revolution. While indigenous resources, local people, and community roots provided the foundation on which the civil rights movement was built, it was arguably Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s oratory and personal presence that brought African-Americans’ demands to the top of the nation’s political agenda (Lischer 1995, 191).

King’s speech was persuasive because it combined the elements of ethos, pathos, and logos. King was able to recognize and take advantage of emotions such as indignation, shame, pity, and anger. This ability was amplified by his tremendous charisma and virtuous reputation.²⁰ King’s rhetorical firepower was brought to bear in his writing and speeches. A passage from “Letter from Birmingham Jail” illustrates the majesty of King’s exhortative verse:

For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This “wait” has almost always meant “Never.” We have waited more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. . . . Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say “wait.” But when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can’t go to the amusement park . . . when your first name becomes nigger and your middle name becomes “boy” . . . when your wife and mother are never given the respected title of “Mrs” . . . when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of nobodiness—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. (quoted in Chalmers 1991, 24)

¹⁸ For examples, see Calhoun 1989, Fraser 1992, Ryan 1996, and Wengrofsky 1997–98.

¹⁹ For a telling study of white supremacy written before the civil rights movement, see Key 1949.

²⁰ “King’s personal history of suffering on behalf of freedom, including his Pauline-like résumé of arrests, imprisonments, and bombings conferred upon him automatic moral stature. . . . His personal history of courage and integrity, his careful management of the roles assigned to him, and his vocation to preach prophetic religion along with the gospel of the Republic—all converged to make him *the* symbol of the sacred American covenant” (Lischer 1995, 191).

While the power of King's prose is undeniable, even *it* pales in front of his public oratory. It is difficult to believe that even the coldest, most corrupt racist soul would fail to be moved by his "I Have a Dream" speech. While the speech is remarkable in any number of ways, its success in presenting African-Americans' demands for civil rights to *all* Americans is noteworthy:

We have . . . come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. . . . Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy; now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice . . . now is the time to make justice a reality for all God's children. . . . We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "for whites only . . ." No, we are not satisfied, and will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. (Washington 1986, 217–19)

King's speech provides us with an excellent example of how claims for justice can be presented persuasively through rhetorical speech. The "I Have a Dream" speech succeeds because King recognized that audiences judge claims to justice not only by their rationality, but also by their ability to touch the listener's soul. The importance of a speaker's ability to move an audience emotionally is absent in Habermas' account and ambiguous in Arendt's. Indeed, Habermas' call for the rule of the better argument rings hollow after we reflect on the majesty of King's speech. Conversely, King's rhetoric transcends the narrow parameters of agonistic display; his words appeal to our better nature, which is grounded in both the rational and emotive parts of the human soul. The undeniable success of King's rhetoric suggests that in politics, reason must enlist the aid of both the speaker's good character and the compassion and/or rightful indignation of his or her audience.²¹

In order to arouse and take advantage of his audience's "anguished conscience," King had to bridge its heterogeneous values. As John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit have pointed out, the success of King's political program depended on his "ability to persuade listeners to sublimate their individual differences in favor of some set of collective similarities" (1993, 96). They note that to reach and influence all Americans King simultaneously drew from and transcended elements of America's public morality. In Lucaites and Condit's words:

King challenged 1960s white America to enact the role of a transhistorical American "people" guided in its contemporary social, political and economic practices by the founding commitment to "equality" as the motivating term for its national constitution. Rather than . . .

²¹ As King intimated:

[A] strong man must be militant as well as moderate. He must be a realist as well as an idealist. If I am to merit the trust invested in me by some of my race, I must be both of those things. This is why nonviolence is a powerful as well as a *just* weapon. If you confront a man who has long been cruelly misusing you, and say, "Punish me, if you will; I do not deserve it, but I will accept it, so that the world will know I am right and you are wrong," then you wield a powerful and just weapon. This man, your oppressor, is automatically morally defeated, and if he has any conscience, he is ashamed. Wherever this weapon is used in a manner that stirs a community's, or a nation's anguished conscience, then the pressure of public opinion becomes an ally in your just cause. (Washington 1986, 348–49)

reject . . . the Anglo-American commitment to “equality,” King crafted a verbal tapestry that invited a public (re)visioning of the term’s usage in the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation. . . . Thus instead of rejecting the prevailing narratives of American political culture, King amplified and redirected them so as to lead white Americans to envision their commitment to “equality” in a more fulgent light. (1993, 102)

Simply put, King “universalized” his normative claims by tapping into the *particularity* of the American creed and its ideals. His harnessing of particularity is not readily justified by either Habermas’ or Arendt’s models. Indeed, Habermas holds that “[v]alid statements must admit of justification by appeal to reasons that could convince *anyone irrespective of time or place*. In raising claims to validity, speakers and hearers transcend the *provincial standards of a merely particular community of interpreters and their spatiotemporally localized communicative practice*” (1993, 52; emphasis added). By Habermas’ standards, King might be *criticized* for tying his normative claims to the “provincial” and “temporal” standards of 1960s America. Yet, one seriously doubts whether King’s rhetoric would have resonated as it did and still does if he had not taken full advantage of particularly American predispositions as well as the specific timing, physical location, and dramatic context of his speeches. Conversely, Arendt’s privileging of individual agonistic display and “natality” obscures the speaker’s relation to the ethical traditions and ideals of his or her community. One cannot be sure whether Arendt simply presupposes a shared understanding founded on moral homogeneity (Benhabib 1992, 78–79), or shuns it in favor of a politics of radical resistance to normalizing ideals (Honig 1992, Villa 1992a, 1992b). Either way, the intimate connection between the speaker and his or her audience is not adequately addressed by Arendt. Like Habermas, she is deeply suspicious of emotive ties that stray too far beyond the values of impartiality and civic friendship (Canovan 1985). For both theorists, intimacy ought to be set aside in favor of an impartial solidarity of citizens.

Neither Arendt’s nor Habermas’ conceptions of the public sphere concedes that political projects like the American civil rights movement are driven in large part by emotionally charged appeals to a specific community’s collective conscience. In the final analysis, Aristotle’s conception of right conduct in the public sphere comes closest to providing an adequate theoretical justification for King’s rhetorical tactics. As such, it stands as a potentially superior alternative to rational/deliberative and agonistic models of the public sphere.

Manuscript submitted 23 June 1997

Final manuscript received 30 June 1998

References

- Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 Arendt, Hannah. 1968. *Between Past and Future*. New York: Viking.

- Aristotle. 1984a. *The Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aristotle. 1984b. *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts. New York: Modern Library.
- Arnhart, Larry. 1981. *Aristotle on Political Reasoning*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Beiner, Ronald. 1983. *Political Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Beiner, Ronald. 1992. *What's the Matter with Liberalism?* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Beiner, Ronald. 1997. *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit: Essays on Contemporary Theory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Benhabib, Seyla. 1992. "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jurgen Habermas." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bradshaw, Leah. 1989. *Acting and Thinking: The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Calhoun, Craig. 1989. "Tiananmen, Television, and the Public Sphere: Internationalization of Culture and the Beijing Spring of 1989." *Public Culture* 2(1): 54–71.
- Canovan, Margaret. 1985. "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm." *History of Political Thought* 6(3): 617–42.
- Canovan, Margaret. 1992. *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chalmers, David. 1991. *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the 1960s*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- d'Entrèves, Maurizio. 1992. "Hannah Arendt and the Idea of Citizenship." In *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community*, ed. Chantal Mouffe. London: Verso.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Sex, Lies, and the Public Sphere: Reflections on the Confirmation of Clarence Thomas." *Critical Inquiry* 18(3): 591–618.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1997. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1986. *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1993. "Philosophizing in Opposition: Strauss and Voegelin on Communication and Science." In *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964*, ed. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1971. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1983. *Philosophical Political Profiles*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Trans. Christian Lenhardt and Sherry Wieber Nicholsen. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1992. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1993. *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*. Trans. Ciaran P. Cronin. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1995. "Reconciliation through the Public Use of Public Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism." *Journal of Philosophy* 112(3): 109–31.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1996a. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Trans. William Rehg. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1996b. "Three Normative Models of Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Honig, Bonnie. 1992. "Toward an Agonistic Feminism." In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge.

- Johnstone, Christopher Lyle. 1980. "An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the Search for Moral Truth." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 13(1): 1–24.
- Key, V. O. 1949. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. New York: Knopf.
- Lischer, Richard. 1995. *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lucaites, John Louis, and Celeste Michelle Condit. 1993. "Universalizing 'Equality': The Public Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr." In *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Sermonic Power of Public Discourse*, ed. Carolyn Calloway-Thomas and John Louis Lucaites. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- McCabe, Mary Margaret. 1994. "Arguments in Context: Aristotle's Defense of Rhetoric." In *Aristotle's Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David J. Furley and Alexander Nehamas. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- McCarthy, Thomas. 1994. "Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism." *Ethics* 105(1): 44–63.
- Mara, Gerald. 1985. "After Virtue, Autonomy: Jurgen Habermas and Greek Political Theory." *Journal of Politics* 47(4): 1036–61.
- Nichols, Mary P. 1987. "Aristotle's Defense of Rhetoric." *Journal of Politics* 49(3): 657–77.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1990. "Aristotelian Social Democracy." In *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. R. Bruce Douglas, Gerald R. Mara, and Henry S. Richardson. New York: Routledge.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1996. "Aristotle on Emotions and Rational Persuasion." In *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Amélie Oskenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Paine, Robert. 1981. "When Saying is Doing." In *Politically Speaking: Cross Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*. Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Social and Economic Papers #10. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Pangle, Thomas L. 1992. *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Plato. 1984. *Apology, Four Texts on Socrates*. Trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Reeve, C. D. C. 1996. "Philosophy, Politics, and Rhetoric in Aristotle." In *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Amélie Oskenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Robinson, Gillian. 1995. "Why Rehabilitate the Greeks?: Ethics, Politics, and Modernity." *Thesis Eleven* 41: 54–75.
- Ryan, Mary P. 1996. "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Salkevar, Stephen G. 1990. *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Vickers, Brian. 1988. *In Defense of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Villa, Dana R. 1992a. "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere." *American Political Science Review* 86(3): 712–21.
- Villa, Dana R. 1992b. "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action." *Political Theory* 20(3): 275–309.
- Voegelin, Eric. 1957. *Plato and Aristotle*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Wardy, Robert. 1996. "Mighty Is the Truth and Shall It Prevail?" In *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Amélie Oskenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Warnke, Georgia. 1995. "Communicative Rationality and Cultural Values." In *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen K. White. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Washington, James M., ed. 1986. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: HarperCollins.
- Wengrofsky, Jeffrey. 1997–98. "Holy Days and Hallowed Ground: An Episode of Symbolic Reconstruction in the Public Sphere." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review* 42:123–54.

- Young, Iris Marion. 1996. "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zuckert, Catherine H. 1983. "Aristotle and the Limits and Satisfactions of Political Life." *Interpretation* 1(2): 185–206.

Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos is a Ph.D. candidate in political science, New School for Social Research, New York, NY 10003.