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The Rhetoric:

Public Speaking Essentials

Aristotle's *The Rhetoric* lays out the Greek thinker's intensive study in the area of public speaking. He defined *rhetoric* as the discovery in every situation of "the available means of persuasion" (Griffin 304). According to his observation, there existed (and continue to exist) three distinct means of persuasion: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. Each type of proof targets a different area of the listener.

Logos is the logical set of appeals made to the audience. Following simple, intellectual progression through an argument establishes a firmly reasoned case that is hard to deny. Furthermore, according to elaboration likelihood model, those audience members who elaborate the argument thoroughly arrive at lasting results. Using the logical proofs of enthymeme (an incomplete, three part syllogism that is inductive in nature) and example (illustration that is deductive), Aristotle argues that the speaker will be well prepared to persuade effectively.

Aristotle also addresses *ethos*, or the ethical guidelines for a speaker. Audience members look beyond the message to the person giving it. Thus, it was important to Aristotle to emphasize a speaker's perceived intelligence, moral character, and goodwill toward the audience. Each of these virtues may see a perceived increase during the address, but it is generally best to enter a speaking situation with these areas already at a

peak; ethical character is rather effective when the audience views the speaker as one who has *its* best in mind.

Finally, Aristotle covers *pathos*, the emotional appeals made by a speaker. Once again referencing ELM, the peripheral route leads to little or no resolve to change behavior. Aristotle knew this truth thousands of years before elaboration likely model even existed. Therefore, he focuses on six dialectics of emotion that, when handled with care, can be used greatly to the speaker's advantage.

I have consciously applied Aristotle's concepts to the majority of speeches I have prepared over the course of my schooling. I find it interesting that I have been taught these principles since grade school, but the complex nature of Aristotle's arguments becomes clearer with every review. From *The Rhetoric* comes the idea that logical thought should be adopted as the greatest means of persuasion. It is Aristotle who set into motion what would eventually cause speakers to cite sources, qualifications, and dates to support their arguments. Thanks to the advice of *The Rhetoric*, we can deliver addresses effectively by monitoring our own motivation and integrity.

In my eyes, *The Rhetoric* is more of an established set of speaker guidelines than it is a theory of communication. I attempt to put into practice all of the means of persuasion whenever the need arises. Perhaps the most important asset that Aristotle has given to me is the discernment needed to wisely (and ethically) choose the most appropriate form of rhetorical proof. I would like to believe that I practice what *The Rhetoric* preaches, but no speaker is free from fault. But that is why *The Rhetoric* was written, is it not? After all, Aristotle's greatest gift was not a book; it was the promise of better communicators, speakers, and leaders for those who would follow him.

Works Cited

Griffin, Em. *A First Look At Communication Theory*. 5th ed. New York: McGraw Hill,
2003.