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Office Hours: Fridays, 3-5pm or by appointment

CLCV / FNDL
Is Rhetoric a Good Thing? The Debate Between Rhetoric and Philosophy
Spring 2021, TTh

This course will introduce undergraduates to the Greco-Roman sources of a key tension that has shaped contemporary humanities: the debate between philosophy and rhetoric, between ideals of truth and powers of persuasion. Beginning with an in-depth examination of Plato’s scathing attack on rhetoric in the Gorgias, a deeply ambiguous text in which Socrates’ championing of philosophy actually seems to fail, we will examine Plato’s rehabilitation of rhetoric in the Phaedrus as a means of leading souls towards truth, Cicero’s attempt to combine rhetoric and philosophy in Book III of his dialogue On the Orator, and Quintilian’s effort to inspire moral commitment in the readers of his rhetorical treatise On the Education of the Orator. In the latter part of the course, we will encounter new voices entering the debate and adding their own unique concerns: Augustine’s conflicted feelings towards his rhetorical education in the Confessions, Isotta Nogarola’s spirited entrance into a tradition of rhetorical and philosophical debate defined and dominated by men, and Petrus Ramus’ attack on the unity of rhetoric and morality that dramatically altered the shape of humanistic studies. We will conclude the course with Danielle Allen’s chapter “Rhetoric, a Good Thing” in Talking to Strangers, which engages in this debate via Aristotle and frames rhetoric as a useful tool for forging civic bonds in troubled political times.

Required Texts
- All other readings will be made available in a course packet. For interested students I can make texts available in Greek and Latin.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will acquire in-depth familiarity with ancient texts in translation and confidently claim these texts as their own through close reading in class, short argumentative exercises, and creative engagement.

2. Students will practice two skills fundamental to mature participation in academic inquiry and in discussion beyond the academy: evidence-based argumentation, and the ability to articulate both sides of a position as fairly as possible.

3. Students will develop the ability to reflect on, question, and refine the assumptions that underlie their commitments in their own writing and speech by examining—and entering—a tradition of reflection on these topics.
Classroom Policies and Assignments

- **Academic Honesty**: Students are expected to abide by the University of Chicago’s guidelines on plagiarism as presented in the student manual. I am always available to address any further questions you may have about what constitutes honest work.

- **Accommodations**: Students requiring specific accommodations for this course should provide me with a copy of their Accommodation Determination Letter (provided by Student Disability Services) as soon as possible so that we can discuss how best to implement specific accommodations. Students who may need to be absent due to illness or for other pressing reasons should notify me by email as soon as possible.

- **Environment**: This class is intended to provide a friendly, open space for all of us as members of the University of Chicago community and individuals coming from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives to engage in discussion that is at once free and respectful. As instructor I am committed to fostering discussion and interaction at the highest level of courtesy, inclusivity, and openness. Issues arising in this area will be addressed promptly, and I encourage students to meet with me to discuss and resolve any concerns they may have.

- **Evaluation**: The percentage breakdown for grading is as follows.

  - **Attendance, Participation, and Preparation (30%)**: A variety of interactive in-class assignments (journaling in response to a prompt, discussions in pairs, large-group discussions) will aim to engage all students during class. Each student’s active engagement is essential to everyone’s learning. This is measured by attentiveness during class and by thoughtfulness during in-class writing reflections and small-group work in addition to discussion contributions. Unexcused absences will negatively affect the participation grade.

  - **Short Assignments (20% each, so 40% total)**: Students will write two four-page essays in response to prompts. Essays will be graded based on the following criteria: strength of evidence-based argument, cohesiveness, clarity of writing, and originality/creativity. This last criterion simply means finding something you would like to add to the discussion of a topic rather than merely reiterating what others have said; it is perfectly acceptable for your contribution to be a small point.

  - **Final Assignment (30%)**: In this assignment I am looking for you to demonstrate your own vigorous engagement with the materials and questions we’ve worked on this quarter through either a longer interpretive essay (5-7 pages) that makes an original claim (see criteria under “Short Assignments” above) or a creative project like one of the following.

    1.) Choose an author we have read this quarter besides Plato and imagine that this author (or a spokesperson) steps in to help Gorgias in his argument with Socrates early on in the *Gorgias*. Can this new character effectively defend rhetoric and head off Socrates’ arguments? Show me, in dialogue form, as Platonically as you like (3-5 pages).

    2.) Partner project: Compose and deliver a brief declamation from memory (3-5 minutes) on both sides of the following proposition: “Philosophy is a nobler pursuit than rhetoric.” You must include emotional and ethical appeals and incorporate one or more of the hand gestures (or toga gestures) from Quintilian Book 11.
Course Schedule

Week 1: Rhetoric Accused, Part 1
Tuesday, March 30: Setting up the problem via Plato’s Gorgias (The argument with Gorgias, 447a-461b)
Thursday, April 1: Gorgias (The argument with Polus, 461b-488b)

Week 2: Rhetoric Accused, Part 2
Tuesday, April 6: Gorgias (The argument with Callicles - 481b-499b)
Thursday, April 8: Gorgias (The argument with Callicles ctd.- 499b-527e)

Week 3: Rhetoric Redeemed
Tuesday, April 13: Phaedrus (Speeches about love and the Divine, 227a- 257b)
Thursday, April 15: Phaedrus (A new kind of rhetoric, 257b-279c)

Week 4: Rhetoric Claims Philosophy
Tuesday, April 20: Cicero, On the Ideal Orator, 1.1-79, 219-233
Thursday, April 22: Cicero, On the Ideal Orator, 3.52-90, 126-143
Friday, April 23: First short assignment due (4 pages)

Week 5: Making a Moral Orator
Tuesday, April 27: Quintilian Book 1 (The orator’s childhood and early education)
Thursday, April 29: Quintilian Book 2: (Beginning rhetorical education and defining rhetoric)

Week 6: The Good Man Skilled in Speaking?
Tuesday, May 4: Quintilian Book 12 (The mature orator as a “good man skilled in speaking”)
Thursday, May 6: Augustine’s Confessions, 1.9-20, 3.3-6, 5.6-14

Week 7: Rhetoric and Christian Revelation
Tuesday, May 11: Augustine, On Christian Doctrine 4.1-86
Thursday, May 13: Augustine, On Christian Doctrine 4.87-166

Week 8: A Good Woman Skilled in Speaking: Renaissance, Rhetoric, and Gender
Tuesday, May 18: Isotta Nogarola, “Dialogue on the Equal or Unequal Sin of Adam and Eve” (Verona, 1451)
Thursday, May 20: Isotta Nogarola, “Oration in Praise of Saint Jerome” (Verona, 1453)
Friday, May 21: Second short assignment due (4 pages)

Week 9: Dismantling a Moral Rhetoric
Tuesday, May 25: Petrus Ramus, Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian, pp.79-99

Week 10: Rhetoric and Civic Friendship: A Way Forward?

Monday, June 7: Final essay or assignment due