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## **The Causes of the Crisis of Rhetoric and Its Role in Social Discourse. In Terms of Chaim Perelman**

### **Why Rhetoric?**

Contemporary social discourse that takes place in social media, especially in the so-called virtual reality (and globalized reality), opens up to everyone the opportunity to speak on any issue regardless of their competencies and language cultures. Therefore, one can observe the so-called “communication chaos” and the widespread lack of communication skills, especially the ignorance or even flagrant disregard for the criteria of discourse. Such phenomena as brutalization or vulgarization of the language and an evident lack of understanding of the issues which are considered, what is being said and spoken about, mean that the social debate in its semantic context is largely reduced to an exchange of opinions which is cognitively empty. What is worse, although these opinions express different attitudes and views of a world-view nature, and therefore are largely subjective, in the absence of the aforementioned universal discourse criteria, they are considered to be cognitively equivalent.

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On the other hand, it is often enough to use professional terminology and build one's statement as well-shaped in order for one to pretend to be an expert in a given matter. In other words, superficial competence and linguistic efficiency, expressing only someone's opinion, can be considered binding on media and internet forums users. It is also emphasized that due to the possibility of anonymous participation in the discourse, which is enabled by social forums, responsibility for spoken (written) words disappears. In addition, using the media, which are communication intermediaries, impairs the ability to engage in real, ongoing tête-à-tête communication or exchange of views. For this reason, people who face the necessity of public speaking, often experience paralyzing fear, have difficulty with formulating their own thoughts and revealing the intentions of their speech.<sup>1</sup>

The literature emphasizes that democratization of social discourse is undoubtedly valuable, but on the other hand it is also clearly emphasized that there must be social concern for the culture of expression/communication, especially for the development and implementation of universal principles or criteria of this discourse. This postulate supports increased interest in rhetoric, as—simply speaking—the art of beautiful and convincing argumentation in relation to the issues which are addressed. The return to rhetoric, that is a sort of reminder that it has shaped the culture of the word in Europe since Greek antiquity, is also supported by the so-called political transformation, which in Poland and in countries that have freed themselves from the regime of political totalitarianism is simply necessary. Changing the profile of social discourse to democratic and the economy to a market style requires shifting social mentality and intensifying life dynamics in social spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the role of communication in social discourse, see Paweł Gondek, "Communio and Communicatio: The Role of Communication for Participating in Public Life," *Studia Gilsoniana* 4, no. 1 (January–March 2015): 17–28.

The so-called “soft” competency, the ability to communicate with other people, is becoming one of the more desirable and socially expected features of civic life. Therefore, ways of improving communication skill are created, such as coaching (which is a form of development in which an experienced person supports a learner or client in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance<sup>2</sup>), mentoring (which is a relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person<sup>3</sup>), public relations (“PR” which is the practice of deliberately managing the spread of information between an individual or an organization and the public<sup>4</sup>), marketing (which is the action or business of promoting and selling products or services<sup>5</sup>), or career counseling (which is a professional intervention made by a specialized person who is focused on how the individuals manage their journey through life, learning and work<sup>6</sup>), etc. The purpose of these forms of education is to prepare modern people to skillfully move in the space of broadly understood interpersonal communication.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that these forms of education fulfill a need of the mo-

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<sup>2</sup> *Excellence in Coaching: The Industry Guide*, ed. Jonathan Passmore (London/Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2016), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Caela Farren, “Eight Types of Mentor: Which Ones Do you Need?,” Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>4</sup> James E. Grunig, Todd Hunt, *Managing Public Relations* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Shelby D. Hunt, “The Nature and Scope of Marketing,” *Journal of Marketing* 40, no. 3 (1976): 17.

<sup>6</sup> Raoul Van Esbroeck and James A. Athanasou, “Introduction: An International Handbook of Career Guidance,” in *International Handbook of Career Guidance*, ed. James A. Athanasou, Raoul Van Esbroeck (Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 2008), 2.

<sup>7</sup> For more about it, see Robert St. Bokacki, *Leadership Tool Box – ludzki kontekst przywództwa* (Warszawa: Kontekst HR International Group, 2014); Ken Blanchard, *The Heart of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007); Sara Thorpe, Jackie Clifford, *Podręcznik coachingu: compendium wiedzy dla trenerów i menedżerów*, trans. Anna Sawicka-Chrapkowicz (Poznań: Rebis, 2004).

ment, which is why they are often created spontaneously, outside the social control of their quality. As a result, teaching these competencies takes on a sophistic character in that it becomes the art of manipulation of another person.<sup>8</sup> It happens that people who are considered experts in the field of communication or speech do not necessarily personify the ethos of the speaker in any way, which results in ignoring the fundamental principles of building a persuasive message.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned earlier, inquiries about rhetoric and universal criteria for cultural discourse have been going on since Greek antiquity, and their intention is to define timeless and supra-cultural norms and principles that would also be *resistant* to any—not always beneficial to man—changes taking place in social life. Ultimately, it seems that concern for social discourse is concern for rhetoric, its proper face and important, if not crucial, role in this discourse. From its beginnings, rhetoric has been associated with philosophy, and philosophy claims to be the cognitive foundation of human culture and human activity in the world. In this connection, the truth about rhetoric should be recognized, namely that it is theoretical knowledge of the essence of the practice of social communication. Such knowledge conditions the practice, it determines the general criteria for this practice, but the practice itself is already an art, because it concerns specific, life-important issues.

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<sup>8</sup> Manipulation is difficult to praise, because it invalidates an important and good aspect of social discourse. The essence of manipulation is to evoke the illusion of communing with the good and the true in another person, which is done by secret or unknown means. Manipulation is therefore a fraud, as a result of which a person persists in the erroneous belief that the decision he/she has made is the result of his/her free and conscious choice. For more on it, see Piotr Jaroszyński, “Manipulacja,” in *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, vol. 6, ed. Andrzej Maryniarczyk (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2006), 779–780.

<sup>9</sup> For more about the speaker’s ethos, see Maria J. Gondek, “Ethos jako forma perswazji retorycznej w ujęciu Arystotelesa,” *Wiśnik Charkiwskowo Nacjonalnowo Uniwersytetu*, no. 1057 (2013): 114–120; Maria J. Gondek, “Ethos mówcy w ‘Gawędzie o gawędzeniu’ o Jacka Woronieckiego,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no. 3 (July–September 2017): 425–449.

This article engages these considerations that have been conducted in the field of culture since ancient times, when the first concepts of rhetoric began to emerge and when the first attempts were made to solve practical problems arising in social discourse. In this connection, it is worthwhile to recall the first concepts of rhetoric and the related attempts to define these criteria in their practical application.

Historically, the rise of rhetoric is associated with events that took place in ancient Greece. In literature related to the study of rhetoric, three such events are often indicated, namely, first of all, the creation of the poleis (800–700 BC); secondly, the overthrow of the rule of the tyrant Trazybulos in Sicily (465 BC); thirdly, the arrival to Athens in the Sicilian mission of the sophist Gorgias (427 BC). Thus, thanks to the emergence of the poleis and, as a consequence, the emergence of various forms of social life (civilization), both politicians and citizens had to learn to speak in public. Convincing others about their point depended on the ability to recall the appropriate argumentation. The example is the case of Sicily, where democracy was brought after the overthrow of the tyrant's rule. This gave the oppressed citizens a chance to recover previously lost goods and lands. However, since there were many cases of vindications, but much fewer lawyers who could represent injured persons, citizens had to go on trial and vindicate their rights. This situation caused many Greeks to think about the speeches, their types and the criteria of persuasion. Corax of Syracuse and his student Tisias made a particular contribution to this issue. The third event, which is recognized as a breakthrough for Greece and the birth of rhetoric, was associated with the arrival of Gorgias to Athens, whose speeches increased awareness of the important role that the spoken word played in public life. Thus, problems related to everyday civic life became the main reason for the rise of rhetoric and for its development. Theoretical considerations of language, its structure and functions, as well as its persuasive capacity followed the spontaneous “de-

velopment” of rhetoric. In other words, reflection on rhetoric, its essence and principles is something secondary to rhetorical practice, but necessary in that it is actually cognitively primary.<sup>10</sup>

### **Chaim Perelman on the Causes of the Rhetoric Crisis**

The work of contemporary thinker, Chaim Perelman, creator of the so-called new rhetoric, deserves to be recognized as a “classic” of rhetorical thought. It is impossible to deal with issues in the theory of rhetoric without recalling the concepts of this thinker, especially his views on the philosophical foundations of rhetoric. He is definitely a point of reference and authority on the basis of reflection on rhetoric and its philosophical foundations. He not only restored rhetoric to its rightful place in scientific and social discourse, but, above all, he renewed key issues and solutions related to it, but first and foremost he pointed out the reasons for its crisis and, then, its fall. This proposal has many supporters and opponents who appreciate its contribution to research on rhetoric, but do not remain uncritical of its claims. This article will take into account and refer critically to both attitudes.

Perelman agrees with the view that rhetoric was discovered by ancient thinkers, but emphasizes that its rational basis was created only by Aristotle, who stressed the connection between rhetoric and dialectic. The beginnings of the crisis of rhetoric, i.e., the loss of its understanding and role in social debate, are associated with the Middle Ages, because, in Perelman’s opinion, during this period rhetoric was gradually reduced to a divagation over the ornamentation of speech. However, the proper beginnings of the rhetoric crisis are associated with the Re-

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Anna Kucz, “Retoryka i oratorstwo w starożytności,” in *Retoryka*, ed. Maria Barłowska, Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca, Piotr Wilczek (Warszawa: PWN, 2008), 17–19; Mirosław Korolko, *Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), 27–34.

naissance thinker Petrus Ramus, who, contrary to Aristotle and tradition, separated dialectics and rhetoric, and combined dialectics with logic. It was Ramus's opinion that both logic and dialectics are only about justifying the judgments, and it is irrelevant whether the justification is necessary or related to the opinion and what is probable/possible. But then, as Perelman points out, the opinion, which is probable, is the domain of rhetoric. As a result, rhetoric without rational bases turns into stylistics, i.e., the theory of tropes, stylistic figures and verbal expression techniques.<sup>11</sup> It follows that the key reason for the fall of classical rhetoric was its break with philosophy, and especially with Aristotle's *Organon* (a collection of his logical writings), which made it an area close to poetry, that is not about persuasion, but about aesthetic catharsis.<sup>12</sup>

Perelman also notes that there were many significant attempts in history to restore rhetoric to its proper place and role. He draws particular attention to the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition and its empiricist-nominalist trend (F. Bacon, J. Locke, D. Hume, Th. Reid), up to contemporary broadly understood analytical philosophy (J. Searle, J. L. Austin, P. Grice and others), in which psychological (emotional) and ideologically (worldview) determined aspects of discourse and their persuasive usefulness (value) in justifying judgments and decisions and in persuading the interlocutor were appreciated. Perelman also treats American tradition, little known in Europe, with great appreciation. He associates his own concept of rhetoric with this achievement, as well as the hope of overcoming Europe's antipathy to this culturally important discipline. He praises the American tradition of the likes of Samuel

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Chaim Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," in *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities: Essays on Rhetoric and its Applications* (Dordrecht: Holland/Boston: U.S.A./London: England: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 1–2.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Chaim Perelman, *L'empire rhétorique. Rhétorique et argumentation* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2002), 13–15.

Silas Curry, James Albert Winans, Charles S. Baldwin, Harry Caplan, Lane Cooper, Everett Lee Hunt and Richard McKeon. The American view emphasizes the importance of rhetoric in social discourse: in politics, in law, in ethics, in philosophy, and in religion. It also emphasizes the persuasive nature of this discourse. Accordingly, it treats rhetoric as an art of persuasion, and therefore, which is close to Perelman, focuses on distinguishing various techniques used in rhetorical argumentation.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned, Perelman proclaims that rhetoric is closely related to philosophy, but he is aware that the problem of philosophy itself should be resolved, namely, the answer to the question: what (which) philosophy resolves the issue of the essence of rhetoric? Philosophy—its specific tradition or current or school—can favor rhetoric or depreciate its role in human life, or even ignore it. Historically, an excellent illustration of the above thesis is the position of the rationalist Parmenides. He excluded rhetoric from the sphere of rational discourse, not unlike the general views of sophists who based all cultural and philosophical discourse on persuasion, such that the goal was seen as influencing the will of the listener and obtaining his/her approval; sophists also emphasized the role of authority in the discourse. Plato placed rhetoric under the so-called *maieutics*, for he saw in it a dialectical tool for persuading about or guiding toward the discovered truth. Plato condemned the sophistic concept of rhetoric because he saw in it only the art of manipulation. In turn, Aristotle, who settled this dispute on the basis of the division of philosophy into theoretical and practical ones, placed rhetoric in the sphere of practical discourse and associated it with what is possible and probable, namely with art. He based his conception of rhetoric on experience and common sense, but he treated it as the art of persuasion, i.e., the art of influencing one's judgment and decision. However, the aforementioned Petrus Ramus threw rhetoric

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," 4–5.

beyond philosophy as a rational discourse, and eventually French rationalist Rene Descartes ousted it from philosophy with his concept of evidence as a criterion of truth, from which it follows that what is possible and probable is not evident and thus does not fit in terms of truth.

According to Perelman, Cartesian absolutism (rationalism) dominated the philosophy and theory of science, but, as he emphasizes, the view was criticized: Karl Popper turned out to be the ultimate conqueror of rationalism, who challenged the Cartesian dogma of evidence (obviousness) as the infallible criterion of truth. He stated that science creates hypotheses, and its domain is the search for convincing arguments that will support their acceptance. He also emphasized the role of the scholar's culture, authority and personality. Popper's thought changes the face of philosophy and science, because it departs from traditional apriorism and absolutism (rationalism), and makes them self-critical disciplines, open to the modification (falsification) of assumptions and views. According to Perelman, a contemporary change in the criterion of rationality demands a renaissance of rhetoric, because it gives rhetoric a strong theoretical foundation.<sup>14</sup>

Perelman is convinced that his own insight into the history of the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric proves that the situation of rhetoric depends on the concept of philosophy and that errors in the field of philosophy (absolutism, formalism, scientism) cast a shadow on rhetoric, limit its scope and applicability, and in extreme cases they eliminate it from cultural discourse. He also emphasizes that changes taking place in European culture, and especially in politics that implements the idea of liberal democracy and the civil state, demand a return of rhetoric. These changes suppose that worldview dialogue is the heart of social life and culture, and rhetoric, understood as a general theory of persuasive speech, covers the "extensive field of informal thought," i.e.,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Perelman, *L'empire rhétorique*, 169–195.

thought measured by worldview, values and beliefs. For this reason, he believes, culture is ruled by a “rhetorical empire” in which rhetoric, as Walter Jens put it, is “the old and new queen of the humanities.”<sup>15</sup>

According to popular opinion, Perelman’s investigations contributed to the 20th-century rhetorical revolution, the growing interest about rhetoric in the academic environment. Perelman demanded a respect for the ancient rhetoric and also referred to it in substantive terms, although as evidenced by the label “new rhetoric” nominally used by Perelman himself, his demand intends to improve rhetoric and develop its important themes. He thinks that modern times are challenging, since they are dominated by changes taking place in philosophy, science and social policy. He adds that the re-flourishing of rhetoric and argumentation theory was also largely due to the rehabilitation of colloquial language associated with the changing times, which until now—especially in formal disciplines—was accused of ambiguity and lack of accuracy.<sup>16</sup>

### What Is New in the New Rhetoric?<sup>17</sup>

An assessment of key aspects of Perelman’s concept of rhetoric with the intention of determining its novelty yields that, first of all, the “new rhetoric” is not limited to style, it is also not focused on one of the components of traditional rhetoric, namely on the demonstrative type. Moreover, it certainly is not reduced to the rationally understood *logos* (and its criteria of consistency and evidence) and thus is not a formal

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 198–199: “Ainsi conçue, elle couvre le champ immense de la pensée non-formalisée: on peut parler, à ce propos, de l’empire rhétorique; c’est dans cet esprit que le professeur W. Jens, de l’université de Tübingen, l’a qualifiée d’*ancienne et nouvelle reine des sciences humaines (alte und neue Königin der Wissenschaften)*.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Michel Meyer, Manuel Maria Carrilho, Benoît Timmermans, *Historia retoryki od Greków do dziś*, trans. Zuzanna Baran (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2010), 263–264.

<sup>17</sup> This issue was indicated in Joanna Kiereś-Łach’s book, *Filozofia i retoryka. Kontekst myślowy “nowej retoryki” Chaima Perelmana* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Academicum, 2015).

discipline, so it does not fall within the scope of logic. It is also not a collection of stylistic figures that explicitly serve manipulation, diverting the attention of the listener or interlocutor from the immoral idea of the speaker. Perelman's rhetoric in the strict sense, as a set of argumentative techniques, is not bound to formal standards and ideals of logic, in the name of which the colloquial language would be unified ("mummified") or deprived of its vitality and dynamism. Thus, at the root of his "new rhetoric" lies the key thesis that rationality is not just the domain of logicism (formalism). In other words, not everything that is formally illogical is *ex definitione* senseless. This belief is associated with the distinction of two functions of reason, namely its rational function and reasonable function. This second function, what is reasonable, is based on its own arguments and related argumentation, which naturally precede decision-making and action. In the context of the above reflection, Perelman formulates his definition of rhetoric as a theory of argumentation for which the object is to study discursive techniques allowing us *to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent*.<sup>18</sup>

In Perelman's opinion, rhetoric—defined in this way—has to serve philosophy, has to be its methodological tool, useful in the practical sphere, e.g., in ethics, law and politics. In connection with the above, it was aptly emphasized that Perelman's concept of philosophy should be

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Chaim Perelman, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité de l'argumentation. La nouvelle rhétorique* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2008), 5: "[D]e meme, la théorie de l'argumentation ne peut se developper so toute prevue est conçue comme reduction à l'évidence. En effet, l'objet de cette théorie est l'étude des techniques discursives permettant *de provoquer ou d'accroître l'adhésion des esprits aux theses qu'on présente à leur assentiment*." And Chaim Perelman, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric. A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson, Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 4: "In the same way, the theory of argumentation cannot be developed if every proof is conceived of as a reduction to the self-evident. Indeed, the object of the theory of argumentation is the study of the discursive techniques allowing us *to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent*."

referred to as the new rhetoric *sensu largo*, and that of rhetoric as the proposed methodological tool of the new rhetoric *sensu stricto*.<sup>19</sup> As he often emphasizes, rhetoric is almost an antipode of logic, because logic does not have sufficient tools to deal with problems of all kinds. Especially nowadays, logic is reduced to a formal discipline which purpose is the logical analysis of language and the examination of the correctness of formal proofs.<sup>20</sup> In short, Perelman understands rhetoric as an argumentative practice wherever logical proof cannot be used or evidence cannot be found.<sup>21</sup>

Perelman's argumentation is defined as "an extended form of Reason and Rationality"<sup>22</sup> and opposed to the aforementioned rhetoric of style which uses language figures for stylistic purposes. Rhetoric, however, emphasizes the persuasive power of these figures. The theory of argumentation will therefore be a treasury of figures that have argumentative power, and thus help the speaker to convince the audience, not to give the audience mere aesthetic or psychological satisfaction. Style rhetoric, or simply stylistics, gathers figures that have a decorative function, while rhetoric *sensu stricto*, i.e., the theory of rhetorical argumentation, provides knowledge about the mechanisms by which one's own beliefs are justified. These justifications are based on proba-

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<sup>19</sup> The distinction between the new rhetoric *sensu largo* and the new rhetoric *sensu stricto* was taken from Anna Frąckiewicz's doctoral dissertation, "Nowa retoryka Chaima Perelmana jako komunikacyjne ujęcie prawa" (PhD diss., The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Chaim Perelman, *Cours de logique*, vol. 3 (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1964), 5–7; Ryszard Kleszcz, "Od analizy do argumentacji. Wprowadzenie do Perelmana," *Studia Filozoficzne* 283, no. 6 (1989): 131.

<sup>21</sup> For more about the issue of obviousness, see Chaim Perelman, "Évidence et preuve," in *Justice et raison* (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1972), 140–154; Chaim Perelman, "O oczywistości w metafizyce," trans. Adam Węgrzecki, in *Szkice filozoficzne: Romanowi Ingardenowi w darze*, ed. Zofia Żarnecka (Warszawa–Kraków: PWN, 1964), 159–171.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, ed. Patricia Bizzell, Bruce Herzberg (Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 1990), 1410.

ble (enthymematic) reasoning, acquired experience and established custom, or on the basis of so-called *common sense*. The rhetorical approach to knowledge as a sphere of permanent discourse protects it from the error of absolutism (apriorism) and mental inertia, which often unreflectively absolutizes and accepts a certain opinion. As Perelman thinks, contemporary philosophers are ready to agree with this approach; they point out that scientific knowledge is the fruit of continuous discussion that takes place within societies that share common beliefs, assumptions, ideals and values, and in various ways make them concrete. Emerging positions and disputes are a source of cognitive progress and moral improvement for humans as social beings. Perelman adds that belief in absolutism destroys all discussion and results in reductionist and inhuman ideologies.<sup>23</sup>

### **Culture and the “New Rhetoric”**

It is the cultural duty of rhetoric to show that not all statements are obvious and “closed,”<sup>24</sup> i.e., absolute, and that key discourses for human culture are persuasive, and therefore based on justifications and arguments that take into account the role of the audience, and even cor-

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Perelman refers here to the conception which was very popular in the 1950s, namely conception of the so-called “open concepts,” which was characteristic for one of the varieties of British analytical philosophy—linguistic philosophy—inspired by the views of Ludwig Wittgenstein, from the second period of his activity. Proponents of this conception distinguish “closed concepts,” appropriate to formal disciplines (logic, mathematics, geometry) whose scope and content are explicitly defined, from “open concepts,” i.e., all qualitative concepts (e.g., man, love, truth, justice, value), whose scope and content are perennially flexible, perennially debatable and subject to constant modification. The consequence of this position is the thesis that universal definitions of open terms are logically precluded—one can only create their reporting definitions and critically highlight those uses that are fertile cognitively and practically. This view took the name of “anti-essentialism.” Cf. Morris Weitz, *The Opening Mind: A Philosophical Study of Humanistic Concepts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

respond to the will and intention of the audience. In assessing his own program of renewing rhetoric, Perelman emphasizes that it is discovering the importance of such concepts as discussion, persuasion, audience and dialectic in the field of practical life. These concepts are part of the canon of reasoning analysis based on probable premises which, thanks to their persuasive power, lead to important decisions. Reversing the order, it can also be said that thanks to the understanding of rhetorical mechanisms it is possible to justify the value of deeds that are the result of decisions based on rhetorical argumentation.<sup>25</sup>

Perelman constantly repeats that rhetoric, understood as the theory of persuasive speech or the theory of rhetorical argumentation, includes every statement which purpose is not to express an impersonal truth, but through which one aims to influence another person or persons. Exerting influence on somebody can, however, consist in both attempting to direct another's thinking, arousing or calming another's emotions, as well as inducing another to act. At this point it is important to note that Perelman distinguishes cultural abstract values from concrete values. The former are hidden behind denominations common to all mankind, e.g., good, love, holiness, but they are specified and hierarchized in specific cultural contexts, so they are given a specific meaning, i.e., a specific concept of good, love or holiness. In other words, abstract values are made concrete in a specific culture, its history, experiences and goals. All these goals should harmonize with the concrete values assumed by the speaker, around which he wants to gather his listeners. Such values gain acceptance, if they are associated with abstract values adopted at the starting point by the participants in the discourse. Consensus on specific values presented for acceptance is there-

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 1410.

fore only possible in a community already organized around a purpose, and recognizing the same abstract values.<sup>26</sup>

According to Perelman, the cultural and universal value of the “new rhetoric” that differentiates it from ancient rhetoric is that it can be directed to any type of audience. So it can be both a crowd gathered in a public place, a team of specialists in a particular field, a single person, or all humanity. It can be practiced in an intra-subjective mode, i.e., considering arguments that arise during internal deliberation (arguments that we direct to ourselves when we consider a given issue, before making a decision or before taking action). In other words, the domain of rhetoric includes any statement aimed at conviction or persuasion. It deals with all types of reasoning that are not formal (they are not formally correct inferences), nor are they mechanical calculations. Therefore, the argumentation is rhetorical regardless of to whom it is addressed or with what it deals; it does not concern the obvious in the sense that it neither provides it nor is directed against it; it deals with the area of reality where there is simply no sufficient reason to take something as self-evident, or there are doubts about something and it is necessary to justify one or another choice. Perelman points out that by distancing rhetoric from logic and formal evidence, he does not claim that rhetoric has nothing to do with evidence. If the speaker is convinced that he is sure about something, then he uses arguments to propagate what he is sure of. One might think that Perelman’s remark concerns what could be called subjective evidence, i.e., the speaker’s internal conviction or faith in the rightness of the argumentation that he used. Such evidence cannot be a criterion of truth, even if the preferred judgments correspond with intuition or with common sense—so important in Perelman’s conception. Perelman constantly emphasizes that rhetoric is a tool of philosophy if it is considered that philosophical

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Perelman, *L’empire rhétorique*, 197–199.

statements are only some kind of hypothesis that can be an optional solution and not be treated as unchanging and ahistorical truths.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion

Perelman strongly emphasizes the dialogical nature of culture. According to him, dialogism is a universal recipe for developing culture. The key to cultural discourse is for its participants to be aware that their living is a constant dialogue. Only this universal awareness will protect culture and its participants from such threats as civilizational totalitarianism and cultural monism. Not without significance is Chaim Perelman's personal experience of the evil of World War II, especially the crimes of genocide (the Holocaust). This painful experience led him to believe that the history of European culture is the history of overcoming traditional absolutism in favor of epistemological and worldview pluralism, as well as egalitarianism, which in turn underlies a democratic civil state. Rhetoric, understood as the theory of persuasive speech (rhetoric *sensu stricto*), would then be the foundation and at the same time an instrument of social and cultural dialogue.

It is absolutely necessary to appreciate Perelman's claims, and see the validity of his criticism of rationalism (absolutism, scientism, logicalism) which—let us emphasize—is one (beside irrationalism) of the currents of the tradition of idealism. For this reason, his thesis, according to which the entire cultural and social discourse, and consequently the whole philosophy, is rhetorical, leads to circular reasoning in justification, and ultimately to relativism, according to which abstract values (truth, good and beauty) are gradual, changeable and dependent on the civilizational and cultural context. What is more, the adoption of relativism as the basis of philosophy leads directly to relativism as the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–23.

basis of rhetoric, which concerns what is possible and what may—but does not have to—happen, but is ultimately based on acts of will (voluntarism) and on a contract (conventionalism). Rhetoric in the classical (Aristotelian) approach takes into account what is really possible and probable, and thus finally becomes valid in the context of real experience. In other words, rhetoric considers what is possible in the future, but is always based on the past and the present. This criticism, nevertheless, does not entirely undermine Perelman’s achievements in the field of argumentative techniques, which can be successfully used as part of and within the context of classical (Aristotelian) rhetoric.



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In Terms of Chaim Perelman**

SUMMARY

This article is an attempt to answer the question about the causes of the rhetoric crisis and its role in social discourse. The theoretical basis of these considerations and their reference point is the concept of new rhetoric in terms of the contemporary rhetoric and argumentation theorist Chaim Perelman. The first part briefly describes contemporary cultural discourse that takes place in a democratized society in the era of so-called new media. It indicates that inquiry into rhetoric (which started in antiquity) is also inquiry into universal criteria for cultural discourse, as well as the timeless and supra-cultural norms and principles that regulate this discourse (taking into account ongoing social and cultural changes). The second part of the article refers directly to the position of Chaim Perelman on the crisis of rhetoric. Perelman saw the main reason for this crisis in the separation of rhetoric from philosophy. The third part characterizes the new rhetoric in terms of its novelty and timeliness, as well as its reference to classical (Aristotelian) rhetoric. The fourth part points to the application of the concept of new rhetoric in cultural discourse. It discusses Perelman’s concept of universal audience, as well as the problem of concrete and abstract values, the understanding of which by the members of a given audience does or does not enable the communication (consensus) between each other. The end of the article briefly assesses Perelman’s contribution to understanding rhetoric and his role in restoring rhetoric to its rightful place in social discourse.

## KEYWORDS

Chaim Perelman, rhetoric, new rhetoric, philosophy, social discourse, communication, crisis of the rhetoric.

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