

# Passionate Thought: Aristotelian Interventions in Deliberative Democratic Theory

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Various contemporary democratic theorists have, in the past two decades, attempted to articulate a model of democracy based on rational discussion and argumentation. Famously called in democratic theory the “deliberative turn,” this sustained inquiry into the role of the exchange of reasons in democratic public spheres presently underpins a great deal of normative inquiry into the concept of democracy.<sup>1</sup> Deliberative democracy has become the buzzword among democratic theorists who want to demonstrate the possibilities of a more inclusive understanding of *demos* in this age characterized by pluralism and multiculturalism.

At the core of this deliberative turn is a belief that rational communication among citizens can help illuminate aspects of democratic institutions and practices only partially glimpsed and realized through the more traditional ways of making and forming democratic

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<sup>1</sup> See John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Dryzek’s book is a helpful introduction to anyone wishing to understand deliberative democracy in general. He explains the relationship between aggregative democracy and deliberative democracy. Furthermore, he provides a significant discussion of the main critics of deliberative democratic theory. He calls attention to at least three main groups of theorists who assume a critical stance towards the theory: liberal theorists, social-choice theorists, and difference theorists. He suggests as well a number of novel, provocative theses, such as broadening the composition of the deliberative forum through the inclusion of “non-human political agents,” and paying better attention to the “transnational” scope and possibilities of democratic deliberation.

decisions. It is primarily a turning away from the aggregative model of democracy, the theory of democratic decision-making akin to the addition of persons' private and particular interests through voting.<sup>2</sup> It can also be seen as democratic theory's "linguistic turn," as deliberative democratic theories become more crucially attuned to the decisive role of speech and language in forming democratic decisions.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, as many historians of political thought are quick to remind us, the philosophical spirit that shaped some of the central concepts behind contemporary deliberative democratic theory can be historically located in the ancient history of democratic thought. The idea of democracy, that is *demos kratia*, a government that puts emphasis on the power of the people to decide its course, can be said to

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<sup>2</sup> It is frequently noted that the aggregative model was primarily inspired by the work of Joseph Schumpeter. See for example his seminal work *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947). Also worth noting is Anthony Downs' *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957). I will not discuss this model, but as I say in my note above, Dryzek's book provides a comprehensive comparison of this model vis-à-vis deliberative democratic theory.

<sup>3</sup> There are many camps of deliberative theorists of democracy. From the early 1990s to the early 2000s, there emerged a considerable amount of literature that can be counted as general statements of the theory. The literature, as it stands now is vast and following is a sampling of works I consulted for this paper. Aside from Dryzek's *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, there is also by him an earlier work entitled *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy and Political Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), which counts as one of the earliest systematic works on the theory. Simone Chamber's *Reasonable Democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) is an early statement explicitly following Habermas' discourse ethics. Seyla Benhabib follows Habermas' discourse ethics in her own model of deliberative democracy. See Seyla Benhabib's "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). James Fishkin's *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reforms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) is similarly good to look into. Another major statement of theory is Amy Gutmann's and Dennis Thompson's *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). A book symposium on this work is Stephen Macedo's *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). The latest book by Gutmann and Thompson is *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). This book contains several responses to the criticisms forwarded in Macedo's *Deliberative Politics*, and one of their newer lines of argument pertains to the form of political communication worth-accommodating in a theory of democratic deliberation is also transformed.

have grown concurrently while philosophy was being cultivated in fifth century Athens.

This is not to say that the major Greek philosophers favored democracy as the best type of rule. Plato is surely one of the most hostile critics of democracy, and Aristotle sees it only as the best of the worst of regime-types available. What I am saying is that the concepts of reasoned talk and argumentation, which proved to be central to the contemporary meaning of the term *deliberation*, initially got sharpened in this phase of Western intellectual history. For example, we see in Plato's Socrates, in his dialogues with the citizens of Athens, the value of justifying the truthfulness of one's beliefs through the public defense of reason in the agora. Aristotle's practical philosophy also considers the relevance of deliberative speech in illuminating the ends of our political lives. This deliberative turn, therefore, in a sense, also points us to a return to ancient democratic theoretical concepts embedded in the long and winding tradition of Western political thought.

However, as we also know from the classical tradition of democratic theory, these philosophers rendered a quite uninspiring picture of democracy. Albeit in different ways and on varying levels, Plato and Aristotle objected to democracy precisely because the *demos*, according to them, are not entirely capable of reasoned argumentation.

Various statements of deliberative democratic theory show that there are numerous and often conflicting assumptions about the nature, status and aims of democracy and of course, deliberation itself. And in the burgeoning literature on this theory, one major issue that recently caught the attention of both its proponents and critics pertains to the form of democratic deliberation such a theory ought to endorse. For some of its critics, democratic deliberation is very suspect because it presupposes a rational form of argumentation, presumably marginalizing the role passions play in democratic societies. This criticism is pointed towards the way mainstream theories of deliberative democracy seem to generally view democratic deliberation: as a decision-making process aiming for rational consensus.

One of the most consistent critics of deliberative democracy following this vein of thought is political thinker Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe deliberately rejects deliberative democracy on the grounds that, as a theory, it fails in acknowledging that any democratic society is ridden with "irreconcilable conflicts" and "antagonisms." She insists that it is

futile to understand democracy in rational terms, precisely because it would elicit violence rather than foster difference in our pluralized democratic societies. More than anything, Mouffe's criticism seems to assume a huge hostility against rationality and the philosophical baggage of the Enlightenment. In her introduction to a special issue of *Philosophy and Social Criticism* on "Politics and Passions," she makes this clear:

It is...crucial for democratic theory to grasp the dynamics of constitution of those antagonisms instead of wishing them away with pious declarations. This requires *relinquishing the rationalist perspective* which predominates in this discipline and which impedes acknowledging the complex and ambivalent nature of human sociability and the ineradicability of social division. By remaining blind to the place of passions in the construction of collective political identities, modern political theory has been unable to understand that the main challenge confronting democratic politics is not to eliminate passions in order to create rational consensus, but how to mobilize them toward democratic designs.<sup>4</sup>

In her powerful tirade against "modern democratic theory," Mouffe rejects, in *toto*, the critical axis informing most theories of deliberative democracy: the relationship between rationality and politics. It is, in her view, dangerous to dream that reason can help us solve the problems that beset democratic politics since passion, far more than reason, is key.

Her criticism, articulated in the terms of her own "agonistic and radical pluralist" model of democracy is in tune with the post-modern and post-structuralist critiques prevalent in most areas of intellectual and political inquiry today. It is a testament to the phenomenon that in the wake of the deliberative turn in democratic theory comes much skepticism and pessimism about its purportedly utopian dimensions: the dream of a rational consensus hoping to serve as the basis of solidarity and integration of a democratic society. She posits that the deliberative tradition is flawed precisely because it does not acknowledge political society for "what it is" but only for "what it should be." This

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<sup>4</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Politics and Passions: Introduction," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 28(2002)6, 615-16. Emphasis mine.

type of democratic thinking is not only dissatisfying but, more worse, is impotent, since it does not grasp the specificity of “the political,” or of that about politics that sets it apart from ethics.<sup>5</sup>

To a certain extent, one could readily accept Mouffe’s observation. Mouffe is correct to observe that the earliest books and essays behind the current revival of interest in deliberative democracy are an attempt to reconcile democratic politics with rationality,<sup>6</sup> in the manner of two of the foremost architects of this revived tradition, John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. What she appears less willing to concede is the lack of resolute agreement among the theorists as to what constitutes democratic deliberation, and the fact that, however it is understood, they are agreed that the passions play a role in it. This paper arose, in a sense, out of a discontent with Mouffe’s sweeping objections against deliberative democratic theory. Reflecting upon the role of passionate emotions and rhetoric in *deliberation*, I myself have come to terms with her critique without having to reject deliberative democratic theory in wholesale fashion. This arises out of thinking with the Ancient Greeks, specifically Aristotle who, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

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<sup>5</sup> Mouffe is only one among several political theorists who adhere to an agonistic conception of democracy. Hannah Arendt is a pivotal thinker in this tradition. See, for example her *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Bonnie Honig, following Arendt, provides as well a significant account of agonism. See her *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993). William Connolly similarly endorses agonism. See *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the collection of essays by James Bohman and William Rehg, *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997). In the introduction to this book, it was highlighted that the theoretical debts of deliberative democratic theory to the practical philosophy of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas are tremendous. According to Bohman and Rehg, the “major statements” of the idea of deliberative democracy can be culled from essays by Habermas like “Popular Sovereignty and Procedure” and Rawls’s “The Idea of Public Reason.” They also took note of Jon Elster’s “The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory” and Joshua Cohen’s “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy.” All of these essays are included in their edited collection. It is through reading the essays in this book that I came up with the idea of “reason and politics” as the main axes of deliberative democratic theory. Of course, it is precisely these axes that critics would sooner try to dismantle. Like Dryzek’s *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, this is a helpful introduction to the idea of deliberative democracy and the philosophical debates that surround it.

speaks of “deliberation” (*bouleusis*) in a manner critically important for understanding the deliberative turn in contemporary democratic theory. As much as deliberative democratic theory may tend to pass Aristotle over in view of his generally unfriendly take on democracy, he does clarify some of the reasons for the shift in emphasis from personal (*monological*), to political (that I will all *poly-logical*), deliberation. With the philosophically neglected, *On Rhetoric*, in mind, therefore, I will attempt to establish the intimate philosophical connections between reason (*logos*), character (*ethos*), and emotions (*pathos*), in light of which I will revisit the notion of *particularity* and *situated judgment* in personal and political deliberation, implied by Aristotle’s political ethics. These themes are well captured in a recent crop of secondary literature that makes the case that the study of Aristotle as an ethical, political, and yes, democratic, theorist, is as relevant as ever.<sup>7</sup>

In the next section, I provide an overview of the “*Aristotelian turn*” in deliberative democratic theory. Underlined here is the attention paid by contemporary political and ethical theorists to Aristotle’s practical philosophy insofar as it could help to resolve a number of the *aporias* that puzzle democratic theorists today. In the section following that, I think with Aristotle against Aristotle over the linkages between ethics and rhetoric in an effort to respond to the glib attacks of thinkers who refuse to concede the philosophical value of *On Rhetoric*. Those who concede Aristotle’s value to contemporary democratic politics will find that *On Rhetoric* does in fact stir up a number of meaningful tensions. In the final section, I examine a number of contemporary arguments that amplify the value of rhetoric in democratic deliberation, specifically Iris Marion Young’s very Aristotelian idea of adding “rhetoric” to enhance deliberative democratic theory.

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<sup>7</sup> A number of contemporary political theorists read *On Rhetoric* against the *Nicomachean Ethics* in an effort to more firmly establish the deliberative turn in democratic theory. Two works are especially salient: (1) see Bryan Garsten’s *Saving Persuasion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) for a comprehensive defense of the tradition of rhetoric as a genre of political speech. In an important chapter, “Drawing Upon Judgment: Aristotle,” Garsten examines the significance of practical judgment in deliberation; (2) see Bernard Yack, “Rhetoric and Public Reasoning: An Aristotelian Understanding of Political Deliberation,” *Political Theory*, 34 (2006) No. 4, 417–438, for a straightforward exegesis of *On Rhetoric* vis-à-vis *Nicomachean Ethics*.

## Why the Aristotelian Turn in Deliberative Democratic Theory?

Notwithstanding his well-known lack of enthusiasm for, even antagonism towards, democracy, an increasing number of contemporary democratic theorists are turning to Aristotle for philosophical inspiration, as they articulate a form of democratic deliberation that does not undermine the value of passions and emotions in decision-making. This Aristotelian turn in democratic theory coincides with a growth in philosophical scholarship on Aristotelian rhetoric. This is exemplified by the 1994 *Proceedings* of the Twelfth Symposium Aristotelicum, entitled, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*,<sup>8</sup> in which distinguished philosophers provide expositions of the many interesting but under-assessed or neglected aspects of Aristotle's theory of rhetoric. They explain that if *On Rhetoric* has traditionally remained at the margins of the scholarship on Aristotle, it is on account of the fact that the academic tradition that originally embraced its salience, typically presenting it as a guide to public speaking, political oratory, and composition writing, does not exactly fall within the territorial domains of traditional philosophical scholarship. One could even speak in terms of an age-old quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric.

By way of an excursus, and in anticipation of a fuller discussion of Aristotle's notion of rhetoric, I propose we have a look at Plato's and Kant's rather dismissive take (albeit in ways that vary) on it. Given their decisive influence upon the manner in which a number of deliberative democratic theorists, as well as their critics, present the notion of public reason, it is important to understand what they had to say.

The reluctant reception(s) of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* among philosophers is due, not only to its institutional connections with

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<sup>8</sup> See Alexander Nehemas' and David J. Furley's edited collection, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) for a very engaging introduction to the many important reasons behind the revival of interest in Aristotle's Rhetoric. What this collection of essays underscored to me was the penchant on the part of some philosophers to simply dismiss rhetoric without a clear understanding of its educative potential. Its third section, "Rhetoric, Ethics and Politics," is especially crucial for understanding Aristotle's practical philosophy in general as well as the way rhetoric integrates smoothly with ethics and politics. Indeed, as the essays demonstrate, by seeing the subtle interconnections between language, action and thought in the realm of practical reason, *reading* Aristotle could pave the way for a theory of democratic deliberation.

supposedly non-philosophical disciplines, but to “the split” between, on the one hand, individuals trained in philosophy and, on the other, individuals who adhere to the ancient Platonic view, found in the *Gorgias*, of rhetoric’s inferior status vis-à-vis dialectic. Socrates, in the *Gorgias*, draws a sharp distinction between two forms of persuasion: the first, rhetoric, producing in its targets, neither knowledge nor reason, but conviction; the second, true knowledge. Unlike the exact sciences such as geometry or mathematics, rhetoric persuades not by means of teaching but by means of flattery. It does not educate, but simply corrupts. It is propelled, not by the desire to learn, but by sheer conviction. It is not a proper art (*techné*), but a “mere knack.” Plato dismisses rhetoric as akin (*antistrophos*) to “cooking.” He writes:

In my opinion then, Gorgias, the whole of which rhetoric is a part is not an art at all, but the habit of a bold and ready wit, which knows how to manage mankind: this habit I sum up under the word “flattery”; and it appears to me to have many other parts, one of which is cooking, which may seem to be an art, but, as I maintain, is only an experience or routine and not an art: another part is rhetoric, and the art of attiring and sophistry are two others.<sup>9</sup>

This negative view of rhetoric figures prominently in the work of Immanuel Kant, and of philosophers influenced by him, such as Rawls and Habermas, who have debated the *idea of public reason*. In the third *Critique*, Kant writes:

Poetry plays with illusion, which it produces at will, and yet without using illusion to deceive us, for poetry tells us that its pursuit is mere play...Oratory [on the other hand], insofar as this is taken to mean the art of persuasion (*ars oratoria*), i.e. of deceiving by beautiful illusion, rather than excellence of speech (eloquence and style), is a dialectic that borrows from poetry only as much as the speaker needs in order to win over people’s minds for his own advantage before they can judge for themselves, and so makes their judgement unfree.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> B. Jowett, trans., *Dialogues of Plato*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, trans. W. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).



Following Plato, Kant deployed binary oppositions to dismiss rhetoric. In a departure from Plato, however, who privileged philosophy over rhetoric, Kant casts rhetoric against poetry. In the view of a number of commentators, Kant's assertion is unwarranted. Brian Vickers writes:

The dichotomy is evidently intended to privilege the poet and disarm the orator, who is even denied the power of *movere*, a particularly arbitrary gesture given the growth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries...of treatises analyzing rhetoric's power over the feelings. Kant does not enquire how the orator works, simply denies him seriousness or understanding, making him an intellectual entertainer. Continuing his demolition without examining rhetorical theory, and without analysing a single text, he declares that the orator totally fails to come up with his promise, and a thing, too, which is his avowed business, namely the engagement of the understanding of some end. One might have expected a philosopher to produce an argument, or at least some evidence, to support such a dismissive judgment.<sup>11</sup>

Both Plato and Kant characterize rhetoric or oratory as a device deployed by its proponents to trick their hearers into giving their assent to claims that have little or no grounding at all in true knowledge. It appeals to the senses and, like poetry, "plays with illusion." It flatters the hearer without necessarily delivering to her a substantial piece of reason. Speaking in rhetorical fashion is analogous to cooking up a meal, in the sense that, a right mixture of ingredients is required, to arouse the desires/appetites of the audience/eaters. For both Plato and Kant the core issue appears to be the epistemic status of the knowledge that rhetoric claims to produce. Whereas dialectic unveils knowledge, rhetoric produces opinions. Rhetoric, in that sense, is epistemologically suspect. Of what real use would an eloquently declared sentence be if it did not assert something of relevance, or with genuine truth-value, in relation to the matter at hand? Democratic deliberators would do well, then, to keep a cool rational head about them, cut rhetoric out of their repertory, and focus on producing rationally acceptable claims. The assumption being made here, of course, is that the deliberative agent

<sup>11</sup> Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 202.

is something of a professionally trained philosopher, and deliberation itself redolent of a seminar in philosophy in which the collection of deliberative interlocutors make it their business to identify and then promote the premises that lead ineluctably to desired conclusions. The intellectual virtues that typically make a good philosopher — precision, clarity, soundness of rational argument — are demanded of the political agent as well. Needless to say, the crafters of this theory are themselves usually trained philosophers. Within the frame of actual democratic deliberation, however, where the tidy distinctions between rhetoric and dialectic are often blurred, such a stance would be unsustainable.

In the next section, I explain in what sense Aristotle's account of rhetoric — which also frames current mainstream theories of democratic deliberation — contains more insight into the matter than Plato's and Kant's straightforward rejection.

### *Ethos, Logos, and Pathos: Three "Proofs" in Aristotelian Rhetoric*

Let us commence with the questions: (1) What in the structure of rhetoric is similar to that of dialectic? (2) What causes them to be different? (3) In what, exactly, does rhetoric consist? Our aim will be to rehabilitate the relation between rhetoric and philosophy, and to identify what elements in Aristotle's theory rhetoric could be of use to democratic deliberation.<sup>12</sup>

Philosophical commentaries on Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* underline the significance of its opening line: "Rhetoric is the *antistrophos*, or the counterpart of Dialectic." In this opening line we find one of the treatise's main hermeneutical keys.<sup>13</sup> It indicates what Aristotle will soon unravel: that (pace Plato) rhetoric is not strictly opposed to dialectic since, in fact, dialectic (argumentation) possesses latent rhetorical aspects. Larry Arnhart captures this remark's spirit very clearly:

<sup>12</sup> Our aim here will not be to provide a comprehensive reading of *On Rhetoric*, but to show how it could be made to underpin the desirable intertwining of reason/passion in democratic deliberation. Aside from Nehamas' collection of essays, I greatly recommended Eugene Garver's *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), as well as Amelie O. Rorty's, *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> All references to the *Rhetoric* are from George Kennedy's *Aristotle's On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

True rhetoric is the “counterpart” not of “cooking” 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.<sup>14</sup>

A number of commentators make the point as well that Aristotle wrote *On Rhetoric* in reaction to the demagoguery and emotional manipulation of political leaders who, in their public addresses, sought to woo the *demos* (a supposedly unthinking mob), at any cost.<sup>15</sup> *On Rhetoric* could then be said to have a corrective intent, with respect to its misrepresentations by earlier thinkers’ (e.g. Plato), as well as to its misuse by those possessed of political power. But in the aftermath of rhetoric’s two thousand year old entanglement with demagoguery, it seems a Herculean task to try to set them apart. A case in point is the commonplace term, “political rhetoric,” referring to such words as politicians utter who would like nothing better than to get us to believe, or to act upon, some issue, in the absence even of any reasonable grounds to do so. Indeed, the term, “rhetoric,” has found its way into our literary and cultural vocabularies, with any number of pejorative connotations attached to it, such as “empty words,” “lip

<sup>14</sup> Larry Arnhart, *Aristotle on Political Reasoning: A Commentary on the “Rhetoric,”* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), 34. Emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Demagoguery is characterized by an asymmetrical relationship between the demagogue (politician) and the mob. The demagogue attempts to sway the public by means of his *act*, which is the speech itself. The public, on the other hand, receives his speech with varying levels and intensities of intellectual and emotional approval (or disapproval). The asymmetry consists not only in numbers (it is *one to many*) but in the amount of political power actually wielded by the politician. This creates an *aporia*: how do we shift the focus of political discussion from “*one-to-many*,” where power lies at the center (the speaker politician), to “*many-to-many*” (where power is decentralized and distributed amongst the public)? This way of formulating the question points comes out of a tradition of democratic deliberation that engages with rhetoric, even if it is not seen as rhetoric in the traditional way.

service," "grandiloquence," and "extravagant language." Aristotle, for his part, points to a dimension of rhetoric that is without such negative connotations. He draws parallels between it and dialectic precisely because he sees it as art, as a *techné*, a skill that can be learned and taught, re-learned and re-taught. He would like to instruct us as to its proper use, within the frame especially of public speaking.<sup>16</sup>

Another lexical definition of rhetoric which is commonplace in our contemporary intellectual cultures is that it can be simply defined as the "art of persuasion." It is Aristotle's view, however, that rhetoric functions, "not to persuade, but to see the available means of persuasion in each case" (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1355b25-6). So when one listens to a speech, one needs to be on the lookout for whatever of its claims may ring false. Rhetoric is "an ability, in each particular case" to see the available means of persuasion. The shift from the simple act of persuasion to the act of seeing the available means of persuasion, is pivotal to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric; it conditions us for the emergence in speech of what Aristotle calls the three *pisteis* or means of persuasion.

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<sup>16</sup> George Kennedy explains the meaning of dialectic for Aristotle in the commentary accompanying his translation of *On Rhetoric*. According to Kennedy: "Dialectic, as understood by Aristotle, was the art of philosophical disputation. Practice in it was regularly provided in his philosophical school, and his treatise known as *Topics* is a textbook of dialectic. The opening chapters of the *Topics* may be found in Appendix I.C. The procedure involved in dialectic was for a student to state a thesis (e.g., "Pleasure is the only good"), and for a second student to try to refute it by asking a series of questions that could be answered either by yes or by no. By defining and dividing the question, drawing analogies, and generally leading the respondent to assume a logically indefensible position, the interlocutor danced around the respondent. The respondent, on the other hand, could also defend his position and win the argument. Dialectic proceeds by question and answer, and not, as rhetoric does, by continuous exposition. A dialectical argument does not contain the parts of a public address. There is, with dialectic, neither introduction, nor narration, nor epilogue, but only proof. Only logical argument are acceptable. Within the frame of rhetorical practice (as Aristotle explains in Chapter 2), the speaker's character, as well as the emotions he might have succeeded in awakening in his audience, are the means in and through which he can exercise his power to persuade. While both dialectic and rhetoric build their arguments on commonly held opinions (*endoxa*) and deal only with the probable (not with scientific certainty), dialectic examines general issues (such as the nature of justice) whereas rhetoric usually seeks a specific judgment, (e.g., whether or not some specific action was just or whether or not some specific policy will be beneficial).

What are these *pisteis*? Aristotle answers: “Of the *pisteis* provided through speech there are three species: for some are in the *ethos* of the speaker, and some in disposing the listener in some way, and some in the argument (*logos*) itself, by showing or seeming to show something (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1356a1-20). He then explains how they intertwine with one another:

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.<sup>17</sup>

Here we get a pretty good idea as to what comprises rhetoric, making it an attractive addition to deliberative democratic practice. We get to see as well the inherent strength of Aristotle’s defense of rhetoric, in terms of its balanced grasp of the communications process. If there is anything we stand to learn from it is that, while we cannot proceed without *logos* (the speech itself), we cannot rely on it alone. We need to consider as well the other two *pisteis* — *ethos* or the character of the speaker, and *pathos* or the arousal of the audience’s emotions — insofar as they gesture in the direction of elements of political communication that, while under-emphasized, are actually quite pertinent. In discussions of deliberative democracy presently taking place, they figure as the nature and status of the political agent (the deliberator herself), vis-à-vis the moral psychology of the listeners (the audience of the deliberator). By bringing *ethos* and *pathos* into the picture, Aristotle elucidates how the (perceived) character of the deliberator shapes her speech, as well as how her character influences the manner in which the audience receives her speech. Given the importance of character and the emotions in this reading of *On Rhetoric*, a theory of democratic deliberation becomes possible that, by not leaving out the passionate elements of

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<sup>17</sup> *Rhetoric*, 1356a10-20, 25.

communication, proves a lot more practicable than ones we have come across that do not recognize Aristotle's points on rhetoric.

In a rhetorical situation, the speech illuminates the character of the speaker at the same time that the claims she makes are judged "cooperatively" by the specific public she addresses. There is a correlation between powerful passionate speech and its capacity to keep its audience bound to "its reasons," the source of this passion. Passion in communication underscores not only the importance, degree of logicity, etc. of the matter, but also its urgency, which could instigate us to put urgency in the balance when making political decisions. What we seek to communicate in speech is after all a great many things, such as reason, importance, urgency, commitment, the all-around psychosocial consequences (e.g. anxiety, happiness etc.) of all this speechmaking, even a sense of one's inability to conform to the norms governing "deliberation." Examples of figures from history and global politics who have deployed passionate rhetoric in advancing the agenda of the disadvantaged are Martin Luther King, Jr. ("I Have A Dream," a speech that catalyzed, in the United States, the civil rights movement); Nelson Mandela ("I Am Prepared to Die," a speech that significantly illumined for all the world to observe, South Africa's long struggle with apartheid).

### *Towards a Rhetorical Turn in Deliberative Democratic Theory?*

In their recent work, B. Garsten and Bernard Yack engender the view that it is important for deliberative democratic theorists, following Aristotle, to work out an understanding and a practice of deliberation that will be friendly to situated judgment, to rhetoric, and to passionate emotions.<sup>18</sup> Iris Marion Young (to extrapolate from a 2001 debate with fellow deliberative democratic theorist Seyla Benhabib), similarly, espouses the adoption and deployment of rhetoric as a legitimate form of communication within the practice of deliberative democracy. It is to Young's project I wish to turn to now. Insofar as Young views the emotions and passions as having a positive role to play in democratic deliberation, she would be supportive of a rhetorical turn in democratic theory. This should excite classical Aristotelian scholars who want

<sup>18</sup> Cf. fn 7 above.

to form new dialogues with contemporary ethical and political philosophers.

Iris Marion Young shares with theorists such as Seyla Benhabib and Jurgen Habermas some of the most fundamental tenets of deliberative democratic thought. In fact, her model, which she prefers to call “communicative democracy,” explicitly builds upon the deliberative model of democracy founded upon Habermas’s discourse ethics and theory of communicative action. She, however, deviates from its strict adherence to dialectic, or “argument,” the form of political communication it is generally assumed to endorse. Additionally, she theorizes what she calls “enhancements” of the dominant form of political communication in deliberative democratic theory. So while she does not regard rational argumentation as dangerous to democratic politics, she believes it stands to be enhanced by other styles of communication. But before we take a closer look at the “enhancements” she proposes, permit me to mention a helpful preliminary distinction Young makes in the introduction to her book, *Inclusion and Democracy*. There Young differentiates between “external exclusion” and “internal exclusion.” External exclusion is a deliberate form of exclusion as when, for example, an individual, or a group of people, are stripped of their membership in a deliberative forum. “Backdoor brokering,” in her view, is an example of this. Another example is expert discussion groups, such as those which are set up prior to public consultation. These tend to work against democratic deliberation when the output from them is presented to the public as established facts, at which point the public is conditioned to regard these “facts” as constitutive of public policy.

Internal exclusion, on the other hand, occurs when certain individuals or groups are part the democratic discourse, but their manner of communication is not, insofar as it fails to coincide with any and all expected or acceptable modes of communication. So despite their attendance at a particular forum, they are unable, on account of the “communication gap,” to influence the way all other participants think.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Young writes: “[when] the terms of discourse make assumptions some do not share, the interaction privileges specific styles

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<sup>19</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55.

of expression, [and] the participation of some people is dismissed as out of order.”<sup>20</sup> At this juncture, precisely, and very subtly, the exclusion of “other” forms of communication, including rhetoric, occurs.

In a chapter called “Inclusive Political Communication,” she describes three enhancements to democratic deliberation, calling them, “greeting, rhetoric and narrative.” I will limit my discussion to rhetoric, since where it occurs, strong disagreements among most theorists and critics of deliberative democracy similarly occur. The significant questions at this point is: what, in Young’s view, is rhetoric? What makes it an attractive “enhancer” for democratic deliberation? What would the benefits be of allowing rhetoric to enter into the public forum? How should we see rhetoric’s relationship to critical argumentation?

First of all, Young acknowledges that a number of deliberative democratic theorists allow for a “Platonic distinction between rational speech and mere rhetoric.” For her, this results to a denigration of “emotion, figurative language, or unusual or playful forms of expression.” This distinction works by looking at “rational speech” as

universalistic, dispassionate, culturally and stylistically neutral argument that focus the mind on their evidence and logical connections, rather than move the heart or engage the imagination.<sup>21</sup>

According to Young, this type of distinction occurs, for example, in Habermas’ theory of discourse ethics, within the frame of which he distinguishes “rational speech from rhetoric,” understanding the former to correspond to a “communicative function,” and the latter to a “strategic function.” Following this distinction, “communicative action” and “rhetorical speech” as follows:

Communicative action involves speech that makes assertions about the natural or human world and signals in its illocutionary acts its commitment to those claims and a willingness to defend them with reasons. Rhetorical speech, on the other hand, aims not to reach understanding with others, but only to manipulate

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.



their thought and feeling in directions that serve the speaker's own ends.<sup>22</sup>

For Young, this tendency within deliberative democratic theory to privilege a particular type of communication that is supposedly less embodied and dispassionate, and to cast rhetoric in a negative fashion, has exclusionary results. Without most people ever noticing it, every political expression (uttered by a politician or an academic) has its rhetorical aspects; for every moment of communication is situated in a particular time and place and geared towards a particular audience. For her, instead of "bracketing" rhetoric for political communication to be "truly rational," it is more important to look at it as an aspect of the communication process that we "ought to attend in our engagement with one another."<sup>23</sup>

Young supplies her own definition of rhetoric, reechoing classical characterizations of rhetoric, such as Aristotle's, but with a very contemporary twist. For Young, first of all, the concept of rhetoric "assumes a distinction between what a discourse says, its substantive content of message, and how it says it." For her, "the general category of 'rhetoric'...refers to the various ways something can be said, which color and condition its substantive content."<sup>24</sup> She lists the most important aspects of this type of communication<sup>25</sup>:

- (a) the emotional tone of the discourse, whether its content is uttered in fear, hope, anger, joy, or in any other outburst of passion. No discourse lacks an emotional tone. Indeed, "dispassionate" discourse carries an emotional tone of calm and distance.
- (b) the use in discourse of figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, puns, synecdoche, etc., along with the styles or attitudes such figures produce — that is, to be playful, humorous, ironic, deadpan, mocking, grave, or majestic.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

- (c) Forms of making a point do not only involve speech, such as visual media, signs and banners, street demonstration, guerilla theatre and the use of symbols in all these contexts.
- (d) All these affective, embodied, and stylistic aspects of communication, finally, involve attention to the particular audience of one's communication, and orienting one's claims and arguments to the particular assumptions, history and idioms of that audience.

We definitely hear Aristotle's tripartite *pisteis* of persuasion echoing through this definition of rhetoric. To put it simply, the meat of Young's discussion of rhetoric as an enhancer of critical argumentation can be summarized in three main points. For Young, rhetoric has at least three positive "functions" in political communication.

- (a) Rhetorical moves often help to get an issue on the agenda for deliberation.<sup>26</sup>
- (b) Rhetoric fashions claims and arguments in ways appropriate to a particular public in a particular situation.<sup>27</sup>
- (c) Rhetoric motivates the move from reason to judgment.<sup>28</sup>

Young's theory of democratic deliberation embraces rhetoric as intimately connected with the idea of "particularity." Rhetoric, Young tells us, has the capacity to deal with practical and concrete questions — which are often the points-of-departure of democratic deliberations. Why is this so? In this view, passionate pleas for abstract issues such as claims for "justice" become concretized through specific and historicized narratives. Particular reasons parlayed to a particular

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

audience produce specific, well-contextualized practical judgments that could potentially lead to decisive political action. This is a very Aristotelian notion of deliberation — as the act of thinking through issues to realize a specific end-goal. Also, the strategies available within rhetoric allow the deliberative agent to explain her side of the issue to a larger audience, which is typically the case in sites of democratic deliberations anyway: whether it is in a congressional assembly or in a community meeting.

Her suggestion also presupposes another point: that dialectic, if we follow its Socratic form, does not elicit the advantages enumerated above simply because of its emphasis on one-on-one dialogue rather than on one-to-many or many-to-many deliberation. In short, for Young, rhetoric illumines aspects of deliberation that simply cannot be captured by logico-deductive argumentation processes; and this would be true of most theories of democratic deliberation.

Seyla Benhabib published her comments on Young's earlier formulations of the latter's suggestions in her article "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," which Young subsequently answered in *Inclusion and Democracy*. The bottom line of Benhabib's comment is that such forms of communication that Young sees as "enhancements" to a model of deliberative democracy are:

neither necessary for the democratic theorist to try to formalize and institutionalize these aspects of communicative everyday competence, nor is it plausible — and this is the more important objection — to build an opposition between them and critical argumentation.<sup>29</sup>

At first glance, Benhabib seems to have provided a sharp critique of Young in her comments above. Young's theorization, and to a certain extent, resuscitation, of forms of communication such as rhetoric, does not, in her view, significantly enhance what in her view is an already satisfactory form of political communication, deliberation and critical argumentation. However, as Young would quickly reiterate in her illuminating response:

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<sup>29</sup> Seyla Benhabib, (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 82.

Seyla Benhabib has objected to my earlier and more sketchy exposition of these categories on two grounds. While greeting, rhetoric, and narrative are indeed aspects of informal communication in everyday life, she says, they do not belong in the public language of institutions and legislatures of a democracy. These should contain only shared public reasons. Benhabib seems here to limit the concept of political communication to the language of statute, which excludes most engaged activities of debate and discussion in mass-mediated public spheres. Her second objection claims that the effort to theorize greeting, rhetoric and narrative as modes of political communication builds an opposition between these and critical argument. These modes of communication are irrational, arbitrary, capricious, she says and *only rational argument contributes to deliberation*. Thus Benhabib joins those who construct an opposition between the rational purity of argument and the irrationality of other forms of communication. *I have aimed to describe the political functions of these modes of communication, however, as accompanying rather than alternatives to argument. They give generalized reason orientation and body.*<sup>30</sup>

In her rejoinder to Benhabib, Young clarifies a very fine point. A stumbling block for democratic deliberation occurs when a specific mode of communication, or of argument, is assumed to be solely legitimate and other forms dismissed. Young, of course, is not alone in recognizing this lack in Habermas's discourse theory, which privileges logic and dialectic. William Rehg, in his essay "Reason and Rhetoric in Habermas's Theory of Argumentation" articulates this as well. Like Young, he poses no objections to adding a rhetorical level to Habermas's argumentation theory. In fact, he suggests that this level is already present in the theory, along with the logical level ("linguistic construction" of argument), and the dialectical level ("competition" among arguments and counterarguments), albeit that its role is only "extrinsic." He demonstrates how we might allow the rhetorical moment to become an "intrinsic" part of Habermas's argumentation theory, which, in his view, would greatly improve it. The main advantage, as he sees it, in working out a "normative account of argumentation in which rhetoric plays an intrinsic role," consists in rhetoric's capacity

<sup>30</sup> *Inclusion and Democracy*, footnote 31, 77. Emphases mine.

to transform argumentation into what he calls “cooperative judgment formation.”<sup>31</sup>

Rehg’s essay concludes by underscoring rhetoric’s emphasis on particularity. To contradistinguish his view from Habermas’s more universalistic idiom, Rehg deploys the images of concreteness and particularity:

By further developing such rhetorical criteria, one could provide a theory of argumentation with more to say about the context of argumentation as a *process of communication*. Here one must attend to the *concrete speech situation*: argumentation involves *particular speakers* who are attempting to persuade *particular hearers* to accept a claim on the basis of particular arguments. From a rhetorical perspective, such communication is a process of *cooperative judgment formation* that involves all three aspects: the immanent qualities of arguments and counterarguments, the rational grounds for trusting other participants’ judgments, and each participant’s capacity to *judge*. Whatever improves the quality of arguments themselves, improves the grounds for trusting fellow participants to cogent argumentation — regardless it issues in consensus.<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately, Young proposes that we work on a more holistic model of democratic deliberation, one that does not purge out rhetoric, but that uses rhetoric’s passionate elements to ground the discussion in specific terms that stand to illuminate its deliberators’ character. Besides Young, other prominent proponents of deliberative democratic theory have made an “Aristotelian” turn. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, in their book, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, make the point concerning the positive uses of rhetoric extremely well. First, they question whether the “style of argument” that deliberative democracy endorses is “biased in favor of the advantaged.” This question is crucial because, it is precisely one of the aims of deliberative democracy to engage individuals in democratic deliberation in an equal manner, giving them equally free rein over the discussion, over its topic, over whether or not a consensus is important to make at some point, or

<sup>31</sup> See William Rehg, “Reason and Rhetoric in Habermas’s Theory of Argumentation,” in Walter Jost and Michael Hyde (eds.), *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 358-77.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 377. Emphases mine.

simply to arrive at an understanding of the issues by means of, as Hannah Arendt, following Kant, puts it, an “enlarged mentality.”

By insisting, however, on the matter of “style,” Gutmann and Thompson bring the issue of “communicative competence” to the fore. The fact of pluralism also seeps into the pluralism of expression human beings are capable of. Whether we are fully aware of it or not, our education may condition us to adhere to particular forms of expression, and to see other forms as contrary. Gutmann and Thompson recognize that, at times, we deliberative democrats ought to favor other forms of speaking:

Groups intent on challenging the status quo do not usually engage in the cool reason-giving that deliberative democracy seems to favor. Seeking to mobilize their own supporters or to gain public attention, they often take extreme positions and make heated appeals. They are more likely to use passion than reason. And for good reason: emotional rhetoric is often more effective than rational syllogism.<sup>33</sup>

They are quick to point out that deliberative democracy “need not assume” and “should not accept” a “dichotomy between passion and reason.” They forward this claim to drive the point that this dichotomy, often assumed by critics of deliberative democracy, sees to it

...that members (or representatives) of disadvantaged groups are less reasonable in their appeals than their more advantaged counterparts. The assumption and implication are misleading. As a generalization, it would be hard to show that defenders of the disadvantaged have been less reasonable in presenting their arguments than defenders of the status quo. Deliberative standards such as being truthful and offering moral reasons are easier to satisfy when criticizing distributive injustices than when defending them. Supporters of the status quo, moreover, show no reluctance to use passionate appeals.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 50-51.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Again, it is not difficult to see why philosophical-dialectical speech seems to be an ideal model to proceed with democratic deliberation. The to-and-fro of question and answer helps us to achieve our objective of developing a clearer understanding of the issue at hand. But we cannot confine every conversation, especially in a deliberation that is supposedly democratic, with this model alone. Democratic deliberation surprises us with many forms of speech. As Gutmann and Thompson clarify, entertaining “emotional rhetoric” can “possibly” pave the way for clarifying certain misconceptions regarding the supposedly unhealthy contamination of reason by passion. Finally, as the epigraph at the beginning of this paper and my discussion of Aristotle demonstrates, this tradition of democratic thinking is not exactly new. By rereading ancient texts in the light of contemporary democratic theory, we can engage with each other’s problems more intelligently and passionately.