

ENGL 4670.003 - The Study of Rhetoric
Fall 2014
TR 2:40-4:05 • Peck Hall 314A
<http://capone.mtsu.edu/jcomas/4670/>

Dr. James Comas
Peck Hall 385 • 898-2606 • jcomas@mtsu.edu
Office hours: TR 8:00-9:30, 4:15-5:45, & by appointment

Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall.
—Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*

SYLLABUS

I. Rhetoric, Drugs, and Democracy

Over 2400 years ago, the Greek thinker Gorgias depicted the power of language by comparing it to the power of drugs. Gorgias claimed that, just as the body is helpless in stopping the effects of drugs, the mind is often defenseless against the allures of language. However, in addition to this fascination with the psychological power of language, other thinkers of this period (including Plato and Aristotle) were examining the role of language in the newly formed institutions of democratic government. That is, these thinkers wanted a better understanding of how people were using language to negotiate decisions regarding the public interest, for example, court decisions regarding perpetrations of violence, as well as legislative decisions of war and peace. Thus, the ancient Greeks were fascinated by two different, if not disparate facets of language: (1) the capacity of language, like a drug, to overpower our ability to make considered decisions and (2) the use of language to pursue *reasoned* decisions and agreements. In other words, the Greeks were fascinated by the fact that language could be used both to *deflect* and to *foster* rational thought. Yet, in spite of the marked difference between these two aspects of language, the Greeks designated both aspects with a single word, a word bequeathed to the history of Western thought and to our own time: *rhêtorikê*.

This class is an introduction to the multifarious idea of rhetoric. We will spend the semester examining how this idea has become influential in several contemporary areas of study (e.g., literary/cultural studies, composition studies, history, philosophy of education, and the disciplines of the human sciences). Also, we will soon find that these contemporary discussions rely on theories developed quite early in the history of rhetoric, especially the theories of the ancient Greeks; hence, we will give close attention to several pivotal works in the history of rhetoric, including Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950).

In addition to providing a basic knowledge of contemporary and historical thinking on rhetoric, this class will consider the following questions:

- What are people doing when they use the term *rhetoric* to characterize political discourse?
- If rhetoric is equated with persuasion, should non-verbal acts be regarded as “rhetorical,” for example, photographs, acts of violent protest, acts of terrorism?
- Is there a rhetoric dimension to literature? If so, how is it different from the aesthetic dimension?
- Why was Plato concerned about the teaching of rhetoric; and what role does this concern play in his invention of moral philosophy?
- What role does rhetoric play in different perspectives on education?
- What do “postmodern” thinkers mean when they claim that all knowledge is essentially “rhetorical”?

II. Texts

Books are available for purchase at Phillips Bookstore. If you prefer to look for these books elsewhere, I've included the ISBNs in the list below. A copy of each book will be available through Walker Library reserve (2 hrs).

Required Books

Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Cornell UP 0801485274)

You may use another translation.

Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. C. J. Rowe (Penguin 9780140449747)

You may use another translation.

Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd ed., trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford UP 0195305094)

Kennedy's recent translation (1991; 2007) is now regarded as the standard. You may, however, use another translation for our class.

K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (U of California P 0520015460)

Burke's 1950 book is, arguably, the most important contribution to rhetorical theory since Aristotle.

Recommended Books

R. A. Lanham, *A Handbook of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (U of California P 978-0520076693)

During the course of its long history, the study of rhetoric has developed an extensive technical vocabulary. Lanham's book is the best inexpensive compilation of this vocabulary.

III . Written Work, Exams and Grading

Written Work. There will be informal and formal writing assignments. *Informal* writing will consist of weekly responses to the readings. There will be three *formal* papers (a brief paper of 2-3 pages, a short paper of 5-8 pages, and a longer paper of 10-15 pages). Each paper assignment will offer several options, including the option of developing your own project. In fact, you will have the option to use these three assignments to develop a single project over the course of a semester. More information on this last option is forthcoming.

In addition to distributing paper copies of assignments and other handouts in class, all these materials will be available on the class website:

<http://capone.mtsu.edu/jcomas/4670/>

Exams. There will be a single exam, at the end of the semester. This exam consists of one question, which I will give to you right now (yes; I'm giving it to you *now*, at the beginning of the semester):

Given our readings and discussions during this course, discuss what you think is significant about Kenneth Burke's quip that "Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall"; that is, what does Burke's statement tell us about *the study of rhetoric*? Your discussion should reference the work of at least *three* other rhetorical theorists, at least one ancient and one modern.

Final Grades. Final grades will be based on (1) class participation, (2) completion of informal written responses to class readings, (3) grades on the formal papers, and (4) the final-exam grade. Students who do not complete *all* assignments will not receive a passing grade.

IV. Attendance, Classroom Conduct, & Academic Misconduct

Attendance. I will excuse absences for participation in university activities, medical emergencies, and family exigencies *only when authenticated in writing*. In addition to excused absences, you are allowed 2 unexcused absences (the equivalent of one week of class). If you end the semester with 3 unexcused absences, the highest course grade you can get is a B; if you have 4 unexcused absences, the highest course grade possible is a C; if you have more than 4 unexcused absences, you will not receive a passing grade. If, at any time during the semester, you anticipate difficulty meeting the attendance requirement, you should speak with me as soon as possible.

Classroom Conduct. I do not permit any use of cell phones, mp3 players, or other electronic devices in class (except, of course, in emergency situations). Any student who uses an electronic device during class

will be dismissed and marked as absent. If you wish to use a laptop or other device for the purpose of taking class notes, you will need to obtain prior permission.

Academic Misconduct. University policy identifies four types of academic misconduct:

Plagiarism. The adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, statements, images, or works of another person as one's own without proper acknowledgment.

Cheating. Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. The term academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours.

Fabrication. Unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

Facilitation. Helping or attempting to help another to violate a provision of the institutional code of academic misconduct.

If I suspect academic misconduct, I will ask the student to meet with me to discuss the situation. I may forward the student's name to the Assistant Dean for Judicial Affairs and Mediation Services for possible disciplinary action. Students found responsible for committing an act of academic misconduct will receive an "F" for the assignment and risk additional punishment from the university.

V. Financial Aid & Unofficial Withdrawals

Federal regulations require the university to report students who stop attending class but do not officially withdraw; in such cases, future financial aid may be blocked and/or previous aid must be returned. These regulations require me at several points during the semester to report students who have stopped attending class without officially withdrawing. Clearly, this policy can seriously affect your financial aid; so you should give it special attention:

Financial aid is initially based on your "enrollment" status. Once the semester begins, faculty report students who never attended or who stopped attending. At that point, your financial aid may be adjusted/canceled, and you may be required to repay financial aid (including loans) to MTSU. If this occurs, you will be unable to view your grades, register for a future semester, or obtain an academic transcript until the balance owed is paid in full.

To ensure progression toward your degree and maintain eligibility for financial aid, you should attend all of your classes and make every effort to be academically successful.

LACK OF ATTENDANCE CAN CAUSE YOU TO OWE BACK FINANCIAL AID!

Did you know there is a difference between receiving a grade of "F" for failing a class versus receiving a grade of "FA" for failing a class with an attendance issue? To be in compliance with federal regulations, MTSU added a new failing grade of "FA" to identify students who failed a class and also stopped attending the class. If you fail class(es) and also stop attending class(es), you may be required to pay back financial aid and/or lose future eligibility for financial aid (including Lottery Scholarships and federal student loans). (*MTSU Summer/Fall 2014 Registration Guide*)

VI. Lottery Scholarships & GPA

Here is MTSU's policy regarding lottery scholarships and GPA:

Do you have a lottery scholarship? To retain the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship eligibility, you must earn a cumulative TELS GPA of 2.75 after 24 and 48 attempted hours and a cumulative TELS GPA of 3.0 thereafter. A grade of C, D, F, FA, or I in this class may negatively impact TELS eligibility.

If you drop this class, withdraw, or if you stop attending this class you may lose eligibility for your lottery scholarship, and you will not be able to regain eligibility at a later time.

VII. Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Middle Tennessee State University is committed to campus access in accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Any student interested in reasonable accommodations can consult the Disability & Access Center (DAC) website www.mtsu.edu/dac and/or contact the DAC for assistance at 615-898-2783 or dacemail@mtsu.edu.

IMPORTANT DATES & WEEKLY SCHEDULE

IMPORTANT DATES

Formal Papers

- Paper 1: Thu, Sep 25
- Paper 2: Thu, Oct 30
- Final Paper: Fri, Dec 05

Exam

- Final Exam: Tue, Dec 09 (3:30 -5:30)

Other Important Dates

- Sep 07 - Last day to drop without a grade
- Oct 29 - Last day to drop with “W”
- Dec 03 - Last day to withdraw from the University (all classes) and receive “W” or “F” as determined by the instructor
- Dec 03 - Last day of classes

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

It's possible that I'll make some changes in the reading schedule, especially in the second half of the semester, once I get a better sense of the class's interests. In the schedule below, readings marked with "[h]" are photocopied handouts; those marked with "[r]" are available from the reserve desk at Walker library. You'll see that some readings are available online via Walker's subscription to databases (e.g., JSTOR); in addition, I will make some other readings available online. Finally, paper dates may change; but if that happens, I'll give you plenty of advance notice.

Unit I. What Should We Regard as “Rhetorical”?

We will spend our first few weeks looking at how scholars use the word *rhetoric*. Of course, we will begin to acquire a better understanding of the concept; but we will see also that there are disagreements about what we should regard as “rhetorical.” First, we will look at what some rhetoricians found interesting in President Clinton's speeches regarding the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing; and we will find that this discussion raised the question whether or not the bombing itself should be regarded as a rhetorical act. Then we will examine a disagreement between two prominent scholars of rhetoric on whether or not works of literature should be regarded as “rhetorical.”

Week 1 (Aug 26-28) - What Do Students of Rhetoric Talk About?Session 1 (Tue, Aug 26)

Required Readings:

White House transcripts of President Clinton's remarks on the Oklahoma City bombing [h]

Excerpts from H-Rhetor discussion on Clinton's remarks [h]

Session 2 (Thu, Aug 28)

Required Readings:

Is Bombing a “Rhetorical” Act? More excerpts from the H-Rhetor discussion on Clinton's remarks [h]

Week 2 (Sep 02-04) - Introduction to the Theory of Rhetoric: The Idea of “Rhetorical Situation”Session 3 (Tue, Sep 02)

Required Readings

Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation” [h]

George W. Bush, Address to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks (September 11, 2001) [h]

Session 4 (Thu, Sep 04)

Required Readings

Donovan J. Ochs, "Death and Its Effects," Ch. 2 of *Consolatory Rhetoric* [h]

Bill Clinton, "Remarks at a Memorial Service for the Bombing Victims in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (April 23, 1995)" [h]

George W. Bush, "Remarks at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Service (September 14, 2001)" [h]

Week 3 (Sep 09-11) - What Is the Scope of Rhetoric? The Place of the Public Eulogy

Session 5 (Tue, Sep 09)

Required Readings

Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" [h]

Garry Wills, "Oratory of the Greek Revival" [h]

Pericles's Funeral Oration, from Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* [h]

Plato, *Menexenus* [h]

Session 6 (Thu, Sep 11)

Required Readings

Simon Stow, "Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero: Tragedy, Patriotism, and Public Mourning," *The American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (2007): 195-208. *JSTOR*.

Week 4 (Sep 16-18) - Is Literature a Type of Rhetoric? The Burke-Howell Exchange

Session 7 (Tue, Sep 16)

Required Readings

K. Burke, "Psychology of Form" in *Counter-Statement* [h]

W. S. Howell, "Kenneth Burke's 'Lexicon Rhetoricæ': A Critical Examination" [h]

Session 8 (Thu, Sep 18)

Required Readings

K. Burke and W. S. Howell, "Colloquy" [h]

Unit II. Rhetoric, Civic Discourse & Practical Reasoning

While reading the Burke-Howell exchange, we found that both rhetoric scholars relied on what has remained, after 2400 years, the most influential work on rhetoric, Aristotle's treatise *On Rhetoric*. So, we now turn to Aristotle's theory. In addition to becoming familiar with his key concepts, we will find an important connection between his interest in *rhētorikē* and a dramatic change in Athenian society: the emergence of "civic discourse" that is, the new political discourse of a society with democratic legislative assemblies and law courts. This connection suggests that the idea of rhetoric would have developed differently if Athens had not invented democratic government.

Week 5 (Sep 23-25) - Aristotle's Theory of Rhetoric

Session 9 (Tue, Sep 23)

Required Readings

Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* Bk. I

_____, "Introduction to Dialectic from Aristotle, *Topics* 1.1-3," in Kennedy's translation (263-66)

Session 10 (Thu., Sep 25)

Paper 1

Required Readings

Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* Bk. II

Week 6 (Sep 30 - Oct 02) - Aristotle & His Modern Influence

Session 11 (Tue, Sep 30)

Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* Bk. III

_____, "On Word Choice and Metaphor from Aristotle's *Poetics*," in Kennedy's translation (275-77)

Session 12 (Thu, Oct 02)

Chaim Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning" [h]

Unit III - Should Rhetoric Be Central to One's Education?

We have seen that Aristotle developed a theory of rhetoric for the purpose of developing a rational approach to civic discourse, including a theoretical foundation for the rhetorical education of citizens expected to take part in the democratic institutions of Athens. However, there were Greek thinkers who were concerned about the consequences of rhetorical education, including Aristotle's teacher, Plato. So we turn next to Plato's two dialogues on rhetoric: *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. In the *Gorgias*, we will find Plato inventing the idea of moral philosophy as a way of life in opposition to the politics and rhetoric of public life. Then, in the *Phaedrus*, we will find Plato concerned with the implications of rhetorical education for an understanding of amatory, or erotic persuasion.

Week 7 (Oct 07-09) - The Beginnings of Rhetorical Education: The Sophists

Session 13 (Tue, Oct 07)

Required Readings

Jacqueline de Romilly, "Rhetorical Education" [h]

Gorgias, "Encomium of Helen" [h]

Antiphon, "The First Tetralogy" [h]

Recommended Readings

T. Conley, "The Teaching of the 'Sophists'" in *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* [r]

Session 14 (Thu, Oct 09)

Required Reading

R. L. Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," *Central States Speech Journal* 18 (1967): 9-17 [h]

Recommended Reading

Susan C. Jarratt, "Sophistic Pedagogy, Then and Now" [h]

• FALL BREAK (Oct 11-14) •

Week 8 (Oct 16) - Plato's Political Critique of Rhetorical Education: The Gorgias

Session 15 (Thu, Oct 16)

Required Reading

Plato, *Gorgias*, Parts I & II

Recommended Reading

J. H. Nichols, "The Rhetoric of Justice in Plato's *Gorgias*" in his translation officially *Gorgias*

Week 9 (Oct 21-23) - Plato's Gorgias (cont.)

Session 16 (Tue, Oct 21)

Required Readings

Plato, *Gorgias*, Part III

Session 17 (Thu, Oct 23)

Required Readings

Christina Tarnopolsky, "Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame," *Political Theory* 32, no. 4 (2004): 468-94. *JSTOR*.

Week 10 (Oct 28-30) - Rhetoric and Erôs: Plato's Phaedrus

Session 18 (Tue, Oct 28)

Required Reading

Plato, *Phaedrus*, Parts I & II

Session 19 (Thu, Oct 30)

Paper 2

Required Reading

Plato, *Phaedrus*, Part III

Unit IV. Rhetoric, the Nature of Meaning, & Human Nature

As we saw in our reading of Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, the idea of rhetoric has significant implications for the concerns of philosophy. In fact, many intellectual historians have identified a fundamental conflict between philosophy and rhetoric (for example, see Samuel IJsseling's *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict: An Historical Survey*). Other thinkers, though, have explored the philosophical implications of rhetoric; and we turn to three influential examples: Vico, Nietzsche, and (again) Burke.

Week 11 (Nov 04-06) - Rhetoric as a Theory of Meaning

Session 20 (Tue, Nov 04)

G. Vico, "Poetic Logic" excerpt from *The New Science* [h]
F. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense" [h]
_____, excerpt from "Lecture Notes on Rhetoric" [h]

Session 21 (Thu, Nov 06)

Required Readings

Kenneth Burke, "Four Master Tropes," *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4 (1941): 421-38. *JSTOR*.

Week 12 (Nov 11-13): Rhetoric and Human Nature: Burke's A Rhetoric of Motives

Session 22 (Tue, Nov 11)

Required Reading

K. Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'" [h]
_____, "Five Master Terms" [h]

Session 23 (Thu, Nov 13)

Required Reading

K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Part I

Week 13 (Nov 18-20) - Burke's A Rhetoric of Motives (cont.)

Session 24 (Tue, Nov 18)

Required Reading

K. Burke, selections from *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Part II

Session 25 (Thu, Nov 20)

Required Reading

K. Burke, selections from *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Part III

Week 14 (Nov 25) - Rhetoric, Human Nature, and the Supernatural

Session 26 (Tue, Nov 25)

Required Reading

Kenneth Burke, "What Are the Signs of What?: A Theory of 'Entitlement,'" *Anthropological Linguistics* 35, no. 1/4 (1993): 476-97. *JSTOR*.

• **THANKSGIVING BREAK (NOV 26-29)** •

Week 15 (Dec 02) - Review & Conclusion

Session 27 (Tue, Dec 02) - Final Day of Class

Review and conclusion.