

## DIALECTIC IN GREEK AND ROMAN RHETORIC

To understand the history of the relations between rhetoric and **dialectic** it is necessary to take account of changes in the definition of **dialectic** and in the educational context of the two subjects. For Plato **dialectic** meant the training in philosophy acquired through dialogue and argument. For Aristotle **dialectic** is the technique of argument used in everyday conversations and in subjects (such as politics or questions of practical behavior) where certain reasoning, which he called analytic, was not possible. Later in antiquity and in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, “**dialectic**” and “logic” were synonyms, so **dialectic** included both plausible and certain reason, both the topics and the syllogism. Since the nineteenth century the term “**dialectic**” has generally been used to refer to the logical method of Hegel and of Marxism. This is connected to the classical Greek idea of **dialectic**, but is separate from the mainly Latin tradition with which this article is concerned.

Aristotle says that rhetoric and **dialectic** are counterparts because they are both concerned with questions that cannot be resolved scientifically. **Dialectic** treats such questions more generally, while rhetoric is concerned with persuasion in the three contexts in which speeches were made in Athens: the law court, the public assembly, and the occasion for celebration or blame. Aristotle was the first to admit the teaching of rhetoric into the school of philosophy and the first to give a systematic account of all the doctrines of rhetoric. Throughout the Hellenistic world the rhetoric schools were the dominant form of higher education.

When Cicero argued in *De oratore* that orators needed knowledge of **dialectic**, for which he wrote his textbook *Topica* and whose doctrines he incorporated in his late synthesis, *Partitiones oratoriae*, he was campaigning for a broadening of rhetorical education. For Quintilian **dialectic**, including the syllogism, the topics, and the four Stoic forms of inference, were part of the orator's education. For much of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages it was usual to study rhetoric and **dialectic** together as constituent parts of the cycle of seven liberal arts. Later in the medieval period the study of logic came to dominate the whole arts course of the universities which were founded then, with rhetoric relegated to the sidelines. In fourteenth-century Italy some teachers of letter-writing, a subject at the margins of the university arts course, revived the imitation of classical Latin and took a more literary approach to the study of Latin rhetoric.

Reactions against the abstractness and lack of application of formal logic have caused some philosophers to attempt to formulate rules for practical arguing. Stephen Toulmin's *The uses of argument* (1958), for example, develops a theory that allows people to assess the strength of arguments in practical life, which owes something both to traditional logic and to rhetoric. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca

incorporated theories of argumentation, topics of invention, and persuasive principles taken from rhetoric in their *Traité de l'argumentation* (1958), which became known in English as *The new rhetoric* (1969). Since then theorists of communication, working partly from linguistics, partly from ideas about mass communications and public relations, and partly from theories of Information connected with computer science, have begun to interact with the newly flourishing historians of rhetoric to find new ways of incorporating the insights of the ancient arts of rhetoric and dialectic in a modern and postmodern framework.

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