Chapter 1 The Whys and Whats of Persuasion

To Make a Long Story Short…

We persuade often and for good reason.

Key Concepts

- Persuasion springs from conviction.
- A dialectical approach to persuasion explores opposing positions to formulate and advance sound ideas.
- Persuasion is neither propaganda nor coercion.
- Persuasion is most common to free societies.
- Effective persuasion requires thought about the controversy, the audience, and the speech's context.

Key Terms

dialectic
polarization
tribalism
persuasion
beliefs
attitudes
actions
cognitive dissonance
brainwashing
propaganda
disinformation
misinformation
coercion
rhetoric

Why Persuasion?

Imagine for a moment a world without disagreement. As a child, you wouldn't wrestle with your playmate over a toy. As a student, you would neither question a rule nor dispute the correct answer on an exam. As an adult in the work force, you would never challenge the wisdom of your boss's decisions, nor would you complain of unjust treatment. We could go on to depict parents and children in perfect harmony, baseball fans and umpires in a perpetual atmosphere of mutual affection, but you get the idea. This is no real world; this is Utopia. Or is it?

Would our lives be more satisfying if we never disagreed and we had no need for the art of persuasion? Brett Stephens, a foreign policy writer for the *New York Times*, wrote a rousing piece about "The Dying Art of Disagreement,"[1] in which he calls disagreement "the most vital ingredient of any society." It's true. We build community and the relationships that sustain us through agreement, but to say, "I disagree" defines us as free people. To disagree makes healthy democracies work. Since we are each unique, we possess different looks, voices, personalities, perspectives, and doctrines. In a world of people, disagreement is inevitable. We can respond to our familial, social, and public disagreements with silence or by speaking our minds—that is, by speaking to persuade.

Figure 1.1 As long as humans diverge in their perspectives, disagreement will persist.

The Importance of Persuasion

Democracy and Polarization

By some accounts, twenty-first-century global populations have been characterized by heightened **polarization**. The Pew Research Center documented a widening gap and increased animosity between right and left political positions in the United States between 1994 and 2014.[2] As political positions become more staunchly partisan, people gravitate toward more entrenched opposition. The political climate becomes *polarized*. We know that with electromagnetic force, positive and negative charges attract; they are drawn together. But politically opposed people *repel* one another.

Harvard psychology professor, Joshua Greene, attributes the tendency toward polarization to the problem of moral **tribalism**. Each "moral tribe" (e.g., a party or political affiliation) has its own common sense that differs from the common sense of other "tribes." Although humans use their particular common sense to cooperate *within* a tribe, tribes tend not to cooperate *with other* tribes. People become both selfish and intensely loyal at the tribal level, favoring *us* over *them*, effectively pushing *them* away, rather than conjoining into intertribal commonality and community.[3]

Throughout the history of humankind, tribal loyalties, those *us*-versus-*them* instincts, have led people away from cooperation and toward domination or destruction of the other. In 1939, Adolf Hitler's determination to square off against the world ignited one of many twentieth-century genocides that upturned countries from Turkey and Russia to Cambodia and Bosnia.

Considering the state of our polarized world and its brazenly dysfunctional disagreement, can we reasonably expect to overcome differences to achieve constructive ends? Although this was the aspiration of a new American democracy in 1787, within twenty years of the newly adopted US Constitution, founder Alexander Hamilton nearly despaired that the country might not survive. In a letter, he referred to the confounding "disease" of democracy.[4] But Hamilton did *not* despair. So must we not. Hamilton's perseverance speaks to the value of maintaining a level head in a polarized world and of working one's way around tribal impulses.

A distinguished historian of early America, Gordon Wood, has pointed out that polarization in Hamilton's day was easily more highly pitched than today.[5] In fact, history shows that persuasion exists *because of* opposition, and that societies can survive polarized times, but it takes grit and a good number of steady hands to maintain the mechanism of democracy.

We have no silver bullets for managing social conflict in democratic systems. Living in a democracy is not for the faint of heart. Rather than shrinking from

political polarization, we need to confront it. We must acknowledge tribal impulses and transcend them to perform the responsibilities of civic life. US Citizenship and Immigration Services[6] articulate several such responsibilities in a democracy: supporting and defending the Constitution, staying informed on the issues of your community, and participating in the democratic process. And eventually we need to reach for that fundamental tool of a democratic society: the art of persuasion.

Benefits of Persuasion

Can persuasion benefit individuals and societies? Celebrities and sports heroes seem to think so; they persuade youth to stay in school and steer clear of drugs. Legislators and lawyers spend their lives persuading constituents, colleagues, and judges. And what about us? We join organizations and attend meetings to impact public policy. We urge family members to quit smoking and city councilors to fix our streets. As students, we prod a professor to put off an exam from Wednesday to Friday, defend our interpretation of a poem, or organize a lobby for more healthful food in the cafeteria. We attempt persuasion when we speak on behalf of a friend who has been unjustly treated and when we appeal at our job for sick pay or family leave. We attempt persuasion because we feel that our way of seeing things has some value or may do some good.

Persuasion is a common form of human interaction, but it is also a valuable and necessary practice. Persuasion makes strong leaders, such as the founder of Nike, Bill Bowerman, who moved a population to improve their well being by taking up jogging, influencing generations of footwear customers. On Bowerman's death, the *New York Times* reported that

> On a trip to New Zealand in the 1960's, Bowerman saw how Arthur Lydiard, a well-known coach, *had persuaded* many people to jog. In 1967, Bowerman wrote *Jogging*, a book credited with inspiring the running boom in America.[7]

Persuasion is a means of making peace. In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower delivered to the United Nations a speech known as "Atoms for Peace." According to Jim Walsh, Former Executive Director of the Project on Managing the Atom, Eisenhower's speech "was one of the defining moments of the nuclear age." At the time, the United States was facing off against communism.

> The United States *had to convince* governments that there was some benefit to nuclear restraint . . . Countries *would have to be persuaded* even as the world's great powers were building their own nuclear weapons. Eisenhower proposed that the United States share the benefits of

> nuclear science—energy, medical isotopes, and the like—with countries that chose peaceful rather than military applications of the atom. This idea was later incorporated into the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.[8]

Persuasion is an art available to any point on the political spectrum and it is practiced by good and bad alike. As Bower Aly, the "Father of High School Debate" in the United States once said, public speakers are not always successful, good, or great. "On the contrary, we may observe [them] sometimes to be unsuccessful, evil, and mean."[9] But, as eighteenth-century British Parliamentarian Edmund Burke purportedly said, the only way to assure the triumph of evil is for good people to remain silent. You might say we speak to persuade when we know we ought not remain silent.

Persuasion through Dialectic

If the persuader may be "unsuccessful, evil, and mean," how can the "art" of persuasion be a positive force? People have raised this question since scholars first discussed and wrote about persuasion. Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, a first century Spaniard raised in Rome and professor of oratory, wrote twelve books on the subject of persuasive speech, and in the second he raises the controversy.

> 'It is eloquence,' [some] say 'that snatches criminals from penalties of the law, eloquence that from time to time secures the condemnation of the innocent . . . that stirs up wars beyond all expiation.'[10]

Still, Quintilian contends that

> Although the weapons of oratory may be used either for good or ill, it is unfair to regard as an evil that which can be employed for good . . . .[11]

For this reason, Quintilian claims that to speak well, the persuasive speaker must be a good person. According to Quintilian, then, unless we possess good character traits, we cannot be eloquent.

So the most useful persuasion requires good people advocating good things. How do we discover what is good? Through conversation and cooperation. Speech scholar Lance Bennett claims that with effective persuasion, we engage *equality* and *consensus* through talk.[12] We prepare to speak by talking and reflecting with diverse people to understand a variety of perspectives and to seek feasible solutions to problems. Classicists called this pre-speech deliberation **dialectic**,[13] a process by which you generate sound ideas through discussion, questioning, and conflicting perspectives.

According to Cass Sunstein, a close advisor to former President Barack Obama, the President had internalized the values of dialectic or what Sunstein called "deliberative democracy." In deliberative democracy, adults converse

and listen to one another. They "attempt to persuade one another by means of argument and evidence, and . . . remain open to the possibility that they could be wrong."[14]

As an example, in a remarkable interview with the late PBS newswoman Gwen Ifill in 2007, Ehud Olmert, then Prime Minister of Israel, spoke of a newly established relationship with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, a relationship in which they were discovering the value of dialectic as precursor to persuasion. They each held political conditions that needed to be met by their adversary. Yet they approached their task, the task of persuading one another, through dialectic. Clearly, the final chapter has not yet been scripted in any Arab-Israeli peace process, but as Olmert pointed out,

> You have supporters. You have opponents. You have opposition. You have coalition. You have to be able to sort your way amongst all these different elements. My conviction is that, when it comes down to these fundamental issues of historical proportions for the life of my country, you have to look beyond the political difficulties and to look at the ultimate goal of what is really good for your country and what is really constructive for the relations that you want to have with your neighbors. And if you do that, you'll find also the political solutions necessary in order to advance it.[15]

Through the process of preparing a persuasive speech—researching facts, coming to understand an audience, and presenting the best possible case for the soundest position—the goal of persuasion becomes, as argumentation scholar Josina Makau claims, a goal we *share* with our audience.[16]

Likewise, contemporary rhetorician Michael Osborn observed that "the nature of [political and social] communication is profoundly cooperative."[17] Osborn envisions persuasive messages as bridges that "join people who otherwise would be quite separate." Imagine times of great crisis, as at the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, September 11, 2001. The community perspective articulated by leaders at such times becomes a source of national unity; it becomes each person's *own* expression.

This is true as well in times of great celebration, as when the United States inaugurated its first African-American President. That day in January, 2009, was characterized by joyous and peaceful crowds, by a state of general euphoria, a word used repeatedly in news reports afterward. Into this moment stepped the master of ceremonies for the inauguration, California Senator Dianne Feinstein, who was to introduce President-elect Barack Obama to the two million people shuddering in sub-freezing cold but, yes, *euphoric* to be part of history. Her task was to capture their mood, to elevate and share it

with the people, and to uphold this democracy as a model. The persuasive intent of her address, then, was to inspire satisfaction and pride in a milestone for racial equality in the United States.

Senator Dianne Feinstein's Welcoming Remarks Inauguration Day, January 20, 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Inauguration of the 44th President of the United States of America. The world is watching today as our great democracy engages in this peaceful transition of power. Here on the national mall, where we remember the founders of our nation and those who fought to make it free, we gather to etch another line in the solid stone of history.

The freedom of a people to choose its leaders is the root of liberty. In a world where political strife is too often settled with violence, we come here every four years to bestow the power of the presidency upon our democratically elected leader. Those who doubt the supremacy of the ballot over the bullet can never diminish the power engendered by nonviolent struggles for justice and equality, like the one that made this day possible. No triumph tainted by brutality could ever match the sweet victory of this hour and what it means to those who marched and died to make it a reality.

Our work is not yet finished, but future generations will mark this morning as the turning point for real and necessary change in our nation. They will look back and remember that this was the moment when the dream that once echoed across history, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial finally reached the walls of the White House.

In that spirit, we today not only inaugurate a new administration, we pledge ourselves to the hope, the vision, the unity and the renewed call to greatness inspired by the 44th president of the United States, Barack Obama. Thank you, and God bless America.[18]

Figure 1.2 Inauguration crowds testify to the significance of this event in American life.

As in moments of celebration, times of crisis elicit exhortations from leaders, who can, in the best of worlds, inspire unity and reject divisive malice. On Thanksgiving Day, 1963, six days after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, newly inaugurated President Lyndon Johnson, spoke these words that capture a timeless conflict and aspiration characteristic of the United States of America.

> Since last Friday[19], Americans have turned to the good, to the decent values of our life. These have served us. Yes, these have saved us. The service of our public institution and our [people] is the salvation of us all from the Supreme Court to the States.
>
> And how much better would it be, how much more sane it would be, how much more decent and American it would be if all Americans could spend their fortunes and could give their time and spend their energies helping our system and its servants to solve your problems instead of pouring out the venom and the hate that stalemate us in progress.
>
> I have served in Washington 32 years—32 years yesterday. I have seen five Presidents fill this awesome office . . . In each administration, the greatest burden that the President had to bear had been the burden of his own [people]'s unthinking and unreasoning hate and division. So, in these days, the fate of this office is the fate of us all. I would ask all Americans on this day of prayer and reverence to think on these things.[20]

It may be that some readers of these words can recall the time of President Kennedy's assassination, or were in New York City on September 11, 2001, or attended the inauguration of a President, or were witness to a mass shooting or other brutality. Whether remembering these events with joy or with horror, these readers were not alone. Humans as social animals share their common anguish and elation with others and together are moved by the words they hear. Speeches can animate our lives, calm our fears, and motivate our actions. Our presumption in this book is that we speak not only *to* people but *with* and *for* people, by discovering the concerns of diverse stakeholders so as to develop a unifying perspective. This defines the merit of a dialectical approach to persuasive speech.

So What *Is* Persuasion?

When we use the term **persuasion** in this book, we are referring to *the intentional verbal act that seeks to influence the beliefs, attitudes, or actions of its listeners.* Each of these characteristics is significant in the study of persuasive speaking.

First, we are looking at persuasion as *intentional*, meaning that the person doing the persuading *wants* to affect the hearers in some way. People can be persuaded, of course, without someone intending to persuade them. If I go to see a new film because I overheard you telling a friend about it, you have unintentionally persuaded me. But this book is not so concerned with *unintentional* influence.

Second, we are looking at persuasion that is substantially *verbal*. We know that nonverbal behavior influences others, as when the sight of a homeless family living on the street prompts you to slip them some cash. Even as we speak, our nonverbal speaking presence—facial expression, posture, or distance from the audience, for instance—can exert influence on people. We will discuss such nonverbal elements in Chapter Ten, but the primary focus of this book is on crafting ideas and their verbal expression when we speak to persuade.

Third, a persuasive speech is a particular *act* rather than an ongoing interaction or social movement. We are considering speeches as they occur within a finite time. Naturally, many elements of the communication process affect the speech's outcome—the time of day, the place where the speech is delivered, the pre-speech experience of audience members, and so on. But our focus is on the speech itself.

Finally, persuasion seeks to influence beliefs, attitudes, and actions.[21] There are some, like modern behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner, who contend that persuaders do not change minds but only behavior or actions.[22] Nevertheless, modern communication theorists describe a three-part scheme of influence. **Beliefs** are ideas that are central to our worldview. Martin Fishbein, who developed a significant body of theory on the subject of attitudes, says that "a belief in a thing means that one contends that the thing exists."[23] Thus one may *believe* that the world is round, that there is a God, that labor unions are fundamental elements in a free market economy, and so on.

Persuasion often seeks to change attitudes.[24] **Attitudes** are predispositions or inclinations to act in one way or another. Once we accumulate information about a person, idea, or situation, we establish a positive or negative attitude toward it. Our attitude indicates how we will *probably act* in one way rather than another, or how we will *respond*:[25] Trusting that the world is round, I would like to sail all the way around it. Or because I believe in God, I want to do good on earth so that I will go to Heaven when I die. And since I believe in the appropriateness of labor unions, I support the picket outside the Sav-U-Mart.

Actions, of course, are when we behave according to the way we think: finally taking that Carnival cruise, putting together a food box for the local mission, or shifting my shopping allegiance to the nearby Foods Plus. Look at these statements schematically. As Figure 1.3 below illustrates, our actions are most often an outgrowth of our beliefs and attitudes.

DISTINGUISHING BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND ACTIONS

BELIEFS	ATTITUDES	ACTIONS
The world *is* round.	I *would like* to sail around the world.	I *am going to* take that Carnival cruise.
There *is* a God.	I *want* to please God by doing good in this world so that I may get to heaven.	I *will help* put together food boxes for the local mission.
Labor unions *are* essential to a free market economy.	I *support* the picket outside the Sav-U-Mart.	I *will shop* instead at Foods Plus.

Figure 1.3 The persuasive targets—beliefs, attitudes, and actions—are interconnected. Actions derive from one's beliefs and attitudes.

Yet, as Leon Festinger posited in his Theory of Cognitive Dissonance,[26] people strive to keep their beliefs, attitudes, and actions consistent with one another. In fact, at times, in order to reconcile behavior (or actions) with underlying attitudes, a person may alter either beliefs, attitudes, or actions. Humans either ignore the internal conflict they experience through denial or adjust a behavior, attitude, or belief. For example, Jack is a cigarette smoker. He believes that smoking is hazardous to his health, but he continues to smoke. His mind is in a state of conflict or imbalance; this is **cognitive dissonance**. According to Festinger, Jack will experience significant cognitive/emotional tension if he continues to smoke believing what he believes.

What does Jack do in order to resolve the cognitive imbalance and reduce tension? He begins to discredit studies that demonstrate the health hazards of smoking; that is, he modifies his beliefs. He becomes involved with the issue of smokers' rights, submerging the attitude that smoking is dangerous under a stronger attitude that smokers deserve equal rights and equal access to public space. Jack's behavior (the result of his addiction to cigarettes) has motivated him to modify his attitude in order to preserve cognitive balance and reduce tension.

In the same way, people may think they never want to have children, until they do, at which time they might wonder why they opposed the idea. The conflicting behavior (the presence of a child they have conceived) causes them to modify their attitudes and beliefs.

Of the three primary persuasive targets—beliefs, attitudes, and actions—the most common is attitudes.[27] Generally people's attitudes follow their beliefs and their actions follow their attitudes, but the reverse may occur. Actions may affect attitudes and beliefs. You might persuade me to vote for Jennifer Clark for mayor, and I vote for her. On the other hand, I might capriciously vote for Clark and after doing so convince myself that she is a good mayor. I justify my action by altering my attitude.

This tendency explains for some how religious instincts develop; the *practice* of religion (that is, a person's religious actions, such as prayer and church attendance) may call up a positive *attitude* toward religion.[28] Likewise, even begrudging acts of charity may intensify our charitable attitudes toward the needy. When we persuade someone, we reinforce or change both minds and behavior.

Figure 1.4 As the diagram illustrates, our actions or behaviors have their origins first in beliefs and then attitudes. Our actions, then, are a physical outgrowth of our mental processes.
Courtesy of Barbara Breaden

Does Persuasion Infringe on Others' Rights?

How Persuasion Differs from Force

In 2002, a *Wall Street Journal* writer was abducted in Pakistan, four months after the World Trade Center attacks of September 11, 2001. Political commentators concluded that Daniel Pearl, a high-profile United States citizen and a Jew, was an ideal prospect for a terrorist act that would gain international attention. In hostage situations such as that of Daniel Pearl, victims are held in isolation, their diet, daily regime, and access to

information strictly controlled. It would not be atypical nor unforgivable for hostages to disavow their country or negotiate with their captors. When Daniel Pearl refused to do so, he was beheaded by his captors.

Not all captives prove so resilient. Kept in captivity and undernourished, their value systems may crumble under the pressure of their captors' political indoctrination. British psychiatrist J.A.C. Brown in his fascinating study of **brainwashing** delineates the stages of this process:[29]

1. *assault upon identity*, where the captive is addressed as a number and captors deny the captive's occupation—as pilot, cook, teacher, doctor, and so on. In this stage, captives are "reduced to a state of infantile dependency" from loss of sleep, poor food, inability to attend to excretory needs, and irregular, disorienting interrogation.
2. *establishment of guilt*, where the captive must learn to feel responsible, to remove the blame from one's captors and place it upon oneself.
3. *self-betrayal*, where the captive isolates himself or herself by denouncing friends, family, colleagues, organizations, and all the society and standards of his or her former life.
4. *total conflict and basic fear*, where the captive experiences the terror of being annihilated as a person.
5. *leniency*, where small remission of this pressure causes the captive to grasp at the captors as saviors.
6. *final confession and resolution*, where the captive admits to real or invented acts against the captors and their system.

Brown points out, however, that once the captor relaxes repressive tactics, the captive reverts to a former identity and belief system. (See Chapter Seven for more on brainwashing.)

Take the 2002 case of Elizabeth Smart, abducted at age 14 from her home in Salt Lake City. Her retrospective recalls life as hostage. "Over the next nine months, Brian David Mitchell would rape me every day, sometimes multiple times a day, he would torture and brutalize me in ways that are impossible to imagine, starve, and manipulate me, like I was an animal,"[30] she wrote. She went on to explain that she would cope with her plight by thinking of her family and by drawing on her religious faith. Eventually she went into survival mode, doing what she was told to do, so that her captor unchained her, she was recognized in public, and her captors taken into custody. Although she obeyed her captors, Elizabeth Smart withstood attempted

brainwashing. As J.A.C. Brown contended, *victims are not persuaded by brainwashing;* brainwashing is not an effective means of persuasion.

Considering Propaganda and False Information

If brainwashing is not an effective means of persuasion, what about propaganda? Rhetoric professors Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell recognize that we associate propaganda with manipulation and disregard for truth or societal well being.[31] Historically, the term propaganda referred to propagation of the faith (*propaganda fide*), methodically spreading information to promote a cause or idea. But today propaganda is linked to concealing information and deliberately spreading disinformation to promote a political outcome.[32]

This dark side of propaganda emerged under the heading of *fake news* in the political climate of the United States 2016 election of President Donald Trump. Fake news was not a new phenomenon, but the label captured public attention in the lead-up to the election and beyond. What was meant by fake news? Because some people adopted the term to refer to any information contrary to their viewpoint, what was called "fake news" was not really false, but rejected information. According to *Merriam-Webster*, the concept of false news has existed since the dawn of journalism, and the precise words *fake news* can be found in US newspapers from the mid- to late nineteenth century.[33] For information that is false, as opposed to information that runs contrary to one's opinion, the University of Michigan Library proposes as a definition for fake news "those news stories that are false: the story itself is fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes."[34]

That false stories spread in cyberspace with ever increasing speed has surely magnified the problem of false news. In fact, an MIT study on *Twitter* data between 2006 and 2017 found that while the top 1% of false news stories reached from 1,000 to 100,000 people, true information rarely diffused to more than 1,000 people.[35] That is, false news "spread farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information."[36] Moreover, "false news spreads . . . more broadly than the truth because humans, not robots, are more likely to spread it."[37]

Thus, even though the internet proliferates false information, we humans are not held harmless. It is human intervention that transforms information into **misinformation** (inadvertent falsehood without intent to mislead) or **disinformation** (deliberate spreading of false information to mislead or influence others), infusing it with propagandistic intent.[38] As MIT discovered with *Twitter*, so did *Facebook* users during the 2016 election cycle find rampant, shocking, often scurrilous stories masquerading as fact

threaded throughout their daily news feeds. With a click, any user could choose to spread suspicious, blatantly false, or propagandistic information to millions of people. The prospect of easily swaying millions of voters doubtless encouraged the phenomenon as the election neared.

If false or misleading information is a type of propaganda, is it successful? Did the 2016 tidal wave of false and misleading information shape election results? Even those who deplored the election outcome recognized that such stories tended to further entrench voters in their already established political positions.[39] As an early 2017 Stanford study showed, US media consumers in 2016 tended to believe "ideologically aligned" stories (stories that they *wanted* to believe) including false information.[40] And the average US adult read and remembered an average of one or perhaps several "fake news" articles in the election period, with an impact of 0.02% points, far smaller than Donald Trump's margin of victory.[41] In the end, false information was not altogether persuasive.

Authentic Persuasion and Free Will

This brings us to a question: Is propaganda authentic persuasion? If by **propaganda** we mean distorting and manipulating facts to achieve a set outcome, the listener is not free to accept or reject the message on the basis of genuine information. Authentic persuasion allows the audience to make an informed and reasoned decision. Persuasion respects the listeners' choice, or free will, whereas propaganda does not.

Coercion, on the other hand, refers to force, restraint, pressure, or compulsion. Here the listener senses a veiled (or not so veiled) threat that prevents freely determined attitude change. In 2009, former Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman analyzed the political tactics of native Taliban rulers in Afghanistan. Rule under the Taliban brought insecurity, repudiation of human rights, and degraded physical and mental health to the Afghan people. Consequently, the public would not freely support their regime, and the Taliban resorted "to self-defeating tactics of cruelty and coercion."[42]

Notice the pattern: in the face of opposition, when persuasion doesn't work, try force. This reasoning presumes that force, coercion, will quell opposition, that people will accept the outcome. The fact is that they may be cowed into silence, but intellectual assent is another matter. As Steven Littlejohn and David Jabusch observe, "If someone pulls a gun on you and you hand over your money, your compliance is probably not a result of

ETHICS WATCH

In late 2017, President Donald Trump fulfilled a campaign pledge to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The move angered many United Nations countries who supported Palestine's partial claim to the city, and 128 countries voted for a resolution to reject the US action.

Consequently, The US Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, announced to those countries in opposition that "The United States . . . will remember it when we are called upon to once again make the world's largest contribution to the United Nations."[43]

Haley's move enraged the opposition still more. The Palestinian ambassador referred to the US pledge, to withhold money from countries it had previously aided, as blackmail. The Turkish Foreign Minister called it "intimidation," and asserted that "No honourable, dignified, country would bow down to this pressure."[44]

So . . .

1. Is it reasonable for the United States to withhold financial aid from countries who oppose them?
2. Would you suppose that countries supporting the US Jerusalem measure agree with the United States position?
3. Does the US policy announced by Haley—to hold opponents accountable for their votes—help to persuade United Nations member countries to support Jerusalem as Israel's capital?

persuasion."[45] Coercion is short-term and requires continual enforcement, whereas persuasion is durable. Later we will consider persuasive strategies and a speaker's ethical responsibilities, but for now we want to define what authentic persuasion is not. It is not an act of control, manipulation, violence, or force to curtail another's views. It is, rather, the invitation that another join our way of seeing things. But it is essential that the other be free to come along or to choose another route.

Is Persuasion Common to All Societies?

One of the earliest societies immersed in the practice of persuasion was the society of ancient Greece. Persuasion was particularly important to this democracy because in the Greek legal system, when accused of a crime and brought to court, a citizen would be expected to speak in his own defense. As Greek society matured, people were trained in public speaking and the art of *rhetoric* (or persuasive speech) so that they could be hired out as advocates for the accused. Speech schools sprang up as a sort of vocational training ground for these early trial lawyers.

On the other side of the globe, the Classical Chinese culture (c. 500–200 BCE) developed a tradition of persuasive discourse separate from but not unlike the emerging Western tradition. In ancient Chinese texts, the term *shui* referred to ingratiating discourse, a receiver-oriented rhetorical strategy used to lobby the current ruler. With *shui* as the overarching goal, the speaker sought to establish a relationship of trust and likeability with the listener.[46] Rhetorical scholars Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin point out that since these ancient periods, Western theories of rhetoric often have stressed "the intent to change others,"[47] invoking superiority or dominance. In contrast, Eastern rhetoric, emphasizes mutuality and respect between communicators. As essayist Andrew Gilmore points out, for China and the rest of Asia, it is important that each party to persuasive communication "save face." For this reason, Asian speakers are likely to frame their preferred outcomes so that both speaker and listener are able to keep their "dignity and honor intact."[48]

In the societies of both Greek and Chinese rhetorical practice, *people* have agency; they are able to *act* within the society to bring about a result. This appears to be a prerequisite to the function of persuasion. That is, persuasive speech thrives in an environment of relative freedom, where speaking is not only possible, but it has its rewards.

Since You Asked...

Question: Shouldn't I avoid rather than practice rhetoric? Isn't rhetoric simply emotional rubbish?

Answer: Partly in response to Protagoras, who claimed that he could make the weaker argument appear the stronger, the fourth-century BCE philosopher Plato attacked rhetoric's focus on opinion rather than absolute scientific knowledge.[49] When Plato's student, Aristotle, defined rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever,"[50] he declared rhetoric ethically neutral. Its good or bad effects depend upon the speaker, not on the nature of the art.

Other scholars, such as Kenneth Burke, have added their own unique emphases. To Burke, rhetoric is the process by which groups transcend their differences and identify with one another. Burke considers rhetoric the process of bringing people into cooperation with one another through discourse.[51]

Contemporary rhetorician Sonja Foss defined rhetoric as "the use of human symbols to communicate." Rhetoric can persuade, but it also functions as an invitation to understanding.[52] Speaker and audience alike "contribute to the thinking about an issue so that everyone gains a greater understanding" of its subtlety and complexity. Both communicators offer ideas and compare diverse

(*Continued*)

Since You Asked... (*Continued*)

perspectives.[53] Persuasion results from a transformation within each party consequent to this interaction.

At a 2012 conference at Oxford University, rhetorical scholar Sir Brian Vickers explored the status of rhetoric in the twenty-first century and defined rhetoric today as (1) a tool for analyzing persuasive works, (2) a body of theory for explaining social phenomena, and (3) a set of strategies for understanding political activity.[54] Vickers considers rhetoric an intellectual process, a way to *think about* persuasive messages rather than a tool for *creating* persuasive messages.

While the definitions of rhetoric diverge, often political figures dismiss rhetoric as showy, florid, or empty talk. The late *New York Times* columnist William Safire attributed this shift in meaning to anti-politician sentiments. The word rhetoric, "once a definition of rational argument . . . [developed] a newer sense of artificial eloquence—mere words."[55] Consequently, politicians have found they can gain favor with the public if they engage in "anti-rhetoric rhetoric."

Real estate magnate Donald Trump, as Republican presidential candidate in 2016, embarked on his own version of anti-rhetoric in asserting "I want to be myself." *New York Times* columnist Mark Thompson pointed out that this "tell it like it is," straight-talk violates "conventional wisdom about political speechifying." Donald Trump's blunt, erratic, and impromptu style reflected his rhetorical objective—authenticity.[56] Thompson observes that such anti-rhetoric is not new. "Authenticism" has resurfaced throughout history. Often it emerges in an antihero who pits "the experts" against "the people," stirring audiences to heated factionalism rather than rational acceptance, to fire up voter commitment.

However we define it, we can see that the study of rhetoric has come full circle. Just as Plato had his suspicions of rhetoric, so do people today. As in Aristotle's day, people influence people. Today when we study rhetoric, we continue to speak and to listen. We share information, analyze events, consider human motivations, and generate both understanding and argument, as a way to participate in issues that shape our lives.

The abolition of slavery in the United States was a reward for the abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass, who argued the cause for more than half a century. If American society had never protested slavery, what might have become of the slave system in the United States? Would the term *civil rights* have had any meaning? If freedom of speech were not built into the US system of government, and if speaking out earned only arrest, would its citizens want to perfect persuasive techniques? No, nor would this book have much practical value in a society without freedom of speech. As Jowett and O'Donnell observe in their compelling *Propaganda and Persuasion*,

"No major rhetorical theories have come from nations whose governments have been totalitarian."[57] Rhetorical scholar Edward Corbett adds

> One fact that emerges from a study of the history of rhetoric is that there is usually a resurgence of rhetoric during periods of social and political upheaval. Whenever the old order is passing away and the new order is marching—or stumbling—in, a loud, clear call goes up for the services of the person skilled in the use of spoken or written words.[58]

Jowett and O'Donnell point out that "Persuasion seeks voluntary change,"[59] and according to Kenneth Burke, we can persuade a person only insofar as that person is free.[60] As we move through this book we need to be mindful of the nature of persuasion as an act of communication dependent on and grounded in individual freedom.

The Canons of Rhetoric: Stages of Persuasive Speaking

We know that persuasion is a valuable, reasonable, and often necessary form of communication. We know that it both protects and depends upon the freedom of its listeners. So when and how do we *begin* speaking to persuade?

As ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians developed their methods for teaching persuasive speechmaking, they devised five areas of focus, which became five speech preparation stages—the **canons**, or guiding precepts, of rhetoric. Figure 1.5 shows these five stages. The first canon of rhetoric, *invention*, looks at the grounds for persuasion: *controversies*. Here is where the speaker *thinks* about what is important, finds out more about issues surrounding a controversy, and considers the people—the audience—to be addressed. What approach will spark their attention, concern, and agreement? How can we anticipate and respond to their arguments against our position?

Once we have thought about the controversy and our audience, we turn to the second canon, *organization*, where we structure our thoughts into a coherent order and form. Once the structure of the speech makes sense, we can polish its *style*, refining word choice and creating verbal images that will engage the audience.

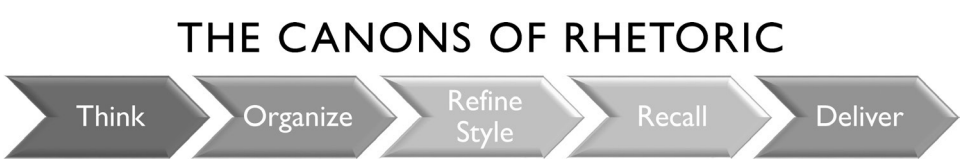

Figure 1.5 The Stages of Persuasive Speaking. The five *canons* leading up to the speech include invention (thinking), organization, style (wording), memory, and delivery.
Courtesy of Barbara Breaden

To complete our preparation, while we continue to reflect on what we will say and rehearse it mentally to confirm both content and form in our minds, we draw on the canon of *memory*. Finally, we rehearse our message aloud to enhance fluency and experiment with adaptations to possible audience reactions during the speech *delivery*.

We will guide you through these canons in the pages to come, digressing at points along the way to consider other concerns. Can I adapt a basic speech for different settings and purposes? What do I have to do to critique a speaker intelligently? As we branch off, these canons will provide our basic persuasive toolkit.

In Summary

Persuasive speaking happens, and it is valuable to our own and other free societies. When we learn to persuade, we are empowered to act positively in our personal lives and cooperatively in the society we inhabit. We also become better able to defend ourselves against negative influence from others.

We consider persuasion the verbal act of attempting to influence others' beliefs, attitudes, and actions. To bring about positive change through persuasion, we must respect the free will of those who hear us speak. In so doing, we become responsible participants in local, national, and global communities.

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Theory into Practice

1. Consider the different occasions for persuasion you have had in your life over the past month. Which are your most common settings for persuasion?

2. Why does a democratic society depend on differences of opinion? Where in our cities and communities are such clashes desirable?

3. Using the definitions given in Chapter One, select a belief you or another person you know well holds to be true. Consider what attitudes derive from this belief. Does the belief ever result in action?

4. Pinpoint one belief you *think* is held by several members of your social group or academic peer group. Imagine three actions you might be able to persuade them to take based on their beliefs.

   EXAMPLE: Several co-workers believe that speech is a valuable skill for your company's employees. You might be able to persuade those in charge to schedule a speech workshop series at your job site.

Oral Practice

Locate an opinion piece in a blog or news source. In a brief presentation (two to three minutes), summarize its content for an appropriate audience, pinpointing the primary beliefs and attitudes expressed by the author.

Subject: _____

Summary of author's main points:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Author's beliefs:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Author's attitudes:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____