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Shakespeare/Plato

IDS 365

Rhetoric's Triad

When discussing rhetoric, it is impossible to separate its three forms logos, pathos and ethos from the conversation. First off, logos must be considered as persuasion through logic, pathos through emotion and ethos through ethics, though more importantly it defines the characteristic nature of a person. In an examination of rhetoric between two classics, Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It* and Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, it seems appropriate to address the three forms of persuasion, and consider how they help the works both succeed and fail. In the comedy, Rosalind who is considered the heroine rules through a rhetoric of pathos, and as such, is not as effective a persuader as Socrates who argues through a collected and thorough use of logic. Despite not being as effective however, pathos more easily accesses ethos, and therefore offers a better sense for the true nature of the character.

Socrates' rhetoric is based on logos, and this is no clearer than in his discussion of the soul's deathlessness. He starts out with the claim that "All soul is deathless" (245c). To back up that claim, Socrates first explains what deathlessness is. "For that which is always moving is deathless; and that which moves something else and is moved by something else, since it has a stopping of motion, has a stopping of life" (245c). There are several techniques going on that Socrates uses to relay his point. The first is the vague words (something, it, that) and the absolute terms (all, always) to refer to *anything* that could *always* move, letting us understand what deathless precisely means in general terms. The second technique is his repetitive phrasing at the end, regarding stopping. He could have said 'that which stops in motion has death.' This would have been more direct and abrupt, but it would have used circular reasoning and related death

back to deathlessness. Ultimately this would not have proven as effective, because connecting a stopping of motion to a stopping of life creates a more dramatic and specific image for the listener (or reader) than just the broad word ‘death.’

In the next section of this same argument Socrates does use circular reasoning however. He says, “A beginning has no coming into being. For everything that comes into being must of necessity come into being from a beginning, but the latter must not come from anything, for if the beginning came into being from something, it would no longer be a beginning” (245d). At the surface, this seems like a muddle of ‘beings’ and ‘beginnings,’ but it does make sense, is intentionally crafted, and is crucial to understanding his argument. He says if something goes through the act of coming into being, by definition it has a beginning. The beginning however, cannot come into being otherwise there is something that would have started it, and by definition would no longer be the beginning. What makes Socrates’ explanation different from this one, is the play on words (being and beginning), which runs in a circular pattern. The circle would have been broken if the word start had been inserted in place of one of the ‘beginnings’ for example. The circle, being not broken however, creates a more dramatic effect that helps the reader relate the start of the argument to the end. This dramatic effect is the logic, or logos, that Socrates employs to demonstrate his point, and regardless of whether or not you believe in souls or deathlessness, you do end up believing his argument.

Rosalind, on the other hand, uses pathos to persuade Orlando that he will be cured of love. In the second scene of Act 3, she appears to Orlando as Ganymede, and chides him for claiming he is in love with Rosalind. She claims she will cure him of his love saying, “For every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color; would now like him, now loathe; then entertain him, then forswear him; now

weep for him, then spit at him, that I drove my suitor from his mad humor of love to a living humor of madness” (3.2.397-403). Like Socrates, a couple techniques are used to present her argument. Word choice is a critical component once again, using words like ‘loathe, weep, spit, humor of love and humor of madness’ to depict images and evoke emotions. The other technique she uses is opposite images, going back and forth from positive to negative back to positive. Looking beyond the specific word, this gives a sense of the turbulence of the message she is delivering, attempting to make it dissuasive. Both of these give the listener a good sense of the passion she carries and the conviction she speaks with. In response however, Orlando says, “I would not be cured, youth” (3.2.409). At this point, the reader must decide who to believe, and as passionate as Rosalind is, there is no reason to believe her, especially when she continues to swoon for Orlando off to the side. In this instance it would seem pathos is not enough to win an argument on its own.

This is not an isolated occurrence where Rosalind’s emotional plea fails to be persuasive. In scene five of Act 3, she and Celia are discussing why Orlando has not returned when he swore he would. Rosalind asks, “But why did he swear he would come this morning, and comes not?” (3.4.18-19). Starting that question with the conjunction ‘but’ indicates her emotional concern and need to know the answer, for without it the question would have come across as any other. Upon hearing her cousin’s case that his truthfulness in love is only true when he actually is in love, she says, “You have heard him swear downright he was” (3.4.27). Celia responds with “‘Was’ is not ‘is’” (3.4.28). It is not specific words but the tone that indicates Rosalind’s denial that he could possibly not be in love, and as rhetoric, flat denial is rarely convincing, for it does not recognize the other side’s credit, and more importantly does not offer any to your side. Celia is more convincing here because there is a sense of logos in her recognizance of specific word choice.

This creates a conflict however, that the reader must choose either to believe Orlando that he is in love or Celia in saying that he is not. Based purely on the rhetoric, Celia is more persuasive because she gives reasons for why she does not support Rosalind, or in other words, logic.

While it has been set up that Socrates is much more persuasive in his logical arguments compared to Rosalind's emotional plea, using the same reasons from these arguments, it is clear that the third aspect of rhetoric, ethos, is much more prevalent in Rosalind's pathos than Socrates' logos. Considering ethos as the rhetoric of ethics that reveals a person's distinguishing character, the problem with Socrates' explanation of coming into being and beginnings is the vague words and the circular rhythm. They do a good job creating an all-inclusive answer for how all souls are deathless, but they fail to evoke emotion and passion, which is what gives insight to one's character. Rosalind's description of the madness of love, filled with weeping and spitting, gives a strong sense of her passionate view on the turbulence of love. The passages that failed to be convincing – her distress that Orlando may not actually love her – prove to offer the most in her ethos regarding love. Despite her banter with Orlando discussing how she will prove he is not in love, we get a strong sense that she believes he is in love, and how badly she desires it.

Using snippets of Socrates' logic in defining the soul's immortality and Rosalind's rebuttal and reclamation of Orlando's love, it is evident that logos is much more persuasive as rhetoric than pathos, yet pathos offers us much more insight into a person's ethos. In a manner of speaking, ethos, which represents the ethics of a character and reveals their characteristic self, could be considered the soul as it involves the internal nature of the speaker. Socrates attempts to logically reason regarding the soul, and does a successful job persuading the reader of its immortality, however he fails to capture the nature of that which he speaks of. Rosalind on the

other hand, fails to persuade the reader Orlando will not be in love, however she captures the nature of her reality – her personal ethos – in her rhetoric involving Orlando and Celia. In other words, logos fails to capture the soul when it neglects pathos, and pathos captures the soul though fails to persuade when it neglects logos. What remains is the conclusion that the triad of rhetoric works best when it works in harmony.