

Prologue

As its subtitle indicates, this book, in the first of its two major parts, treats types of thinking, first developed by select authors in the ancient Greco-Roman world, about rhetoric—that is, verbal suasion or psychagogy. (The term, meaning the verbal guidance of soul, is Plato’s.) Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Virgil have fashioned the types of rhetorical thinking this book examines and, to be candid, promotes as beneficial and necessary today. To avoid confusion for the reader in the pages to come, the word “rhetoric” will usually mean thought about *verbal psychagogy and all related to it*, which, as we will see, includes the basic concerns of human welfare. A second, more restricted sense is the art of managing language for the purpose of psychagogy *in any verbal form whatsoever*, written or spoken, as, for example, in the rhetoric of the memorandum, love letter, lyric poem, novel, lecture, public speech, or conversations of all sorts. These will be the two primary senses of the word in this book.

There are other senses of the word also. That rhetoric means only civic oratory (public speaking) or the art of oratory is common today and was so also in antiquity. But this very narrow sense of the word will be of only minor importance, and the introductory remarks below will show the reader why. Of course, rhetoric can also mean self-serving or partisan speech, often involving verbal duplicity and fraud. These pejorative senses of the word were very common both in antiquity and in modern times.

Considered overall, the book presents a basic claim: that the rhetorical thinking of these ancient writers, though not in all respects the same, differed in two essential



ways from the thinking of most other writers in the ancient rhetorical tradition and nearly all in the contemporary world of scholarly academics and educators. First, their thinking differed in that for the ills of life caused by strife, delusion, and deceit, all of them sought a reality-based verbal remedy, often called truth or wisdom or justice or right when recognized and spoken. Some (Homer, Aeschylus, and Vergil) sought the remedy through their life and work as poets. Others (Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero) did likewise by participating in a way of life and speech they, with various understandings, called philosophy. Second, in spite of the complicity of speech in the ills of life, these writers showed an exceptionally keen valuation of human language owing to what in human nature came to be called psyche or soul—what made human beings distinctive among all other beings in the world in using and responding to speech.

In the contemporary world, rhetorical thinking of the ancient types treated here is nearly moribund because a real, common wisdom or truth upon which to draw is discounted as culture-bound and thus cannot be common at all, and because psyche (usually “soul” in English) is thought of as a fiction for brain function, thus not as the non-material source and ontological basis of humanity that functions as the internal governor of human life and that, because non-material, suggests also what our relation to higher “divine” beings may be, and what consequences regarding our relations to such divinity may follow. As a result, the types of rhetorical thinking treated here are strangers in the land of contemporary higher learning. The wisdom sought here combines many academic disciplines (as they are conceived today), is identifiable with no one of them, and moves thought about language and its effects on human behavior in a metaphysical and theological direction rejected by the physical and social sciences and many contemporary understandings of philosophy. In fact, both contemporary paradigms of academic thought and many of the persistent realities of human nature and history are powerfully antagonistic to the types of ancient rhetorical thought this



book presents.

But there is one field of bright flowers in this rough contemporary landscape. There does exist today a great deal of academic scholarship about ancient rhetoric as a legitimate field of historical study, even if it is dismissed in the end as a curious intellectual tradition of little (economic) value. This historical scholarship, although sometimes nearly lifeless, has made it possible to revive phoenix-like from the ashes of irrelevance and dismissal a new and deeper understanding of the great, if limited, hope ancient rhetoric offers. Such revival is the chief reason for this book. These matters will be again discussed later in this prologue and elsewhere in this book.

What follows is some introductory information about the subject of the book, rhetoric (taken in its two primary senses); the parts of the book; some of the important tenets connected to its basic claim; its form or genre as an essay (and not a history); and a fuller statement of why it was written—that is, the hope represented by the rhetorical thinking this book examines.

The Subject Matter and Parts of the Book

Aristotle (according to Diogenes) claimed that Empedocles, a Sicilian poet-philosopher, discovered rhetoric. Aristotle also claimed (in the report of Cicero) that the first manuals to conceive of and present rhetoric as a set of techniques to manage language to make it suasive and effective were developed also in Sicily by Corax and Tisias, Syracusans of the fifth century BCE, apparently as practical help for litigants in regaining property confiscated by a tyrannical regime. So began a cultural tradition of preceptive rhetorical teaching, including the writing of technical manuals and model speeches and school exercises. The tradition would extend far beyond the fall of Rome, conventionally put at 476 CE. The ancients did not write a history of rhetoric, but some moved in that direction. Aristotle collected the manuals written before him, and, much later, in his *Brutus*

