

AUDIENCE AND ARGUMENTATION  
– FROM HELLENIC ORATORS TO PERELMAN –

MARIA CORNELIA BÂRLIBA\*

**I. AUDIENCE VS. ORATOR**

In the rhetorical argumentation, the characteristics of the audience are of great importance; even Demosthenes said that the power of orators usually depends on those persons who listen to them. In the arguments' development, the opinion shared by the audience with regard to the orator plays therefore a significant role; on the logical level, this opinion is not relevant or powerful.

The interaction between the opinion of the audience regarding the profile and the personality of the orator, on the one hand, and the opinion about his judgements and arguments, on the other hand, seems to be very close. The positive parameters of the orator are, *inter alia*: competence, authority, prestige, capacity of persuasion.

The respective parameters are not constant and unchangeable; on the contrary, they would be directly influenced by each thesis put forward by the orator. On the level of logical thinking and scientific research, one could consider that our ideas are the re-production of the reality and thus express the truth; our person (individual personality) does not intervene into our judgements: the sentence is not conceived as a personal act.

The basic difference between the rhetorical modality and logic is related to the fact that the person has contributed to the sentence's value through his/her own adhesion.

This interaction is not limited to the moral or aesthetic judgements. It concerns the argumentation as a whole. The prestige of the orator acts only if he agrees to involve such a prestige in the exercise undertaken by himself. An increased prestige could be generated by the discourse of the orator, but – at the same time – for each sentence, the prestige seems to be partially exposed to several risks.

The interaction between the person and the affirmative sentences in the rhetorical discourse contains two basic extreme situations: the sentence concerns a real, existing fact (a fact is more respectable than the "Lord Mayor of London"); the person who delivers the respective affirmative sentences is considered to be perfect, for instance, everything that is said or done by God ("perfect being") is the best possible in our world.

\* "Politehnica" University, Bucharest.

The following kinds of audience are of particular significance, in Ch. Perelman's view: the audience composed of only one member/person; the audience composed of the mankind as such.

## II. AUDIENCE AS A SINGLE PERSON

In the oral presentation of the discourse, the procedure for a single person is different from the procedure envisaged for a broad audience. A series of aspects should be taken into consideration:

- a gradual step-by-step agreement with your partner (as audience) is needed, through various subsequent questions and answers to the latter's possible objections;
- the discourse finally becomes a dialogue;
- it is the procedure used by Socrates (dialectical dialogue), which is opposed to the procedure used by Protagoras. This technique is generally based on questions and answers;
- it is, in principle, the procedure when we decide by ourselves, taking into account possible solutions "for" and "against", in a special situation.

Chaim Perelman, in his book *Rhétoriques*, describes as an illusion the above-mentioned famous procedure used by Socrates. This illusion is explained by certain clear reasons. The fact that the partner admits each part/step, seems to be in the field of the truth, and not in the field of the opinion. Such a conviction that the respective sentences are better supported and promoted is possible to occur, if we compare them with the rhetorical argumentation, where the proof needed for each argument cannot be undertaken by the direct and gradual reaction of the partner; Plato's genuine art in Perelman's view facilitated this illusion as well as the identification, at a later stage, of the dialectics with the science of logic.

The argumentation embodied in the Socratic dialogue, which is presented in Plato's *Dialogues*, has an essential feature: *the maieutics*. Socrates addresses himself to a single partner, through the modality of maieutics. *Socrates becomes the Wisdom, the Idea of Moral Goodness.*

## III. UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE

The main parameters of this kind of audience are related to the fact that it is not real, actually existent. Therefore, Ch. Perelman formulates the following considerations:

- it does not depend on the social or psychological conditions of the environment;

- it is rather ideal;
- it is a product/result of the orator's imagination;
- in order to obtain the adhesion of such audience, the orator must use only pre-requisites generally understood by everybody, or fully accepted by a quite critical assembly;
- the author must be, *de facto*, included in this audience;
- each period, each culture and each individual entity have their "universal audience";
- this universal audience is composed in a manner which excludes those persons who will not accept our argumentation (we consider them as "monsters" and therefore, we no more insist to persuade them to change their ideas and convictions);
- we judge people only on the basis of the judgements of value, which are launched by themselves;
- we reserve ourselves the right to judge them, taking into consideration the specific value/importance attached to our arguments;
- as a matter of fact, there is a transition from a universal audience to an elite audience.

Coming back to the Socratic dialogue, as developed in Plato's *Dialogues*, Socrates speaks for Man – as mankind; here one can see the reasons for the universality of his discourses. Despite of the fact that the reference is made to one person, he offers a message for everybody. Socrates' audience is not – and does not become – a restrained one (an elite).

Through his death, Socrates fully confirmed his own solid adhesion to the moral values transmitted by his discourses, during the whole life.

#### IV. LEVELS OF SOCRATIC DISCOURSE IN THE *DIALOGUES*

The following levels are mainly envisaged: the orator, the audience as a single person and the relationship between essentiality and appearance in the dialogue.

*The orator* is, *de facto*, Socrates as a character of the imagined dialogue, written by Plato. Socrates-the character is associated, in the readers' perspective, to Socrates-the philosopher, famous personality of Athens, of the Hellenic culture.

Socrates-the philosopher is seen in a double initial posture: the character is conceived as, has the status of a philosopher both for his partners of dialogue and for Plato-the author who, otherwise, "arranged" this dialogue/discourse with a single person.

A third posture for Socrates-the philosopher is that of perception, given by readers, in a *meta-dialogue with the dialogue*, as designed by Plato and Socrates.

In conclusion, there are the following situations:

- a) Socrates-the character, as created by the author Plato;
- b) Socrates-the philosopher in a triad of meanings:
  - the philosopher of Athens; citizen Socrates;
  - the philosopher for the partner of dialogue as well as for Plato;
  - the philosopher for the readers of the *Dialogues*

*The audience as a single person* is represented by: Gorgias, Kalikles, Phaidros, etc., real personalities in the life in Athens, philosophers and partners created by the author Plato.

The orators Plato and Socrates are situated on the level of public opinion, of the collective conscience (taking into account the framework of the *Dialogues*: the existing Socrates (the philosopher) delivers the pleadings in his capacity as Socrates-the character (created by Plato); the existing Plato (the philosopher) delivers the pleadings in his capacity as the author of dialogues, through Socrates-the character, in the name of Moral Goodness of God.

The audience is symbolically created, is an abstraction: a MAN; a single man, who accepts or rejects what is good for ALL men, for mankind.

The meta-communication, as specific argumentation, embodied in Plato's *Dialogues* has two levels of presence: *direct* – dialogue with a single person; *indirect* (essential) – a dialogue with the entire mankind.

The “Trojan horse” of the discourses, within the philosophy of the *Dialogues*, is represented by Socrates as an old man who seems to confess (it is just an illusion of confession). This modality illustrates Plato's huge capacity to give expression to the discursive value of the Socratic thoughts:

- *methodological attitude*: Socrates is aware of building an argumentation accepted from rational and moral points of view;
- *procedural attitude*: Socrates does not renounce, he does not put an end to his argumentation without a personal opinion, as a terminal point of the dialogue.

#### V. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESSENTIALITY AND APPEARANCE

Only as an appearance, Socrates introduces the adhesion for each of the expressed opinions. Pleadings in favor of universal causes and universal values do not lead to an adhesion; therefore, it is not the case of the logic of speaking which is able to build specific “realities of concepts”.

Socrates does not enter into dialogue with a single man/person; symbolically, through meta-communication, through maieutics, Socrates talks with a partner, with one as a sign, as a name, as a symbol for everyone, for the mankind.

The difficulties raised in the process of communication through discourses delivered in front of an audience – having, as extreme cases, a single person or the

mankind as such – were discovered and solved by those who created the rhetorical systemic exercise.

In his *Dialogues*, Plato succeeded in the undertaken efforts of combining the two kinds of audience, identified by Ch. Perelman through a meta-dialogue, through a transition from one to all, to the mankind as such. Socrates, a famous “Trojan horse” *sui-generis*, gives a simultaneous reaction at two levels of reception: *the individual as a symbol for universal*.

The clever Ulysses, due to an ingenious idea, was able to become the conqueror of Troy. The clever Plato, with the assistance of the equally clever Socrates, is a genuine conqueror in the process of argumentation. Plato’s *Dialogues* “speak” by themselves over centuries and centuries, just because they were delivered by an orator (Socrates) in front of a single partner as audience.

#### VI. THE UNIVERSAL OF DEMOSTHENES’ DISCOURSES

In his pleadings belonging to the series of the *Philippics*, Demosthenes universally pleads with dignity, gravity and energy, for freedom and democracy in Athens. He looks like a monument in front of his people: he used to be strong and powerful, but he had also a specific charm, in his capacity as a product of *demos*. Demosthenes is, therefore, a result and a creation of democracy as a supreme social value: as a matter of fact, his personality represented a synthesis between the Hellenic *logos* and the Hellenic morality. This is why the Athenian society was listening to Demosthenes with great respect.

Politics was his main source of inspiration. The basic ideas and guidelines, embodied in his political discourses (*Philippics*) were deeply promoted and implemented on the level of the current policy. By their essence, the *Philippics* are:

- a) *popular discourses*;
- b) *democratic discourses*.

a) As popular discourses, they express the highest degree of addressability and the Hellenic genuine intentionality. Demosthenes speaks for *demos*, for the “Athenians, citizens of Athens”. He does not address himself to a specific institution or personality. Only Gods, representatives of divinity are often evoked in the respective discourses, addressed to his people. In the *First Philippic*, Demosthenes had the following pleading: “As it is, I do not know what will happen to me, for what I had said: but I have chosen to speak in the sure conviction that if you carry out my proposal, it will be for your good; and may the victory rest with that policy which will be for the good of all!”.

b) As democratic discourses, the *Philippics* stress a clear basic idea: the only legitimate power is that of the people (*demos*); this power could decide upon the inevitability of war, if such a war seems to be useful for Athens, for the Athenians.

Demosthenes gives a clear explanation at the beginning of the *Second Philippic*: “The responsibility for this rests with us all, men of Athens. It is by deeds and actions, not by words, that a policy of encroachment must be arrested: and yet, in the first place, we who rise to address you will not face the duty of proposing or advising such action, for fear of unpopularity with you, though we dilate upon the character of Philip’s acts, upon their atrocity, and so forth.”

The freedom of the people of Athens, with a feature of perfection in terms of social organization, as an example for the entire Peloponnese and Attica is argued, keeping the measure of *logos*, the feeling of history; the responsibility for the present is associated to the responsibility for the future.

Demosthenes’ pathos is a genuine one. His strong and honest pleadings are in favor of harmony which could be assured by Athens, as well as of the principles contained in the *Philippics*: Athens as the leading force of the Hellenic people and the dignity of the respective people.

Demosthenes created the “diamond” of the argumentative structure in the *Philippics* and, through this rhetorical exercise, he succeeded to set up the “*philippic*” as a kind of discourse, the rhetorical model of the Attic style.

The political eloquence addressed to the universal audience, by means of a meta-dialogue, is a modality of delivering the discourse which becomes a *dialogue within a dialogue*, a speech having two levels of addressability:

- Demosthenes enters into a dialogue with the citizens of Athens and with King Philip;
- Demosthenes enters into a dialogue with the dialogue itself, with the relationship between the positive values (freedom and democracy) and the negative values (King Philip and his humiliating policy).

The meta-dialogue, as a second-degree level of essentiality, is the generator of dynamism, of the dialogue process and creates the sense – unity of the democratic existence of the Hellenic people (not only of Athens).

Through such a meta-dialogue, a meta-argumentation, Demosthenes’ political ideas are expressed, so that he becomes the author of the concept of national unity, as a pre-requisite for the existence of each people.

In the history of political philosophy, Demosthenes could be considered as the first to have formulated a definition for the motherland.

His pleadings provide a style of existence through a contradiction between two basic levels: a discursive contact, in contradiction with the present reality of the Macedonian domination; a broadly democratic historical context, a generous pleading for freedom and democracy.

The great orator delivers his pleadings in front of an audience, which is universal in terms of the intentionality of messages transferred by his arguments.

Demosthenes could become – and sometimes, he became *de facto* – the *raison d’être* of things, due to his discourses. Through such speeches, he could

decisively influence various actions and developments, various options. Therefore, his discourses have gradually received political, juridical and moral legitimacy, irrespective of historical periods. *Demosthenes' discourse became the law as such.*

As far as the elements of intentionality generating the universality of discourses are concerned, in the *Philippics* they require the following acts of renunciation:

- people should renounce their passivity;
- orators should renounce delivering so many discourses and speeches;
- traitors should give up betrayal;
- the famous portrait of King Philip as conqueror should be abandoned;
- the easy acceptance of the existing situation should no longer continue.

The relationship between Demosthenes as an orator, on the one hand, and the people of Athens, the values of the Hellenic *polis*, on the other hand, explains the universality of his audience both in historical time and in essential order.

This vocation for the universality of values transmitted by the discourse, embodied in all *Philippics* is fully emphasized in a specific manner: Demosthenes invites other orators to undertake a stronger and more persuasive argumentation than his own in the name of the same Hellenic values.

But the history of discourse did not confirm such a special ability of other orators. Therefore, Demosthenes has remained until now a unique representative with his unequalled pleadings in favor of freedom and democracy.

As a final remark, the difficulties identified by the Brussels school of neo-rhetoric were both created and solved in the ancient Agora, through an outstanding theoretical intuition and pragmatic exercise.

#### REFERENCES

- The Public Orations of Demosthenes*, translated by Arthur Wallace Pickard, vol. I, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1912.
- Platon, *Dialoguri*, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, București, 1968.
- Chaim Perelman, *Rhétoriques*, Ed. de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1989.
- Chaim Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca, *La nouvelle rhétorique. Traité de l'argumentation*, PUF, Paris, 1958.
- Roland Barthes, *L'ancienne rhétorique*, in vol. "Recherches rhétoriques", Communications, 16, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1994.
- Maria Cornelia Bârliba, *Ideatic Specificity of the Discourse. Demosthenes – "Philippics"*, in Noesis, XXIV, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 1999.