

Beyond Persuasion: Rhetoric as a Tool of Political Motivation

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The revival of scholarly interest in political rhetoric is salutary, but has unnecessarily focused on defending only the kind of rhetoric whose end is to persuade listeners to change their judgments. In this article, I explore an additional style of rhetoric that has another aim: that of motivating or inspiring listeners to support with vigorous action a judgment already made. Such rhetoric is not simply a species of persuasive rhetoric, and therefore must be justified on its own terms. I argue that motivational rhetoric is fundamentally linked to a particular psychological phenomenon: *akrasia*, or weakness of will. Through an examination of classical theorists of rhetoric, as well as contemporary debates and empirical research, I attempt to distinguish motivational rhetoric from its persuasive counterpart and make a preliminary defense for it as a legitimate mode of political speech.

Is a speaker's aim accomplished once she has persuaded her listeners to conform their judgement to hers? Nearly all contemporary theoretical and empirical studies of political communication assume that it is. Once your audience agrees with you, what more is left to do? However, attempts at political persuasion aim not simply at changing the opinions of listeners, but at producing some effect on the world. Persuasive political speech occurs for the sake of causing the audience to perform some action: to vote for a certain candidate or to support a particular policy, etc. Contemporary studies of political rhetoric and persuasion—both theoretical and empirical—thus seem to contain an implicit assumption: human practical rationality, the idea that people reliably act according to their judgements. Yet, we all know from our own lives that we do not always behave so rationally. Human beings regularly experience a phenomenon wherein we actually fail to act according to our own fixed judgments. The dieter may indulge in a hot fudge sundae, or the academic may choose to watch videos of cats on the internet rather than finishing a paper with a fast-approaching deadline. In such cases, we frequently know that our action (or inaction) con-

tradicts our own views of what would be best for us. This can happen in the strong sense (when we do not act according to our judgments at all) or in the weaker sense (when we act but only halfheartedly). This phenomenon, termed *akrasia* by the ancient Greeks, refers to the condition of practical irrationality, when a person's considered judgment fails to determine her action. Although it does not correspond perfectly with the Greek meaning, the term "weakness of will" captures the idea moderately well.¹ At any rate, the reality of *akrasia* suggests that human action depends on our motivational states, as well as our judgments.²

In this article I argue that the fact of *akrasia* has significant implications for how we ought to think about political rhetoric. If people often require further motivation to act even on their own judgments, then the job of the political speaker is not in fact done when she has convinced her audience of her argument. She must also motivate or inspire her audience to support with action their conviction—a task that often relies on nonrational appeals to emotions or even on subrational features of communication such as voice modulation and rhythm. Accepting this additional function of

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1. Although there is some controversy, many scholars are willing to translate *akrasia* as "weakness of will." In general, I leave the Greek term untranslated to preserve the ambiguity in the concept (cf. Destree 2007).

2. This is not to say that judgments themselves are not powerful motivators. If I believe that a certain action is just, or in my self-interest, I already have significant motivation to do it. But as will be explored below, judgements and beliefs (even when firmly held and logically decisive) are not always sufficient to produce action, and conversely we often find elements of political speech that seem intended to produce motivation without really appealing to our judgments or beliefs at all. In this article, it is only this latter kind of speech that I mean when I refer to "motivational" rhetoric.

rhetoric, we should also be able to recognize that in some instances the goal of political speech is primarily (perhaps even only) this latter purpose, rather than the changing of minds. Sometimes speakers take the agreement of an audience for granted and seek instead simply to inspire and enliven listeners, to imbue them with the necessary enthusiasm to carry out a difficult, costly, or otherwise distasteful course of action. When described in this manner, the reality and even desirability of motivational political rhetoric may seem self-evident. But from the earliest classical theorists of rhetoric to contemporary scholarship, this distinct motivational mode has been largely ignored or left ambiguously conflated with persuasion.

The focus on the persuasive function of rhetoric traces back at least as far as Aristotle, who, in his writings on rhetoric, defends it as a method of engaging the judgement of listeners to change their minds. Aristotle provides the classic definition of what rhetoric is, distinguishing it from discussion based entirely on logical syllogisms. Aristotle understood that, for a variety of reasons, the task of changing minds often requires something beyond the pure force of reason. Sometimes people need first to have some hostile passion alleviated before they can be receptive to a contrary opinion. Or perhaps they need reassurance that the speaker is trustworthy and has their interests at heart. Rhetoric for Aristotle is the art that employs those additional means (along with logic and argument) to change minds. But here Aristotle's account seems to stop: once the minds of the audience are changed, the rhetorician's task is done. Action must necessarily follow from a change in judgment.

The contemporary renewal of scholarly interest in rhetoric has remained largely within the classical framework, depending especially on Aristotle's original treatment of the subject. In this article, I argue that this revival—while salutary—has reproduced Aristotle's confusing ambiguity about the relationship between persuasion and motivation, leaving it unable to examine the full scope of uses to which political rhetoric is put. This problem affects not only normative and theoretical scholarship but even empirical attempts to examine the role of persuasion in contemporary politics.

Yet an examination of this same classical rhetorical tradition can help us to distinguish the unique possibilities of motivational rhetoric as well. Aristotle's ambiguous treatment of *akrasia* yields a correspondingly ambiguous account of the sufficiency of persuasion to prompt political action. But later thinkers, especially Cicero and Augustine, take up the problem. They disentangle the persuasive and motivational functions of political rhetoric in part by focusing on the role of the will as an engine of human action. They recognize that if people cannot be counted on to act in ac-

cordance with their judgements, a rhetoric that merely persuades will often prove politically ineffective. As a result, an effective orator must also incorporate another objective in his speaking: that of motivation. They show that rhetoric can play a vital role in inspiring listeners, energizing their wills to support with action a judgement already made.

In this article, I seek to recover the conceptual distinction between this motivational role of rhetoric and the more well-known persuasive function. This in turn makes it possible to begin grappling with the normative issues the former raises. I start by examining the contemporary focus on rhetoric as a method of persuasion and its classical antecedent. Modern thinkers on political rhetoric have generally passed over this problem of weakness of will, thus missing its central connection to some key purposes of rhetoric. However, through an examination of some of the great classical theorists of rhetoric, I show that the problem of *akrasia* is the issue upon which the possibility of motivational or inspiring rhetoric must turn. I suggest how contemporary normative and empirical studies of rhetoric could benefit by recognizing this as a distinct mode of political speech. Finally, I explore some of the peculiar moral and ethical issues that arise in the use of motivational rhetoric. I argue that overmotivating an audience is a serious danger in this kind of rhetoric, which is unlikely to be recognized if we think only in terms of persuasion. But I also propose that the motivational function of rhetoric offers unique resources to reinforce the autonomy of listeners.

PERSUASION AND ITS LIMITS

Long neglected, political rhetoric has recently again become a significant focus for both empirical and normative scholars of politics. Among political theorists, rhetoric has become the focus of a debate about the acceptable means of political persuasion, offered by some as a form of healthy democratic communication that can serve as an alternative to the austere discourse of public reason and deliberative democracy (Abizadeh 2002; Garsten 2009, 2011; Kapust and Schwarze 2016; Remer 1999). This revival of interest in rhetoric is undoubtedly beneficial, and its focus specifically on rhetoric as a means of persuasion is both understandable and reasonable. Much of the theory and practice of political rhetoric is concerned with the questions about the efficacy or moral norms of its use in the effort to change people's minds.

Yet not all political rhetoric falls clearly into this category. Indeed, a focus on persuasion may make it difficult to account for the significance of some of the most famous instances of political rhetoric. It is probably quite rare for a piece of political rhetoric to entirely neglect persuasion in favor of motivation. But certain aspects of political speech appear to

have very little to do with changing minds—and perhaps even take for granted that the judgments of the speaker and the listener are aligned. When Winston Churchill declared that “we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the hills and in the streets,” he was not attempting to persuade the British public about where it would be best to fight. Here he seems to assume that the decision to battle on everywhere has already been made by the nation (Churchill 1940). The rhythm and imagery of this passage seem meant encourage the British public, to fill it with vigor for the task ahead. Likewise, in the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln does not seem primarily to want to change the judgments of his listeners about the Civil War when he suggests that “from these honored dead we take *increased devotion* to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion” (Lincoln 1980, emphasis added). In short, Churchill and Lincoln seem in these instances interested in motivating and inspiring their listeners, not changing their opinions or judgements. In both speeches, there are other moments that are aimed more at changing minds. For example, Lincoln attempts to defend a particular view of the cause for which the Union is fighting. But it is hard to account for significant portions of the speeches if one imagines Lincoln and Churchill are not sometimes addressing those who already agree with them and for whom persuasion then is unnecessary.

More mundanely and commonly, there is the problem of the political “stump speech.” A ubiquitous feature of modern political campaigns and given primarily to supporters, stump speeches often contain a considerable amount of “red meat”—material that energizes those who already agree with the candidate but which is unlikely to move an undecided or opposed voter. So both outstanding and utterly commonplace political speech provides us examples of rhetoric that is not meant (primarily) to persuade, understood as referring only to changes of opinions and judgements.³ Nor, as I show below, does this speech fit neatly into Aristotle’s famous account of rhetoric, the basic outline of which remains the dominant prism

3. As noted above, it is difficult to imagine a significant political speech totally devoid of persuasive content. Even the Churchill and Lincoln examples contain significant argumentative components. Rather than conceiving of them as wholly separate genres (persuasive speech vs. motivational speech), it might be more helpful to think of elements of political speech as serving either a persuasive or a motivational function—and it is certainly possible that a speaker might be attempting both at once. But as I argue below, there are significant analytical and normative gains to be made by being able, when necessary, to distinguish the two. So when I refer to motivational rhetoric throughout this article, I mean those aspects of political communication that seek to move us to action through means other than changing our judgments.

through which the rhetorical revival has looked at political communication.

In part because of the antirhetorical turn of much modern political thought, the renewed interest in rhetoric has prompted many scholars to return to theories of rhetoric in classic texts. Some look to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (Abizadeh 2002), Cicero’s many works on the subject (Vasaly 1985), or the Renaissance rhetorical revival (Kahn 1994). Others have sought to engage in contemporary debates over what sort of political speech ought to be permissible (O’Neill 2002; Young 1996). Much of this work follows Bryan Garsten’s approach of mining historical political philosophy in service of a rethinking of the practice of democratic discourse. Garsten’s (2009) influential *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* has largely set the agenda for this rhetorical revival. For Garsten and others, the turn to rhetoric stems from a reaction against the restrictive norms of discourse insisted upon by many of the leading theorists of deliberative democracy (Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Habermas 1996; Rawls 2005).⁴ These deliberative democrats have laid out principles of public reason, according to which we should only attempt to persuade fellow citizens to change their minds by appealing to reasons accessible to all, without manipulative appeals to emotion or concessions to prejudice. Only in this way, say the deliberative democrats, will democratic speech be free from exploitation and irrationality.

Garsten and others rightly object that such a view inappropriately limits the scope of permissible political speech. They point out that human nature being what it is, such principles may often make changing the minds of listeners downright impossible. If listeners’ judgements are affected by emotions, or if they hold prejudiced or erroneous views with conviction, a speaker who refuses to make any concessions to those realities may have no hope of effecting a change in their judgments. Moreover, it is far from clear that the stringent requirements of deliberative democrats are normatively superior to rhetorical persuasion. Only the latter approach requires speakers to meet their listeners, so to speak, where they are. As Garsten puts it: “a politics of persuasion—in which people try to change one another’s minds by appealing not only to reason but also to passions and sometimes even to prejudices—is a mode of politics worth defending . . . because it requires us to pay attention to our fellow citizens . . . to engage with others wherever they stand and begin our argument there” (2009, 3). Kapust and Schwarze rightly note that such appeals may be necessary to get listeners even to trust the speaker enough to listen to arguments in the first place (2016). Likewise, Remer

4. See Garsten (2011) and Remer (1999) for further accounts of this debate.

notes that rhetorical language becomes necessary when the audience grows too large for a speaker to persuade each listener rationally and dialogically (1999).

But with the partial exception of Remer, these authors join Garsten in considering rhetorical speech only to the extent that it enables one to persuade—that is, to change the opinions of listeners. Garsten himself goes so far as to define legitimate rhetoric solely in terms of its contribution to persuasion: “I follow a long tradition of understanding rhetoric as speech designed to persuade. If this definition leaves out a whole host of familiar rhetorical practices, including certain techniques of manipulation and deception . . . that is because I do not aim to defend those practices here—or at least, I am to defend them only insofar as they can be viewed as necessary to the politics of persuasion” (2009, 5). Garsten goes on to explain that his project of saving rhetorical persuasion is “an argument for protecting the practice of judgment” (2009, 9).⁵

In the empirical scholarship on political rhetoric, the distinction between persuasion and motivation is sometimes simply obscured by judging the success of rhetoric by the actions of the audience: the speaker is judged persuasive if she produces the desired change in the audience’s behavior. Failing to distinguish between these two modes of rhetoric, however, comes at a real cost. A speaker whose audience does not act as desired appears to have failed to persuade them—but she may well have succeeded in persuading them while failing to motivate. Conversely, an apparently successful persuader may only have motivated an audience already in agreement with her. Since the methods of changing people’s judgments and motivating them are often quite different, a failure to distinguish the two would obstruct any attempt to improve rhetorical practice or better understand its effects.

For example, the idea of persuasion—how and when it happens—looms especially large in questions of voter behavior. There is a long-standing debate between scholars of voting behavior over whether and to what extent political campaigns actually persuade voters (Jacobson 2015). But it is not clear that scholars are evaluating or measuring the same thing. Some scholars, for instance, assume persuasion produces action—so, for example, a voter is considered “persuaded” when she actually goes and votes accordingly (Della-

Vigna and Gentzkow 2010; Huber and Arceneaux 2007; Jacobson 2015). Others evaluate persuasion by the change in opinions of voters as reported by the voters themselves (Gerber et al. 2011; Hill et al. 2013; Kalla and Broockman 2018).⁶ But again, it may well be that voters were convinced by a message and yet were insufficiently motivated to actually show up to the polls. For the former group of scholars, such voters would not appear “persuaded,” but for the latter they would. It seems then that empirical scholarship, too, could benefit by distinguishing the motivational and persuasive features of rhetoric.

PROBLEM OF AKRASIA

As we have seen, it is an implicit premise of many contemporary defenses of rhetoric as persuasion that judgement, once made, invariably leads to a corresponding action. Since the purpose of persuasive speech is to produce action, if something beyond a change in judgment were necessary to that end, the rhetoric-as-persuasion approach would be incomplete on its own account. It turns out that the defenders of rhetorical persuasion are in agreement with the deliberative democrats on this issue. The deliberative democrats likewise consider the important work done once citizens have felt what Habermas calls the “unforced force of the better argument” (1996, 306; see also Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Rawls 2005). For the former, appeals to emotion, imaginative language, and concessions to previous opinions and prejudices held by the listeners are part of the acceptable methods for bringing an audience to such a judgement. The latter rule such tactics out as impermissible. Yet both accept persuasion as the end point aimed at by political communication.

The idea that action necessarily follows one’s judgment dates back at least to Plato. The rhetorical revival has taken Plato’s general attack on rhetoric in the *Gorgias* as a serious challenge to its view (Garsten 2011; Stauffer 2009; Tarnopolsky 2007, 2010). But in their attempts at refutation, the rhetorical revivalists seem to have accepted an important argument that Plato (1874) produces in another dialogue, the *Protagoras*. The discussion in the *Protagoras* in fact holds decisive implications for the question of motivational political rhetoric. There Plato’s Socrates introduces the question of akrasia. Socrates makes the following argument: “nobody does anything under the idea or conviction that some

5. Judgment itself is a somewhat ambiguous term. After all, when we refer to a court’s “judgment,” we mean both a reasoned conclusion of what ought to be done and an actual legal action that corresponds to that reasoning. But human judgment in general is, by Garsten’s own definition, a “mental activity of responding to particular situations.” This idea is linked to Aristotle’s practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and Aquinas’s prudence (2009, 7–8). It must therefore be at least conceptually distinct from the action itself. So the question remains whether the mental activity of judgment necessarily translates into the corresponding action in the world.

6. Much of this scholarship depends directly or indirectly on the work of C. I. Hovland (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953; Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield 1949). Hovland describes persuasion as taking place in three phases: exposure, reception, and acceptance. In the last phase, the subject takes a message in and allows it to influence her opinions or preferences. But this still does not seem to reach the point of motivation.

other thing would be better and is also attainable, when he might do the better. And this inferiority of man to himself is merely ignorance.” He continues: “and is not ignorance the having a false opinion and being deceived about important matters? [So] no man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil” (*Protagoras* 358d–e). This “inferiority of a man to himself” is *akrasia*.

In this passage, Plato’s Socrates raises and then dismisses the possibility of *akrasia*. According to Socrates’s argument, no one willingly acts in a way they believe is not good, and conversely, no one fails to act to do something they believe to be best.⁷ By this, Socrates does not mean that people never do things they think are morally wrong. Rather, Socrates is talking about an “all things considered” mindset, where one forms an opinion that something ought to be done in light of all the available options and choices.⁸ In other words, Socrates’s claim amounts to the following: no person ever thinks “I believe the best thing for me to do right now is *x*” but then deliberately do $\sim x$. For Socrates, all human action proceeds from judgements or opinions that we have about what ought to be done.

Although Plato does not here connect this argument to issues of rhetoric, we can draw a clear inference from it: that to act in a particular way, one need only be convinced of the goodness or rightness of it. A failure to act rightly must be derived from a wrong opinion; what we experience as *akrasia* is really nothing but ignorance—a failure to truly know the right course of action. Thus, we would expect that rhetoric as mere persuasion would suffice to achieve a political aim. Once the listeners’ judgements have been made, action ought to follow.

But Plato’s would not be the final word on the problem of *akrasia*. Most famously, Aristotle responds to Plato and raises doubts about this position: “Socrates [held] that there is no such thing as incontinence [*akrasia*]; no one . . . when he judges, acts against what he judges best—people act so only by reason of ignorance” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b; Aristotle 2014). Aristotle rightly points out that the Socratic posi-

7. A view Plato’s Socrates again professes in the *Apology* (25e–26a).

8. It is certainly true that not all goods can be achieved at once; people’s judgments and value-commitments come in groups and are given certain priorities because we are limited in time and resources. For example, if a voter believes it would be good to vote for a particular candidate but also believes that it is more important for her to run errands on election day, she is not suffering from *akrasia* if she runs those errands instead of voting. Her action does in fact align with her judgement (in this case: that voting would be good, but running errands is better). Instead, Socrates is denying the possibility of a different scenario: she does believe that it would be better all things considered (including the importance of her errands, her normative commitments to democracy, etc.) for her to vote, and yet she fails to do so.

tion “plainly contradicts the observed facts” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1146a). It is a common human experience to believe that one course of action is the right one yet to act otherwise. Aristotle describes a person in such a state as one “whom passion masters so that he does not act according to the right reason” but not so much that he loses sight of that reason altogether (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1151a). For instance, someone may choose to lie in bed in the morning instead of getting up to exercise, without believing that self-indulgence is actually the better choice.

Aristotle acknowledges that this poses a puzzle, since he agrees with Plato that it would be “absurd” to claim that the wise person (i.e., one who knows the right thing to do) could be incontinent (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1146a). Out of his investigation of the possibilities, Aristotle offers the following solution. He argues that *akrasia* arises from a conflict of beliefs or opinions in a person, particularly a conflict between a general belief one has and one’s belief about a particular instance. “When the one universal belief is present in the person deterring him from tasting, along with the other that everything sweet is pleasant, as well as the belief that this is sweet—and it is the latter that is activated in him—and when appetite happens to be present within him, one belief bids him avoid this, but appetite leads him on, since it can move each of our body parts” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1147a).

In other words, a person who eats when she knows she should abstain in fact has conflicting opinions. On the one hand, she believes she should not eat. On the other hand, she believes that tasting sweet things is good and the particular food in question is sweet. Aristotle diminishes the status of the second kind of belief, saying that it is not “real knowledge but only perceptual knowledge.” As a result, Socrates’s argument “seems to follow” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1147b).

Aristotle’s conclusion is somewhat ambiguous and is contested by scholars.⁹ Although he claims ultimately to agree with Plato’s Socrates on the whole, Aristotle’s account of *akrasia* differs from Plato’s in an important way. Like Socrates, he places the ultimate source of human action on knowledge or opinion about the good. Unlike Plato, however, he incorporates an active role to appetite, which can unite with opinions, causing a person to be “dragged about” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1147b). For Aristotle, human action proceeds from

9. It is impossible to do justice to the various interpretations that Aristotle’s position has spawned. But some of the leading accounts can be found in Bobonich and Destrée (2007), Chappell (1995), Gosling (1993), Henry (2002), Robinson (1977), Santas (1969), and Stoyles (2007). For an overview of the issue, see the section on *akrasia* in Kraut (2001). For the current purposes, it is enough that Aristotle’s position on *akrasia* is ambiguous.

some interaction—never completely specified—between reason and desire. Whether the will can play a distinct role in this relationship is uncertain in part because it is unclear whether Aristotle even has a concept of the will at all (Kenny 2003). However, Aristotle does not entertain the possibility in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that one might act contrary to one's better judgement while holding no such competing opinion. Also like Plato, Aristotle does not draw any explicit conclusions for the practice of rhetoric from his view of this issue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The problem of akrasia persists today in psychological and philosophical literature. R. M. Hare (1952) adopts the strong Platonic position that akrasia is actually impossible. But the scholarly consensus since the mid-twentieth century has generally held that akrasia is a real phenomenon (see Stroud and Tappolet 2003, 5). Donald Davidson and Amelie Rorty make especially strong philosophical arguments for its reality (Davidson 1980; Rorty 1980). Richard Holton suggests that strength of will is in fact a unique mental faculty, separate from the reasoning and desiring features of our minds (2003, 40). Support for this view comes from a psychological experiment conducted by Walter Mischel. Children were told that they could get one cookie by ringing a bell but would get two if they waited until an adult entered the room. Mischel found that though the children understood the stakes of their decision, their relative strength of will varied substantially (see Mischel 1996).

Willpower seems to vary not only across individuals but can also be enhanced or depleted within individuals. Fatigue, anxiety, and depression increase an alcoholic's risk of a relapse (Baumeister, Heatherton, and Tice 1994). Testing the willpower of dieters in an unrelated area makes them more likely to eat more (Muraven, Tice, and Baumeister 1998). Conversely, habituation can lead one to build up willpower (Muraven, Baumeister, and Tice 1999).¹⁰ This discovery is especially important for the possibility or efficacy of motivational rhetoric because it suggests that it is possible to effect the willpower of a person through external stimuli—as through an inspiring speech.

The problem of akrasia has generally remained within the sphere of philosophy and psychology and has not been systematically taken up by scholars of politics (much less has its possible connection to rhetoric). A partial exception is Philip Pettit, who does consider the problem of group akrasia (unconnected to rhetoric). However, Pettit explores the ways in which group decision making, channeled through certain

institutions, may produce inaction or action contrary to the group's purposes through the nonakratic behavior of its members (2003). Thus, Pettit does not address situations in which a group of people behaves akratically because most or all of its members are unmotivated to act according to their own judgments. As a result, the possibility that rhetoric may offer a potential solution to a certain kind of group akrasia does not enter into his exploration.

ARISTOTLE AND THE CLASSIC STATEMENT OF PERSUASIVE RHETORIC

We can begin to see how a failure to take akrasia as a serious political problem leads to a lacuna in the discussion of rhetoric. Aristotle's ambiguous position on akrasia fits with the fact that in his *Rhetoric*, he leaves the motivational function of rhetoric largely unexplored but not completely foreclosed. Aristotle's opening discussion establishes the now-familiar approach of limiting rhetoric's proper role to persuasion: "the modes of persuasion are the only true constituents of the art [of rhetoric]: everything else is merely accessory" (*Rhetoric* 1354a; Aristotle 2001). Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of rhetorical speeches: deliberative (as in political debates), forensic (concerning the guilt or innocence of an accused person), and epideictic (praise or blame, as at a funeral). As the first is the only one in which a political orator seeks to move his audience to a political action, it is the one that most relates to the current question, although forensic rhetoric is relevant here too. Aristotle argues that a successful speaker will depend on three factors to persuade the audience: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (*Rhetoric* 1356a). In the first (*ethos*), the speaker establishes his trustworthiness, so that the listeners will believe him and be inclined to follow his advice. *Pathos* refers to the successful management of the audience's emotions, defusing hostile ones, encouraging ones friendly to the speaker. Finally, *logos* concerns the logical nature of the argument.

It is in the province of *pathos* that we might expect to find Aristotle explore the motivational feature of rhetoric. However, for the most part, Aristotle remains within his established framework, according to which rhetoric is aimed at persuading and changing the judgment of listeners. He acknowledges that the ultimate purpose of this communication is to produce some action in the listeners, but he implies that this action will reliably follow the listeners' judgments. So he says that managing the emotions of the audience is important because "our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile" (*Rhetoric* 1356a). In book 2 of the *Rhetoric*, which is devoted especially to categorizing the emotions and exploring how to manipulate them, Aristotle explains that "emotions are all those feelings that

10. For the relevance of the above psychological literature to the problem of akrasia, see Holton (2003).

so change men as to affect their judgments [*krisis*]” (*Rhetoric* 1378a).¹¹ Like the advocates of rhetoric in the contemporary revival, Aristotle accepts the legitimacy of playing on the emotions of listeners but with an eye to putting them in the right mental state to make the desired change of opinion. In other words, Aristotle theorizes appeals to the emotions as prior to (and preparatory for) making a judgment—but sees little reason to appeal to them after the judgment has been made. Yet if *akrasia* is a real phenomenon, we might often need to enlist our emotions after a judgment to motivate us to act accordingly.

Aristotle thus seems to exclude the problem of *akrasia* from the art of rhetoric: “the use of persuasive speech is to lead to decisions. When we know [*ismen*] a thing and have distinguished it [*kekrikamen*], there is no further use in speaking about it” (*Rhetoric* 1391b). This, in a nutshell, expresses the fundamental (if often unmentioned) assumption of the modern rhetorical revival as well. The appeals to listeners’ emotions have as their aim only the making of a judgement about what ought to be done. Such a judgment only requires that the listeners know and distinguish the matter properly; beyond that there is no reason to speak. That listeners might accept an argument about what ought to be done yet still not act upon it (or act upon it only halfheartedly) does not enter into consideration.¹²

In discussing the conclusion of one’s speech, Aristotle does devote a single line to the fact that the speaker ought to play to the audience’s emotions there too (*Rhetoric* 1419b). Perhaps this constitutes a slight concession or openness to the potential need for motivational appeals that go beyond the listeners’ judgments. However, as with his discussion of *akrasia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the import of this line in the *Rhetoric* is not entirely clear. Aristotle refers the reader back to his more extensive discussion of the emotions in book 2, where he had claimed that the purpose of arousing such emotions was to make the listener well disposed to one’s argument (or hostile to one’s opponent’s). For this reason, it may be that he is still discussing emotions that precede judgment. Moreover, Aristotle then suggests that the speaker, after having made this last appeal to the audience’s emotions, ought to say: “I have

done. The facts are before you. I ask for your judgment” (1420b). This implies once again that Aristotle believes that the judgment has not yet taken place and would be the sufficient cause for action. Thus, with slight ambiguity, Aristotle’s vision of rhetoric aligns with his account of human psychology that places nearly all its weight on the human judgment as the source of voluntary acts. Rhetoric therefore aims at the judgment of the listeners and engages their emotions only as a means to prepare them for the desired judgment.

Since the contemporary rhetorical revival understands itself as the heir to Aristotle, it has kept his conception of rhetoric as aimed at judgment. Hence Garsten’s claim that “I follow a long tradition of understanding rhetoric as speech designed to persuade” (2009, 5). Yack’s defense of rhetoric remains fixed on determining the proper conditions of judgment and is likewise self-consciously indebted to Aristotle (2006, 419). Abizadeh also looks to Aristotle to defend rhetoric’s role in shaping judgment (2002, 267). Even those contemporary theorists who look elsewhere than to Aristotle for inspiration keep the same focus. Goodman’s compelling analysis of Burke’s rhetorical theory emphasizes the way rhetoric—especially oratory—can “provoke” audiences, but Goodman still conceives of it as provoking them “to the exercise of judgment” (2018, 270). The whole thrust of the rhetorical revival has been to explore the possibilities of rhetoric as an aid in persuasion, understood in this limited sense of transforming listeners’ judgments.¹³

Garsten and Abizadeh present very partial exceptions to the general silence on inspiring rhetoric. Abizadeh raises the problem of motivation in response to Habermasian deliberation, but he does not go on to explore or defend the motivational possibilities of rhetoric. He limits himself to “making a claim about the discursive structure of Habermas’s argument,” namely, that “by implicitly adopting the parameters of the philosophy/rhetoric binaries, [Habermas’s] structure discursively generates a conception of practical reason that is marred by impotence” (Abizadeh 2007, 462). Garsten’s narrow definition of legitimate rhetoric offered above seems to exclude as impermissible the kind of rhetoric that seeks not to persuade but to inspire or motivate. Elsewhere, however, Garsten implies that his account does not rule out the latter sort of rhetoric: “sometimes people make the case for the importance of rhetoric by pointing to the way in which inspiring speeches can spark us to noble action” (2009, 174). He argues that his own account expands the role of rhetoric beyond this “limited” view. In this light, the argument of this

11. The word *krisis* can also be rendered “decision,” which could deepen the ambiguity in Aristotle’s position by emphasizing that the ultimate aim of persuasive rhetoric is action. However, the next passage suggests that Aristotle believes such action follows automatically upon our cognitive state.

12. Mary Nichols suggests that Aristotle does recognize the importance of the motivational quality of rhetoric. She argues that the very etymology of Aristotle’s term *enthymeme* implies an inspiring quality, as its root word is the Greek word for spirit (*en-thumos*) (Nichols 1987, 667). However, Aristotle does not seem to develop this implication, and his explicit statements on the subject seem to relegate the inspiring role of rhetoric to merely placing listeners in the state of mind most receptive to the argument of the speaker, so that they will make the appropriate judgment.

13. This focus persists in the other major examples of the rhetorical revival, see Kapust and Schwarze (2016), O’Neill (2002), and Urbinati (2010).

article is not at odds with Garsten's larger project. However, Garsten does not explain how this latter concession is compatible with his far more restricted definition of acceptable rhetoric quoted above. Moreover, although Garsten implies that the case for motivational rhetoric has been made by others, he does not cite anyone who has done so. Nor does a survey of other key works of the contemporary rhetorical revival yield any examples.

Garsten is correct in implying that the motivational function of rhetoric need not contradict the persuasive one; the argument presented here is wholly compatible with a defense of rhetoric that means to persuade. But one cannot simply take the possibility of the former for granted. Not only has persistent doubt about the existence of akrasia rendered its possibility questionable, but its conflation with persuasion also creates conceptual difficulties. Furthermore, its unique purpose raises different moral questions than does a focus on persuasion. As a result, it is important to examine motivational rhetoric in theory and practice to begin to integrate it into a more comprehensive understanding of the possibilities of political rhetoric as a genre. For this reason, we ought to turn to later figures in the classical rhetorical tradition who progress beyond Aristotle's framework.

CICERO: SPEAKING "AS A COMMANDER"

Cicero has a certain advantage over Aristotle and Plato on the subject of political rhetoric (especially oratory), as he was an active—indeed master—practitioner of it.¹⁴ In many ways, Cicero follows Aristotle, at least formally, on the basics of his theory of rhetoric. He accepts the Aristotelian division of rhetoric into the three categories (political, forensic, and epideictic), and often describes the end of political rhetoric as "persuasion" (*On Invention* 1.6–1.7; Cicero 1949).

Cicero is also deeply sympathetic to the idea that right action derives from a kind of knowledge, or at least is fundamentally connected to wisdom (*On the Laws* 1.32; Cicero 1999). However, his account of vice and wrong action places only part of the blame on ignorance. We are also corrupted by our appetites, particularly by our desire for pleasure (*On the Laws* 1.47). Our actions, therefore, do not flow purely from judgements arrived at by our reason but also from the appetitive side of our psyche. Moreover, as an avowed academic skeptic, Cicero denies that we can ever have any sure knowledge (*On Duties* 2.8; Cicero 1991). As a result, even when we have been powerfully convinced of the rightness of a course

14. Indeed, the kind of motivational rhetoric discussed here seems most closely connected with political oratory—i.e., political speeches—rather than in other possible modes of rhetoric, such as the written word.

of action, we cannot be automatically relied on to act on it. Cicero thus implicitly accepts akrasia as a serious problem.¹⁵ We do not always do what we perceive to be best.

Unlike Aristotle or Plato, Cicero also connects the problem of akrasia—if again implicitly—to the function of rhetoric. He distinguishes informing people and changing their minds from prompting them to action. In *On the Orator*, Cicero's spokesman, Crassus, includes motivation as a purpose of speech along with changing minds: "[rhetoric's] object is to move men to action, or to instruct them, or to deter them, to excite them or to curb them, to fire them or to calm them down" (*On the Orator* 3.23; Cicero 1948). Crassus places the emphasis on moving listeners to act, separate from mere judging or deciding. Although he does not expand upon it, Remer seems to recognize this insight as distinguishing Cicero from Aristotle: "another reason why Cicero viewed oratory, not conversation, as suited to political debate is that oratory is directed to action in a way that conversation is not, and politics depends on action" (1999, 53).¹⁶

For Cicero, the orator's need to play upon the audience's emotions continues after he has succeeded in convincing them to make a judgement. In contrast with Aristotle, Cicero's discussion of the very ends of speeches focuses on emotions. Cicero takes great pains to illustrate the ways in which hatred or pity could be injected into an audience in the final part of the speech (*On Invention* 1.98). By discussing how to play upon the emotions here, in the last part of the speech, Cicero makes clear that he is making use of emotion not to persuade but to produce action, since the argumentative portion of the speech has already occurred. When stirring up hatred, Cicero emphasizes the importance of indignation. He explains: "all the attributes of persons and things can give occasion for any use of amplification that may be desired, or any method of arousing indignation" (*On Invention* 1.100). Likewise, the orator may inspire pity for the victim of evil deeds (*On Invention* 1.108–110).

For Cicero, these kinds of appeals to the emotions take place not only through the actual content of a speaker's words, but also through the rhythm and tone of voice in which they

15. Cicero's acknowledged source of inspiration in *De officiis* is the Stoic Chrysippus, who wrote of people suffering from akrasia: "such states are like those that are out of control (*akrateis*), as if the men had no power over themselves but were carried away, just as those who run hard are carried along and have no control over that sort of movement" (Gourinat 2007, 244).

16. Remer acknowledges that using emotions to support judgment is one way in which oratory better produces action, but he includes it as one in a list of such features of political rhetoric that make it superior to other methods of discussion, a list that also includes the rules of order in speaking, formal address, and fixed subject matter. He does not expand on the implications of the motivational function.

are uttered. While these may seem to be features of poetry or theater, Cicero insists that they are just as much a part of the political orator's art. Far more than Aristotle, Cicero dwells on the precise way by which to reflect and inspire the proper emotion: "for nature has assigned to every emotion a particular look and tone of voice and bearing of its own; and the whole of a person's frame and every look on his face and utterance of his voice are like the strings of a harp, and sound according as they are struck by each successive emotion" (*On the Orator* 3.216).¹⁷

As for cadence and rhythm, Cicero exclaims that "nothing is so akin to our minds as rhythms and tones, these rouse us up to excitement, and smooth and calm us down, and often lead us to mirth and to sorrow" (*On the Orator* 3.197). Moreover, although Cicero does his best to give extensive rules and guidance for how to achieve the proper effect in every case, he admits that there is an element of natural taste that is the final judge: "a thought may fall into a periodic form and conclusion, and when it is thus gathered up in fitting words, it ends often with a rhythmical cadence. The reason is that the ear itself judges what is complete, what is deficient" (*Brutus* 34; Cicero 1939).¹⁸ Through these methods of poetry, rhythm, and gesture, Cicero emphasizes the essential sub-rational component of effective rhetoric. In part these features of a speech will serve to facilitate the making of a judgement, but they also inspire listeners to act—in a way that no number of compelling rational arguments could.

Cicero himself had acknowledged that such speech has something in common with battlefield oratory, but it is nevertheless part of political rhetoric. In his Fourth Philippic against Antony, Cicero declares: "I will act, therefore, as commanders are in the habit of doing when their army is ready for battle, who, although they see their soldiers ready to engage, still address an exhortation to them; and in like manner I will exhort you who are already eager and burning to recover your liberty. . . . Apply yourselves then to this business, as you are doing" (11–12; Cicero 2010). Cicero does not seek to change the listeners' minds. Instead, he likens himself to a general addressing his troops—not to persuade them but to encourage them, to rouse their spirits so that they will follow through on their judgement as vigorously as possible. Here Cicero seems concerned not that his audience will fail to act at all (strong *akrasia*)—but that they will falter, or act only halfheartedly (weak *akrasia*). They obviously do not require fur-

ther reasons or persuasion to act, since they are already acting. It must simply be that their wills are not as thoroughly enlisted in the fight as their judgments are.¹⁹

AUGUSTINE: "WHEN LISTENERS HAVE TO BE MOVED RATHER THAN INSTRUCTED"

Augustine was a devoted student of Cicero and first rose to prominence as a master rhetorician before his conversion to Christianity. After his conversion, he put his rhetorical talents to use in service of the church. Although the writings of Cicero strongly implied the existence of the motivational component of rhetoric and even provided examples of rhetoric that seems to fit this purpose, they had not explicitly identified and distinguished it from persuasion. Augustine would do just that.

Augustine's Christianity may well have helped him to clarify the issue and recognize the separate role of motivation within rhetoric. After all, Christianity teaches emphatically that human sinfulness makes us susceptible of doing wrong even though we know what is right. Christians may have faith and may believe all that they are taught about right living, yet Christianity teaches that all will lapse at many points throughout their lives. In this way, Christianity places new focus on the will as a key component of human psychology—a good will being more valuable than a wise mind. Therefore, the Christian conception of sin includes something like the idea of *akrasia*. This means that persuasion alone can never ensure right action.

Augustine takes this insight seriously when he explores the practice of Christian rhetoric. Augustine says that when an orator finds a "favorable, interested, and docile" audience, one already accepting of the orator's claims and arguments, "there are other goals that then must be achieved" (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.13–14; Augustine 1996). Augustine explains what these other goals are: "if there are certain doubts of fact, the listeners require information . . . but if listeners have to be moved rather than instructed, so that they are not numb, so that they will act on

17. However, no set of rules can ever comprehensively determine what a speaker should say or how he should say it. See Kapust (2011, 97) and Gill (1988).

18. See also *Orator* 162, 183. For more on this Cicero's naturalism as it relates to such issues, see Arkes (1992).

19. The distinction between strong and weak *akrasia* is mine and not found in the original Greek philosophical discussions. But the following illustrates why I think it is reasonable to include halfhearted action in support of one's judgment as a species of *akrasia*. The use of political rhetoric in response to weak *akrasia* in this way might be analogized to the use of "pump-up" music when people are exercising. When I am running on a treadmill, I have already made a judgment that it would be best for me to exercise and that my time will be partially wasted if I do not put my full effort in. Thus, to run slowly would be weakly *akratic* in the sense that I am using the term (acting on my judgment but only halfheartedly). Still, that knowledge alone is not always sufficient to prevent me from adopting a languid pace. In these conditions, it would be implausible to claim that "Eye of the Tiger" provides any cogent arguments or reasons for me to try any harder. Yet listening to that song seems to bypass my judgment entirely and appeal directly to my affective state so that I do run faster.

the knowledge they already have . . . then one needs entreaties, rebukes, harangues” (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.15). This dangerous numbness is *akrasia*. Augustine says that the speakers’ efforts will be in vain if the listener is persuaded (*persuadetur*) but does not act, clearly implying that it is truly possible for someone to be convinced of an argument and yet still not act accordingly (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.79). In fact, Augustine says this motivational tactic is needed not only for the particularly vicious or sinful but even for people of good character, who already know what they ought to do but require added impetus: “the effect of eloquence on a good listener is not so much to instruct through diligent discussion but inflame by speaking ardently” (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.59).

From these passages, we can see Augustine laying out explicitly the argument that the speaker’s task is not done, just because the audience has been persuaded. Motivating listeners, inspiring them with the necessary will to carry out their reasoned judgment, is a separate task. Augustine sums up this view quite simply: “there are certain other things in the grand manner of eloquence which can be done to move the minds of listeners, not so that they know what they must do but to make them do what they already know they ought to do” (*De Doctrina Christiana* 4.75, emphasis added). Augustine connects the motivational function of rhetoric to the very feature of human psychology that Holton suggests may be responsible for curbing *akrasia*: the will. A speaker sometimes needs to compel an audience to act according to an already-made judgment.

NORMATIVE STAKES OF MOTIVATIONAL RHETORIC

Whereas Plato (and possibly Aristotle) seemed to deny the possibility of this kind of motivational rhetoric, later critics of Roman republican-style politics accepted its possibility but vehemently denied its permissibility. Hobbes, especially, condemned this sort of speaking as the source of many seditions. According to Hobbes ([1642] 1998), eloquence is divided into two modes: deliberative logic accompanied by pleasing language, and rhetorical appeals to the passions. He writes: “each hath its use, that in deliberations, this in exhortation, for that is never disjoined from wisdom, this almost ever” (*De Cive* 12.12). Indeed, listening to the stump speeches of modern political candidates, who often enthusiastically play to the passions and prejudices of their audience—not, as in persuasive rhetoric, to prepare their audience to make a judgement, but simply to “rile them up”—one might be inclined to agree with Hobbes that this sort of rhetoric serves only to turn “auditors out of fools and into madmen” (*De Cive* 12.12).

As a result, the question of motivational rhetoric necessarily includes not only its identification but its normative value. There are then two issues at stake in considering the

place of motivational rhetoric: its possibility and its goodness. Both our own psychological experience and contemporary research seem to confirm that *akrasia* is a real phenomenon. Therefore, speech aimed at action does often have to do more than merely persuade; it must motivate. Without recourse to this distinction, it is difficult to make sense of many kinds of public speech.

Perhaps for this reason, the red-meat style of political speech has not been the subject of much sustained scholarly attention. Of those who have examined it, there has been considerable difficulty in making sense of its function. Without using Aristotle’s terminology, Hayes (2005) implies that such speeches may focus on the *ethos* element of deliberative rhetoric, arguing that politicians attempt to signal that they possess the virtues that voters are looking for. While that may explain some such speeches, many others—especially those that focus on denigrating opponents and stirring listeners’ indignation—do not seem to fit this model. However, such speeches fit well within the framework of motivational rhetoric: the speakers address their own supporters in order to motivate them to actually act. Distinguishing the motivational function of rhetoric from the persuasive one thus offers greater conceptual clarity about how and why we talk to each other in political life.²⁰

The main purpose of this article has been to establish the conceptual basis for recognizing motivational rhetoric as a distinct phenomenon. But I also want to open the discussion of the normative issues raised by the motivational component of rhetoric, which differ at least in part from those of persuasion. Like persuasion, the status of motivational rhetoric depends in part on the cause for which it is deployed. Certainly speech which inspires listeners to yield follow through on cruel, unjust, or imprudent judgments is indefensible.²¹

20. Of course, it may still be unclear to a speaker which is called for in a given circumstance. To return to an example from above: a supporter of a particular candidate who fails to vote for that candidate on election day may be *akratic*. But she may simply have a reasoned belief that assigns a relatively low priority to voting. In the latter circumstance, persuasive rhetoric of the sort discussed by Aristotle and Garsten is required to persuade the voter to change her judgement about what she ought to do, since it is her judgment (that voting would be good but running errands is better) that is governing her action. However, if she is so persuaded and yet still does not vote, then the motivational appeals of rhetoric become necessary to get her to follow through.

21. As Garsten notes, our moral evaluation of rhetoric cannot be entirely disentangled from the ends to which it is put and the moral commitments of the speaker (2009, 118–49). So we can say that it would be obviously wrong to deploy motivational rhetoric to encourage an apathetic racist to support his prejudiced beliefs and judgments with corresponding action. A more interesting question is whether it might be good for a speaker to deliberately cultivate *akrasia* in a racist listener. I think we might say “yes” if the circumstances

One might also ask why it should ever be a good thing that a listener's behavior should change on the basis of the rhythm or modulation of a speaker's voice. Here again, the defense of persuasive rhetoric seems also to apply: it might be preferable for human beings to act only on the rational bases of facts and argument, but we simply do not. Therefore, a speaker who wishes to bring about some change in her listeners must meet them where they are and address them as their psychology actually works, not as she might prefer it to work (Garsten 2009, 3).

That said, motivational rhetoric is probably far less prone to certain abuses that afflict persuasive rhetoric. Because one is addressing people whose judgement about the goodness or prudence or necessity of a course of action is already made, one stands in far less danger of misleading people or manipulating them into doing things contrary to their own values. There is, of course, an inegalitarian element to such rhetoric, in that the audience does not have the same influence on the speaker as the speaker does on the audience. But that feature is embedded in all unidirectional political communication. At least in motivational rhetoric, properly understood, listeners are left with whatever opinions they already held.

But if motivational rhetoric avoids the pitfall of deception/manipulation that plagues persuasion, it is subject to special dangers of its own. Because the motivational aspect of rhetoric (insofar as it is distinct from persuasion) does not deal in explicit arguments or reasons for acting (but rather in suggestion, implication, voice modulation, etc.), it can be an extremely imprecise tool. Unless the speaker is very careful, the energized affective state cultivated in an audience may apply itself to other courses of action than the one intended by the speaker. For instance, a candidate for office may want to make sure that those who believe they should vote for her actually turn out to do so on election day. As a result, in addition to persuasive rhetorical appeals to their judgement that voting for her is good, she might also deliberately stoke feelings of camaraderie or even fanatical attachment, such that her supporters not only feel motivated to vote for her, but also to assault supporters of a rival candidate. Or a candidate might choose to reinforce the considered judgments of his supporters with such anxiety about his opponent, that they vote for him but also refuse to accept the outcome of the election when he loses. This consideration is likely to be missed if one only thinks of rhetoric as a species of persuasion. Under that framework, one would only consider what judgment the listeners

give the speaker little hope of actually changing the racist's considered judgment. But this is certainly an area where further discussion of the ethics of motivational (or unmotivational) speech merit further examination.

have adopted; and if the new judgment is the right one, the advocates of persuasion have nothing further to say. The persuasion model does not address the problem of the side-effects of all-too-forcefully affecting an audience.

We need not look far to see that these are not idle concerns.²² The red-meat style of political harangue seems especially prone to producing such ill effects. I doubt that there could ever be a comprehensive and authoritative rule by which we could fairly determine how much motivation is appropriate to encourage in an audience, but there clearly is such a thing as too much.²³ Some element of Aristotle's practical wisdom seems indispensable for judging in particular circumstances.

If the conceptual difference I propose between the persuasive and motivational functions of rhetoric holds, there is considerable work to do simply in distinguishing their separate instances and disentangling their effects. Our view of the normative issues surrounding such rhetoric, which I have only begun to sketch here, may develop as we gain a more sophisticated understanding of what it is and how it works. However, for all of the potential dangers inherent in such rhetoric, I believe it also offers at least one potential benefit unique to it among other species of political communication. If it truly is possible to be "weaker than oneself" (*Protagoras* 358c), then *akrasia* is a limitation of autonomy. Our individual and collective self-rule is undermined by our occasional inability to act in accordance with our judgments, especially when the course we know is best might be costly or dangerous. Speech that enables listeners to overcome themselves, to act in whatever way they themselves already believe to be right, is in that sense a means of augmenting and facilitating autonomy. Such appeals may fail, of course, or lead listeners to follow their worst passions and prejudices. But at its best, motivational rhetoric provides suprarational support for the "better angels of our nature" (Lincoln [1861] 2012).

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22. Once again, the same problems afflict nonpolitical motivational rhetoric and are perhaps more clearly perceived there. For instance, very few people at a sporting event change their minds about which team they want to win. So we can safely assume that nearly all appeals to enliven hometown fans at a sporting event work in the motivational rather than persuasive register. This is unobjectionable so long as it motivates the crowd to cheer when appropriate, but it becomes dangerous when it prompts fans of one team to assault those of another.

23. In contrast, if one's cause is just or prudent, there seems no corresponding danger of overpersuading listeners.

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