

Persuasion, Rhetoric and Authority

Luca Maria Scarantino

Because an appeal makes logical sense,
that is no guarantee that it will work.
William Bernbach

In *Ethics and Language* (1944), Charles Stevenson refers to the case of a writer wishing to make known within a society the customs and rights of a minority group living in the midst of that same society. A scientific, rationally based description of their ways of living would not be very effective, wrote Stevenson, given that 'their way of living is one with which most people are totally unfamiliar' (Stevenson, 1994: 144). The writer in question therefore chose to write a 'didactic novel'. A work of fiction, then, in which the world of this group could be reconstituted in such a way that the novel's readers could become involved with this little-known environment, identifying with the different characters and reliving them, to a certain degree, within their own universe. This form of communication can prove particularly effective because it proceeds via a process of identification between reader and text, which Stevenson characterizes by the German term *Einfühlung* – identification or affective participation.

The source group that inspired Stevenson's example is not known for certain. But whether this story is true or not is of no real importance for us. What is interesting is how belief is established in an audience: the fact that, to gain acceptance of a set of propositions that are scientifically or rationally true one has to have recourse to mechanisms other than those of rational analysis. These mechanisms are of their nature emotional and constitute the base principles that underpin the process of persuasion.¹ In order to study these emotional processes we must therefore analyse the dynamic that links belief and emotion, and strive to understand how these two aspects strengthen or weaken assent to a belief, even when this latter is open to conclusive rational demonstration.

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Persuasion and conviction

Behind the dynamic between emotion and belief there obviously lies the linkage between *persuasion* and *conviction*, something 'as ancient as our civilisation and which can be traced back to the classical Greek distinction between $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ and $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ ' (Preti, 1968: 148) – as set out by the Italian philosopher Giulio Preti, who revisited this distinction and formalized it in the 1960s. Let us consider his approach. Preti distinguishes, on the one hand, 'a *persuasive* discourse, which is situated within a pragmatic, hence an emotional, values-based frame of reference (the affective dimension) and which aims to produce an *assent* from among those who are engaged by the discourse' (Preti, 1968: 150). This discourse 'is always addressed to an audience which is limited and anthropologically specific, whether through sex, age, culture, prior certitudes etc.' (p. 203): its validity is linked 'to the emotions, feelings and prior opinions of this group' (p. 204). On the other hand, 'a *probative* and *demonstrative* discourse, which aims at the truth, is not immediately pragmatic and is not value-based but *fact-based*' (p. 150). This second discourse-type addresses an audience that is 'ideally non-specific, among whom (ideally) no prior opinions may be presupposed and which admits only that which is necessarily evident, whether this be the apodeictic evidence of logic and mathematics or else the evidence provided by the experience of pure perception, $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\omicron\chi\eta$ being made up of feelings and values' (p. 204).

The distinction between sure belief, or conviction, and persuasion is thus thematized out of the concept of *audience*. Originally introduced by Aristotle and taken up by Chaïm Perelman in the second half of the 20th century, this concept, finally formalized by Preti, is constitutive of the persuasive process in that 'the basic situation in which all discursive acts are grounded can be represented as that of a speaker before an audience' (Preti, 1968: 156–7). Now, the more *heterogeneous* (hence broader) the audience, the more the discourse must draw abstractions from its particular determined content. Otherwise expressed, the degree of rationality of a discourse can be measured by the degree of heterogeneity of the audience to which it is addressed:

an essential difference between the persuasive discourse, whose object is to enhance persuasion, and the discourse aimed at producing conviction – in brief, between rhetorical and logical discourse – is to be found in the quality of the audience. Or better, in a certain sense, in the quantity of this audience. Rhetorical discourse addresses itself to a precise and concrete audience which is always, by its very nature, *partial*. Logical discourse aims at a general, a-temporal and a-spatial audience, in other words, one that is *universal*. (Preti, 1968: 157)

This passage shows that the concept of universal audience does not designate a concrete entity. It relates rather to a functional abstraction, a construction of the orator who calibrates his discourse on this ideal public or, in Perelman's terms, one which is *imaginary*.² The discourse addressing a universal audience does not therefore rest upon a simple *generalization* of its content, which would lead it to become vacuous, to lose any real grasp on experience and so become hollow. The rationality of probative, or logical, discourse proceeds rather from a relative indifference to its

content. Its intention is represented more by the linkage of arguments than by a set of determined theses: it is, so to speak, a model for the shaping of those discourses which are concrete. Formal purification is a gage of validity for the discourse: whereas 'prejudices or traditional opinions, passions, sentiments, emotions and personal experiences are extremely variable' (Preti, 1968: 158), the formal structures of knowledge persist throughout historical duration. This type of discourse, as will be subsequently seen, does not have the object of procuring an action: it aims rather at bringing the audience to the point of recognizing the validity of a certain number of ideas which will subsequently allow it to take practical decisions. It does not have as primary objective the defence of a particular conclusion. One therefore understands that the discourse addressed to the universal audience is at once 'the richest in strictly logical arguments and in factual validations' and 'the poorest in appeals to the sentiment, in value indicators, in arguments founded on authority and *consensus*' (p. 158). Its validity is independent of the particular subjective nature of the audience to which it is addressed. It proceeds from a 'maximum possible abstraction of the principal sources of opinion and of diversity of opinions: authority, tradition (custom), feelings and emotions and, as a consequence, the type of culture, the historical period, the nation, the social group and so on' (p. 160).³

Viewed thus, the criteria of truth can no longer be limited to the *consensus* assented to within a particular group, they constrain a universal recognition:

To this objective universality, this validation process, the Greeks gave the name of *ἀνάγκη*, or 'necessity'; . . . But in its original sense, as still today in the minds of certain analysts of contemporary language, this term refers to a sort of 'constraint', to something so inescapably evident that no human being of sound reasoning and good faith could deny this evidence. (Preti, 1968: 159)

And furthermore, 'in the rational mode of argumentation one cannot think that what is said is valid for all (that is, for all those who are aware of the logical and factual presuppositions of the discourse): if one is aware of possible reasons for valid objection on the part of anyone, the discourse will *ipso facto* be to some extent modified' (Preti, 1968: 161).

The dynamic between the factual and the normative

When putting a proposition to a universal audience, one seeks to elicit an assent to that proposition by way of a category mediation: the acceptance of a belief. One then speaks of *rational persuasion*. Space precludes pausing to examine the technical processes by which the logical and argumentative structure of rational persuasion is constructed (cf. Stevenson, 1944; Preti, 1957, 2002; Scarantino, 2004). Suffice to note that a factual observation never implies a normative consequence, unless this is accompanied by premises that are norm- or value-related. From the point of view of strict logic, statements like 'The President of the Republic's term is five years', 'It is raining' or 'Fortissimi sunt Belgae' have no necessary practical consequence: they are simply capable of being verified or refuted. On the other hand, a normative propo-

sition is in itself neither true nor false: there is nothing to verify in the instruction to 'come here!' There consequently exists a reciprocal functional autonomy between theoretical knowledge and value judgement: the norm that unifies fact reposes in the final instance on a value judgement that cannot be reduced to the content of these facts. Normative intentionality, like any functional intentionality, is totally autonomous and represents a formal a priori.

This functional articulation defines the logical structure of persuasive statements. In practical experience, nevertheless, there is always a coexistence between rational elements and emotional elements. It is indeed fair to say that most factual observations already encompass value connotations. No real discourse can be either purely rational or purely emotional: any distinction between logical and rhetorical discourses is misleading wherever it is considered as other than a purely functional abstraction. Even if 'in the scientific abstraction there occurs an *ἐποχή* of the emotional moment, an isolation of the moment of pure representativity', in the concrete psychological experience 'perception and emotion are indissociable' (Preti, 1968: 201). As Freud would say, they are *legierte*. The synthetic nature of the common language brings it about that, in its statements, factual, values-related and prescriptive levels are all interlocked one with another. If, at the moment I am about to go out, someone points out to me that it is raining, it is so that I should take my umbrella – the corresponding statement therefore contains both an evaluation ('getting wet isn't good for you') and an implicit prescriptive indicator ('take your umbrella').⁴ This interlinking between the factual and the normative has been formalized by Stevenson through 'persuasive definitions' that represent the technical mechanism which allows apophatic and value judgements to be formally associated together. Such definitions permit both the description of something and the affirmation of its value: 'Persuasive definitions', explains Stevenson, 'are often recognizable from the words "real" or "true" employed in a metaphorical way' (Stevenson, 1944: 213). They represent 'an effort to secure, by this interplay between emotive and descriptive meaning, a redirection of people's attitudes' (p. 210). The persuasive definition establishes a link between a fact A and a term B (which makes it similar to all other definitions), but its specific function resides in the fact that this term B is accompanied by a value-associated attribute, or, in a way that is even deeper and more immediate, it carries an inherent axiological charge: in other words, it is associated with an emotion.⁵ A passage from Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* allows Stevenson to illustrate the reach of his definitions, and us to realize that the inscription *Arbeit macht frei* functioned as a persuasive definition:

But if you want to be free, you've got to be a prisoner. It's the condition of freedom – true freedom.

True freedom!, Anthony repeated in a parody of the clerical voice. I always love that kind of argument. The contrary of a thing isn't the contrary; oh dear me, no! It's the thing itself, but as it *truly* is.

...

What's in a name?, Anthony went on. The answer is, practically everything, if the name's a good one. Freedom's a marvellous name. That's why you're so anxious to make use of it. You think that, if you call imprisonment true freedom, people will be attracted to the

prison. And the worst of it is you're quite right. The name counts more with most people than the thing. They'll follow the man who repeats it most often, and in the loudest voice. And of course, 'True Freedom' is actually a better name than freedom *tout court*.

(Huxley, 1959: 78–9)

Persuasive definitions establish both the semantic domain and the emotional reach of the terms. As such, they represent constituent principles of moral discourse and, like all such constituent principles, contain an a priori element (that is conventional) and a pragmatic element (in this instance, emotional attitudes). If it is true that no fact immediately implies a prescription, it is also true that every norm also reposes on elements of knowledge: 'even if the moment that is properly speaking value-associated (the "attitude") does not lend itself entirely to reduction to the cognitive moment (the "belief"), it is nevertheless certain that the complex, motivated value judgement incorporates a cognitive element which plays an essential part' (Preti, 1968: 215). In other words, the assent we lend to value judgements (hence our preparedness to act upon prescriptive statements) is also a function of the validity of the factual statements contained within these value judgements (or prescriptive injunctions). Any value judgement about witches loses its sense from the moment that one ceases to believe in the existence of witches.

A whole passage of Preti (1968) is devoted to discussing Husserl's theory of axiological objects as *νοήματα* of the second degree and 'founded' on theoretical objects ('the founding *νόημα* is theoretical, cognitive': p. 220). As such, values inherit the intentional charge which is the property of epistemic statements: they are projected into the praxis and 'offer themselves to the will as something that should be realized' (p. 221). Normative intentionality, like all legalizatory functionality, is indissoluble from the operational reach of empirical statements. The moral structures of action are therefore, in the final instance, a function of the epistemic structures of validation of experience. Intersubjectivity or objectivity is always based on an epistemic mechanism for the elaboration of experience.

All validation of experience is a universalization of the immediate, and historically determined, perceptual experience of the moment, through which our 'natural' relation with the world is expressed. But the modalities of this validation implicitly anticipate diverse pragmatic effects. It is a functional, not metaphysical, constitution of objectivities that we look to in order to assemble the practical modalities of persuasion by which to seek the free and rational assent of the individual. Only a formal and historically determined construction of the transcendental subject of knowledge (the formal nexus of perceptual, conceptual and intentional a priori notions) allows the building of a free, dialogic and open interaction. When the subject remains fixed in a substantial hypostasis, when he is attributed an identity that is non-subjective, the opening up of meaning to universality becomes blocked in favour of certain particular determinations, which impose their particular law as the universal law of experience. To this authoritarian attitude, which properly defines the epistemic roots of violence, there stands opposed the formal universality of a system of constantly evolving intentionalities. In releasing the intuitive level from its determinateness through a system of transcendental ideas, reason delivers experience from its embeddedness in a substantial finitude which screens out interaction

with other finitudes. This formal locus for the exchange and elaboration of experience allows different individual intuitions to interact and to integrate into the ongoing development of a culture and society. It is the moment of the *public formation of meaning*, the moment at which is also formed the epistemic confidence necessary for any social linkage. The lived experience is transposed on to a transcendental plane where it can undergo elaboration within the common sphere and engender a communicational enactment which privileges 'discussion over dogma, consultation over coercion, persuasion over violence' (Preti, 2002: 117–18).

The moral-persuasive discourse thus acquires, in the same way as any other discourse, a rational universality. Persuasion embeds an emotional state or drive within a rational moral system. In this way they are detached from their particular determination and are transformed into particular cases of a more general norm, which become the norm of action:

I may experience no repugnance at all before the idea of killing a particular individual: but can I accept the idea of being a murderer? Equally I may desire that the police arrest and imprison all drunkards; but can I accept that the police should have the right to involve themselves with the predilections of private persons in line with a compulsory moral criterion? (Preti, 1957: 227)

Only persuasion which embeds a series of perceptive and emotional determinations within a more general normative fabric may be considered as being rational. It is not limited to acting upon a particular set of contents or emotional states, but transposes them within a categorical network and transforms them into meanings belonging to the public space of intersubjectivity. Such is precisely the sense of the *ἀκριβολογία* 'rigorous discourse': against sophist rhetoric, which 'seeks to persuade by means of suggestive and emotional association . . .'; Socrates sets up in opposition to this rhetorical *ψυχαγωγία* the notion of rational persuasion which is the property of the dialectic' (Preti, 2002: 102–3).

Beliefs versus action

The categorial nature of conviction does not of itself generate immediate effects, either direct or indirect, with respect to actions: logical argumentation aimed at convincing 'does not bear directly on actions, it bears on "beliefs": these too are attitudes, but of a second level of intentionality, aimed at influencing other attitudes, not actions directly' (Preti, 1968: 149). The universality inherent in any categorial assertion opens an unlimited palette of possible actions. 'A look at a barometer or a hygrometer [wrote Preti] can *convince* me that it will rain tomorrow, whether I am happy about that or not: but, *in itself*, this conviction does not persuade me of anything' (pp. 149–50). For action to be generated, it needs something more than just a simple epistemic belief. If I propose to take a girlfriend to the beach, it is not enough just explaining to her that the summer is going to be sweltering hot, for she may just as easily decide to go off to the mountains. I would do better to show her a promotional film that gives her the *desire* to go to the beach: the persuasive techniques of

advertising are always likely to win out over the choices of 'reason'.

The choice to act appeals to an extra-logical dimension, it demands 'the total engagement of the whole man across a whole range of purposes and values . . . Persuasion requires *feelings, value-related attitudes*, which rational conviction does not require' (Preti, 1968: 149). Following a tradition that goes back at least as far as Rousseau, and within which the works of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are inscribed, in the case of eliciting action persuasion wins out over conviction 'conviction is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for action. There can be action, even conscious action, without conviction; whereas a conviction (in the sense we have attributed to it) does not necessarily lead to action' (p. 149).

There exists therefore a field of the persuasive discourse that rests directly on *emotional attitudes*, on emotions which apply only to a determined situation, or to a relatively limited range of possible situations. Contrary to the categorial structures of rationality, these emotional attitudes give rise to specific behaviours. They bring about a particular action, or a limited series of actions. When the persuasive message becomes entirely associated with this emotional field, short-circuiting the level of belief, it changes from being rational into being manipulative. It then enters the domain of *rhetoric*. It no longer aims at examining the conditions for possible behaviours, but rather becomes focused on particular attitudes and behaviours. In a certain sense one may speak of a *situated* persuasion, where the link between message and action becomes emotional and pragmatic: its aim is to directly arouse in the person addressed or in the public 'certain *attitudes*, that is to say, certain *readinesses to behave* in a particular manner, for example to buy or not to buy a certain product, to vote or not for a particular electoral list or candidate, to get married or not, and so on' (Preti, 1968: 149). This particular characteristic of persuasion is apparent in certain of today's educational practices, which tend towards regulating socially dangerous behaviours through processes of emotional conditioning. The proliferation of driver-education courses where young drivers are taken to visit rehabilitation centres for road accident victims is a good example of such rhetorical-emotional discourse.

Authority and conformism

Rhetoric is thus borne upon the emotional dynamic which comes into play in the formation of assent. As a logic of the 'preferable' or a 'logic of value judgements' it is a theory of the conditions leading to assent rather than a theory of the valid forms of discourse.⁶ It differs from logic, wrote Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1952: 18), 'by the fact that it is concerned not with abstract truth, whether categorial or hypothetical, but with adherence. Its aim is to produce or increase the adherence of a particular audience to certain theses. Its point of departure will be the adherence of that same audience to other theses'. That granted, in what manner may such an adherence admit a degree of *intensity*? Such can only be emotional, for it is difficult to see how one might evoke degrees of assent in relation to a logical-rational truth: conviction, insofar as it is founded on truth, responds to an apophatic T/F (True/False) logic. Contrary to what happens in logic, where the argumentation is by nature compelling and that therefore 'once a proposition is proved, all other

proofs become superfluous', in rhetoric 'since the argumentation is not of necessity compelling . . . there is no limit as to how many arguments might be usefully accumulated and one cannot say in advance which proofs will be sufficient to generate adherence' (p. 29). In rhetorical-persuasive discourse, the validity of proofs is determined almost on an à la carte basis, since 'demanding particular arguments equates to indicating the conditions for one's adherence' (p. 207).⁷ A previously accepted thesis may be knocked off balance by other theses that are accepted 'more intensely' without there being the slightest contradiction between them. At the very most one might lend a modal structure to rhetorical argumentation, articulated around different levels of necessity. But Perelman discards the option 'which would consist of making rhetorical argumentation a logic of the probable' (p. 33) and affirms the irreducibility of rhetoric to any form of T/F logic.

Contemporary cultural sociology, starting with Karl Mannheim, has given prominence to the eminent role played by the emotions and feelings in the formation of the social nexus. All generation theory, for example, rests on the concept of 'emotional community'. In this regard it is possible to speak of an 'emotional foundation' of the social, to all events a reciprocal and permanent conditioning between emotivity and socio-cultural belonging. Preti underlines the weight of this tradition of thought by unhesitatingly affirming that rhetorical discourse

is a type of discourse that is not simply and not principally communicative in the sense of the communication of knowledge, but rather, I would say, a discourse of community, it is a way of being in concrete and personal form, a 'participation'. (Preti, 1968:169)

In this discourse, assent is no longer anchored within a free and rational individual discernment, but proceeds out of conditioning exercised by a specific concrete human group. This conditioning is first and foremost epistemic. The criterion of truth is no longer immanent within the discourse, it proceeds from the *auctoritas* of the group. The transactional and open association between the individual and the world is substituted by the exclusive and finite horizon of the mass-group. The criterion of operational verifiability is replaced by the criterion of acceptability within a particular *ethos*. In other terms, the discourse

is directed towards a psychologically concrete, and hence limited, humanity. Such a discourse evolves within the concrete circumstance of a social interpersonality, rather than in the ideal domain of a universal intersubjectivity or objectivity. (Preti, 1968: 166)

The strength of that authority is thus the strength of the *δόξα*, which is 'first and foremost, the *consensus gentium*, the opinion of society and of one's neighbour' (Preti, 1968: 172). Assent becomes an instrument of social positioning. It draws its legitimacy from the recognition granted to it by a concrete social group. This authority does not imperatively have the face of an individual or of an Inquisitor, it derives in the first place from the powerfully conformist conditioning of custom and tradition, from an inherent and 'invisible' controlling mechanism at the heart of a social group. Such a culture 'subordinates the moment of pure awareness beneath the socially concrete, making it subject to the human realm of values that are current within a

society' (p. 202). Thus may explain the ambiguous sense of the paradox which, though a factor of progress within the domain of scientific knowledge, becomes a factor of disturbance within systems of group-accepted opinion (and where, still further, its effects may vary according to the group within which it is practised: rejection in the case of a closed or repressive society, where the 'eccentric individual' is imprisoned, caricatured or reduced to the status of the 'village idiot', appreciation in a libertarian society which celebrates itself in witty *agudezas* satire or the *mot d'esprit*).

This, then, indicates the presence of an ethical system which 'by its very nature rooted in social and customary behaviour, relates of necessity to the social group' (Preti, 1968: 206) and 'is *structurally* related to this group', a social behaviour which is 'always closed within a social group and linked to the *true way of life* of this group' (p. 206). This moment of persuasion grounded in emotion is, furthermore, not necessarily conscious. The authoritarian principle possesses an epistemic autonomy which is perpetuated through deeply-embedded 'natural' beliefs transmitted by a tradition: *hypothesis anguli acuti est absolute falsa quia repugnans naturae lineae rectae* [the hypothesis of the acute angle is absolutely false because repugnant to the nature of the straight line] is the eminently culturally-shaped formula by which Father Saccheri refused the logical consistency of the non-Euclidian hypothesis. Equally related to this dominant social influence is the *laxist* attitude, which is not only a weakness of the individual will, but a subordination of that will to prevailing custom.

The 'oratorical drama' in the society of the image

In the pages of the *Art of Thinking* of the Jansenist Port-Royal community, and in John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, this power of conformism has been thematized under the term 'sophism of authority' and, in Locke, through the distinction between arguments *ad verecundiam*, *ad ignorantiam* and *ad hominem*. Preti makes use of this to show that, in a consensual context, 'the "best" are so identified within a concrete human context and thanks to the consideration granted them by the *consensus*. Their "universal" personal quality, so to speak, lends them "authority", coming from the reputation which they enjoy and, very often (if they are alive) the social position that they occupy . . . They represent the "official" opinion: whence the condemnation directed at those who would presume to counterpose their own *private* convictions against that authority' (Preti, 1968: 172–3). The false reasoning (sophism) of authority depends 'on the esteem (positive or negative) accorded to persons who express an opinion, even in matters where that esteem (or negative esteem), founded on other motives, should not have any relevance' (p. 164). The criteria for extending such prestige are eminently social. They proceed from a granting of confidence stemming from 'a concrete human situation (hence, in the final analysis, emotional)' (p. 164), by which the interlocutor is judged on the basis of his capacity to impose himself within the dynamic of social exchanges. The identification mechanism described by Stevenson (*Einfühlung*) is at work in the social dynamic when we assess someone as being capable of realizing or defending values to which we attribute high priority. Once again, it is a matter of a hierarchy of

values, where he or she who appears capable of ensuring the realization of certain key essential values is conceded power over the whole of the axiological domain. In summary this amounts to a renunciation of personal responsibility, partly proceeding from an individual's lack of confidence in him- or herself and in his or her capacity to engage in the process of social exchange (epistemic weakness), but also affirming, as in the case of resentment, the primacy of group belonging over individual free initiative. Put briefly, the self-closure of individual identity gives rise necessarily to social interaction of an authoritarian type. On the scale of a whole society, this 'universal' attribution of prestige takes the extreme form of a *Gefolgschaft*, a state of follower-dom, involving an emotional transfer on to the figure of the leader which confers on the latter the status of *symbolic incarnation* of a whole group. Totalitarianism is not an accident of history, but the necessary consequence of a substantialization of the transcendental subject of knowledge.

Under this configuration, *credibility* proceeds from criteria external to the discourse, following the model devised by Locke, and consists of 'causing statements to resound with the esteem, values and authority enjoyed by those who utter them' (Prete, 1968: 164). Inversely (by employing *ad ignorantiam* and *ad hominem* arguments) an interlocutor on the edge of the discourse will not be taken seriously, even if his propositions are, in themselves, perfectly reasonable, for the effectiveness of persuasion proceeds 'from the quality of the persons intervening in the oratorical drama' (p. 167). The social nature of this emotional (rhetorical) discourse is also found in the mode by which epideictic or demonstrative discourse functions, this being one of the three oratorical forms out of which Aristotle constructed his *Rhetoric*. In this form of discourse, the audience 'judges on the ability of the speaker', it is thus in the role of 'spectator [*θεωρός*]' (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I, III [1358b], 2–3). Effectively the spectator accomplishes an *aesthetic*, hence emotional, function, which is therefore also social and linked to social power structures. In the epideictic form of discourse, wrote Aristotle, 'the speech is put together with reference to the spectator as if he were a judge' (*Rhetoric*, II, XVIII [1391b], 1). Prete appears to perceive this aesthetic element of the non-rational discourse: he declares that the rational logic leading towards conviction is replaced by persuasion through images or imitation, where argumentation unfolds 'in the form of the plastic example, where the dialectic of concepts is transformed into the drama of characters'⁸ (Prete, 1968: 176). However, the placing of an argument within a dramatic frame is not limited simply to generating the *Einfühlung* evoked by Stevenson. The reduction of the actants of a dialogue to the status of characters within an oratorical drama equates to identifying them with one or other of their particular determinations, thus fixing them into a public *image* which crystallizes the role attributed to them within a closed social structure. Thus, the exchange is no longer a constituent of personal identity but becomes simply a power dynamic. Why is the eminent scientist brought together with the charlatan in the rhetorical pastiche of a talk show? The ability to impose one's superiority in lively media debates brings about an attribution of confidence within a group where social positioning takes precedence over a system of shared intentionalities. In Madame Verdurin's little clan, the meek Saniette has no chance at all of being heard.

This contamination between rational judgement and socio-emotional judgement as a cognitive function of a social group has been analysed by Eugène Dupréel (1949)

through the concept of 'confused thought'. This latter can be interpreted as a mingling or contamination between two different logics: a scientific logic of (objective) rational analysis of experience and a social logic of acceptance of what makes up part of the ethic of a group and is recognized as such. In the analysis of 'personal merit', a typical example of a 'confused' notion, it is possible to isolate on the one hand a component relating to *intention*, which corresponds to the capabilities of the subject, and on the other hand a component relating to *success* (the *results obtained*) which arises out of social recognition. In the latter case, merit may be attributed in a way that is completely independent of the real ability of the subject to attain certain objectives, and emerges rather from a convergence with the presumed common judgement, with the 'image' of what is 'successful'. That is the fateful alternative between good generals and lucky generals, but that also encapsulates all the complexity of the dynamic between credibility and acts or, as Preti puts it in terms of moral philosophy, the 'eminently problematic nature of the very notion of the moral person, such as defined for example by Max Scheler, among others: the moral person is a unitary centre of acts, from which she/he draws his/her recognized set of qualities, but which acts are at the same time qualified by the intrinsic quality of the person' (Preti, 1968: 168).

The age of the masses: propaganda and resentment

It is through lending flattery to these conditionings that the persuasive discourse degenerates into the discourse of propaganda. Without being of a nature to absolutely impose itself, the propaganda discourse is always manipulatory, marked by 'immediate emotive resonances' but which is 'not logically organized into a discourse universe of rational type' (Preti, 1957: 229), and which does not aim 'to render more rational, more thoughtful and more capable of acting in a firm and coherent manner those to whom it is directed: it draws its support from the aspects of mental immaturity of its victims themselves and tends, through the crushing dynamic of mass emotion, to impede the emergence of any independent critical and rational reflection' (p. 229). It therefore aims at achieving 'immediate practical goals, making use of mass emotion in such a way that it does not appeal to habits of verification and deduction, but rather to those immediate associations elicited between certain signs and certain behaviours' (p. 246). This mode of functioning through 'immediate resonances' had eventually been the object of an analysis by Charles Morris (1946: 149), for whom the propaganda discourse was such that 'the speaker changes the denotation of certain common terms while continuing to use the existing appraisive and prescriptive features of their signification'. In other words, one or more connotations of a concept are applied to other concepts to which the first concept is linked, but with which it does not in fact share these connotations. An attribution of meaning that shares the same logical structure of the attribution of credibility proper to the 'sophism of authority'. The reasons that render this connotative displacement effective are of an emotional order which neutralizes the effect of paralogism.

On the social scale, this emotional dynamic corresponds to the refusal of any

interaction, even that which is conflictual but always resolved by dialogue, instead choosing to adhere to a sectarian logic, an expression of particular interests that are opposed to the general interest instead of becoming integrated with it. In this context we might adopt a term introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche (1889/1956) and by Max Scheler (1994) and speak of a morality of *resentment*. In this particular type of moral conformism, the desire to adhere to an *ethos* from which one feels excluded provokes a hostile reaction with regard to the same *ethos*. The 'man of resentment' nourishes a feeling of rage and impotence with respect to other value systems. He perceives them as potential aggressors, bearers of discredit with regard to his own moral world, as affirmations of an identity which he does not share and consequently, within the sphere of moral identity which characterizes him, as being potential threats and enemies. Whence the new, subtle but very violent forms of exclusion that this conformism engenders: 'not having a car, not watching television become crimes against the social system' (Prete, 1983: 214). The individual prone to resentment sees in such behaviours a refusal, for him insufferable, of an ethic he urgently desires but from which he feels excluded.

This identity-related process, which corresponds to the break-up of the ideal level of intersubjectivity, and therefore to the dissolution of epistemic confidence, causes social cohesion to burst asunder, leading to the formation of closed, almost disconnected groups carrying a strong internal identity matrix. Henceforth, social action can no longer be measured by the yardstick of an exchange between morally free individuals, but through the closed-ethic determination of a consensual and authoritarian collectivism. As a consequence of their ceasing to interact, these groups become impoverished, for the flow of exchanges dries up and the social fabric degrades. The whole social edifice then becomes shaken. The unitary person becomes fragmented into a series of partial identities which make up the new actors (subjects) of social interaction: people become identified in terms of being consumers, television viewers, purchasers, electors . . . and, more and more, in terms of economically and socially relevant categories: the elderly, tourists, the obese, homosexuals, teenagers, women, and so on. This dividing up in the community sense of the social fabric becomes an essential element of social control: whence the multiplication of products and services directed towards one or another of these categories and, through a return-loop effect, the growth of identity-related appeals more and more conveyed through persuasive messages.

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Let us attempt to sum up. The persuasive process is articulated within a dynamic linking beliefs and emotions. The different possible states of equilibrium balancing these two aspects define a persuasive process as more inherently rational or more inherently rhetorical. This latter, being marked by an immediate emotional participation, functions within a social context of the community type. It is dominated by an aesthetic form of communication, where epistemic belief proceeds out of a conformist adherence to the *ethos* of the group. Its extreme form is represented by the discourse of propaganda. Linked to the epistemic structure of the rhetorical discourse there corresponds a moral structure of resentment and an authoritarian social

structure. Although rational elements and emotional elements still coexist within concrete discourses, the possibility of distinguishing them in terms of autonomous functionalities represents the specific adjunct brought by philosophical reflection to the determination of the epistemic structure of persuasion.

Luca Maria Scarantino

Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris

Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

Notes

1. The substance of a scenario such as described by Stevenson can be perfectly analysed in rational form: 'No matter what means the writer used in communicating beliefs to his readers, no matter how much the beliefs may have been fashioned by *Einfühlung*, they will remain empirically true or false and open to the usual tests' (Stevenson, 1944: 145). Nevertheless, the choice of the form by which they are communicated is not without influence on the content of the message: 'Some of the beliefs that are in question, for instance, may be very faintly suggested by the language used, rather than crystallized in a literal way. It may be then misleading to say that "reasons" are being given, as we have just seen in the case of metaphor. And some of the beliefs may be presented along with praise or condemnation. The *Einfühlung* which attends them may have a double purpose, first of enabling the beliefs to be communicated, and second of altering the reader's favor or disfavor, *independently* of beliefs, to the issues that are being discussed. To the latter extent the methods will be persuasive' (p. 145).
2. 'The universal audience has this characteristic that it is never real, in actual existence, and therefore that it is not subject to social or psychological conditions of the surrounding *milieu*, that rather it is ideal, a product of the author's imagination, and that, to obtain the adherence of such an audience, one can rely only on premises that are universally accepted, or accepted at least by that hypercritical assemblage, independent of the contingencies of time and place, which one is supposed to be addressing' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1952: 22).
3. The universal audience 'will be convinced only by an argumentation which claims to be objective, which is based on the "facts" of what is considered to be true, or on values that are universally accepted. A structure of argument which will grant to its exposition a scientific or philosophical cachet which is not possessed by arguments addressing more particular audiences' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1952: 20–1). We should observe in passing that the term 'maximum possible' used by Preti relates directly to the historico-cultural limits of the transcendental which are equally, and on each occasion, the limits of the 'universal' audience. This finitude of the logical discourse, which would lead us into considering the historically determined nature of the transcendental subject of knowledge, is recognized by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca: 'We each construct for ourselves a model of man – the incarnation of reason, of the particular kind of knowledge we are concerned with, or of philosophy – whom we then strive to convince, and who varies with our knowledge of other people, of other civilizations, of other systems of thought, with what we accept as being incontrovertible facts or objective truths. That is besides the reason for which each period, each culture, each science and even each individual has their own universal audience' (1952: 22).
4. Clearly, the fact that a factual utterance is used in this situation rather than an exhortation or a value-related utterance is without importance for the connotation of the discourse: such multiple semantic possibilities emanate from the synthetic and *action-oriented* nature of the common language.
5. "Charity", in the true sense of the word, means the giving not merely of gold but of understanding. True love is the communion between minds alone. Real courage is strength against adverse public opinion. Each of these statements (if we take the last two as being in quasi-syntactical idiom) is a way of redirecting attitudes, by leaving the emotive meaning of a word laudatory, and wedding it to a

avored descriptive one . . . “True”, in such contexts, is obviously not used literally. Since people usually accept what they consider true, “true” comes to have the persuasive force of “to be accepted”. This force is utilized in the metaphorical expression “true meaning”. The hearer is induced to accept the new meaning which the speaker introduces’ (Stevenson, 1944: 213–14).

6. ‘Stevenson, and also Perelman with great vigour, perceive in value discourse a discourse of persuasion, which, in Stevenson’s terms, has to do not only with “beliefs”, but also and especially with attitudes. Perelman, making a specific reference to Stevenson, affirms that such persuasive discourse is a rhetorical discourse, and that the *δργασιον* of this is not the Logic but the Rhetoric’ (Preti, 1968: 155).
7. It is accepted as normal, synthesizes Perelman, ‘that a mathematical demonstration proceeds in systematic fashion, without human intervention. What determines the demonstration is the system within the centre of which it is unfolding; what characterizes argumentation is that it is essentially communication, dialogue, discussion. The first is independent of any mind, even in the extreme case, that of the speaker, because a calculation can be entrusted to a machine; the second requires a contact between the speaker and his audience’ (Perelman, 1971: 99). Or, as he had written a few pages earlier, ‘whereas the demonstration presents as impersonal, the argumentative discourse is always situated’ (p. 97).
8. Curiously, Perelman underestimates this aesthetic charge of the demonstrative discourse. He seems more interested in concentrating on the cultural function, on the content of the discourse rather than on its epistemic structure, and refuses to found value judgements on an aesthetic adjunct: ‘The ancients could not see that this type bore, not on the truth, but on value judgements to which adherence was attached with a variable level of intensity. It is therefore constantly important to confirm this adherence, to recreate a communion around the accepted value . . . Aristotle himself seemed to grasp only the decorative and ostentatious aspects of the epideictic discourse. He did not perceive that the premises on which the deliberative and judicatory discourses are constructed, and whose object seemed to him so important, are value judgements. Thus it is necessary for these premises to be sustained and confirmed by the epideictic discourse’ (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1952: 13–14). It is therefore no accident that the Belgian translation due to C.E. Ruelle, and presented by Michel Meyer, evokes the possibility that public judgement might bear more on the content of the argument than on the speaker himself (see the *Livre de Poche* edition of Aristotle’s *Rhétorique*, 1991, p. 93, n. 2).

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