INTRODUCTION: THE AMBIGUITY OF RHETORIC

This paper is about the meaning of the word, rhetoric. The meaning assigned to this word by the South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary for general consumption indicates that it is an ambiguous term with both creative and destructive potentialities. On the one hand the Pocket Oxford Dictionary describes it as persuasion, and then if by afterthought in brackets it includes implications of insincerity or exaggeration. The inclusion of the word etcetera is damning, in the sense that it implies that these negative associations with the word rhetoric are merely the beginning of a long list, and it is up to you, the curious, to fill it in. It is as if between these brackets, the arm of Plato reaches out from beyond the grave to warn us of the dangers and insidious power of rhetoric. The kind of
rhetoric, which Plato's Socrates depicts as one where: 'the orator need have no knowledge of the truth about things; it is enough for him to have discovered the knack of convincing the ignorant that he knows more than the experts' (Pl. Gorg 459.1-5). In this version of the meaning of the word between brackets, rhetoric is the refuge of charlatans; con-artists; tricksters; and more recently, politicians. People who trade in empty promises and half-truths.

However, this is only but one part of the story about the meaning of this word. In a lesser told version of the story we discover in ancient Greece, that Isocrates describes the power of rhetoric as one that enables us as human beings to come together to form communities and to build cities. In the process, indicating to many of us these days who have become sceptical about politicians and politics, that politics also has a positive value in the sense that it enables us to do and achieve things as a community that would be impossible for us to do as individuals. Later, Cicero was to write that rhetoric is the greatest gift of all: 'This art of all others has ever found its fullest development in every free community, and more especially in states enjoying peace and tranquillity, and has ever exercised a dominant influence. What indeed is so truly wonderful as that out of an infinite number of men one man should stand forth able alone, or with few others, to use with effect what is really nature's gift to all? What pleasure is greater to mind or ear than a speech adorned with wise sentiments and weighty words and in perfect style?' (Cic. DeOr 1.30-31).

Rhetoric it would seem then, is a word whose meaning is rife with ambiguity, and even more so for those who are concerned with a positive evaluation of the meaning of this word. Here the problem that this ambiguity generates is that usually an agreed upon definition of the term is required as a starting point for discussion proper, yet because the term rhetoric is rife with ambiguity there is a constant debate about its proper use and the upshot is that the discussion proper remains perpetually deferred. Vickers (1993:2) illustrates this problem in relation to the complex issues that the 'recent recovery of rhetoric' movement has generated: 'the term “rhetoric” itself has within the past decade been broadened to such a degree that the more sensitive purists have considerable and sometimes justified difficulty in recognising this expanding penumbra as rhetoric in the traditional sense.'

In the face of the ambiguity that the Pocket Oxford dictionary illustrates in terms of the content of the meaning of the word rhetoric, it can be argued that there are two possible reactions to this situation. The first reaction is to strive for a completely unambiguous meaning of the word whereby unwanted meanings are eliminated in the search for precision. In this context such a reaction is based on the premise that the ambiguity associated with the definition of the word is viewed as an impediment, a hindrance, and detrimental to conversation proper. The lament here being that we cannot start 'really conversing' until we first agree
on the correct definition of rhetoric. However the problem with the concern for the correct interpretation of the meaning of the word rhetoric is, who determines the correctness of the term and on what basis? Here concern with the correct interpretation ironically defers the problematic of the ambiguity of rhetoric for further discussion in trying to answer this very question. The added danger is that concern with the correct interpretation, as a means for starting conversation, entails that some alternative interpretations will be written off as deviant and paradoxically, the sought after conversation is faced with closure in favour of a certain interpretation.

The second possible reaction, in contrast to the first does not view the ambiguity of the word rhetoric as blameworthy confusion, but rather considers this ambiguity indicative of what Ricoeur (1977:105) calls a surplus of meaning (surcroit de sens) which requires further examination, unravelling, and analysing. This paper tries to address this problem of the ambiguity of the term rhetoric in the second sense by attempting to show that the surplus of meaning which surrounds the term, rhetoric, is itself important in attempting to come to terms with this confusion. In the sense that while the meaning of the word rhetoric is rife with ambiguity, this should not be viewed as a fundamental flaw in the discipline of rhetoric, but rather one should acknowledge that rhetoric, as a result of this fact, is at the same time also rich in meaning and history and as such is in need of further attention.

In other words, to make any headway amidst the ambiguity of the meaning of rhetoric, it is important to understand the debates and strategies that have taken place over the meaning of the word through the centuries, and the implications of these strategies and debates for each other and for the content of the term rhetoric as a whole. To understand the term rhetoric then, it is necessary to understand the debates about the meaning of rhetoric, because it can be argued along with Hariman (1986:38) that the definition and demarcation of rhetoric as a ‘discipline is one that has been profoundly shaped by the debates of the relative value of its subject, and these debates are inseparable from the activity of categorising it in relation to other discourses.’

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2 Sometimes this debate over the correct interpretation of the meaning of rhetoric can be quite acrimonious. For instance Whitson and Poulakis’s (1993:132) chastisement of Scott for dabbling in notions of rhetoric as epistemic: ‘The above statement makes clear that Scott discovered, much like Nietzsche’s clever beasts, that he too had misunderstood rhetoric....Why Scott recanted or what impact his recantation has had on the very studies he once stimulated is not our concern here. Our interest rather lies in the question it asks on behalf of students of rhetoric: How are we to escape the deleterious implications of the Aristotelian notion of rhetoric as the counterpart of dialectic? How can we avoid delivering ourselves back into the hands of our adversaries when asserting that rhetoric is epistemic?’
2 THE MANIFEST TRADITION OF RHETORIC

This tradition of defining rhetoric begins with the vague, but classic definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion. That is, the initial categories and distinctions, attributed to the word rhetoric by the sophists, undergo, over a period of time, a process of reassessment which can be broken into two separate, yet interlinked strands. The first is the negative value associated with the term rhetoric as a result of the sustained attacks by Plato upon the term and whose theme is later picked up by numerous authors through the centuries. The second is the adjustments and reappraisals made as to rhetoric's content, as a result of these sustained attacks in order to ensure its continued survival. The effect of these two strands of reassessment, is that the initial categories and distinctions, attributed to the word by the sophists, is overshadowed and fades into obscurity.

2.1 The sophistic conception

The sophists, contrary to the perception that they were some kind of unified sect or school, owe their classification to the fact that they were professional teachers who sold their wisdom for money, and the central discipline they promoted was training in the arts of persuasion. Nevertheless, it can be argued that while they were somewhat unified in their reliance on the arts of persuasion, they had differing views as to the purpose and content of persuasion. One difficulty in assessing the sophists is the lack of a large body of literature written by them, and our reliance on second-hand accounts from Plato and Aristophanes whose assessment of the sophists is coloured by their opposition to them.

Despite these limitations, there are a few sophists who stand out in this period. Probably the most famous and controversial sophist of this age is Protagoras with his statement that 'man is the measure of all things, of the existence of the things that are, and the non-existence of the things that are not' (PlTheaet 152.4-6). The significance and the impact of this statement through the centuries can hardly be belied. It is one of the earliest arguments in the debate about language and representation and it serves as the philosophical origin of the emergence of the impor-

3 The word, sophist comes from the Greek word sophia meaning wise or wisdom. The understanding of the word sophist I am referring to here is based on the fifth century BCE accounts. This account is one that highlights the professionalism of the sophists as people who possessed skill's in a particular craft, prudence and wisdom in general matters, especially in terms of practical and political wisdom; and scientific, or abstract wisdom. The other distinguishing feature is that they were by and large nomadic people, wandering from town to town in search of prospective clients who would pay for their services (Kerferd 1981:24-25).

4 This problem is exacerbated in trying to assess the impact of the sophistic movement before the fifth century BCE. Here one is faced with an almost complete lack of texts to work from, and a very vague and liberal application to many early wise men such as the poets (Homer), musicians, diviners, and seers -that it becomes difficult to demarcate the term sophist itself (Kerferd:1981:8).
tance of rhetoric as persuasion in the sophistic worldview. This refers to the de-
bate about whether our language that we use corresponds with the phenomenon
in the world that we apprehend. The celebrated nomos/physis debate in ancient
Greece over whether social convention as mediated through agreement on names
and terms in language, or the laws of nature which inform our senses, serves as
the basis for knowledge. Encapsulated in a nutshell, it can be argued that the de-
bate is about whether our language informs us of our reality, or does reality, the
phenomenon that we apprehend, inform our language.

Protagoras chose the former, arguing that the relationship between language
and reality is an arbitrary one, and the means for us as human beings in coming to
terms with phenomena in the world is by agreement on the correct names and
terms for these entities. Since language constructs our reality in this case, and that
the phenomenon in the world are not givens in the sense that they speak to us and
tell us what they are, persuasion becomes all important in advocating different
kinds of realities, because the facts do not speak for themselves. In this concep-
tion of rhetoric as persuasion, rhetoric is the presentation of images about our
world on the basis of inter-subjective agreement so that we might be better able to
cope with the world around us (Guthrie 1969:183-184).

Gorgias picks up this theme in specific relation to truth and falsity. In this
conception of rhetoric, persuasion is the result of deception (a theme to be pur-
sued later, vigorously by thinkers such as Nietzsche, Derrida, and De Man). Here
persuasion succeeds through moulding false logoi. Gorgias argued that there was
a radical gulf between the language we use and the phenomena to which it refers.
In this understanding of the relationship between language and reality, language
can never succeed in faithfully reproducing the essence of the phenomenon that
lies outside the boundaries of language itself.5

To the degree that people think that language faithfully and accurately repro-
duces reality, Gorgias argues that this is no more than deception. Because all lan-
guage is deception the only recourse we have to relating to things in the world is
through opinion which is unreliable and subject to change. Nevertheless this is
the locus in which rhetoric operates because opinion is not knowledge and there-
fore open to change. Rhetoric achieves this through the persuasive presentation of
images and its success depends on the presence of specific elements in debate.
The implication of this understanding of language in relation to persuasion is that
rhetoric provides standardised ways to construct reality (Kerferd 1981:80-81).

While Protagoras and Gorgias tend to view rhetoric more as a tool in coping
with the inadequacies of our language, Isocrates (Isoc 253a) views rhetoric more
explicitly as a means of building community: 'Because there is born in us the

5 Aristotle (979 a.12-14) sums up Gorgias's argument in the following manner: 'Gorgias
declares that nothing exists; and if anything exists it is unknowable; and if it exists and is
knowable, yet it cannot be communicated to others.'
power to persuade one other and to set forth what we have determined, not only have we been freed from the life of wild beasts but we have come together to found cities, lay down laws and discover arts.' In promoting this understanding of rhetoric, Isocrates moves away from the more abstract, vague, and meta-rhetorical conception of persuasion (namely how is rhetoric possible?) which is the concern of Protagoras and Gorgias to focus largely on a practical conception of rhetoric which emphasises verbal skills as a means that would enable people to prepare for, and succeed in public office. Simultaneously it also represents the attempt to formalise and standardise rhetoric as the art of persuasion as manifested in, and achieved through fostering verbal skills.

Isocrates gives us the following picture as an example of this formal training for a life in politics, in Against the Sophists (17.b-c): ‘For I hold that to obtain a knowledge on the elements out of which we make and compose all discourses is not so very difficult if anyone entrusts himself, not to those who make rash promises, but to those who have some knowledge of these things...to choose from these elements those which should be employed for each subject, to join them together, to arrange them properly, and also, not to miss what the occasion demands but appropriately to adorn the whole speech with striking thoughts and to clothe it in flowing and melodious phrase—these things, I hold, require much study and are the task of a vigorous and imaginative mind: for this the student must not only have the requisite aptitude but he also must learn the different kinds of discourse and practice himself in their use.’

Plato certainly thought otherwise, condemning rhetoric as a false art. Nevertheless, in considering the impact of the sophistic conception of rhetoric it can be argued that it was pivotal in the sophistic world view from both a meta-rhetorical and the more practical understanding, as a means of building community. From a meta-rhetorical understanding as to how rhetoric is possible, it can be said that the sophists indicate that persuasion is vital in building communities to the degree that it is the basis for promoting inter-subjective agreement as to how we are to relate to the world around us, and in presenting and constructing standardised realities that enable us to cope with the limitations of our language. In more practical terms this is achieved by an understanding of rhetoric as the art of persuasion which is manifested in, and created by, fostering verbal skills. Across the board it can be argued that the sophistic definition is one that emphasises oratorical skill.

While this sophistic conception of rhetoric is an extremely positive one, it is not without its problems, the most notable being its vagueness (which later was to open the space for much abuse). This problem is a vexing one compounded by the fact that the sophists were not unified in their approach to teaching rhetoric, save for what Guthrie (1969:50) would call an overwhelming scepticism as the epistemological starting point for their emphasis on the importance of persuasion.
as the means of coming to terms with the phenomenological world. In other words, while unified to a degree in their scepticism, it can be said that the sophists' rhetoric which emerges from this epistemological starting point tends to be disparate, being marked by different emphases, nuances and goals. Here the vexation lies in trying to choose whose sophist's understanding of rhetoric is definitive and why, and furthermore in trying to deduce from those texts, that can be characterised as models and examples of rhetorical speeches, some kind of rhetorical system. For someone seeking an easy workable sophistic definition of rhetoric from which to work from this can be a debilitating drawback.

2.2 The Platonic tradition

It can be readily acknowledged that by the time Plato emerges in ancient Greek society, it is a society in a period of decline, plagued by corruption, marked social conflict, and strife (Nelson & Megill 1986:22). Simultaneously, the sophists as a movement were increasingly coming under fire for their participation in this decline and the meaning of the term sophist was changing as a result into something of a swearword. Protagoras gives us some idea of the kind of transition in people's assessment of the profession of the sophists that was occurring during this period: 'When a man who is a foreigner makes his way into great cities and there persuades the best of young men to abandon their associations with others ...whether older or younger than themselves and to associate with him under the idea that they will become better through their associations with him, a man so proceeding needs to be on his guard. For great are the jealousies that arise together with other resentments and attacks upon him' (PlProt 316.c8-d4).

In this increasingly hostile climate, while there were many other attacks upon the sophists, Plato's negative judgement and hostility towards the sophists and their rhetoric is by far the most systematic, detailed, and comprehensive criticism at the time. There are several strands to understanding Plato's negative judgement of rhetoric. One salient point that emerges is that there is a political conflict taking place between the sophists as a movement and the aristocracy.

It can be argued that the issue at stake here is that the sophists were undermining the traditional power-base of the aristocracy. This occurred to the extent that the sophists were intimately tied to the processes of profound change taking place

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6 For instance, Xenophon (XenMem 1.2.4-8) in his portrayal of Socrates: 'Nor again did he make his associates money-lovers: he rid them of all other desires except for his company, and for that he charged no fee....those who accepted a fee in return for their services he nick-named "self-enslavers".....he expressed surprise that a man who offered to teach goodness should demand to be paid for it.' Interestingly this negative connotation towards the term sophist continues to this day, for instance Ken Owen (1994:28) in his editorial on the collapse of Bophuthatswana writes: 'Clever lawyers will construct sophistries (my emphasis) to show, that actually, Bop never existed except as a figment of Mr Mangope's fevered imagination, and that therefore it was never overthrown.'
in Athenian society, and protected under the patronage of Pericles, amongst others, who were encouraging enlightenment reforms which included notably a transition of the Polis from one controlled by the aristocracy to a limited democracy (Wood 1978:72-73). The sophists were intimately tied to this process of profound change to the extent that they sold their services to anyone who had money to pay for them. This effectively meant that anyone off the street could train to be a successful politician so that he could become a real force in the affairs of the Polis. The conflict, which emerged between the aristocracy and the sophists, was the result of the invasion of the affairs of the Polis by all manners of charlatans; small traders; and petty demagogues (Kerferd 1981:24-26).

The second strand in understanding Plato's hostile judgement towards rhetoric is that what exacerbates this situation of conflict in the Polis, is that power is going to people who trade in probabilities. The problem for Plato is that trading in probabilities is superficial to the degree that it gives one the means of expression without protecting one against its abuse: ‘The orator need have no knowledge of the truth about things; it is enough for him to have discovered the knack of convincing the ignorant that he knows more than the experts’ (PlGorg 459.c 1-5). It can be argued that the fact that the sophists traded in probabilities and the ensuing chaos and abuses that it generated lies at the heart of the Platonic quest for certainty.

Plato's The Republic provides a good example of how he goes about tackling this problem and it is a lengthy argument devoted to a fundamental redefinition of the Polis, dealing with issues of truth, knowledge, education, and justice. At the same time it is a blue-print for a counter-revolution aimed at undermining the authority and power of the sophists, while reasserting the hegemony of the aristocracy over the affairs of the Polis. The key to this blue-print for a counter-revolution is Plato's emphasis on the need for a philosopher-king as head of the redefined Polis who possesses true knowledge of the good. In arguing for this particular type of leader the differences between Plato and the sophistic movement come into sharp relief, as Plato's Socrates (520.e4-521) argues in the following manner: ‘The truth is that if you want a well-governed state to be possible, you must find for your future rulers some way of life they like better than government; for only then will you have government by the truly rich, those, that is, whose riches consist not of gold, but of the true happiness of the good and rational life. If you get, in public affairs, men whose life is impoverished and destitute of personal satisfactions, but who hope to snatch some compensation for their own inadequacy from a political career, there can never be good government. They start fighting for power, and the consequent internal and domestic conflicts ruin both them and society.’

Here Plato returns to the nomos/physis debate, and in sharp contrast to the sophists he opts for the latter: knowledge of the truth of things are determined by
the laws of nature, the reminders of which are the forms we possess in our souls from birth. In this framework, the power of dialectic (reason) provides the criterion for distinguishing between a true and a false word, while at the same time for distinguishing between a true lover of wisdom (philosopher) and a false one (sophist). Dialectic can be described as a search for correct definitions and this is tied to Plato's conception of truth. In this formulation of truth, words are seen as names for concepts. This entails that we understand the true nature of things in the world around us not in the first place by means of words, but with the help of concepts (correct definitions). ‘So you agree in calling a man a dialectician who can take account of the essential nature of each thing;... if a man can't define the form of the good and distinguish it clearly in his account from everything else, and then battle his way through all objections, determined to give them refutation based on reality and not opinion, and come through his argument unshaken, you wouldn't say he knew what the good in itself was....Any shadowy notion such a man gets hold of is the product of opinion rather than knowledge, and he is living in a dream from which he will not awake’ (Pl Resp 534.b3-d).

This is also tied to his understanding of the relationship between concepts and things in the world which has a particular nature, and which is markedly different to the sophistic emphasis on probabilities. The things in the world, Plato's Socrates (508.d.4) indicates, are only shadow images of the true nature of things which belong to a different world than the one we observe: ‘When the mind's eye is fixed on objects illuminated by truth and reality, it understands and knows them and its possession of intelligence is evident; but when fixed on the twilight world of change and decay, it can only form opinions, its vision is confused and its opinion shifting, and it seems to lack intelligence.’ These essentially true things which possess the shadow images that we observe, Plato's Socrates (508.e.-509) indicates are ideas which are part of the true world—the form of the Good: ‘... what gives the objects of knowledge their truth and the knower's mind the power of knowing is the form of the good. It is the cause of knowledge and truth....’ The true form of the Good is accordingly objective and the starting point required for good practice and theory: ‘But in my opinion...the form of the good; once seen, it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing in the visible region light and the source of light, and being in the intelligible region itself controlling source of truth and intelligence. And anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private light must have sight of it’ (Pl Resp 517.b8-c6).

In the Platonic world view it can be said that in the search for meaning, Plato constructs a notion of dialectic (reason) which serves as the basis for all thought and practice. In emphasising the priority of dialectic (reason), language is subordinated to reason. This utilitarian view of language indicates that the power of dialectic is distinct and separate from the social and linguistic context it finds
itself in. With the power of dialectic as the search for correct definitions, and as the only access to truth 'out there' (form of the good) the possession of existing language is vital: it must be tamed and transformed from its wild, metaphorical, dangerous, and ambiguous state into extraordinary exact, literal, and non-metaphorical use as a precise reflection of reality. This Platonic view interprets knowledge of the truth in terms of accumulation. The implication here is that with truth framed in the conditions of progress it becomes an endgame that allows via the notion of accumulation, one to speak with finality.

In this Platonic discourse of the power of reason (dialectic) there can only be one key to unlocking the secrets of history, and only one interpretation of man and his world. In this view there is no room for other discourses, they must be discouraged because they mislead, confuse, lead to violence, and are untruthful. In other words, what Plato does, is to introduce a number of binary oppositions that effectively precludes rhetoric from any serious worthwhile human activity. The effect of these arguments is to shift rhetoric from the centre stage of knowledge to the periphery. Vickers (1982:250) illustrates the effects of the binary oppositions that Plato introduces: 'rhetoric is equated with the arts of appearance rather then reality; rhetoric deals with surfaces, philosophy with depths. It has no real knowledge, but only urges on us convictions or opinions.' In short, it can be said that from these tensions between the sophists and Plato, one witnesses the beginnings of a tradition that devotes itself to the systematic rejection of rhetoric as intellectually worthless, a concern with clear and simple language that accurately reports phenomena in the world, and an emphasis on demonstrable proof.

It is as if from this magnificent tension in ancient Greek society, to use Nietzsche's words (1973:32), that Plato 'with so tense a bow' was able to 'shoot for the most distant targets'. Amongst others, in this trajectory we find Hobbes (1987:15) under similar social conditions to that of Plato arguing for a clear and simple language as opposed to rhetoric: 'Seeing then that truth consists in the right ordering of names in our affirmations, a man that seeketh precise truth, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly; or else he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twigs; the more he struggles the, more belimed.' And more recently, Iris Murdoch (1982:231) with her concern for a clear, straight form of style: 'A philosopher must...avoid rhetoric and idle decoration....When the philosopher is as it were in the front line in relation to his problems I think he speaks with a certain cold clear recognisable voice.'

If we are to examine the Platonic tradition of defining rhetoric, it can be argued that there are two strands which inform this tradition of negative definition that questions the worth and merit of rhetoric as means of acquiring knowledge, as a means of proof, and as a means of guiding ethical conduct. The first is the negative content given to rhetoric in this tradition: where it is typified as mislead-
ing, untrustworthy, and insincere as a form of communication. The kind of trade plied by the irrational, and the demagogues of this world who whip up the passions and stir the masses with empty promises and falsehoods.

The second strand is the utilisation of this definition as a weapon to defeat other peoples' arguments. We use the term 'mere rhetoric' when we want to deflate other peoples' claims or prevent them from being taken seriously. Here, ironically in this context the word rhetoric only becomes admissible when we are out to promote our own aims. In this conceptualisation, rhetoric is a word that is utilised to enforce silence, eliminate competing claims of others, and close off conversation. Rhetoric in this understanding, is a weapon we use against others.  

Testifying to the course of the manifest history of rhetoric and philosophy it seems that political and social power in the end was restored to the 'fathers', and Plato succeeded in his task at being taken seriously, while rhetoric has not been treated too kindly. In the movement initiated by Plato, rhetoric becomes a mere supplement to philosophy, subordinated to logical proof. Rhetoric viewed as a mere supplement becomes a formal, empty discipline. In the process, the original power and versatility of rhetoric as practised by the sophists becomes a lost art. As a result, the manifest history of rhetoric is the history of rhetoric as a supplement. A history which Gaonkar (1990:348) typifies as 'a history of obscure places, unfamiliar names, and forgotten texts.' The 'hidden history' refers to the sophistic tradition of practising rhetoric, which as a result of their defeat in the competition for political and social hegemony in ancient Greek society are driven out by their philosophical detractors to live a subterranean existence.

2.3 The supplementary tradition

Despite Plato's objections towards rhetoric, the fact that the initial content given to the term rhetoric by the sophists is vague, this feature, it can be argued, was to prove paradoxically to be one of its saving graces in the face of sustained criticism. That it was vague, meant that the initial definition of the term was also very broad, thereby allowing room for a host of different interpretations and accordingly, the space for it to adapt to and circumvent crises when and where they occurred. While Plato was prepared to largely write-off rhetoric as a serious intellectual activity, Aristotle concluded that despite Plato's criticism of rhetoric as a means of generating knowledge, rhetoric had still a role to play as the counterpart

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7 This seems to be the attitude de rigouer towards the meaning of the word in the print media when discussing politicians. While Nyatsumba (1994:12) uses the words 'usual rhetoric' to deflate the National Party's claims, Wetherell (1994:6) uses the word rhetoric to undermine Mugabe's speech in Cape town about good government: 'Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's address to parliament in Cape Town last week revealed the yawning chasm between rhetoric and reality familiar to observers beyond South Africa's borders...good governance and democratic practices are more than just rhetorical flourishes.'
of dialectic.

While dialectic concentrates on the philosophical questions and takes the form of debate, rhetoric concerns itself with practical and concrete questions in the form of continuous discourse. Because of this, rhetoric is essentially and logically a counterpart to dialectic in which the functions of both are parallel movements: both are dealing with matters that are a common part of knowledge. However, rhetorical demonstration is an enthymeme—a kind of syllogism, and the study of syllogisms is the preserve of dialectic. In this movement rhetoric is subordinated to dialectic as a supplement to knowledge proper itself (Kennedy 1980:65).

To achieve this, Aristotle sets about reforming the disparate rhetoric of the sophists. The basis for this reform is the contention that the sophists focus on the glorification of the orator, and emphasise political and eristic success at the expense of paying attention to the essence of rhetoric which is 'learning in each case the available means of persuasion' (AristotRhet 1.1335a1-5). In focusing on the need for attention to the various modes of persuasion, Aristotle moves towards a more technical definition of rhetoric that aims to give content to the vague sophistic definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion manifested in verbal skills.

If rhetoric, in other words, is there to discover the available means of persuasion, Aristotle indicates it is a theoretical activity which discovers knowledge through examining the words, arguments, and topics utilised by the orator as the material in his speeches. 8

Aristotle is certainly characteristic of the supplementary tradition, and it is one marked by a greater concern towards determining a more technical definition of rhetoric. In this tradition one discovers a surge in manuals, textbooks, and handbooks on the arts of persuasion, and it is a tradition in which one finds such classics on the topic such as Cicero's De Inventione and Quintilian's Institutio. These are rhetorical handbooks that focus on public life, particularly the composition and style of arguments in the law courts.

Otherwise known as declamation, it promoted inter alia, the study of fictional laws which encouraged flexibility and ingenuity in argumentation, the practice of lucid and organised thought by training the student to speak a declamation that had shape, and which advanced from argument to argument in a systematic and logical sequence while keeping in mind the entire structure of the declamation as he spoke (Winterbottom 1982:65-66). This tradition of technical rhetoric, or applied rhetoric which focuses on the composition and style of the speech act itself

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8 Aristotle's systematic account of rhetoric is based on internal modes of proof which can be divided into three types: ethos, pathos, and logos. Briefly ethos refers to the personal character of the speaker in the speech, pathos is the artistic mode of proof referring to the emotion that moves the audience, logos refers to the construction of the speech or the argument in terms of whether it is inductive reasoning from examples or deductive on the basis of enthymemes (AristotRhet 1.1358b.1-10).
includes in its trajectory the transmission of this form of rhetoric from the Romans to the Middle Ages, the later Renaissance Humanists, and through to this century.

While this subsequent history of rhetoric after Plato's denigration of it as a false art, is one as a supplement to knowledge with a focus on the more technical aspects of the speech act, it is one also characterised by periodic attempts to widen the scope of what constitutes rhetoric. Characteristic of these more notable attempts are figures such as Cicero, and the Renaissance humanist, Petrarch amongst others. While concentrating on the more applied rhetoric in terms of rhetoric as the composition and style of speech acts, Cicero was also exploring meta-rhetorical issues as a means of finding a philosophical grounding as justification for the former. In a sense here one witnesses a return to the sophistic notion of rhetoric as building community. Rhetoric, Cicero indicates, plays a vital role in society because it preserves the community, renders life safe and protects virtue, through the power of speech of the orator.

In a similar vein, many centuries later Petrarch was to argue that: 'we correct not only our life and conduct, which is the primary concern of virtue, but our language usage as well...by the cultivation of eloquence' (I.9; 1.4,7). The function of rhetoric, in other words, is there to develop our powers of communication for the good of others and the community. Rhetoric in this understanding has an intrinsic ethical component that harks back to Isocrates' contention that the art of persuasion manifested in verbal skills is one 'which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust, and things honourable and base....It is by this also that we confute the bad and extol the good. Through this we educate the ignorant and appraise the wise; for the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul' (Antidosis 254-255).

However, despite the attempts of Cicero and Petrarch amongst others, to broaden the scope of rhetoric, on the whole this supplementary tradition is not a history of violent opposition, but rather one of accommodation, reinterpretation, and adjustment to the conceptual impasse brought about by Plato. In the face of the epistemic crises introduced by Plato in terms of rhetoric's capability to produce knowledge, it can be argued that the vague sophistic conception was as a result also broad enough to allow such reinterpretation and adjustment. The strategy of accommodation, reinterpretation, and adjustment by the supplementary tradition in the face of this epistemic crises is one characterised by a movement away from the problematic meta-rhetorical issues towards more practical concerns. Here the focus of rhetoric is on the composition and style of the speech act itself, and a movement away from the sophistic emphasis on the orator.

Given the meta-rhetorical crisis of the sophists, this tradition focuses attention on giving content to the other vague, more practical sophistic emphasis on rhetoric.
as the art of persuasion manifested in verbal skills. This was possible because the sophistic conception is vague and broad, lending itself to contrasting modes of appropriation, and acts of selection. If one were to characterise rhetoric in the supplementary tradition it is one of applied rhetoric, or technical rhetoric: that is a focus on the techniques, composition, and style of speech acts largely at the expense of theory.

3 THE REVENGE OF RHETORIC

This is a tale about twenty-first century rhetoric which is marked by a widespread revived interest in rhetoric and is characterised by both a renewed theoretical concern with meta-rhetorical questions (how is rhetoric possible?), and in the ability of rhetoric to function as a critical tool (rhetoric as subversion). This is often referred to as the 'Rhetorical Turn' because of its revolt and opposition against the strictures placed upon rhetoric by the Platonic and supplementary traditions. The newness of this project refers to the idea that it is concerned with pushing open the boundaries that rhetoric has traditionally been confined to, rather than effecting a complete break with past traditions of defining rhetoric. In pushing open these boundaries these scholars are in effect continuing the centuries old dialogue as to what constitutes the term rhetoric, returning implicitly or explicitly in their writings to either a sophistic conception of rhetoric, or the supplementary tradition as a starting point for expansion.

In opposition to the traditional strictures placed on rhetoric, the scholars of the 'Rhetorical Turn' seeks the rehabilitation of rhetoric as a formal discipline with a formal content in its own right. This rehabilitation of rhetoric has recently been widely advocated on the basis of the arguments of Kenneth Burke, Lucien Olbrechts-Tyteca, and Chaim Perelman, and in the wake of the epistemic gap created by the post-modernist critique of Western intellectual practices and traditions. The insights of the post-modernist critique of Western intellectual hegemony (especially those of Foucault, and Derrida) that relate to the repression, suppression, and violence that informs 'history', the plight of marginalised communities, and the silencing of critical voices which ask for a rehabilitation, has been used in the rhetorical assault upon the perceived hypocritical claims of Western intellectual practices. In this 'Rhetorical Turn' there are a number of strategies which animate this project of rehabilitation and keep it going.

3.1 The new Sophistic

So named for its preoccupation with the rehabilitation of the sophists and their rhetoric, and the advocacy of a return to this world view. In the return to the sophistic movement, the New Sophistic seeks to develop a rhetorical perspective that in the context of the dispute between Plato and the sophists tries to examine how philosophers and philosophy has conned its way into power and dominance
by claiming a hegemony on the means of access to truth. Characteristic of this trend, is the attempt to escape the conceptual impasse brought about by Plato, and the supplementary tradition that he confines rhetoric to, through reviving his historical opponent the sophistic movement. Gaonkar (1990:347) indicates that this strategy consists of two sets of related moves: the historical and the philosophical.

In terms of the historical move, this attempt is characterised by a focus on the ‘hidden history’ of the sophistic movement, (that faded into obscurity due to its denigration by Plato, and the rise of the supplementary tradition of rhetoric) in order to legitimate its claim to renewed intellectual attention. Given the violence of the philosophical world view the new sophistic seeks to rehabilitate the marginalised voices of the sophists. In this context, Poulakos (1983:35) argues that since philosophy has been telling the story about rhetoric for centuries, and as an opponent which seeks to discredit rhetoric for failing to be true, it has been impossible for rhetoric to get a fair hearing. In order to achieve a more balanced view, the first step one needs to take is to develop a sophistic definition of rhetoric as opposed to a Platonic one: ‘This essay presumes that without the Sophists our picture of the rhetoric that came out of the Greek experience is almost incomplete. For over two millennia we have relied almost exclusively on the Platonic and Aristotelian notions of discourse while we have treated the sophistic position as an obscure but interesting footnote...but because rhetoric came about as an activity grounded in human experience, not in philosophical reflection, we must approach it by looking at those who practised it before turning to those who reflected about it.’

In other words, what Poulakos wants to achieve here by focusing on a sophistic definition of rhetoric, is to place the dispute between Plato and the sophists in the proper light by telling the sophists version of the encounter.

Secondly, to advocate a return of the ‘sophistic’ paradigm and worldview for the practice of rhetoric to its full potential, as it was before its denigration by Plato and his subsequent cohorts. In this history, Plato and philosophy are of little importance as they give us a skewed version of the sophists, whereas a focus on the sophists themselves is the correct starting place if we want to discover both the full story and potential of rhetoric.

Leff (1987:31, 34) carries the arguments of Poulakos to its conclusions more explicitly, by actualising the hidden history of sophistic rhetoric for current use: ‘The sources of this doctrine are various, but the label “sophistic” seems appropriate. Its general characteristics closely parallel the tradition that originated with the old Greek sophists and was carried forward through the works of Isocrates, Cicero, and the Italian humanists...Sophistic is a field dependent approach that relies on concrete models.’ And then: ‘Viewed from this perspective, the main problem in the new sophistic appears as the obverse of the main problem in its older variants. Traditional humanists struggle to control the anarchistic tendencies
of public rhetoric by discovering philosophical controls...Modern sophists struggle against the constrictive tendencies of technical rhetoric by finding a means of opening it to the public without destroying its integrity.'

In terms of the second approach (interrelated with the first), this is a philosophical one that tries to de-center the epistemic crises by returning to the meta-rhetorical question as to how is rhetoric possible. The basic strategy here is to, as Gaonkar (1990:347) states: 'derive in a global fashion the inevitability of rhetoric from our social relations as they are mediated by language' in order to rehabilitate the sophistic tradition of rhetoric. Cascardi's (1983:225) views on the rehabilitation of rhetoric is a good example of this approach: 'Indeed if language and life are themselves dialogic forms of understanding then the values of knowledge and truth which Socrates guarded against the Sophists may be purchased back from philosophy at no great price....Since man is defined from within language his "knowledge" will always be a function of his language, as will he....Persuasion is the key because it is crucial to understanding...rhetoric is equivalent to the "conversation" in which understanding occurs.' The implication here is that by proving that Plato and Socrates engage in rhetoric means that they can be displaced from their accusations against rhetoric.

In a more forceful note on this theme, Vickers (1982:250) gives us a picture of rhetoric at war with itself in describing the nature of Plato's attack: 'the first and most influential of these attacks, is the Gorgias, a masterpiece of rhetorical and argumentative strategy. In this polemical dialogue Socrates hunts the Sophists down remorselessly.' What Vickers does in other words, by portraying Plato as using the tools of rhetoric to attack sophistic rhetoric, is to undermine Plato's (philosophy) claim to the epistemological and moral high-ground, and in so doing 'level the playing field' between philosophy and rhetoric. Vickers's (1982:250-251) verdict of Plato's rhetoric as a result is one of rejection: 'Yet, if it is a rhetoric, it is a rhetoric of a highly dubious sort, manoeuvring categories and analogies by sleight-of-hand to effect an arbitrary identification of rhetoric with ignoble and disreputable arts, and seeking to arouse in the listener or reader emotions of disgust or contempt.' The effect here is similar to that produced by Cascardi's. In this movement, the implication here is that by debunking Plato and Socrates for engaging in rhetoric of a dubious nature, worse than that practised by the sophists—the sophists and their rhetoric are exonerated and rehabilitated.

In examining this approach of the second sophistic it can be argued that the trend in defining rhetoric, is at a historical level, one that aims at finding the 'essence' or 'true' definition of rhetoric through historical regression to its earliest origin. The argument here is that the initial definition of rhetoric as given content to by the sophists is the 'pure', or correct definition of rhetoric which forms the basis from which one should work. The second more philosophical approach aims at a more universal notion of rhetoric that is ubiquitous with the lan-
language that we use. This approach favours certain theories of language over others (i.e., everything is metaphor) and endorses the Protagorean notion that our reality is linguistically shaped and informed.

The problem with the historical approach is manifold. The question that can be raised in this context is: at which point does the historical regression cease in achieving the true sophistic definition of rhetoric, and which definition out of many that the sophists formulated does one choose as the correct one, and why? Armed with the ‘essence’ or the ‘true’ definition of rhetoric in the sophistic movement there is also the very real problem of introducing closure.9 Closure, in the sense that other traditions of defining rhetoric are written off for failing to be true, as Poulakis demonstrates in his remonstration of Scott who ‘recanted’ on his assertion that rhetoric was epistemic. At the same time the other problem that this closure generates is one that pushes rhetoric in the direction of the very thing that it is opposed to in philosophy: rhetoric, instead now becomes the new cultural imperialist determining along the way what will be considered true, just, and fair.

While the second philosophical, or meta-rhetorical approach generates a valuable insight, in terms of the idea that philosophy as the traditional opponent of rhetoric has a history of its own rhetoric which has yet to be written (along with many other discourses), the problem with making rhetoric synonymous with language is that one makes the definition of rhetoric in this instance, so broad and so vague that it is virtually devoid of content.

3.2 The rhetoric of inquiry
In a similar, yet different vein to the philosophical or meta-rhetorical strand in the New Sophistic, this school seeks to discover a rhetorical motive in other substantive discourses (anthropology, history, political science etc) where it is usually thought not to be. Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey (1987:4) characterise this rhetoric of inquiry in the following manner: ‘one way to see beneath the masks of methodology is to look at how scholars really do converse.’

In examining the rhetoric in the substantive disciplines, this form of inquiry rests on two assertions, namely: despite the fragmentation of academic fields, argumentation is far more unified than commonly thought, to the degree that scholars in diverse fields utilise and rely on common devices peculiar to rhetoric: for instance metaphors, invocations of authority, and appeals to audiences. Secondly, that the scope of argumentation is far more diverse than commonly supposed, in the sense that every discipline/field is defined by its own particular

9 Gaonkar (1990:351) spells out some of the implications of the closure that this approach introduces as follows: ‘It speaks as though the quarrel between Plato and the older sophists over the epistemic status of rhetoric continually and exclusively shaped its complex history. It fails to acknowledge...technical rhetoric (and) it completely overlooks the third tradition of rhetoric, the tradition of civic humanism that stretches from Protagoras through Isocrates and Cicero.’
forms of rhetoric, that is, theorems, arguments from invisible hands, and appeals to textual possibilities.

Here the rhetoric of inquiry works by exploring the rhetorical motives present in particular discourses, while in the process making people aware of this fact so that it renders the particular discourses more intelligible to the scholars within that discourse and to others. The development of this understanding of rhetoric is a complex one and operates initially at a fairly high abstract level. This approach is made up of three strands which are integrated: the first being the meta-rhetorical justification for such an approach. This comprises an implicit return to the sophistic world view that our world is a linguistically constituted one. In this context, the rhetoric of inquiry comes into play because of the decline of the Cartesian project after sustained attacks: ‘Nietzsche and Heidegger disputed the notion that the facts speak for themselves. Rhetoric of inquiry is needed precisely because the facts are mute. Whatever the facts, we do the speaking—whether through them or for them’ (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 1987:8).

In other words, in this trend we have an implicit return to the Protagorean notion that because the facts do not speak for themselves, and our world is a linguistically created one, identification can only be elicited through the persuasive presentation of images, or as Nelson (1987:202) states it: ‘the substantive, expressive, and persuasive talk needed for communication amongst humans’. The impact of this understanding is that the entire ball-game changes in terms of the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic. Here dialectic merely becomes another form of rhetoric. Rhetoric according to this trend is synonymous with, and an unavoidable component in human belief.

On the basis of this knowledge, the second strand attempts to overturn the supplementary tradition of rhetoric that Aristotle reduces it to as a subordinate to dialectic, by expanding the definition of rhetoric to include and subsume dialectic as a certain kind of rhetoric, so that the two are synthesised into a rhetoric of inquiry. Simultaneously, it tries to achieve this synthesis without negating the insights of the applied rhetoric developed by the supplementary tradition. Nelson (1987:203-204) motivates the broadening of this understanding of rhetoric due to the manifest inadequacy of the recent logic of inquiry. Here the inadequacy stems from the tendency of the logic of inquiry to stress a fundamental separation between it and the contexts of concrete inquiry. The upshot of which, is that the logic of inquiry becomes trapped in abstract, pseudo-questions and concerns which leave no useful answers. In contrast, a rhetoric of inquiry is one characterised by a reluctance to separate epistemic concerns from theoretical ones, and in dividing theory from practical limits. The advantage of a rhetoric of inquiry in this instance is that it treats such dichotomies as particular rhetoric’s, in the process indicating their disadvantages in many contexts.

The other component of keeping applied rhetoric alive despite the broadening
of the notion of rhetoric, is to argue that while rhetoric of inquiry reflects on abstract issues it does so through relating it to the concrete contexts that give rise to these issue's. Nelson (1987:205-206) explains this point as follows: 'Rhetoric of inquiry concerns the interaction of communication and inquiry. It studies the reasoning of scholars in research communities...to improve many styles of scholarship. It rejects the notion that a single set of autonomous rules can stand apart from actual practices...rhetoric of inquiry must resist supposedly universal rules of inference in order to make room for the warrants and backings of various arguments.' In taking into account these various arguments, rhetoricians of inquiry analyse these texts in terms of their composition, style and structure, focusing on the tropes employed, the linguistic conventions utilised, and other devices of rhetoric.

In this particular trend, what one encounters as a result is a profusion of different 'rhetorics' in which the sophistic and the supplementary traditions of defining rhetoric are often intermingled and used for analysis without distinction, or which are used implicitly without the author actually being aware of the kind of rhetoric he or she is using as an explanatory tool. This can at times be terribly confusing even for those scholars familiar with the field of rhetoric. Perhaps, this is because the rhetoric of inquiry is a grandiose project in the sense that it is one that tries to unite both the meta-rhetorical concerns of the sophists and the applied rhetoric developed in the supplementary tradition while expanding them simultaneously in overturning the Aristotelian distinction. However, compounding this problem is the definition Nelson, Megill and McCloskey (1987:16) attribute to rhetoric: 'Rhetoric covers at once what is communicated, how it is communicated, what happens when it is communicated, how to communicate it better, and what communication is in general. Rhetoric of inquiry enlarges these meanings to encompass the interdependence of inquiry and communication, and to encourage all the skeins of rhetoric into a commitment for better inquiry to inform action.'

Here the definition is both extremely broad and vague as to seem devoid of content. Despite these problems I would like to argue that the project of the rhetoric of inquiry has the potential to avoid these drawbacks. For one, while implicitly drawing on the sophistic meta-rhetorical view which is both vague and broad, the rhetoric of inquiry overcomes this limitation by linking it to the in-

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10 The use of this kind of definition is problematic because it is so broad and vague in the sense that rhetoric becomes synonymous with communication. In some instances this has led to the situation where the word rhetoric has been carelessly thrown about by some authors in their texts without aiding the reader as to what they actually mean when they use the word rhetoric. For people unfamiliar with the notion of rhetoric this can be debilitating in terms of trying to understand what these authors are driving at in their arguments. This tends to be self-defeating in terms of the very purpose of these authors to re-establish rhetoric as a serious and worthwhile intellectual activity. Here one might say that these authors actually need to examine their own rhetoric, when writing about rhetoric!
sights into the structure and style of argumentation developed in the supplementary tradition of applied rhetoric. Secondly, in creating this link it also overcomes the often repeated charge that the applied rhetoric developed in the supplementary tradition is one that suffers from a poverty of theory. These linkages and the implications thereof, simply need to be made more explicit. Finally, it can be argued that in spite of these shortcomings and some of the confusion about rhetoric that this approach has engendered, the rhetoric of inquiry has opened the space for the critical analysis of the implicit rhetorical strategies at work in many disciplinary fields, and has led to a greater awareness of rhetoric in general.

3.3 Rhetoric as subversion: the power-play in and for meaning

This trend could be read as an extension of the critical dimension in the rhetoric of inquiry, but one that is far more self-conscious. If one were to read the history of rhetoric as an ongoing tale about the fortunes of this term (as I have tried to illustrate in this article), this trend would certainly bring about a curious and fascinating twist to this story. While the subsequent traditions of rhetoric in the face of Plato's systematic attack on rhetoric as a false art that works by deception, tries to rehabilitate rhetoric: by focusing on less contentious issues (applied rhetoric); or by trying to displace Plato by proving that he also engages in rhetoric (New Sophistic); or through indicating multifarious rhetoric's at work in other substantive disciplines (rhetoric of inquiry)—this trend in contrast openly acknowledges some of Plato's charges. Rhetoric is about deception and subversion, and what's more, it most certainly deals with surfaces!

If one were to characterise this trend it can be argued that it constitutes in a sense what one could call an implicit 'Gorgian' turn which stresses the gulf between language and reality, and the idea that language is deception to the degree that it can never faithfully report the phenomena around us in the world. As de Man (1979:115) argues in his discussion of language as literature which is the ultimate grounds for understanding the world: 'But when literature seduces us with the freedom of its figural combinations...it is not the less deceitful because it asserts its own deceitful properties.' In other words, language (literature) is never a transparent medium and as a result the only recourse we have in relating to things in the world is through a language which creates these phenomena. The result of this understanding of language is the realisation that there is no escape from untruth or deceit, and despite an explicit realisation of this deceitful character of language, this realisation, and language, still remains deceitful. All we are left with are images, and opinions that we create about the world which are unreliable and subject to change. Nevertheless, this is the locus in which rhetoric operates because opinion is not knowledge and therefore open to change. Rhetoric achieves this through the persuasive presentation of images and its success depends on how these images are constructed and utilised in gaining adherence.
In this understanding of rhetoric as subversion the contention is that if the locus of rhetoric is opinion and subject to change then rhetorical cognition should be understood as a quest for meaning that is marked by a power-play and competition. Rhetoric, in other words becomes equated with the power-play in and for meaning: that is the infinite repetition of the construction, reversal, and deconstruction of various 'truths'. Here rhetoric functions by disclosng through a reconstruction of the discourse things in it that were unnoticed in its natural structure and by exploring how this discourse structures reality. In this movement rhetoric subverts the 'normal' order of the text by examining the power-relations and the competition in and for meaning that constitute it as a text.

However it can also be said that this understanding of rhetorical cognition as a power-play in and for meaning is radically subversive to the extent that it also reflects on its own power-relations that animates it as a project. In this context, rhetoric reflects on its own deceitful status to the extent that it tries to escape or mask the disruptive rhetorical forces of untruth that it announces. Carroll (1971: 34) cites Lacoue-Labarthe's insights into the tendency of rhetoricians to favour a certain theory of language (as metaphor or trope) as the basis for reasserting and rehabilitating rhetoric as a serious intellectual activity. That is, the strategy of using the figurative forces of fiction (the sophistic meta-rhetorical view of the world) against rhetoric's detractors (philosophy) while asserting that this is the ultimate ground of reference: that all language is figurative. Lacoue-Labarthe indicates that the problem with this strategy is that 'in its principle, regardless of the brutality or subtlety of its strategic intentions, it is absolutely subjected to a whole conceptual apparatus that is metaphysical from start to finish.'

In other words, there is no innocent concept of rhetoric, because the concept itself is the result of power-relations, which continually subverts itself to the degree that it cannot escape from the rhetorical deceit it announces. Deceit (that rhetoric operates because the truth about language is that it has no relation to reality and persuasion is necessary because the facts do not speak for themselves) leads to more deceit (forgetting, mistaking or masking this linguistic origin that it announces in its attack against philosophy). Rhetoric leads to more rhetoric—it becomes a monster that continually subverts itself. Carroll (1987: 20) argues that as a result of this realisation 'rhetoric is not a concept, but a process or use of language perpetually in search of its concept whose definition or realisation must be infinitely postponed—precisely because the rhetorical realisation of the concept would at the same time displace it, derealize it'. Nevertheless, the monstrous character of rhetoric as a term that continually subverts itself is an important critical tool as a means of questioning the integrity of literature and philosophy to the degree that it takes no form of truth or deceit (death of truth) as its truth.

The problem with this understanding of rhetoric is that it operates at such an abstract level that some people will understandably have great difficulty in rec-
ognising it as rhetoric. The other problem is that as a critical tool it tends to be vague as to how the critical process and analysis should be conducted. However, perhaps the important contribution that this trend makes in the field is to introduce a reflective domain in rhetoric that is conducted from a rhetorical perspective itself. In terms of analysing the terminology used, its web of relations, and the implications that these terms and relations hold for the domain of rhetoric. This trend in a sense announces, to use Dillon's (1991:2) words, that the 'carnivalesque spirit' of the heady days of a free-care expansion of rhetoric are over. That after all the construction and expansion of rhetoric; and deconstruction of rhetoric's opponents: the 'kicking of butts', and the tipping of boats 'to the other side'—it is perhaps time to take stock, step back and examine the handiwork.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper tries to examine and reflect on some of the handiwork done to the term rhetoric over the centuries. Unavoidably due to the restrictions of the length of the paper the choice of trends for examination is extremely selective and there are many gaps that need to be filled. However a comprehensive overview of traditions and trends in defining rhetoric was not the purpose here, but rather to indicate that between the two lines of the Pocket Oxford dictionary there is a vast scope of literature on the topic of rhetoric, with many strands, traditions, strategies, and nuances that inform the term. This review tries to give to those who are just starting out in the study of rhetoric (as I started two years ago) some kind of ready access guide to the universe of rhetoric, so as to make it more palatable and easy to understand.

Rhetoric, as Leeman (1982:42) saw it is a 'chameleonic notion', its meaning being fluid as a result of the more or less independent strategies of appropriation through the centuries for purposes of attack or defence. The temptation in the light of this fact is to try and fix one stable meaning of rhetoric for all time, to close off conversation in the face of alternative definitions by spluttering 'that's not rhetoric!' Viewed this way rhetoric comes to be seen as a trial and a snare that hampers discussion proper. However, this paper argues that rhetoric need not be viewed this way. In examining the various trends it tries to indicate that what we think falls outside the domain of rhetoric as persuasion (rhetoric as subversion, as inquiry, as epistemic, as applied) is in fact part of an ongoing conversation about the nature and the status of rhetoric.

In other words, that even the definitions attributed to rhetoric which seem so unfamiliar to our common understanding has a trace, that all of the definitions reviewed in this paper have a trace in one way or another to the sophistic conception of rhetoric. The trick is to pick up these traces, link them, and articulate them through examining the history of the debates over the status and content of rhetoric. This is why I argue that the debates about rhetoric themselves are so
important, because the surplus of meaning that surrounds this word is a means to understanding the term in all its ambiguity. In closing therefore I would like to argue while the realisation that even the remotest definitions reviewed here have a trace to the sophistic conception of rhetoric, and the field of rhetoric as a result, is so diverse, this should not be viewed as a hindrance. Rather, the recognition of these traces should lead one to acknowledge that while the field of rhetoric is one that is rich in diversity, it is also more unified than commonly thought, and that such a realisation should enable one to do more things with rhetoric than previously thought of, or allowed.

APPENDIX I

EXAMPLES OF DEFINITIONS ACCORDING TO THE VARIOUS TRADITIONS IN THE MANIFEST HISTORY OF RHETORIC

2.1 The sophistic conception
- ‘there is nothing analogous in the case of oratory, which does its work and produces its effect entirely by means of speech. That is why I assert that the art of oratory is the art of speech par excellence...’ (PlGorg 450b).

- ‘There is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped establish. For this it is which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust, and things honourable and base; and if were not for these ordinances we should not be able to live with one another. It is by this also that we confute the bad and extol the good. Through this we educate the ignorant and appraise the wise; for the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul. With this faculty we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute and seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown; for the same arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts; and while we call eloquent those who are able to speak before a crowd, we regard as a sage those who most skilfully debate their problems in their own minds...in all our actions as well as all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom’ (IsocAntidosis 256-257).

2.2 The Platonic conception
- ‘Rhetoric, so far as this is taken to mean the art of persuasion, i.e., the art of deluding by means of fair semblance...is a dialectic, which borrows from po-
etry only so much as is necessary to win over men's minds to the side of the speaker before they have weighed the matter, and to rob the verdict of its freedom. Hence it can be recommended neither for the bar nor the pulpit...the machinery of persuasion, which, being equally available for putting a fine gloss or cloak upon vice and error, fails to rid one completely of the lurking suspicion that one is being artfully hoodwinked' (Kant 1973:192-123).

- 'Since wit and fancy find easier entertainment in the world than dry truth and real knowledge, figurative speeches and allusion in language will hardly be admitted as an imperfection or abuse of it. I confess in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight than information and improvement, such ornaments as are borrowed from them can scarce pass for faults. But yet if we could speak of things as they are, we must allow all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement, and so are indeed perfect cheats' (Locke 1975:112).

2.3 The supplementary or applied conception

- 'What makes a formal argument persuasive? In most genuinely persuasive arguments there are five elements...

- **A human approach.** The writer strikes the reader as an honest, believable person who has a genuine interest in his material and in his reader.

- **Solid evidence.** The writer does not rely on mere assertion; he uses pertinent facts, details, statistics, or testimony from authorities to back up his statements.

- **Good logic.** The writer makes the right connections between his pieces of evidence; he creates accurate generalisations and draws proper conclusions.

- **An avoidance of fallacy.** The writer not only avoids logical errors, he also avoids irrelevancies, false appeals to emotion, or question begging.

- **A clear argumentative organisation.** The writer organises his argument so that his reader can understand all its parts and how the parts relate to each other and to the thesis' (Tibbets 1991:315).
EXAMPLES OF DEFINITIONS ACCORDING TO THE VARIOUS TRENDS IN THE REVENGE OF RHETORIC

3.1 The new sophistic

'I have suggested a "sophistic" definition of rhetoric founded on and consistent with the notions of rhetoric as art, style as personal expression, the timely, the appropriate, and the possible. This definition posits that man is driven primarily by his desire to be other. Moreover, it points out that as man becomes what he is not he encounters situations to which he often responds to with language. It also suggests that if man's responses are to be effective, they must take into account the temporal and formal structure of the situations he addresses. As such they must be guided by a sense of time and propriety, and must be formulated in ways consonant with himself. Finally this definition stresses that the whole enterprise of symbolic expression falls within the region of art' (Poulakis 1983:43).

John Nelson aptly uses the term "sophistic" to characterise the stance now current among students of the rhetoric of human sciences. As contrasted with modernism, the most obvious feature of this approach is its rejection of global generalizations, grand theories, and synthetic methodologies. Sophistic gives priority to the unity of concrete experience as it is filtered through our interests rather than to the theoretical coherence of the varieties of experience as they are ordered according to an abstract rational calculus. Sophistic implies a pluralism in which the methods for inquiry are adapted to the particular subject under investigation. It seeks to solve situated problems rather than to formulate abstract theoretical principles' (Leff 1987:29).

3.2 The rhetoric of inquiry

'What has this to do with rhetoric in science? Plenty. I have deliberately begun with the hardest case, mathematics, because I want to illustrate a general point. A crucial part of persuasion in science as in everyday life is the formulation of thoughts and reasons in ways that will enable the limited cognitive systems that are the targets of persuasion to think well about the pertinent issue. In mathematics the rhetorical forms are both spare and conventionalized. In consequence mathematics typically repeats a small number of pieces of dead rhetoric, devices so commonly used that they become the equivalents of cliché....There is no line to be drawn between the devices that focus the atten-
tion of professional mathematicians on the structures of complex proofs and the images deployed by scientific revolutionaries attempting to make compelling a new vision of the order of nature’ (Kitcher 1991:8).

- ‘A work of history we argue, does not derive chiefly from solitary illumination in the archives. It is writing, an attempt at persuasion. Histories can be read as orations. “The writing of history is rhetorical—that is, argumentative, using at its best all the devices of language and fact and logic to sustain argument.” “Rhetoric” is not confined to falsehoods. Trying to write history unrhetorically is like trying to tell a joke unverbally. Historians will resist the notion that their writing is “rhetorical”. Few want to be caught in company with so nasty a word. Since the decline of classical civilization, rhetoric has acquired a bad name, worsened by abuses in the age of Goebbels and J Walter Thompson’ (Megill and McCloskey 1987:221).

3.3 Rhetoric as subversion

- ‘Essentially Valesio argues that all language is ideological. That is, due to its realisation of certain structural choices, language always directs our perception in certain ways based on its social contexts.... Rhetoric functions as negation to subvert the dominant opinion. Rhetoric's function is to make possible discussion where there is no need for discussion. Rhetoric, then, is not essentially a process of replacing one opinion with another but of resisting any position being raised above discussion (Leff 1983:438-439).

- ‘It becomes clear that critical rhetoricians and their discourses do not set practices of resistance into motion but, rather, are themselves set into motion by those practices. That is to say, rather than being originary in the sense that as McKerrow put it, their words “contain the seeds of subversion or rejection of authority” , critical rhetoricians are, like all others, selves “called into being by the totality of these practises, the concept which they need in order to be able to link themselves together”. A critical rhetoric is a timely discourse whose task is not, as we have heretofore thought, one of “changing what's in peoples heads”. Instead it is about turning the grid of intelligibility that organizes the present in such a way that it becomes possible “to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression” out of which “new forms of community, co-existence, pleasure” will emerge’ (Biesecker 1992:361).

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