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CULTURE AND RHETORIC: CAN THEY EXIST WITHOUT EACH OTHER? A RESEARCH PROPOSAL.

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Abstract

The problem posed in the title seems both apparent and crucial. Its solution depends on how we understand the terms: culture and rhetoric. The definitions proposed in this study are not immediately obvious. Rhetoric should be understood following Quintilian's "Rhetorice est inveniendi recte et disponendi et eloquendi cum firma memoria et cum dignitate actionis scientia" [Quint., V.10.54]; culture, on the other hand, is cumulative and should be perceived as information obtained from others through mechanisms of social transmission, such as imitation, teaching, or language. In this situation, rhetoric possesses the tools for this social transmission. The tools of transmission will be both imitation (imitatio) and teaching and language, which are related to rhetoric (téchne rhetoriké). With this understanding of both terms—culture and rhetoric—it turns out that the latter is indispensable to culture. This article therefore provides evidence for this hypothesis.

Keywords: rhetoric, culture, AI review of rhetoric and culture, Aristotle, M.F. Quintilian, Philodemus, Martin Borrhaus, Józef I.M. Bocheński OP, Wolfram Ax, Alex Mesoudi, R.E. Volkmann.

AB AUCTORE: RHETORICA ET EIUS EFFECTUS IN CULTURAM

The problem seems apparent, as rhetoric is one of the most important tools of culture (*Histoire de la rhétorique* 1999; Booth 2004; Lichański 2017a). Of course, we must remember that there is no consensus among scholars on clear definitions of both concepts. I will mention just two examples: Leonhard von Spengel's still

important study, which, although published in 1863, has not lost its relevance and provides over 50 definitions of rhetoric from ancient times – though we too rarely use them (Spengel 1863, 481-526). On the other hand, although this source is not entirely reliable, a review of the bibliography provided under the entries "Kultura [Culture]" and "Culture" on Wikipedia (<https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kultura>, [2025-10-24] and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture>, [2025-10-24]) reveals a profound complexity in understanding the concept.

It should also be remembered that rhetoric itself, in its classical sense, is currently being marginalized, even as a result of linguistic research, especially when it comes to text linguistics. This also applies to pedagogy, where rhetoric as a tool in education is no longer important, and if it is invoked, it is more likely as a collection of stylistic devices and as a propaedeutic for oratory. Finally, postmodern thinking is also reluctant to refer to classical rhetoric. In this situation, the question of rhetoric's role in culture, while undisputed historically until the late 19th century, seems entirely marginal in the 20th and 21st centuries. However, programs such as WAC (*Writing Across the Curriculum*) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing_across_the_curriculum, [2025-10-24]) indicate that we are witnessing a renaissance of rhetoric, and its role in culture, particularly in education, which is one of the mechanisms for the social transmission of information, remains important.

Is the categorical statement I opened this discussion with at least a significant risk of error? I believe that the research hypothesis that rhetoric is indispensable to culture, considered one of the most important mechanisms for the social transmission of information in areas such as imitation, teaching, and finally, language, is defensible¹. The text "*Culture and Rhetoric: Can they exist without each other? Research proposal*" is an attempt to demonstrate that the hypothesis: rhetoric is one of the most important tools for culture is a thesis.

Before I proceed to prove the above hypothesis and demonstrate its validity, I will point out that education is, of course, the most important element of culture, and its role among the mechanisms of social transmission in acquiring information is undeniable (Mesoudi 2011, 1); moreover, culture is cumulative in nature (Mesoudi 2011a, 1-16). Alex Mesoudi demonstrates these propositions using the example of humanist culture, which shaped the intellectual face of a world rooted in the Mediterranean tradition from the 14th to the 17th century. It is also worth paying attention to extremely important texts, such as Martin Borrhaus's edition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Borrhaus 1551), as well as Father Jan Wierus's short but extremely valuable text, *Assertiones Rhetoricae* (1577). It is also worth consulting the anthology *Literaturnye manifesty zapadnoevropejskikh klassicistov* (Literary manifests of the Western European classicists, 1980), or Bernard Weinberg's earlier *Trattati di poetica e rhetorica delo Cinquecento* (1970-1974), to see that Alex Mesoudi's judgment is solidly founded.

These problems were discussed in great detail by Stefan Świeżawski in his studies of European philosophy in the 15th century (Świeżawski 1974-1987). These issues were also presented in the volume edited by Małgorzata Frankowska-Terlecka, *Rhetoric in the 15th Century. Studies on the Tradition, Theory, and Practice of Fifteenth-Century Rhetoric* (1988). One could add here the volumes from the series *History of Catholic Theology in Poland*, particularly the second volume (1975), which covers the period from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, including issues

related to education. The volumes mentioned, and this is only a selection from the broader literature, fully confirm Alex Mesoudi's assessment.

Of course, one could object to the presented remarks that the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries saw a breakthrough associated with the emergence of Romantic movements, which quite consciously rejected the older tradition. However, an analysis of texts by authors such as Maurycy Mochnacki, Tomasz S. Dziekoński, and Ricarda Huch suggests caution in the view that rhetoric is being abandoned as a significant cultural tool. I pointed out these issues in my study of the Romantic tradition (Lichański 2024, 57-80).

At the same time, I must refer to the review of the relationship between rhetoric and culture conducted by AI. There are suggestions that

Rhetoric and culture are interconnected because rhetoric is the study of persuasion and communication, while culture provides the context for those messages. All cultures are rhetorical, and all rhetorics are cultural, meaning that the way a culture persuades an The way a culture makes meaning is influenced by its own unique customs, values, and historical context. The study of cultural rhetoric examines how these elements interact, shaping public discourse and individual identity. (Culture and Rhetoric, Review from AI, 2025-11-19).

This observation is both accurate and inaccurate. Rhetoric is not the study of persuasion and communication, and culture does not provide the context for these messages. Rhetoric is the science of textual construction and argumentation based on uncertain premises, while culture is one of the mechanisms of social transmission—the transfer of information in areas such as imitation, teaching, and finally, language. For me, these are distinct disciplines, independent, though they certainly interact and draw on each other's methods.

So we return to the title question: can culture exist without rhetoric? I believe the answer is unequivocal—culture cannot exist without rhetoric. It's time, therefore, to prove the hypothesis.

INTRODUCTIO

I will therefore reiterate that the problem posed in the title seems both apparent and crucial. It boils down to understanding the terms culture and rhetoric, or more precisely, how we will use them and what referents we use them to describe². The definition proposed in this study is not, at first glance, obvious. Initially, I will understand rhetoric (Spengel 1863, 481-526; Lichański 2007, I.20-25, 59-87) following Quintilian: *Rhetorice est inveniendi recte et disponendi et eloquendi cum firma memoria et cum dignitate actionis scientia* (Quint., V.10.54). This understanding is echoed by Philodemus: [...] *first, one must carefully consider the content and choose words that are not inappropriate for it, and in the final phase, one must add a beautiful stylistic setting and provide the work with what makes it enjoyable* (PHIL., poet., NK).

Culture poses a greater problem, because, firstly, it is *cumulative in nature* (Mesoudi 2011a, 5)³, and, secondly, it must be perceived as

² In order to determine both the understanding and use of terms and what designates we use them to describe, we must use the principles of status science, cf. Volkmann 1885/1987, pp. 33-92, and Lichański, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 98-104.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by Jakub Z. Lichański.

information obtained from others through **mechanisms of social transmission**, such as imitation, teaching, or language (Mesoudi 2011, 1; emphasis – JZL). In this situation, rhetoric possesses the tools for the aforementioned social transmission. Both imitation (imitatio), teaching, and language are tools used by rhetoric (*téchne rhetoriké*) (CORN., *rhet. ad Her.*, *passim*; Volkmann 1885/1987; Lichański 2025, 3987-3997). With this understanding of both terms—culture and rhetoric—it turns out that the latter is indispensable to culture. This article provides evidence for this hypothesis.

PROBLEMA PRAESENTANDUM

It's worth beginning by recalling the opinion of Martin Borrhaus⁴, who interprets the beginning of Aristotle's Rhetoric as follows:

"Η ρητορική ἔστιν ἀντίστροφος τῇ διαλεκτικῇ [...] Ars rhetorica dialecticae tanquam ex altera parte respondent [...] or the Art of Rhetoric corresponds to dialectic as if from the other side" (Borrhaus 1551, f. A1r).

In this way, Borrhaus links rhetoric with the skill of asking questions, interpretation, and argumentation, and in this sense it is also part of logic (specifically, the Organon; it includes the Categories, On Interpretation, On Sophistic Proofs, Analytics I and II, and Topics). This issue is crucial because the Greek term – *antistrophos* – indicates at least the dual nature of rhetoric as a science. It is similar to dialectic, yet at the same time merely its counterpart. Rhetoric, as Sonja K. Foss noted centuries later, says something important about the subject of speech (and further, about its structure, etc.), but also about the speaker and his or her audience (Foss 1989, 191-196).

Certain issues related to rhetoric were definitively clarified in the works of Wolfram Ax (Ax 2000; Lichański 2008, 247-256). He emphasized that language must be considered as lexis and dianoia, or the level of grammar, which only tells how to construct a correct utterance (*the lexis level*, meaning one that is understandable to all users of a given language), and *the level of dianoia* belonging to rhetoric (poetics serves as a "service" to it), which deals with shaping thought, i.e., when we use the rules of grammar (along with syntax) to present it clearly and emphatically in our speech. This was pointed out by, among others, Stefania Skwarczyńska (Skwarczyńska 1954, 2. 324-397) (from the perspective of literary studies) and Leon Zawadowski (Zawadowski 1966, 145-148) (from the linguistic perspective), not to mention other researchers.

QUOMODO CONCEPTUS INTELEGERE

It is therefore clear how I understand the concepts in the title. Let us reiterate that culture is:

[...] information obtained from others through **mechanisms of social transmission**, such as imitation, teaching, or language (Mesoudi 2011, 1; emphasis – JZL).

Moreover – to reiterate – culture possesses the characteristic of "cumulativeness" (Mesoudi 2011a, 5); this means that past solutions influence our contemporary perception of cultural phenomena (Histoire de la rhétorique 1999; Booth 2004; Lichański 2017a). This also means that, in a sense, we continue to use past solutions, only adapting them to changing circumstances, i.e.,

peristases. These remarks align with Józef Bocheński's reflections on culture (Bocheński 2024, 136-151). He states:

Culture is defined as the totality of all things that humans, as humans, contribute to nature. [...] Culture can be external or internal. [...] Hence, external culture has three parts: religion, social life, and technology. Internal culture, on the other hand, concerns the body or the soul. If it concerns the former, it is physical culture, "sports," cosmetics, etc. If it concerns the latter, it refines either the intellect, the will, or the emotions. Culture that refines the intellect is science, culture that refines the will is morality, and culture that refines emotions is partly morality, partly fine art (Bocheński 2024, 137).

Thus, both terms complement each other.

Rhetoric, on the other hand, should be perceived – I will expand on the ancient definitions provided earlier – as follows:

Rhetoric is a formal system in which rules are defined for constructing, analyzing, and, i.e., uttering an infinite number of correct texts composed of a finite number of correct sentences, or periods. Both the sentences, or periods, and the texts are: organized inventively, dispositionally, and elocutionally. This ordering serves to present specific ideas in the eye and refers to specific values. Both the ordering of texts and the presentation of specific ideas and the reference to specific values are the result of intentional acts of the author (Lichański 2007, I.80).

This can be linked to the previously mentioned remarks by both Stefania Skwarczyńska and Leon Zawadowski (Skwarczyńska 1954, 2. 324-397; Zawadowski 1966, 145-148). However, it is important to recall Philodemus's important reservation that rhetoric can be fully applied only within literature (PHIL., 2006, II.1-3; Asper 2019, 655-674). In law and social life, however, the principle is to strive for truth (PHIL., 2006, II.4). I would also add philosophy and the sciences here, which is consistent with Józef Bocheński's remarks (Bocheński 2024, 96): the aim of philosophizing is to obtain truth for its own sake. The same principle applies to science.

CONCLUSIONES PRAELIMINARES

The conclusions are therefore quite obvious: with the understanding of culture as I have presented, rhetoric is a virtually indispensable tool for it. Both in terms of conveying information and as a tool of social transmission. A significant element of this transmission, within the tools of rhetoric, is the topic (Curtius 1997; Emrich 1977, 235-263; Wagner 2009, Bd. 9, Col. 605-626; Ostheeren, Kalivoda, Ranieri, von Rosen, Danuser, Jordan, & Gessmann, 2009, Bd. 9, Col. 630-724; Thompson 2023). It is thanks to the topic that certain motifs recur, ensuring continuity in the way of perceiving, for example, interpersonal relationships; what's more, they are elements of argumentation. But they, along with tropes and figures, are also elements of both continuity and imitation, and are continually perpetuated through teaching and language (Berger 1987; Classen 1988, 7-19; Booth 1991; Collingwood 1937; Götttert 1991).

Moreover, rhetoric, as an important tool of philology and hermeneutics, helps to perpetuate certain ways of perceiving the world and its interpretation (Boeckh 1886; Korbut 1924; Skwarczyńska 1948; Lonergan 1976; Rożdestvenskij 1979; Mantzavinos 2005; Turner 2014; Senegačnik 2021, 103-125; Lichański 2025, 3957-3997). Finally, research on tradition has shown the necessity of its subjective perception (Szacki 1971).

⁴ Description of Borrhaus's study in: Lichański, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 32, 94-96.

DISPUTATIO

However, certain doubts can be raised regarding the presented concept. These can primarily be attributed to changes that have occurred in the perception of language (*Structural Linguistics* 1979) and all the consequences its development has brought. The development of phenomenology has also introduced certain fundamental innovations in the perspective on literary works (Ingarden 1960; Lichański 2017) and, more broadly, culture (Stein 2016, 363-366ff). These changes, such as text linguistics and cultural studies not only among phenomenologists but also postmodernists, raise fundamental doubts about whether rhetoric is a valid tool for cultural research.

However, it can be pointed out that the issues, particularly those related to the development of linguistics, do not contradict the previously stated point. Simply put, the approaches proposed by structural linguistics, in particular, as well as phenomenological research, can be considered complementary to the approach proposed by rhetoric, along with hermeneutics and the general principles of philology (Boeckh 1886; Mantzavinos 2005; Senegačnik 2021, 103-125; Lichański 2025, 3957-3997). The same observation can be made regarding cultural research, because in a phenomenological approach, the problem of values, which is closely related to the issue of culture, can be linked to the previously cited remark by Józef Bocheński; the opinion contained in André Lalande's dictionary is very similar:

[Culture] more generally and usually: The character of an educated person who, thanks to this education, has developed his critical sense and judgment: education that aims to shape this character. [...] Culture, and then its supplementation [culture of memory, culture of mind]. (Lalande 1972, 199-200).

Also, the approaches to culture proposed by, among others, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/> (2024-09-30)) and Burkhardt Dürker and Ivo Strecker (Dürker 1998, Bd. 4, col. 1384-1420; Strecker 1998, Bd. 4, col. 1421-1439) indicate that various definitions of this concept can be reconciled with the principles of *téchne rhetoriké*. I also believe that Richard P. Feynman's opinion, quoted as the epigraph, clearly points to the role not only of education but also of the critical thinking that should accompany it. And technical rhetoric, thanks to the tools that are at the stages of *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*, help find answers to the questions that Feynman posed to the teacher, *resp.* education.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion is therefore obvious – the hypothesis that rhetoric is essential in the study of culture has been defended and can be considered a thesis. Moreover, culture cannot exist without rhetoric, but perceived in its classical form as *téchne rhetoriké*. Especially if we remember its important interpretations, for example those proposed by Martin Borrhaus (Aristotle 1551). It is also worth referring to the mottos with which I opened these considerations. Guillaume Tardif merely recalled that rhetoric is essential when preparing any text (the term "writer" should be understood more broadly). Richard Emil Volkmann, on the other hand, pointed to rhetoric as a tool for shaping social life correctly, i.e., in accordance with Immanuel Kant's principle: *Act in such a way that you always use humanity [the human person – note JZL], both in your own person and in the person of every other, as an end and never merely as a means* (Kant 1953, 62). In both cases, rhetoric proves indispensable to culture; as, by the way, Richard P.

Feynman's remark also emphasizes. And let us remember the warning of both Socrates and Christ that in our statements about important matters we should strive to discover the truth, and not amuse ourselves with oratorical tricks, a point emphasized by both Plato and Διδαχὴ (PL., *de rep.*, II.382e; V.454a; VII.533d; Διδαχὴ 2025, II.4-5).

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