

Antidosis¹:

An Apology for the Art of Rhetoric

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Because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish (from Isocrates' Antidosis)

The O.J. Simpson trial confirmed for a majority of Americans their low opinion of lawyers and revealed their low opinion of rhetoric, especially the rhetoric of public discourse. For over thirty years I have taught the art of rhetoric to many students who initially, at least, have shared this majority view. I believe that more than anything else that it is the mistrust and misunderstanding of this art that accounts for our despising lawyers, politicians, public relations professionals, and advertising executives.²

Persuasion depends on language, and the defining attitude of too many Americans toward language is a profound distrust. What

¹ The title for this piece comes from the work of the same name written by Isocrates of Athens (436-338 B.C.E.). This work is one of the most famous defenses of the art of rhetoric.

² A more recent telling example involves the demonizing of Kenneth Starr by a majority of Americans. This example is interesting since Starr was a prosecutor, not a defense attorney, and the case itself was political, if not Starr's motives as well. Lawyer and politician combined, a scapegoating two for one.

we love is certainty. We wish our laws and the process whereby we arrive at them to be perfect. We wish justice to be a matter of demonstration, not persuasion. We have cause to be concerned by the degree to which our students and the public at large misunderstand the role rhetoric and persuasion play in our legislative life, our judicial life, and our entrepreneurial life. This distrust and misunderstanding is no more evidenced than in the fact that many polls reveal that lawyers, politicians, public relations professionals, and advertising executives are some of the most despised people in our community. Yet their functions are essential for the success of our civic life.

It is impossible to imagine a state of affairs more threatening to the life of a free nation and a free people than despising the very instrument by which our civic life is advanced. Our democratic and entrepreneurial systems are at risk unless rhetoric and our understanding of the relationship between language and knowledge are vastly improved. Without this understanding, we will continue to scapegoat politicians, lawyers, PR people, those in advertising, seeing their art as manipulation, propaganda and lies--mere rhetoric.

This distrust of rhetoric has been with us since the beginning of western democracy and can be traced back to the dispute between Plato, the philosopher, and the sophists, the

practitioners of the art of rhetoric in early Greece.³

Plato mistrusted the democratic practices of Athens and the probability-based rhetoric--to him, the deception-based rhetoric -- of the sophists. As a philosopher, he believed the sophists never approached the primary concern of philosophers, truth. He also worried that without such philosophical truths the governing of human beings would not rest on a firm foundation. In other words, all activities that were not based on "the truth" would be based on false beliefs or at best "mere" opinion.

Plato had a profound distrust of democracy and the chaos necessarily inherent in democracy. Behind this distrust of democracy and the practitioners of democracy -- lawyers and politicians -- was a profound mistrust of rhetoric. Plato was a word hater, in spite of the fact that he was a brilliant user of words, an artist who gave us the dialogues that raise the very question we are examining. The philosopher Plato was a word hater because he believed that words interfere with the understanding of the world around us and that rhetoric is little more than the art

³ Plato was concerned with the written word and believed that it was a threat to both memory and the dialectical search for truth. About the practitioners of this written art, the sophists, he said they had the "smell of the lamp" about them, testifying to their writing at night with the help of oil lamps. The Egyptians had a similar distrust, but one of the spoken word, not the written. According to Diodorus, a Roman historian, the Egyptians were convinced that if the advocates (lawyers) were allowed to speak they would greatly becloud the justice of the case. Therefore, all criminal proceedings were conducted in silence and everything was done in writing. At the end, when all writing had been examined, the judge placed a carved image of truth upon one of the two pleas without once ever speaking a word.

of flattery and at worst an art that can make the best seem the worst and the worst the best. ⁴

Yet it is important to understand that Plato did not win this battle with the sophists. In his day, Plato was not the winner. In fact, the winners were the sophists, who argued that the laws we will live by in the future, judgments about past events, judicial rhetoric, and the praising and blaming of present things (what the Greeks called epideictic rhetoric, which would compare to advertising and PR today) do not belong in the realm of philosophical or metaphysical truths, the realm of certain and absolute and verifiable truths, but in the realm of persuasion—the realm of mere opinion. For Plato, rhetoric's only role, if it was to have one at all, was to communicate truths that were arrived at through philosophy. For the sophists, rhetoric was a mode of inquiry. It is how our communities come to agree on the beliefs and values that we would have within a culture. These values and judgment are not a matter of absolute truths that can exist independent of rhetoric, but are the result of shared inquiry.

When Plato does defend rhetoric in one of his dialogues

⁴ It is not my intent to imply that all attacks against Democracy are based on a mistrust of language, though I believe it is a factor in many anti-democratic notions. For a fuller "menu" of motives I would recommend Garry Wills' *A Necessary Evil: A History of American Distrust of Government (1999)*. Nevertheless, I would note that in his excellent chapter entitled "The Withdrawers" (in particular his focus on Thoreau) Wills quotes Thoreau: "It is not so important that many should be as good as you, as that there be some *absolute goodness* (my italics) somewhere; for that will leaven the whole lump." Good and evil in democratic terms do not mix at all with absolutist thinking. To commune with others was something that Thoreau could barely

called the "Phaedrus," he defends a very anti-democratic version of rhetoric, something that we would call propaganda. It is perfectly consistent with Plato's view that if you know what is true independent of language, then language's job becomes nothing more than manipulating people into coming to know the truths that are for their own good. So ironically, when Plato does allow for a rhetoric, it is a rhetoric of propaganda and manipulation, not a rhetoric of shared inquiry and discovery.

Quintilian was a Roman rhetorician who wrote about rhetoric after a point in Roman history when rhetoric no longer played a role in discovering the shared beliefs and values of a community, when the Roman Republic has been replaced by the absolute rule of the Caesars. He makes the case that when a lawyer has determined the guilt or innocence of a client, that lawyer has every right to deceive or to lie to free his client.⁵ Cicero, who came before Quintilian and had not absorbed Plato as had Quintilian, lived in a time when Rome was a Republic and not under the rule of the Caesars. He understood best that it was the process of inquiry

tolerate.

⁵ On a related matter it is noteworthy that Quintilian promulgated a doctrine known as the "vir bonus" which asserted that one could not be a good orator unless one were a good man. This was an absolutist position and it is still relevant today as we watch the savaging of the character of politicians. This is not to suggest the relevance of character or ethos as a necessary and effective available means of persuasion. The character of the speaker is relevant, but the perfection of the speaker's character is only an ideal that the more practical Cicero understood only so well. The endless attacks against the character of politicians, already under attack for being politicians, is made all the more problematic by another absolutist standard.

that determines guilt or innocence. Guilt or innocence is not something that is known in advance, but is "discovered" together through rhetorical inquiry and persuasion. ⁶

It is in fact true that O.J. Simpson is either innocent or guilty, a logical and absolute truth if you will. Certainly if one "knew" in advance that Simpson was guilty or innocent, there would be the temptation to either give the accused a lesser defense if one decided that he is guilty, or to suborn perjury or conceal evidence or to outright lie to get him acquitted if one decided that he is innocent.

The problem of course is that guilt or innocence is not known in advance. One of the points that the sophists made against Plato is not so much that they disagreed with his philosophical concerns, but that they saw that in the realm of human affairs involving laws for the future, determining justice for past events, and the praising and blaming of present things, rhetoric is the only method we have to come to shared beliefs. Ultimately, O.J.Simpson's guilt or innocence before the law was based on what a jury believed. Verdicts are finally not about "mere" facts, but persuasion and belief. It is this process that we distrust. It is the practitioners that we despise. But in despising and misunderstanding the instrument of rhetoric, we cut off the lifeblood of democratic survival. I might add that from rhetoric's

⁶ There are certainly lawyers, both prosecutors and defense attorneys, who in fact practice such a notion of the law. What is ironic is that from the position I am advocating here, herein lies the greater offense; lawyers who take the law into their own

point of view the "bad" lawyers in the O.J. Simpson trial were the prosecutors who acted as if DNA facts spoke for themselves and confused persuasion with demonstration.

Our democratic way of life requires a proper understanding of rhetoric as a mode of inquiry (this public and essential role of rhetoric certainly does not exhaust all other uses of rhetoric), of how rhetoric takes part in the creation of knowledge, which was at the center of the epistemic debate between the sophists and Plato. Rhetoric is not concerned with metaphysical truths or scientific facts, but with the essentials of our civic life--the things that we value, but which we unfortunately relegate to "mere opinion".

I began this short history of rhetoric with the quarrel between the philosopher Plato and the orators, the sophists, and the influence of the Greeks on Roman rhetoric. But the negative influence of Plato can be felt right up to modern times. In a sense, a vast number of American citizens are Platonists, whether they have ever read Plato or not. For too many Americans, language is mostly about communicating truths that are a matter of demonstration, not about shared inquiry and the complexity of persuasion.

In any case, the next major step in the denigration of rhetoric occurred with the downfall of Rome and the rise of Christianity. Much of Christian thought was amenable to Platonic thinking, and though Augustine worked diligently to rescue

hands, as opposed to those who play by the rules.

rhetoric, Christianity overwhelmingly rejected rhetoric, believing that faith in God's word alone was enough. But even if Augustine's enterprise of rescuing rhetoric and linking Christianity with the secular and pagan thought of the Romans and Greeks had been successful, it would not have rescued rhetoric in the sense that rhetoric had any epistemic or knowledge-inventing power. Truth came only from the Bible and even Augustine's view, at best, would merely have enhanced the art of preaching revealed truth.

It is not until the Renaissance, beginning first in Italy and later in England, that much of the oratorical or sophistic tradition was reborn. However, any promotion of rhetoric as a mode of inquiry and of inventing the cultural values we would live by would be short lived, not only because the excesses of the Renaissance resulted in reactionary forces that limited the scope of rhetoric in civic life, but primarily because of the advances of science.

Although the materialist-based philosophy of science may seem far removed from the idealism of Plato, there is in the tenets of the "new science" a profound concern with the discovery of absolute laws, governing not only the motions of the physical world, but the "motions" or motives of human activity, the "social sciences". These laws would exist outside the probability-based, shared and agreed to beliefs born of rhetoric.

Descartes, a French philosopher and proponent of the new science, wrote: "We reject all such merely probable knowledge and make it a rule to trust only what is completely known and

incapable of being doubted" (First Meditations). The ultimate concern of science in the so-called period of the Enlightenment was the discovery of these absolute and demonstrable truths, and the rejection of knowledge and beliefs that were the result of persuasion. If rhetoric had a role to play it would merely be to communicate such truths, and in a worst-case scenario for rhetoric, rhetoric would, as it was for Plato, have the role of manipulating audiences for their own good. Ironically, propaganda, outright deception and manipulation will be more plentiful when one's view of rhetoric as a mode of inquiry is less. If one believes that one's audience is not sophisticated enough, or philosophical enough, or scientific enough, then one can engage in bad rhetoric for the so-called good of one's audience and the advancement of truth.

One of the great ironies of democracy is that while it brought with it a trust of the people against the experts, against aristocracies and monarchies, it also brought with it a distrust of language. The Achilles heel of democracy is not trust of the people, but rather the people's distrust of rhetoric.⁷

⁷ Not all distrust of government is traceable to distrust of rhetoric (as a matter of fact this paper contends that this motive is often overlooked). Distrust of government, a view toward government well documented in Garry Wills' recent book (A Necessary Evil), is often a result of prevailing views about freedom. The classical sophistic tradition had a view toward freedom that could be labeled "positive freedom" that entailed a greater respect for community, obligations, responsibilities and self-discipline. In the United States the tradition regarding freedom has stressed rights, the individual, and a resistance to authority and tradition—"negative freedom". Attitudes toward rhetoric cannot be divorced from attitudes toward freedom. Rhetoric does not

Furthermore, in so far as a bad rhetoric relies on discovering what will move people, a citizenry uneducated in rhetoric or hostile to it becomes easier to manipulate and deceive.

What happened in the Enlightenment was something well beyond the desire to know what moves the planets and our physical world, but what moves human beings -- to move human motivation into the realm of facts, as if facts could exist independent of beliefs, and to remove rhetoric and language from their primary role of being the prime mover of human behavior. What the sophists knew is that seeing is not believing, that belief precedes seeing, that facts don't speak for themselves, that someone's values speak for them -- their fictions, if you will, speak first. This does not argue for an easy relativism. It doesn't argue against metaphysics; it doesn't argue against science. What it argues for is that if you are going to have laws for the future, if you are going to try to make determinations about past events in order to promote justice--to free the innocent or punish the guilty -- and if you are going to engage in selling products, facts do not come first. To teach the mathematical "fact" that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line is also to preach the value of that fact. That mathematical fact does not contain or argue for its value--we teach such facts because we believe they are

flourish well where it has little epistemic power, and likewise, it does not flourish well where freedom is non-existent or where freedom is disconnected from a strong sense of community and citizenship.

valuable.⁸

The legacy of the Enlightenment has been this preoccupation with fact and the crucial downplaying of the role of rhetoric in our civic life, and the placing of fact in a hostile relationship with "fictions" or beliefs. We privilege only that which is demonstrable, and relegate to "mere opinion" that which is not. It is here that easy relativism is formed, not in the crucible of a probability-based rhetoric, but in the fact/value split fostered by scientific philosophy. Once in the realm of mere opinion, rhetoric becomes aligned with "mere rhetoric."

The problem is that what is good or bad, just or unjust, good law or bad law is not a matter of demonstration. It is a matter of inquiry and persuasion. Unfortunately, language, the very instrument that we need to make such determinations, is profoundly mistrusted. The more it is mistrusted the more our rhetoric becomes shrill and manipulative. And the more it becomes mere propaganda the more entitled we feel to distrust it.

I have suggested Platonism and science as major contributors to our pejorative view of rhetoric. What current activities reinforce and reveal this pejorative view of rhetoric?

I would first of all restate that many polls list lawyers and

⁸ When John Glenn got a second chance to return to space a controversy ensued as to whether his trip was for legitimate scientific purposes (among which was the determination of any ill effects on senior citizens) or "mere spin". Here again, I would suggest that it was the "mere spin" that most justified the mission. The facts discovered from exploring space come after the belief, the fiction, that space ought to be explored. John Glenn's second trip was an argument, a reinforcement of our

politicians and PR specialists and advertisers as among the most despised of professionals. This is a form of scapegoating. The wrangling chaotic process that Plato witnessed in Athens is also what we witness every day in Washington and did on TV with the O.J. Simpson trial. Such a process dismays us. We protect ourselves from this process by blaming "them." We blame "them" for not going to Washington, or to our state capitals, or to court, and doing the clear and demonstrable "right" thing.

But in our civic life the right thing comes after the process, not before, and the "right" thing will not be a metaphysical certainty or a scientific fact. What we want more than anything, revealing our Platonic roots, is certainty and perfection. We want our truths to be self-evident. In our Declaration of Independence it is written that we hold these truths to be "self-evident," though at the time it wasn't self-evident who actually could vote--that only seemed self-evident after a lengthy struggle to change our collective mind.

None of this argues against the possibility that we will be convinced of some things that turn out to be problematic beliefs--voters, jurors, and consumers can make mistakes. The solution, however, is not to disparage rhetoric, but to get better at it. The quality of our nation's rhetoric cannot be divorced from the quality of our citizens--the audience that politicians, lawyers, and advertisers address. Voters, jurors, and consumers share

political will, to continue to do so.

responsibility for the quality of an argument. An educated citizenry, a citizenry that can both write and read critically is essential. It is understandable that the funding for higher education is linked to jobs and economic development. But one look at the civic unrest that exists throughout the world, as well as the serious problems that face our nation, should serve as a warning that the most essential aspects of public supported education is the maintaining of civic life and the foundations upon which all else rests.

Talk radio, on both the left and right, is shrill and abounds with problematic appeals, including the appeal to the self-evident and the absolute. Non-sequiturs, ad hominems, inductive fallacies, innuendo, half-truths, false dichotomies, either/or thinking are all present and all allowed. Some of the people, at least some of the time, to paraphrase Lincoln, are susceptible. We need a citizenry that cannot be fooled all the time.

Negative campaign ads are not the sole responsibility of their makers. We share responsibility. If the defense seems to be getting away with murder, then the prosecution needs to do its job better. If you believe that a product is a good one, then convince people of it. If you believe a law needs changing, then find the available means to do so. All of this requires respect for the ability of rhetoric to enhance our civic life and to search for shared beliefs and values. The real tendency of democracy will not be away from dictatorship, but toward dictatorship. A symptom of this can be found in our attitude toward rhetoric and language.

Insofar as democracy mistrusts rhetoric its default setting will be towards less freedom. And the greater the mistrust of rhetoric, the greater the likelihood that rhetoric and its role in civic life will be replaced by the less liberating activity of propaganda.

One good thing that came from the O.J. Simpson trial was the opportunity to understand how rhetoric and the law work. I won't say that a better understanding will occur automatically, because I sense that for many citizens what took place was further proof for attacking rhetoric and lawyers. But an opportunity exists to examine underlying assumptions. The Rodney King trial, as well as the trial involving the beating of Reginald Denny, also have served as opportunities to examine beliefs about the self-evident nature of justice. In both cases, the belief that videotapes presented self-evident and demonstrable truths interfered with a less clear and more complex view of how the law works. In the process, we may discover that discretionary powers given the police are too broad and that penalties for assault and battery are too lenient. Furthermore, we will discover that context plays a crucial role in determining meaning. Tapes (or DNA)—facts--don't speak for themselves.

Journalists also play a role in propagating a pejorative view of rhetoric. The epistemology of journalism is a flawed one. What the press seeks is clarity over complexity. It is the nature of news that readers be bombarded by facts that are often without context. It is the point of the news to be clear, not complex.

What happens is that such a view brings with it the inevitable privileging of facts over "mere opinion."⁹

The opinion page is a specially designated section of a newspaper. It is never the front page, which is reserved for "non opinion." But in a very essential way the front page is an opinion page. This does not mean that the facts on the front page are not true (there are also facts on the opinion page), but it does mean these facts are preceded by the opinion that they matter and that readers should know them or want to know them. The headlines are cues as to how the reader should enter the text and are not per se facts. They are the judgments of the various editors as to what counts in this community, what this community values and needs to know. In other words, they are opinions.

That this is so is not cause for alarm. Rather, it is cause for celebration. Human beings are about valuing. We are first and foremost judgment makers. And these judgments take place in the realm of persuasion, not demonstration. Nevertheless, the news media carries with it, not so much a worked out epistemology that is false, but the impression that knowledge is about facts, that opinions have to be segregated to a separate page (as if the only persuasion that is going on is in this special section).

⁹ Kathleen Jamison, the Dean of the Annenberg School of Journalism, in her book Everything That You Thought You Knew About Politics and Why You Are Wrong, points out that political speeches are not the lousy discourse we believe they are. Most citizens get their understanding of the content of political speeches from the press which presents them as attacks--drama sells papers. The newspapers have their own interpretive framework. Ironically, they are not giving us the facts, but the

Furthermore, it is not unusual for journalists to attack word users (lawyers, politicians, and advertisers) as a sure-fire way to curry favor with their readers. The irony is that newspapers that depend on language and the art of communicating do not have a strong enough respect for rhetoric. They carry with them this Platonic and scientific perspective that is rather hostile to language as a means of inquiry. To be sure, the press is quite vocal about the constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of the press, and no doubt this does a great service for democracy. But in another sense, its reinforcement of a pejorative view toward the art of persuasion and shared inquiry does democracy harm.

Television documentaries, like the sort produced by Jacques Cousteau, that attempt to raise our sympathies about the plight of dolphins, often unintentionally diminish human language in order to anthropomorphize the language of dolphins. Cousteau referred to the communication acts of dolphins as if they are of the same kind as humans.

But human language is much more than this. Cousteau confused the sign language capacity of dolphins with the symbol-using power of human beings. The difference is a profound one. Behind Cousteau's celebrations of higher order mammals is a misunderstanding of the symbol-using activities of human beings. The symbolic activities of humans are found in math, the visual arts, music, and words. As Helen Keller discovered, the *W* etched

facts contextualized in a way guaranteed to distort the matter.

across her hand, which was a sign for water, could also be a symbol for water. She could create worlds in which the self can transcend the material aspects of life and create and invent not an immanent world where the sign exists in an environment, but a symbol that projects a world of our own making. Etymologically, the words sign and symbol are enlightening on this point. The word "sign" has its roots in the notion of "following," while the word "symbol" means "to project" or "to will or determine" as in a projection of the mind. We don't just "follow" each other's meanings when we engage in communication. We also will it, imagine it, create it.

It is human language, what Walker Percy calls the Delta factor, which places us in a realm beyond that of the communication skills of dolphins or great apes. And it little matters how large or small the claims about their vocabulary may be. Cousteau's perspective reveals a view toward language that may rescue dolphins insofar as they are like us--physical creatures in an environment using signs to communicate. There is good reason, however, to be cautious about this symbol using power when we realize how our symbolic actions "project" us into a world of evil and human atrocities that are beyond the imagination and sign action of dolphins. For instance, only humans have the minus, or the negative, or the zero (a term, if you will, for no-thing). Only humans can imagine or will a world so that the elimination of a whole people becomes possible. Once we have imagined, persuaded others and ourselves that someone is a zero, a negative, a minus,

a no-thing, then it becomes possible to kill with impunity and engage in atrocities that are "unimaginable" for dolphins.

Such a capacity should serve to remind us of the falseness of our distinction between "words and deeds." There are no more profound deeds than those symbolic deeds or actions that persuade people to commit unspeakable acts (as well as our most awe-inspiring ones). Nevertheless, Cousteau's anthropomorphizing dolphins does perpetuate the view that lessens our understanding of human language and thus our understanding of rhetoric and the role it plays in imagining the world that we choose to live in.

One can also see the Platonic strain of anti-rhetoric in much of contemporary religion, particularly the separation of the revealed truths of one's sacred texts from any sort of hierarchical tradition and authority. I think churches play a very positive role in our civic life. Churches with a strong theological tradition do in fact contextualize the teachings of the Bible and recognize the limitations of biblical exegesis that ignores context. But where people want their truths to be self-evident and absolute, there one will find a negative attitude toward rhetoric and its role in inventing our shared values. It is also noteworthy that the more a religion is non-hierarchical, non-episcopal, less influenced by tradition and context, the more one will see a small number of worshipers who hire a minister who shares their beliefs in the self-evident truths of the Bible. My point is not to debate any particular claims that are made by these various and varied churches who claim to be in possession of

self-evident truth, but merely to note that this atmosphere contributes to our misunderstanding and mis-valuing of rhetoric and the art of persuasion.

The decontextualizing of knowledge, the removal of humanistic studies from a particular historical, philosophical, or religious perspective serve also to remove persuasion from its central role in our universities and its role in creating the values we would live by. Instead, it has been replaced with a desire for self-evident, absolute, and ahistorical truths. Whether these truths are religious or whether they are the truths of diverse and disparate parts of the university and its various sciences (all reducing human motivation to the terms and equipment of their science), they threaten to replace persuasion with demonstration. They threaten the very idea of a uni-versity with di-versity in which no framework exists to preserve and advance our civic life. The goal of an education ought not to be the choosing of a point of view, but to use points of view to make choices.

The fear I suppose is that if truths are not self-evident and a matter of demonstration, then such truths will have no standing. To have standing they must be universal, ahistorical, absolute and self-evident or they are "mere opinion." But in fact, such beliefs can have standing. They may stand on ground less "firm" than the demonstrably or tautologically so, but we are quite capable of living well with shared beliefs and values that are the result of shared inquiry and assent. Recent debates about the wisdom and justification for the dropping of the atomic bombs during WWII

illustrate this point. For some history is only about facts, facts that speak for themselves. To move the debate into the realm of persuasion and out of the realm of demonstration is taken as a threat to the truth, but the "truths" we share about our past are matters of assent. They are not givens, but "gots."

One of the greatest ironies is that the real threat to the faith and hope of our students is not the so-called threat of relativism (though I understand the worry), but the inevitable skepticism that removes the most important aspects of our civic life into the realm of "mere opinion" and gives standing only to revealed truths or scientific truths that privilege fact over opinion. There is no doubt that college students relegate most of the important issues of our day to "mere opinion", but the major cause for this is our collective failure to understand the nature of rhetoric and knowledge and the limiting of knowledge to only the demonstrable and the self-evident. It is no accident that, for many Americans, our up-front focus on language, and one certainly fostered by too many English teachers, is on clarity and correctness. We hide from view the essential opaqueness of language by focusing on grammar and surface features.

Another area where one can sense a reinforcement of a pejorative view of rhetoric is in the artifacts of our entertainment industry. A Stallone movie called *Judge Dredd* is a case in point (though numerous Clint Eastwood movies or the *Godfather* sequels would do as well). Justice is swift and clear, without lawyers and the process of persuasion. The fact that such

movies have a public suggests that money can at least be made in catering to the anti-rhetoric attitude that lies beneath the surface. In such movies justice is self-evident. No talk, no lawyers. Similarly, detective stories thrive on the denigrating of lawyers and give them equal billing with sociopathic killers. Lawyers in such texts serve only to get "off" the self-evident killer.

We hate language. We hate what is the essential aspect of language--an instrument of persuasion. We hate that aspect of language we call rhetoric. We pejoratively label it "mere rhetoric." The defining attitude of Americans toward language is a profound distrust. What we love is certainty--perfection. We wish our laws to be perfect, our justice to be perfect, and our entrepreneurial life to be perfect.

We believe that voting is the ultimate act of civic responsibility. It is not. Talk is. Good talk. Inquiry and the search for common ground and shared beliefs are the ultimate acts of civic responsibility. Without this the voting booth and the ballot are only about power. As our political life becomes more about power and propaganda and less about discovering shared beliefs, as it reflects more and more the absolutist positions found across our political spectrum, then the more the sound of a vote being cast is more and more indistinguishable from the sound of a shell being loaded into a shotgun.

