

# RHETORICAL THEORY

FALL 2018  
Dr. Will Duffy  
Tuesdays | 5:30-8:30

Definitions of rhetoric tend to fall into two general categories, ones that are **descriptive** and ones that are **teleological**. Paolo Valesio's definition ("the functional organization of discourse") and John Ruskiewicz's ("the art of using language and media to achieve particular goals"), for instance, are examples of the former, while I.A. Richards's definition ("the study of misunderstanding and its remedy") and Henry Ward Beecher's ("the art of influencing conduct with the truth set home by all the resources of the living man") are examples of the latter. Since its inception, the Western rhetorical tradition has always been caught up in the messy work of negotiating the arts of *description* alongside those of *advocacy*, which is to say rhetoricians still find themselves reinventing rhetoric as both a tradition and a toolbox. With Joe Kelleher, we might thus call rhetoric a "two-handed technology," one that seems to thrive in the in-between spaces of disciplinary practices.

This seminar will be structured to reflect the "two-handed" nature of rhetoric by focusing on traditional sites of theoretical concern as well as more contemporary movements that have developed rhetorical study into distinct theoretical schools. So on the one hand we will study how scholars have theorized the relationship between rhetoric and epistemology, the rhetorical situation, the canons of rhetoric, and the public sphere, while on the other, we will explore the concerns of feminist rhetorics, cultural rhetorics, materialist rhetorics, human rights rhetorics, and other contemporary schools that have distinct political aims.

Please note this is not a history of rhetoric course, although we will be reading selections from classical, enlightenment, and 18th-century theorists alongside the work of contemporary scholars. For more information, please contact the instructor ([weduffy@memphis.edu](mailto:weduffy@memphis.edu)).