

Field Examination: History and Theory of Rhetoric

Date: May, 2010

Instructions: You have four hours to complete this examination. You must answer three questions. You must answer one question from each category.

Category 1: Classical and Medieval Rhetoric

1. "Speech is a powerful lord, which by means of the finest and most invisible body accomplishes the greatest of works." Taking this passage from Gorgias' "Encomium of Helen" as your point of departure, discuss the contest between sophistry and philosophy in ancient Greece.
2. According to Plato, rhetoric is the "counterpart" (antistrophos) of cookery; according to his pupil, Aristotle, rhetoric is the "counterpart" (antistrophos) of dialectics. Drawing on at least Gorgias, Phaedrus, and Rhetoric, compare and contrast these two authors' treatments of rhetoric.
3. Cicero's De Oratore models itself upon Plato's Phaedrus. Taking De Oratore as your point of departure, discuss the appropriation of Greek rhetorical theory in Cicero and Quintilian.
4. In On Christian Doctrine Saint Augustine confesses that he loves Cicero's "tongue" but not his "heart." Drawing on Augustine and at least two other authors, discuss the Christian appropriations of "pagan" rhetoric in the Middle Ages.

Category 2: Renaissance and Enlightenment Rhetoric

1. The rediscovery of the rhetorical treatises of Cicero and Quintilian was one of the decisive events of the European Renaissance. Drawing on at least three authors, discuss the legacy of Roman rhetoric in Renaissance humanism.
2. According to Francis Bacon, "the first distemper of learning [is] when men study words and not matter." With reference to Bacon and two other writers from your list, discuss the relationship between words and matter in Renaissance rhetoric.
3. In Leviathan Thomas Hobbes condemns tropes and figures. "Reasoning upon them," he writes, "is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities." Drawing on at least three authors, discuss how Hobbes' view reflects Enlightenment attitudes toward rhetoric.

Category 3: Modern and Contemporary Rhetoric

1. In the rhetorical tradition prior to the twentieth century, the speaking or writing agent was generally seen to be the controlling force of discourse. Drawing on Kenneth Burke, Mikhail Bakhtin, and at least one other theorist, discuss how this view has changed.
2. “Every advance in moral and epistemological knowledge has reinstated the sophists...” In a sense, these words from Nietzsche’s The Will to Power describe the course of rhetorical theory in the twentieth century. Discuss with reference to at least three authors on your reading list.
3. Several twentieth century rhetoricians developed approaches to rhetoric that saw identification as the key term of a “new rhetoric.” What is new about identification, and how does it relate to the key term of classical rhetoric, persuasion?