

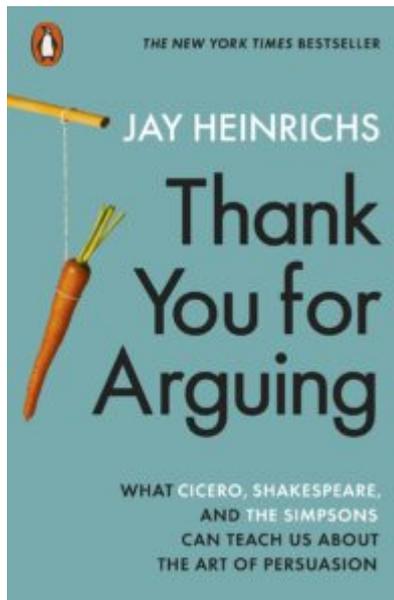
RHETORIC AND THE ART OF PERSUASION: BOOK REVIEW OF “THANK YOU FOR ARGUING” BY JAY HEINRICHS

“There are two things which distinguish us from the animal kingdom. One is our ability to express our ideas the way no other animal can, and second is our ability to create the necessary tools that help us to do our job.” (Restoring The Mind, 2008)

Yes, the real power of the human mind lies in its ability to invent and create the necessary tools to enable man to live and succeed. Brainpower is not only about inventing but also successfully mastering the application of these tools. When it comes to language, one of the most powerful tools is rhetoric. Historians tell us that Greeks were known to have mastered the art of rhetoric. From where did the Greek learn this skill, is not known. Nowadays, rhetoric is mainly used by leaders in an attempt to persuade their audience, by speaking *“the language of the audience.”* The gullible public is often oblivious to the fact that articulate speakers often happen to be skilled rhetoricians.

Often politicians apply rhetoric to influence our minds to think in a certain way, especially during the campaigns seasons. Brexit is a prime example, where the politicians took the script from Greek orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero and thus played with emotions of the voters and managed to convince a considerable majority to vote for leave. Marcus Tullius Cicero believed that by stimulating your audience’s emotions you can

change their opinion and then get them to act accordingly.



What makes the professional speakers so special is their ability to be coherent and lucid in expressing their ideas to the audience. *“Being coherent is a skill that is learnt, which when fully accomplished and mastered becomes an art.”* Those at the top of the game (the leadership) wish to influence, they wish to succeed in influencing others. Rhetoric allows you to succeed in an argument when you persuade your audience. Jay Heinrichs, the author of, *Thank You for Arguing* (Penguin, 2017), affirm that *“rhetoric is the art of influence, friendship, and eloquence, of ready wit and irrefutable logic. And it harnesses the most powerful of social forces, argument.”*

Heinrichs, a rhetorician by profession is a self-proclaimed fan of Marcus Tullius Cicero. But the more popular personality from the ancient Greek era is Aristotle. Aristotle thought that most human arguments tend to be based on one of these three core issues: (1) **Blame** (2) **Values** (3) **Choice**.

Blame = Past

Values = Present

Choice = Future

According to Aristotle, "**Present-tense** (demonstrative) rhetoric tends to finish with people bonding or separating. **Past-tense** (forensic) rhetoric threatens punishment. **Future-tense** (deliberative) argument promises a payoff. You can see why Aristotle dedicated the rhetoric of decision making to the future."

We play the blame game when we are dealing with the rhetoric of the past. It is interesting that married couples who fight and blame each other, tend to focus on the past and as a result, many such couples end up divorced. The rhetoric of the past deals with issues of justice. *"This is the judicial argument of the courtroom. Aristotle called it "forensic" rhetoric, because it covers forensics."* The couples who have happy marriages tend to focus on the future. *"Aristotle, who devised a form of rhetoric for each of the tenses, liked the future best of all."*

I recall after winning the elections, the British PM David Cameron chose two policies as his focal point; for many years, he kept blaming the previous government (**Past**) for the alleged economic quagmire, allowing him to bring about the disastrous policy of austerity as a necessary measure without much opposition. The controlled media helped promote both myths by not challenging the rhetoric.

In contrast, I noted how the Pakistani public, in 2018, welcomed the first official speech of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan. The whole speech was based on future

plans (**Choices**) of the newly elected government, and the PM did not hesitate to mention all the points that the public wanted to hear. It seems rhetoric played a big part in that speech. Rhetoric is about convincing the audience that the speaker has their best interest at heart. A shrewd rhetorician tells the audience what they want to hear.

Perhaps the real skill lies in knowing the mood and expectations of the audience. As Heinrichs says, *“one of the most important traits of practical wisdom is “sussing” ability—the knack of determining what the issue is really about.”* In rhetoric, it is not relevant whether the speaker is an honest person or not in real life. What is important is perception. In other words, it is pivotal that the audience perceives that the orator is speaking the truth at the time. I agree with Heinrichs that *“persuasion doesn’t depend on being true to yourself. It depends on being true to your audience.”*

“You succeed in an argument when you persuade your audience.”

Ultimately, persuasion requires a connection with the emotions of the audience. Heinrichs writes that *“Aristotle preferred to modify people’s emotions through their beliefs. Emotions actually come from beliefs, he said—about what we value, what we think we know, and what we expect.”*

Heinrichs’s book is one of the most stimulating, powerful and absorbing books to read. At the same time, it is entertaining, educational and truly illuminating. Author’s experience in the field as a lecturer on rhetoric has made it possible for him to make a complicated subject accessible and coherent. It is quite easy to be lost in the maze of rhetoric if you try remembering all the rules and names for different types of

rhetoric. For example, one method is called a **tactical flaw**.

Tactical flaw requires revealing some defect that shows your dedication to the audience's values. Heinrichs provides an example of:

“George Washington, who was the unequalled master of this device. Late in the Revolutionary War, his officers grew frustrated by the Continental Congress's delays in paying them, and they threatened mutiny. Washington requested a meeting and showed up with a congressional resolution that assured immediate pay. He pulled the document from his pocket and then fumbled with his spectacles.

Washington: Forgive me, gentlemen, for my eyes have grown dim in the service of my country.

The men burst into tears and swore their fealty to the chief. It was a sentimental time.”

Being skilled in the art of persuasion is a powerful tool that is mastered by very few. Personally speaking, I was quite surprised while reading and learning how our contemporary politicians have used rhetoric to influence our minds. This made me realise how important it is to know the tools if we are to fully understand the world and modus operandi of our leaders. Only then we can achieve our goals of Restoring the Mind.