

Educating rhetorical consciousness¹

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Abstract

Since summer 2013 we initiated a project entitled “Rhetorical exercises: practical reasoning, creativity, citizenship”. In this framework, we adapt ancient rhetorical exercises to contemporary pedagogy. This project includes a dimension of experimental archeology: testing ancient rhetorical tools in an attempt to rediscover their purposes and their effects (in terms of targeted skills). This project also includes an educational concern: bringing rhetorical tools to future citizens. The first section presents our approach to rhetorical exercises and the general philosophy of our project. The second section is dedicated to the exercises we used to develop learners’ rhetorical consciousness and to the discussion of the first results of our experiment.

Keywords: Rhetorical exercises, *dissoi logoi*, rhetorical proof, critical thinking, consciousness

1. Introduction

In his treatise, Aristotle defines rhetoric as an ability (*dunamis*²) to perceive, on any issue, the available means of persuasion (*Rhet.* I, 2, 1356a). This definition has important implications for the conception and the implementation of a rhetorical training. Indeed, to be in line with Aristotle’s definition, the purpose of a rhetorical course should not primarily to advice on how to persuade. Its primarily purpose should rather be to educate students’ ability to put a theoretical eye on argumentation. Along the same lines, we started, since summer 2013, to implement a rhetorical training aiming at developing students’ argumentative consciousness. By means of rhetorical exercises, we attempt to develop their ability to perceive argumentation as a field of theoretical inquiry, as a field in which there are progresses to be achieved. This training was designed for young pupils in high school and for university students³. For different reasons, detailed further below, both categories of learners have a lot to gain from this training.

The purpose of this paper is to present our methods and our first results. By providing details about the designing of our exercises, their purposes (in terms of targeted skills), and their implementation in the classroom, we also intend to stimulate scholars and teachers’ interest for rhetorical exercises. We believe that there is a whole field of research to be developed from the observation of pupils’ rhetorical performances. The first section introduces our approach to rhetorical exercises and the general philosophy of our project. The

¹ This document is a reworked version of a paper that was first presented at the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (May 24 - 26 2014 at Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario).

² On the implications of Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as a *dunamis* for the theory and the practice of this discipline, see Sans (2013).

³ Thanks to a new kind of fellowship from the Belgian National Scientific Research Funds (FNRS), we initiated a partnership with a secondary school that practices an active pedagogy and that was open to new kinds of teaching. In the meantime, we had the opportunity to design a rhetorical course for third year students’ at university.

second section is dedicated to the presentation of the exercises we used to develop learners' rhetorical *dunamis*.

2. Rhetorical exercises as tools for citizenship

The theory of rhetoric was born with the first democratic institutions in ancient Greece, to equip citizens for a new reality: a reality in which any of them might have to defend his interests in front of an audience. This is precisely the conception of rhetoric we intend to renew: a discipline specialized in the development of students' skills for public life.

2.1. A practical approach to citizenship

Our willingness to reintroduce a genuine teaching of rhetoric originates in a conviction that education for citizenship should focus on *skills* and not only on *values*. Ancient theory and practice of rhetoric offer countless tools to implement such a practical conception of citizenship.

Since the beginning of its history, rhetoric has been taught by exercises. This teaching, which closely associated theory and practice, reminds us of craftsmanship where one learns by doing (Sennett: 2008). After the first Sophists, rhetorical teaching evolved to become, around the beginning of the Roman Empire, a comprehensive educative program delivered by specialized rhetors. At that time, there was a relatively homogeneous set of exercises called *progymnasmata*⁴. The word *progymnasmata* is based on the verb *gymnazein* and evokes the training of an athlete. Students had to face an increasing difficulty, from basic writing exercises to parts of discourses, and, finally, to complete speeches and argumentations. Exercises were supposed to prepare the students to deliberative and forensic declamations, the *suasoriae* and *controversiae*, and to epideictic speeches (discourses of praise or blame), which were very in vogue in the first centuries A. D. Those who had learned rhetoric were then prepared to face all situations in public life. Rhetorical exercises continued to be practiced until the end of the nineteenth century, and many new exercises and manuals were produced. When rhetoric was excluded from teaching and schools programs, all these pedagogical tools were almost entirely forgotten⁵. At the beginning of the XXIth century, rhetoric is often perceived as an elitist discipline, a collection of sophisticated figures of speech. And the benefits of educating citizens' rhetorical *dunamis* are almost entirely neglected⁶.

2.2. The virtues of *dissoi logoi*

Training students to deal peacefully with opposites points of views is probably one of the main issues of our contemporary multicultural democracies. The role public education has to play to face this challenge is all the more important that humans might have a natural tendency for segregation (Crisp and Meleady, 2012). We suggest that ancient rhetorical

⁴ We still know about those exercises thanks to practical treatises or manuals, collections of declamations and papyrological evidences.

⁵ *Progymnasmata* nonetheless remained an object of interest for learned scholars. See for instance Webb (2001).

⁶ In Belgium (as well as in France), the only trace of rhetorical teaching is the French dissertation of the French course: an exercise of argumentation and abstract reasoning on philosophical questions. Such an exercise might not be suitable to develop transferable skills to real argumentative interactions: some kinds of proofs (*ethos*, *pathos*, examples) are forbidden and the frame is very strict. The focus is not on finding creative arguments, but on conforming to a specific argumentative framework. Moreover, even though this exercise requires taking an opposite point of view into account (the 'antithesis'), the purpose is ultimately to reach a *better opinion* (the 'synthesis'). As a consequence, such an exercise is more likely to reinforce students' *confirmation bias* (Mercier & Sperber, 2011, pp. 63-68) than to stimulate their ability to think critically.

exercises might be more effective to equip citizens for this multicultural reality than most contemporary approaches to argumentation (Ferry, 2013a). In particular, *dissoi logoi*, an exercise invented by the Sophists, is worth mentioning. *Dissoi logoi*, or twofold arguments, are exercises in which a student has to argue successively for two opposite, and even contradictory views on a same issue. Such an exercise might thus be used, on any subject, to make students think and feel from the “other’s” perspective. This point was first made by Charles Kimber Pearce, in a working paper entitled “Contradictory Arguments for Contemporary Pedagogy”:

Unrestricted by the rule of non-contradiction, students are better equipped to recognize the merits of a honourable opposition. Such a consideration of multiple perceptions is an approach to invention that allows more latitude for adapting arguments to situational constraints. (Pearce, 1994, p. 6)

It is worth stressing that *dissoi logoi* challenge the most fundamental logical rule, the rule of non-contradiction. Even more: *dissoi logoi* challenge the whole normative project to give citizens tools to distinguish sound arguments from fallacious ones (Hamblin, 1970; van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984). However, the intellectual discomfort one might feel toward *dissoi logoi* is precisely the price to pay for effective training to a multicultural public sphere⁷. Indeed, when facing an opposite point of view, our spontaneous argumentative behavior, comforted by most philosophical and logical tradition, urge us to find *who is wrong*. On the contrary, the practice of *dissoi logoi* habituates future citizens to perceive the honorability of both sides of any issue. This regular practice might accustom future citizens to *suspend their judgment* (Danblon, 2013, pp. 127-148), that is, to postpone the confirmation phase. In doing so, one learns to perceive the plurality of legitimate and contradictory views on any question, one begins to experience the intellectual pleasure of identifying persuasive rhetorical strategies, independently of the opinion one might have. This is the *rhetorical eye* of Aristotle’s treatise.

3. Ancient tools for contemporary pedagogy: reintroducing rhetorical teaching

The rhetorical training we designed consists in variations on the exercise of *dissoi logoi*. The following sections present the methodological choices we made to adapt those exercises to young pupils (11 to 13 years old) and to university students.

3.1. Teaching rhetoric in high school

In Belgium, the disappearance of rhetoric led to a paradoxical situation: the last year of high school is still called ‘Rhetoric’ but only a few teachers and pupils still know what rhetoric is. As a consequence, the reintroduction of a rhetorical teaching in high school requires finding a place in the pupils’ schedule. The best solution for us was to work with a Latin and Greek teacher who could immediately understand the philosophy of our project. For the year 2013-2014, our experiment took place in the weekly class council of the pupils with their Latin teacher.

⁷ This discomfort might explain why *dissoi logoi* were seldom experienced in contemporary pedagogy, even though modernity often celebrated “respect for diversity”. Surprisingly, even Martha Nussbaum, who dedicated several works to the relevance of ancient pedagogical tools for citizens’ education (in particular: Nussbaum, 2012) didn’t perceive the virtues of *dissoi logoi*. This is all the more surprising that Nussbaum considers empathy as a key skill in a multicultural society (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 425-433).

3.1.1. In the workshop: reinventing controversia

Our project includes a dimension of experimental archeology. This field of study attempts to test archeological hypotheses by replicating ancient techniques and artifacts. Similarly, by experimenting ancient rhetorical exercises (i.e., by practicing those exercises ourselves), we can hope to better understand the way ancient rhetors designed those exercises and the skills they targeted. Looking for an exercise based on the same principle as *dissoi logoi* in ancient manuals and exercises collections, we decided to experiment the *controversia*. It consisted in producing a speech of accusation or a speech of defense, or both, in an imaginary trial based on the application of a given law to a specific case. The *controversia* is known thanks to Seneca the Elder and Pseudo-Quintilian's declamations. Here is an example that we gave to our pupils:

Cold water given to a stepson

A man had a son. When he lost the boy's mother, he married another wife. The son fell gravely ill. Doctors were called and they said that he would die if he drank cold water. The stepmother gave him cold water. The youth died. The stepmother is accused of poisoning by her husband.

(Ps-Quint., *Lesser Decl.*, p. 350)

Such exercises were often badly considered: they seem violent, complicated, improbable and obsolete. *Controversia*, however, immediately puts pupils into a concrete situation and thus stimulates them to produce arguments. In Ancient treatises, *controversiae* are often quoted to illustrate the theory of *staseis* (lat. status; engl. issues), probably elaborated by Hermagoras but mostly known thanks to the treatise "*On Issues*" of Hermogene and later treatises. Professor Malcolm Heath, who translated Hermogene and tried to teach his treatise to his students, shows that the system of issues develops the ability to recognize the type of the case and the available arguments; more than the production of the speech itself, the purpose is to train invention: finding, in each situation, various, relevant and consistent arguments (Heath, 2007).

In the above example, the accusation seems easy at first sight since the facts are not disputed; but it faces a problem of definition: no law forbids giving water to a sick person and no law defines water as poison. And these are available arguments for the defense speech. Besides, the intention of the stepmother is not clear: it could seem strange, but it is precisely an ambiguous element that can be used by both sides. Ambiguous elements (relation between the characters, ambiguity of the law, expert's advice) have to be used to ground opposite argumentations; they are also means to focus creativity on specific points. By isolating these principles, we created new exercises based on contemporary matters (like everyday life at school). Here are two examples of exercises we designed on this basis:

The pupil with scissors

Rule: *it is strictly forbidden to bring weapons at school.*

Before the beginning of a class, two pupils are violently arguing. One of them makes a rush at the other. Alarmed by the noise, a teacher enters in the classroom. When the pupil who had made a rush goes back to his seat, scissors fall out of his pocket. He is accused of attempting to use a weapon. He defends himself.

A false alarm

Rule: *it is strictly forbidden to leave the classroom without the teacher's permission.*

In the middle of a lesson, the fire alarm rings unexpectedly (no exercise had been planned). By rushing out, a pupil causes uproar among his classmates. Pupils are finally gathered together, according to the procedure. It was a false alarm. Back in the classroom, the teacher punishes pupils who left without permission. Pupils defend themselves.

Let us now turn to the implementation of those exercises in the classroom.

3.1.2. In the classroom

Each session was divided into three phases. To begin with, pupils were given theoretical landmarks (what is rhetoric, what is an argument...) and were informed of the purpose of rhetorical exercises. Pupils were then asked to work in small groups and to find at least three arguments for each side of the controversy. Finally, pupils' findings were discussed and evaluated in common. During the first session, all the groups worked on the same exercise. The second time, each group worked on different exercises, with a mix of new and ancient controversies.

3.1.2.1. Pupils' reactions

Most pupils were enthusiastic to do this new kind of activity and seemed to enjoy it; they had no difficulties to deal with ancient controversies. These exercises create a different atmosphere in the classroom than traditional debates: pupils were not confined in one position, but switched easily from one to another, trying to counter the arguments of their classmates as well as their own. It also appeared that as soon as pupils understand that their own opinion is not relevant they are keen to put themselves into one or the other point of view and to find increasingly creative arguments⁸.

3.1.2.2. Discussion: exercising pupils' empathy

Let us now turn to the main issue of the introduction of a rhetorical training in high school. Early adolescence (around 12 years old) is a key period in the development of human's ability to take others' subjectivities into account when thinking, arguing, deciding and acting. As the French physiologist Alain Berthoz argued, this is precisely the period chose by religious fundamentalists and other fanatics to lock children in one rigid view about the world (Berthoz, 2004, pp. 273-275, 2010). Berthoz thus advocated for a right to develop flexibility in points of views (2010). We believe that our exercises are especially suitable to give pupils access to this right.

The above *controversiae* require pupils to produce arguments from various perspectives on a same issue. Most pupils were successful in this task. For instance, in the case of the false alarm, they had no difficulties to adopt the teacher's point of view: they blamed the pupils for their selfishness because they didn't thought that their teacher could search for them in the burning school, risking his life or could even have troubles with his 'boss'. At this stage, it is worth distinguishing two skills: (1) the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes (i.e., producing the arguments the teacher might produce); (2) the ability to take opposite points of

⁸ From time to time, we had to address the issue of the tension between creativity and relevance. For instance, in the poisoning case, several pupils charged the stepmother by arguing that she found a chance to execute the first step of an evil plan and that her aim was the money of her naïve husband. This was for us an opportunity to introduce the pupils to the concept of extrinsic proof (Aristotle, *Rhet.*, I, 2, 1356a) by asking them whether they had any evidence of the stepmother's evil plan.

views into account when arguing (i.e., making a concession to the opponent's view when defending one's own point of view). The former requires to adopt an *heterocentric* point of view, the latter to adopt an *allocentric* one (Berthoz, 2004, p. 273): perceiving a situation from 'above', perceiving the diversity of possible views on the same issue. This is precisely the *theoretical eye* on argumentation that rhetorical training aims at developing⁹.

To stimulate this theoretical eye, we organized an evaluation phase in which pupils had to judge the arguments they had produced. We accompanied them in this task by picking up some arguments and by asking whether they find them interesting or worth using. In doing so, we tried to focus pupils' attention on the technical dimension of argumentation: how arguments can be drawn from causes, consequences or circumstances, how their arguments are supported by implicit values or arouse emotions. We also asked pupils to discuss the relevancy or plausibility of some answers and to find some possible improvements. Finally, we asked pupils to identify similarities between arguments they produced in different *controversiae*¹⁰.

Now, if we have good reasons to believe that such a rhetorical training contributes to the development of pupils' flexibility in point of views, this does not imply that they will show *more concern* for others' points of views. This raises the complex issue of the relation between empathy and morality. Rhetoric might have a role to play on this issue¹¹. Recent researches in neurosciences (Decety & Cowell, 2014, p. 338) show that our empathetic circle (i.e., the types of individuals we are willing to care for) is highly sensible to our social environment. In particular, speeches we hear might have a high influence in the framing of our empathetic circle (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 306-309). A life long rhetorical training, addressing increasingly complex rhetorical phenomenon, might thus make us more conscious of the factors that influence our decisions to care or not to care for someone else's distress. Some aspects of this more sophisticated rhetorical training will be now addressed.

3.2. Teaching rhetoric at university

While a rhetorical teaching in high school consists mainly in *activating* pupil's attention on argumentation, rhetorical teaching at university consists, in large part, in *deconstructing* clichés about reasoning and valid argumentation that students often inherited from their education. The absence of a proper rhetorical teaching in Europe since the end of the XIXth century left the door wide open for philosophical speculations about argumentation. Philosophical ideals continue to have a huge impact on the way our students perceive rhetoric. For instance, Habermas' idea that the *best opinion* might be found if one applies the good method or has access to the relevant knowledge is widely shared (Ferry: 2012a). As a consequence, our students are convinced that good arguments are, somehow, *outside of themselves*. The idea that one might work on an opinion, the same way one works on a piece

⁹ Here, again, it is worth noting the importance of beginning a rhetorical training from the early adolescence. The *rhetorical eye* on argumentation requires being able to think and to discuss *about* argumentation (the 'formal thinking' in Piaget's words). In his studies on children's mental development, Jean Piaget noted the appearance of this ability from the age of 11 to 12 (Piaget, 1964, pp.76-80).

¹⁰ For instance, in the poisoning case, they proposed: "water is no poison" as an argument to defend the stepmother. Against her, they proposed: "in that case, water had the same effect than poison". When asked to find in the scissors' case an argument built on the same scheme, they picked up the right one: scissors are not a weapon but a part of the school material. They were also able to build on the basis of the first exercise a corresponding counterargument: "scissors can be used as a weapon".

¹¹ The relation between rhetoric and empathy will be investigated by Victor Ferry in his postdoctoral research "Exercising empathy: rhetorics of others' points of views", thanks to a grant awarded by the Wiener-Anspach Foundation.

of wood, is alien to them. We thus focussed our rhetorical teaching on the richness and the diversity of the available means to express an opinion.

3.2.1. Exercising rhetorical proofs

Even though Brussels' University (ULB) hosted the teaching of Chaïm Perelman, there is no rhetorical department in this institution. However, the faculty of philosophy and literature offers its members the opportunity to create, every year, a seminar for the third year students. During the academic year 2013-2014, and under the scientific direction of Emmanuelle Danblon, we thus designed and taught a one semester-course entitled "Theory and practice of rhetorical proof".

In the first lesson, students were asked to choose an issue on which to produce two opposite discourses. We suggested that they should, in their choices, take into account the intellectual pleasure they might find in arguing for both sides. Students chose subjects in various domains: political (such as "is there a need for a king in Belgium?"), social (such as "do social networks make us anti-social?"), moral issues (such as "is contraception a liberation for women" or "can one be a fan of Bertrand Cantat¹²?"), art (such as "should we exhibit the work 'Piss-Christ'?") and literary issues (such as "is rap music a form of poetry?"). In their pro and cons speeches, students had to use a given set of rhetorical proofs: extrinsic proofs, *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*. As far as *logos* is concerned, we asked our students to use three different rhetorical strategies: historical precedent (*paradeigma*), description (*ekphrasis*) and dissociation of notions. Each lesson was dedicated to one of those means of proof and was divided into three parts: a theoretical presentation of the means of proof, a reading exercise in which students had to identify and discuss the means of proof in a famous speech, a performance exercise in which students had to use the means of proof. At the end of the semester, students had to give back their two opposite discourses followed by a two-pages critical note. In this note, students had to justify their rhetorical choices and to confront them with theoretical literature. The following sections present in more detail the exercises we designed to help students to master the different rhetorical proofs.

3.2.2.1. Extrinsic proofs

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle famously distinguishes *intrinsic* proofs from *extrinsic* ones (*Rhet.*, I, 2, 1356a). Intrinsic proofs (*logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*) have to be *invented* by an orator: they originate from an appropriate use of rhetorical *technique*. On the contrary, *extrinsic* proofs are supposed to exist independently from the speech: they are not *invented* but *used* by the orator. Aristotle's distinction might, however, be confusing. Indeed, as Quintilian put it: "though these species of proof are devoid of art in themselves, they yet require, very frequently, to be supported or overthrown with the utmost force of eloquence" (*Instit. Orat.*, V, 1). In other words, leaving *intrinsic* proofs outside of rhetorical art might lead to neglect the various means by which an orator can dissipate or strengthen the persuasiveness of factual evidence.

By integrating extrinsic proofs to our teaching of rhetoric, our goal was twofold: we wanted to raise our students' awareness on the importance, especially in academic writing, to ground assumptions on data that the reader can verify. We also wanted to raise our students' awareness on the effectiveness of those proofs and on the means by which this effectiveness can be increased or dissipated. To do so, we trained our students to identify and to master formulas that commonly precede the delivery of an extrinsic proof (such as "this is not a matter of opinion but of facts").

¹² A French rock singer who violently killed his mistress, the French actress Marie Trintignant.

3.2.2.2. Logos

As far as *logos* is concerned, we wanted to raise students' awareness on the variety of rhetorical strategies they might use to support their opinions. We focussed on three of them: (1) the *paradeigma*, that is, the use of an historical precedent as an example of the judgement to make on a comparable issue (Ferry, 2011, 2013b; Sans, 2011); (2) the description or *ekphrasis*¹³; (3) the dissociation of notions. To introduce students to the functioning of the latter, we designed a new rhetorical exercise.

The dissociation of notion was first described by Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). Dissociation of notion, as they put it, "is always prompted by the desire to remove an incompatibility arising out of the confrontation of one proposition with others, whether one is dealing with norms, facts or truth" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 413). For instance, the need for a judge to dissociate between the *letter* and the *spirit* of the law originates in the feeling that the strict implementation of the law would be unjust in a given case¹⁴. To train students to this technique, we designed argumentative situations in which they would have to dissociate a notion. For instance:

The law is unambiguous on this point: a traitor to the nation does not have the right to a proper burial. Your brother's destiny was to fight for the enemy and to pass away in the conflict that recently opposed your city to the one that is now his. You cannot resign yourself to leave his body to vultures; you break the law and put your brother in the ground. Your King is outraged: how dare you despise the law of the city? You answer by dissociating the notion of justice.

In addition to being entertaining, this exercise offers an opportunity to introduce students to the question of philosophical essentialism (Dupréel, 1939, p. 19; Popper, 1991). Indeed, the practice of the dissociation of notion confronts students with their spontaneous tendency to believe that sound argumentation consists in a process of clarification of notions¹⁵. By dissociating notions, by looking for rhetorical means to make the result of their dissociations convincing, students become accustomed to the fact that the meaning of notions as important as justice is a matter of *agreement* and cannot be grasped once for all¹⁶. The practice of dissociation thus contributes to enlarge students' perception of the field of argumentation, and, ultimately, cultivate their critical thinking.

3.2.2.3. Ethos

Introducing the ethical proof to university students was especially challenging. Indeed, the very idea that one constructs an image in a speech and that it is worth *working* on this image is at odd with the teaching students receive in most other courses. Student are often trained to believe that their discourses have to be neutral and objective, that their identities should not

¹³ To train students to this means of proof, we asked them to produce a description to support and to refute the claim: "University is a good preparation for professional life".

¹⁴ This technique is also often used in philosophical and scientific argumentation where an author often pretends that his/her predecessors did not grasp the *true meaning* of such or such concept.

¹⁵ For a critic of the view according to which the result of a sound dissociation is a clarified notion, see Ferry (2012b, pp. 145-148; 2013a, pp. 2-5).

¹⁶ Such was Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's view when writing: "it is precisely because the notions used in argumentation are not univocal and have no fixed meaning that will not change that the conclusions of an argumentation are not binding" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 132).

interfere with their writings. Against this view, we tried to make our students aware that the neutral and objective *ethos* of academic writing can also be a matter of rhetorical work. As Ruth Amossy (2010, p.187) judiciously states it, scientific *ethos* is more the result of an erasing than of an absence. It was also for our students to understand that building a scientific *ethos* is only one possible rhetorical strategy among others. For instance, constructing an *ethos* of specialist or an *ethos* of witness can prove useful in various argumentative situations they might have to face in their university career.

To raise students' awareness on *ethos*, we found inspiration in the ancient rhetorical exercise of *ἠθοποιία / êthopoiia* (Gibson, 2008, p. 355). In this exercise, it is for the student to write a discourse from someone else's perspective (for instance, writing the words a husband might say to his wife before leaving for a long journey). This requires understanding someone else's mental states and feelings in front of a given situation. Such an exercise is thus highly efficient to seize the ethical proof but, also, for the intuitive understanding of the intimate relation between *ethos* and *pathos*.

3.2.2.4. Pathos

Finally, as far as *pathos* is concerned, the challenge was to make students understand that a rational argumentation does not consist in *getting rid* of emotions but, rather, in being aware of *appropriate* emotions (Aristotle, *Rhet.*, III, 1408a). To raise student awareness on emotional appropriateness, we designed the following exercise. Students were asked to rewrite a brief description of a car accident two times: firstly, in an attempt to induce sympathy for the driver and, secondly, in an attempt to induce sympathy for the victim. Here is the description students had to rewrite:

Around 8am, Marc, 45, floorwalker in an appliance store hit Veronica, a 35 years old promising CEO. Veronica was not crossing on the crosswalk. She was having a phone talk with a colleague at the moment of impact; she was not looking and did not see the car. She died before rescuers arrived. Marc was eager to take his children to school; he was driving at a speed of 47 km /h; the traffic light near the crossroad had just turned yellow.

This exercise requires exploring a *topic of emotions* (i.e. to identify the emotions different parties might feel in a given argumentative situation). In doing so, students cultivate their ability to elaborate speeches that would be acceptable for a wide audience (Ferry & Sans, 2014). To illustrate this point, we shall comment on the rhetorical strategy chose by one of our students. One student tried to induce sympathy for the driver by blaming the victim. In particular, he described Veronica as “an inconsiderate and distracted young woman” who “did not even look at the road, probably too absorbed by her phone call”. It is not difficult to prove that such a rhetorical strategy lacks universality since it does not take into account relevant emotions for the other side (i.e. Veronica's relatives legitimate sadness). By contrast, the following rhetorical strategy induces sympathy for Marc while taking into account other party's legitimate emotions: “Marc mourns the victim too. He the father, he the simple worker, is perceived as a murderer only for being at the wrong place at the wrong time”.

With their concept of *universal audience*, Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca advocated for a humanistic approach to rationality, as opposed to an idealistic conception of rationality. A humanistic conception of rationality consists in the *practical efforts* the orator makes to overcome the differences of opinion he/she is aware of (1969, p. 31). Along the same lines, the above rhetorical exercises can be used to direct students' efforts to reach a more *universal audience*.

4. Concluding remarks: teachers' rhetorical *dunamis*

To conclude, we shall address the issue of the evaluation of students' performances. The difficulty to find objective criteria of a *good* rhetorical strategy might be responsible for the teachers and deciders' reluctance to sponsor a proper argumentative training. It is, indeed, more reassuring to begin an argumentative exercise with an agreement on the rules one has to follow when arguing (such as the pragma-dialectical rules for discussion) and on the types of arguments one is allowed to use (avoiding the so-called *fallacies*). However, forbidding an opinion, condemning the argument on which it is grounded, will not incite a student to abandon it. Quite the contrary. In our view, a reasonable answer to the issue of the evaluation of students' performances is to advise teachers to cultivate their own rhetorical *dunamis*. Indeed, the best way to evaluate students' performances is not to join the rhetorical exercise with an idealistic idea of the *better argument*. The best way is to join the exercise with a sufficient mastery of rhetoric to show students that any *better argument* can be countered by an even better one.

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