

SUMMARY

The subject of the present monograph is Chaïm Perelman's conception of "the new rhetoric", and the aspect on which the discussion is focused is the philosophical context of this conception and its philosophical inspirations. What arguments are there for undertaking this problem and the problems connected with it? The answer is partially contained in Perelman's name of the conception of the rhetoric that he himself calls "the new rhetoric". The name points to an attempt to reformulate the achievements of the rhetoric tradition and to give a new face to rhetoric. Perelman met the challenge for two reasons. The first of them was the motivation based on his outlook, that is caused by the experience of social evil – Holocaust, brought by the Nazi totalitarianism. According to Perelman this evil was caused by absolutism and epistemological monism dominating in European culture, especially in philosophy. This fact forces one to think over thoroughly European culture's *logos* and its axiology. Thinking through the foundations of European culture has resulted in Perelman's conception of the so-called open philosophy (methodological pluralism) and its author's conviction that the essential form of social discourse is rhetoric, which he describes as the theory of persuasive argumentation. Both Perelman and his pupils, as well as some commentators, think that "the new rhetoric" not only restores this important discipline to modern culture, but also is a continuation of classical rhetoric; a continuation that is made critical, which means that it is freed from the burden of errors that beset the traditional rhetoric.

In the monograph an attempt is made to explain the following issues: firstly, what “the new rhetoric” is, and what is its relation towards the classical tradition in rhetoric, especially to the concept developed by Aristotle, who, according to Perelman, is an unquestionable authority in this field; secondly, since Perelman stresses that it is philosophy that is the cognitive foundation of “the new rhetoric”, and at the same time he reformulates philosophy, being in favour of the so-called open philosophy, it should be explained, what “open philosophy” is and how it conditions “the new rhetoric”. The state of research into these issues is relatively limited, however, two positions are clearly distinct. The representatives of the first one are afraid that the conception of philosophy promoted by the Belgian thinker leads to relativism, while those who support the other one are focused on deliberations on rhetoric whose clou are the so-called argument techniques, while separating, or indeed leaving out the problem of philosophy. The question of the connection between Perelman’s philosophical thought and his “new rhetoric” has to be resolved, as it is a necessary condition for evaluating his work connected with rhetoric that he defines as a set of argument techniques.

In the introduction the vicissitudes of Perelman’s life, his academic work as well as his inspirations and ideological sympathies are discussed. As we will see, Perelman is exceptionally erudite; his thought is consistent, but eclectic. The main body of the monograph is divided into two parts. In Part I, entitled “The new rhetoric in the broad sense” the stages are discussed, in which Perelman’s philosophical thought was shaped, and which made him turn towards rhetoric as a universal method of cultural discourse. In Chapter I his inquiries about the problem of justice are reconstructed; their result being the so-called rule (definition) of formal justice, that is such a definition of justice that in principle is universal and that – according to Perelman – is not axiologically charged. In Chapter II entitled “Perelman’s conception of value” Perelman’s axiology is discussed, starting from deliberations about the logic of value judgments, to the position that – in his opinion – decides axiological questions, that is to pluralism of values. This position – according to Perelman – does not col-

lide with his conception of justice, but it proves that value is an essential feature of practical discourse, constituting the element of rhetoric. In Chapter III entitled “Chaïm Perelman’s conception of philosophy” his criticism of absolutism (and, essentially – as we will see – of rationalism) and the principles of his so-called open philosophy: pluralism, common sense, rhetoric argumentation, are analyzed. In the conclusion of the chapter it is stated that Perelman promotes a rhetoric conception of philosophy, that is, he understands philosophy as “the new rhetoric” in the broad sense. Part I is summed up with a confrontation of Perelman’s views concerning justice, values and philosophy with the way they are approached within the tradition of philosophical realism (Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas). It is stated that Perelman’s conception of the so-called open philosophy is the antipode of realism and can be contained within the tradition of idealism, and to be more precise, within one of its streams – irrationalism.

In Part II entitled “New rhetoric in the broad sense”, in Chapter I the historical aspect of rhetoric in Perelman’s formulation is discussed, as well as the history of its connection with philosophy and its dependence on the conception of philosophy. Perelman is convinced that the reflection on these issues proves that his conception of philosophy and the emerging reformed conception of rhetoric is right. In Chapter II entitled “The novelty of the new rhetoric” Perelman’s view is quoted of the relation between his conception of rhetoric and the tradition (especially Aristotle’s conception), and also the criteria of the new rhetoric are given: broadening the field of rationality by including common sense in it; making the social role of rhetoric clear, universality of rhetoric (it embraces all the discourse); distinguishing the stylistic means and persuasive ones; a new conception of the audience; openness (all arguments are hypotheses or options). In this chapter also Perelman’s view of the relation of “the new rhetoric” to the classical triad of the logos, ethos and pathos is discussed. In Chapter III entitled “A review of argument techniques of the new rhetoric” the techniques are mentioned within the so-called mechanism of association and dissociation, and their uses are illustrated by examples quoted by Perelman and his co-worker –

Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. In the conclusion of Part II Perelman's argumentation about the crisis of rhetoric and his conviction that "the new rhetoric" is a remedy for the crisis is polemically quoted, and next, his definition of "the new rhetoric" is confronted with its traditional definitions, with the intention of finding what is common (the art of persuasion), and what divides them. Since Perelman is often defined as a follower of Aristotle, the Stagirite's conception of the art is quoted; the conception that includes rhetoric. On the basis of this analysis significant differences are emphasized that separate Aristotle's and Perelman's thoughts.

In the Conclusion two questions are distinguished that are connected with Perelman's thought, firstly, the philosophical context that is formed by the so-called open philosophy that – in accordance with Perelman's assumptions – justifies his vision of "the new rhetoric"; and secondly, the very conception of "the new rhetoric" as a set of argument techniques. It is shown that the evaluation of "the new rhetoric" if it is closely connected with its philosophical context formed by the so-called open philosophy is different from the evaluation made when the set of argument techniques is abstracted from its philosophical context and treated as a useful tool formally disciplining the rhetorical practice. This distinction is also projected on the solution of the question of "the new rhetoric's" connections with the tradition, and especially with Aristotle's philosophical thought and with the conception of rhetoric that has arisen from it.

Hence in an appraisal of Perelman's thought as a whole his motivations connected with his outlook should be made clear, that is lack of his agreement to totalitarianism and homicide that is connected with it, but also the philosophical roots of this thought should be emphasized, so that his "new rhetoric" as a theory of persuasion (argument) techniques, and its connection with the tradition, and especially with Aristotle's thought, could be seen against this background. In connection with this latter issue it may be thought that albeit Perelman's "new rhetoric" is not strictly a continuation of the classical conception of rhetoric, but it does not exclude it either. It is a result of laborious research, owing to which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca described and organized

argument techniques that in their opinion are essential. The techniques, taken *in abstracto*, that is abstracted from the conception of the so-called open philosophy, are certainly rhetorically useful, especially as far as the so-called legal rhetoric is concerned. However, when we refer to the aforementioned conception of philosophy that – as Perelman stresses – is the intellectual context and a justification of his “new rhetoric” in the strict sense, “the new rhetoric” may assume the form of “the new sophistry”. Cognitive relativism and ontological mobilism are the criteria of the so-called open philosophy; and in the light of these criteria what we call the world is a historical, that is subject to changes, projection of man entangled in a particular logos and ethos (axiology) of a particular civilization and culture.

Although studies of Perelman’s thought are not an easy task, they are an excellent source for the study of rhetoric from its beginning until modern times. The author of the monograph often had to cope with the problem of deciphering the intentions that guided Perelman in his erudite commentaries, that is of guessing if they are important for the substance of his argument, or if they are just remarks made *ad hoc*. In other words, the trouble with the reception of Perelman’s thought is the ambiguous character of his remarks that does not allow to know with all certainty if when referring to a conception he agreed with its author or its assumptions, or if he treated it heuristically, or if he only wanted to show his knowledge of the problem he was dealing with. Doubtless the basic difficulty in the reception of Perelman’s thought is its inner dynamism, that is otherwise in conformity with the basic assumption of his thought, namely with the dialogic conception of the cultural discourse, including philosophy. However, putting the mentioned difficulties in brackets, it has to be noted that Perelman is an important author and his “new rhetoric” deserves to be thoroughly studied.

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