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Leading over the Long Run: Rhetorical Consequentialism and Rhetorical Leadership

Przywódca na lata: retoryczny konsekwencjalizm i retoryczne przywództwo

Abstract

Because the goals leaders and organizations seek typically require persistent engagement over time, rhetorical leadership has as a central concern the long-term consequences of the leader's rhetorical choices. Although traditional rhetorical theory downplayed this long-term perspective in favor of the singular rhetorical engagement (such as a speech), rhetorical theorists have begun considering the rhetorical implications of persuasion wrought over the long-run. This essay applies rhetorical consequentialism, a theoretical perspective developed by the author, to explain the orientation and strategies the rhetorical leader must consider in long-term persuasion. Leaders must be concerned about consistency over time to avoid charges of waffling, delusion, lying, hypocrisy, and the like if they are to maintain their ethos and that of their organizations. They also should take positive steps to create the symbolic and material conditions for rhetorical success over the long run. The essay describes „constraint avoidance" strategies that limit inconsistencies over time, as well as „stage-setting" strategies that prepare the symbolic and material ground for future rhetorical success. The essay draws examples from American political rhetoric, especially that of Donald Trump, to illuminate these strategies. The essay concludes by considering the challenges and prospects of such strategies.

Ze względu na to, że cele, do których dążą liderzy i organizacje, zazwyczaj wymagają stałego zaangażowania w dłuższym okresie, retoryczne przywództwo ma zasadnicze znaczenie dla długoterminowych konsekwencji retorycznych wyborów lidera. Chociaż tradycyjne teorie retoryczne bagatelizowały tę długoterminową perspektywę na korzyść pojedynczego aktu retorycznego (np. przemówienia), teoretycy retoryki zaczęli rozważać retoryczne implikacje perswazji mającej oddziaływać w dłuższym okresie. W artykule zastosowano opracowaną przez autora teorię konsekwencjalizmu retorycznego w celu wyjaśnienia orientacji i strategii, które retoryczny przywódca musi wziąć pod uwagę w długoterminowej perswazji. Liderzy muszą troszczyć się o spójność przekazu w długim okresie, aby uniknąć oskarżeń o „wodolejstwo", zwodzenie, kłamstwo, hipokryzję i tym podobne, jeśli mają utrzymać etos swój i swojej organizacji. Powinni również podjąć pozytywne kroki, aby stworzyć symboliczne i materialne warunki do retorycznego sukcesu na dłuższą metę. Artykuł opisuje strategie „unikania ograniczeń", które pomagają eliminować niespójności w dłuższej perspektywie czasowej, a także strategie „szykowania gruntu", które przygotowują symboliczną i materialną podstawę dla przyszłego sukcesu retorycznego. Autor czerpie przykłady z amerykańskiej retoryki politycznej, głównie retoryki Donalda Trumpa, w celu naświetlenia omawianych strategii. Na zakończenie Autor rozważa wyzwania i perspektywy owych długotrwałych strategii retorycznych.

Key words

rhetorical consequentialism, rhetorical leadership, consistency, political rhetoric, Donald Trump
konsekwencjalizm retoryczny, retoryczne przywództwo, konsekwencja, retoryka polityczna, Donald Trump

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The notion of *rhetorical* leadership is surely redundant, for any leadership of humans must necessarily be rhetorical; that is, it must be first and foremost a leadership through *symbols*. Of course leadership is about "getting things done," and those things done often will be more than symbolic – building "things," engaging material operations that change the nonsymbolic world. But even these, as Bahktin ([1929] 1986, 9-16) and Burke ([1945] 1969, 158-167) both recognized, have symbolic dimensions in what they represent and in what they lead us to see, think, and feel.

But, like the emphasis on the *rhetorical presidency* by scholars in the United States (see, e.g., Tulis; Medhurst), that adjective *rhetorical* is meant to draw our attention to the central importance of the management of communication in leadership as it helps to build coalitions, frame ways of seeing, define the terms of discussions, set goals, urge particular solutions, encourage followers, persuade those who resist, and so forth, in support of actions that move a group or organization towards the ends it seeks (see, e.g., Gaffey). The art of managing such communication derives from the infinite variety of situations within which leaders lead. They face symbolic and material landscapes with historical, cultural, social, economic, political, technological, ideological, and other features that support or hinder their efforts to lead their followers towards important goals. They address audiences who are friendly, hostile, or indifferent. They may have many or few resources. They must use a language that supports or constrains them through its historical accretions and its terministic screens (Burke 1966, 44-62). They speak in situations that invoke generic expectations, shaping what they may appropriately say and do, and how that will be interpreted (Campbell, Jamieson 1978).

Out of this vast array of rhetorical work undertaken by leaders I would like to draw attention to one critical dimension of the challenge facing them: their concern with rhetoric over the long run. I am not dismissing the role of "emergent" leaders who arise to handle brief, ad hoc issues, typically without formal standing

to do so (e.g., Schneider, Goktepe, 1983). Instead I am focusing on the paradigm case of leadership which involves one who must be concerned about speaking tomorrow as well as today, of one whose leadership persists for a while. The Aristotelian tradition that held so much sway over rhetorical studies for the better part of the last century drew our attention to the short-term rhetorical situation – paradigmatically the singular speech – rather than long-term rhetorical concerns that are central to leadership. Rhetorical scholars interested in social movements, political campaigns, and rhetorical genres were required to expand the time frame for rhetorical concerns to show how discourses are adapted to prior discourses and changing conditions.

I have worked on the issue of long-term rhetoric for more than thirty years. Beginning with the notion that rhetors of all sorts argue "prospectively," I have developed a theoretical perspective I call *rhetorical consequentialism*. Rhetorical consequentialism is particularly well suited to describing and evaluating some of the central concerns of rhetorical leadership, making clear the kind of foresight and imagination the rhetorical leader must have and the care he must take to ensure progress towards group and organizational goals.

1. Rhetorical Consequentialism

Aristotle drew attention to the central feature of rhetorical discourse as *situated* when he urged that speakers need to discover "the available means of persuasion in a *given case*" (*Rhetoric*, I.2.; emphasis mine). The "given case" is that narrow historical confluence of audience, setting, and occasion a rhetor faces when she stands to speak. The speaker's goals are constrained by this "case" orientation – to "win the day," persuade the audience before her, to achieve the limited changes that might be wrought by a speaker in the relatively short exchange that constitutes a "speech."

Now certainly persuading particular audiences in particular situations is an important skill for leaders. However, since the typical leader will continue in his role after a speech, and his group or organization will need him to do so to reach its goals, the rhetorical leader cannot simply be concerned to "win the day"; rather he must be concerned about achieving what he can in a day as well as creating the conditions for future rhetorical successes, which reaching long-term goals requires. I will take as my paradigm case the politician whose concern for the consequences of public speech are particularly acute. However, since most organizations rely on a positive public image, from the social movement to the private corporation, the lessons here apply as well.

In a 1987 essay I described the two concerns of the rhetor with this long-term orientation (Rountree 1987): first, a speaker must be defensive and take care

to avoid saying things today that may constrain what she can say in the future. Second, a speaker must work positively to "set the stage," symbolically and materially, for rhetorical success in the future.

Constraint avoidance primarily involves avoiding charges of inconsistency, which is a universal standard frequently used to question, criticize, or condemn speakers and organizations. Inconsistency can undermine the credibility of leaders and the groups and organizations they represent, leading to questions regarding their understanding and morality. Drawing on work by John Lyne (1981), I described these types of inconsistency in terms of semiotic categories: semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic inconsistency. President Donald Trump provides handy illustrations of these inconsistencies, as perhaps the most rhetorically inept American leader in history.[1]

Semantic inconsistency involves the word-world (or statement-world) relationship; speakers who say things about the world that are inconsistent with what we know about the world may be called "mistaken," "delusional," or "liars." The speaker who says something about the world today must be concerned that such statements in the future may be shown to be wrong. This includes both the CEO who makes claims about the profitability of his company that are later shown to be wrong, as well as the same businessman who *forecasts* a certain level of profitability in the future that is not realized. President Trump illustrates this inconsistency when he claimed hundreds of times during his presidential campaign that he would build a wall across the southern border of the United States to prevent illegal immigration and that Mexico would pay for it (Qiu 2019). Mexico, unsurprisingly, refused to fund this wall. So, beginning in late 2018, President Trump closed down part of the federal government for more than a month by refusing to sign a federal budget agreement crafted by members of his own party, who controlled both houses of Congress, because it did not include funding for the border wall that he had promised Mexico would pay for. In early 2019 he announced he would use controversial emergency presidential powers to repurpose money allocated to the military for construction of part of a wall on the southern border. Obviously, there is an inconsistency between his statement that Mexico would pay for the wall and the subsequent funding of that wall, making him look, at best, ignorant of what he could get Mexico to do, and, at worst, a liar in his campaign discourse.

Syntactic consistency has to do with word-word relationships, or in argument terms, statement 1-statement 2 relationships. Prospectively, this is a concern that one does not say something today that is inconsistent with something one says

1. In particular, I argue that President Trump's impulsive rhetoric ignores future implications, leading to frequent inconsistencies that make him poor at rhetorical leadership. On the other hand, President Trump has been remarkably successful as a campaigner for reasons I will consider later in this paper. I explore his rhetorical success more fully in Rountree 2017.

later. Late in the 2016 presidential campaign against Democratic Party rival Hillary Clinton, Trump suffered the most damning revelation of the campaign. Reporters had uncovered raw footage of a television show in 2005, *Access Hollywood*, in which Trump claimed that as a celebrity he could grab women by the genitals and get away with it. He quickly offered a public apology for the remarks, dismissing them as "locker room talk" with host Billy Bush. In 2017, having won the presidency despite this appalling revelation, Trump began questioning the authenticity of the tape, urging, "We don't think that was my voice" (Haberman, Martin 2017). The *New York Times* explained this discrepancy by suggesting that Trump is perhaps a serial liar, noting: "Mr. Trump's falsehoods about the 'Access Hollywood' tape are part of his lifelong habit of attempting to create and sell his own version of reality" (Haberman, Martin 2017). Late night television host Seth Meyers simply asked of Trump: "Are you insane?" (qtd. in Stewart 2017). Being branded insane or a liar will undermine a leader's ongoing credibility and his ability to get things done.

Pragmatic inconsistency concerns word-effect relations, which prospectively centers on the relationship between what one says and what one does later. Thus, one can promise to do something then fail to do it, or suggest that others not do something that one is found to be doing (not "practicing what you preach"). President Obama infamously warned that if the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its own people in its civil war that would be a "red line" for the United States. A year later they did just that, killing over a thousand civilians and Obama did nothing for a month, despite this warning. This led political commentators to call his unenforced warning a "fiasco" (Ward 2018).

Candidate Trump made a similar mistake in his health care pronouncements. He opposed a health care law passed by President Obama that dramatically increased the number of Americans with health care insurance. He insisted he could do better, promising to replace it with something "terrific." He told the television news program *60 Minutes* in 2015: "I am going to take care of everybody. I don't care if it costs me votes or not. Everybody's going to be taken care of much better than they're taken care of now. [Furthermore, t]he government's going to pay for it. But we're going to save so much money on the other side" (Suderman 2019).

In March 2019 Trump directed his attorney general to join a lawsuit to overturn Obama's health insurance law, potentially throwing twenty million Americans off health insurance and freeing insurance companies to again deny coverage to people with preexisting illnesses and to significantly increase rates on those they do cover. And this despite the fact that Trump had no plan to replace the coverage provided by Obama's law (Suderman 2019). So, after two years as president, he had taken no action at all to „take care of everybody;" on the contrary, he actively sought to do the opposite and take coverage away from people.

2. Constraint Avoidance Strategies

Leaders and their organizations obviously need to avoid charges that they are mistaken or insane, lying or acting hypocritically, lest they undermine their credibility and hurt their long-term goals. Rhetorically savvy leaders speak defensively to avoid future charges of inconsistency using a number of strategies.

The first strategy is to control if and how messages are released. A leader can do that by ensuring that sensitive statements and those of others in her organization are not recorded. Without a record, later inconsistency is harder to demonstrate. Thus, when discussing "internal" matters, the rhetorical leader seeks to ensure that no one is recording what is said and that those involved will not betray the confidence of such discussions. This has become harder to accomplish today when recording and distribution have become easy with cell phones, YouTube, social media, and 24/7 television news eager for video footage dramatizing hypocrisy and inconsistency in leaders. In an example with serious consequences, 2012 Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney was giving a speech at a fundraiser when an attendee secretly videotaped him complaining about President Obama's advantage over him, saying:

> There are 47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what…. All right, there are 47 percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it. That that's an entitlement. And the government should give it to them. And they will vote for this president no matter what. (Moorhead 2012)

The recording leaked online and was covered by many news organizations. Romney's videotaped dismissal of half the country – including millions of Americans who had earned retirement benefits from a federal program they were required to pay into all their lives – made it impossible for him later to defend his remarks about them as "takers" and claim he would represent all Americans if elected (Hargo 2012).

President Trump has suffered many people from his administration speaking "out of doors," likely because of the fraught relationships he creates and because of the outlandish things he says. For example, since his presidential campaign, Trump has faced legitimate charges that he is a racist (Rountree 2017). So few were surprised by an anonymous source's report to journalists that when he was discussing the problem of immigration with fellow Republicans he complained about immigrants from "shithole countries" such as Haiti and those in Africa, despite repeatedly insisting previously that he is "the least racist person" one might meet (Scott 2018).

The lesson here for the rhetorical leader is that he must know who he is talking to and how much he can trust them with "inside talk." Although he might solve this problem by never saying anything in private he is not willing to say in public, that is an unrealistic approach given the need to talk frankly and creatively about problems and solutions which limitations on talk may undermine.

Leaders can also try to prevent existing documents from reaching the public. President Trump's administration is currently engaged in an effort to prevent potentially damaging documents and testimony from becoming public. These include U.S. Attorney General William Barr refusing to release to congressional investigators an unredacted copy of a report on Special Counsel Robert Mueller's two-year investigation in Russia's attack on the 2016 presidential election and the Trump administration's efforts to obstruct an investigation of it (Faulders and Siegel 2019), as well as unprecedented stonewalling on requests for testimony from White House and Trump campaign officials (Graham 2019). If such information is kept from the public it will be easier for Trump to deny inconsistency.

Organizations may avoid inconsistency to the extent that the speaking of their members can be distinguished from the organizations themselves, in what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca would call dissociation (1969, 411-59). Thus, when Republican congressman Steve King of Iowa asked the *New York Times*, "White nationalist, white supremacist, Western civilization—how did that language become offensive?", House minority leader Republican Kevin McCarthy asserted: "Steve's remarks are beneath the dignity of the party of Lincoln and the United States of America…" („Republicans Condemn Steve King" 2019). Such dissociation is much harder if the offending speaker is the leader of the organization, as Republicans have frequently found with President Trump's racist remarks (e.g., Shear, Haberman 2019). Of course, the adept rhetorical leader will avoid such remarks and keep those in her organization in line, though in large organizations that may be impossible.

In contrast to the inadvertent leak, a leader may deploy strategic leaks to the public as a "trial balloon," in an effort to see if a tentative idea gets a positive reception. If it is generally accepted, it may be publicly embraced; if it is rejected, it may be dismissed as not a serious proposal or one whose origins are unknown (Sigal 1973, 339). President Trump illustrates how not to do this by having his senior staff announce policies publicly that he then rejects, undermining their authority and leaving everyone unsure about any policy coming from the White House. For example, as the *Washington Post* reported:

> After Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf nations cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar, over its alleged support for terrorists in the region, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and principal deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders all said on Monday [June 5, 2017] that the United States hoped to help mediate and de-escalate the crisis.

> But on Tuesday, in early morning tweets, Trump leaned into the dispute. He lambasted Qatar and voiced support for the Saudi-led coalition of nations, all the while seemingly ignoring that the United States has long had strategic military ties to Qatar. (Phillip and Johnson 2017)

Multivocal messages from an organization, such as in a debate among its members or a book with a variety of its members as authors, are easy to distinguish from an organization since no unified message can be attributed to it. It can be passed off as "discussion" or a kind of "brainstorming" of ideas, some of which might rightly be rejected as not "of" the organization.

When messages are directly offered to a public by a leader or organization, they can be offered with careful wording that will prevent hamstringing future messages. A standard strategy is simple vagueness or ambiguity. For example, all politicians are for "progress," but that could mean "ending access to abortion" for a conservative and "expanding access to abortion" for a liberal. Of course such vagueness may not have the punch of, say, Trump claiming that Mexico will „pay" for a southern border wall. But such specific language left him backtracking in early 2019 when he insisted: "When I said Mexico is paying for the wall in front of thousands and thousands of people, obviously they are not going to write a check…. They are paying for the wall indirectly, many, many times over by the really great trade deal [a revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement] we just made…" (Behsudi 2019). That retroactive qualification would have been easier to sustain had Trump said initially, "*One way or another*, Mexico will pay for the wall."

Finally, a huge range of strategies may be deployed for qualifying statements so that one can later avoid responsibility for the full implications of them. This can be done in terms of the following:

1) strength ("This probably will happen"; "I might do this")
2) conditions ("I will do this if X conditions prevail")
3) assumptions ("Assuming X is true, then I believe/will do Y")
4) reliance ("My statement relies on another's statement" which might prove erroneous)
5) intentions ("I hope to do this"; „I will try to do this")
6) memory ("To the best of my recollection this is the case")
7) personal experience ("In my experience this is the case")
8) limited purposes ("For the purposes of this analysis I will assume X")
9) insinuation, implication, or suggestion (i.e., not stating something outright so that one may deny it later)

10) central versus peripheral statements (making multiple statements that may later be distinguished as central or unimportant, as courts do with the holding-dicta distinction)

11) situational influences (stressing salient factors or exigencies in a given situation that support statements now but may change with a new situation, allowing a rhetor to later warn, “Don’t take my words out of context!”)

Each of these qualifications provides an “out” to the rhetorical leader who can point back to what she said previously and insist, for example, that she could not do what she hoped to do, or misremembered something, or relied on a source that turned out to be wrong, or did not really state outright that she would do something, or that an anticipated outcome was only probable, etc. This is the language of prudence, the style of speaking that diplomats use in carefully parsing what they say to avoid charges of inconsistency. It is available to the rhetorical leader who wants to avoid being called a liar, a flip-flopper, one out-of-touch with reality, or otherwise inconsistent.

3. Stage-Setting Strategies

In contrast to the defensiveness of constraint avoidance is the positive effort to create the conditions for effective persuasion in the future. Such “stage setting” work is complicated by the fact that both material conditions and symbolism shape the possibilities for effective rhetoric. That is, the rhetorical leader can *do* things to change the context of a future rhetorical situation, as well as *say* things. Here President Trump has fared better, though in an ugly way. For example, he has worked symbolically to prepare the ground to support his southern border wall by creating fear of Mexicans that the wall ostensibly would keep out. In his announcement of his candidacy for president he claimed: “When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best…. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems to us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crimes. They're rapists” (Gatehouse 2016). In his speech to the Republican National Convention accepting their nomination for president, he emphasized this threat from Mexicans, noting that record numbers of illegal immigrants were being released by the Obama administration, leading to mayhem, such as

> [a] border-crosser [who] was released and made his way to Nebraska. There, he ended the life of an innocent young girl named Sarah Root. She was 21 years-old, and was killed the day after graduating from college with a 4.0 Grade Point Average. Number one in her class. Her killer was then released a second time, and he is now a fugitive from the law. I've met Sarah's beautiful family. But to this Administration, their amazing daughter was just one more American life that wasn't worth protecting. No more. (Trump 2016)

When President Trump made the controversial declaration of a national emergency on the southern border to divert military funds to build a wall, he built upon the fearful image he had constructed in arguing: "The current situation at the southern border presents a border security and humanitarian crisis that threatens core national security interests and constitutes a national emergency. The southern border is a major entry point for criminals, gang members, and illicit narcotics" (Trump 2019). As Kenneth Burke has noted, the strategy of "endless repetition" of the same points, even when erroneous, may have a greater effect than more traditional methods ([1941] 1973, 217), setting the stage for rhetorical success that builds upon the repeated points.

In a more-than-symbolic stage-setting strategy, Trump sought to create conditions to support his claim that Obama's health care law was a "disaster." As president he cut the budget for advertising the enrollment period for new patients, cut the length of the enrollment period, and pushed through legislation to stop the requirement that everyone have health care insurance or pay a penalty (Lovelace 2018). All of these efforts undermined the program to some extent, helping support his ongoing claim that the program was faltering.

To further illustrate how complex such stage-setting strategies can be, I will review three cases I have previously studied. The first involves an anti-abortion group, Americans United for Life (AUL), who developed an elaborate prospective strategy in the 1980s to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in the United States (Rountree 1989). In a book by members of the organization, *Abortion and the Constitution: Reversing* ***Roe v. Wade*** *through the Courts* (Horan, Grant, and Cunningham 1987), a number of stage-setting strategies were recommended. An obvious one is encouraging conservative judicial appointments so that the "audience" of later legal appeals will support the desired decision. They recommended working with states to pass laws that chip away at access to abortion, such as requiring underage women to notify their parents before getting an abortion and forcing abortion clinics to have more robust (and expensive) facilities in the rare case of an emergency during an abortion. Such strategies have been widely deployed and have led to the closure of numerous abortion clinics. If they succeed in making access only "theoretical," then it will be easier for the Supreme Court to overrule a "paper" right.

More subtle elements of their plan involve getting history scholars to challenge the *Roe* decision's account of abortion in the United States. The Court had argued that abortion was not illegal in many states until relatively recently, so that an assumption of a right to abortion might be inferred in the U.S. Constitution; critics of the decision claim that before the advent of modern medicine, an abortion was a death sentence, so prohibitions were not needed (Rountree 1989). Another

interesting strategy urged AUL to oppose euthanasia, even in cases where people have painful, terminal diseases, because that would "cheapen" attitudes towards life and redound upon public opinions about abortion.

A second case study involves President George H. W. Bush's efforts to get Congress to support his attack on Iraq in the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf Conflict (Rountree 1996). Iraq had invaded and occupied Kuwait, leading Bush to send one hundred thousand U.S. troops to Kuwait's border with Saudi Arabia in a campaign called *Desert Shield*. Bush wanted to use force to kick Iraq out of Kuwait, but the Democrat-controlled Congress opposed him, opting for sanctions instead. When Congress went on a holiday recess, Bush ordered the doubling of the number of troops in the Persian Gulf to give him an offensive option.

That act changed the entire rhetorical situation. It put pressure on Congress because, effectively, Bush had already spent the money for deployment that might have concerned Congress. Bush also had called up a huge number of National Guard troops (who merely train monthly in case they are needed to supplement active-duty military personnel), throwing the lives of these "weekend warriors" (which included women with young children) into turmoil as they left their regular jobs and sat in the desert waiting for Congress to do something. It made Saddam Hussein dig in and engage in mostly empty threats that made him appear more like an enemy worth attacking. And, importantly, it changed the geopolitical situation, as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger testified: "Once 200,000 troops were sent there, we could not withdraw these troops without achieving our objectives without a collapse of our entire position in the Islamic world and the high probability of a much more damaging war" (Rountree 1996, 15). Congress approved Bush's use of military force, which led to the successful Desert Storm campaign. Military actions are not usually considered as rhetorical strategies, but they obviously served that purpose in this case.

A third case study demonstrates how long-term such prospective strategies can be. It involves a legal campaign by an African-American civil rights organization to rid the United States of legally-sanctioned racial segregation (Rountree 2004). In an 1896 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the court announced that states could pass laws requiring railroads to segregate their passenger cars by race, so long as the cars were of the same quality. This was the origin of the "separate but equal" requirement under the U.S. Constitution. In the southern United States, where racial animosity was high, the races were segregated in public schools, public restrooms, and public transportation, supported by this precedent.

Thirteen years later the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded and set as its goal the reversal of the *Plessy* rule. The created a Legal Defense Fund (LDF) that would work for over forty years

in supporting a series of cases to challenge "separate but equal," finally culminating in the landmark ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which held that "[s]eparate..facilities are inherently unequal" (Rountree 2004, 76). I describe their stage-setting strategy as aiming to ultimately create the ideal rhetorical situation in a future case whereby speaker, audience, message, and occasion supported the outcome they sought. This strategy brilliantly focused on segregation in graduate education because there were almost no graduate schools for African-Americans in the segregated states; hence, no "separate," much less "equal."

I show how the LDF created "speakers": training African-American law students in civil rights law (the first such training in the country) to represent clients they recruited. These clients were qualified for graduate school admission, but denied solely because of their race. Second, they sought (mostly unsuccessfully) to shape their ultimate audience, the U.S. Supreme Court, by opposing nominees who had shown racist attitudes.

The LDF's development of the message was the most complex: this involved arguing cases that they could win to set precedents that might be built upon in later litigation. They had to be careful not to try to move too quickly, lest they set bad precedents. They were fortunate when a case they refused to support succeeded in denying railroads the option to drop expensive first-class cars for blacks because there were too few customers to make hauling the luxury cars economical. The Supreme Court ruled in 1914 that constitutional rights were personal, so railroads could not deny service based on the number of persons who wanted them. There were cases that rejected the efforts of segregating states to provide African-Americans vouchers to attend graduate schools in other states. When segregating states started throwing up black graduate schools overnight, questions of how long a student had to wait for admission (no longer than whites, they ruled) and whether those were actually equal (they were not) were tackled. The final cases involved intangibles of the racially segregated schools, such as reputation, faculty, the variety of the curriculum and so forth. That allowed the High Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* to mention those intangibles, which included the stigma of being separated from whites, as relevant.

These case studies illustrate the complexity of prospective rhetoric, as it uses symbols to change material conditions (e.g., protests against a racist judge to ensure he is not seated), material operations to shape symbolic contexts (e.g., doubling the number of troops to change the "pressure" on members of Congress to act), and symbols to change symbolic conditions (e.g., rewriting abortion history to change the foundation for an argument about constitutional law). They raise serious issues for the rhetorical leader who must see far beyond the confines of the "given case" that concerned Aristotle.

While Trump has successfully used stage-setting strategies, he has been a failure in consistency. Yet his political successes require that we scrutinize the rhetorical leader's need for consistency and constraint avoidance.

4. Trump's Challenge to Rhetorical Consequentialism

President Trump provides a challenge to the idea that leaders must be consistent to be effective as rhetorical leaders. The examples of inconsistency documented above were evident from the beginning of his presidential campaign, yet he still won. He maintains high approval ratings within the Republican Party (Bach 2019) and has cowed Republicans in Congress.[2] Nevertheless, a number of caveats must be considered before giving up on consistency as a standard for rhetorical leadership.

First, although Trump has been very popular with Republicans, he was never very popular nationally. Through the quirk of the U.S. Electoral College, which gives more power to small states (many of which Trump carried), Trump won the presidency while losing the popular vote by three million. His approval ratings nationally have ranged from the mid-30s to mid-40s (Bach 2019)—a full ten percent below that of his predecessors during his first year in office, despite a strong economy and no major unpopular wars to dog him.

Second, the most popular conservative television news network, Fox News, has acted as a de facto propaganda organization for Trump, spinning or ignoring troublesome news about him and his administration, and even coordinating with him (Illing 2019). Republican Congressman Justin Amash of Michigan, who is the lone Republican as of this writing to suggest Trump should face impeachment, surprised his constituents in a town hall, one of whom told a reporter afterword she was "surprised to hear there was anything negative in the Mueller report at all about President Trump," that she "hadn't heard that before," undoubtedly because she „mainly listened to conservative news and…hadn't heard anything negative about that report and President Trump has been exonerated" (Golshan 2019). Inconsistency is not a problem if the sources of information an audience uses hides it.

Related to Fox's support is Trump's repeated dismissal of mainstream media news as "liberal" propagators of "fake news." He built upon growing distrust of the media, which is shared by a majority of Americans (Cillizza 2019). Thus,

2. As Juan Williams notes, Trump backs tax cuts, anti-abortion views, and conservative judges, but the GOP before Trump stood for free trade, not tariffs. They supported legal immigration. They fought high deficits. They backed NATO allies and opposed Russian aggression. And they did not embrace the politics of put-downs — including lying, nasty comments about women — while emboldening racists and anti-Semites. (Williams 2018).

while plenty of reporting highlights Trump's inconsistencies, his supporters often discount those reports.

Even more cynicism attaches to politicians, leading some to apparently dismiss Trump's lies as just something politicians do (Cillizza 2019). And Trump already had a reputation as an exaggerator, if not a liar; but, as Cillizza contends, "[his supporters] didn't care. Or, more accurately, they cared about other things more" (2019). To the extent that such cynicism or acceptance is prevalent today, the need for constraint avoidance strategies is diminished. However, even in Trump's case, there is a notable effort to avoid the *appearance* of inconsistency by denying it and dismissing sources that point to it.

And inconsistency creates other problems besides those with "tribal" constituents who may not be bothered by it. Former U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen warned that Trump's inconsistency in foreign policy made other countries unsure about our policy and its continuity (Tan 2019). Trump's inconsistency in negotiating with Congress has undermined trust that he will do what he says (Rampell 2018).

Consistency is not just important for maintaining a leader's credibility, but for clarity and effectiveness in interacting with others. The extent to which one can depend on what another says and does has enormous implications for those working with him, knowing what can be assumed (or not), what will be forthcoming (or not), what his intentions are, etc. Here is where ethics dovetails with pragmatic concerns, as telling what one believes to be the case, expressing what one feels, and promising what one intends to do helps others coordinate actions. This is what Quintilian recognizes with his concept, *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, the good man skilled in speaking. In the twelfth book of his *Institutes of Oratory* he argues that no man can be an effective orator unless he is moral, emphasizing (as Aristotle did not) that prior reputation is crucial to ethos. Consistency reflects one aspect of ethos to the extent that saying things that appear to be true and consistent with other things you have said and done is a sign of honesty, integrity, and reliability.

5. Anticipating the Future: The Ultimate Challenge of Rhetorical Leadership

Admittedly, it is asking a great deal for a leader to anticipate an unfolding rhetorical landscape, as it is shaped both by historical currents and by the rhetorical choices made by the leader herself. In avoiding constraints, the task is fairly manageable. If the leader takes care not to claim more than she reasonably might in a given situation, then she can avoid being called out as a liar or exaggerator. If she sticks to what she really believes, she is less likely to have to flip-flop or

waffle; and, if she must change her position, she should offer sufficient reasons for the change of heart. If she does not promise more than she can deliver or call out others for doing something she may have to or want to do in the future, then she can avoid charges of hypocrisy. And, of course, since she can control her future actions, she can make the hard choice of not doing those things she condemns in others.

The primary concern for the rhetorical leader in constraint avoidance is not to focus on winning the day by ignoring the long-term. Again, President Trump offers a negative illustration: When he used his emergency declaration to get funding for a border wall, he was warned that future Democratic presidents could use the same overreaching strategy to take progressive actions, on gun control or climate change. But, those warnings did not deter this myopic leader.

Setting the stage for success in the future requires imagination to envision exactly what changes are should be sought by the leader and his organization over the long term, and the particular rhetorical situations that will make that change more likely. It requires broad thinking about how things in the world are connected (e.g., euthanasia and abortion) and what the implications of one's symbolic and material engagements in the world are likely to yield over time. It requires the leader to appreciate the consequences of rhetoric, by the leader, his supporters, his opponents, and those tangentially related to a situation who might nonetheless shape it, as well as social, political, economic, technological, and other changes that can have indirect implications for how we think and talk about issues.

Ultimately, a rhetorical leader needs to be sensitive to *kairos*, or rhetorical timing, when waiting for her moment to capitalize on prior rhetorical work and situations that arise unexpectedly (such as the LDF's "gift" of a 1914 decision it did not argue). Rhetorical leaders do not simply come up with good arguments in a "given case," they realize when a situation's elements have so coalesced that they can take on the role of the right speaker addressing the right audience on the right topic in the right setting at the right time. As Benedikt describes it, the

> concern for *kairos* begins with an effort to recognize opportunity, making one sensitive to the critical character of moments that require decision. The decision concerning the right moment signifies understanding concerning this moment as distinct from others, concerning this moment as the culmination of a series of events. (2002, 227)

And, as this essay makes clear, rhetorical leaders can be involved in the creation of a series of events (stage-setting) that create *kairic* moments.

As a rule of thumb, it might be useful for the rhetorical leader to ask himself what an ideal rhetorical situation for "winning the war" he is fighting for his organization might look like. He can consider who would be in the ideal audience and

what they would think of him, his organization, and their position; what present or future inventional resources might best support a winning message; what ideal occasion might support success. That heuristic parses the rhetorical situation into traditional, identifiable parts which theoretically can be shaped by a rhetorical leader's words and actions.

Finally, I should acknowledge that rhetorical consequentialism's focus on consistency does not account for the problem of a kind of dogmatic consistency that might cause an audience to view a rhetorical leader as inflexible or insensitive to changing circumstances. Indeed, rhetorical consequentialism should be paired with an appreciation of justificatory practices that properly and effectively support changes of mind by a rhetorical leader.

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