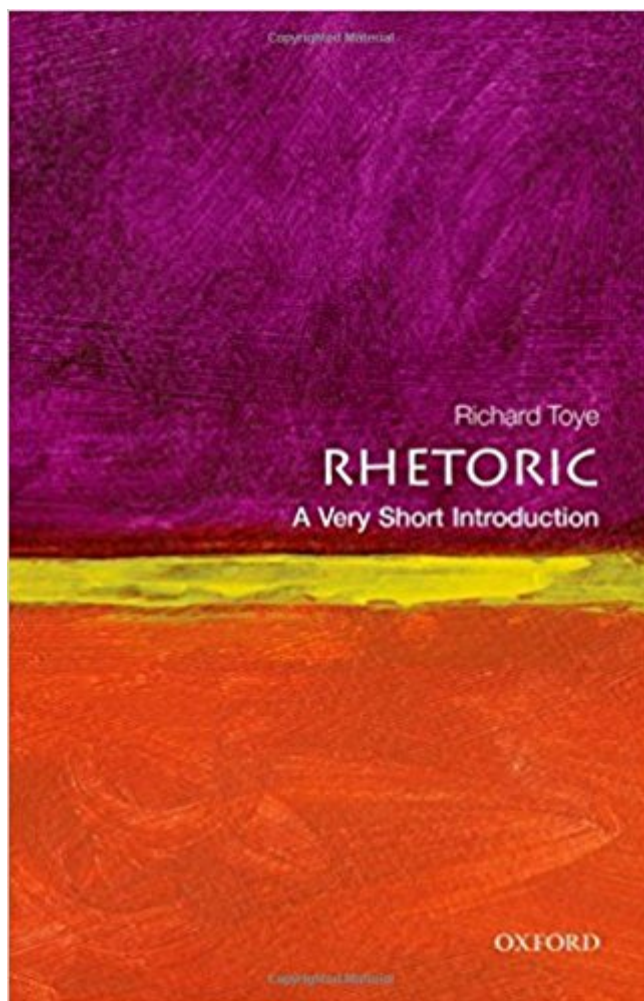


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Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

Rhetoric was once an essential part of western education. Aristotle wrote an important treatise on it and Demosthenes remains famous to this day for his skills as a rhetorician. But skill with rhetoric today is no longer admired. Rhetoric is often seen as a synonym for shallow, deceptive language--empty words, empty rhetoric--and therefore as something quite negative. But if we view rhetoric in more neutral terms, as the "art of persuasion," it is clear that we are all forced to engage with it at some level, if only because we are constantly exposed to the rhetoric of others. In this Very Short Introduction, Richard Toye explores the purpose of rhetoric. Rather than presenting a defense of it, he considers it as the foundation-stone of civil society, and an essential part of any democratic process. Using wide-ranging examples from ancient Greece, medieval Islamic preaching, the wartime speeches of Winston Churchill, and modern cinema, Toye considers why we should all have an appreciation of the art of rhetoric. About the Series:Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rhetoric matters. To explicate this shaggy beast in 35,000 words is no small challenge, and Toye succeeds with a consistently light touch. * The Speechwriter *

Richard Toye is Professor of Modern History at the University of Exeter. His books include Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness and Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made.

Exactly as described. Needed it for a class.

That's grated

Good quality, and fast delivery! Thanks!

excellent condition.

I just got into this but it's been very good so far. Recommended for those who have an interest in how speech and language help shape a society's mindset.

Rhetoric is the art of speaking. The Greeks both prized and despised it. Plato gave the Sophists and rhetoricians a bad name which has endured for two and a half millennia, yet rhetoric has been part of any standard curriculum in the West for much of that time. It is well known that there is a vast difference between the truth of an argument and its persuasive power. Lawyers have always been suspect: they say whatever they need in order to win. All of America thought that O. J. Simpson murdered his wife, but skillful rhetoric by his attorney Johnnie Cochran got him acquitted. As far back as Machiavelli, lying and rhetoric have been recognized as essential tools of statecraft. Rhetoric appeals to three aspects of self: logos, ethos and pathos. The Greeks named them - they have been studied ever since. The first is logic - the quality of an argument itself. The second is an appeal to character, or ethics. The third is an appeal to the emotions, i.e., "You can't

execute this triple murderer- he's just a boy." Toye identifies three ages of rhetoric. An oral age, that of the Greeks, when few people read and wrote, and argument was therefore spoken. It was followed by a literary age, after the invention of the printing press, when authors were able to start to use longer constructions and more sophisticated vocabularies suited to reading. It was also a time when the topics of argument became more complex: public policy involved schools and bond issues as often as wars. It is followed by a second oral age, today, which started just short of a century ago with radio, and has accelerated with the spread of TV and the extension of the voting franchise to just about anybody who owns one. Toye offers an invitation to analyze texts for use of the classical rhetorical devices such as the tricolon and antithesis. He suggests looking closely at the structure of arguments, oral or written. Tricks: "Have you stopped beating your wife?" One of the most valuable aspects of the book is the set of problems he poses for the reader, opportunities to explore how rhetoric is used now and in history. Words alone do not carry the argument. He offers a discussion of the nonverbal aspects of speech: voice, gesture, and the choice of clothing, venue, backdrop and anything else that will visually sway the audience. Rhetoric depends on the shared values and culture of the audience. A British political speech is pitched at fellow members of the legislature; a speech by the American President nowadays bypasses Congress, working to sway the electorate to put pressure on their Congressmen. Words never mean just one thing. Context and time are always important. He cites literary theory and deconstruction - Foucault and Richards et al. He does not get into semantics. Others such as Chomsky, Hayakawa and Wittgenstein have a lot to say about the meaning of words, and how much meaning they contain. Kahneman, Trivers and Ariely among others have looked deeply into self-deception, which often means, of course, allowing oneself to be deceived by appealing rhetoric. The book is erudite while still being easy to read. The work of a man very comfortable with the language, as one would hope. A pleasant, quick read. Rhetoric stresses the importance of what is not said. There is a modern campaign, a highly successful one, to rule out discussion of certain topics. They are not resolved, they simply remain unarguable by serious contenders. However, PC goes in and out of fashion. As a book title says of communism, "Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More" Conclusion - Read if for exactly what it claims to be, a short introduction. It is also a defense, and a justification for the study of rhetoric for the sake of recognizing and defending yourself against rhetorical questions (viz, my wife had me smell her wrist yesterday and asked "Honey, do I deserve this \$200 perfume?"). If you want to practice the tricks yourself, there are many "How to" books about rhetoric, on everything from the art of seducing women, from Ovid through RoushV (whom I review), to the art of seducing voters.

I realized several important points as a result of this book. First, use of the term "rhetoric" has a dismissive, prejudicial tone in our culture (as in "that's just rhetoric") but in fact is really just about the presentation of arguments or facts to persuade somebody. Second, as though I had been in some sort of bad mind-warp, I had always dismissed the argumentative aspects of lawyering as merely the creation of an arbitrary "story" for presentation to a jury. In fact, the "opposing" sides are engaged in a highly formalized rhetorical debate. It is as if the debate is the important thing, perhaps even just the theater of the debate, rather than the vote for guilt or innocence. The form of this debate is at least 2500 years old. Finally, it became clear that the reader (or listener) is an active participant in all rhetorical discussions. I would have liked a glossary of some of the technical rhetorical terms. It would be so cool to be able to say, "Oh, that's just so-and-so using [something technically cool]." But hey, this is a very short introduction...

This is my first foray into the series 'A Very Short Introduction'. I was intrigued by the premise that these titles were intended to give the reader a jump start in subject in a reasonably short, straight forward and concise fashion. The topic here, being 'Rhetoric' the ability for people through speech or the written word to attempt to enlighten, influence, or encourage particular audiences in specific situations to their point of view/theory. For me the book seemed to give over more the take of the subject through history and its importance as a subject of formal study and a productive civic practice, and the role that rhetoric has played with in the Western tradition. Like other reviewers have commented I found it initially a hard book to get into, but once there I felt the 'journey' was worthwhile. All in all a good productive read and hence my 4 star rating.

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