



The poetic argument

Thinking begins with being touched by words or images - they touch you, they reach your heart. This is what happens in the famous philosophical dialogues which Socrates conducted in the market in Athens more than twenty five centuries ago. His dialogues are not only dialectical or rhetorical, they are also necessarily poetic. Otherwise it is impossible to endure the efforts of thinking.

What is the difference between these three forms of thinking and speaking? One could explain it like this. With rhetorical argumentation one wants to convince, by taking a clear stance, by defining the concepts, considering both the pro's and con's of the argument, and by including both pathos and ethos. In dialectic argumentation one wants to examine, by asking the right questions, clarifying experiences, testing presuppositions and putting oneself in somebody else's position. In poetic argumentation one wants to touch, by addressing the imagination, by choosing the right words for 'essences and excellences' and by generating new ways of thinking by finding the middle path. This practical guide aims to help you at manage the differences between these three forms.

Approach

1. Choose a theme you want to explore together. An example could be, what is the importance of boredom?
2. All write a short text about this theme in a rhetorical style, that is, try to convince your audience by showing how attractive your point of view is. 'Boredom is very useful, because it feeds our desire and without desire there would be no life', or something like that.
3. Read the texts and start a conversation about them. Did you convince your audience? What proved to be effective? Try to determine why that was.
4. Now write a short text about the same theme in a dialectical style, by which you try to lure your audience into taking part in an inquiry. An example could be, what your experiences with boredom have been. What experiences do you know from others? What exactly happened there, what did not happen? Boredom feels boring, one could say, but why is that the case? Is it because you don't know what to do. But what is that – not knowing what to do? When does that happen to you? How does it arise?
5. Read the texts and start a conversation about them. Did you convince your audience? What proved to be effective? Try to determine why that was.
6. Finally write about the same theme in a poetic style, namely what the essence of your experience is and what your analysis of it is. What touches you? What does it demand from you? Choose words which convey to the audience that you are touched by the theme, but without losing sight of your argument. Continuing our example of earlier, 'Boredom is essentially an experience of being at a loss, without having lost something. It encourages you to inquire what it is you want to gain, with the risk of losing it again. What is the mastery of gaining and losing?'





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7. Read the texts and start a conversation about them. Did you convince your audience? What proved to be effective? Try to determine why that was.

8. Reflect on the three texts from the following perspectives:
 - What changed in your message when writing it in a different style?
 - What insights did you gain from the examination of this theme by doing it in three different styles?
 - Which style proved to be most effective for yourself? And which one for the others? How come?

