

Call for Papers: Rhetoric and Uncertainty – Historical Dimensions of Ambiguity in Persuasion

The American Society for the History of Rhetoric invites proposals for the upcoming Symposium exploring “Rhetoric and Uncertainty: Historical Dimensions of Ambiguity in Persuasion.” This interdisciplinary event will be held immediately prior to the Rhetoric Society of American Biennial Conference in Denver (May 2024).

Given the current era of rapidly evolving, widespread informational flux, the concept of uncertainty has become an increasingly important topic in the fields of rhetoric, communication studies, and others. As historians of rhetoric, we also recognize the critical role that ambiguity, doubt, contingency, and indeterminacy have played in the history of communication. From rhetoric’s well-trod Western canon, we might consider Gorgias’s assertion that nothing can exist or be precisely communicated, Plato’s view of material reality as mere deceptive shadow, Augustine’s examinations of semiotic instability, or John Locke’s discussion of linguistic obscurity in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Of course, serious consideration of uncertainty and persuasion is not the sole remit of “Western” rhetoric: equally important might be discussions of assent and belief in Arabic commentaries on Aristotle, the role of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in the communicative philosophy of the Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna, or rhetorical methods of grappling with deliberative uncertainty in ancient Confucian and Taoist rhetorics.

This Symposium seeks submissions that explore how rhetoric has engaged with uncertainty across historical periods, cultures, and communicative contexts. As such, we welcome submissions that examine how uncertainty has been deployed, navigated, or contested in rhetorical practices, theories, and pedagogies across time and space.

Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- The strategic use of ambiguity or ambivalence in texts or speeches
- Rhetorical strategies for managing uncertainty in political, legal, or religious contexts
- The role of doubt or skepticism in rhetorical education and pedagogy
- The evolution or use of rhetorical tropes that invoke or exploit uncertainty (e.g. *paralipsis*, *ennoia*, *periphrasis*, *circumlocutio*)
- The impact of technological advancements on the proliferation or mitigation of uncertainty
- The use of rhetorical theories or concepts to address uncertainty in deliberative or judicial scenarios
- The relationship between foresight, deliberation, and uncertainty

We encourage submissions from a range of disciplines, including history, philosophy, communication studies, literary studies, cultural studies, and education, among others.

Submission Guidelines:

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words, along with a brief author biography (50 words) and contact information by Sept. 15, 2023. There is no cost to attend the Symposium,

but all presenters must be members of ASHR (joining can happen *after* acceptance) and must register for the RSA 2024 conference.

For more information on ASHR and becoming a member, visit <https://ashr.org/>. We look forward to a stimulating and enriching exchange of ideas that will expand our understanding of the intersections between rhetoric and uncertainty throughout history.