

What makes symbouleutic, dicanic, and epideictic three different genres of rhetoric? In this paper, I apply a speech-act understanding of genre to gain a fresh understanding of Aristotle's three *eidē* of rhetoric as delineated in his *On Rhetoric 1.3*. First I look to argument and persuasion as the underlying actions that unify the three types of rhetorical speech. In all rhetorical utterances, the collective judgment of the hearers signals the completion of the speech-act and enables us to distinguish successful acts of persuasion from those that have missed the mark. The art of rhetoric aims at securing that persuasive success.

I then evaluate the differences among the *eidē* in terms of the actions they perform in their respective contexts. Aristotle's distinctions among symbouleutic, dicanic, and epideictic as three separate forms of rhetoric can be molded into the speech-act model. The role of the hearer as judge is either formalized and universally binding within the community, as in the case of symbouleutic and dicanic rhetoric where a public vote ensues, or informal and that of a spectator (*theōros*), as in epideictic rhetoric. The formal and collective nature of the addressee's judgment sets up distinct expectations and social protocols for each genre that the speaker must adhere to. We can understand what Aristotle calls special times (*chronoi hekastou*) and ends (*telē*) as integral components of these protocols. To these social conventions, I add (a) the role of the speaker relative to the audience, (b) the nature of the proposition as a potential institutional fact, and (c) the situation of the *logos* within a series of utterances. By considering the different actions and performance contexts of symbouleutic, dicanic, and epideictic rhetoric, we are able to appreciate why Aristotle designates particular topics and methods of argumentation as appropriate to each *eidē* and tailored for successful persuasion within each different set of expectations.

Redefining Aristotle's generic boundaries in terms of speech as action and the social conventions that made those actions possible brings to the fore the significance of performative speech in 4th century Athens and the complexity of the institutions that gave rise to it.