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Erasmus vs. Lamy

When looking to persuade others, people either cite Erasmus' or Lamy's method of rhetoric for working up, developing or amplifying a case. Erasmus looks at rhetoric as teaching delighting and moving the audience, while Lamy views rhetoric as winning friends and influencing people. Both versions of rhetoric have their merits when looking to persuade others. In a situation where persuading the audience is vital, such as when President Obama gives a nationally-televised speech trying to persuade Americans to support immigration legislation, Lamy's method is vastly superior to Erasmus' method of rhetoric. President Obama would be better served by Lamy's method of developing a case, because it holds efficiency with the utmost importance, it evokes and plays upon passion, and understands the importance of a background in human psychology. These are all important aspects to presenting a speech to the American people. Efficiency in developing a case helps the President make a strong argument in support of immigration legislation without adding in other unnecessary stances. Evoking and playing upon passion brings attention to the speech and makes it memorable. Having an understanding of human psychology aids the President in examining which points will resonate best with the audience. While Erasmus' supporters may question the ethics of these points, these are all clearly very vital, realistic aspects to the President giving a memorable address to the nation.
In addressing the American Public, President Obama would be best served by developing his speech with brevity, only using those arguments that are necessary. In writing the speech, Lamy would argue the pertinence of examining all the things relating to the subject of immigration legislation, and "making a strict choice and selection of what (things) are absolutely necessary and avoiding those that are superfluous "(183). He argues this is to the President's benefit when he states, "We are to be continually intent upon the end to which we would arrive; we are to take to take the shortest cut to it, and avoid all manner of deviation. Unless we slightly run over things of small importance...our reader will be weary and his application diverted from such as are" (183). With this quote, Lamy eloquently explains that in writing Obama's speech, he should always be aware of the conclusion he wants the public to arrive at and make the shortest route to that conclusion, if not the audience's attention will be drawn elsewhere and they will quickly lose interest. As someone who believed "there is nothing more admirable or more splendid than a speech with a rich copia of thoughts and words overflowing" (11), Erasmus would argue that this is the precise issue with Lamy's concept of rhetoric. This concept of a rich copia of thoughts can be seen by his analogy that "I want the furnishings of a rich house to exhibit the greatest variety; but I want it to be altogether in good taste" (19). This notion of exhibiting the greatest variety of explanations might be a noble goal, but it comes at the hefty expense of the interest of the audience. Therefore, in addressing the public mass it would be better for President Obama to harken Lamy's concept of brevity in argument.

While the brevity of a speech holds the public listening, passion captivates the audience and helps them remember the speech. Lamy argues this concept when he states "tis not enough therefore to produce good arguments, to deliver them with clearness and
perspicuity; but we must use them with extraordinary address. That may surprise the hearer, make him admire and draw the eyes of the world upon us” (365). With this quote, it becomes obvious that a speech with the best of arguments delivered with clear language can fall flat without great passion. If that were not true, we would have a vastly different set of people as politicians. Therefore, it is imperative that if Obama wants the public to listen intently to his argument for immigration legislation, he should emote great passion for the subject.

Erasmus would disagree that passion is the best way to help prove the President’s point, instead arguing that explaining a variation on the subject, such as amplification. This can be seen to benefit when he questions, “who is so patient a listener that he would even for a short time put up with a speech unvarying throughout?” (16). This quote explains that Erasmus desires keeping the audience interested but comes at it from the aspect of varying the language used. An example he explains is “speech is varied by amplification when in order to render something more effectively we put in place of an appropriate word a stronger one” (35). While this would be a compelling point from Erasmus, it has one fatal flaw. If the amplification, or any variation of language, in a message is spoken in a monotone voice it will go by forgotten. This is why Lamy makes a more compelling argument that the best way to affect a person is “to give him a lively sense and impression of the object of that passion wherewith we desire he should be mov’d” (364). Passion makes a clear impression and would help President Obama persuade people towards his desire for immigration reform, while Erasmus might amplify the case but it could fall upon people whom have already lost interest from a monotone delivery.
Another key point to developing a strong speech comes from an understanding of human psychology. Lamy first explains why it is necessary to grasp concepts of how humans operate by explaining why persuasion is necessary. This can be seen when he states, “they hate it (the truth), and because it consists not with their interests, they do willingly blind themselves to it” (351). This argument explains that opponents to what Obama states as the truth about immigration legislation will blind themselves to it and therefore will not listen without an understanding of their psychology. This concept of developing an argument with the intention of manipulating the audience to agree with the statement would disgust Erasmus, as his entire book, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, was written with the intention of teaching and delighting. However, Lamy goes on to further that point when he expiates “that the truths of which it is necessary they should be persuaded, are to be delivered with such art, that they may posses the heart before be perceived; and as if they were children, they are to be coaxed and flattered till they take down the Medicine that is prepared for their cure” (352). With this point, it becomes apparent that it would be imperative for President Obama to examine the way in which his dissenters would want to hear his argument so as to best persuade them. Lamy would argue that by understanding how everyone would want to hear his argument the President could best frame his speech.

If President Obama were to have to decide between using the writings of Erasmus and Lamy for developing his case for immigration legislation, he would make a more compelling speech with Lamy’s perspective. Granted, Erasmus has compelling points about how to develop a case using a variety of language to teach the perspective and delight the audience with these teachings, especially when he states that “if all things continually
present themselves to the mind without variation it will at once turn away with disgust” (16). However, these concepts are not the best for President Obama's speech. He is trying to rally an entire nation around his immigration legislation, and Lamy's concepts better fit what needs to be done. By placing an emphasis on brevity in argument, speaking about the subject with passion, and framing the argument with an understanding of what the public wants to hear, President Obama would make a far better and far more memorable speech. In conclusion, these concepts would better enable President Obama to raise support for immigration legislation by winning friends and influencing the public.