Neo-Aristotelian Analysis of Gary Yourofsky's Speech on Veganism

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요 약

비건이즘의 확산에 따라서 비건이즘의 수사학적 상황이 발생하고 이에 따른 수사학적 담화가 이루 어지고 있다. 따라서 본 논문은 비건이즘의 수사학적 담화에 대한 분석을 다루고 있다. 수사학적 상황이란 수사학적 담화에 따라 현실에 변화를 줄 수 있는 상황일 때에 수사학적 상황이라고 정하여 진다. 비건이즘은 생활방식의 한 종류로서 동물성 생산물을 소비하지 않는 생활방식을 뜻한다. 예를 들어 비건들은 육류, 어류, 유제품, 가축, 또한 모피 등을 소비하지 않는 사람들이다. 이러한 생활 방식을 선택하는 이유로는 사람마다 각기 다양하였지만 주로 윤리적인 그리고 환경오염에 대한 우려에 기반한다. 따라서 비건이즘을 토대로는 담화는 필연적으로 사람들의 윤리와 환경보호에 대한 기준 기준을 도전하고 변화시키고자 하는 내용을 담게 된다. 본 논문은 이러한 비건이즘에 대하여 가장 영향 력이 있는 스피치 중 하나인 Gary Yourofsky의 스피치를 신아리스토텔레스의 수사학적 분석 방법을 사용하여 분석하였고 논문의 목적은 비건이 아닌 사람들을 어떠한 담화적 방법으로 설득하고 호소하 는지에 대하여 알아보는 것이다.

핵심어 : 신아리스토텔, 수사학적 상황, 수사학적 담화, 비건이즘의 수사학적 담화, 수사학 비평

Abstract

The growing movement of veganism is now more a rhetorical situation than ever before and causing a lively rhetorical discourse. The rhetorical discourse of veganism is the issue of analysis in this paper. The very nature of rhetorical situation is that the situation must be located in reality and invite a rhetorical discourse capable of participating with possibly altering its reality. Veganism is a life style choice to find the alternative source for any animal products. Vegans do not consume animal products such as meat, fish, dairy, leather or fur. The reason behind choosing this lifestyle varies but a big majority is due to ethical and environmental concerns. Hence, the rhetorical discourse surrounding discourse in veganism is to challenge and change people's previous conceptions about their own long believed par of moral and environmentally friendly choices in their lives. By analyzing one of the most famous speeches within the vegan community-Gary Yourofsky's speech-using neo-Aristotelian method of rhetorical criticism, this paper aims to find the methods and choices the narrator made to persuade and appeal to non-vegan audience.

Keywords : neo-aristotle, rhetorical situation, rhetorical discourse, veganism as rhetorical discourse, rhetorical criticism

1. Introduction

News headlines such as “The number of vegans in Britain has risen by more than 360 percent over the past decade” [1], “A New 2017 Report Confirms a 6% Increase In The Vegan

Received(July 7, 2018), Review Result(July 27, 2018), Accepted(August 10, 2018), Published(October 31, 2018)

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Population!”[2] or “16 Million People in the US are Now Vegan or Vegetarian!”[3] shows that vegetarianism and most specifically veganism has been in the spotlight of rhetorical dialogues. There are more than 7 million videos about veganism on YouTube; which is more than video search result on “Kim Jong Eun” (about 3,820,000) or “global warming” (about 3,460,000) or even “Hillary Clinton” (about 4,790,000).

Though veganism is no longer unfamiliar to the public, it is still an unorthodox lifestyle and thus is subject to intense debates. The controversies surrounding veganism mostly circle around three main points: health of humans, animal welfare, and Earth’s wellbeing. These three main points are all connected with (overall) happiness. Happiness (or the pursuit of happiness) is the ultimate and greatest topoi for rhetorical discourses, according to Aristotle. This is one of the main reasons why rhetorical discourse concerning veganism is in a form of persuasion and since it could be seen as an attack to one’s ethics or morals, rhetorical excellence is much needed. Hence, the rhetorical dialogue regarding veganism is a valuable and interesting source for rhetorical criticism.

2. Rhetorical situation and rhetorical discourse of veganism

2.1 Veganism as rhetorical situation

To begin with, evaluating the rhetorical situation of veganism is in order. Lloyd Bitzer [4] states that “a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change the world” (60). As stated in Bitzer’s definition of rhetorical situation, situation is rhetorical insofar as it needs and invites discourse capable of participating with situation and thereby altering its reality (61)[5]. In this regard, situation of veganism is a rhetorical situation since it invites discourses that aim to alter the reality – change your lifestyle and save yourself, animals, and the world. Since the significance of the situation gives a rhetorical significance to a speech, speeches about spreading veganism is given a rhetorical significance.

2.2 Context and methodology of analysis

Among many speeches done about veganism, Gary Yourofsky’s speech was chosen for analysis in this paper. Gary Yourofsky is an American animal rights activist and lecturer and has given more than 2,660 lectures to more than 60,000 people[6] (as of January 2015 ) and his
YouTube channel has been translated into thirty seven languages. There may hardly be anybody from the vegan community who has never heard of Gary Yourofsky. One of his most famous speeches on YouTube is titled 'The Best Speech You Will Ever Hear' and the non-subtitle original version hit about 4 million. Hence, this speech[7] -one of his most famous lectures- would be examined using rhetorical criticism.

The analysis will be based on neo-Aristotelian method of analysis. More specifically, Forbes Hill’s framework of neo-Aristotelian analysis will be the structure of the analysis methodology. Neo-Aristotelianism is one of the first rhetorical methods of criticism and its central features or focus is on analyzing the methodology behind a speech’s ability to convey an idea to the audience. While organizing rhetoric as a field of study, Aristotle did not spell out a critical system for rhetorical method of criticism. Still, it is implied that literary work (or oratory) should refer to three things: the universe, the writer, and the audience (Mohrmann 360)[8]. Reviving this dormant rhetorical perspective, scholars such as Herbert A. Wichelns developed twelve different topics-similar to what Aristotle discussed- to be studied (Wichelns 181-183)[9].

Forbes Hill assembled his own method of neo-Aristotelian analyses topics. His outline of neo-Aristotelian criticism consists of four topics: the situation, disposition and synopsis, logical and psychological persuasive factors, and characterological and stylistic factors[10](Hill 139). For Hill, the ultimate goal of neo-Aristotelian criticism is to “discover whether the speaker makes the best choices from the inventory to get a favorable decision from a specified group of auditors in a specific situation. It does not, of course aim to discover whether or not the speaker actually gets his favorable decision” [11](Hill 139). Since Yourofsky’s lecture is to introduce, spread, and convince veganism to a group of college students, this lecture inevitably entails methods to win over the audience and to hopefully get a favorable decision from the auditors. Hence, in this paper, Hill’s outline for neo-Aristotelian criticism will be employed to analyze Yourofsky’s lecture. Hill’s four topics demonstrates what neo-Aristotelian method of criticism aims to achieve- which is to compare the means of persuasion used by a speaker- in a simple but overarching topics to be analyzed. Hence, in this paper, the first two topics of Hill’s outline for neo-Aristotelian criticism will be employed for analyzing Yourofsky’s lecture.

3. Neo-Aristotelian Analysis

3.1 Situation

Meat (red meat, poultry, and other aquatic mammals) consumption in US from 1961 to 2013
more than doubled[12]. Globally, the FAO data shows that livestock production is growing rapidly which is interpreted to be the result of the increasing demand for products. Global meat production has more than tripled, milk production doubled and egg production has increased by nearly four times since 1961[13]. The increase in population, increase in affluence in many developed countries, and factory farming livestock attributes to this rise in animal product consumption.

Such high level of production and consumption can cause many complications in health and environment. As for complications in environment: escalating demand for animal products leads to animal concentrations that are out of balance with the waste absorption and feed supply capacity of available land. High concentrations of animals close to human agglomerations often cause enormous pollution problems(Delgado 46)[14].

In addition, studies showing correlation between high meat consumption and higher rates of chronic disease (Dwyer T & Hetzel BS[15]; Armstrong B & Doll R[16]) has been in the field of science since the seventies. Within the WHO report, Dr Christopher Wild, Director of IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer), says “these findings (associations of cancer with the consumption of red and processed meat) further support current public health recommendations to limit intake of meat.”[17]

The discussion whether animal products are harmful or beneficial are still one of the hot topics in diet and nutrition. There are medical and scientific journals constantly providing us with study results but still, the advertisements and education on nutrition is still very meat and dairy-friendly. If you look at television advertisements, there are pizza, burger, ice cream, milk, or cheese advertisements at least once in every ten minutes. At schools, we see nutrition pyramids containing meat and dairy as a necessary nutrition for balanced and healthy diet. In this respect, it could be said that majority of the society believes that meant and dairy is not harmful but essential to our diet.

There are many doctors who advocate eliminating meat and dairy (such as Collin Campbell, John McDougall, Caldwell Esselstyn, Neal Barnard, Michael Gregor, Michael Klaper, Joel Fuhrman) who write books, give lectures and speeches, and establish medical centers to cure people with a vegan diet. The health aspect of the vegan debate is actually a huge part of veganism is still in process since there seems to be no clear consensus about this issue (all doctors would agree than smoking a cigarette is harmful for your health but not about veganism).

This speech takes place with the access to diverse information about medical and scientific studies revealing the harm of meat and dairy. Additionally, the magnitude of the industry of
meat and dairy is not just on the debate about health of human body, but also the impact it has on environment. The land that is cleared out to grow livestock, and all the waste that the livestock produce, the food and water consumed to grow these livestock are all under the fault of harming the environment.

Among the three main approaches in advocating vegan diet are: health of humanity, health of our planet, and ethics. The speech discusses all three approaches but mainly takes the ethical point of view of veganism. This may be because it can be more easily accepted compared to the other two approaches. Health of our bodies and the planet and the impact the meat and dairy industry has over them are still very much not accepted as a common knowledge, so to reach out to people by talking about a more subjective route - in this case, ethical approach- could have been the best choice for the animal activist lecturer, Gary Yourofsky.

3.2 Disposition and Synopsis

The speech begins with an enthymeme that attacks the prejudicial notions of the topic of the speech. Yourofsky opens his speech by “today we will talk about world’s forgotten victims: animals”. He then continues defining and redefining critical terms such as slaughterhouse, vegans, activist, and genuine compassion, species-ism. The rest of the proem is taken up by series of attempts to put himself as a person who is not trying to be a judgmental enemy who condemns all meat-eating audiences. He states that he too was a meat-eating, leather-wearing non vegan for 25 years. In this manner, Yourofsky’s moral end that he so consciously chooses, which is to have and show and act with empathy, depicts his character favorably. Hence, Yourofsky’s narration consists of drawing a clear line between the narrator and the opponent (the society that promotes animal products).

His narrative commences by accusing lies and propagandas of animal abusers or the animal product industry as a cause for lack of connection between animals (as living being and not as machines or food) and humans. In this sense, his speech fits Aristotelian pattern of proem, narrative, proofs, and epilogue (the four necessary parts of discourse). The narrative’s function is to depict the narrator’s character favorably and opponent’s unfavorably. Yourofsky’s puts himself as well as the audience inside the boundary of ‘animal rights person’ by saying “every person in this room used to be a real animal rights person at one time, a true animal lover, and a real friend to the animal kingdom. And it’s when we were kids”. He then puts ‘animal abusers’ and meat and dairy industry as opponents who “taught us to be so mean, and nasty
and vicious and hateful, or indifferent towards animals”. He defines species-ism and like racism, sexism, heterosexism, antisemitism, and misogyny, it is a “learned behavior”.

During his narrative, Yourofsky gives his first proofs: graphic pictures and four minute video that shows what’s going on in the meat industry. He then appeals to ethos of the audience as well as pathos by saying, “I want to ask you, not to turn away, not to close your eyes during this video. It is because, if you choose to eat meat, cheese, milk and eggs, I think at the very least, you are obligated to see the pain and suffering you are causing. But if you do feel the need to turn away or close your eyes during this video, you might want to ask yourself a question: if it’s not good enough for my eyes, then why is it good enough for my stomach?” After the video he further explains how animals are killed and how much before they enter slaughterhouses.

Next, Yourofsky presents his epilogue. Epilogue is comprised of “reinforcement of a favorable attitude to ourselves and an unfavorable one to our opponents, amplifications of the significance of the facts that are favorable to us” (Hill 107)[18]. After showing the proofs of animal cruelty he then says “When you hit the door, after my speech, are you aware, that for the first time ever you can no directly participate in ending a massacre?” serving as an epilogue of the speech. Following this statement, he again expresses his well-meaning intention and character by differentiating himself from politicians or sales : “I am not a politician. I don’t know how to schmooze people. Hope you appreciate my honesty and . I am not a sale person. I have no books to sell after my speech, no DVDs, no documentaries. I don’t want your money”. This statement is followed by leaving the choice to “show how truly peaceful” to the audience.

In this sense, his speech has Aristotle’s four necessary parts of discourse: proem, narrative, proofs, and epilogue in such order. The other half of the speech consists of more proofs addressing some possible arguments or questions that might be raised by the opponents. The rest of the speech consists of more proofs assessing humans as herbivores, animal products as causes of diseases, environmental issues. These proofs are mainly inartistic proofs with statistics and research findings as well as personal and society’s evident phenomenon such as family members who died of diseases.

3.3 Logical and Psychological Persuasive Factors

Aristotelian assessment of means of persuasion is an account of choice of major premises on which the enthymemes that form the body of proof are based and methods to bring auditors to feel favorable to accept the premises (Hill, “Conventional Wisdom” 142). There are several
enthymemes based on value premise in this speech. The most dominant enthymeme is that we need and want genuine peace and compassion. Presumably no one would try to refute this enthymeme by saying that peace and compassion are not primary goods for men, though some might argue that consuming animals is a ‘necessary evil’ by arguing that animals are sources of necessary nutrients and well-being of human health. Yourofsky buries this concern by cancelling out the very belief on animals being a primary and essential source for good health and claims that animal products (meat, fish, eggs, and dairy) are main reasons for most deadly as well as chronic diseases.

A related value premise would be that animals are not machines but living beings that can “think, feel, be rational, be aware and be self-aware” and are to be granted compassion and as less suffering as possible. Rationally, one might ‘know’ that this premise is true especially if they have or had animal companions. However, one might not think of livestock (like cows, pigs, and chickens) as emotional and smart beings but just as food and thus one might not ‘feel’ much empathy towards livestock animals. Yourofsky uses videos of cruelty of animal farms, dairy farms, and slaughter houses to rectify such notions.

Both premises stated above are value premises that are hard to refute without being seen as a person with poor and selfish values. Furthermore, since veganism associates with cruelty-free and compassion, it is manifestly good and the meat and dairy industry as well as those who participate in the cruelty by supporting those industry are participants of bad. This binary good and bad image of the speaker and the opponent (animal consuming industry) is even more intensified if the auditors are in state of disgust towards the opposing side of the argument. The visual images of the cruelty make the audience to feel disgust towards it. Moreover, words like slavery, discrimination, and holocaust are used as a way to express animal cruelty in our society today. Expressions used for animal products also cause audience to feel disgust. For example, meat is a “cut up corpse of a dismembered body” that consists of blood, flesh, veins, muscles, and tendons; a glass of milk has “one eye dropper full of pus” in it; unfertilized egg is “hen’s period”; honey is “bee-vomit”. In this sense, Yourofsky’s message of veganism promotes a state of disgust towards animal products through images and words while creating a state of feeling favorable towards a vegan diet and lifestyle.

In sequence with videos and words that describe animal products, Gary Yourofsky presents vegan food as approachable, accessible, and easy as possible. He does not show slides of broccoli and tomatoes or fruits in variety on the screen. Instead, he shows the audience of products that can replace meat and dairy. He claims “the coolest part of being vegan in this day in age: its never been easier! You can have the same smell, taste, and texture of meat,
cheese and milk, without it. Nobody has to suffer and die for your dinner anymore, including you. They make all the products you like to eat, in a vegan version." Again, here, he does not place himself as a vegan who naturally loves all things natural and plant based whole foods. He does not try to persuade them that salads are delicious or that it is our long years of not so healthy eating that made our taste buds to crave the taste of meat and dairy. Instead, he recommends vegan items that taste and look like meat or dairy. In a sense, it is not depriving people of their pleasures in eating delicious food, but Gary Yourofsky makes it seem like a more healthy and pleasurable alternative.

In the question and answer session after the speech is any indication, the audience of the speech did not question the ethical parts of veganism but more concerned about the difficulty of eating vegan. Since the audience was college students, they asked about vegan food being more expensive. Likewise, a lot of questions were about the efficiency, the price, and accessability of vegan food items. In conclusion, it was less about ‘why vegan?’ but more about ‘how to be vegan’ that were the issue after the speech. This could meant that the speech was a successful one that addressed the ‘why’ questions of veganism.

34. Characterological and Stylistic Factors

Yourofsky’s choice of value premises is closely related to his ethos as conveyed by the speech. Stepping away from animal products, from the speaker’s point of view, is stepping away from act of slavery, victimizing, domination, and atrocity. He also is not a politician or a sales person who is trying to sell or force unnatural ideas or ideology. His intention is to take off the blinders the society and the animal consuming industry placed and to re-connect humans with animals.

His view on animal consumption is not flexible or compromising. In any possible circumstances, he is against animal products and believes that they are absolutely unnecessary. However, he is approachable and relatable by admitting that he too was a meat and dairy eater before he found out about the reality of animal cruelty and that he loves the taste of meat and dairy. He emphasizes that he did choose to become vegan because he did not enjoy the taste of meat and dairy but because of ethical reasons. He is an activist who ‘acts’ by doing and showing in real act of compassion and not just talking about compassion. Throughout the speech, he has one single big enemy which is the meat and dairy industry that gives false propagandas and information and emphasizes multiple times to the audience that he is not trying to “dog you out” or to judge and point fingers towards them. During the
end of the speech he does point out that such cruelty "happens because you buy those products". In other words, he does not give unconditional free pass to the audience and places a sense of responsibility for animal cruelty even if the audience chooses not to go vegan.

The language used in the speech helps to reinforce his pathos. His word choices and metaphors are powerful means of reinforcing his pathos. He uses the word "meat eaters" instead of words like 'normal people' or 'regular people'. Furthermore, he uses terms like 'holocaust' 'racism' and 'sexism' to point out that 'species-ism' (believing that certain species is more special and superior) is also the same act of purest form of hatred. He also uses words like 'concentration camp trucks' or 'concentration camp slaughterhouses'. These expressions cause a state of anger, hatred, shame, and disgust towards animal cruelty as well as pity towards animals.

4. General Assessment

A general assessment would be answering the question; how well did Yourofsky's speech choose among the available means of persuasion for this particular topic which can easily come off as offensive and intense? First, the message was designed to appeal to those who are not vegans. The audience are college students and the way Gary Yourofsky explains the word vegan in the beginning, we may assume that his target audience is people who has never heard of vegan or looked into veganism closely before.

The structure of this speech was largely in accordance with four parts of discourse: proem, narrative, proof, and epilogue. The most crucial part of these four structures in this speech was the centrality of narrative and proof. Especially, where to situate the audience who may probably be non-vegans, was important. In other words, the speaker had to be careful not to be accusatory towards the audience but to inform them that they are one of the participants of animal cruelty without offending the audience. Yourofsky places himself and the audience in somewhat of a neutral ground in the first part of the speech by indicating that he too was a non-vegan and that all of 'us' were 'animal lovers' who were oppressed and programmed by the industry and the society not to care about where and how meat and dairy you buy in stores come from. Scientific facts and statistics were not overly but were still used as one of the main proofs of the speech. Yourofsky also used logos, pathos, and ethos by giving graphic videos, logical and common sense (such as, 'if we have alive rabbit and an apple in our hands we will eat an apple'), and metaphors and expressions. Other proofs in a form of facts and research findings could have been more precisely presented. However, since the time frame of the speech was about an hour and that the target audience was not familiar with biological or
scientific facts and that the primary goal of this speech was to invite the audience to be aware of the unethical aspect of consuming animals, his statistic and scientific proofs were not the focus of this speech.

References

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2879&v=es6U00LMmC4