

Book Review

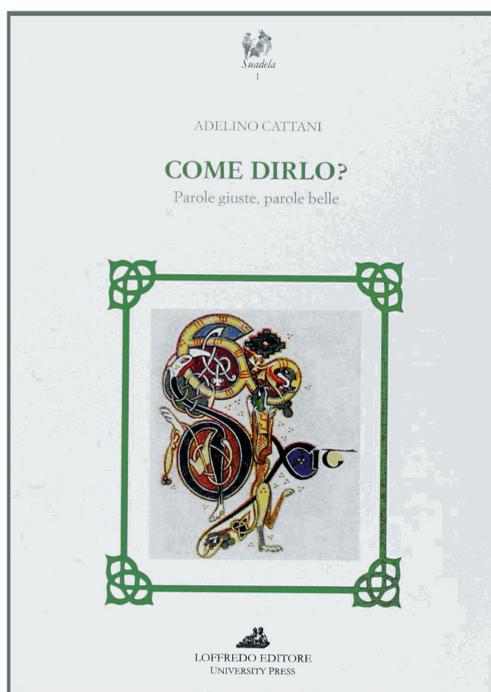
Come dirlo? Parole giuste, parole belle

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Adelino Cattani, “*Come dirlo? Parole giuste, parole belle*”,
Loffredo editore University press, 2008, p. 118.



“*Come dirlo? Parole giuste, parole belle*” (How to say it? Right words, beautiful words) is a book by the Italian scholar Adelino Cattani written in Italian that presents both a praise of the *word* and its persuasive dimension and a systematization of the rhetorical uses of language, enriched with the hermeneutic reflection on language use in poetry and ethic with an explicit reference to the praxis and action of the *ars bene dicendi*. It is not a coincidence that *the book's* title evokes an association with the Latin consideration of rhetoric as the *ars bene dicendi* or the *bene dicendi scientia*. (Quintilian).

Adelino Cattani is a Professor of Argumentation Theory at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Educational Sciences and Applied Psychology of University of Padua. He is President of the Association for Culture and Promotion of Debate, Director of the *Eris* International Online Journal of Argumentation and Debate, and member of International Association of the Study of Controversies – IASC. Since 2006 he has organized the National and Regional Argumentative Debate Tournaments in Italy. His international teaching and research experience refer to the universities and research institutions in Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Mexico, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and the USA.

His book combines a solid classical rhetorical foundation with contemporary argumentative dimensions and current examples. The author's rhetorical invention refers to examples from the history of the rhetoric, philosophy, literature, journalism. He involves a wide spectrum of rhetorical examples – from the ancient rhetorical theory of Gorgias and Zeno to the contemporary theories of Austin and Wittgenstein, the dystopian writings of George Orwell, Primo Levi's short stories or the magical realism of the internationally bestselling contemporary writer Isabel Allende. Therefore, the book is intended for a broader audience in social and human studies, but also jurists, journalists, writers, public relation experts, students, even the newborn professions of bloggers, vloggers, etc. Its purpose is to set out a clearly expressed yet comprehensive explanation of the rules of persuasive speech that apply to all aspects of targeting.

The book discusses its subject of study – the correct and persuasive speaking created by choosing the right words (“those that illuminate the thought, attract the intuition and warm the heart”, from multiple perspectives. Answering the question of the book's title (*How to say it? Right words, beautiful words*), Cattani analyses two ways of persuasive speech: “as an inspired poet” who uses beautiful words pleasantly and “as an inspiring persuader” who uses the right words effectively. The author's core statement is that the word is magical, and its magic power consists of remote action implemented at three steps. In the first place, the words create *images*; then, the images create *ideas* and finally, the ideas create *behaviours*. /p. 9/ Analyzing this process the author identifies the *clearness*, the *syntheticity* and the *versatility* as the three fundamental characteristics of the effective speech. Moreover, Adelino Cattani's consideration is that exactly this specific magic dimension of words is what guarantees the *power* and the *salvation* embodied within discourse.

Before introducing the book's structure I would like to focus on the book's title which in my opinion leaves it to the audience to make the implied connection to the ancient Greek ideal of gentlemanly personal conduct, “the highest principle

of all human will and action”, defined with the term *calocagathia* (καλοκαγαθία). [1] I believe this ideal should be used as a background for the reading of the book that makes it different from the mainstream studies on persuasive speech. I will remind that Plato defines *calocagathia* as the opposite of injustice and wickedness that establishes it as a matter of ethics. [2] Despite its legacy of the Homeric civilisation the widespread use of the term *kalokagathia* refers to the Sophists, and indicates the moral value of virtue and justice that characterises the career of orators and politicians.

Such contextualisation could help the reader to better understand Adelino Cattani’s rhetorical formula: “We could say things that are right or wrong, good or bad, but only the one of the possible combinations between the four should be ‘lucky’, according to the rules of the reasoning based on “correct and persuasive speech”, i. e. “when the right things have been told in a good manner”, (p. 8). [3] And once again: “It is not enough to be right; we must be able to reason and to explain”, because “language and thought must *go hand in hand*” (pp.6-8). We may assume the same rule leads the book itself and designs its structure – nine chapters, each divided in paragraphs with specific subtitles that *help readers* to navigate the text.

The first chapter of the book is dedicated to the magical words and arguments, the enchanting discourses and logical self-defense from the rhetorical enchantment of the word. It introduces the idea for the words used to create action where language is considered not a mere tool for communication, but an action: “the words seduce, deceive, spur, enchant”. The chapter identifies the magic unity of “to say” and “to do” as the core aspect of the speech act’s performativity (pp. 19-23). [4] (To clarify this assumption Cattani explains “the words are instrument for the organisation, structuring and categorisation of the world”, an “instrument to create good, beauty and truth.”

In the second chapter “The power of the words”, the author continues his survey on the magical word identifying a set of examples of fictional characters developed through the salvation word/discourse. The inventory spectrum that supports the thesis that the word brings salvation refers to protagonists as Belisa Crepuscolario, Scheherazade, as well as Native American Folk tales.

The third chapter “To say it better” focuses the author’s attention to the importance of discourse versatility.

Chapters Four “The *littleness* of the terms and concepts“ and **Five** “Abundance of terms and concepts” are dedicated to the consideration of the perfection and imperfection of language. Cattani’s examples refer to Orwell’s fictional language Newspeak/Neo-Language defined with the axiomatic “few terms and

elementary rules”, the political intervention on public opinion (quoting a Decree from the 1999 on how Turkish mass media, should use certain terms to comment on the Kurdish independency movement) and some cases of administrative language.

Chapters six “*The double language*” and **Seven** “Simulations and dissimulations” could also be considered thematically close to each other. The first of them analyses the metaphor for language untruthfulness represented by the term “Doublespeak” and the expression “forked tongue” meanwhile in “Simulations and dissimulations” Cattani discusses the role of language in deception and vice versa – the role of deception in language.

The focus of **Chapter eight** “The difficult words” is on analysing how we should speak in an appropriate way and how to criticise without offending our dialogical partner while **Chapter Nine** “The difficult words” is dedicated to the political correctness of language in relation with its gender specifics and the tension between the social and political dimensions of correctness.

To summarise, “*Come dirlo? Parole giuste, parole belle*” is an inventive and wise study of the different examples of contemporary argumentation in different areas of the world demonstrated against the background of a deeper basis of knowledge of the classical rhetorical rules, techniques and values. Taking everything into account, I will say Adelino Cattani’s of is a brilliant rhetorical study on the persuasive dimensions of language interpreted not as a mere tool for communication, but as a fundamental human action founded on magical words – words told by an orator (a good and beautiful person) that has a potential to transform (organise, structure and categorise) the world... words that brings salvation.

References and Notes

- [1] *Calocagathia* was the ancient Greek personified spirit of nobility and goodness as well as “*in possession of all virtues*” personal conduct. The term is composed of two adjectives kalos (καλὸς means “beautiful” and encompasses meanings equivalent to English “good”, “noble”, and “handsome”) and (ἀγαθός, that means “good” or “virtuous” and describes the person’s excellence of character (ethical virtue).
- [2] Werner J. (1947). *Paideia: The Ideals Of Greek Culture: Volume II*, *Search of the Divine Centre*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Oxford, 13.
- [3] Cattani, A. (2008). *Come dirlo? Parole giuste, parole belle*. Caloria-Napoli: Loffredo Editore University Press, 8.
- [4] Cattani, A. (2008). *Come dirlo? Parole giuste, parole belle*. Caloria-Napoli: Loffredo Editore University Press, 19-23.

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