

Background: This is Goebbels' discussion of Hitler's speaking ability, taken from an illustrated book on Hitler published in 1936. Goebbels presents Hitler as a unique master of rhetoric, able to speak the truth to the masses in a way that inspires them to greatness. The [pictures that accompany the chapter](#) are available on a separate page.

The source: Joseph Goebbels, "Der Führer als Redner," *Adolf Hitler. Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers* (Hamburg: Cigaretten/Bilderdienst Hamburg/Bahrenfeld, 1936, pp. 27-34).

The Führer as a Speaker

by Dr. Joseph Goebbels

There are two fundamentally different kinds of speakers: those who use reasoning, and those who speak from the heart. They reach two different sorts of people, those who understand through reason, and those who understand through the heart. Speakers who aim for the reason are generally found in parliaments, those who speak from the heart speak to the people.

The speaker who uses reason, if he is to be effective, must command a wide range of statistical and factual material. He must be a master of dialectic as the pianist is master of the keyboard. With ice cold logic, he develops his line of thinking and draws irrefutable conclusions. He is most effective with people who work primarily or exclusively with reason. Big and compelling successes are denied him. He does not understand how to fire up the masses for a great cause. He is limited to educational discourse. Since he is cold, he leaves his listeners cold. At best he persuades people, but never mobilizes them and sets them marching regardless of their own ideas or the element of personal risk involved.



Adolf Hitler

The speaker from the heart is different. He may have the skills of the master of reasoning. They are, however, only tools he uses as a true rhetorical virtuoso. He has abilities not found in the reasoning speaker. He combines clear diction with simple argumentation, and instinct tells him what to say and how to say it. Language is united with ideas. He knows the secret corners and aspects of the mass soul and knows how to reach and touch them. His speeches are masterpieces of declamation. He outlines people and conditions; he inscribes his theses on the tablet of the age; with deep and noble passion he explains the pillars of his world view. His voice reaches out from the depths of his blood into the depths of the souls of his listeners. He brings to expression the secrets of the human soul. He rouses the tired and lazy, fires up the indifferent and the doubting, turns cowards into men and weaklings into heroes.

These rhetorical geniuses are the drummers of fate. They begin their work alone in dark and dismal historical epochs and suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves in the spotlight of new developments. They are the speakers that make history.

As any great man, a gifted speaker has his individual style. He can only speak as he is. His words are written into his body. He speaks his own language, whether in posters or letters, essays, addresses or speeches.

There are many examples in history that prove that great speakers

resemble each other only in their effects. The nature of their appeals to people, their appeals to the heart, vary with the time, the nation, and the character of the epoch. Caesar spoke differently to his legions than Frederick the Great did to his army, Napoleon differently to his guard than Bismarck did to the members of the Prussian Parliament. Each used language that his hearers understood and used words and thoughts that reached their emotions and found an echo in their hearts. The daemon of their era gave each the ability to speak in a way that raised them above his century as one of the eternal proclaimers of great ideas, one of those who makes history and transforms nations.

The various races seem to have differing abilities in this realm. Some seem too reserved to practice the art, others seem practically predestined to it. One speaks of Latin eloquence, for example. The wealth of average and important speakers in the Roman peoples is also some proof of this. It also seems true that rhetorical ability in these nations finds a public that understands it and gives it the widest possibility of success.

In the past, our German people was not particularly gifted in this regard. We had more than enough statesmen and soldiers, philosophers and scientists, musicians and poets, builders and engineers, geniuses of planning and organization. But we always lacked those with rhetorical gifts. No one after Fichte's classic speeches to the German people was able to reach the people's hearts, until Bismarck. When Bismarck departed, no one followed until the collapse after the World War brought forth a new preacher. In between we had at best serviceable speakers, suitable for everyday or parliamentary use or service on boards of directors, but who encountered only icy reserve when they spoke to the people.

This was probably the result of the times. There were no great ideas, no powerful projects. Rhetoric sank into a morass of self-satisfaction. The only apparent exception, Marxism, was secretly allied with them and its speakers represented a materialism that could never release the spark of true genius.

But revolutions bring forth true speakers, and true speakers make revolutions! One should not overestimate the role of written or printed words in revolutions, but the secret magic of the spoken word reaches directly the emotions and the hearts of people. It reaches the eye and the ear, and the electrifying force of the masses seized by the human voice sweeps with it the wavering and the doubting.

What would happen to a statesmanly genius who fate had for some reason placed in an inferior position if he lacked the power of speech and the explosive force of the word! It gives him the ability to make ideas from ideals and realities from ideas. With its help, he gathers people to his flag who are ready to fight with him; driven by it, men risk their health and their lives to bring a new world to victory. An organization comes from the propaganda of the word, a movement from the organization, and that movement conquers the state. The important thing is not whether an idea is right; the decisive thing is whether one can present it effectively to the masses so that they become its adherents. Theories remain theories when living men do not give them expression. Living people in difficult times follow only an appeal that reaches their hearts because it comes from the heart.

It is difficult to place the Führer within these categories. His ability to reach the masses is unique and remarkable, fitting no organizational scheme or dogma. It would be ridiculous to think he attended some sort of speaker school; he is a rhetorical genius who developed his own abilities with no help from anyone else. One cannot imagine that the Führer ever spoke differently than he does today, or that he will ever speak differently. He speaks his heart, and therefore reaches the hearts of those who hear him. He has the amazing gift of sensing what is in the air. He has the ability to express things so clearly, logically and directly that listeners are convinced that that is what they have always thought themselves. That is the true secret of the effectiveness of Adolf Hitler's speeches. The Führer is neither a speaker from reason nor from the heart. He uses both, depending on the needs of the moment. The essential characteristics of his speeches to the people are: clear organization, irrefutable logical

reasoning, simplicity and clarity of expression, razor-sharp dialectic, a developed and sure instinct for the masses and their feelings, an electrifying emotional appeal that is used sparingly, and the ability to reach out to the souls of the people in a way that never goes unanswered.

Long ago when he was still far from power, the Führer spoke to a meeting filled primarily with his political opponents. From the beginning, he was rejected. For two hours he struggled with the stubbornness of his audience, addressing all their problems and objections until at the end there was only thundering agreement, jubilation and enthusiasm. As he concluded, someone yelled from the highest row: "Hitler is Columbus!"

That got to the heart of it. He had stood the egg on its end. He clarified the confused and mysterious nature of the age. He showed his hearers in a clear and simple way that the man in the street had long sensed, but had not found the courage to express. Hitler said what everyone thought and felt! More than that, he had the civil courage in the face of nearly everyone else to express with iron logic what had to be done.

The Führer is the first person in Germany to use speech to make history. As he began, it was all he had. He had only a strong heart and his pure word. Using them, he reached the deepest depths of the souls of his people. He did not speak like everyone else. He could not be compared with them. He understood the cares and worries of the little man and spoke about them, but they were for him only brush strokes on the dreadful painting of Germany's collapse. He did more than simply talk about them, he was not a mere reporter like the others. He took the events of the day and gave them a larger national significance that put them in context. He appealed to the good, not the bad instincts of the masses. His speaking was a magnet that drew to him whomever in the people who still had iron in his blood.

Stupid and empty-headed bourgeois people for a time were pleased to disparage him as a "drummer." They made themselves ridiculous, but did not realize it. Since they entirely lacked rhetorical ability, they thought his was a lesser form of leadership. They strove for power without realizing that Marxism had taken power from them by force, and would give up that power only as the result of force. They formed groups when they needed a national movement. They attempted putsches when revolution was in the air. They held the masses in contempt because they did not want to lead them. The masses bow only to him who puts them under his uncompromising command. They obey only him who knows how to give orders. They have a fine instinct for determining if something is really meant, or only said.

It is perhaps a classic proof of the inner strength of the German people that it heard the appeal of a man who went his own way, in opposition to the state and society, the press and public opinion, apparently against all reason and good sense. It is also a classic proof for the outstanding rhetorical brilliance of the Führer that his word alone was enough to transform an entire period, to defeat an apparently strong state and to bring in a new era.

An historic figure who has such impact must command all the skills of the spoken word. That is the case with the Führer. He speaks as confidently before workers as before scientists. His words strike deep into the hearts of farmers and city-dwellers. When he speaks to children, they are deeply moved. The magic of his voice reaches men's secret feelings. He translates historical philosophy into the language of the people. He has the ability to call up long forgotten history and make those who hear him feel as if they had always known about it. There is no element of superiority in his speaking, the kind of thing one sees in the speeches of the educated.

His words always focus on the central ideas of our people, our nation, and our race. He can express things in a thousand different ways. The listener never feels that he has heard it before. The masses hear the same major ideas of our national renaissance in ever new forms. There is nothing doctrinaire in his style. If he makes an assertion, it is proven by a multitude of examples. The examples are not taken only from the experiences of a particular area or class, thus leaving everyone else untouched. They

come from everywhere in the nation, such that each is spoken to. They are chosen with such care that even the blindest opponent must in the end grant that, unlike the parliamentary speakers, this man believes what he says.

Ordinary life is presented in a way that grips the hearers. The problems of the day are not explained only with the difficult tools of a worldview, but with wit and biting irony. His humor triumphs; one cries with one eye and laughs with the other. Every tone of daily life is touched upon.

A sure sign of a good speech is that it not only sounds good, but reads well. The Führer's speeches are stylistic masterpieces, whether he improvizes at the podium, speaks from brief notes, or speaks from a manuscript at an important international occasion. If one is not in his immediate vicinity, he cannot tell if the speech is a written speech delivered extemporaneously, or an extemporaneous speech delivered as if it were written out. His speeches are always ready to be printed. The picture would not be complete if we did not point out that the Führer is a master of rhetorical discussion. The last time the public had an opportunity to see him in action was his reckoning with the Social Democrats in the Reichstag in 1933, when he responded to the then Representative Wels. One had the feeling that a cat was playing with a mouse. Marxism was driven from one corner into another. Wherever he sought cover, he faced destruction. With breathtaking precision, one rhetorical blow after another fell on him. Without a manuscript or notes, the Führer gave a major, long-desired attack on Social Democratic parliamentarians who here received their *coup de grace*. How often in the past he had defeated them when they dared to show up in our meetings. Back then they had the ability to turn shameful defeats into brilliant victories in their newspapers the next day. Now the whole nation saw them fall into his hands. It was a debacle.

Judges and states attorney had learned to respect his rhetorical offensives. They asked the accused or the witness Hitler naive sounding questions or tried to lead him onto thin ice with innocent sounding questions. The 1924 trial on the uprising of 8-9 November 1923 turned into a triumphant success for the accused, since the Führer overcame the mountains of files, hostility, and misunderstanding through the shining strength of his obvious truthfulness and the power of his gripping eloquence. The Republic probably regretted that Leipzig Reichswehr trial in 1930, in which it tried to destroy the Führer and his movement. They gave him a platform from which the whole people heard his rhetorical effectiveness. One recalls today with a shudder that a Jewish-Communist attorney fired questions at him for nine hours straight, but recalls with satisfaction that Jewish Bolshevism found an opponent whose words and ideas wrestled it to the ground.

We saw and experienced the Führer as a speaker at the Party Rally of Freedom in 1935. He spoke fifteen times within a period of seven days. Not once did he repeat a thought or a phrase. Everything was new, fresh, young, vital, and compelling. He spoke in one way to officials, another to the S.A. and S.S. men, one way to the youth and another to the women. In his major speech on culture, he explained the deepest secrets of the arts, and his speech to the Wehrmacht was understood by the last soldier in the last battalion. The entire life of the German people was spanned by his speeches. He is a proclaimer of the word who can express its thousand-fold nature through the grace of God.

The Führer it at his best, however, before a small audience. Here he is able to reach each individual member of the audience. His speaking carries away the listener, who never loses interest because he always feels spoken to directly. He may speak about a random theme with an expertise that astonishes the specialists, or in speaking about everyday matters suddenly raise them to universal significance.

On such occasions the Führer can be more intimate and precise than a public speech permits. He can go into the heart of things with irrefutable logic. Only one who has heard him in such a setting can understand his full brilliance as a speaker.

One can say that his speeches to his people and the world have an audience unprecedented in world

history. They are words that inspire the heart and have a lasting impact in forming a new international epoch, There is probably no educated person in the world who has not heard the sound of his voice and who, whether he understood the words or not, felt that his heart was spoken to by magical words. Our people is fortunate to know the voice the world hears, a voice that puts words into thoughts and uses those thoughts to move an era. This man is a man with the courage to say yes and no, without qualifying them with an if or a but. Millions of people are suffering from bitter sorrow, great troubles, and terrible need. They see hardly a star of hope through the dark clouds that cover Europe's sky. No one is able to dispel the despair they face. But in Germany, God chose one from countless millions to speak our pain!