

Essay- great speeches

[Sociology](#)



" A great speech, rational or emotional, has the power to influence, challenge or persuade more than one audience. " Write an essay response supporting your argument to this statement in a close analysis of how three speeches have been crafted. Roman rhetorician Quintilian once commented, " And what, after all, is an orator? Not a good speaker, but a good person speaking well..." Great speeches influence, challenge or persuade audiences from any context because they are messages ' good' people have imparted upon human society to urge moral and social progress. Some orators such as Socrates focus on logical argument, whilst others such as Lincoln and Levertov use the emotional powers of their rhetoric. However, they all expound universally appreciated values such as truth, freedom and peace. As such, whether or not they are received well in their own contexts, they continue to influence, challenge or persuade audiences due to the timeless relevance of their moral message. More than two millennia ago, Socrates attacked the materialistic human condition, driving society's moral progress in his exertion of the values of truth and virtue. Socrates sought to bring Athens out of a state of material ignorance and help its citizens recognise the ultimate importance of morality and truth, sacrificing his life in this attempt. Though booed and jeered by his Athenian jury, Socrates did not die in vain, for his speech continues to challenge modern audiences. This is because these values are still relevant to today's society. By contrasting " Death, exile, disgrace", which are denounced as the evils of the average man, to the " far greater evil" of injustice, which his prosecutors committed upon him, Socrates establishes a dichotomy between morality and mortality, the latter raised above the former. This upheaval of virtue over life continues to influence man's sense of moral progress, because the conflict between

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material and moral values inherently emerges in all human contexts. As such the high modality of 'no' in "no evil can happen to a good man" continues to urge society's moral progression beyond the physical. Furthermore, Socrates' metaphorical representation of Athens as "a big generous horse, rather slow...and in need of being waked up", strikes at any audience in its portrayal of mankind's universal state of hubris and material ignorance, bringing them to act towards moral progress. This is reinforced by the metaphorical "hand of Truth", an imposing philosophical image that subjugates both Socrates' jury and responders of other contexts under the authority of Truth. The universal and metaphysical nature of this image has meant that it has enduringly influenced moral progress in its capacity to enlighten. Socrates, through his unapologetic tone and logical and structured argument, raises virtue and truth far above trivial material values, both admonishing his Athenian audience and continually urging moral progress within responders from other contexts. Like Socrates, Lincoln urges society to progress in his Gettysburg Address, espousing the values upon which modern Western democracy is built- freedom and equality. Through the emotional and ideological power of his rhetoric, Lincoln's speech not only inspires Union soldiers to create a free and just world, but also reinvigorates this intrinsically human struggle for moral progress within responders from any context. The allusions to the Declaration of Independence at the onset of the speech, with the direct quote of the iconic line "all men are created equal", immediately appeals to the human desire for Liberty, and a yearning for the values of freedom and equality to emerge in the world is immediately felt by both Union troops and future responders. Lincoln further utilises the anti-thesis, "The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here,

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but it can never forget what they did here", to raise permanent and everlasting images of sacrifice for the ideals which his symbolic nation represents- freedom and equality- inspiring all audiences to similarly fight for moral progress. The epistrophe of ' people' in " that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth" re-enforces the image of human liberation. Combined with the juxtaposition of the moralistic ' perish' with the idea of ' birth', Lincoln simultaneously inspires and burdens Union troops to persevere in defending the nation- a living, evolving and ever-changing concept representing Liberty which is in danger of destruction, whilst enlivening this spirit of moral progress within any responder. Though Socrates uses a logical and philosophical argument and Lincoln an emotional eulogy, both urge their audiences to seek moral progress, Socrates challenging our material values and Lincoln inspiring our inherent desire for Liberty. Through powerfully emotional rhetoric, Levertov roused the spirits of her 1970s American audience, challenging their complacency towards the Vietnam War and influencing them to act by raising the universal values of peace and freedom. These values have resonated down from Socrates' to Lincoln's and finally Levertov's orations, and they continue to influence, persuade and challenge responders from any context to critically perceive and improve their own societies. As in Lincoln's oration, Levertov uses rhetoric to sway our emotions. The hyperbolised oxymoron " a ' balanced' view of genocide", combined with repeatedly re-enforced images of decay and destruction through long sentences of anaphoric listing, has an amplified emotional effect in highlighting the morally degraded state of society, challenging 1970s audiences to act. These images of decay simultaneously evoke an emotional response within future

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responders, forcing them to consider the enduring social and moral issue of war. Images of tranquility and beauty, " the spring sunshine, the new leaves" are contrasted to the reality of 1970s society. The universal appreciation of this image of beauty and peace not only influenced Levertov's American audience to oppose the horror that was the Vietnam War, but continues to force future responders to question the very notion of warfare and oppose this impediment on society's moral progress. Indeed, this indictment of governmental control over the moral direction of society is epitomized through the anaphora of the third person possessive ' its' and the hyperbolised, zoomorphic description of ' tentacles', conjuring images of monstrosity and manipulation. Combined with the triple imperative on which the speech concludes, " Stop the bombing. Declare peace. Change the system", Levertov urges her audience to steer society away from ' evil' in the hands of greedy, power-lusting institutions and towards moral progress. Future responders are similarly challenged to question their own institutions and influenced to advance society towards moral progress because Levertov's rhetoric, at its deepest level, revolves around the universal human value of freedom, placing this into question within any responder. Levertov's speech, like Lincoln's and Socrates', influences both its own audience and audiences today because it espouses the essentially human process of moral progress, based on the universal values of freedom and peace. Socrates', Lincoln's and Levertov's speeches were all orated years apart to different audiences. Nevertheless, they shall be valued by mankind throughout time because these three orators speak on behalf of the human spirit and the human conscience. The techniques used by these orators effectively imbue audiences from all contexts with the desire to incite the

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moral progression of society and build a world where universally appreciated values such as freedom, justice and truth are omnipresent.