

The Amorality of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

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MOST COMMENTATORS have described Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as a morally neutral treatise; in George Kennedy's succinct phrase, "the art itself he [Aristotle] considered amoral."¹ A minority of commentators have maintained that the work shows a positive moral commitment either in part or in whole.² The position that parts of the treatise show this commitment was advocated in this journal by Eugene Ryan;³ that the whole takes a moral stance has recently been advanced elsewhere by Lois Self.⁴

Ryan argues that Aristotle regarded the ethos of a society as the ultimate ethical reality from which any philosopher producing an ethical treatise must start. Since the works of Aristotle show his desire to avoid the subjectivity of "man is the measure of all things," he must have believed in some objective process for determining the ethos of society. That process is public discourse, deliberative and epideictic. The *Rhetoric*, according to Ryan, was his attempt to show how the ethos of society is generated through deliberative and ceremonial address. This attempt is reflected in Aristotle's treatment of deliberation in Bk. I chs. 4–8. "Three of these chapters," Ryan states, "with the exception of a brief tech-

¹ George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963) 123.

² Some of those who have written that part of it shows moral commitment are: Friedrich Solmsen, *Die Entwicklung der aristotelischen Logik und Rhetorik* (Berlin 1929) 225, but Solmsen does not take this position elsewhere; and Robert J. Olian, "The Intended Uses of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," *Speech Monographs* 35 (1968) 137–48. Whitney J. Oates, *Aristotle and the Problem of Value* (Princeton 1963) 335, states that "ambivalence" about questions of value is the "most striking characteristic" of the *Rhetoric*. Among those taking the view that the whole shows moral commitment are: W. Rhys Roberts, "Notes on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," *AJP* 45 (1924) 351–61 ("Aristotle's object is to show how truth and justice may be aided by the effective use of public speech"); Charles Sears Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York 1924) 9 (rhetoric like logic "is a means of bringing out truth, of making people see what is true and fitting"); Henry W. Johnstone, "The Relevance of Rhetoric to Philosophy and of Philosophy to Rhetoric," *QuartJourSpeech* 52 (1966) 43–55. W. M. A. Grimaldi, S.J., *Aristotle, Rhetoric I, a Commentary* (New York 1980) does not address the question directly, but several remarks suggest that he should be placed in the latter group (*cf. infra* n.7).

³ Eugene E. Ryan, "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Ethics* and the Ethos of Society," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 291–308.

⁴ Lois S. Self, "Rhetoric and *Phronesis*: The Aristotelian Ideal," *Phil. & Rhet.* 12 (1979) 130–45.

nical segment to be discussed later, form a substantive Aristotelian treatise on value." Aristotle also "develops his brief account of epideictic rhetoric (Bk. I ch. 9) in a serious way, and in a way that is strikingly parallel to his study of value in *Rhet.* I chs. 5–7."

Self argues that "there is an association of persuasion and virtue in Aristotle's theory of rhetoric which derives from the nature of the art . . . itself." Aristotle conceived of an art to be used by a *φρόνιμος*, a person of practical wisdom. *φρόνησις* and rhetoric have much the same concerns: they work in the realm of the contingent and are directed toward decision-making using all the faculties, rational and appetitive, of human nature to the end of advancing the public good. *φρόνησις* is also one of the *ἀρεταί* listed in Bk. I ch. 9 and likewise a constituent of rhetorical *ἦθος*. It is therefore deeply interwoven in the fabric of Aristotelian rhetoric. Since it is by nature a moral quality, the *Rhetoric*, under its influence, must take a stance that is fundamentally moral.

Some of the passages crucial to the arguments of Ryan and Self are problematic when juxtaposed with these claims. Among the materials for deliberative speeches found in Bk. I chs. 5–7 is the proposition: "if the largest member of one class exceeds the largest of another, the former class consists of things larger; conversely, if a class consists of things larger, the largest member of that class exceeds the largest of the other, *e.g.*, if the biggest man is larger than the biggest woman, men in general exceed women in size, and if men exceed women in size, then the biggest man is larger than the biggest woman. For members of a class usually exceed those of another proportionally to the difference in size of their largest members" (1363b21–27). The generalization here enunciated is often in our experience true, but almost as often it is false. Could Aristotle have intended it as part of a substantive treatise?

Later we encounter the proposition: "what is rarer is a greater good than what is abundant, *e.g.*, gold than iron, though it is less useful; possessing it seems a greater good since it is harder to achieve." But the opposite may also be argued: "what is abundant is better than what is rare; it surpasses in utility, since what is frequently useful surpasses what is less frequently so" (1364a24–27). Which are we to understand is more valuable, the rarer item or the more abundant one? The text does not give a clue, but would it not necessarily do so if it were part of a work with a consistent moral stance throughout?

Finally, "whatever people wish to *be* are greater goods than what they wish to *seem*, since they are nearer to reality. Wherefore

even justice is said to be of small value, because to seem just is more worthy of choice than to be just, which is not true of health” (1365b5–8). Did Aristotle really think justice something of small value? He does not quite claim this, but that justice is sometimes said to be of small value. Still, if the passage is part of a substantive treatise, Aristotle must somehow have been committed to the statements in it. That he could have been in any way committed to this statement about justice would seem incredible to most readers of Aristotle’s works. Because these and other sections of the *Rhetoric* do not seem entirely consonant with the views of Ryan and Self, we must look carefully at the arguments they advance in their support.

Ryan begins by making some exceptions to his characterization of chapters 5–7 of Bk. I as substantive. In ch. 7 Aristotle reminds the deliberative speaker that *διαιρούμενα . . . εἰς τὰ μέρη τὰ αὐτὰ μείζω φαίνεται πλειόνων γὰρ ὑπερέχειν φαίνεται* (1365a10–11). This is a basic principle of rhetorical amplification—that any event can be made more important by describing each of its aspects in turn so that it seems as great as several events. Aristotle recommends in addition the figures of accumulation and climax: *τὸ συντιθέναι . . . καὶ τὸ ἐπικοδομεῖν . . . διὰ τε τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ διαίρεσει (ἢ γὰρ σύνθεσις ὑπεροχὴν δείκνυσι πολλήν) καὶ ὅτι ἀρχὴ φαίνεται μεγάλων καὶ αἴτιον* (1365a16–19). They are not only like *τὸ διαίρεσθαι* in that they make the subject described seem to exceed in number, they also make it look like a first principle and cause of important consequences. Making good and evil events seem more important than they really are is a necessary tool of rhetoric, but subversive of a substantive treatment of value. One can, of course, pluck this passage out of context and relegate it to the technical side of the *Rhetoric*, but certainly Aristotle in no way marks it off from the rest of his chapter.

Turning to the passages that are claimed as substantive, let us examine first the definitions of *εὐδαιμονία* (Bk. I ch. 5). Aristotle uses these definitions as the *ἀρχαί* of deliberative speaking, the ultimate bases of persuasion and dissuasion. The first is *εὐπραξία μετὰ ἀρετῆς* (1360b14), “right action with virtue.”⁵ At first glance this definition appears to support the notion that the section is sub-

⁵ This translation rather than “prosperity with virtue” follows the suggestion of Edward Meredith Cope, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle with a Commentary*, rev. and ed. by John Edwin Sandys (Cambridge 1877) I 74, that the meaning of *εὐπραξία* here should be limited by *Pol.* 1362b12–13 to ‘acting well’ but not ‘faring well’. Translators have not followed Cope in this.

stantively Aristotelian. In its emphasis on activity and excellence it is quite close to the familiar *ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατ' ἀρετήν* of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the principal difference being that the *Ethics* localizes activity in the *ψυχή*, no doubt in preparation for subsequently equating the highest kind of *εὐδαιμονία* with intellectual activity.

The other three definitions of *εὐδαιμονία*, however, cannot be ignored. The second, *αὐτάρκεια ζωῆς* (1360b15), is also compatible with well-known Aristotelian doctrines; one of the principal arguments of the *Nicomachean Ethics* establishing *εὐδαιμονία* as the end of human action proceeds from the proposition that what is self-sufficient is the final good (1097b6–21). But the next two definitions are quite different: they emphasize pleasure and physical resources. The third, *ὁ βίος ὁ μετὰ ἀσφαλείας ἡδιστος* (1360b15), sounds as if it might have been made by Eudoxus. To be sure, the addition of the notion that, for the pleasant life to be *εὐδαίμων*, it must be secure, makes this definition something less than an expression of vulgar hedonism. It takes a certain amount of calculation to determine which pleasures do not impair security.

The fourth definition, *εὐθηνία κτημάτων καὶ σωμαίων μετὰ δυνάμεως φυλακτικῆς τε καὶ πρακτικῆς τούτων* (1360b15–17), perhaps best conceived as being about a “flourishing condition of properties and persons,”⁶ could come from any number of sophists. Here too the qualifying phrase about being able to preserve and utilize these human and physical resources shows that the definition denotes no mere miserly piling up of wealth. Still, neither this definition nor its predecessor could be mistaken for Aristotelian formulations of *εὐδαιμονία*. They are not quite compatible with the notion that *ἀρετή* is the key to a successful life.

At this point chapter 5 proceeds to a deduction of the individual constituents of *εὐδαιμονία* from the four definitions. One observes that all four definitions are used impartially for these deductions—*e.g.*, somatic excellences like health, strength, and athletic ability must be parts of *εὐδαιμονία* because they make other good things secure and because they are necessary conditions for the maximum of pleasure. There is nothing to suggest that any one of the definitions is preferred.

Consideration of the chapter as a whole thus suggests that Aris-

⁶ Possibly, following Cope (*supra* n.5) 75, “a flourishing state of goods and chattels,” but it is more in line with Aristotelian thinking to interpret *κτῆματα* as the possessions of the members of the household and *σώματα* as their personal excellences like health, strength, and virtue, as is implied by the translation of Rhys Roberts (Oxford 1924).

totle is setting down positions representative of several philosophical schools of his time. There is a rational hedonist position, and a rational materialist one, a position like that of the sophist Hippias with its demand for self-sufficiency of life, and his own position that successful living is impossible without moral excellence. He seems to say, “Let us, for the purposes of rhetoric, grant an equal degree of probability to all these positions. Then they will serve as a foundation for our catalogue of the undisputed elements of happiness.”⁷ These elements are, of course, intended as the proximate ends to which deliberators will look when choosing their arguments.

Ryan also cites Bk. I ch. 9 as substantive rather than technical. The subject is *τὸ καλόν* and *τὸ αἰσχρόν*, the ends of the ceremonial kind of speaking (*τὸ γένος ἐπιδεικτικόν*); in this context they are virtually equated with *ἀρετή* and *κακία*. Here again Ryan finds it necessary to except a whole passage of the chapter because it obviously cannot be part of a substantive treatment of value. This passage recommends that the ceremonial speaker in his praising and blaming should treat qualities that resemble those of his subject as identical with the ones actually possessed by that person—*e.g.*, the cautious person should be called cold and calculating, the simple-minded a good person, the phlegmatic gentle, the one given to quick rage straight-forward, etc. (1367a32–b1). Indeed, Ryan holds that “this technical point of view alternates with the substantive up to the end of the chapter.” So it does, for Aristotle next tells us that all those having excesses can be described as having the appropriate virtue—*e.g.*, the rash are to be eulogized as brave. This will be effective, he says, because people are prone to accept a false argument *a fortiori*: if a man endangers himself when there is no necessity, much more will he be likely to do so for an honorable cause (1367b1–6). He goes on to give a number of suggestions for amplification of the virtues that the orator claims are possessed by his subject, since of all general notions that generate arguments, amplification is the most useful for ceremonial speakers (1368a26–27). This passage, where admittedly the “technical point of view alternates with the substantive,” constitutes nearly half the chapter. But let us examine the remainder.

⁷ Cf. Baldwin (*supra* n.2) 16, “the student of deliberative oratory needs such a survey of philosophy as will acquaint him with current ideas concerning happiness. . . .” The opposite position is taken by Grimaldi (*supra* n.2) 123: Some commentators “imply (or state) that the definitions really are expedient methods to achieve an end proposed—namely success in deliberative rhetoric—and not analyses of *τὸ ἀγαθόν*. This is incorrect. In their substance the definitions and the instances drawn from them are correct. . . .”

The chapter starts with two definitions of τὸ καλόν: ὁ ἄν δι' αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν ὃν ἐπαινετὸν ἦ, or ὁ ἄν ἀγαθὸν ὃν ἠδὲ ἦ, ὅτι ἀγαθόν (1366a 33–35). As the chapter proceeds, however, to the various lines of argument about τὸ καλόν, it becomes clear that what is important is the unselfish motive (see especially 1366b34–1367a5). The motive makes a good act praiseworthy, and is also what makes one take pleasure in doing it for its intrinsic goodness. These, no doubt, are Aristotle's own conceptions of the noble, though they are also popular conceptions. From the definitions it is deduced that ἀρετή must always be καλόν, because it is good (which, of course, implies being chosen for itself) and also praiseworthy. Nevertheless, ἀρετή is defined differently: it is a δύναμις ποριστικὴ ἀγαθῶν καὶ φυλακτικὴ and a δύναμις εὐεργετικὴ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων, καὶ πάντων περὶ πάντα (1366a36–b1). These definitions stress that other goods result from ἀρετή; like the Protestant ethic it is a condition for productivity, and also operates to preserve what has been produced. The connection of ἀρετή with moral choice (προαίρεσις) is not made until later in the chapter and then only in the context of recommending that accidental actions should be represented for the purpose of praising someone as the result of choice (1367b 21–26).

Ryan asserts that all this “is substantive Aristotelian doctrine, which though described in a different way from that found in the other Aristotelian treatises, does not conflict with what is found in them.” He then notes that the leading nineteenth century English commentator, E. M. Cope, disagrees on the basis of the definition of ἀρετή found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Bk. II ch. 6.⁸ Indeed Cope does, and for what would seem to be the best reasons, for ἀρετή is defined there as a ἔξις προαιρετικὴ, ἐν μεσότητι οὕσα τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὠρισμένη λόγῳ καὶ ὡς ἂν ὁ φρόνιμος ὀρίσειεν (1106b 36–07a2). There are four highly significant elements here: first ἀρετή is a ἔξις not a δύναμις, second it is a fixed disposition to make certain προαιρέσεις, third it is a mean-seeking disposition, and finally it is determined on the principle that the mean relative to us is where the φρόνιμος would define it. Some of these elements are implied by other passages in the *Rhetoric*, e.g., the connection with προαίρεσις (1367b21–26) and the prudent-man rule (1363a16–17 and 1364b11–16), but none of the four enters into either of the definitions of ἀρετή given at the beginning of ch. 9.

⁸ Cope (*supra* n.5) 159.

In view of this contrast, we must conclude that the definitions in the *Rhetoric* do not represent substantive Aristotelian doctrine.

Seven of the eight *ἀρεταί* listed in ch. 9 are among those occurring in the *Ethics*. But in ch. 9 they are rationalized on the grounds that they produce so many benefits. On this basis *δικαιοσύνη* and *ἀνδρεία* are the most honored among the virtues, because the latter is the most useful to others in war while the former is useful in war and peace (1366b5–7). This would be an unusual point of view for Aristotle to take, if it were accepted as his real opinion. However, the even more important difference between the doctrine found here and that of the ethical treatises is that none of the *ἀρεταί* is treated as a mean-seeking disposition.

Thus among the propositions for proving someone *καλός* are these: it is noble to get vengeance on one's enemies rather than settling with them, for to give back equal to what one has received is just, and it is also part of being a brave person not to be vanquished. Indeed victory and honor are among noble things, for they are worthy of choice even when fruitless, and they also show surpassing virtue (1367a19–23). These propositions are fine examples of the *φιλοτιμία* which has sometimes been remarked as a leading characteristic of Greek culture, and perhaps they are the inevitable precepts of popular morality as Cooper says.⁹ They are not, however, bases for an intellectual perspective on moral choices, and while the position of these passages is somewhat like that of Aristotle's treatment of the citizen's courage (*Eth.Nic.* Bk. III ch. 7), elsewhere such propositions are not treated as representing the highest type of virtue. They do not square well enough with Aristotle's doctrines to form part of a substantive Aristotelian treatise on value.

The positive proofs for Self's notion that *φρόνησις* is deeply woven into Aristotelian rhetoric seem slight. That a person can be praised for his practical wisdom does not make this virtue fundamental to the art of rhetoric any more than the fact that a person can be praised for *ἀνδρεία* makes that virtue fundamental to the art. A similar argument applies to *φρόνησις* as a constituent of *ἦθος*. Aristotle advises the orator to create a public image of being *φρόνιμος* because out of the three possible reasons for speaking or advising erroneously in any situation, foremost is *δι' ἀφροσύνην*

⁹ Lane Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle, an Expanded Translation* (New York 1932) 49.

οὐκ ὀρθῶς δοξάζουσιν (1378a10). Most speakers have taken the advice to heart, claiming, by and large, that they are the opposite of ἄφρων; they 'have given the situation thoughtful consideration' or 'reflected for a long time on the matter'. For an orator not to make such claims would be a failure to use the available means of persuasion. This should not imply that such claims are in every respect true; much less does anything Aristotle says in this connection imply that because speakers must claim to be φρόνιμοι, φρόνησις is basic to the art of rhetoric itself.

That both rhetoric and φρόνησις have as their end decision-making about contingent matters and involve rational as well as appetitive faculties also does not establish Self's conclusion. φρόνησις is a fixed intellectual disposition to choose wisely about contingent matters; rhetoric is a collection of methods and materials for arguing exhaustively about such matters. The former by definition looks at the subject-matter from a moral viewpoint, the latter from a methodological one. They are not the same.

I do not mean to deny that the treatise on rhetoric was probably intended for use by φρόνιμοι. It was clearly designed for a special audience: references to Aristotle's treatises on ethics and the *Politics* are common, and there are a few references to the *Physics*. The treatment of common topics and topics of enthymemes (Bk. II chs. 19 and 23–24) are more intelligible if one has read the *Topics*, and the various *dicta* about the enthymeme are unintelligible without knowledge of the *Prior Analytics*. It seems that the *Rhetoric* was designed as a handbook for the philosophically trained student, perhaps the graduate of the Lyceum who had to make his appearance in the *ecclesia* or law courts. He would need to relate his philosophical training to techniques of popular argumentation, and some directions for doing this are what Aristotle intended to give. He designed the book for the intellectual descendants of Pericles, not of Cleon. It is no doubt true that Aristotle expected the graduates of the Lyceum to be superior to others at making ethical decisions, in short to be φρόνιμοι. Hence, if the *Rhetoric* was designed for their use, it was designed for φρόνιμοι. All of which is not at all the same as saying that the art itself embodies or is coterminous with the intellectual virtue, φρόνησις.

In a number of passages, in fact, Aristotle seems to take the position that the art of rhetoric occupies a morally neutral position. It is the counterpart of dialectic (Bk. I ch. 1), so that if the *Rhetoric* contains a substantive treatment of value or is informed throughout by the moral virtue φρόνησις, the same should be true

of Aristotle's treatise on that subject. No one has to my knowledge made that claim about the *Topics*, a claim which would be incompatible with the definition of dialectic as a method by which we can reason from *ἔνδοξα* about any problem with which we are presented (*Top.* Bk. I ch. 1 100a18–19). If one reasons from received opinions about any and all subjects, his method cannot be morally bound, and the same is true if dialectic impartially investigates the first principles of all methods to find the way into any subject (*Top.* Bk. I ch. 2 101b4). Like dialectic, rhetoric is *οὐδεμιᾶς ἐπιστήμης ἀφωρισμένης*, not bounded by any specialized subject-area (Bk. I ch. 1 1354a3, also 1355b8), as are medicine and geometry, but it is able to observe whatever is persuasive about any given subject (1355b32–34). Such statements imply that the two arts are alike in lacking substantive content, moral or otherwise. Indeed, both are *δυνάμεις τοῦ πορίσαι λόγους* (1356a33–34), which is better rendered by a modern metaphor, “capacities for generating arguments,” than by the more traditional “faculties for providing arguments.”

A characteristic of these *δυνάμεις* is that they provide arguments to opposing conclusions: *τῶν μὲν οὖν ἄλλων τεχνῶν οὐδεμία τὰναντία συλλογίζεται, ἡ δὲ διαλεκτικὴ καὶ ἡ ῥητορικὴ μόνα τοῦτο ποιοῦσιν* (1355a33–35). This characteristic is consonant with the statement that rhetoric is useful because it requires the rhetorician to examine the arguments that lead to contrary conclusions about a question without premature commitment, *ἵνα μὴ λανθάνῃ πῶς ἔχει, καὶ ὅπως ἄλλου χρωμένου μὴ δικαίως τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοὶ λύειν ἔχωμεν* (1355a31–33). Aristotle wants the philosophically trained speaker to become habituated to canvassing the disposition of every aspect of his subject, and, when some opponent uses the available arguments unjustly, to have at hand the materials to refute him. Rhetoric is a capacity to generate for our scrutiny all the arguments inherent in a subject, whether specious or not. As a capacity, it therefore must be morally neutral.¹⁰

To be sure, Aristotle remarks in this context *οὐ δεῖ τὰ φαῦλα πείθειν*, an injunction on the rhetorician not to use in practice arguments that he knows to be of an immoral tendency. This seems at first glance to imply a moral stance. But coming as it does just after

¹⁰ Cf. Edward Meredith Cope, *An Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric* (New York 1867) 9: “It resembles dialectics also in being indifferent to the truth of its conclusions, so far as it is considered as an *art*, and the speaker as an *artist*: both of them argue indifferently on either side of a question and may prove affirmative or negative according as either of these happen to suit the reasoner's immediate purpose.”

the statement that we must not let any aspect of the subject escape us, it can be taken to mean that only after the art of rhetoric has presented him with all the arguments can a person judge that some of them lead to ends that are *φραύλα*. This same art supplies what is highly probable and what is merely plausible: *τῆς αὐτῆς τό τε πιθανόν καὶ τὸ φαινόμενον ἰδεῖν πιθανόν, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς διαλεκτικῆς συλλογισμόν τε καὶ φαινόμενον συλλογισμόν* (1355b15–17). This last dictum comes close to being an explicit avowal of the moral neutrality of the art, and its immediate sequel seems to me decisive: Aristotle gives the reason why rhetoric and dialectic encompass both proof and apparent proof—*ἡ γὰρ σοφιστικὴ οὐκ ἐν τῇ δυνάμει ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ προαίρεσει* (1355b17–18), sophistry is not inherent in the capacity itself but in the moral choice (presumably the choice made by the speaker).

A minor difference between rhetoric and dialectic is then noted, *πλὴν ἐνταῦθα μὲν ἔσται ὁ μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ὁ δὲ κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν ῥήτωρ, ἐκεῖ δὲ σοφιστῆς μὲν κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν, διαλεκτικὸς δὲ οὐ κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν* (1355b 18–21): except here (in the case of rhetoric) a person according to either his moral purpose or the discipline will be a rhetorician, but there (in the case of dialectic) according to his moral purpose he will be a sophist, according to the capacity a rhetorician.¹¹ Self apparently interprets this passage to mean that dialectic has no moral stance since there is a separate word to characterize the capacity and the moral purpose of the person who uses it, but rhetoric has one since there is no separate word for the art and the moral purpose. The text will not bear this interpretation. It plainly starts from the position that rhetoric and dialectic are basically alike in that they look at both real and apparent proof. It proceeds to the proposition that any sophistry connected with apparent proofs is really in the intention of the user. The only difference between the arts lies in the minor exception set off by *πλὴν*, namely,

¹¹ In this passage *δύναμις* and *ἐπιστήμη* seem to be used interchangeably to refer to the *τέχνη ῥητορικὴ* and the *τέχνη διαλεκτικὴ*. Cope (*supra* n.10) 13–14 distinguishes between *τέχνη* and *δύναμις* only in that the one views the subject as a body of principles and examples, the other is seen from the vantage point of the individual practitioner applying the art to a case of a particular type. But, he goes on to say, *τέχνη* too may be regarded subjectively as a *ἔξις* or fixed disposition to think about cases in a certain way. Aristotle often uses *τέχνη* with this signification, “which brings it very nearly into coincidence with the other term, *δύναμις*, by which he designates it [the study of rhetoric].” Cope draws a subtle distinction, and something simpler could be said: *δύναμις* and *τέχνη* are always used interchangeably in the *Rhetoric*. What is slightly unusual in 1355b18–20 is the use of *ἐπιστήμη*, evidently in a non-technical sense.

that for dialectic there is a special word for someone who uses it to a bad end.

Careful examination of Bk. I of the *Rhetoric* appears to preclude our viewing it as a morally committed treatise. Furthermore, the notion that Aristotle intended to write a treatise on the development of moral values in society is erroneous in a more fundamental way. It is based on a misapprehension of the context out of which Aristotle's *Rhetoric* developed. That context was the battle between Plato and the sophists. Much of what was in dispute revolved around rhetoric and its relation to moral truth and moral education. A leading moment in the battle is marked by a dialogue named for a famous sophist, the *Gorgias*. The introductory chapters of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, as has often been remarked, are entirely framed by the positions staked out by the participants in that dialogue.¹² For example, Socrates denied that rhetoric is a *τέχνη*, maintaining the analogy of rhetoricians to pastry cooks, since rhetoric is a kind of sycophancy like that practiced on sweet-toothed children by the makers of sweets. It is the *ἀντίστροφον ὀψοποιίας ἐν ψυχῇ, ὡς ἐκεῖνο ἐν σώματι* (*Grg.* 465D8). Solmsen has pointed out that the first line of the *Rhetoric*, *Ἡ ῥητορική ἐστὶν ἀντίστροφος τῇ διαλεκτικῇ* (1354a1), directly refutes this charge as surely as if Aristotle had written, 'No, it is not the counterpart of pastry-making, it is the counterpart of dialectic'.¹³

Another example of how the dialogue provides the frame for *Rhetoric* I.1–3 has to do with the question of the subject-matter of rhetoric. Gorgias stated that it is *περὶ λόγους* (449E1). Socrates would not accept this answer; rhetoric, he insisted, is not concerned with statements or arguments about just anything, for example, about medicine or gymnastics, otherwise rhetoricians would be doctors and trainers in another guise. He forced Gorgias to define a subject-matter for rhetoric. At first, Gorgias evaded the question, calling its subject *τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων καὶ ἄριστα* (451D7–8). Even after he agreed to the famous *πειθοῦς δημίουργος* (454A2–3), there remained the question, persuasion

¹² See Hugo Santaine Anton, "Ueber die Rhetorik bei Aristoteles in ihrem Verhältnis zu Platons Gorgias," *Museum für Philologie* n.f. 14 (1859) 570–98; Karl Barwick, "Die Gliederung der Rhetorischen *τέχνη* und die Horazische *Epistula ad Pisones*," *Hermes* 57 (1922) 1–62; Grimaldi (*supra* n.2) in notes on Ch. 1–2, 1–77; A. Hellwig, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie der Rhetorik bei Platon und Aristoteles* (Hypomnemata 38: 1973); Forbes Hill, "The *Rhetoric* of Aristotle," in James J. Murphy, ed., *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric* (New York 1972) 19–76; and Solmsen (*supra* n.2) 196–229.

¹³ Solmsen (*supra* n.2) 210.

about what? At length Gorgias answered *περὶ τούτων ἃ ἔστι δίκαιά τε καὶ ἄδικα* (454B7). The second sentence of Aristotle's treatise takes direct aim at this answer. Like dialectic, rhetoric is concerned with everything that is *οὐδεμιᾶς ἐπιστήμης ἀφωρισμένης* (1354a3). This point is repeated in the summary at the end of ch. 1: *οὐκ ἔστιν οὔτε ἑνός τινος γένους ἀφωρισμένου ἢ ῥητορικῆ, ἀλλὰ καθάπερ ἢ διαλεκτικῆ* (1355b8–9).

Other arts and sciences instruct and persuade about their individual subjects, *e.g.*, medicine about illnesses (even the example used in the *Gorgias* is cited), but rhetoric *περὶ τοῦ δοθέντος ὡς εἰπεῖν δοκεῖ δύνασθαι θεωρεῖν τὸ πιθανόν. διὸ καὶ φαμεν αὐτὴν οὐ περὶ τι γένος ἴδιον ἀφωρισμένον ἔχειν τὸ τεχνικόν* (1355b32–34). This too is in direct answer to the Platonic question, What is the subject-matter of rhetoric? It is a study that “seems able to discover the persuasive factors concerning whatever subject is given. Wherefore we say that with respect to its character as an art, it does not concern any particular defined class of subjects.” This answer is the opposite of the one Socrates extracted from *Gorgias*.

Chapter 1, also in answer to the *Gorgias*, upholds the status of rhetoric as a *τέχνη*. Everyone uses rhetoric: some speakers do it on the basis of trial and error, others by habit based on a conception of sound method. Whichever way they do it, they are successful only sometimes, and it is possible to seek the reason for their success; everyone would agree that this is the function of an art (1354a4–11).

The *Gorgias* labored the point that rhetoric is useless or, paradoxically, useful only to accuse oneself so that he may suffer corrective punishment for his crimes (480A–D). As one might expect, Aristotle takes up that charge and lays down four legitimate uses for rhetoric: (1) to support truth and justice when they might lose because of an advocate's lack of skill, (2) to convince people who cannot bear instruction in one of the specialized fields, (3) to ensure that none of the arguments belonging within any subject escapes one's notice, and (4) to defend oneself when wrongly charged (1355a20–b2). This passage is parallel to one at the beginning of the *Topics* (101a25–b4) that gives three similar uses for dialectic, with the third subdivided so as to make in effect four.

These and other points of contact between the *Gorgias* and the early chapters of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* have been known for some time; they have recently been reëxamined by Hellwig. I would argue further that the chapters grew entirely within the framework established by the *Gorgias*. This is important because the *Gorgias*

is crucial to the question of whether or not Aristotle took the position that rhetoric as an art is founded on moral commitment. If rhetoric is about what is just and unjust, Socrates asked the aging sophist, does the teacher of rhetoric instruct his pupil about these things or not? If the pupil does not know them, answered Gorgias. Socrates pressed on: if he has learned what is just and unjust, either formerly or more recently from you, will he not act justly? Is not, then, an unjust rhetorician impossible? At this point in the dialogue, Gorgias is represented as agreeing to the famous Socratic doctrine that to know justice and injustice entails acting justly (459E–460C).

Earlier, however, he had taken a different tack: he compared rhetoric to boxing, wrestling, and jousting in armor. If someone having learned the martial arts went about harming parents, neighbors, and friends, we would not hold the teacher of the art morally responsible, we would blame the one who has learned for his misuse of the art (456C7–457C3). Which does Gorgias believe, that the teacher of rhetoric should be as exempt from moral responsibility for the actions of his pupil as the teacher of wrestling or as responsible as the teacher of ethics?

In general, sophists from Protagoras to Quintilian and the rhetoricians of the second sophistic have given the latter answer to that question. They have claimed that along with rhetoric they were teachers of morality.¹⁴ Protagoras, in the dialogue bearing his name, unabashedly claimed to teach the *πολιτικὴ ἀρετή*, but Gorgias has every reason to fear giving that answer, considering what Socrates is likely to ask next—something like, “What is *ἀρετή*?” and “How do you know that what you are teaching really is *ἀρετή*?” He was known for his epistemological scepticism, and Plato no doubt intended to depict him accurately by having him resist putting forward the usual sophistic claims until Socrates pressed him hard.

On the other hand, Gorgias was unable to give the former answer for an important reason. He believed that rhetoric is the art of arts, or, as it would later be called, the queen of the arts. From this perspective the analogy to boxing or even military science is demeaning. Such studies as these obviously occupy a subordinate position in the educational system, and the analogy implies that rhetoric too is a kind of tool to be governed in its use by more

¹⁴ My argument at this point follows the general lines of Friedrich Solmsen’s well-known article, “The Aristotelian Tradition in Ancient Rhetoric,” *AJP* 62 (1941) 35–50 and 169–90.

important disciplines. That is a position for rhetoric that neither the historical Gorgias nor the character in the dialogue could accept. Gorgias found this dilemma insoluble and so retired from the dialogue thoroughly embarrassed.

Aristotle firmly grasps the first horn of the dilemma. Since rhetoric has no subject-matter of its own and provides arguments indifferently on either side of a given question, it is a methodological tool of other arts. Though it theoretically may serve any of the arts or sciences, it is most often the tool of politics, with which some sophists have perniciously confounded it (1356a28–30). Politics most assuredly does have moral commitment: Aristotle's treatise on the subject, though perhaps dialectical in parts, sets forth a host of substantive propositions of value to which he clearly is committed.

Aristotle could easily accept a subordinate status for rhetoric as Gorgias could not. He assigned it a proper position in the whole circle of studies pursued at the Lyceum. It was not necessary for a student there to carry on ethical investigations in relation to the course of lectures on rhetoric, for there were other courses where this could be done. Most of the sophists, on the other hand, had developed something very like a curriculum centered around rhetoric—in some cases virtually restricted to rhetoric. If rhetoric were assigned a subordinate status, in effect the importance of their popular schools would be much reduced and their viability perhaps threatened. The difference between sophistic and Aristotelian conceptions is illustrated in the contrast between his work and that of the greatest representative of the sophistic tradition, Quintilian. Quintilian wrote a book on the complete education of the orator; Aristotle wrote on rhetorical method as a tool of studies like ethics and politics. The conception of the one is grandiose, of the other limited.

Ryan and Self interpret Aristotle as if his primary interest were in a sociology of values, or, perhaps, a sociology of rhetoric. Obviously whenever a speaker reiterates the value propositions espoused by the active members of his society, he tends to reinforce them. Such reinforcement also takes place when the auditors are dikasts and the speech forensic, or when the speeches are deliberative or ceremonial. It is not essentially different when the speaker or pamphleteer invokes the bravery of those who fought at Marathon or when he calls up the memory of those who wintered at Valley Forge. Yet in all the *Rhetoric* there is hardly any explicit mention of reinforcement of values. The *ēvδοξα* are treated as

propositions that one reasons *from* in reaching conclusions about various kinds of policies or cases. Aristotle surely knew that reinforcement of values takes place. Surely he omits mention of the phenomenon because his focus is elsewhere. This examination of how the *Rhetoric* grew out of the concerns of the *Gorgias* shows him seeking to find a legitimate place for the art within his philosophical system and the curriculum of his school. He found rhetoric a place by interpreting it as an extensive inventory of materials and methods for arguing. He related it closely to his logical works, later collectively to be called the *ὄργανον* or tool. Such a focus did not lead him to deal much with questions about sociology of values.

Behind the view that Aristotle intended the *Rhetoric* as a treatise with moral content lies the assumption that if it were not so, the work would lack seriousness; it would be somehow superficial or even frivolous. Ryan claims that establishing the *Rhetoric* as “a work of a different sort from what it has been thought to be” is the most important consequence of his article. Aristotle, however, did not believe that a treatise had to have substantive moral content to be taken seriously. Plato did; the *Gorgias* makes it clear that where there is no subject-matter and moral commitment, there can be no *τέχνη*. If I understand it correctly, that is likewise the position of the *Phaedrus*. That assumption Aristotle intended to reject. Several of his most important works are studies of method divorced from substantive content except for some propositions used for illustrative purposes. The *Prior Analytics* is the most obvious example, but the *Categories* could be cited, and, most assuredly, that counterpart of the *Rhetoric*, the *Topics*. Nothing about these works gives any indication that Aristotle failed to take them seriously. In the same way he obviously took the *Rhetoric* seriously. Ryan is right to reject descriptions that make it confused or superficial or merely practical. Such descriptions in no way do justice to Aristotle’s work. But when we insist that the *Rhetoric* be given its proper place and importance, we must proceed from arguments that Aristotle himself might have used—arguments that accurately interpret his intentions to our age.

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