

ARISTOTLE'S *RHETORIC* AS AN ENHANCEMENT OF PRACTICAL REASONING

La *Retórica* de Aristóteles como dilatación
del razonamiento práctico

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle's account of rhetoric goes beyond its previous consideration as an art of persuasion to be regarded as a suitable logic for human affairs. In the realm of ethics and politics, he needs to appeal to a logic that can deal with contingency without discarding the concept of truth. I claim that the double rapport of rhetoric with dialectic and ethical-political issues links public discourse with the question of rationality and practical truth. I will start with a brief overview of two passages of the *Rhetoric* that account for the liaison of rhetoric with dialectic. Secondly, I consider two contributions that rhetoric theory makes to the enhancement of the rationality of ethics. Lastly, I will reflect on the relationship of rhetorical discourse with practical truth.

KEYWORDS: *Rhetoric, dialectic, practical reasoning, truth, verisimilitude, contingency*

RESUMEN

La reflexión aristotélica sobre la retórica va más allá de su consideración previa como un arte de persuasión para ser comprendida como una lógica adecuada a los asuntos humanos. En el ámbito de la ética y la política se necesita apelar a una técnica de razonamiento que pueda lidiar con la contingencia, sin descartar el concepto de verdad. En este artículo defiendo que la doble relación de la retórica con las cuestiones dialécticas y ético-políticas vincula el discurso público con la cuestión de la racionalidad y la verdad práctica. Comenzaré con una breve descripción de dos pasajes de la *Retórica* que explican el vínculo de la retórica con la dialéctica. En segundo lugar, consideraré dos contribuciones que hace la teoría de la retórica al realce de la racionalidad de la ética. Por último, reflexionaré sobre la relación del discurso retórico con la verdad práctica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Retórica, dialéctica, razonamiento práctico, verdad, verosimilitud, contingencia*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The discovery of the psychagogic nature of language —i.e., the ability of λόγος in guiding souls— is probably the drive of the whole intellectual atmosphere of the fifth century AD, and accounts for the development of both sophistry and the Socratic phenomenon, as well as for the dawn of education as we have known it for millennia. The sophists and rhetors became aware of the consequences of this power in the public sphere and taught it as a tool for success. Plato recalls Gorgias's testimony: "The art of persuasion surpasses all others for this ... makes all things subject to itself, not by force, but by free will, and is by far the best of all arts" (*Philebus* 58a-b). Conceived from the beginning as τέχνη, rhetoric established the rules of persuasive discourse on issues concerning the πόλις, topics on which one must take sides and make decisions. Rhetoric regulated public discourse and became a requirement for success in the Athenian political scenario.

In the systematization of rhetoric conducted by Aristotle, rhetoric emerges associated with dialectic, politics, psychology, and even poetics. Thus, rhetoric rests at the crossroad between methodic rationality and the theory of human action.¹ There is ample testimony of recent rhetoric revival in political theory (Ballacci, 2018). I believe one can find in Aristotle's transformation of rhetoric indications of how practical (ethical-political) concerns interconnect with the communicative and linguistic fabric of human nature and, accordingly, with the desire for truth. I

¹ The idea that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has a more philosophical significance than merely that of a handbook of persuasion dates back to the works of Solmsen (1927) and Grimaldi (1980/1988) and ultimately to Heidegger's lectures from 1924 (Heidegger, 2002).

intend to show that it is precisely this double rapport of rhetoric with dialectic (and thus rationality) and ethical-political issues, which, at least in Aristotelian theory, links public discourse with the question of practical truth.

II. THE DIALECTICAL NATURE OF RHETORIC

All through the *Rhetoric*, rhetoric is linked to dialectic. It is successively characterized as counterpart (ἀντίστροφος) (*Rhet.* 1354a1), branch (παραφυῆς) (1356a25), semblance (ὁμοιωμα) (1356a31), or part (μῦριον) (1356a30) of dialectic.

Rhetoric as a counterpart of dialectic

Right from the outset, we read:

Rhetoric is a counterpart (ἀντίστροφος) of dialectic; for both have to do with matters that are in a manner within the cognizance of all men and not confined to any special science. Hence all men in a manner have a share of both; for all, up to a certain point, endeavor to criticize or uphold an argument, to defend themselves or to accuse. Now, the majority of people do this either at random or with a familiarity arising from habit. But since both these ways are possible, it is clear that matters can be reduced to a system, for it is possible to examine the reason why some attain their end by familiarity and others by chance; and such an examination all would at once admit to be the function of an art. (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1354a1-11)

Ἀντίστροφος is the first word Aristotle uses to relate rhetoric to dialectics. Starting with the Latin commentators and to this day, much has been written about what to make of this expression (Cope, 1877/2006; Green, 1990; Rapp, 2002). Originally it indicates the movement of *replica*, identical but inverse to that of the στροφή in choral odes. The term was coined in its philosophical use by Plato and is employed by both him and Aristotle to introduce some sort of analogy. It can be rendered as counterpart or

correspondence.² If this is so, then one may say that the logical structure of the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic is that of an analogy: identical function within a diversity of contents. An analogous term is correlative, not just similar, it has convertible links, and is interdependent. Aristotle's allusion to dialectic seems to be an indication of his revision of Plato's opposition between rhetoric and dialectic.

As Spranzi (2011) and Rapp (2016) maintain, Aristotle advances a dialectical reinterpretation of rhetoric. That is to say, Aristotle analyses rhetorical argumentation in terms borrowed from the *Topics* and re-signifies classic rhetorical terms in a dialectical manner. For Aristotle, rhetoric is dialectic-based: an idea "which was innovative, provocative and apt to dissipate the reservations against rhetoric that were deeply rooted in his Platonic background" (Rapp, 2016, p. 165).

As stated by Aristotle, rhetoric shares with dialectic that both deal with topics that matter to all of us and do not belong to any particular field of knowledge. Everyone to some extent partakes of both since we all discuss spontaneously these issues. Rhetoric and dialectic are not confined to specialized ambits, moreover, they are present everywhere. The rhetorical and dialectical usages of language are not exclusive to courts, popular assemblies, or academia, but play a part in all spheres of life where there is communication, even ordinary social relationships. Both rhetoric and dialectic can argue from the opposite sides of the same question and should be able to prove opposite views, contrary to science, which can arrive only at one conclusion (*Rhet.* 1355a29-30).³ Therefore, they do not demonstrate or attain any certainty, but rather persuade: their con-

² Plato; *Gorg.*, 464b, 465d; *Rep.* 522a, 530d, 539d, 605a, 6016b; *Thaet.* 158c and 175d; *Phileb.* 40d, 51e and 57a; *Tim.* 87c, *Laws* 951a, 953c; Aristotle, *Pol.* 1292b5 and *Part. Anim.* 661a27 where he also introduces different kind of analogies with the word ἀντίστοιχος.

³ For a report of Alexander's *Commentary on the Topics'* similitudes and differences between rhetoric and dialectic, see Rapp, 2002, pp. 265-276.

clusions do not follow in a strictly logical fashion from axioms and principles as established in the sciences. According to Aristotle, the proofs of persuasion (πίστεις) resemble demonstration or are a sort of arguments (πίστις ἀπόδειξις τις) (1355a5), because we persuade ourselves when we believe that something is proven. In strict sense, scientific discourse is the proper realm of demonstrative proof, which leads to necessary and universal conclusions (*An. Post.* 71b18 and 73a24). That is the reason why elsewhere Aristotle states that the rhetor does not seek demonstration (*Eth. Nic.* 1094b4). Instead, this type of reasoning appeals to κοινὰ ἄρχαί or even just τὰ κοινά (the common or the usual), that is, axioms and principles universal to all reasoning and common sense.

Both rhetoric and dialectic are techniques of λόγοι. Properly speaking, they are abilities (δυνάμεις), not scientific disciplines. According to Aristotle, whoever endeavors to make of them sciences instead of capacities “will, not knowing it, destroy their real nature, in thus altering their character, by crossing over into the domain of sciences, whose subjects are certain definite things, not merely words” (*Rhet.* 1359b12-16). That is, scientific knowledge deals with reality (τὰ πράγματα), whereas rhetoric and dialectic deal with words, with representations instead of real things.

The differences between dialectics and rhetoric are mainly that 1) dialectics proceeds in the way of debate, by question and answer, whereas rhetoric is more of a continuous narrative speech, and 2) dialectics deals with every kind of problem submitted to it and its discussions are of a more general character, while rhetoric is usually concerned with political affairs and, therefore, is of a more concrete nature, as it deals preferably with individual cases instead of the universal or general subject-matters of dialectics.

This last appraisal is better appreciated in the light of the second account Aristotle gives of rhetoric. I agree with Rapp (2016) that Aristotle's explanation of the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic should be treated with terminological flexibility, given that the analogy model of the ἀντίστροφου account seems incompatible with the part-whole description advanced in the offshoot simile.

Rhetoric as an offshoot of dialectic and politics

Rhetoric is also portrayed by Aristotle as an offshoot or sprout (παραφυῆς) of dialectic and the study of characters, the discipline that deals with ethical issues (ἡ περὶ τὰ ἥθη πραγματεία) called politics (*Rhet.* 1356a 25-27). Consistent with the representation of ethics as the inquiry into characters, politics will aim to search for the best form of political organization in which virtuous characters are possible. “Rhetoric is represented by this metaphor as a scion derived from two stocks or plants, Dialectics and Ethics, not identical with either, but with a general or inherited family resemblance to both” (Cope, 2006, p. 33). Further, into the text, Aristotle reiterates his claim: “Rhetoric is composed of analytical science and of that branch of political science which is concerned with characters (ethics), and (...) it resembles partly dialectic and partly sophistical arguments” (*Rhet.* 1359b9-12).

Rhetoric depends on the study of dialectics and politics, insofar as it borrows its method from dialectics and its subject matter from politics. In order to furnish good rhetorical proofs, “a man must be capable of logical reasoning and of studying characters and the virtues, and thirdly the emotions—the nature and character of each, its origin, and how it is produced” (*Rhet.* 1356a21-24). That is, to master rhetoric, one must previously become skilled in dialectic and ethics/politics. Dialectic provides the tools for reasoning and debating, while the other expertise (in character, virtue, and emotions) is competence in politics. One might say that it is an enrichment of dialectic on one hand and a tool of politics on the other. Anyhow, the use of the word offshoot suggests that rhetoric is dependent on both politics and dialectic. In that line, one could say tentatively that rhetoric entails logical reasoning for human affairs, as Aristotle describes elsewhere the content of ethics and politics).⁴

⁴ See *Eth. Nic.* 1181b15-16: ἡ περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπεια φιλοσοφία.

Aristotle does not completely disavow the platonic idea that links rhetoric with likeness or appearance, as can be inferred from his suggestion that rhetoric sometimes disguises itself as politics. But instead of stating that rhetoric is essentially a smokescreen of justice as Plato alleges (*Gorgias* 564b), Aristotle seems to make a much less committed appraisal: rhetoric partakes of both dialectic and politics and might be portrayed as an enhancement of both. If rhetoric and rhetoricians sometimes mask their true nature, that is due to various forms of human weakness but needs not to be the case (*Rhet.* 1356a27-30).

Then again, Aristotle warns us against confusing rhetoric and politics. As stated before, whereas political science deals with real things, rhetoric deals with words, that is, with representations. Thus, it is the competence of the political science (πολιτική επιστήμη) to inquire into the subjects of rhetorical speech, although the rhetorician needs to have *some* knowledge of these to be in a position to argue about them (*Rhet.* 1359b16-18). Another source of imbalance between rhetorical reasoning and ethical reasoning is the public character of rhetorical practice: “Proofs and arguments must rest on generally accepted principles when speaking of converse with the multitude (πρὸς τοὺς πολλούς)” (*Rhet.* 1355a27-29). This multitude or crowd is usually uneducated and not prone to instruction, both being elements which constrain public speech. According to Aristotle, rhetoric faces “such hearers as are unable to take a general view of many stages, or to follow a lengthy chain of argument” (*Rhet.* 1357a3-4). These traits impose rules on rhetoric that are dissimilar from scientific discourse or even ethical face-to-face persuasion. Consequently, rhetoric discourse ought to take all this into account.

Despite these cautions, what I want to highlight is that it is precisely the entailment of rhetoric with both analytical logic and ethical-political concerns that makes the Aristotelian account of rhetoric so appealing. It provides an insight into the publicly discursive standpoint of ethical/political deliberation, sound and unsound, true or false. That is, into the practical rationality suitable for contingent public affairs.

2. DELIBERATION ENHANCED

As stated before, in a broad sense, rhetoric relies on ethical/political expertise. Furthermore, an interesting thing about the treatise called *Rhetoric* is that it presents an enhancement of the scope of deliberation. Garver (2017), for instance, argues that Aristotle places deliberative rhetoric at the center of his art. Allow me to elaborate on this in two points.

Psycho-logy for Ethics. Desires intertwined with λόγος

For the ancient Greeks, rhetoric renders the method to elaborate, solely with the elements provided by the language, a network of rational and emotional structures that constructs what is proposed or defended as probable and persuasive. It is, therefore, the application of a creative and heuristic language capacity to develop public discourses. It was Plato who discovered the relationship of this heuristic capacity of language with what we might now label moral psychology. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato attributes rhetoric roots in both dialectics and psychology. For him dialectic has a double function: on the one hand, the power to see together the one and the multiple—that is, the capacity to grasp the whole in an overall vision (συνορᾶν)—and, on the other hand, an ability similar to the art of the butcher, who knows how to skillfully cut by the natural joints—that is, dialectic masters the art of uniting and dividing and that is what makes one capable of thinking (*Phaed.* 265e-266c). Regarding the psychological knowledge required for rhetoric, he tells us that the rhetor must know the soul, how it acts and how it is affected, without this knowledge it is not possible to communicate practices of behavior or virtue. Hence, “the power of words is found in that they are able to guide souls” (*Phaed.* 271c-d). Therefore, anyone who wants to be a rhetorician must master everything he can about human nature. Thus, rhetoric is the art of leading souls through language.

As it is well known, Aristotle distinguishes in his *Rhetoric* three means that coincide in persuasive or rhetorical arguments:

the character of the speaker, the mood of the audience, and the content of the discourse (*Rhet* 1356a1-4). These are not three disconnected arguments, but all these proofs are supplied by the discourse itself (διὰ τοῦ λόγου) and, to that extent, have a logical fabric. Now, while the third factor is linked more immediately with the dialectical capacity, the first two elements answer to the domain of ethics (in this psychological/sociological fashion portrayed in the *Rhetoric*) and that is what ultimately differentiates the rhetorical argument from the dialectical, that is, from the purely analytical or logical argument.

The question that guides the typology of passions is to find out why and how they are born and dissolved; who feels them and in what circumstances; how someone can act on them. Thus, some judgments trigger or rule out certain emotions, and in turn, certain emotions prompt one to lean toward certain judgments or close access to others (*Rhet*. 1377b31-78a1). Emotions are very closely linked to beliefs and can be altered if the latter are modified. Now, what is interesting about what *Rhetoric* advances is that this is a double-track relationship: an adjustment of emotion can also modify belief and judgment. For these reasons, they are liable to communicative use.

Human desires and emotions do not merely act on impulses and physical reactions, for they are linguistically articulated and, therefore, can be used rhetorically. That is the basis of their undeniable moral, social and political strength. Indeed, besides desires and passions of mere biological kind (ἄλογοι), Aristotle distinguishes other emotions that entail a stronger cognitive factor, i.e., emotions receptive to persuasion and, ergo, interpretation. “I call those desires rational which are due to our being convinced; for there are many things which we desire to see or acquire when we have heard them spoken of and are convinced that they are pleasant” (*Rhet*. 1370a25-27). These desires arise strictly as a result of our linguistic nature: they must be *heard of*. Their emergence requires imagination, memory, and expectation, i.e., awareness of time. This χρόνου ἄισθησις is a trait that Aristotle mentions elsewhere (*De Anima* 433b6-10) as a feature of superior animals

and which accounts for the likelihood of moral conflict and mistake. This possibility is intrinsic to practical reasoning insofar as it is grounded in the initial in-determination of the good in the context of human life. In the current passage of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle stresses that these kinds of (logical) desires account for the possibility and value of the art of *logoi*. Men can be convinced in one way or the other.

What I wanted to emphasize here is that *Rhetoric* gives more insight into these kinds of desires and helps explain the psychological dynamics of our ethical life. Not only the aims pursued in ethical and political contexts are contingent, but correspondingly the moral agent is emotionally aware of such contingency. For humans, the desirable —i.e., happiness and the means to attain it— appear and come to be mediated by language. Thus, one can say that the treatise called *Rhetoric* is an enhancement of the scope of ethics as elaborated in *Nichomachean Ethics* or *Politics* in that it sheds light on the relationship of desires, emotions, and human actions (contingency) with language.⁵ Therefore, we encounter once more that rhetoric appeals to a logic of human affairs (rendered here as *psycho-logic*).

Accepted opinions and verisimilitude in practical discourse

The second point I want to make on this enhancement of the rationality of Ethics reckons probability. This is a trait that rhetoric inherits from both dialectics and ethics, although in different ways. Materials and methods are alike *probable*. That is, all three —dialectic, rhetoric, and politics— use arguments from probability. Rhetoric proof produces the conviction that may be as strong and certain as that which follows from a scientific demonstration. However, we are moving within the realm of the contingent, of

⁵ In a novel fashion, G. Ballaci (2018) has presented a persuasive case for understanding rhetoric in the light of the tension of politics between contingency and transcendence.

what is and is not. In contrast to scientific knowledge, the probable is not what is invariable and true all the time, but what is not constant and only truthlike for the most part.

Indeed, the initial topic of rhetoric was τὸ εἰκός, the probable, not merely the possible (δυνατός) nor the accepted opinions (ἔνδοξα) without further ado. The invention of rhetoric in the first half of the Fifth Century “had a specific meaning, namely the introduction of the appeal to probability instead of fact, the drawing up of rules for its application, and their embodiment in written handbooks” (Guthrie, 1969, p. 178). There is the well-known argument from Corax and Tisias, depicted as pioneers of the art of rhetoric, that both Aristotle and Plato call attention to: if a man accused of assault can defend himself by appealing to facts, there is apparently no need for rhetoric. But if he cannot, and he masters the art of *logoi*, he might invoke an argument from probability. Thus, if he is small and weak, he will say that it is not likely that someone like him would go for a stronger man; if instead, he is strong, he might argue that it would be foolish to attack someone when he will be the one suspicion would fall on.⁶ What is important for the rhetorician are not facts (τὰ ἔργα), but probability and credibility that take form from accepted opinions.

Both the dialectical and the rhetorical syllogisms (the enthymeme) pivot around the domain of what is generally accepted, that which Aristotle calls ἔνδοξα. This term is defined in the *Topics* as “things generally admitted by all, or by most men, or by the wise, and by all or most of these, or by the most notable and esteemed” (*Top.* I 1, 100b 21-23). Both the dialectical and the rhetorical arguments place as the first premise something plausible (opinions). However, while the dialectician is interested in any type of plausibility that allows him to ascend to principles, the rhetorician employs not what is merely possible, but the plausible that is also doable, and open to intervention. That is, we deliberate about

⁶ See Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1402a17 and Plato, *Phaedr.* 267a y 273a-b.

what “is properly related to us and whose principle of creation is in us” (*Rhet.* 1359a38-39). Rhetoric must find out whether things desired are possible or impossible to perform, therefore the scope of rhetoric is coextensive with that of deliberation.

Rhetoric deals with that which matters to us all and can go in different ways. Nonetheless, rhetoric (as so does dialectic) operates regarding questions that Aristotle describes as “within the cognizance of all” (*Rhet.* 1354a2-3). An interesting question would be how these matters fall under the expertise of everybody. This cognizance is not strictly knowledge, but rather opinion and belief (ἔνδοξα and πιστεῖς), attained by familiarity or habituation (συνήθεια), i.e., acquired by association, by living together. Hence this sort of knowledge is both public, insofar as it is shared by all or almost all, and ethical, in the broader sense that it stems from habit (*ethos*). However, precisely because there are different options available, there is not only one account of things, but a plurality of opinions from people who differ among them. All are directly concerned with the issues at stake and all have something to say about them, not only the expert. However, this affective epistemic value has to come to light by speech, through the furnishing of the rhetorical proofs.

In ethical-political premises, the basis of the probable (εἰκός) is precisely the commonly accepted opinions (ἔνδοξα). Then one may ask what the role of truth-seeking plays in all of this. For Aristotle, every authentic belief contains some truth, and everyone has something to contribute to it, however incipient or tentative. As he indicates:

Everyone has something relative to contribute to the truth, and we must start from this to give a sort of proof about our views; for from statements that are true but not clearly expressed, as we advance, clearness will also be attained, if at every stage we adopt more scientific positions in exchange for the customary

confused statements. (*Eth. Eud.* 1216b30ff.)⁷

Elsewhere he draws attention to the fact that “for what all think to be good, that, we assert, is good; and he that subverts our belief in the opinion of all mankind, will hardly persuade us to believe his own either” (*Eth. Nic.* 1173a1-3). That is why common beliefs make a good starting point for both dialectical and rhetorical reasoning. What dialectic and rhetoric add to this incipient knowledge is the training to expunge what is imprecise or false and extract the truth that remained inexplicit at first. As he also states in *Nichomachean Ethics*: “If on any question the beliefs still stand after the difficulties have been resolved, that in itself is sufficient proof” (1145b6).

One may say that this way of proceeding is tentative. However, this cautiousness entails esteem for inherited ideas and prevails as the starting line of Aristotle's method. In matters about the realm of $\pi\rho\tilde{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$, it is sufficient to deliver conjectures or suppositions as a departing point. As is also the case with theoretical conjecture, that common opinion that serves as a starting point for public argumentation (rhetoric) is necessarily provisional and subject to revision, in such a way that particular observations and objections can be inserted in it and modified. Indeed, while it is true that facts, decisions, etc., only make sense in a context, it is also true that the verification or falsification of such facts can and should be able to modify the context. A good public logic would be able to give a provisional account of all the facts (circumstances, motives, consequences, choices, etc.). As dialectics is to science, rhetoric is to a philosophy of human affairs.

The point I wanted to highlight is that $\tau\acute{o}$ $\epsilon\iota\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$, as the starting point of enthymeme, is construed from commonly accepted opinions ($\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\zeta\alpha\nu\delta\omicron\chi\alpha$), i.e., folk morality, as logically tested verisimilitude. It is this verisimilitude that has the power to convince and that attains to logical or dialectical method.

3. THE POETICAL (ARTIFICIAL) FRAME OF RHETORICAL PROOFS AND

⁷ See also *Eth. Nic.* 1143b11-14.

THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO TRUTH

As Aristotle puts it, “rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (*Rhet.* 1355b25-26). Hence, rhetoric ceases to be considered merely the art of persuasion, as was the case with the sophists and even Plato, to become the faculty of discovering possible means of persuasion, i.e., a rational technique that logically deals with methods and tools. Accordingly, Aristotle distinguishes between artificial (technical) and inartificial proofs for persuasion:

By the latter I understand all those which have not been furnished by ourselves but were already in existence, such as witnesses, tortures, contracts, and the like; by the former, all that can be constructed by method and by our own efforts. Thus, we have only to make use of the latter, whereas we must invent the former. (*Rhet.* 1355b35-39)

Technical proofs are of three kinds: “The first depends upon the moral character of the speaker, the second upon putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind, the third upon the speech itself, in so far as it proves or seems to prove” (*Ibid.* 1356a1-4). The mark of rhetorical (technical) proofs —i.e., ἦθος, πάθος, πίστεις— is that they are furnished by λόγος itself. All these three rhetorical proofs are susceptible to a method and must be invented) devised, and concocted⁸ by the discursive plot itself. One may say that rhetoric is a τέχνη that fashions things with words.

What I want to stress is that even the first two kinds of proofs, which are sometimes called subjective proofs, are for Aristotle’s rational proofs, subject to a method. Indeed, Aristotle condemns former handbooks because, in their account of rhetoric, they considered only matters external to the subject. For him, instead, the so-called subjective proofs are not external nor merely instrumental.

⁸ The term used by Aristotle is εὑρεῖν. See *Rhet.* 1355b39.

They are relevant to the matter and must come under the guidance of λόγος. There are rules to be followed and patterns to be recognized and resignified, i.e., they have a logical character as well.

The making of the ethos and the causation of emotions as language-technique

Aristotle stresses that in all three cases, persuasion is produced through speech. Even in the first case, that of the character of the speaker, which one may consider as something given and alien to invention, Aristotle emphasizes that speech must configure the trustworthiness of the moral character so that one can rely on him. It is due to the speech itself, διὰ τοῦ λόγου (*Rhet.* 1356a9-10), that someone becomes reliable.

Inventing a character involves making use of the appropriate strategies (that is rhetorical procedures) to convince the public that he is someone trustworthy. A certain plot needs to be built coherently. If indeed the speaker is reliable will be decided or not in the public sphere through following events and the possibility of an opposite speech. Though the preconceived idea of the speaker's character may be used to support the speech, it is through the same λόγος, amidst the rhetorical discourse, that such character is fashioned and presented to the public. Cope (2006, p. 29) notices that Aristotle's *ethos* it is not equivalent to the latter rhetoricians' *auctoritas*, which must be previously acquired. For Aristotle, *ethos* as a rhetorical proof is not independent of the method, furthermore, its creation is part of the technical procedures of rhetoric.

Nonetheless, what kind of character is in a position to grant greater confidence depends, according to Aristotle, on the public space in which the discourse is developed, that is to say, toward what type of regime or political culture a specific nation tends to (*Rhet.* 1366a4- 7). According to the Stagirite, it is crucial to building the credibility of the speaker in one way or another according to the hopes and expectations of each regime (in democracy, freedom; in oligarchy, wealth; in aristocracy, education and laws; in

tyranny, security; in nationalism, identity, etc.). This construed character embodies, and in a certain manner also fashions, the people's character, in what one may consider a reciprocal rhetorical relationship. Therefore, the construction of ethos through λόγος cannot be separated from emotions or passions, which to a certain extent form the character of a community.

In the second type of technical proof, which focuses on the emotions of the hearers, persuasion results “when they are roused to emotion by the speech” (ὕπο τοῦ λόγου) (*Rhet.* 1356a14-15). Following the Platonic indication that rhetoric requires a particular understanding of souls, Aristotle fashions a detailed and acute analysis of human passions in the second book of *Rhetoric*. If the final aim of rhetoric is to change judgment (*Rhet.* 1377b21), familiarity with what induces or modifies belief is essential. In fact, awareness of the role of emotions (anger, love, hate, shame, confidence, indignation, etc.) gives the speaker the power to move the audience. As the Stagirite acknowledges, “for opinions vary, according as men love or hate, are wrathful or mild, and things appear either altogether different, or different in degree” (*Rhet.* 1377b31-78a1).⁹

To incline the judgment of a community in one way or another regarding something practical is only possible because of the emotional or passionate character of humankind. Indeed, the relevance of emotions for rhetoric derives from the fact that they are responsible to a large extent, for the variations of opinions: “Passions are certainly the cause of men becoming fickle and changing in relation to their judgments” (*Rhet.* 1378a19-22). Therefore, having control over them is an essential feature for the success of the rhetorical argument.

Human emotions are tangled and complex because they have cognitive assumptions of different orders, which require a rational

⁹ For an account of the discriminating role of emotions in Aristotle, see Nussbaum (1996).

articulation that can do justice to their complexity. This has been explored above (see 2.1). What I want to underline now is how the heuristic performance of rhetoric is accomplished precisely through λόγος itself in the construction of the character of the speaker and the conduction of the passions of the hearers. That is to say, the concocting of facts and data in a certain narrative structure accounts for these proofs.

A question that arises is whether the heuristic capacity in dealing with the subjective means of persuasion is so effective to the point of deactivating the ability of discernment, critical judgment on the part of the public. Are there any grounds for trusting reason, despite the apparently despotic domination rhetoric language has over our passions?

Establishing the true or what seems true from credibility (*Rhet.* 1356a19-21)

One should not confuse probable arguments with deceitful arguments, for there are arguments from probability that Aristotle claims are true. The distinction between reality and appearance, truth and its false semblance¹⁰ is also present in the opening of *Sophistic Elenchi*. To all intents and purposes, the false semblance is the mark of the sophists' practice (*Soph. El.* 165a21, 171b27-34).

Overall, the danger of making false arguments is that it can engender the illusion that rhetoric is purely fictional. Therefore, it may eventually lead to practical indifference, or triviality, to the truth. Plato had already criticized the sophistic rendering of the probable as indifferent to the truth.

Sometimes, there is no reason to even mention things as they have happened, if the facts have no credibility; It is better to speak of simple verisimilitudes, both in the accusation and in

¹⁰ Ἀληθὲς φαινόμενον in *Rhet.* 1356a16 or τὸ ἀληθές καὶ τὸ ὁμοῖον τοῖ ἀληθεῖ in 1355a14.

the apology. Whenever someone exposes something, he must, therefore, pursue the plausible, saying goodbye to the truth with many cordial gestures. (*Phaedr.* 272d-273a)

Plato unmasks the common rhetoricians because they despise the truth as real scammers. Not because they use the *psychagogic* character of language without further ado, but rather because they “disguise that they know things of the soul” (*Phaedr.* 271b). Plato’s critique in the *Gorgias* is well known: rhetoric is prone to become an instrument of demagogical manipulation. However, in contrast to the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedrus* leaves room for a positive role of rhetoric in the πόλις. And so there lies the rhetors’ power: in that they keep that knowledge to themselves and do everything possible to hide it from others, while they dissuade others from procuring it.

It rings true to Aristotle as well that what separates the sophist from the philosopher and the good rhetorician from the (bad) rhetoric is moral choice (προαίρεσις), not merely discursive competence (*Rhet.* 1355b18). That is, what differentiates the honest rhetorician from the dishonest one—as does the dialectician from the sophist—does not lie in the mastery of technique but in its moral intention, in that what moves him is the desire to succeed and gain influence on others. Even though Aristotle claims that traditional rhetoric suffers from logical error, it is also true that the issue is moral as well.

Indeed, this potentially deceptive nature of rhetoric shows its link with morality, and thus he can assert in another passage that has already been quoted that rhetoric may mask the figure of politics (*Rhet.* 1356a28). One may say that in the rhetorical field the opposite of truth is not merely falsehood, but deceit, i.e., deliberate lying. If this is the case, the only thing left to neutralize the threat of manipulation is to appeal to morality and good intentions? What tools, if not rationality itself, could be used to avoid this dangerous situation? Is there any relationship to the truth beyond the moral aspect?

In *Rhet.* 1356a19-21 Aristotle states that “lastly, persuasion is produced by the speech itself when we establish the true or apparently true from the means of persuasion applicable to each individual subject”. It is worth noting that Aristotle clearly states that it is λόγος itself that brings to light or shows forth the true or apparently true from what is (originally) likely, credible or plausible in each case. Things are not simply credible, but they must be elaborated as such. Despite this, what has been considered true or close to truth plays an important part in the art of λόγος. I believe that while rhetoric features a creative or heuristic character that shares elements with the poetical, this indication among others suggests that this same τέχνη is also akin to truth and reasoning.

According to Aristotle, enthymemes derive from several sources: probabilities (τὰ οἰκότα) and signs (τὰ σημεῖα) which can be necessary or not (*Rhet.* 1357a32-34; 1402b12-14). In all these cases, I believe some kind of truth or verisimilitude has a regulative use for the devising of the proofs. Let me elaborate on this briefly.

As has been already stated, the probable (εἰκός) refers to things that usually happen or seem to do so. That is, to an opinion or popular belief. But then again, as it has also been settled, rhetorical proofs are fabricated, so we are not here talking of raw opinions. While ἔνδοξα may be treated as φαινόμενα in the technical sense of something that appears or is given, the probable as a rhetorical element is construed by rhetorical λόγος. One of the most interesting possibilities for ethical-political practice exhibited by this type of argument is that it allows a heuristic approach, as a kind of pre-factual anticipation, which enables us to anticipate the facts and design policies and solutions to the problems before they happen. In the practical field, rhetorical articulation —through a certain narrative configuration of the facts, circumstances, opinions, beliefs, histories, reasons, emotions, etc.— paves the way for moral and political action, providing this raw data with meaning. As has already been stated, this common (fashioned) opinion that serves as a starting point for public argumentation

(rhetoric) should necessarily be provisional and subject to revision. But that does not take away any of its significance to the truth.

Where can one find the relationship to truth in these kinds of arguments? A passage may shed light on this first dialectical function of rhetoric regarding truth:

For, in fact, the true and that which resembles it come under the purview of the same faculty, and at the same time men have a sufficient natural capacity for the truth and indeed in most cases attain to it; wherefore one who divines well in regard to the truth will also be able to divine well in regard to probabilities. (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1355a14-18)

In enthymemes from probabilities, the relationship with truth is established by the proximity of the probable-credible to the truth. As Aristotle states, the capacity to recognize what is true and what resembles the true is the same. This idea is already in Plato: he who knows the true is in a better situation to know the similarities or likelihoods (*Phaedr.* 273d). One could say that what dialectics is to science —i.e., heuristic approach to its principles—, rhetoric is to ethical-political practice. Regarding the scientific field, Aristotle calls this step prior to any investigation paradoxical conjecture (see *An. Pr.* 46a17-22), which is construed as a certain collection of phenomena seen under a certain unit, which serves as a prelude to the elaboration of a theory. Correspondingly, the starting point of deliberation on the ethical-political ground cannot simply be the description of raw data, not even merely ἔνδοξα, for it requires a prior narrative structure, in which the data finds meaning and sense. This is what for Aristotle is εἰκός as the source of rhetorical arguments and one may say that it fulfills the function of what for the last two centuries we have called public opinion. The measure of truth here is that of coherence, i.e., the idea that the truth of an argument lies in its consistency with a specified set of propositions. In this case, the set of propositions that validate a rhetorical proof are the commonly accepted opinions construed as probabilities.

According to Aristotle, even if rhetoric deals with opposites, “generally speaking, that which is true and better is naturally always easier to prove and more likely to persuade” (*Rhet.* 1355a37ff). Aristotle seems to optimistically believe there is a natural tendency toward truth and justice stitched to our human fabric. One could say this opinion agrees with his definition of the human being as an animal with λόγος and, therefore, with a certain vicinity to the truth. However, this natural predisposition can be neglected.

Aristotle states clearly that it is “evident that it belongs to rhetoric to discover the real and apparent means of persuasion, just as it belongs to dialectic to discover the real and apparent syllogism” (*Rhet.* 1355b16-17). Aristotle devotes a chapter of the second book of *Rhetorics* to deception. He describes enthymemes that are apparent (φαινόμενα ἐνθυμήματα) and the devices used to create them. Aristotle opposes them to τὰ ὄντα ἐνθυμήματα, that is, sound, genuine inferences. Besides real arguments, there are, in rhetoric as well as in dialectics,¹¹ arguments which are apparent, fallacious, illogical, and usually employed to deceive. Aristotle believes one should be well acquainted with them in order to be able to detect and refute them. Fallacious enthymemes which Aristotle analyses are: abuse of syllogistic language while omitting the syllogistic process, that is, to assume something without proof, giving the impression of having reached a conclusion by using words that usually mean it: “therefore this or that”, “therefore this follows” (something can have the effect of an argument and deceive the listener in thinking it is proven); taking advantage of equivocal expressions (ὁμωνυμία or ἀμφιβολία); a combination of things known separately as if they were one; exaggerating or amplifying something; assuming a sequence as a true cause; confusing the occurrence of something contemporaneously or subsequently, etc.

¹¹ See *Soph. El.* 1-16 where he correspondingly establishes a selection of dialectical fallacies.

Fallacies I find particularly significant for my claim are those that omit the when, where, or how: the omission of time, place, or manner. They disregard circumstances and facts. If rhetorical argumentation is practical reasoning and it is precisely a mark of practical reason to take into account the circumstances, then rhetorical arguments must grasp the contingent structure of reality in the modalities of the when, where, how, etc. When it fails to do so, rhetorical language is open to deceitfulness and manipulation. Failing to account for contingency is due to the mistake of confusing theoretical with practical reasons. In public domain, we ought to deal with the temptation of making totalizing or maximizing discourses that draw from the theoretical reason a trait of necessity that is not suitable for ethical and political life, which dwells in the realm of contingency. This is a source of deceit, as one can see in the case of ideologies. In these cases, facts (what, when, where, how...) are discarded for the sake of universalist claims. Then again, precisely this disregarding of facts reveals the deficiency of truth in the general account. Therefore, a logical account of contingency is crucial to make space for freedom, and that is the responsibility of the argumentative technique for the political realm.

Dialectic-based rhetoric plays a critical role in public speech. It has the task to examine arguments and judge if they are sound or unsound, true or false. It is precisely the faculty of analyzing the difficulties on both sides of a subject matter inherited from dialectics that makes it possible to distinguish true from false. Thus, training in dialectic detects ambiguities, distinguishes true from false, reveals fallacious arguments, etc. In scientific inquiry, this critical function of dialectic is vital, for it paves the way to the first principles of every science (see *Top.* 101ab1, 159a32-37; *Metaph.* 1004b25). In the public domain, it is essential to the possibility of free political life forged around the common good.

This critical vein of public speech is also manifest in another one of the sources of enthymemes Aristotle enumerates. What Aristotle calls here a sign indicates that which points (before

or after) to a fact (τὸ πρᾶγμα), and seeks to be a demonstrative proposition, necessary or plausible. Some signs are certain and necessary (he calls them τεκμήρια) as when one says a man is sick because he has a fever. Only in these kinds of signs, “if the fact is true, is the argument irrefutable” (*Rhet.* 1357b17). However, even if not all arguments based on signs or facts are universal and unrestrictedly true, it can be said that, with the necessary logical constraints, the true appears in all signs in some way, precisely because of the reference to the factual.

In some other passages of his work, Aristotle appeals to the truth of facts as an external limit, as a regulatory boundary of language in the social sphere. I find this especially interesting because, in my opinion, such texts clash with the overly plausibilistic and probabilistic interpretations of rhetoric and ethics, which in some cases turn into a certain kind of soft relativism attributed to the Stagirite. For instance, he states in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

It seems that true arguments (*logoi*) are not only useful for knowledge, but also for life because, as they are in harmony with the facts, they persuade, and thus they push those who understand them to live in accordance with them. (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1172b3-7)

The ability to persuade and move to the action of these arguments lies precisely in their harmony, in their agreement, with the facts (τὰ ἔργα). That is, regulation of ethical-rhetorical argument lies in the facts, in what we might call factual truth.

As a counterpart, he recognizes the undermining power of language, which not only ravages trustworthiness but ultimately discredits truth itself:

In the case of feelings and actions, words do not inspire as much confidence as the facts and, consequently, when the former disagree with what is perceived by the senses, they are dismissed as false and discredit (destroy) the truth at the same time. (*Rhet.* 1172a34-b1)

There is another indication, this time in *Sophistic Refutations*, that shows this mark of rhetoric that guarantees truth and freedom. The Stagirite says: “the task of the one who knows is ... to avoid lying about what he knows and being able to expose the one who lies” (*Soph. El.* 165a24-25). In order to assure that social coexistence is not destroyed, it is fundamental that the credible conjecture on which the rhetorical argument is based —i.e., public opinion— can be falsified or corroborated.

In both enthymemes based on probabilities or signs there is a relationship with practical truth, but then again in different ways. Thus, we can speak of two forms of argumentation of rhetoric: a first one that can be called probabilistic or verisimilar and another factual one. Therefore, rhetoric has to deal with truth in a double sense: in its heuristic function as verisimilitude and its critical function as its limit, that is, as its measure. Not every narrative is oriented to the truth in that double sense of verisimilitude and criticism. For instance, it is not the case of poetics where the measure of truth happens only as verisimilitude, as narrative coherence. However, rhetoric, as well as philosophy, is accompanied by dialectics and method. That is, rhetoric is not only poetic, it is also argumentation. And as also happens with philosophical argument, rhetorical inference has an external regulative limit, which is reality, which in the field of the practical we denominate facts. If rhetoric is diluted in poetics, it loses its connection with dialectic and, when stripped of argumentation, frustrates its mark as a social sting that ultimately guarantees human coexistence. In the realm of human (practical) affairs, Aristotle appeals to a logic that can deal with contingency. This logic of practical reason has a public dimension displayed in the *Rhetoric*, and by establishing a logical order in the public usage of language, Aristotle conceived his dialectic-based rhetoric as a stronghold against the possibility of the despotism of language in the social sphere.

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