



## The Definition of Rhetoric according to Aristotle

Theresa M. Crem

Volume 12, numéro 2, 1956

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019945ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019945ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

### ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Crem, T. M. (1956). The Definition of Rhetoric according to Aristotle. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 12(2), 233–250. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019945ar>

# The Definition of Rhetoric according to Aristotle

---

## INTRODUCTION

Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric is unique, in that it is a properly scientific consideration of the subject. This characteristic becomes manifest, when we compare it with other rhetorical treatises, such as those of Cicero. The works of this great rhetorician are of high value because of his wide experience in the field ; nevertheless, they do not methodically treat of the nature of rhetoric. Rather, they are hand-books of practical advice on public speaking and on the formation of the rhetorician.

On the other hand, Aristotle speaks not as an experienced rhetorician, but as a logician. Rhetoric is a part of logic understood in the broad sense, i.e., taken to include all disciplines which direct the act of reason. In the order of logical treatises, the *Rhetoric* is placed immediately after the *Topics*, which is concerned with dialectic. Hence, because he is proceeding from a logical point of view, and since these two parts of logic have a great deal in common, Aristotle very aptly begins his consideration of rhetoric by comparing it to dialectic.

Aristotle's aim in writing this work is a scientific presentation of the rhetorical method. Thus, besides setting down its nature in the first two chapters, he also discusses the many things which the rhetorician must know in order to practice his art successfully. Hence, in the remainder of Book I he divides rhetoric into three genera : deliberative, forensic, and epideictic ; and gives the characteristics and special topics proper to each. In Book II he discusses passions, human character, virtues and vices ; for without some knowledge of these, the rhetorician would be incapable of constructing a speech proportionate to his audience, and of arousing their passions. After this, he treats of common topics, which are applicable to rhetoric in general. Book III is principally devoted to style and arrangement which, though secondary, obviously must be included in any complete study of rhetoric. It is evident, then, that although Aristotle was not himself a rhetorician, still he was far from lacking experience in this domain. For besides possessing the universality proper to a scientific treatise, his work contains a wealth of concrete detail.

The commentary which is to follow, however, is limited to the first and the beginning of the second chapter of Book I, which is the most important part of the treatise, for it contains a definition of rhetoric and an explanation of the rhetorical method. Aristotle's text

has been incorporated herein, therefore we do not think it necessary to quote it apart. This article is a literal commentary, based on the principle that the sole function of a commentator is to be an intermediary between the master and the reader, by making the master's thought more explicit and hence more easily understood. In order to assure greater fidelity, we have compared various translations<sup>1</sup> of the Greek original.

#### I. COMMON CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NATURE OF RHETORIC

This first section has four divisions : a *quid nominis* of *rhetorica utens*, the *an est* of *rhetorica docens*, a common consideration of what should constitute the rhetorical method, and a résumé.

##### 1) A « *Quid Nominis* » of « *Rhetorica Utens* »

Here Aristotle does three things : he compares rhetoric to dialectic, gives the reason for this comparison, and substantiates this reason by examples drawn from common experience.

##### a) *A Comparison of Rhetoric and Dialectic*

Aristotle states that rhetoric is the antistrophe of dialectic. This is an instance of the *locutio exemplaris*, i.e., the use of a word having a sole, concrete signification to manifest something else. There is no new imposition as is the case in analogy ; nor is the word given an improper or figurative sense as in the metaphor.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle draws his example from the Greeks' everyday life, using something with which all were familiar, the choral odes. The

1. *Rhetoric*, trans. W. RHYS ROBERTS, ed. Solmsen, N. Y., Random House, 1954 ; *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. JOHN HENRY FREESE, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1939 ; *Art Rhétorique*, trans. JEAN VOILQUIN et JEAN CAPELLE, Paris, Librairie Garnier, 1944.

2. The *locutio exemplaris* and the metaphor resemble each other and are opposed to analogy inasmuch as they are not new impositions of a word. However, they differ in that the metaphor implies a new and figurative sense, whereas the *locutio exemplaris* does not. In constructing a metaphor, a word which properly signifies a certain object is applied to something else bearing some resemblance to that object. But despite this resemblance, the word cannot properly signify the new object ; therefore, it must do so only in a figurative or improper sense. This figurative sense then becomes the principle of manifesting a characteristic of the new object. Thus, the metaphor is a kind of discourse notable for its brevity, for in one word it signifies a thing and that to which the thing is compared. In the *locutio exemplaris*, however, there is no question of a new and improper sense, for it is not the application of a name to a new object. Rather, it is merely the comparison of an object relatively unknown, to another which is better known, in order to attain a more complete knowledge of the former. The principle of manifestation lies in the proper sense of the words used.

antistrophe is that part of the choral ode which alternates with and answers the strophe. Thus, what is meant by this *locutio exemplaris* is that there is a special relation between dialectic and rhetoric. Just as the strophe and antistrophe are similar in that they are corresponding parts of the choral ode, so too, dialectic and rhetoric have certain characteristics in common. In the same way, just as the strophe and antistrophe are distinct from one another and ordered in a particular way, inasmuch as the antistrophe is always consequent upon the strophe ; so also, rhetoric is distinct from dialectic, and is in a way consequent upon it. Hence, it is clear that by means of this *locutio exemplaris* any Greek familiar with dialectic would immediately acquire a fundamental, though common notion of the nature of rhetoric.

It is unfortunate that in English translation, « antistrophe » is usually rendered by another term, such as « counterpart » ; for by this departure from the precision of Aristotle's terminology, the principle of manifestation which he intended is lost.

#### b) *The Reason for This Comparison*

Aristotle does not now consider the aspects in which rhetoric and dialectic differ, for this presupposes more distinct knowledge. However, he immediately states what they have in common : both dialectic and rhetoric are concerned with matters which are in some way known by all men, and which are proper to no definite science. These two characteristics are closely related, being effects of the same cause. Such matter does not belong to any particular science because it is common ; i.e., it extends to many things, but in a superficial way. For this same reason, it falls within the comprehension of all men. On the contrary, the subject proper to a given science is known only to the initiated in that science, and unknown to the majority of men. This is obvious from the fact that the multitude cannot understand scientific reasoning. But dialectic and rhetoric are not limited to any determinate genus of being. They treat of any subject whatever, arguing not from principles proper to a given thing, but from certain common principles familiar to all.

There are other similarities between rhetoric and dialectic ; in fact, they are so closely related that distinct knowledge of rhetoric implies knowledge of the *Topics*. However, we are now concerned only with a confused and common knowledge, a *quid nominis* which will lead us to distinct knowledge. Therefore, Aristotle restricts himself to mentioning a similarity which is most manifest, one which can be understood even by those having no knowledge of rhetoric.

#### c) *Aristotle Substantiates this Reason*

A proof that the matter of rhetoric and dialectic is such things as are known by all men is the fact that all make use of these faculties

to some extent : dialectic, when they criticize opinions or seek to uphold them ; rhetoric, when they defend themselves or accuse others.

2) *The "An Est" of "Rhetorica Docens"*

These faculties can be used in two ways, either by chance or by acquired habit. In either way success is possible ; therefore we can inquire as to the reason for this success. Once this cause has been found, we can set up principles which will enable the intellect to proceed in a determinate fashion. Such an inquiry obviously is the function of a method, for the very word "method" means "a short way."<sup>1</sup>

This rhetorical method is *rhetorica docens* (τέχνη), which must not be confused with *rhetorica utens* (ῥητορικὴ). To clarify this point it may be useful to manifest the same distinction as applied to dialectic. *Dialectica docens*, the doctrine contained in the *Topics*, is the speculative art concerned with directing probable argument. It proceeds demonstratively, and so is a science in the strict sense. *Dialectica utens* is the application of *dialectica docens* in actual argument. This use of dialectic declines from the mode of science because its matter is only probable.<sup>2</sup> Thus, when Aristotle describes rhetoric as the antistrophe of dialectic, possessed by all and having common matter, he is referring to both rhetoric and dialectic under the aspect of *utens*. For the matter of *dialectica* and *rhetorica docens*, like that of all the other sciences, is not common but proper ; it is not possessed by all, but must be acquired.

By proceeding in this fashion, Aristotle also manifests the priority in time or generation of *rhetorica utens* over *rhetorica docens*. The same doctrine is taught by Cicero : "But to my thinking the virtue in all the rules is, not that orators by following them have won a reputation for eloquence, but that certain persons have noted and collected the doings of men who were naturally eloquent : thus eloquence is not the offspring of the art, but the art of eloquence . . ."<sup>3</sup>

1. « Est autem quod dicimus *methodum metaphorice* : dicitur enim *methodus* brevis via, quae via est compendii, et vulgariter vocatur *summa*. Per similitudinem ergo transfertur ad istam scientiam proprie et artem : quia cum speculabilia et operabilia multa offerantur, sua multitudine et longitudine, distantiae quidem ipsorum dispendere faciunt, nisi per formam scientiae et artis ad compendium redigantur : et ab hac similitudine nomen methodi ad artem et scientiam transfertur » (ST. ALBERT, *In I Topicorum*, Prooemium, cap.2).

2. « Dialectica enim potest considerari secundum quod est docens, et secundum quod est utens. Secundum quidem quod est docens, habet considerationem de istis intentionibus, instituens modum, quo per eas procedi possit ad conclusiones in singulis scientiis probabiliter ostendendas ; et hoc demonstrative facit, et secundum hoc est scientia. Utens vero est secundum quod modo adiuncto utitur ad concludendum aliquid probabiliter in singulis scientiis ; et sic recedit a modo scientiae » (ST. THOMAS, *In IV Metaphysicorum*, lect.4, edit. Marietti, n.576). Cf. also ST. ALBERT, *In I Topicorum*, Prooemium, cap.1.

3. *De Oratore*, I, cap.32, n.146 ; trans. E. W. SUTTON, The Leob Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Univ. Press, 1942.

3) *In What the Rhetorical Method Should Consist*

Aristotle proceeds to develop the *quid*, first by a negative treatment, then by a positive consideration. He does three things: manifests the errors in the treatises written by his predecessors, shows by a positive approach what should constitute the method, and states the utility of such a method.

a) *A Negative Treatment: The Errors of Aristotle's Predecessors*

Aristotle begins with a history of the method in order better to manifest the *quid*. This is an example of using history to illuminate a question of properly doctrinal import. He says that those who have written treatises on rhetoric have constructed only a small part of the method. For proofs are the only true constituents of the method; all else is merely accessory. Now these authors say nothing about enthymemes, which are the substance of rhetorical persuasion, but deal principally with non-essentials. The arousing of prejudice, pity, anger, and other passions has nothing to do with the essential facts, but is merely a personal appeal to those judging the case. A sign of the irrelevance of such procedure is that it is forbidden by law in well-governed states. If these laws were applied everywhere, such writers would be left with nothing to say. Yet this is sound law and custom, and all men agree that it should be so. For it is wrong to pervert the judge by moving him to anger, envy, or pity. Aristotle likens this to warping a carpenter's rule before using it. This is an apt comparison, because the judge is as a rule of justice.<sup>1</sup> Now since passion can impede reason, it is possible to influence him in favor of one side or another by arousing his passions; but this is to put an obstacle in the way of the exercise of his function.

That passion can be detrimental is easily shown; for example, in anger there is a certain use of reason insofar as the angry man reasons that he must avenge an injury, yet his reasoning is imperfect, lacking determination and order. Because of the velocity of its movement, anger excludes deliberation.<sup>2</sup> In the *Ethics*,<sup>3</sup> Aristotle compares the angry man to hasty servants who start out on an errand before they have heard the entire command, and therefore make mistakes; and to dogs which bark as soon as they hear a knock at the door, before knowing whether it is friend or foe.

However, passion can either precede or follow judgment. If it precedes, it is an obstacle because it impedes deliberation, which is

1. « . . . Sic cum debemus uti iudice tanquam regula rectitudinis, non debemus illum ad hanc vel illam partem inflectere, excitando in eo iram, misericordiam, invidiam, etc. . . . » (SYLVESTER MAURUS, *In I Rhetoricorum*, cap.1, a.2, n.5).

2. ST. THOMAS, *In III Ethicorum*, lect.5, edit. Marietti, n.442.

3. VII, chap.6, 1149 a 25-31.

necessary for the formation of the judgment. But if passion occurs after the judgment has been formed, it is a help rather than a hindrance. Such passion is a sign of the motion of the will, which in its intensity, overflows into the inferior appetite. It can also be an instrument aiding execution by enabling one to act more promptly and easily.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, passion should not precede discourse, but rather, should be its effect. Hence, Aristotle says that once the rhetorician has clearly stated the facts and evaluated them, then he must arouse the passions of the audience.<sup>2</sup>

The rôle of the litigant is merely to show whether or not a fact is so, whether it has or has not happened. As to whether a thing is important or unimportant, just or unjust, the judge must not take advice from the litigants, but it is his duty to decide for himself all points which the law does not already specifically define for him.

It is of great importance that good laws should themselves determine as many points as possible and leave very few to the decision of the judges ; and this for three reasons. First, because law-making is restricted to one or to a few public personages having the whole people under their care,<sup>3</sup> and it is easier to find one or a few men who are wise and capable of legislating, than it is to find the large number which would be necessary to judge each particular case.

Secondly, laws are made after long deliberation, whereas court decisions must be given on short notice, a fact which makes it difficult for the judge to satisfy the claims of justice and expediency.

The third and most important reason is that the judgment of the legislator is not particular, but universal and concerning future events ; whereas the judge must decide actual, particular cases. Laws are universal propositions of the practical reason which are ordered to operation. They hold the same position with respect to operations as propositions of the speculative reason hold with respect to conclusions.<sup>4</sup> Any precept in regard to some particular work is devoid of the nature of law except insofar as it regards the common good.<sup>5</sup>

Since law bears not on the particular, but on the universal and future, it is free from passion. Because men's acts and choices are concerned with singulars, the appetite is affected in relation to the singular. Therefore, from the very fact that the sensitive appetite is a particular power, it has great influence in disposing man so that something seems to him desirable or undesirable in particular cases.

---

1. ST. THOMAS, *Q.D. de Veritate*, q.26, a.7, c. and ad 3 ; *In IV Ethicorum*, lect.8, n.805.

2. *Rhetoric*, III, chap.19, 1419 b 24.

3. ST. THOMAS, *Ia IIae*, q.90, a.3.

4. *Ibid.*, a.1, ad 2.

5. *Ibid.*, a.2.

For example, that which seems good to a man when angry no longer seems good to him when he is calm. Thus, the intellect is moved to judge in accordance with appetite, for according as a man is, such does the end seem to him.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, reason is said to govern the sensitive appetite with a political rule as opposed to a despotic rule, for the irascible and concupiscible powers can resist the commands of reason, just as free men can act counter to the commands of their ruler.<sup>2</sup> From this we can conclude that the more reason is liberated from passion, the more easily can it judge rightly.

Hence in law courts, where particular and actual issues are under consideration, the judges are often so influenced by feelings of friendship, hatred, or personal interest that they are no longer capable of discerning the truth adequately, and their judgment is obscured by personal pleasure or displeasure. For this reason, the judge should be allowed to decide as few things as possible — only those particular facts which cannot be foreseen by the legislator, as for example, whether something has or has not happened.

If all this is true, it is evident that those who make rules about such matters, as what must be the contents of the introduction, or the narration, or any of the other divisions of a speech, are treating non-essentials as if they pertained to the method. For they are concerned not with proof, but only with putting the judge into a favorable frame of mind, and they completely ignore what is proper to the rhetorician, namely, the construction of enthymemes.

Consequently, although the method of deliberative and forensic rhetoric is the same, and although the former, being more directly concerned with the common good, is nobler and more befitting a statesman than the latter, which is limited to transactions between private individuals, these authors say nothing about deliberative rhetoric, but all devote themselves to writing treatises on how to plead in court. The reason for this is that in deliberative rhetoric there is less inducement to talk about non-essentials, because since it treats of issues which are of more general interest, there is less opportunity for unscrupulous practices. In a political debate, the man who forms a judgment makes a decision about his own vital interests — the good

1. ST THOMAS, *Ia IIae*, q.9, a.2, c. and ad 2.

2. "Invenitur enim inter partes hominis quod anima dominatur corpori, sed hoc est despotico principatu in quo servus in nullo potest resistere domino . . . et hoc videmus in membris corporis, scilicet manibus et pedibus quod statim sine contradictione ad imperium animae applicantur ad opus. Invenimus etiam quod intellectus seu ratio dominatur appetitui, sed principatu politico et regali qui est ad liberos, unde possunt in aliquibus contradicere: et similiter appetitus aliquando non sequitur rationem. Et hujusmodi diversitatis ratio est, quia corpus non potest moveri nisi ab anima, et ideo totaliter subjicitur ei; sed appetitus potest moveri non solum a ratione, sed etiam a sensu; et ideo non totaliter subjicitur rationi" (ST. THOMAS, *In I Politicorum*, lect.3, Laval Univ. Edit., p.22). Cf also *Ia IIae*, q.9, a.2. ad 3; *Ia Pars*, q.81, a.3, ad 2.



at stake, being a common good, belongs to him also. Thus, there is no need to prove anything except that the facts are in reality what the supporter of a measure maintains them to be. The fact that Aristotle's predecessors neglected this nobler branch of rhetoric, in which there is little chance of moving the judge, is a sign that their method consisted principally in a consideration of the passions, with moving the judge as the end in view.

On the contrary, in forensic rhetoric merely upholding the facts does not suffice ; it is very useful to win over the listeners. For here it is other people's affairs that are to be decided ; therefore, the judges, intent on their own satisfaction and listening with partiality, give in to the disputants instead of judging between them. Hence, as we have seen, in many states irrelevant speaking is forbidden in the law courts ; but in the public assembly, those who have to form a judgment are themselves able to guard against it.

#### b) *Positive Consideration*

Aristotle then manifests in a common way in what the rhetorical method (*rhetorica docens*) should consist ; a proper treatment is reserved for Chapter II. He states that it is now clear that this method, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion, i.e., with proofs. Here it is important to note that rhetorical persuasion is not convertible with persuasion in all its amplitude, but is restricted to persuasion in view of action for the common good. For rhetoric deals with political things,<sup>1</sup> and is therefore subordinated to politics,<sup>2</sup> which is concerned with the highest common good operable by man.<sup>3</sup>

Now it is evident that persuasion is a kind of demonstration, since we are most completely persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated. Here, by "demonstration" Aristotle does not mean the *ratio propria* as given in the *Posterior Analytics*, which is verified only in demonstration *propter quid*, but the *ratio communis* taken to include all kinds of proofs. Rhetorical demonstration consists principally in the enthymeme which is, in general, the most effective

1. ST. THOMAS, *In I Ethicorum*, lect.3, n.36.

2. *Ibid.*, lect.2, n.28.

3. "Tertio possumus accipere dignitatem et ordinem politicae ad omnes alias scientias practicas. Est enim civitas principalissimum eorum quae humana ratione constitui possunt. Nam ad ipsam omnes communitates humanae referuntur. Rursumque omnia tota quae per artes mechanicas constituuntur ex rebus in usum hominum venientibus, ad homines ordinantur, sicut ad finem. Si igitur principalior scientia est quae est de nobiliori et perfectiori, necesse est politicam inter omnes scientias practicas esse principaliorum et architectonicam omnium aliarum, utpote considerans ultimum et perfectum bonum in rebus humanis. Et propter hoc Philosophus dicit in fine decimi *Ethicorum* quod ad politica perficitur philosophia, quae est circa res humanas" (ST. THOMAS, *In I Politicorum*, Prologus).

of the modes of persuasion. The term "enthymeme" (*ἐνθύμημα*) is derived from *ἐνθυμῆσαι* which means "to keep in mind," "to consider;" and a rhetorical syllogism is so-called from the fact that only one of its propositions is expressed, whereas the other is merely understood or kept in the mind. Hence, the enthymeme is nominally defined as "an argument consisting of only two propositions, an antecedent and its consequent; a syllogism with one premiss omitted."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the enthymeme is a kind of syllogism, and the consideration of every kind of syllogism pertains to logic — either to logic as a whole, or to one of its parts. Since the end of logic is to direct the act of reason, so that man may be able to proceed with order, facility, and without error,<sup>2</sup> it is concerned with the act of reason as with its proper matter.<sup>3</sup> But the syllogism, being a kind of discourse from the known to the unknown, is proper to the third operation of the mind; consequently, it is evident that logic must treat of every kind of syllogism. Aristotle distinguishes between "logic as a whole" and "one of its parts," because the syllogism can be considered either as to form alone, or as to both matter and form. The study of the syllogism as to form, prescinding from determinate matter, pertains to a part of logic, namely, to the *Prior Analytics*. Since the principles laid down in this treatise apply to all syllogisms regardless of their determinate matter, this part of logic can be said to consider every kind of syllogism.<sup>4</sup> If, however, we consider also the matter of the syllogism, then different parts of logic are devoted to different kinds: the *Posterior Analytics*, to the demonstrative syllogism having necessary matter; the *Topics* and the *Sophistics*, to the dialectical syllogism, which has probable matter; and the *Rhetoric*, to the enthymeme. Thus, if we consider the syllogism as to both matter and form, the study of every kind of syllogism pertains to the whole of logic.

It is to be noted that both "syllogism" and "logic" are understood in a broad sense. "Syllogism" is not restricted to the true syllogism, i.e., to one having perfect syllogistic form, but is taken to include the enthymeme, which is imperfect, and which therefore can be called a syllogism only *secundum quid*. In the same way, "logic"

1. WEBSTER'S *New International Dictionary of the English Language*, the word "enthymeme."

2. ST. THOMAS, *In I Posteriorum Analyticorum*, Prooemium, edit. Marietti, n.1.

3. *Ibid.*, n.2.

4. ". . . Vel per dialecticam totam vel per aliquam ejus partem, puta per illam, quae traditur in libris Priorum, habemus facultatem conficiendi syllogismos universim et varias species syllogismorum . . ." (SYLVESTER MAURUS, *In I Rhetoricorum*, cap.1, a.3, n.10). Here "dialectic" means "logic": ". . . Nomine dialecticae intelligendo non solum Topi- cam, sed logicam universam, quae agit de omni syllogismo" (*Ibid.*).

"Secundum autem quod simpliciter dicitur simplex formale a sua acceptum simplicitate formali, non tractat de syllogismo simpliciter tota logica, sed determinatur in uno librorum ejus . . ." (ST. ALBERT, *In I Priorum Analyticorum*, tract.1, cap.1).

is taken to include all disciplines which direct the act of reason, and therefore also *rhetorica docens*, whose function it is to direct the act of reason in forming enthymemes.<sup>1</sup>

Some thought that even logic in the broad sense was concerned only with the true syllogism, thus determining the common subject of logic from the principal subject. This position is untenable because logic, being the mode of all science, must have a subject equally applicable to them all. But the true syllogism requires a universal, and therefore cannot always be used, as is the case in *rhetorica utens*.<sup>2</sup>

By comparing the enthymeme to the syllogism, Aristotle relates the method of rhetoric fundamentally to logic. He who possesses logic and is proficient in constructing syllogisms will also be skillful in forming enthymemes, once he has learned what the subject of the enthymeme is, and how the enthymeme differs from the logical syllogism. Furthermore, although it is principally ordered to science, logic must also consider probable knowledge, for the true and the apparently true are apprehended by the same faculty. Men have a certain natural capacity for truth, and therefore usually do attain it.<sup>3</sup> This applies to the probable also, for the same power which enables us to arrive at truth, also enables one to recognize the probable.

c) *The Utility of the Rhetorical Method*

Next, Aristotle gives four reasons why such a method is useful :

1) The true and the just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites ; therefore, if decisions are not what they should be,

1. "... Logica generaliter dicta totum comprehendit trivium vel quatrivium secundum Aristotelem... Haec ergo comprehendit... rhetoricam..." (ST. ALBERT, *In I Topicorum*, tract.4, cap.2).

2. "Inter species autem argumentationis praecipua est syllogismus. Propter quod quidam dixerunt quod logica tota est de syllogismo et partibus syllogismi : determinantes commune subjectum logicae secundum id quod est subjectum principale. Non enim de omnibus fides esse poterit per syllogismum, propter hoc quod discursus syllogisticus non est nisi ab universali universaliter accepto : quod in multis scientiis esse non poterit, ut in rhetoricis. Propterea quod in illis praecipue locales habitudines attenduntur, a quibus per enthymemata concluditur id quod quaesitum est. Cum igitur logica, ut dicit Aristoteles, det omni scientiae modum disserendi, et inveniendi, et dijudicandi quod quaesitum est : oportet quod de tali sit ut de subjecto, quod omnibus in omni aequaliter applicabile est... Propter quod syllogismus commune subjectum logicae esse non potest" (ST. ALBERT, *De Praedicabilibus*, tract.1, cap.4).

3. This statement must not be taken in an absolute way, for as regards proper, scientific knowledge man is usually in error. (ARISTOTLE, *On the Soul*, III, chap.3, 427 b 1 ; ST. THOMAS, *In III de Anima*, lect.4, edit. Marietti, n.624). It must be understood in its context, taking into consideration that this is a rhetorical treatise. Now, the matter of rhetoric is common and concerned with civil things, and as regards such *communia* man usually does arrive at truth. That rhetorical matter is proportionate to the masses may be seen from the fact that a rhetorical proposition is called an opinion held by the common people : "In tertio autem ordine est propositio opinabilis opinione plurimum non sapientum : et argumentatio ex his composita vocatur ratio vel argumentatio rhetorica" (ST. ALBERT, *In I Posteriorum Analyticorum*, tract.1, cap.2).

the defect must be due to the speakers themselves. *Rhetorica docens* can remedy this.

2) In dealing with some audiences, not even the possession of the most distinct knowledge will make it easy for us to persuade them. For argument based on such knowledge implies instruction, and there are people whom one cannot instruct. In fact, under such circumstances, the use of distinct or scientific knowledge would actually impede persuasion. For although man is by nature proportionate to truth in a common way, this does not extend to particulars. Consequently, confused knowledge is more certain than distinct knowledge, because its object is common, and therefore more proportionate to our intellect, which proceeds from potency to act. Because our intellect must operate in this fashion, we first know things in a general way and under a certain confusion before knowing them distinctly; for confused knowledge is intermediate between pure potency and perfect act. It is important to note that confusion is opposed not to certitude, but to distinctness. For example, we can know with certitude that man is animal, but this is confused rather than distinct knowledge, for it is not a complete knowledge of man up to his ultimate difference, since "animal" contains "rational" only in potency.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, the rhetorician must use as modes of persuasion and argument, notions already possessed by all; as Aristotle states also in the *Topics*,<sup>2</sup> where he speaks of the utility of dialectic for handling a popular audience: "[Dialectic] is useful because when we have considered the opinions held by most people, we shall meet them on the ground not of other people's convictions, but of their own, while we shift the ground of any argument that they appear to us to state unsoundly."

3) We must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that if another person argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to refute him. Of the arts, only *rhetorica* and *dialectica utens* draw opposite conclusions. In commenting on Aristotle's *Topics*, St. Albert states that because *dialectica docens* enables us to find common appearances, it enables us to argue probably about any problem with ease from either side of a contradiction.<sup>3</sup>

1. ST. THOMAS, *In I Physicorum*, lect.1, edit. Marietti, n.7; *In II Metaphysicorum*, lect.1, nn.282,285; *Ia Pars*, q.85, a.3.

2. I, chap.2, 101 a 30-34; trans. W. A. PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE, ed. McKeon, N.Y., Random House, 1941.

3. "... Hanc methodum... (quae docet communia invenire)... conferens ad facile de proposito arguendum de utraque parte contradictionis, valet ad exercitationes..." (*In I Topicorum*, tract.1, cap.5).

Both of these arts draw opposite conclusions impartially ; yet the facts do not lend themselves equally well to the contrary views. Rather, things that are true and things that are better are, by their very nature, almost always easier to prove and easier to believe.

4) It is absurd to hold that a man should be ashamed of being unable to defend himself by physical strength, but not of being unable to defend himself by speech and reason, when the use of speech is more proper to man than the use of his limbs.

If it is argued that one who uses such power of speech unjustly may do great harm, this is an objection which applies equally to all good things except virtue (for virtue, understood in its primary sense, i.e., moral virtue, by its very definition implies a perfecting of the agent and an assurance of good operation),<sup>1</sup> especially to those things which are most useful, such as strength, health, wealth, or military power. For as a man can confer the greatest benefit by using these properly, so can he inflict the greatest injuries by abusing them.

#### 4) *Résumé*

It is clear then, that *rhetorica utens* does not deal with a particular genus of things, but that like *dialectica utens*, it is universal. It is also evident that it is useful. Furthermore, its function is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather, to discover the means of persuasion available in each particular case.

The rhetorician does not always succeed in persuading, for there are three possible impediments : a bad case, perverse judges, and weakness of argument due to the contingency of the matter. Yet, if he operates well according to the principles of his art, we say that he

---

1. "... Virtutes sunt principia actionum quae non transeunt in exteriorem materiam, sed manent in ipsis agentibus. Unde tales actiones sunt perfectiones agentium. Et ideo bonum harum actionum in ipsis agentibus consistit" (ST. THOMAS, *In II Ethic.*, lect 4, n.282).

"... Omnis virtus subiectum cuius est, facit bene habere, et opus eius bene se habens... secundum virtutem propriam unaquaeque res et bona sit, et bene operetur" (*Ibid.*, lect. 6, nn.307-308).

"... Per virtutem aliquis non solum potest bene operari, sed etiam bene operans : quia virtus inclinatur ad bonam operationem, sicut et natura" (*Ibid.*, n.316).

"... Virtus, ex ipsa ratione nominis, importat quamdam perfectionem potentiae..." (ST. THOMAS, *Ia IIae*, q.55, a.2).

"... Virtus humana, quae est habitus operativus, est bonus habitus, et boni operativus..." (*Ibid.*, a.3).

"Virtus autem humana... secundum perfectam rationem virtutis dicitur, quae requirit rectitudinem appetitus ; huiusmodi enim virtus non solum facit facultatem bene agendi, sed ipsum etiam usum boni operis causat. ... Constat autem quod perfectum est principaliter imperfecto. Et ideo virtutes quae continent rectitudinem appetitus, dicuntur principales. Huiusmodi autem sunt virtutes morales..." (*Ibid.*, q.61, a.1).

has sufficiently attained his end, even should he fail to persuade.<sup>1</sup> For in any discipline we cannot seek more than its principles warrant.<sup>2</sup> In this, *rhetorica utens* resembles all the other arts. For example, the function of medicine is not simply to restore the patient to health, but to promote this end as far as possible ; for even those who will never recover can be given proper treatment.

Moreover, it is evident that it pertains to rhetoric to discover the real and the apparent means of persuasion, just as it is the function of dialectic to discern the real and the apparent syllogism. This does not make the dialectician a sophist, for the sophist is defined not by his knowledge, but by his moral purpose — he is morally perverse. An argument can be sophistic without its proponent's being a sophist. Dialectic is ordered to truth ; bad intention is completely extrinsic to it. Thus a man is a dialectician because of his knowledge or faculty ; he is a sophist because of his evil intention.<sup>3</sup> However, in rhetoric there is no such distinction, for the rhetorician may be denominated either from his faculty, or from his intention.

Aristotle brings his first chapter to a close with a statement of what is to follow in the next chapter. He says that we shall now treat of the rhetorical method itself to see how we can attain our goal. But first, we must make a fresh start, and before going further, define rhetoric anew.

In this chapter, Aristotle began with a *quid nominis* of *rhetorica utens*, which gave us only a vague notion of its nature. Next he proceeded to the *an est* of *rhetorica docens*, and finally, by means of first a negative and then a positive approach, he enabled us to acquire further insight into what rhetoric is — principally, that the substance of the method consists in proofs. However, this does not as yet give us the distinct *quid* ; it is still confused and common knowledge.

In Chapter II, Aristotle will incorporate our newly acquired knowledge into a new definition, thus furnishing us a fresh point of departure. From there, he will continue in a proper way the positive treatment of the rhetorical method.

1. " Neque enim rhetoricus advocatus omnino et universaliter persuadebit, impedimento triplici impeditus : malitia causae, perversitate iudicis, et debilitate allegationis suae . . . Sed si unusquisque . . . ex contingentibus secundum suae artis facultatem nihil omiserit, dicemus disciplinam et disciplinabilem finem habere sufficienter secundum artis contingentiam, quamvis non semper habeat finem sufficienter in alio secundum effectum persuasionis . . . " (ST. ALBERT, *In I Topicorum*, tract.1, cap.5).

2. " . . . Nemo quaerat in scientia quod ex principiis ejusdem non poterat " (*Ibid.*).

3. " A sophista vero differt philosophus ' prohaeresi ', idest electione vel voluptate, idest desiderio vitae. Ad aliud enim ordinat vitam suam et actiones philosophus et sophista. Philosophus quidem ad sciendum veritatem ; sophista vero ad hoc quod videatur scire quamvis nesciat " (ST. THOMAS, *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 4, n.575).

## II. A PROPER TREATMENT OF THE RHETORICAL METHOD

This section has two divisions : the *quid rei* of *rhetorica utens*, and a consideration of the end of rhetoric.

1) The " *Quid Rei* " of " *Rhetorica Utens* "

Aristotle begins by defining rhetoric as the faculty of discovering, in any given case, the available means of persuasion. Rhetoric is a faculty, because it has no determinate subject. For every art and science can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject : for instance, medicine deals with health and sickness ; geometry, with the properties of magnitudes ; and arithmetic, with numbers. But rhetoric is the power of observing the means of persuasion on any subject which presents itself, and this is why we say that it is not concerned with any particular or definite genus of things.

2) *The End of Rhetoric : Persuasion*

This definition makes it clear that *rhetorica utens* aims at effecting persuasion.<sup>1</sup> Now, persuasion implies the presentation of an object as an *operable good*.<sup>2</sup> But the good is said in relation to appetite,<sup>3</sup> and furthermore, it is envisioned by the rhetorician as *operable*. Therefore, persuasion is not a purely speculative assent, but it also involves appetite, and is ordered to moving the will.<sup>4</sup>

1. "... Per rhetoricam, quae componit ad persuadendum, ut sc. supra dixit, quod non fuit intentionis quod sua praedicatio niteretur philosophicis rationibus ; ita nunc dicit non fuisse suae intentionis niti rhetoricis persuasionibus (ST. THOMAS, *In I ad Corinthios*, lect. 4, cap.2).

2. " Per modum quidem persuasionis, sicut cum proponitur aliquid virtuti cognoscitivae ut bonum " (ST. THOMAS, *Q.D. de Malo*, q.3, a.4).

" Nulla igitur substantia creata potest movere voluntatem nisi mediante bono intellecto. Hoc autem est in quantum manifestat ei aliquid esse bonum ad agendum : quod est *persuadere*. Nulla igitur substantia creata potest agere in voluntatem, vel esse causa electionis nostrae, nisi per modum persuadentis " (ST. THOMAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, cap.88).

" Tertio modo, ille qui persuadet objectum propositum habere rationem boni : quia et hic aliquantulum proponit proprium objectum voluntati, quod est rationis bonum vel apparens " (ST. THOMAS, *Ia IIae*, q.80, a.1).

3. " Ex parte quidem obiecti, movet voluntatem et ipsum bonum quod est voluntatis obiectum, sicut appetibile movet appetitum ; et ille qui demonstrat obiectum, puta qui demonstrat aliquid esse bonum. Sed sicut supra dictum est, alia quidem bona aliquantulum inclinant voluntatem ; sed nihil sufficienter movet voluntatem, nisi bonum universale quod est Deus . . . Angelus ergo non sufficienter movet voluntatem neque ut obiectum, neque ut ostendens obiectum. Sed inclinatur eam, ut amabile quoddam, et ut manifestans aliqua bona creata ordinata in Dei bonitatem. Et per hoc inclinare potest ad amorem creaturae vel Dei, per modum suadentis " (ST. THOMAS, *Ia Pars*, q.106, a.2).

4. "... Voluntas ad aliquid inclinari dicitur dupliciter : uno modo ab exteriori ; alio modo ab interiori. Ab exteriori quidem, sicut ab obiecto apprehenso ; nam bonum

Because of this, it is of capital importance that the rhetorician should consider the dispositions of his audience ; for according as men are differently disposed, so will different things seem good to them. Since the passions play an essential rôle in disposing man, St. Thomas holds that rhetoric, unlike demonstration, is not restricted to the domain of reason ; but that in order to attain its end, it must also arouse the passions of the audience.<sup>1</sup> It is evident then, that persuasion involves two elements, one which is appetitive, and the other which is properly rational.<sup>2</sup> The latter consists in a partial inclination to reason to one side of a contradiction which is known as suspicion.<sup>3</sup>

---

apprehensum movere dicitur voluntatem ; et per hunc modum dicitur movere consilians vel suadens, in quantum scilicet facit apparere aliquod esse bonum . . . Obiectum non ex necessitate movet voluntatem ; et ideo nulla persuasio ex necessitate movet hominem ad agendum " (ST. THOMAS, *De Malo*, q.3, a.3).

" Et mediante hoc obiecto potest aliqua creatura inclinare aliquatenus voluntatem, non tamen necessario immutare ; sicut patet cum aliquis persuadet alicui aliquid faciendum proponendo ei eius utilitatem et honestatem ; tamen in potestate voluntatis est ut illud acceptet vel non acceptet, eo quod non est naturaliter determinata ad id " (ST. THOMAS, *Q.D. de Veritate*, q.22, a.9).

1. " Cuius ratio est, quia consideratio huius libri directe ordinatur ad scientiam demonstrativam, in qua animus hominis per rationem inducitur ad consentiendum vero ex his quae sunt propria rei ; et ideo demonstrator non utitur ad suum finem nisi enunciativis orationibus, significantibus res secundum quod earum veritas est in anima. Sed rhetor et poeta inducunt ad assentiendum ei quod intendunt, non solum per ea quae sunt propria rei, sed etiam per dispositiones audientis. Unde rhetores et poeta plerumque movere auditores nituntur provocando eos ad aliquas passiones, ut Philosophus dicit in sua Rhetorica " (ST. THOMAS, *In I Peri Hermeneias*, lect. 7, edit. Marietti, n.87).

2. " Unde secundum quod aliquis est causa quod aliquid apprehendatur ut bonum ad appetendum, secundum hoc movet voluntatem. Et sic solus Deus efficaciter potest movere voluntatem ; angelus autem et homo per modum suadentis, ut supra dictum est. Sed praeter hunc modum, etiam aliter movetur in hominibus voluntas ab exteriori, scilicet ex passione existente circa appetitum sensitivum ; sicut ex concupiscentia vel ira inclinatur voluntas ad aliquid volendum. Et sic etiam angeli, in quantum possunt concitare huiusmodi passiones, possunt voluntatem movere. Non tamen ex necessitate, quia voluntas semper remanet libera ad consentiendum vel resistendum passioni " (ST. THOMAS, *1a Pars*, q.111, a.2, c.).

" Dicitur tamen diabolus incensor cogitationum, in quantum incitat ad cogitandum, vel ad appetendum cogitata, per modum suadentis, vel passionem concitantis " (*Ibid.*, ad 2).

3. We have thought it best to use the English word "suspicion" to translate the Latin *suspicio*. However, a few precisions must be made to clarify its meaning in this context. The first meaning of "suspicion" is "... imagination or apprehension of something wrong or hurtful, without proof, or on slight evidence..." (WEBSTER'S *New International Dictionary of the English Language*, the word "suspicion"). But suspicion, as an effect produced by rhetorical argumentation, does not necessarily imply "something wrong or hurtful." Rather, it should be understood in the sense in which it is synonymous with "surmise" and "conjecture." The second meaning given for "surmise" is "suspicion ;" the third meaning is "a thought or idea based on scanty evidence ; a conjecture ; a random conclusion..." (*Ibid.*, the word "surmise"). "Conjecture" is defined as "... to form opinions concerning, on grounds confessedly insufficient to certain conclusion ;" and "suspect" is given as a synonym (*Ibid.*, the word "conjecture").



Suspicion can be said to be a mean between doubt and opinion. It is opposed to doubt and resembles opinion, in that it involves inclination to one side of a contradiction. Yet, it differs from opinion, inasmuch as this inclination is not total, and is therefore not a true adherence.<sup>1</sup> To make these differences more explicit : in doubt, the intellect is completely undetermined ; for there is no greater inclination to one side of a contradiction rather than to the other. Opinion involves a total inclination, or a true adherence to one side of a contradiction which, however, does not result in complete assent ; for there remains a fear that the other side may be true.<sup>2</sup> This adherence constitutes a determination of reason, albeit incomplete, inasmuch as the inclination is totally to one side.<sup>3</sup> But in suspicion, the inclination of reason is only predominantly, and not totally to one side of a contradiction.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, we can assign two reasons for the necessity of arousing the passions in rhetoric : the weakness of rhetorical argumentation, which renders it incapable of effecting a true assent of reason, and the fact that mere presentation of truth is insufficient to move men to action. St. Augustine very aptly explains the latter aspect :

Verum quoniam plerumque stulti homines ad ea quae suadentur recte, utiliter et honeste, non ipsam sincerissimam quam rarus animus videt veritatem, sed proprios sensus consuetudinemque sectantur, oportebat eos non doceri solum quantum queunt sed saepe et maxime commoveri. Hanc suam partem quae id ageret, necessitatis pleniorum quam puritatis, refer-

1. " Quandoque vero, non fit complete fides vel opinio, sed suspicio quaedam, quia non totaliter declinatur ad unam partem contradictionis, licet magis inclinatur in hanc quam in illam. Et ad hoc ordinatur *Rhetorica* " (ST. THOMAS, *In I Posteriorum Analyticorum*, Prooemium, edit. Marietti, n.6).

2. " Quandoque vero intellectus inclinatur magis ad unum quam ad alterum ; sed tamen illud inclinans non sufficienter movet intellectum ad hoc quod determinet ipsum in unam partium totaliter ; unde accipit quidem unam partem, tamen semper dubitat de opposita. Et haec est dispositio opinantis, qui accipit unam partem contradictionis cum formidine alterius (ST. THOMAS, *De Veritate*, q.14, a.1).

3. "... Quandoque quidem etsi non fiat scientia, fit tamen fides vel opinio propter probabilitatem propositionum, ex quibus proceditur ; quia ratio totaliter declinat in unam partem contradictionis, licet cum formidine alterius, et ad hoc ordinatur *Topica* sive *Dialectica* " (ST. THOMAS, *In I Post. Anal.*, Prooemium, n.6).

" Licet opinans non sit certus, tamen iam determinavit se ad unum ..." (ST. THOMAS, *In VI Ethicorum*, lect.8, edit. Marietti, n.1221).

" Et dicit, quod omne illud de quo habetur opinio, iam est determinatum quantum ad opinantem, licet non sit determinatum quantum ad rei veritatem " (*Ibid.*, n.1226).

4. " Quidam vero actus intellectus habent quidem cogitationem informem absque firma assensione : sive in neutram partem declinent, sicut accidit dubitanti ; sive in unam partem magis declinent sed tenentur aliquo levi signo, sicut accidit suspicanti ; sive uni parti adhaereant, tamen cum formidine alterius, quod accidit opinanti " (ST. THOMAS, *Ila Ilae*, q.2, a.1).

tissimo gremio deliciarum, quas populo spargat, ut ad utilitatem suam dignetur adduci, vocavit rhetoricam.<sup>1</sup>

A further insight into the rôle played by the dispositions of the audience can be had by examining the words of Cicero :

This indeed is the reason why, when setting about a hazardous and important case, in order to explore the feelings of the tribunal, I engage wholeheartedly in a consideration so careful, that I scent out with all possible keenness their thoughts, judgments, anticipations and wishes, and the direction in which they seem likely to be led away most easily by eloquence . . . If however an arbitrator is neutral and free from pre-disposition, my task is harder, since everything has to be called forth by my speech, with no help from the listener's character. But so potent is that Eloquence, rightly styled by an excellent poet, "soulbending sovereign of all things," that she can not only support the sinking and bend the upstanding, but, like a good and brave commander, can even make prisoner a resisting antagonist.<sup>2</sup>

Is this contrary, then, to the position maintained by Aristotle when he criticizes his predecessors? Not at all, for his criticism is aimed at those who give no thought to argumentation, but make rhetoric consist entirely or principally in moving the passions. That Aristotle does not underestimate the importance of the dispositions of the audience is evident from the fact that he devotes the greater part of Book II to a study of the various passions and types of human character. Also, of the three modes of persuasion, only the third is based on argumentative proof. The difference lies in that Aristotle holds argumentation to be essential: "enthymemes . . . are the substance of rhetorical persuasion;"<sup>3</sup> arousing the passions, though necessary, is only secondary. Hence, they are not to be aroused at the outset, when they could impede judgment, but only in the epilogue. "Next, when the facts and their importance are clearly understood, you must excite your hearers' emotions."<sup>4</sup> By then, the rhetorician has proceeded as far as possible in the line of argumentation, i.e., he has aroused suspicion. But because the matter is too contingent to merit assent, he must bridge the gap by an appeal to the emotions.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the foundation of judgment is laid by means of an exposition

1. *De Ordine*, II, cap.13, n.38 : *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, éd. Bénédictine, Paris Desclée de Brouwer, 1948, Vol.IV.

2. *Orator*, II, cap.44, n.186 ; trans. H. M. HUBBELL, The Leob Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Univ. Press, 1939.

3. *Rhetoric*, I, chap.1, 1354 a 14.

4. ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, III, chap.18, 1419 b 24, trans. W. RHYS ROBERTS, ed. Solmsen, N. Y., Random House, 1954.

5. "The emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgements, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure" (*Ibid.*, II, chap.1, 1378 a 20).

of the facts of the case, but judgment is completed and assured through movement of the passions.

Once it has been understood that rhetoric is ordered to persuasion, we have the key to the entire rhetorical method. For the end is the cause of causes,<sup>1</sup> inasmuch as all else is intended for the sake of the end, and must therefore be proportionate to it.

THERESA M. CREM.



---

1. ST. THOMAS, *In V Metaphysicorum*, lect.3. n.782.