Rhetoric
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Introduction.
This paper constitutes merely an initial exploration into the field of rhetoric, a field that is quite new to me. Its stimulus was the realization, while working with Aquinas, of how rhetorical some of his arguments were despite his apparent rejection of rhetoric. A little reading indicated the perilous state of the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric. Yet the practice of rhetoric is obviously alive in public life. It seems arguable that its health could be bettered by an improvement in the relationship as could the relevance of philosophy to the interests of society at large.

I apologize if the matter of the paper is too elementary for this group. On the other hand, the issue should surely be of interest to people involved in the public discussion of ethical issues. I will be grateful for any criticisms or suggestions of directions that further work could take.

Again there is no question that rhetoric has fallen into disrepute. It is variously regarded as ornate but hollow when the witty and imaginative uses of speech are envisaged as being deceptive and manipulative when it is viewed as the practice of changing people’s convictions by means of deliberate appeals to the emotions or by means of fallacious arguments and linguistic tricks. Although some of the reasons for this will emerge in the course of this paper, I do not wish to dwell on it. What is interesting is that the analyses and development of rhetorical theory by Plato and Aristotle as well as other major figures grew out a similar situation, in which abuses of clever speech were so rampant that the limits of rhetoric had to be set, and the possibilities of truth and of the establishment of justice had to be demonstrated.

1. Historical Comments.

a. Origins.
Rhetoric is generally thought to have originated in the Greek world at the beginning of the fifth century B.C. Its first uses appear to have been in the law courts, although the deliberative rhetoric of public and legislative assemblies was probably not far behind. Isocrates (436-338 B.C.) was among the first to develop a systematic theory of rhetoric.

The Sophists such as Protagoras (b. ca. 486) and Gorgias (ca. 483-374) took up rhetoric and charged fees for preparing speeches for others and for teaching others to argue either side of a case. It is here that the charge of “making the weaker argument stronger” arose. They carried with them an epistemology that implied that truth was what you made it and had no consistency across cultures or between individuals.

It was against the Sophists that Socrates argued and against them that Plato established the distinction between opinion (doxa) and knowledge (episteme).

b. Aristotle.
However, the major formative work in the theory of rhetoric is Aristotle’s Rhetoric, and it is to this that we turn for an initial outline of the field and for terms and definitions.

Aristotle defines rhetoric “as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion”. It is an art and as such involves “a true course of reasoning”. It “is the counterpart of dialectic”, and as such has no particular subject matter of its own but is concerned with all matters of human interest. Like dialectic and in opposition to analytics, it starts from opinion rather than from true and certain principles.

Aristotle distinguishes three technical modes of persuasion that are provided by the spoken word.

The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent

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1See for instance ST I 84, 1-2. The argument appears to be dialectical but it is not. Rather it is highly constructed and directed not at establishing principles but at ensuring that the beginners in theology to whom the text is directed “get the point”. On Thomas’s rejection of rhetoric SEE JORDAN

2See Renato Barilli, Rhetoric, translated by Giuliana Menozzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 3. Barilli provides a good history of rhetoric from its known origins to the present.

3TEXT:

4Protagoras REF:

5Rhet I, 2 (1355b27). Barnes p. 2155.

6Rhetoric I, 1. 1354a1-11. On art or techne see Nic. Ethics VI, 6 (1140a9-10).
Other modes, such as evidence and witnesses, which Aristotle calls non-technical, are provided by the occasion or circumstances. The duty of rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is to deal with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts or systems to guide us, in the hearing of persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning. (1357a1-4)

In other words, rhetoric takes its task from two directions. The opinion, from which it begins its argument, is opinion that does not lend itself to science. The audience, on the other hand, is one that does not have the capacity to deal with the length and difficulty of full analytic or dialectic arguments. Nor is the rhetorical forum one in which those arguments could be heard.

Two further distinctions are important. First, Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric urges the hearer to do or not do something and is directed towards public assemblies and legislatures. It urges acceptance on the basis of good. Forensic rhetoric attacks or defends someone before judges and juries. It works for the establishment of justice or injustice. Demonstrative or laudatory rhetoric praises or censures somebody and can be directed towards all human beings. It demonstrates either honour or dishonour. Eulogies and graduation speeches fall into this category. (I, 3)

Second, Aristotle divides rhetoric into three parts. The first, which is the discussion of the modes of persuasion and the discovery of arguments, occupies two books. The other two parts, namely discussion of language or style, which has links to the Poetics, and the arrangement of the speech, occupy the third book. Aristotle is most insistent that the first part is the most important and that sole concentration on the latter two parts leads to deception.

Several things stand out. Rhetoric is fundamentally public. Written or private forms would seem to be derivative. It deals with opinion that is held by or accepted by the majority of the hearers rather than with opinion that is the best. In this it differs from dialectic which typically seeks the best of past and present opinions in order to establish the first principles of a science or to determine some other matter not given to analytic demonstration. Further, while Aristotle stress the importance of argument, it is argument which deals not only with the formal logic of the situation, but also with the states and emotions of the hearers and with the establishment of the character and credibility of the speaker. Although style and arrangement are less important than argument, the former provides appeal to the listener and the latter helps make the argument accessible. In short, rhetoric aims to persuade, whatever the particular circumstances in which it is used, and to use all legitimate means at its disposal.

Aristotle spends a lot of time looking into what the various kinds of orators should know and into the emotions and states of character. The latter bear careful comparison with the Nicomachean Ethics and also with the Politics, but neither will detain us here although both call for philosophical examination. The final chapters of Book Two concern the forms of argument common to all oratory, and that is important to us.

Rhetorical argumentation can be inductive, by means of examples, or deductive, by means of the enthymeme. The latter is preferred. In an inductive argument, many examples, either factual or invented, must be presented before a conclusion is drawn. (II, 20) An enthymeme is a kind of syllogism. It differs from the dialectical syllogism in that it is briefer and can omit steps of the argument so as to appeal to the kind of audience to which it is addressed. It need not go back to general principles but can start from common opinion. The premises themselves can be conflated. (II, 22) It differs from analytic syllogisms in that its premises are probabilities and signs. (I, 2)8 “A probability is a thing that happens for the most part.” (1357a35) The sources of premises are either facts of different kinds or commonplaces (topoi), which are commonly accepted opinions. We will treat commonplaces in the final part of this paper.

**c. Some Subsequent History.**

I will note some aspects of the subsequent history of rhetoric very briefly. Cicero was both a master of the practice of rhetoric and a theoretician. For our purposes three of his technical developments are of interest. First, he developed memory and delivery as two additional parts of rhetoric. Quintilian later codified rhetoric as having five parts: inventio or the discovery of arguments;

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7“Any person whom we wish to persuade is a judge, even if it is only one person whose conduct we wish to change”. (II, 18)

8Barilli gives a modern example from advertising which seems to incorporate all these qualities. “This car will rejuvenate its owner”. The full syllogism would be: everything that rejuvenates one is good and desirable; this car will rejuvenate one; therefore this car is good and desirable. The major premise is, of course, only probable and may not be accepted by some of the audience. Rhetoric p. 14.
dispositio or arrangement; elocuto or style; memoria or memory; and actio or delivery. Second, he fused moments of a speech that the Greeks had kept separate. One should move (movere), teach (docere) and delight (delectare) the audience all at once rather than doing each in turn at particular parts of the speech. Third, he brought considerable development to the understanding of the figures of speech employed in an oration.

But the most significant development made by Cicero was to increase rhetoric’s importance and to reverse its relationship with logic. For Cicero rhetoric belonged to the life of the Republic. What was important was not the leisure (otium) in which the Greeks had developed philosophy but business (negotium). The business of the Republic was conducted in the Forum, and its medium was rhetoric. He restructured Aristotle’s Organon in such a way that analytics disappeared, and dialectic became subject to rhetoric.

The early Christian centuries produced some very beautiful rhetoric as is seen, for instance in Augustine, Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa. Augustine’s arguments in De doctrina Christiana for the use of Ciceronian rhetoric to teach Christian doctrine was to have lasting effect. The secular sphere saw the revival of rhetoric in what has become known as the Second Sophistic.

But problems remained. Rhetoric maintained its separation from logic, so that its domain retracted to questions of style and delivery. Autocratic emperors supressed political debate, and, in the large complex legal system of the empire, technical discussion of laws replaced forensic oration. Only demonstrative or laudatory rhetoric maintained free reign.

More significant was the devaluation of opinion that followed in the wake of Christian revelation. St Paul captures this in 1 Corinthians 2:1. “As for me, brothers, when I came to you, it was not with any show of oratory or philosophy, but simply to tell you what God had guaranteed.” In other words, truth is found not through philosophy or rhetoric but through revelation. In the Greek New Testament and in the post-apostolic fathers, doxa is never used in the original sense of opinion. What becomes important is pistis but meaning faith rather than the more standard senses of confidence or conviction. Where opinion as a human phenomenon lacks recognition, rhetoric in the classical sense can scarcely flourish.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail about modern developments in the relation of philosophy and rhetoric. Bacon, Hobbes and Locke each kept a place for rhetoric even if its value was reduced in relation to science. Cartesian rationalism, on the other hand, left little room for rhetoric because of both its rejection of opinion and probability and its relegation of certainty to the sole mind of the scientist. The general myth of the Enlightenment was that all human and natural problems would be solved by science and that through universal education scientific knowledge would be available to all. This again removed the need for any serious consideration of rhetoric.

2. Is there Room for the Involvement of Philosophy with Rhetoric?

a. Some Arguments in the Affirmative.

Plato is often taken to have condemned and rejected rhetoric. But while it is true that Plato had Socrates disputing with and exposing the sophistic rhetoricians of his day, it does not seem to be true that he rejected rhetoric itself out of hand. Indeed, Plato’s own writings had a rhetorical dimension and even the Protagoras, which on one level attacks rhetoric cannot be fully understood until Plato’s own rhetorical moves are recognized. Rhetoric is one form of human discourse; philosophy is another. They can interact and influence one another, but neither can take the other over apart from seemingly. That Plato was aware of this is shown by two brief texts.

In the allegory of the cave in Book VII of The Republic, the cave-dweller must leave the cave in

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11 Barilli, Rhetoric pp. 31-32.
16 See Kittel, Dictionary, vol. 6, p. 228.
19 Republic Book VII (514a- ). See also the interpretative essay in Allan Bloom, The Republic.
order to see the light, for the light cannot be brought into the cave. Once he has seen the light he will prefer to stay in it because of what it is in itself and because, if he goes back into the cave, he will seem ridiculous since at first his eyes will be unaccustomed to the darkness. Further, knowing too much he will be less able to discourse in the customary manner.

In interpreting the allegory, Socrates says that the founders of the city must compel the best natures to see the good and to make the ascent. Contrary to Glaucon’s expectation, he continues that once they have seen the light they must be compelled to go back among the prisoners in the cave, into the darkness. His reason for this is that their education is not for themselves but for the sake of the city. They have to live both lives. On their return to the cave and after they have become accustomed to the darkness, they are best able to understand the shadows and best able to rule the city. (519c-520d)

In the *Meno*, Socrates pursues Meno’s question about whether virtue can be taught. Towards the end of the dialogue he changes the question to that of whether teachers of virtue exist, and he interrogates Anytus. (89e-95a) Now Anytus is a respected and successful citizen of Athens, the son of a good Athenian who has also had his own son educated well. Socrates presumes that he will know who are the teachers of virtue. For Anytus, any decent Athenian can be a teacher of virtue. Socrates demolishes this view and Anytus leaves in anger. Socrates says to Meno:

He thinks I am slandering our statesmen, and moreover he believes himself to be one of them. He doesn’t know what slander really is: if he ever finds out he will forgive me. 20

A little later in the dialogue, Socrates discusses the difference between true opinion and knowledge. (97a-98b) True opinion is just as useful as knowledge for acting rightly. The difference is that “the man with knowledge will always be successful, and the man with right opinion only sometimes.” (97c) Socrates then draws an analogy from the statues of Daedalus, which are very valuable but sometimes run away if they are not tied down.

True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place; but they will not stay long. They run away from a man’s mind, so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason. 21

What are we to make of these discussions? Plato is clearly recognizing two worlds: that of the philosopher who has true knowledge and that of the citizen who lives by opinion. The two cannot coalesce. The sun cannot be taken into the cave, nor can all the cave dwellers be forced out into the sun. Opinion has its place. Meno is respected by Socrates even though he cannot understand what slander really is. Further, some indication is also given of the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric. The philosopher has the duty to understand the shadows well. Philosophy somehow tethers or limits rhetoric so that it will not run away.

We have seen sufficient of Aristotle’s views for the purposes of this paper. He was able to hold the various parts of human science and discourse apart while still recognizing the ways in which they relate and the whole that they form. Analytics, dialectic, rhetoric, poetics and the various sciences all have their place. The subsequent collapse of rhetoric is in part due to a failure to observe their differences. In taking a part for the whole both parts and whole are somehow lost. It matters not whether it is logic or science or faith or even opinion itself that is taken for the whole. The result is the same. 22

In a free society opinion must vary, and persuasion ought to be valued above coercion. Some matters of public interest will be determined by science or by philosophy, but many will not, and among those that are, some will be based on arguments that are too difficult for non-specialists to appreciate. Both these latter situations seem to call for rhetoric as a serious form of discourse, which generates proper arguments and other appropriate means of persuasion.

A case for the use of rhetoric might be found in the abortion debate. Most disputants attempt to establish demonstrative arguments from first principles such as natural rights or natural laws. 23

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23 See Gerald Gleeson, “Renewing the Debate over Abortion,” *Bioethics Outlook* 3 (March 1992): 6-7. It seems to me that the most heinous aspect of abortion is what does to the mother, viz., turn mother to aborter, and that sufficient reason can be found in this to ban all abortion. But this can scarcely be argued politically in the current situation where where individuality and rights, and particularly women’s rights, are foremost in people’s minds.”
But this is difficult ground, and the context in which they are used is that of political decision about an issue on which opinions abound. Might not consciously rhetorical arguments be better. For instance, against abortion we might argue that what abortion does is make the quality of one life more significant than the fact of another life. Similarly, opponents of abortion have been remiss in not pointing out that most abortions are not the result of life threatening illness or deformity of the foetus or vicious rape but are rather little more than a form of contraception especially convenient to the improvident.

Attention to rhetoric may also clear up some philosophical perplexities. This group recently heard a paper by Susan Uniacke called “Singer on Euthanasia”. It centred on his definition of euthanasia which it showed to shift around and to involve Singer in serious inconsistencies. Considered just philosophically, this leaves us in some perplexity. Does he know this? Should he know it? How would he answer if told? But considered rhetorically, it is clear that he has simply used one of the standard rhetorical topics--number seven in Aristotle’s list of topics. He has extended the definition of euthanasia to suit both his cases and his particular audiences. In addition, he has done it inappropriately as readily appears when different speeches are analysed. Philosophy has shown up the inconsistency which is clarified when different speeches are analysed. Philosophy has shown up the inconsistency which is clarified by considering the rhetorical dimension of his work. It merits a rhetorical response.

**b. A Suggestion of Where Philosophy Might Interact.**

So far we have tried to get some idea of the nature of rhetoric. We have done this by looking particularly at Aristotle’s work but also at significant changes in thinking that happened at other times and with other authors. We have made a case for treating rhetoric seriously and based it on the dignity of opinion, the recognition that most people will not fully understand philosophic and scientific arguments, and the necessity of persuasion. We have also made a case for philosophy’s involvement with rhetoric. But where will the interaction take place?

An obvious place to begin is in the articulation of the relationship itself. We need to reconstruct an adequate theory of discourse that gives due place to each of philosophy, science and rhetoric. There seems to be a significant amount of energy going into this project. Some are following more traditional lines. Others, like Group Mu with their New Rhetoric, are attempting to establish new relationships. Various attempts try to incorporate the findings of the social sciences into the discussion. Further serious research is needed.

More immediately, philosophy can attend to the commonplaces. These are the commonly held opinions that serve as the major premises of rhetorical argument. Recent work has been done on the commonplaces of former times. For example, speeches of the British Parliament have been analysed for their commonplaces so that Victorian culture has been described by means of its beliefs. But a more direct involvement for philosophy is to establish new commonplaces and to challenge existing ones.

A word needs to be said about commonplaces for they are rather slippery. They do not appear in set formulae as maxims like “you can’t take it with you”, although this maxim could and does serve as

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27 People working under the influence of Carol Arnold at Pennsylvania State University seem to have done a significant amount of this. See Eugene E. White (ed.), Rhetoric in Transition (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980.
a commonplace, for instance, in an argument that one should spend one’s money immediately. Commonplaces are not strict formulations but they can be found in ordinary discourse. An example made topical by the recently completed harbour tunnel is that after the completion of major road improvements the congestion just moves elsewhere. This commonplace is used in numerous arguments: that freeway construction should be halted and public transport improved; that the city has exceeded its viable size; that the highway designers are incompetent; that the government is wasteful; that the general lot of humankind is hopeless.

Historically, the issue of the nature of commonplaces suffers from considerable confusion. Aristotle spoke both of commonplaces (koinoi topoi) and also of places or topics (topoi). The latter have a quasi-logical form and are sources of commonplaces. It seems that for Aristotle they provided a link with dialectic. Cicero reduced them to mere memory devices for the speaker. For the Fathers of the Church they became series of stock arguments which could be readily brought into a speech. By the Renaissance they had assumed the form of poetical figures. For example, effictio was a description of the appearance of a person which literally moved from head to toe. Joseph Priestly, in his 1777 Lectures on Oratory returned to a quasi-logical series of topics which he also called commonplaces but which he insisted were mere memory devices and had no proper logical content. It is clear, however, that Priestly’s theory of rhetoric and his understanding of topoi are dependent on a Lockean theory of ideas. More research is needed also in this area.

Conclusion

30 For an example see Mariantonia Liberio, “Rhetorical Topoi as ‘Clues’ in Chrétien de Troyes”, in Rhetoric Revalued edited by Brian Vickers (Binghampton NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), pp 174-178. Liberio shows that Chrétien was able to say something about a character simply by omitting part of the well-known figure. 31 Joseph Priestly, Lectures on Oratory and Criticism, facsimile reprint of 1777 edition (Menston, England: The Scholar Press, 1968), pp. 6-25.
Rhetoric

Introduction.

1. Historical Comments.
   a. Origins.
   b. Aristotle.

   Definition: “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” An art. The counterpart of dialectic.
   Modes of Persuasion: 1. the personal character of speaker; 2. putting the audience in a certain frame of mind; 3. proof or apparent proof.
   Duty of rhetoric: “to deal with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts or systems to guide us, in the hearing of persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning”.

   Kinds of rhetoric: Deliberative, Forensic, Laudatory.
   Parts of Rhetoric: discovery of arguments, language or style, arrangement.
   Forms of argumentation: examples; the enthymeme.

c. Some Subsequent History.

   Cicero: 1. the parts of rhetoric: discovery of arguments (inventio), arrangement (dispositio), style (elocutio), memory (memoria), delivery (actio);
   2. to move, to teach, to delight: movere, docere, delectare.
   3. elevation of opinion; rhetoric above logic.
   Christianity: devaluation of opinion.
   Early modern philosophy and the Enlightenment.

2. Is there Room for the Involvement of Philosophy with Rhetoric?
   a. Some Arguments in the Affirmative.

   Plato: the allegory of the cave; the Meno.
   Aristotle: distinction but interdependence of the sciences.
   Key: matters not amenable to scientific determination; matters too difficult for non-specialists to understand.
   Examples: abortion debate; “Singer on Euthanasia”.


   In articulating the relationship itself.
   By establishing and challenging commonplaces.
   Commonplaces.
   Commonplaces and topics: some confusion.

Conclusion