

The Uses of Aristotle's Rhetoric in Contemporary American Scholarship

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ABSTRACT: In contemporary American scholarship, interpretation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has become the locus of sustained and sharp controversy. Differing views of the *Rhetoric* and its significance have become tokens in a more general dispute about what rhetoric is or ought to be. This essay examines three central issues that have emerged in this larger arena of controversy: the relationship between Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions of rhetoric, the relationships among rhetoric, ethics, and epistemology in Aristotle, and the placement of rhetoric within Aristotle's system of arts and sciences.

KEY WORDS: Aristotle, Rhetoric, History of Rhetoric.

The reception of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the Twentieth Century presents us with a complicated and somewhat ironic tale. Through much of the century, while rhetoric remained an unfashionable subject, the treatise was largely ignored or dismissed by philologists and philosophers, but it was studied avidly by scholars in the language arts, especially by those in the emerging discipline of Speech Communication and by literary critics concerned about close, formalistic readings of poetic texts. More recently, as interest in rhetoric has revived, the *Rhetoric* has attracted broader attention: Classicists, after a long hiatus, have produced new commentaries and translations; philosophers have reclaimed the work, arguing that it has real significance for ethics and philosophical psychology; political scientists have used it to support a revisionist approach to political theory, and it has attracted notice even in such apparently remote disciplines as economics and social psychology. At the same time, however, in the area where its authority was once secure, the status of the *Rhetoric* has declined precipitously. Rhetoricians in American Departments of English and Speech Communication now commonly associate Aristotle with the "old rhetoric", which, in their view, was at best moribund and at worst actually opposed to the formation of a genuine rhetorical consciousness. Hence the repeated calls for a new rhetoric conventionally include an attack on Aristotle as the *fons et origo* of the sins committed by the older generation. Yet, while this attitude is widespread, it is not universal, since some scholars hold that the liabilities of "neo-Aristotelianism" resulted from the "neo" rather than the "Aristotelian"; that is, the problem was not the *Rhetoric*, but the inaccurate or misguided interpretations placed upon it by modern readers. And from this perspective, the

Rhetoric, when properly interpreted, has a perennial value; it continues to speak to current interests and should remain a central, if not the central, text in rhetorical scholarship.

This whole development is extremely complex, but the actions and reactions of the professional rhetoricians seem to follow a familiar pattern. As Richard McKeon has noted, the general history of Aristotle's influence often takes form "as revolts against his outworn authority or as discovery of his forgotten methods."¹ On a much reduced scale, twentieth-century rhetoricians appear to have reenacted this tension, and the disciplinary history of rhetoric (which is only a small part of its entire history in our century) turns on the attitude toward Aristotle. Traditionalists accept Aristotle's authority; radical revisionists deny it altogether; and moderate revisionists seek to rediscover its meaning and significance. In this context, interpretation of Aristotle hardly becomes a disinterested exegetical task, but instead functions as a vehicle for articulating different visions of what rhetoric is or should be.

This is not to say that the *Rhetoric* simply has become a Rohrschach test, dividing contemporary rhetoricians into different philosophical camps. In fact, the literature contains lively debates about the interpretation and application of specific Aristotelian principles. In this context, we encounter issues such as these: Is the enthymeme a truncated formal syllogism, or does its identity depend upon more subtle features?² Does the rhetorical induction (*paradeigma*) require some kind of mediating generalization between particulars, or does it move directly from particular to particular?³ Do the *topoi* in the *Rhetoric* provide formal, material, or both formal and material resources for invention?⁴ Is the theory of metaphor in Book 3 substantially connected with the theory of invention in the first two books, or does it address a different aspect of the rhetorical process?⁵ Rhetoricians who raise these issues are concerned about their application to current problems, but they also seek to understand the text. Thus, if they do not always adhere to the most scrupulous standards of philological inquiry, they at least recognize these standards as relevant to their arguments. As a result, controversies about these matters, while often sharp and theoretically significant, retain a degree of stability, since the criteria for settling them seem reasonably clear and consistent.

More typically, however, – and this is especially true since the coming of the post-modern revolution – contemporary rhetoricians assess the *Rhetoric* in global, meta-theoretical terms. At this level, the issues define and impart attitudes toward the *Rhetoric* as a whole. Differing views rarely make much argumentative contact with one another, since opposition is either unrecognized or used to distinguish the infidels from the true believers. The grounds for settling controversy are obscure, and necessarily so, because, as Rosalin Gabin has noted, the disagreements are "not logical but ontological." And so to choose a position is to choose "a total view of language and its human use, and a total view of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and what it offers us as a text."⁶

In order to illustrate and clarify this larger arena of controversy, I have isolated three issues that seem especially prominent, and in what follows, I will

summarize the opposing positions concerning each of them. These issues are: the placement of Aristotelian rhetoric in reference to Plato; Aristotle's conception of the epistemological and ethical status of rhetoric; and the location of rhetoric within the Aristotelian system of the arts and sciences. Within the discussion of these issues, I will also comment here and there about two other matters that deserve separate consideration, but which I do not have the time to address in detail – the scope of Aristotelian rhetoric and the relationship between rhetoric and extra-verbal reality in Aristotelian thought.

I. PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

Contemporary rhetoricians display great concern about the origins of the art and routinely set out the possibilities for rhetorical theory within the parameters of its development in classical Greek thought. In charting this development, the conventional method is to follow a sequence that first compares the sophists with Plato and then Plato with Aristotle. Since this progression places Aristotle at the conclusion of the process and Plato as the middle term, the relationship between the two emerges as a conceptual pivot. As we might expect, there is no consensus about this matter.

In an influential essay that does much to establish the method I have just described, Everett Lee Hunt disputes interpretations that stress the affinity between the *Rhetoric* and the Platonic dialogues. Reading the *Rhetoric* as a practical and popular treatise, Hunt concludes that Aristotle's theory "bears more resemblance to that of Protagoras and Gorgias than to that of Plato."⁷ James Kinneavy reaches a somewhat more restricted but basically similar conclusion. Since Aristotle accepts contingency and probability as the legitimate domain of rhetoric, Kinneavy holds that Aristotle "sides with Isocrates in the epistemological debate with Plato."⁸ John Gage agrees that the attitude toward probability marks a crucial distinction between Plato and Aristotle, but Gage also insists that Aristotle's position departs sharply from that of the sophists. Like Plato, Aristotle objects to the technical and eristic emphasis in the sophistic manuals, and he views rhetoric as connected with knowledge. But, Gage adds, unlike Plato, Aristotle conceives knowledge in the rhetorical sphere as a product of contingency and social interaction – not as something discovered outside the process of deliberation, but as an activity which develops in and through discursive exchange. On this view, Aristotle occupies a well demarcated middle ground between Platonic idealism and sophistic relativism.⁹

While Hunt and Kinneavy draw heavily from Cope's commentaries, Gage is much more influenced by William Grimaldi. Grimaldi, however, presses well beyond Gage in aligning Aristotle with Plato. Agreeing with During that the *Rhetoric* is composed against the background of the *Phaedrus*, Grimaldi contends that Aristotle "clearly sides with Plato ... on the relation between rhetoric and truth: one must know the subject and present its truth."¹⁰ Consequently, Aristotle fully justifies "rhetoric for the most Platonic Platonist."¹¹ This

strong association between Aristotle and Plato allows Grimaldi to make a sharp contrast between Aristotle and the sophistic rhetoricians, and in his view, the contrast serves to vindicate Aristotelian rhetoric.

In other quarters, however, this same alignment works to vindicate the sophists, since Plato and Aristotle come to represent a closed, metaphysically tainted conception of the art. Thus, Eric Charles White argues that Aristotle's rhetoric of probability presupposes a stable and ordered reality as its referent, and so it is decisively opposed to "Gorgias' skepticism concerning the possibility of final truth."¹² The *Rhetoric*, on White's account, circumscribes "the merely probable" within the ambit "of certain knowledge," and while it assumes a more practical guise than Platonic rhetoric, Aristotelian rhetoric remains committed to the metaphysical premise that the function of language is to reproduce knowledge of the real.¹³ In this respect, Aristotelian and Platonic rhetoric are essentially the same, and both suppress the open-ended, constantly mutable, and tropological forms of invention that characterize Gorgianic rhetoric. Other contemporary scholars who support this post-modern rehabilitation of the sophists also stress the metaphysical – and therefore Platonic – basis of the *Rhetoric*.¹⁴

II. RHETORIC, ETHICS, AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Aristotle never clearly and systematically explains his conception of the relationships among rhetoric, truth, and ethics, but contemporary scholars often make strong, unqualified claims in interpreting his position. On one side, there are those who insist that the connections are intimate and fundamental. Thus, Charles S. Baldwin maintains that Aristotle establishes for all time "the true theory of rhetoric as the energizing of knowledge."¹⁵ Lester Thonnsen and A. Craig Baird assert that "Aristotle's basic philosophy did not tolerate compromise with the moral integrity and design of the speaker," and that "a fair reading of the *Rhetoric* reveals no significant departures from the high moral principles enunciated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*."¹⁶ Larry Arnhart, who has pursued the issue in much greater detail, reaches a similar conclusion: "Although Aristotle recognizes the differences between rhetoric and moral philosophy, and although these differences are reflected in his treatment of nobility and virtue in the *Rhetoric*, what he says in the *Rhetoric* does not fundamentally contradict what he says in the *Ethics*."¹⁷ As I have already noted, the strong link Grimaldi forges between Aristotle and Plato rests on the conviction that the *Rhetoric* is committed to truth. For Grimaldi, Aristotle's attitude is "simply that rhetoric qua rhetoric stretches out to truth."¹⁸ As a linguistic art, then, rhetoric is mimetic and "is supposed to re-present the real (i.e. truth and justice) in any situation for an auditor."¹⁹ And this formulation, strange though it may seem, corresponds quite closely to the orthodox post-modern view of the *Rhetoric's* method and purpose. The difference here is not descriptive but evaluative; Aristotle emerges as hero or villain depending on the attitude toward this sort of representational theory of

language and its ethical implications.

On the other side, we find an equally long list of those who regard the *Rhetoric* as a purely practical and instrumental treatise. In part, this interpretation arises from Aristotle's shrewd and pragmatic treatment of specific rhetorical tactics, and in truth, it is difficult to read parts of the *Rhetoric* without noting the agonistic and even eristic tone. Troubled by the apparent inconsistency between these sections and the more philosophical stance Aristotle adopts elsewhere in the text, Whitney Oates concludes that the *Rhetoric* is ambivalent in its attitude toward ethical values. At times, Aristotle behaves as a proper philosopher, attending to questions of value as he tries to link rhetoric with logic, ethics, and politics. But once he launches into the barnyard of tactics, he becomes transformed into a sophistical Mr. Hyde, approving of conventional response as a standard for values, reducing the craft of persuasion to a mere matter of words, and adopting the view that "anything goes if only persuasion emerges."¹⁹ More impressed by the strategic than the philosophical moments in the *Rhetoric*, B. A. G. Fuller argues that Aristotle assumes a medical and not a moral posture concerning rhetoric. Thus, rhetoric becomes a clinical power, since whether it is used "in the interests of truth or falsehood, or right or wrong makes no difference. Rhetoric is good or bad according as it wins the case."²⁰ Likewise, W. D. Ross believes that the *Rhetoric* has "a purely practical purpose." It is not a theoretical work, but "a manual for speakers."²¹

The views I have just summarized come from an older generation of philologists and philosophers, who are sceptical about rhetoric in general and who seem almost embarrassed by the fact that Aristotle had written about the subject. Nevertheless, the instrumental interpretation of the *Rhetoric* has also commanded the attention of professional rhetoricians, and it emerges most clearly among those who emphasize the distance between Aristotelian and Platonic rhetoric. Hunt, for example, repeatedly stresses the moral neutrality of the *Rhetoric*. In an often cited passage, he asserts that "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is largely detached from both morality and pedagogy. It is neither a manual of rules nor a collection of injunctions. It is an unmoral and scientific analysis of the means of persuasion."²² In assessing Aristotle's treatment of forensic oratory, Hunt observes that "once engaged in the classification of arguments ... [Aristotle] is concerned with rhetorical effectiveness and not with moral justifiability."²³ Finally, Aristotle's treatment of delivery reveals that he regarded the art as an "instrument of persuasion detached from the moral nature of the rhetorician."²⁴

This disjunction between persuasive effect and the moral quality of the act yields a reasonably clear and technical basis for defining the position of rhetoric within a disciplinary matrix. J. Robert Olian explains that the key issue here is the distinction between "rhetoric as productive art and ethics or politics as practical arts."²⁵ Productive arts concern themselves only with making, while practical arts "suggest modes of conduct." Consequently, rhetoric, in the Aristotelian scheme, is purely instrumental and cannot entail intrinsic ethical or political standards. The social uses of rhetoric are regulated externally by ethics

and politics. Accepting this view, Forbes Hill maintains that Aristotelian rhetoric “is a neutral instrument that sees impartially the arguments on both sides of a question. It is subservient, politics is the architectonic art.”²⁶ Moreover, Hill extends and refines this position to formulate a theory of rhetorical criticism in which the critic assumes a neutral, politically disinterested stance with respect to persuasive discourse.²⁷

Recently, a third approach to this issue has emerged, one that stands between the idealism suggested by Grimaldi and the pure functionalism advocated by Hunt and Hill. Scholars such as Lois Self,²⁸ Christopher Johnstone,²⁹ Ronald Beiner,³⁰ and Eugene Garver³¹ attempt to discover the connection between rhetoric and ethics in Aristotle neither by considering the representational solidity of rhetoric nor by comparing specific doctrines in the *Nichomachean Ethics* or the *Politics* with sections of the *Rhetoric*. Instead, they concentrate on apparent similarities between Aristotle’s account of the rhetorical process and the operation of practical wisdom, as it is explained in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Their studies indicate three important points of convergence between rhetoric and phronesis. First, both must balance reason and passion, intellect and desire, and deal with a unified activity of the whole being. Second, the object of both rhetorical and ethical deliberation concerns particulars that are not yet determined and cannot be determined through universals. And third, rhetoric, like phronesis, does not find its end in judgment or understanding but in action.³² Taken together, these points suggest a conceptual affinity between rhetoric and ethics in Aristotelian thought, and rhetoric begins to emerge as a deliberative faculty rather than as a technical instrument. Conceived in this way, rhetoric assumes a civic rather than a professional identity, and within the economy of Aristotelian thought, it must incorporate intrinsic standards for success. This requirement involves a serious complication, since in order to satisfy it, rhetoric must be defined as a practical art, and as I hope to show in the next section of this paper, the placement of rhetoric within the Aristotelian system of the arts poses a vexing problem.

III. RHETORIC IN THE SYSTEM OF THE ARTS

Everyone agrees that Aristotle regards rhetoric as an art, but no agreement exists about how he classifies it as an art. There are four possibilities: a productive art, a practical art, a theoretical art, or some combination of the above. Each of these possibilities is instanced in the literature, and, ironically, the Aristotelian classifications, often cited as an example of his effort to order and clarify matters, proves a source of contention and confusion.

Traditional scholarship places rhetoric among the productive arts, and this placement tacitly informs the perspective adopted by Hunt, Thonssen and Baird, and other rhetoricians of the past generation. As we have noted, Olian makes this assumption explicit, arguing that its status as a productive art is the key to understanding Aristotelian rhetoric. Olian, however, merely asserts and does not

justify this categorization.

In her essay "Judgment, Probability, and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," Barbara Warnick presents a rationale for this position.³³ Warnick's motive is to counter interpretations, such as those sponsored by Grimaldi and Johnstone, which expand the scope of Aristotelian rhetoric beyond the arenas of traditional civic discourse. While she does not make this point fully explicit, these extensions of the scope of the *Rhetoric* follow from a classification of it as something other than a productive art. Grimaldi, although he recognizes practical and productive considerations found within the text, heavily stresses the theoretical aspect of the *Rhetoric*. Consequently, he claims that Aristotle offers us a rhetoric that functions as a universal faculty and operates throughout the spectrum of discursive practices, finding application in the physical sciences as well as in politics. Johnstone, who flatly asserts that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a practical art, maintains that it functions as a general faculty of deliberation concerning contingent particulars. Consequently, its domain includes all situations that engage ethical or political issues, even ethical self-deliberation.

Both these views, Warnick argues, violate Aristotle's intentions. Referring to *Posterior Analytics* 89b7-9 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b15, Warnick notes the schematic divisions among the domains of inquiry and emphasizes the fact that *techne* is distinguished from theoretical, scientific, or practical knowledge because it finds its end in production. Since Aristotle labels rhetoric as a *techne*, Warnick contends that its identity and its relationship to other disciplines are fully apparent. Like dialectic and unlike all other arts or rational activities, rhetoric produces arguments, and the distinction between rhetoric and dialectic corresponds to differences in the institutional contexts, the modes of discourse (i.e. monologue as opposed to dialogue), and the specificity or generality of the premises that characterize the two arts. On this analysis, rhetoric emerges not as a general faculty of deliberation but as a method for making arguments, whose range of operation is restricted to specific social and political environments.

Warnick's argument works to yield a relatively bounded and determinate conception of Aristotelian rhetoric, and in this respect, her position corresponds to the traditional attitude associated with the theory that rhetoric is a productive art. Janet Atwill, however, departs from this tradition and argues that the productive status of Aristotelian rhetoric indicates that its functions are indeterminate, and thus it is fundamentally and not just schematically different from other disciplines in the Aristotelian system. Theoretical and practical knowledge, Atwill explains, ultimately refer to the self-contained activity of the individual subject: theoretical knowledge manifests itself in disinterested contemplation, and practical wisdom eventuates in action undertaken for its own sake. In both cases, Aristotle stresses aims, dispositions, and habits possessed by the human subject and thus capable of being regulated without reference to extrinsic standards. A productive art, on Atwill's account, presents a very different situation, since it works within a medium of exchange. In this exchange between the maker and the user of the art, neither party can control its operations or outcomes, and thus productive knowledge is itself contingent and

indeterminate: "Subjects of productive knowledge are defined by social exchange rather than private possession; and just as a *techne* could never be a form of private property, neither could the makers and users with which it is identified be private, stable entities. The subject defined by *techne* is mutable and social, and rather than embodying the culture's highest value, that subject functions as the very nexus of competing standards of value.... Rather than securing boundaries, it would seem that productive knowledge is inevitably implicated in their transgression and renegotiation.... Thus productive knowledge becomes a significant stumbling block for those who attempt to invoke Aristotle to authorize either a philosophical or deliberative rhetoric."³⁴ As Susan Jarrett notes, this interest in the indeterminacy of the subject has a distinctively post-modern ring.³⁵

Thus, in comparing Warnick and Atwill, we arrive at another interesting paradox. The classification of the *Rhetoric* as a productive art may justify the "modernist" bias in favor of a rhetoric that fits neatly into the corporation of disciplines; or it may justify the "post-modern" bias in favor of a rhetoric that destabilizes the entire system. Further complications arise when we consider the objections that exist, in principle, to any definition of Aristotelian rhetoric as a productive art.

George Kennedy, who considers Aristotelian rhetoric a theoretical art, raises one of these objections succinctly and clearly. Given that rhetoric involves "creativity", it might be regarded, like poetry, as a productive art. Aristotle, however, "fails to make the identification. Rhetoric in his view does not produce oratory in the same sense that poetics produces poetry, for it stands at a different stage in the productive process."³⁶ Significantly, neither Warnick nor Atwill compare rhetoric to poetic, even though poetic, as its very name suggests, seems to offer the prototype of a productive art. Had they attempted the comparison, the problem Kennedy raises would have emerged immediately. What is it that a productive art produces? In the case of poetic, the answer is clear – a poem. In the case of rhetoric, the answer is not at all clear. Warnick asserts that it is argument, but the status of argument as a product is hardly the same as the status of a poem. To claim that argument is the product of rhetorical art seems equivalent to the claim that *muthos* is the product of poetic; it is to single out a part without regard to the whole. Atwill, since she emphasizes the process of exchange, probably would hold that persuasion is the product of rhetoric. But again this response does not seem adequate, since persuasion clearly is not a product in the same sense that shoes or poems are products.

The anomaly is highlighted if we consider an important observation made by Richard McKeon. McKeon notes that the ancestor to the *Rhetoric* was Aristotle's *Collection of the Arts*, a work which "summarized the characteristics of rhetorical systems." On the other hand, the ancestor to the *Poetics* was *On Poets*, which devoted itself to the history of poetry *per se*. Thus, "Aristotle's interests in poetry seem to have followed the analogy of his interests in politics and to have been concerned rather more with the history of the subject of inquiry than with previous theories ..."³⁷ In other words, Aristotle has an interest in the

products of the poetic art which is not matched, as it is in Cicero, by an interest in the products of the rhetorical art. This difference becomes obvious when we compare the place of the poets in the *Poetics* to the place of the orators in the *Rhetoric*. In the former, the great works of Greek tragedy, especially the plays of Sophocles, form the basis of inquiry. In the latter, as Hunt remarks, Aristotle refers to "any existing examples of eloquence only most casually for the sake of illustration."³⁸ Consistent with this inattention to actual rhetorical production, Aristotle omits two things which, whether we judge by the standard of the *Poetics* or by the standard established in other classical rhetorics, would seem necessary components of a productive art – a doctrine of organic form³⁹ and reference to paradigmatic works that embody the principles of the art.

Now, the evidence being what it is, and intentions – even of the simple-minded, let alone Aristotle – being as elusive as they are, I think it possible that Aristotle's conception of productive art was sufficiently elastic to include the *Rhetoric*. Nevertheless, the contrast between the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* surely indicates that the issue is not simple and cannot be resolved by a direct deduction from the schemata of the arts and sciences that Aristotle presents in other works.

As I indicated at the end of the preceding section of this paper, the view that Aristotelian rhetoric is "civic" or "deliberative" leads to its classification as a practical art. This alignment is not obvious, and those attempting to justify it face serious obstacles. Perhaps the most serious arises from a point Janet Atwill has made and which I summarized above. Practical arts are self-regulative because they find their end in action undertaken for its own sake. Persuasion, however, occurs through exchange, accommodation, and social interaction. How, then, can an art of persuasion assume a self-regulative function? How can Aristotle assign an autonomous end to an activity that seems to require heteronomous judgment?

A relatively simple answer is to argue that, for Aristotle, the end of rhetoric is not to persuade but to discover the available means of persuasion as they apply to particular cases. The need to deal with particulars counters Kennedy's claim that this definition indicates that the art is theoretical. That is, the rhetorician not only needs to discover the means of persuasion but to apply them to contingent particulars. Since this process is clearly deliberative, rhetoric itself must be a deliberative or practical art, and if its standards refer to the quality of the act rather than its effects, then the art can sustain an autonomous end – namely, to deliberate well. But this argument, as Warnick suggests, is not sufficient, because, even if accepted, it would only justify placing rhetoric within the genus of deliberation; it does not distinguish rhetoric from other practical arts and hence simply collapses it into ethics and politics. Thus, to sustain the classification of rhetoric as practical art, it is necessary to locate a specific deliberative function performed by the art that is distinct from other types of deliberative practice.

In a recent series of articles, Eugene Garver makes a direct and sustained effort to solve this problem.⁴⁰ His starting premise is that rhetoric entails two

possible standards of success – an external standard based upon actual results and an internal standard which depends upon the way the agent acts so as to produce the result. The first criterion, which Garver associates with sophistic, “pre-philosophical” rhetoric, refers to what is done by words and resists artistic treatment. The second criterion refers to what is done in words, and since it specifies something in the power of the agent, it offers the basis for an art of rhetoric. Aristotle, Garver argues, accepts the second criterion, and the consequences of this choice become evident in terms of a familiar comparison: “Neither the art of rhetoric nor the analogous art of medicine in fact aims at producing that product, persuasion or health. Each aims at producing everything in its power to achieve that end.”⁴¹ Viewed from this angle, the practical aspect of rhetoric takes priority over its productive aspect: “Doing everything in one’s power is precisely a doing as opposed to a making, even if it is doing everything in one’s power to make something.”⁴² Furthermore, since the function of the art is not realized in a product, it must depend upon the agent’s action.

What, then, is the function of artistic rhetoric? On this point, Garver notes that Aristotle has a fairly clear position. The function of rhetoric is to deliberate about matters where there is no specific art or method to guide us. As Garver interprets it, this view indicates that rhetoric deals with indeterminate issues, which cannot be resolved by determinate methods of science or logic. Rhetoric may enter into the discourse of a determinate subject, such as physics, but in such a case it fulfills a secondary or supplementary purpose. Rhetoric fulfills its own function only in contexts where the deliberative process is self-regulative, where there is no appeal to fixed principles that stand outside the process. Persuasion, Garver explains, is entirely general, but for Aristotle, artistic rhetoric can occur only in situations where the deliberative function is autonomous and thus can be said to operate for its sake.⁴³

This conception of function, however, applies generally to practical knowledge, and Garver still must account for the distinctive status of the rhetorical art. For this purpose, he returns to his point about the dual standards for success that can apply to rhetoric. Unlike ethics, which directly engages *praxis*, rhetoric arises from and occurs within social institutions where productive results (i.e. persuasion) inform the agent’s actions. Yet, it is also possible to conceive rhetoric as an artistic power in which the agent’s actions have an intrinsic value. (Garver cautions that this value cannot be fully equivalent to the autonomy of right conduct in ethics, but it must be sufficient to allow for standards that are not determined by sheer results.) To establish rhetoric as a practical art, therefore, it is necessary to make an inference from *poesis* to *praxis* – an inference that allows for recognition of inherent value embedded in the productive process. Persuasion in general cannot offer a basis for this inference, since its function is to produce an effect, a matter that is entirely extrinsic. Nevertheless, there are institutional settings in which the rhetorical function becomes the only available standard for deliberative proceedings, and by limiting artistic rhetoric to these contexts, Aristotle can locate intrinsic value in the exercise of that function. Thus, on Garver’s account, the Aristotelian

genres of rhetoric do not represent an exhaustive classification of types of persuasive discourse, but rather they designate the contexts in which persuasion can manifest itself as a practical art, since in these three settings, the proper exercise of the art can have a value in and of itself. In the political, forensic, and epideictic species of rhetoric, it is possible to establish a role for both speaker and auditor that corresponds to the internal demands of the rhetorical function; and hence, in delimiting artistic rhetoric to these types, Aristotle establishes rhetoric as a practical art, generically similar to ethics but specifically different from it.⁴⁴

This summary does not adequately represent the complexity of Garver's argument. And, in fact, this very complexity is one of its notable features, since it indicates the difficulty involved in presenting an adequate case for rhetoric as practical art. Garver's long and involved chain of reasoning is sustained only by filtering the opening chapters of the *Rhetoric* through Aristotle's ethical doctrine. It is plausible, of course, that this method places us in contact with Aristotle's own thought process, but the connection remains a matter of conjecture. Moreover, I wonder how well Garver's theory can account for the more technical sections of the *Rhetoric* (the middle and later chapter of Book One for example), or how it can dismiss or accommodate the whole of Book Three. Nevertheless, Garver certainly opens a number of interesting issues, and whatever the gaps or problems in his position, I think he has succeeded, where others have failed, in making a *prima facie* case to justify Aristotelian rhetoric as a practical art.

In summary, this survey demonstrates that existing scholarly opinion covers the spectrum of possibilities concerning the classification of Aristotelian rhetoric as an art: It is variously conceived as a productive, a theoretical, or a practical art. Moreover, efforts to establish one of these categories as absolute and to dismiss the others do not seem convincing. And even the more reasonable effort to elevate one of the three to a coordinating position entails great difficulty, perhaps revealing more about the interests of the interpreter than the disposition of the issue. These disagreements and problems, therefore, lend support to Richard McKeon's thesis that the Aristotelian classifications are "reduced to confusion and contradiction" if one limits the process of classification to a single basis.⁴⁵ Mindful of his own admonition, McKeon considers Aristotelian rhetoric to be an architectonic, productive art, and since an architectonic art involves "a doing", this means that rhetoric is at once an art of making and of doing.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it seems consistent with the spirit of McKeon's thought to regard this combination as only one of the possible and plausible alternatives. Apparently, then, rhetoric has productive, practical, and theoretical aspects that all play significant roles in the Aristotelian conception of the art, and efforts to file the *Rhetoric* in only one folder are bound to prove frustrating. Nevertheless, many rhetoricians – a clear majority, I suspect – still firmly believe that on this matter Aristotelian rhetoric is all one thing.

IV. CONCLUSION

What is true of the classification of Aristotelian rhetoric among the arts also holds good through the whole range of the meta-theoretical arguments. The rhetorical literature is filled with articles, monographs, and books that offer equally global but incompatible interpretations of the *Rhetoric*. A short list of the entries might include the following: Aristotle's *Rhetoric* accepts the key premises of sophistic epistemology; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* presents the definitive and final refutation of sophistic epistemology; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is relevant only to civic issues; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is relevant to all types of discourse; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* reflects its author's metaphysical bias and thus circumscribes the function of the art within a fixed, determinate conception of reality; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* presents the art as a generative force that works within the indeterminate world of human relations; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a neutral, scientific treatise; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* describes instruments designed to repress political dissent; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* embodies lofty principles of ethical conduct; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a bag of tricks. Anyone who works through this literature and its conflicting pronouncements might well conclude – if I may use a yuppie variant on an ancient analogy – that the *Rhetoric* is like tofu; it is something whose color and flavor depends on the other ingredients and thus turns out to be completely different in each recipe.

The tendency to oversimplify Aristotelian rhetoric is often accompanied by a strong tendency to oversimplify his role in the history of rhetoric. Thus, the *Rhetoric* is often taken to represent the whole of classical rhetoric, or the whole of “traditional rhetoric” (that is, everything between Aristotle and, for example, Derrida). Although the revival of interest in Isocrates and the Latin rhetoricians has begun to erode this assumption, it is difficult to exaggerate how deeply it has affected the collective unconscious of twentieth-century rhetoricians. Thus, in Thonssen and Baird's enormously influential textbook, *Speech Criticism*, the whole of Roman rhetoric is covered in a chapter entitled “Elaborations of Aristotelian Principles.”⁴⁷ A more recent composition text offers this thumbnail sketch: Classical rhetoric became “fixed as a definite body of doctrine by Aristotle's book, *Rhetoric*. The working out of what was inherent in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* continued throughout the life of the Roman Empire.”⁴⁸ And much more recently, Richard Lanham, a scholar with formidable credentials, has asserted that the “Aristotelian pattern ... has characterized the Western rhetorical tradition ever since Aristotle.”⁴⁹

Put these two tendencies together, and we get a double distortion of the *Rhetoric*. First, it is contracted to the point that it represents a single, uncomplicated perspective, and then it is expanded to the point that it blocks perception of anything else in the history of rhetoric. The result is to promote some very simple stories about Aristotle and the rhetorical tradition. And I close by presenting two versions of the story that reduce things to the greatest simplicity – the older “modernist” version and the new, unexpurgated “post-modernist” version.

The older variant reads, more or less, as follows:

Once upon a time, there existed a group of miscreants who called themselves sophists. Since they hated truth, justice, and healthful daily exercise, they invented something called false rhetoric and peddled it throughout Hellas. Just in the nick of time, however, Plato rose up and smote them with dialectical logic, shattering their evil plans. Some time later Plato's faithful Macedonian companion picked up the pieces and fashioned a proper rhetoric; he domesticated rhetoric by giving priority to content over form, reason over emotion, and argument over style. This philosophical rhetoric put the art in its proper place, and all later development ought to be gauged against this Aristotelian standard.

This story (and I hardly exaggerate its general tendency) offers a perfect target for the weapons of deconstruction; it is filled with sub-texts and hidden ideological premises, and it is blindly logocentric, homological, and patriarchal. Thus, even without bothering to check the historical sources, it is an easy task to "detonate" this story, to reveal its misplaced seriousness, and through the magic of binary opposition to replace it with a mirror image. The new version reads something like this:

In the beginning were the sophists, and they were liberated, creative users of the word – free spirits innocent of any lust for logical order. Unhappily, however, an evil metaphysician, named Plato, noticed the way they frolicked with words. Since he hated unrepressed, free use of language – or for that matter, the possibility that anyone might be having a good time – he thundered mightily and with much effect against them. Worst of all, he incited a guillible student, a logic-besotted wretch known as Aristotle, to trap their precious rhetoric within the labyrinth of philosophical categories. There, in the prison called the *Rhetoric*, true rhetoric atrophied and eventually died a horrible death, much to the delight of the whole brigade of philosophical prigs. In the face of this systematic repression, our only course, as rhetoricians or as human beings, is to tear down this Aristotelian prison-house and to return to our sophistic origins.

NOTES

¹ "Rhetoric and Poetic in Aristotle", in *Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elder Olson, Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1965, 233.

² See, for example, Lloyd Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (1959): 399–408, and Charles Mudd, "The Enthymeme and Logical Validity", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (1959): 409–414. Concerning more recent developments, see Thomas Conley, "The Enthymeme in Perspective", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 168–187, and Michael Hood, "The Enthymeme: A Brief Bibliography of Modern Sources", *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 14 (1984): 159–162.

³ Gerard Hauser, "The Example in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: Bifurcation or Contradiction?", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 78–90, "Aristotle's Example Revisited", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 18 (1985): 171–180, and "Reply to Benoit," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 20 (1987): 268–273; Scott Consigny, "The Rhetorical Example", *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 41 (1976): 121–134; William Benoit, "Aristotle's Example: The Rhetorical Induction", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980) 182–192, and "On Aristotle's Example", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 20 (1987): 261–267; Michael McGuire,

"Some Problems with Rhetorical Example", *Pre/Text* 3 (1982): 121–136; James Raymond, "Enthymemes, Examples, and Rhetorical Method", in Robert Connors, Lisa Ede, and Andrea Lunsford, eds., *Essays on Classical and Modern Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 144–148.

⁴ William Grimaldi, "A Note on the *Pisteis* in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, 1354–1356, *American Journal of Philology* 78 (1957): 188–192; George Brake, "A Reconsideration of Aristotle's Concept of Topics", *Central States Speech Journal* 16 (1965): 106–112; Richard Huseman, "Aristotle's System of Topics", *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 30 (1964): 243–252. Donovan Ochs, "Aristotle's Concept of Formal Topics", *Speech Monographs* 36 (1969): 419–425; Thomas Conley, "Logical Hylomorphism" and Aristotle's *Koinoi Topoi*", *Central State Speech Journal* 29 (1978): 92–97.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, tran. Robert Czerny (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 9–43; Samuel R. Levin, "Aristotle's Theory of Metaphor", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 15 (1982): 24–46; Eugene E. Ryan, *Aristotle's Theory of Rhetorical Argumentation*, Montreal: Bellarmin, 1984, 157–172.

⁶ "Aristotle and the New Rhetoric: Grimaldi and Valesio", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 20 (1987): 180.

⁷ "Plato and Aristotle on Rhetoric and Rhetoricians", in *Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians*, ed. Raymond F. Howes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961; rpt. 1924): 70.

⁸ "Translating Theory into Practice in Teaching Composition", in *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse* 1, 76.

⁹ "An Adequate Epistemology for Composition: Classical and Modern Perspectives", in *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*, 152–169.

¹⁰ "Rhetoric and Truth: A Note on Aristotle. *Rhetoric* 1355a.21–24", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 11 (1978): 173.

¹¹ *Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Weisbaden: F. Steiner, 1972, 151.

¹² *Kaironomia: On the Will to Invent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, and see 23–31 for White's elaboration of this assertion.

¹⁴ John Poulakos, "Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible", *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 215–226; Victor Vitanza, "Critical Sub/Versions of the History of Philosophical Rhetoric", *Rhetoric Review* 6 (1987): 41–66; Jane Sutton, "The Death of Rhetoric and Its Rebirth in Philosophy", *Rhetorica* 4 (1986): 203–227, and "Rereading Sophistical Arguments: A Political Intervention", *Argumentation* 5 (1991): 141–158.

¹⁵ *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York: MacMillan, 1928), 3.

¹⁶ *Speech Criticism* (New York: Ronald Press, 1948), 74–75.

¹⁷ *Aristotle on Political Reasoning: A Commentary on the Rhetoric* Dekalb (Northern Illinois University Press), 1981, 78.

¹⁸ "Rhetoric and Truth" (see above, note 10), 176.

¹⁹ "Aristotle and the Problem of Value", in *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*, ed. Keith Erickson Metuchen (N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 105–106, reprint of pp. 333–351 of Oates *Aristotle and the Problem of Value*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1963.

²⁰ *A History of Greek Philosophy: Aristotle* (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 294.

²¹ *Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 5th rev. ed., 1949), 276.

²² "Plato and Aristotle" (see above, note 7), 56.

²³ *Ibid.* 61.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 63–64.

²⁵ "The Intended Uses of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*", *Speech Monographs* 35 (1968): 140.

²⁶ "The *Rhetoric* of Aristotle", in *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy (New York: Random House, 1972), 25.

²⁷ "Conventional Wisdom – Traditional Form: The President's Message of November 3, 1969", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (1972): 373–86.

²⁸ "Rhetoric and Phronesis: The Aristotelian Ideal", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 12 (1979):

130–145.

²⁹ “An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the Search for Moral Truth”, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* **13** (1980): 1–24.

³⁰ *Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 83–97.

³¹ “Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as a Work of Philosophy”, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* **19** (1986): 1–22; “Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* on Unintentionally Hitting the Principles of the Sciences”, *Rhetorica* **6** (1988): 381–394; “The Human Function and Aristotle’s Art of Rhetoric”, *History of Philosophy Quarterly* **6** (1989): 133–146; “Making Discourse Ethical: The Lessons of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*”, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* **5** (1990): 73–96.

³² The first point is stressed by Self and Johnstone (see above, notes 27 & 28), and also relevant here is Arthur B. Miller and John D. Bee, “Enthymemes: Body and Soul!”, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* **5** (1972): 201–214. The second point is stressed by both Beiner (see above, note 30) and Garver (see above, note 31). The last point is most clearly formulated by Beiner.

³³ *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **75** (1989): 299–311.

³⁴ I am quoting from pp. 221, 222, and 223 of Atwill’s recently completed dissertation (Department of English, Purdue University). I am indebted to Professor Atwill for giving me access to sections of her dissertation that bear on the themes of this paper.

³⁵ *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 122, note 7.

³⁶ *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient Times to Modern* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1980), 63.

³⁷ “Rhetoric and Poetic” (see above, note 1), 206.

³⁸ Hunt, “Plato and Aristotle” (see above, note 7), 56.

³⁹ Hill’s comments on this matter, *Synoptic History*, 69 (see above note, 26), are very much to the point.

⁴⁰ See above, note 31. In the first essay in this series, “Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as a work of Philosophy”, some of Garver’s remarks indicate that he views Aristotelian rhetoric as a productive art (see p. 8). By the last essay in the series, “Making Discourse Ethical”, he maintains that “the *Rhetoric* constructs a new kind of art, which is practical rather than productive, an art which is a doing rather than a making” (p. 74).

⁴¹ Garver, “The Human Function”, 136. Garver makes the distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of rhetoric in several of his essays, but perhaps it is most fully explained in “Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as a Work of Philosophy”, 2–7 and 10–15.

⁴² “The Human Function”, 136.

⁴³ This argument is most clearly developed in “The Human Function”.

⁴⁴ In this paragraph, I am referring mainly to “The Human Function”, 138–141.

⁴⁵ “Rhetoric and Poetic” (see above, note 1), 244 ff.

⁴⁶ “The Uses of Rhetoric in a Technological Age: Archetectonic Productive Arts”, *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, ed. Edwin Black and Lloyd Bitzer (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), 44–63.

⁴⁷ I refer to Chapter Three of their book (for the reference see above, note 16).

⁴⁸ John H. Mackin, *Classical Rhetoric for Modern Discourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 34–45.

⁴⁹ *Literacy and the Survival of the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 15.