The McCarron Lectures*

Lecture 4: Aristotle on Rhetorica

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Abstract
After a short biographical summary of Aristotle's life, this lecture turns to the different ways in which Aristotle and Plato practiced philosophy, identifiable in the different ways they presented their ideas. Through this lecture's lens we view these philosophers' texts, Aristotle's logic, syllogism, Aristotle's *rhetorica*, and the distinction he drew between *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, referring to the speaker, the audience, and the discourse.

Keywords: Aristotle, Plato, philosophy, *rhetorica*

Résumé
Suivant un bref sommaire biographique de la vie d'Aristote, ce cours se penche sur les différentes manières dont Aristote et Platon pratiquaient la philosophie, identifiables par les façons divergentes dont ils présentaient leurs idées. Dans ce cours, on passe en revue les textes de ces philosophes, la logique d'Aristote, le syllogisme, la Rhétorique d'Aristote, et la distinction que celui-ci a faite entre ethos, pathos et logos, c'est-à-dire l'orateur, l'auditoire et le discours.

Mots clés : Aristote, Platon, philosophie, *rhetorica*

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Introduction

When people say that rhetoric is "the art of persuasion," they are, whether they know it or not, quoting from Aristotle. Whereas Plato's criticisms of rhetoric continue to resonate, Aristotle's systematic organization of rhetorical techniques remains an essential part of modern educational thought concerning rhetoric.

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Aristotle versus Plato

In addition to being one of the Western world's most famous philosophers, Aristotle was also one of the most prolific, systematically organizing enormous bodies of knowledge into coherent and orderly presentations. I mention this at the outset because Aristotle's fondness for organizational exactitude is a hallmark of his philosophical labours and played a significant role in his approach to rhetoric. His passion for systematization also indicates an important way in which he diverges from his illustrious teacher, for by immersing himself in the study of the material world, Aristotle rejected Plato's idealist philosophy with its focus on abstract matters. This does not mean that Aristotle had no interest in traditional metaphysical problems, in fact, quite the opposite. Aristotle wrote a good deal about the conventional philosophical problems of his times, including works on the soul, memory, politics, poetry, and, of course, rhetoric. But he also wrote important books in what we would recognize today as the physical and social sciences, including texts on physics, logic, biology, sleep, dreams, and meteorology. In other words, Aristotle combined an interest in the material questions that engaged the Presocratics with an equally strong interest in cultural and humanistic practices, such as poetics and drama. In each instance, his method differed a great deal from the style preferred by Plato.

Consider Aristotle's approach to politics. Whereas Plato sought to devise the perfect society in his speculative work *The Republic*, Aristotle was more interested in studying and cataloguing the many different forms of governance that existed in the known world. His work on politics, in other words, reads more like a thesis on the history and theory of governments than a plea to implement a favoured form of government. By collecting and cataloging information about different forms of government in the world as he was aware of it, Aristotle demonstrated how different societies were organized and how their form of government influenced their culture. This is different from Plato's approach, which argues strongly for the form of government he thought was best.

The difference in their respective approaches to politics appears also in their treatments of rhetoric. Whereas Plato raised objections to training in persuasion because he thought it harmed our efforts to find truth, Aristotle was more concerned with understanding what sorts of things rhetoric comprised and what kinds of strategies people actually used in seeking to be persuasive. When Socrates questions Gorgias about rhetoric throughout that eponymous dialogue (Plato, 1997), he obviously has a clear moral objection to persuasion, but when Aristotle investigates rhetoric, he hardly touches on moral questions (though they come up occasionally); instead, he prefers to systematically arrange the various techniques by which someone might attempt to persuade another person. Although Aristotle was influenced by Plato, he was a different sort of thinker. In fact, it has been suggested that Plato and Aristotle constitute the two most powerful archetypes in Western thinking: rationalism (Plato) and empiricism (Aristotle).[1] Whether this is historically true is the sort of question that can be debated endlessly, but it is a convenient way to keep their respective approaches straight.

The differences in their philosophical approaches and their styles of presentation also offer a partial explanation for their differing views of rhetoric. Plato's hostility to rhetoric, as evidenced in the *Gorgias*, was motivated in part by his underlying commitment

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to the idea that absolute truth was possible for the properly trained dialectical philosopher. By contrast, Aristotle was far less antagonistic to the practice of rhetoric because he believed that there is nothing wrong in acknowledging that some things can be known only provisionally. This meant that while he was prepared to accept that the gradations of truth as given in Plato's *The Republic* were important to epistemology, Aristotle did not dismiss entirely things below the infamous dotted line. That is, he did not follow Plato in rejecting the world of opinions and conjectures.

This difference in temperament also shows up in the style in which they present their ideas. Following a short biographical summary of Aristotle's life, I will return to the essential difference in their styles—orality versus literacy—followed by an overview of Aristotle's work on logic. This will lead into a description of Aristotle's essential contributions to the study of rhetoric as presented in the appropriately named *Rhetorica*.

About Aristotle

Aristotle was born in Macedonia in the town of Stagiros (later Stagira) in 384 BCE, around the same time that Plato was opening his academy in Athens. Although he was born in Macedonia, Aristotle's parents were Greek, and being associated with Macedonia rather than mainland Greece was a problem Aristotle had to face at different times in his life. The culture in Athens could be provincial and narrow-minded, and some Athenians regarded Aristotle as an outsider because he was born in Macedonia. Parochialism and bigotry are currents that run deep in the tides of human history, and Athens at the time Aristotle lived, unfortunately, was no exception to ethnic prejudice.

Aristotle's father, Nichomachus, was the court physician to the Macedonian royal family, and his mother, Phaestis, came from a family of doctors. This background in medicine is often cited as contributing to Aristotle's lifelong interest in biology, but as his father died when Aristotle was a child, it is unclear if it influenced his fascination with the study of living things. Regardless of the source, Aristotle's fascination with biological phenomena was intense: his works contain detailed descriptions of the physiology and behaviour of nearly 540 separate zoological species. His writings on these subjects were remarkably accurate. Some of his investigations, including his work on the digestion of ruminants and his studies of the reproductive systems of mammals, remained unchanged until the sixteenth century; his studies of the human heart and vascular system were orthodox medicine until the eighteenth century; and his research on octopuses and squid was only recently improved on.

Around the age of 18, Aristotle left Macedonia for Athens to enter Plato's academy. He remained there for at least twenty years, completing his studies and then staying on as a teacher. When Aristotle arrived, Plato was away in Syracuse, trying to convince King Dionysius I to establish a perfect kingdom based on the ideas outlined in *The Republic*. The Syracuse court was unresponsive to his plan, however, so Plato came back to Athens in 365 BCE, where he is believed to have taught Aristotle directly until 361 BCE. Plato then decided to return to Syracuse for another two years. Because they were in contact for a relatively short period, it is unclear how close they became. In what may be an apocryphal tale, Plato is said to have nicknamed Aristotle "the reader," but

whether this reflects genuine intimacy and friendship is hard to know, as some say that Plato gave everyone nicknames. Some historians have questioned whether Aristotle's admiration for Plato was genuine. Fragments and accounts of the few dialogues that Aristotle wrote appear to have been meant to popularize Platonism, but it is unclear whether he was genuinely interested in spreading Plato's philosophy or merely trying to ingratiate himself with his famous teacher.

Whether their friendship was deep or superficial, Aristotle did not agree with all aspects of Plato's philosophy. Aristotle, for example, rejected the idea of transcendent truths; he was particularly opposed to the notion of the Ideal Forms, which Plato had elevated to the status of absolute reality. Aristotle is frequently cited as saying, "Plato is dear to me, but truth is dearer still," a sentiment that would suggest at least a modicum of hostility as Plato fervently believed his approach to finding the truth was the single acceptable pathway.[2] But while this pithy phrase might have signalled a break between them, it also indicated that their philosophic goals were similar in an important respect: the notion that the fundamental point of life is the pursuit of the truth. This tells us that what underlay their philosophical differences was not necessarily their ambitions but the methods they used to get there.

When Plato died in 347 BCE, the headship of the academy was not offered to Aristotle, his star pupil, but to Plato's nephew, Speusippus (pronounced SPEW-sipus). Some say this was payback for Aristotle having declared himself opposed to certain Platonic doctrines; others say the main problem was the prevalence of anti-Macedonian tendencies in Athens. In any event, Aristotle left the city to assume the position of tutor to the 13-year-old son of King Phillip II of Macedonia, Prince Alexander, who would later gain fame as Alexander the Great. Aristotle did not return to Athens for ten years.

In addition to becoming Alexander's private tutor, Aristotle used his time away from Athens to conduct much of the preliminary analyses of nature that would figure prominently in his later writings. He conducted a good deal of the fieldwork for his biological research during this period.[3] In fact, when Alexander became king, he issued orders throughout all of Asia Minor that everyone should collect information about animals and other life forms in every part of the empire and convey this information to Aristotle. When Alexander was crowned in 335 BCE, Aristotle left Macedonia and returned to Athens where he set up his own school: the Lyceum. Alexander, of course, set off to conquer the world.

The Lyceum is often referred to as the Peripatetic school, owing to Aristotle's tendency to walk around while lecturing.[4] He probably collected fees from his students—a practice that Plato would have disliked—as this had become a more common practice in Athens. It certainly would have been consistent with the other Athenian schools of the era that taught rhetoric, including the academy founded by Isocrates, a chief rival of Plato and Aristotle, who appears to have begun to teach courses on rhetoric before Aristotle developed his own curriculum.[5]

In 323 BCE, twelve years after Aristotle founded his school, Alexander the Great died. Without the protection Alexander's presence afforded, anti-Macedonian sentiments

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erupted in riots that swept through Athens. Many native-born Athenians, who always considered themselves the true representatives of the Greek ideal, had been uncomfortable with a Macedonian ruler, someone without a claim to the status of a native-born Greek. Aristotle, who was born in Macedonia and had served as Alexander's tutor, was charged with impiety. Consequently, Aristotle decided to flee the city. No doubt Socrates' fate was on his mind, for he is reported to have proclaimed that he did not want the Athenians to "sin twice against philosophy," meaning that he did not want them to execute him unjustly as they had done to Socrates. Only a year later, while still in exile, he died. He was sixty-two years old.

The texts of Plato and Aristotle

Although Plato was Aristotle's teacher, they differed in how they practiced philosophy, and some of these differences can be identified in the way they present their ideas in their surviving works. Plato's dialogues, for instance, not only reveal his philosophy but also give a glimpse into his personality.[6] Reading the dialogues, one gains an appreciation of Plato's humour, an awareness of his ethical preoccupations, and an understanding of his sense of irony. British philosopher Simon Blackburn (1997) makes similar observations in his biography of Plato, agreeing that the dialogue format conveys a sense of Plato's character. Blackburn goes on to add, however, that the dialogical style can also make the central argument difficult to discern, that the dialogues appear at times to be wrapped up in an intellectual secretiveness. As a way of "doing philosophy," the dialogue format can make it seem that the writer is holding back something essential. This is because the dialogue moves slowly, progressing at the rhythm of a conversation. Thus, some readers have the impression, Blackburn insists, that an important objective is not being fully revealed in the narrative, that the dialogue—as is the case with real-life conversations—meanders a bit more than would be the case with a text that was purposefully written from the start and not later reproduced from memory. Written works usually get to the point quickly, but this is not always the case with people delivering their ideas verbally. The difference between literary and oral texts can suggest a corresponding difference between directness and indirectness.

Blackburn (1997) points out that, even taking this criticism into account, it would be extremely unrealistic to imagine that the dialogues do nothing but wander about aimlessly or that the point of the dialogue format is to disguise its own purpose behind the fitful starts and stops of a question-and-answer discussion. On the contrary, he says:

> Plato, and presumably Socrates, really did have doctrines to teach, but that for some irritating reason they preferred to unveil them only partially, one bit at a time, in a kind of intellectual striptease. (p. 5)

I do not agree with Blackburn entirely, but I like his idea that the dialogues are a form of "intellectual striptease," especially because the idea of "revealing" the truth is a common metaphor in modern philosophy. I also enjoy Blackburn referring to this tendency as "irritating" because it matches the experience of many who find the dialogues hard to piece together, even though the language is plain and easily understood. I think the impatience Blackburn identifies may be a product of applying a literate mindset to an oral presentation. Some people want to "cut to the chase," while others enjoy the pleasure of the journey.[7] Perhaps it comes down to individual tastes.

Blackburn's (1997) main point, however, is more serious than his clever phrase equating the dialogue format with an intellectual striptease might suggest. He is saying that when you write in dialogue form, you run the risk of having your readers distracted by the story, the characters, the clever asides, the descriptions of drinking, and possibly the setting—even to the point of losing the thread of the philosophical argument. The dialogues are challenging because they are philosophy wrapped up in a story and a story wrapped up in philosophy. Many people today are accustomed to philosophical presentations that move deductively through a series of premises to an irrefutable conclusion, and this is precisely what the dialogues repudiate. In any event, the dialogue style of presentation has largely been abandoned by modern philosophers, who seem to prefer Aristotle's bluntness to Plato's indirection.[8]

Of course, Socrates used the dialogical format because he genuinely believed this was the only way to get to the truth. By standing face-to-face with his conversational partner, Socrates thought he could maintain the sort of interpersonal connection that would enable both him and his subject to focus intently on the topic at hand. And, without distraction, they would eventually come as close to the truth of the matter as time and patience would allow. Thus, Socrates frequently praises the dialogical method, which he calls the dialectic, at the same time as he voices his displeasure with the spread of writing.

In fact, Plato's preference for oral conversation was at least partly motivated by his corresponding belief that there is something socially detrimental about writing. The most well-known of his complaints against writing was his belief that it would lead to the destruction of memory, but he had other concerns as well. He also claimed that writing is unresponsive to questioning, that a text is a lifeless and impersonal thing, and that without a human dimension, it is an impoverished form of communication. Writing provides no hint of the nuances apparent in the speaker's voice, and thus the written word, Plato claimed, is more likely to deceive the reader than the spoken word is liable to deceive the listener. These are some of the reasons why Plato (1997) has Socrates say in *Phaedrus*:

> Those who think they can leave written instructions for an art, as well as those who accept them, thinking that writing can yield results that are clear or certain, must be quite naïve and truly ignorant … otherwise, how could they possibly think that words that have been written down can do more than remind those who already know what the writing is about? (275d)

And from the same dialogue:

> [Writing] will introduce forgetfulness in the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your pupils with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so. (274a)

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So, Socrates' philosophy focused on an appreciation of the immediacy of human contact that transpires through speech, and he was committed to the importance of communal expression in a dialogical encounter as opposed to the solitary experience of the printed word. While this position may seem unfashionable now, different forms of it can be found today, such as the argument that digital devices encourage us to shut out people in our immediate vicinity and focus on our screens, or the notion that social media makes us less social.[9] These are both versions of the same argument made by Plato: modern technologies negatively affect the richness of human communication. It is true that Socrates underestimated the value of print, but the questions he raised about mediated human communication are still with us today.

Aristotle did not share Plato's disdain for writing. Indeed, his own ideas were produced over a long course of constant revision in the written form, and thus writing played an important part in how he both formulated and reformulated his ideas.[10] This suggests that some of the thoroughness of Aristotle's books may be a consequence of what the French writer Roland Barthes (1975) calls the "writerly" quality of a text. A writerly text is one that is meant to be read as the author intended—a summary of the ten steps you need to follow to fix a problem with a computer, for example, or a genre novel that does not encourage a wide range of interpretations. Writerly texts do not ask that readers approach them with the goal of making sense of hidden meanings, appreciating subtle shades of nuance, or diving into their story-like aspects. These latter qualities are associated with what Barthes calls a "readerly" text. Readerly texts are open-ended and offer a different kind of pleasure. Whereas writerly texts tend to be efficient in giving us a clearly reasoned description, a readerly text is more fluid, less determinate, and usually presented with greater opportunities for interpretive freedom.[11]

Aristotle is very clear about what he wants you to take away from his texts, and in that respect, we can describe his work as writerly rather than readerly. By contrast, Plato can be a bit opaquer and more invitational. In fact, one reason why the Socratic dialogues are engaging is because they are meant to be read aloud. They are a legacy of the oral tradition and thus their style—though written down by Plato—still retains some of the features of oral culture as outlined by Walter Ong (1982).[12] Aristotle's work has little of the oral tradition about it. It is almost never presented as a narrative and, therefore, lacks most traces of the verbal culture that enlivened Plato's writings. Aristotle's work evinces the qualities of a fully literate world in that it is organized much more like a college textbook. In place of the more readerly qualities of Plato's texts, Aristotle's work includes the systematic organization of the central topic; categorical thinking in which things are placed in discrete containers; the subordination of ideas to main themes to help the reader avoid confusion; and a detailed analysis rather than expository narrative.

These qualities help explain why it is frequently noted that Aristotle writes like a modern-day professor—though it might be more correct to say that modern-day professors write like Aristotle. Aristotle usually starts by defining his subject and indicating the question he wants to answer. Then he considers earlier answers, examines problems with those answers, and points out the different objections one might raise against them. He places the topics he wants to examine in categories and then subdivides these

categories into smaller subcategories. He frequently draws distinctions to help clear up any possible confusion and states which problems remain unresolved before finally recapping. There is an orderly progression of ideas at the very heart of Aristotle's work that is not found in Plato's *Dialogues*.

The differences between the respective philosophical styles of Plato and Aristotle explain why Aristotle's work on rhetoric is more systematic than moral, a point we will pursue shortly. Aristotle was inordinately fond of systematic presentations—a hallmark of the literate tradition—and so his works, including *Rhetorica*, are often filled with divisions, subdivisions, and even sub-subdivisions.

If this is Aristotle's style as a philosopher, it would make sense to turn directly to his book on rhetoric: *Rhetorica*. I want to take a brief detour, however, and look at Aristotle's work on logic, which will offer perspective on his rhetorical theories. After all, both logic and rhetoric are forms of argument, and the way in which Aristotle ultimately presents his ideas on persuasion in *Rhetorica* are nicely reflected in some of the ideas he worked through in thinking about problems in logic.

Aristotle's logic

Aristotle invented logic, and while that is a remarkable achievement, it is perhaps equally remarkable that centuries passed before any substantial additions to Aristotle's work were realized. What also surprises people is that Aristotle did not write a single volume entitled *Logic*, so when contemporary scholars refer to his work on logic, they are actually referring to a collection of his texts commonly called the *Organon*, which includes *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*. Aristotle did not intentionally arrange these texts into a collection, this was done after his death by scholars who identified commonalities among them. Yet, while there are undeniably common themes in each of the texts, the *Organon* is a curiously diverse collection, and the idea that the six volumes articulate a single philosophical field has long been controversial. Indeed, some of Aristotle's contemporaries argued that logic should not even be considered a part of philosophy, a position that was adopted by the Stoic philosophers. Others believed that while logic on its own could not be called philosophy, it was a useful tool for doing philosophy and deserved consideration as a philosophical method. These are arguments we would rarely hear now, for it would be difficult to imagine today's professional philosophers denying logic its status as a branch of philosophy. Obtaining a contemporary undergraduate degree in philosophy requires the completion of many courses in logic.

If Aristotle did not regard the texts of the *Organon* as constituting an intentional, interrelated series of ideas, how much does the *Organon* differ from the organization of its member texts as arranged by Aristotle himself? Frankly, the differences are not terribly important, though there are a couple of divergences worth mentioning. Unsurprisingly, Aristotle saw *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* as two parts of a single work, but he included *Sophistical Refutations* as the conclusion to *Topics*, a union that might make less sense to modern readers. What is most interesting for our purposes, however, is that some scholars have argued that the *Organon* should also have included Aristotle's work on rhetoric, *Rhetorica*. Different reasons have been offered for this idea, the most

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important in my view being that Aristotelian logic comes into close alignment with his ideas about rhetoric in his concepts of the *syllogism* and the *enthymeme*. The enthymeme, in particular, is an important aspect of his analysis of rhetoric, and understanding what Aristotle meant by the enthymeme ultimately relies on knowing something of his theory of syllogisms. And understanding syllogistic reasoning takes us into the heart of his logic. So, our foray into Aristotelian logic ultimately turns on figuring out what he meant by syllogistic reasoning in order to gain an understanding of enthymematic arguments. Although this may sound complicated, it is actually rather easy to understand.

A quick look at the syllogism

Logic is variously described as a mode of inquiry, the analysis of reason, and the study of the ways in which people construct and present valid arguments. These are all versions of the same point concerning how people apply reason—a mode of inquiry—in their attempt to understand the world. It also involves the application of rules specifying how proper reasoning should be conducted and what makes reason itself the appropriate form of inquiry everyone should follow. I am going to pass over Aristotle's conception of reason and focus on the simple fact that Aristotle figured out many centuries ago that validity in logic—that is, what makes an argument valid—can often be put down to *a matter of form*. What did he mean in saying that an argument is valid if it conforms to proper form? A simple way to begin to answer this question is to consider the following:

> All markindales are franjelums.
>
> All franjelums are poortivols.
>
> Therefore, all markindales are poortivols.

It is not an original teaching strategy to use gobbledygook words to explain what Aristotle is up to regarding the idea of proper form (and *proper form* crops up in the work of rhetoricians in later centuries, but we will get to that in due course). For present purposes, note that while only three words in my argument are recognizable English words (*all*, *are*, and *therefore*), you can nevertheless see that the argument, which is called a syllogism, is correct or valid. In other words, validity is produced by following the correct form: truth is not produced by a guarantee that the subjects of the syllogism correspond to something real in the outside world. There are no "markindales," "franjelums," or "poortivols" anywhere on earth, and yet the syllogism—an argument using two premises to reach a conclusion—is valid. Why? Because the conclusion is said to be contained in the preceding premises; the conclusion—given those two premises—is a logically derived consequence. Whether or not such things exist is irrelevant. The only important consideration is the form. You only have to exercise your reason to see the truth of this truth.

The idea that form can guarantee a certain conception of truth—specifically, validity—is a pretty monumental discovery since it makes validity independent of what you might usually think of when examining everyday arguments. In other words, Aristotle showed that logical truth is produced by form rather than by correspondence.[13] Thus, we can replace our "markindales" with other words and still produce valid syllogisms.

By using the principle of reduction borrowed from the Presocratics, we can insert universal placeholders in our argument and say the following:

> All A are B.
>
> All B are C.
>
> *Therefore*, all A are C.

This is probably more familiar to you, and quite possibly more obvious. But you should also keep in mind that neither an A, a B, nor a C corresponds to anything in the real world any more than do my "markindales" and "poortivols." The argument is valid because of its form. Moreover, you can also probably see that it does not matter what you replace A, B, and C with, for the result will always be a valid syllogism—so long as you retain this form (or another valid form). Moreover, it is also helpful that you can replace the variables with other things because then you can work out problems in the real world—that is, you can reason per Aristotelian logic to determine the correctness of your argument in everyday language. And people do this all the time. Take this example:

> All politicians are crooks.
>
> Bill is a politician.
>
> Therefore, Bill is a crook.

It might not be true that Bill is a crook but it is nevertheless a valid syllogism. And what is more important is that some people will mistake validity for truth.

This form of the syllogism, in which a quality is predicated of something, is at the root of Aristotle's logic and is called *predicate logic*. This just means—thinking back to English grammar—that one thing is said to be a quality (or predicate) of something else. If I say that my desk is cluttered, then I am asserting that a particular quality (a state of being cluttered) can be ascribed to, or predicated of, my desk. If I say that you are tall, then I am claiming that one of your qualities, something that can be predicated of you, is tallness. If I say that all people are mortal, then I am asserting that mortality can be predicated of every single person. When Aristotle says that all As are B, he is asserting that the quality of B-ness can be attributed to, or predicated of, A.

Of course, other kinds of syllogisms are possible using slightly different kinds of logic. One of these is *inferential logic*, which works with conditionals; that is, premises that have an if-then structure. This just means that if certain conditions are met, then certain conditions will follow—and note that this explanation is itself an example of conditional reasoning. Let us consider an example:

> If you leave the top down on your convertible while it is raining, it will result in the interior of your car getting wet.
>
> You have left the top down and it is raining.
>
> Therefore, your car's interior will get wet.

This argument is correct, because it follows the appropriate structure:

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If A, then B.

A.

Therefore, B.

Thus, if we convert the letters A and B back into the above premises we get:

A: If you leave the top down in the rain,

B: then the interior gets wet.

A: You left the top down in the rain,

B: therefore, the interior is wet.

These kinds of formulations are common and used often in both formal and informal settings. It is important, however, to bear in mind that not every syllogism—or every argument that looks like a syllogism—is proper in the sense that it conforms to the form outlined in Aristotle. Consider the following form:

If A, then B.

B.

Therefore, A.

Translated into English using the propositions suggested above, we would have the following:

If it rains when the top is down, the interior of the car will get wet.

The interior of the car is wet.

Therefore, it must have rained.

But this is not valid. Why? The fact that the interior of your car is wet does not mean that you left the top down in the rain; there are other reasons that might explain why your car's interior got damp. Perhaps you forgot about the unopened bottle of water left on the dashboard and it fell over. Logic must be precise in its expression—the form must be correct—for us to be able to draw conclusions that are invariably correct. Aristotle says that although the above syllogism looks correct, it is not valid. In short, it is possible to be fooled into thinking an argument is valid because some syllogistic forms appear to be valid when, in fact, they are not.

Indeed, there are many such examples of incorrect form or faulty reasoning. In *Sophistical Refutations*, one of the texts collected in the *Organon*, Aristotle offers a range of such fallacious arguments, explaining that it is important to be able to distinguish between a true refutation of an argument and a refutation that only appears to be true.[14] Aristotle identifies thirteen fallacies in *Sophistical Refutations* and argues that it is important to know about these fallacies to avoid being deceived in an argument. His list of thirteen informal fallacies has been expanded in the ensuing centuries as logicians added a few that escaped Aristotle's notice. Nonetheless, Aristotle noted the major fallacious arguments in his work, including practices such as *affirming the consequent* and *equivocation*. An example of affirming the consequent is, "If you are doing drugs, you will often be low on cash a lot. You are low on cash a lot, so you must be doing drugs." Equivocation is summed up in this example, "The news media should

present all those facts that are in the public interest. The public is certainly interested in the lives of celebrities and movie stars; therefore, the news media should present all the facts about celebrities and movie stars." It is important to note that Aristotle combines his interest in logic, which is dialectic in his sense of the term, with an interest in rhetoric, which focuses on a different kind of argumentation based on persuasion.

In modern times, most advances in logic have had to do with clarifying mathematical proofs. There is now, in other words, a close correspondence between mathematics and logic. But that was not Aristotle's concern. He was interested not so much in mathematics—about which he knew and wrote a good deal—but in whether the syllogistic approach he developed might fit the sorts of arguments used by Socrates. Consider that in a conventional Socratic dialogue the main characters talk about whether a certain class of things did or did not have a certain property. For instance, Socrates responds to Gorgias' claim that rhetoric is concerned with speeches. Socrates lists several different kinds of speeches and then asks if they all are instances of what Gorgias means by rhetoric. Gorgias admits that not all forms of speech—medical speech, for instance—fall under the rubric of rhetoric. Hence, he is forced to concede that rhetoric is not a property of all forms of speech—that is, *rhetoric cannot be predicated of all forms of speech*. Socrates then proceeds to draw out logical consequences, consider apparent exceptions, and formulate new principles. Aristotle's reading of Plato was an attempt to see whether the dialogues had a rigorous logical form.

Note also that what Aristotle is suggesting is that persuasion and logic are related, though possibly distant cousins. That is, he wants to take persuasion—complete with its concerns with sympathies, emotions, and affairs of the heart—and consider it as a form of argumentation that allows us to reduce an argument to its essential parts and then determine if it is valid. Why would he do this? Well, people do this frequently when they pick apart an opponent's argument to see where there is a flaw in the reasoning. Sometimes people overtly proclaim that they will not be persuaded by an illogical or irrational argument. There is an interesting corollary to such claims, however, namely the supposition that if an argument *is* valid, or if it *is* logical, then we will be persuaded by it. In other words, if we are not readily persuaded by invalid arguments, and might say, "Your argument just does not make sense to me," then we should be persuaded by valid arguments, saying something along the lines of, "That is a valid point, so you have persuaded me." But we need to ask whether we are inevitably persuaded by valid arguments. Do people always agree that they have been persuaded because someone has produced a logically valid syllogism leading to an irrefutable conclusion? I tend to doubt this is the way things happen in the actual world, much to the consternation of people trained in logic. People often say something such as, "I understand your argument and I cannot really dispute your main point but I still think you are wrong." This would be a nonsensical response if we were thoroughly committed to predicate logic, for an argument is valid if it is valid, and it cannot be rejected based on sentiment, emotion, prior experience, or personal taste. People do not, however, reason in the everyday world according to the strict principles set out by predicate logic.

Because people do not always reason logically, we can infer that Aristotle might be understood as pointing to the danger of mixing up two things: *conviction* and *persua-*

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sion. I am going to return to the so-called conviction-persuasion dichotomy in a later lecture. For the moment, however, it is important to note that Aristotle was one of the first to understand, however basic his conception, that while logic and persuasion are somewhat related, they are not necessarily the same thing. Rhetoric cannot be reduced in every instance to flattery or fine language, just as it cannot be reduced entirely to logical syllogisms. But this does not mean that Aristotle rejected logic or that he disavowed rhetoric. Rather, he said that there are different ways of understanding things, and that these different modes of understanding involve different social, cultural, and epistemic conditions and requirements. Recall the earlier point that Aristotle accepted the central principles of Plato's theory of the divided line of knowledge, though his acceptance came with qualifications. He agreed with Plato that people can be persuaded by things that might not be logical. However, if something *is* logical then, technically, *people are not persuaded but convinced*. These are different forms of argument and lead to different cognitive states in the person the argument is directed to. I can *convince* you of a mathematical proof by demonstrating to you that it is universally true. It would be ridiculous to say, however, that I can *persuade* you of the truth of a mathematical proof by pleading and playing on your sympathies. By contrast, I might *persuade* you of a moral argument (e.g., torture is morally inappropriate in all circumstances), but I cannot *convince* you of that argument because, strictly speaking, it is not true in the way that a mathematical proof is true.

This discussion of logic and the syllogistic process Aristotle developed provides us with an entry point into his work on rhetoric. An important consideration is the idea that persuasion is a form of change—a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of opinion—and this idea of change greatly intrigued Aristotle. His work in biology predisposed him to appreciate the way that living things change, and his work in logic was founded on an understanding of the permanence of rational deduction. This may remind you of Plato, who tried to resolve the debate between Heraclitus and Parmenides—and the debate among Presocratics—concerning the relationship between permanence and change. Aristotle was also interested in the permanence of things such as logic and the impermanence or transitory nature of other things, such as bodies. Aristotle did not subscribe to Plato's metaphysical dualism, but traces of this argument between permanence and change are found in several places in *Rhetorica*.

Aristotle's *Rhetorica*

It is generally believed that Aristotle began writing *Rhetorica* during the time he was serving as tutor to Alexander the Great. Some historians suggest that he began to study rhetoric because he saw it would be a good addition to the curriculum at the Lyceum; that is, he could earn money with a course on rhetoric. In other accounts, it is said that he began to teach a course on rhetoric while he was still at Plato's academy. In either event, Aristotle regarded his work on rhetoric as an important addition to philosophy.

Aristotle was one of the first of the ancient writers to regard rhetoric as having no necessary moral commitment. In other words, he tended to ascribe neither a positive nor negative moral value to rhetoric, for despite the importance of rhetorical techniques in conducting oneself in the civic arena, Aristotle was aware that rhetoric could

also be used for illicit purposes by people such as sophists or con artists. Nonetheless, even as he tried to avoid taking a moral stand on the matter of persuasion, Aristotle remained ambiguous as to his feelings about rhetoric throughout his life, despite developing an important rapprochement between the critical views of Plato and the practical concerns of people such as Isocrates. As he was usually concerned with following the most pragmatic approach in all things, Aristotle's *Rhetorica* is an exemplary illustration of how best to tame the transcendent tendencies of Platonism without abandoning the essential quest to faithfully search for the truth.

Exemplary though *Rhetorica* might be in this particular regard, however, it is a challenging book for modern readers. One reason it can be hard to penetrate is the economical style in which it is composed. Aristotle presumed that his readers knew about the history of his subject, and so he did not always bother to explain some of the more arcane points his arguments relied on. Most contemporary editions are filled with explanatory notes and appendices offering background on the texts and people Aristotle references. In addition, because he wrote the text over a long period of time, there are inconsistencies. Aristotle wrote by hand on some form of papyrus, so it was difficult to go back to earlier places in the text and revise things written months or possibly years earlier. Finally, because *Rhetorica* is thought to be a collection of lecture notes and not a completed text, certain difficulties arise in trying to determine how the various pieces fit together.

Putting aside the obvious difficulties *Rhetorica* presents to contemporary readers, it is still possible to examine the text's essential components. It is a bit of a rambling work, so I will focus on a few of its main components. *Rhetorica* is famous for providing one of the most widely cited definitions in the history of rhetoric, so I will begin there.

According to Aristotle, "rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."[15] This definition is the most commonly cited remark on rhetoric that Aristotle offered, and yet it could be argued from a rhetorical point of view that this brief quotation is misleading for being incomplete. In other words, although it is the one passage from *Rhetorica* that gets mentioned in virtually every text on the history of rhetoric, it does not fully capture the main points Aristotle is aiming for. Here is a longer extract from Aristotle's (1984) *Rhetorica* that comes a few paragraphs earlier than that famous phrase.

> It is clear, then, that rhetoric is not bound up with a single definite class of subjects, but is as universal as dialectic; it is clear, also, that it is useful. It is clear, further, that its function is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow. In this it resembles all other arts. For example, it is not the function of medicine simply to make a man quite healthy, but to put him as far as may be on the road to health; it is possible to give excellent treatment even to those who can never enjoy sound health. Furthermore, it is plain that it is the function of one and the same art to discern the real and the apparent means of persuasion, just as it is the function of dialectic to discern the real and the apparent syllogism. (1355b, 5-15)

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This additional context greatly qualifies the more simplistic observation that Aristotle said rhetoric is nothing but the art of persuasion, a definition you find in countless books on the history of rhetorical theory. However, it is significant that Aristotle's thinking about rhetoric is not only more complex than that simple oft-quoted definition suggests but also more ambivalent. Aristotle does not say that persuasion is always successful, quite the opposite; just as it is possible to offer medical treatment to patients who will not survive, so it is possible to apply your talents at persuasion only to see them fail. Rhetoric is like medicine insofar as the latter seeks to promote health, not create it. So, too, rhetoric seeks to promote belief, not create it. Rhetoric is the application of various strategies to the task of persuading others of a particular idea or point of view, but whether or not we are successful depends on both our skill as a rhetor and the predispositions of the person we are trying to persuade. We will not always be successful because people have free will.

This is a position consistent with Aristotle's overall conception of art, for it is the skill that he regards as the art, not the product produced by it. So, too, with rhetoric, the art is the effort to discover the available means of persuasion that are suitable for the occasion. In fact, note that he says rather plainly that rhetoric's "function is not simply to succeed in persuading." Hence the effort to determine the best techniques you might devise to be persuasive will be useful—for Aristotle tells us in this passage that rhetoric is useful regardless of whether it is successful in every instance. This is also consistent with his focus on practical matters; his concern with things being mostly, if not invariably, true; and his desire to separate himself from the idealistic approach taken by Plato. Even his use of a medical analogy might have been chosen deliberately to counter Plato's medical analogy in disputing the value of rhetoric as taught by Gorgias.

Now, the passage cited above contains what I have described as the most famous way Aristotle defines rhetoric, but that definition is not found at the beginning of *Rhetorica* (it is from part two of book one). Let us backtrack to the very beginning of *Rhetorica* and note how Aristotle commences his discussion. Aristotle (1984) writes:

> Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic. Both alike are concerned with such things as come, more or less, within the general ken of all men and belong to no definite science. Accordingly all men make use, more or less, of both; for to a certain extent all men attempt to discuss statements and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others. Ordinary people do this either at random or through practice and from acquired habit. Both ways being possible, the subject can plainly be handled systematically, for it is possible to inquire the reason why some speakers succeed through practice and others spontaneously; and every one will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of an art. (1354a)

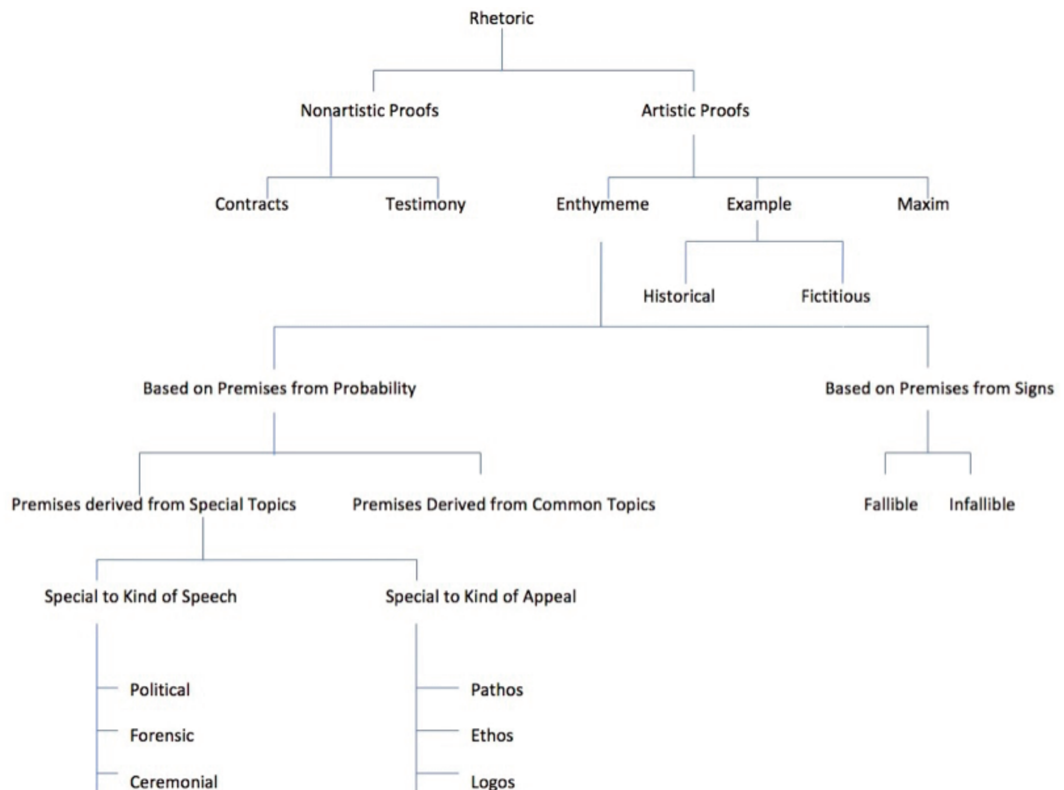
There are several interesting things going on in this passage worth highlighting. The first is that Aristotle wants to put rhetoric on a plane equal to dialectic. If we think of rhetoric broadly as public discourse for the purposes of persuasion and dialectic as arguments conducted according to the principles of logic, Aristotle is telling us that both persuasive discourse and logical reasoning can work together productively in swaying people to accept an argument. He is, therefore, retaining Plato's celebration of dialectic, even as he is elevating rhetoric to an equal plane. In that respect, his opening

sentence can also be something of a repudiation of Plato's argument in the *Gorgias* where Socrates proudly boasts that the power of dialectic clearly trumps the power of rhetoric as a way of repudiating his opponent's argument. So, while Aristotle is setting out his understanding of rhetoric, he is also making sure that we know that his account will differ in at least one important respect from Plato's: rhetoric will occupy a station equal to the status of dialectic.

Second, this opening section demonstrates that Aristotle is not concerned with discovering a form of knowledge that is specific to rhetoric, something that is nearly an obsession for Socrates as he questions Gorgias about what body of knowledge rhetoric can lay claim to. Aristotle views rhetoric as a tool; he adopts a more utilitarian position than Plato and argues that since all people "seek to discuss statements and to maintain them"—the task of dialectic—and "to defend themselves and to attack others"—the task of rhetoric—the two things must work in a complementary fashion. It is clear, then, that Aristotle wants to show how dialectic and rhetoric can work together, and this is why he says in the opening sentence that rhetoric is the *counterpart* of dialectic.

It is also noteworthy that Aristotle uses a phrase in his opening passage that translates to "more or less," a far less definitive expression than would have found its way into Plato's work. Aristotle is interested in the way that people will draw equally from dialectic—logic—and rhetoric—persuasion—to make their case. And because there is a comingling of these two modes of expression, Aristotle defends the idea that rhetoric is an art. He also explains that it will be possible to arrange rhetoric according to its various components, for he says that the subject can "be handled systematically."

Figure 1: Diagram of Aristotle's *Rhetorica*



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Aristotle's claim that rhetoric as a subject can "be handled systematically" encourages me to take up the challenge of making the whole of *Rhetorica* systematic by attempting to sketch out a broad conception of the book's essential argument. To that end, I want to provide a systematic visual of *Rhetorica*. I will not follow up on everything Aristotle describes, of course, for he spends a good deal of time in *Rhetorica* engaging in other tasks, such as disputing the need for rhetorical handbooks, the tendency of teachers of rhetoric to focus mainly on courtroom settings, the problem of using (or not using) emotional appeals when seeking to be persuasive, and so on. These are interesting to people concerned with detailed discussions of the history of rhetoric, but I am going to offer a visualization of Aristotle's analysis of rhetoric in the form of a table that will guide the rest of this lecture.

Let us start at the top. When someone employs rhetoric, that is, when someone seeks to be persuasive, the first thing is to consider what sort of proof should be used. From the point of view of a rhetorician studying their discourse, this means we want to know if their appeal is based on strictly factual information or whether it is based on an argument that might use emotion or other non-factual elements. In Aristotle's terms, we are seeking to understand whether the rhetor is using *artistic* or *non-artistic* proofs.

Non-artistic proofs, which are plain and unadorned, are based on factual events or artefacts. A signed contract, for example, can be a way of proving your case and thereby winning an argument. You can prove your case by persuading the judge of the authenticity of the signed agreement. Similarly, someone can provide testimony as to the facts of the case and thus prove that one side or the other is telling the truth because the testimony of the witness coincides most closely with one of them. These are both illustrations of non-artistic proofs because while they are said to be useful in proving a case, neither requires artistry in the form of innovation or creativity.[16]

Artistic proofs, on the other hand, require a measure of creativity and invention, and Aristotle identifies three sorts of artistic proofs: enthymemes, examples, and maxims, which I will explain in the reverse order in which they appear on the diagram. A maxim is a saying or proverb, a form of persuasive appeal quite different from the signature along the bottom of a contract. Aristotle considers a maxim to be artistic because it requires a bit of inventiveness to pick the appropriate maxim for a given occasion. For instance, you might wish to persuade someone to be on time for an early morning class by telling them that "the early bird gets the worm." This maxim would be persuasive in this particular context because your classmate probably realizes that being on time for class is personally beneficial. In a different context, however, you might counsel them to "look before you leap," a proverb that conveys the opposite advice and would be inappropriate as guidance for punctuality. It might, however, be good advice if your friend was, in your view, rushing into something to which more thought should be given. With a maxim, then, you would be trying to persuade with a creative or artistic form of discourse. What makes them work? It is hard to say for certain, but maxims or proverbs are like short-hand versions of longer and more complex arguments, and their brevity is one of their most appealing features. And although they are based on conventional or traditional wisdom, the artistry is in picking the right proverb for the right moment. There is an art, in other words, in the deployment of proverbs.[17]

Not everyone is persuaded by maxims or proverbs, however, and many people find them unconvincing and even trite. So, your artistic proof might be drawn from a selection of examples to make your case. Although it might seem that examples are too simple to require a definition, Aristotle, in his wish to be orderly and systematic, indicates that we need to keep in mind that two sorts of examples are to be distinguished from one another: real examples that might come from your own experiences or research, which he calls *historical*, and hypothetical examples that comprise a made-up story to illustrate something, which he calls *fictitious*. Historical or real examples are plain. You might tell someone that based on your experience, you would suggest choosing one course of action over another. Or you might enumerate the many things you have seen regarding the matter being discussed as a way of persuading your conversational partner. "When I was your age," "In my experience," and "In cases like this, experts usually advise" are all examples of historical examples that can be used for persuasive purposes.

Fictitious or hypothetical examples can also be persuasive. Someone trying to be persuasive might begin as follows: "Imagine a situation where you find yourself without enough money to pay your rent. …" This example, though fabricated and imaginary, can still be compelling if the narrative is powerful. Indeed, examples can be very effective, but keep in mind that they are non-syllogistic. Why? Because examples are inductive not deductive. Say, for instance, you are discussing whether mandatory sentencing in criminal cases is a good or bad idea. You decide it is a bad idea and now need to persuade your partner of this position. But as your country does not yet have mandatory sentencing, you need to rely on examples drawn from other countries and other jurisdictions to prove your argument. You might cite cases of other jurisdictions where mandatory sentencing has not worked, or you might present the conclusions from studies of mandatory sentencing by criminologists that support your view, and so on. You cannot prove your point by saying:

> All A are B.
>
> B.
>
> *Therefore*, A.

This would be a deductive argument, and such logic is unavailable to you in the present case. Therefore, you will try to use the sheer weight of the examples you can accumulate to show that your position is correct. What I mean is that you will add example to example to example, all the while being aware that no matter how many examples you provide, they are still examples and your audience might remain unpersuaded. Because they are not deductive, examples are not the same as logical proof.

This brings us to what is often seen as Aristotle's most important contribution to the study of rhetoric: the kind of artistic proof he calls the *enthymeme*. The enthymeme is a subject of considerable debate among rhetoricians even today. For his part, Aristotle (1984) was cryptic to the point of frustration, famously describing the enthymeme in *Rhetorica* as "a sort of deduction [syllogism]" (1355a). This loose definition has made unanimous agreement about the enthymeme impossible, though there are several things we can say about enthymemes that most scholars generally agree upon. Let me offer what I regard as the conventional understanding of what constitutes an enthymeme.

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Someone might try to persuade you about X by saying something like this: "Gary is a professor; therefore, he will know about X." This is not a terribly unusual sort of thing to say, but you should note that while there is some logic here, it is far from ironclad. Indeed, it is what we call *weak* logic. This just means that while the argument is not entirely unreasonable, it does not rise to the level of a deductively valid syllogism. But having mentioned the idea of the syllogism, and taking note of Aristotle's definition of the enthymeme as a "sort of syllogism," how might we represent the above argument were we to attempt to translate it into syllogistic form? It would look something like this:

> (All/many professors know about X.)
>
> Gary is a professor.
>
> Therefore, Gary will know about X.

You can see right away that the argument as initially stated is missing a first premise (added here in parentheses). However, I might ask if the premise really needs to be included, or whether you assumed it because it was somehow implied in the second premise and the conclusion. To put that differently, is an enthymeme only a "sort of a syllogism" because it is missing a premise? After all, if the premise that is not actually stated (or written) is implied in the argument—and supplied by the hearer or reader in their own mind—then saying that the syllogism is missing is not entirely correct. It is missing in a sense, but it is really there. If I say, "You should hear how loudly Fluffy meows when she's hungry," you probably know Fluffy is a cat without having to be informed of that fact. We take linguistic shortcuts all the time, so maybe the enthymeme is not so special after all.

In fact, this is the definition most modern scholars accept: an enthymeme is a syllogism with one of its premises missing or left out. Why would you construct an incomplete argument? Why would you leave a premise out? The general supposition is that people do this because the premise's content is so obvious that it can be left out without damaging the argument. In addition, audiences are often thought to supply the missing premise in their minds. If I tell you, "That dog is sure large, he must be part husky," I am drawing a conclusion based on a single premise, namely, the dog is large. But the missing premise—huskies are a large breed of dog—is so obvious that it does not necessarily need stating. In fact, a person unfamiliar with huskies will possibly be able to infer that huskies are large animals by correctly assuming the missing premise. We are sufficiently accustomed to thinking and reasoning in a syllogistic manner that filling in absent premises to complete an argument is a customary practice.

Looking at Figure 1, you can see that Aristotle suggests that enthymemes can be divided into two classes: those we derive from premises based on probability and those based on premises derived from signs. I will start with the latter. Although Aristotle is not using the term *signs* to reference semiotics, it certainly captures something of what he means. More specifically, Aristotle uses *signs* in a way that suggests what contemporary semioticians would call *indexical signs*, those signs that bear a causal or existential relationship to the thing they represent. In the case of an enthymematic argument relying on a sign, then, one might try to persuade by drawing a causal or existential link. The classic example from Aristotelian theory would be to say something like this:

"Because she has stolen things in the past, she will likely steal again in the future." In other words, because the past can index the future—that is, the past is a sign of what might come—a rhetor might try to persuade by using this argument. It is clearly an enthymeme because it lacks an important premise: anyone who has ever stolen once will probably steal again. It is also an example of a fallible sign because it is based on probability and not on determinate logic and, for that reason, it would certainly be liable to challenge. The corollary is that an enthymeme based on an infallible sign would be universally true. If I tell you, "Aristotle will die one day because he is human," this is obviously valid. The missing premise that all humans die does not need to be stated. Being human, in other words, is an index—a sign—of mortality.

This takes us to the final section of Figure 1, the situation where the enthymeme is based on premises derived from probability, which Aristotle subdivides into premises derived from *special* or *common* topics. The concept of topics, the plural in Greek is *topoi*, which occurs both in *Rhetorica* and in *Topics*, is a complex and contested notion in Aristotelian thought. What he mainly deals with in his theory of the topoi is the idea that we should situate ourselves in relation to our subject using ready-made topics that function as frames for our presentation. But why the term *topic*? Because in the Greek tradition, people would be imagined as occupying a particular place from which they would offer their point of view. The word *topography* derives from the Greek word *topoi*. In other words, the Greeks took the spatial metaphor almost literally, for to say that you have a point of view is to suggest that the point you have adopted is a literal place. Topics are heuristics of a sort from which people provide opinions based on what they can "see" from that vantage point. Sometimes in English people say that they are "coming at a problem" from a particular "place" or "standpoint." We use the same metaphor, though we do not ordinarily use the word *topic* in quite the same way as Aristotle.

In the case of so-called common topics, Aristotle says that we take up positions, or use topoi, to be persuasive. Imagine, for example, that you and your friends want to decide on a venue for a night out. What sorts of things should be considered? Aristotle says that you will search about for topics of a common variety—that is, you will try to be persuasive by imagining how different people in your party might see the situation from their particular points of view. These are common topics because they can be used virtually anywhere and on nearly any occasion. Moreover, they can be adapted for an individual occasion without distorting their fundamental meaning. So, to consider your options—and perhaps to persuade your friends that your preferred venue for a night out is the best—you might consider the following: places that are more or less expensive, noisy, and convenient/inconvenient; places that have good reputations versus places with bad reputations; places that serve local cuisine, vegetarian options, or vegan food; and places that play jazz, or rock, or alternative music.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. I only want to point out that these are the kinds of things Aristotle identified as topics (points of view) that are used commonly in situations where someone is trying to persuade others. If you happen to have a preferred option, you might aim to sway everyone by suggesting that your choice is less expensive, more convenient, known to serve local food, and famous for its jazz. Maybe this will work; maybe it will not. But remember, Aristotle is less concerned with the result

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than he is with the process by which rhetorical strategies are selected and pursued. Common topics, then, are used across a range of situations where deliberation might be said to take place unconsciously.

At other times, however, we need to be creative in our choice of material and presentation, and relying on ready-made topics, while very helpful to some extent, is only part of the rhetorical process. The special topics (*idio topoi*) are reserved for particular sorts of argumentative situations that cannot easily be generalized to other everyday events. The most famous of the situations for which special topics are useful, as identified by Aristotle, were occasions for forensic, political, and epideictic speeches. Let us look at these in turn.

Forensic oratory—the court setting—is a form of oratory that deals only with individual matters. In other words, lawyers argue as persuasively as possible regarding the merits of a single issue: the guilt or innocence of an accused. Aristotle says a good deal about forensic rhetoric (or forensic discourse), but all we need to be attentive to at present is that forensic discourse is a kind of speech that requires the mobilization of special topics if one is to be an effective defender or prosecutor. A lawyer might try to persuade the jury that her client was not present during the commission of the crime. Should information emerge during the trial that her client was indeed present, the lawyer will then change directions and say that while her client was present, he did not participate. If further evidence contradicts this appeal, she might argue that though her client was present and did seem to participate, his behaviour can be explained by his being under duress. Lawyers have ready-made or special topoi to argue as persuasively as possible.

If forensic discourse is about individual cases, political discourse is about issues relevant to the whole society. This is because political oratory (sometimes called *deliberative* oratory) is focused on more substantial matters that relate to society rather than the individual fate of a single defendant. Hence, a lawyer in a courtroom deals mainly with what Aristotle calls "non-essentials" because the lawyer is focusing on swaying the judge's opinion. In political oratory, by contrast, there is far less opportunity for dealing with non-essentials because politics deals with wider issues than forensic oratory.

Finally, people also present speeches on special occasions such as weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, funerals, and celebrations of important events, such as commemorations. This is called *epideictic* oratory, which means "fit for display" in Greek. Epideictic discourse is commonly seen on occasions when someone is to be praised; in the ancient world, however, blame also called for public oration, and thus epideictic speech-making could also be about condemnation. Today, we tend to regard ceremonial rhetoric as far more likely to be celebratory than condemnatory, and most examples in contemporary texts will assume that public oration of the ceremonial variety is festive, congratulatory, or eulogistic. Thus, people praise when raising a toast to the bride; they lament the loss of a friend or a family member in a eulogy; or they call everyone to cheer for the anniversary couple.

Aristotle also says that it is typical of the three forms of rhetoric to have a particular orientation toward time, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Forms of rhetoric and temporality

Forensic rhetoric	Typical of law courts	Focuses on the past
Deliberative rhetoric	Typical of governing bodies	Focuses on the future
Epideictic rhetoric	Typical of ceremonial speeches	Focuses on the present

These three forms of discourse are oriented in time and space. They involve topoi because they involve the act of assuming a point of view.

Ethos, pathos, and logos

If the enthymeme is one of Aristotle's most important contributions to the study of rhetoric, his most well-known is likely the distinction he drew between *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, referring to the speaker, the audience, and the discourse.

Ethos refers to the credibility, honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, and so on of the speaker. A speaker who has persuasive appeal possesses some quality or visible sign that they are someone we should listen to. Thus, trustworthiness might be established because the speaker is wearing a white medical jacket and we are speaking in a hospital. In this case, the medical garment conveys authority and knowledge, both of which lend the speaker more prestige and thus makes their pronouncements more persuasive. Or the speaker might advance their ethos by speaking about their background, experience, and previous education to establish their credentials for the task at hand. Certain words such as *expert*, *up-to-date*, *elder*, *entrepreneur*, *professor*, *minister*, and *spouse* can all be used in the right context to support the idea that the rhetor has a claim to being persuasive and, therefore, to being believed. We usually imagine that ethos will be expressed by words directly spoken by the rhetor, but ethos can also be established by the context, the setting, or visible signs of expertise. To borrow from Kenneth Burke, when you settle into your dentist's chair, the dentist's ethos—credibility and expertise—is communicated to you by the array of technological contrivances and specialized equipment on display. Ethos can also be conveyed by titles, certificates, and qualifications. For instance, the conservative Canadian politician Kellie Leitch once boasted of the number of letters that follow her name as proof of her qualifications for the party's leadership.[18] Ethos can even be a result of an explicit proclamation of credibility. For instance, you may have found yourself telling someone in the midst of an effort at persuasion that "I know what I'm talking about." Such an assertion will work on some occasions, but it could also fall flat on others. Indeed, in whatever fashion someone proclaims their ethos, their proclamation must be accepted by the audience, for it is the audience that will conclude that the rhetor has the requisite authority, skill, experience, and standing to be taken seriously.

Pathos refers to the way that the rhetor uses emotional appeals to move an audience, and thus is said to be the most psychological of the various accounts Aristotle provides in his study of rhetoric. Indeed, the use of emotional language was probably the thing that most concerned Aristotle in that he was obviously uncertain of his position regard-

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ing what we know as a *pathetic appeal*. At some points in *Rhetorica*, he argues strongly against using emotional arguments, while at other points he recognizes that a good speaker will know how to move the audience with just the right degree of emotion at just the right moment. At one point, for instance, he says that using an emotional appeal in the courts is too risky, as it will warp the judge's ability to adjudicate fairly. Therefore, in a forensic situation, you should only present facts, not emotions. He later acknowledges, however, that it can be useful to offer emotional arguments, especially at the end of an oration. This is the approach of the famous Roman rhetorician and politician Cicero, who thought it was always good to use emotional arguments as long as you confined them to the conclusion of your speech.

Pathos is also regarded as a form of identification. That is, with the emotional appeal, you are usually trying to get your audience to agree with your own sympathies, and thus pathetic appeals are sometimes said to be about creating a sense of commonality between the rhetor and the audience. When Antony speaks to the crowd in William Shakespeare's (1966) *Julius Caesar*, he seeks to rile the crowd to oppose Brutus and the other conspirators through an emotional argument by describing the individual knife wounds on Caesar's body and relating these wounds indexically to the assassins. He wants his audience to identify with his own outrage:

> Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through;
> See what a rent the envious Casca made;
> Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabb'd,
> And as he pluck'd his cursed steel away,
> Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it,
> As rushing out of doors to be resolv'd
> If Brutus so unkindly knock'd or no;
> For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.
> Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar lov'd him!
> This was the most unkindest cut of all. (3.2.179-188, p. 835)

An emotional appeal always risks rejection if it is regarded as overly sentimental, maudlin, or "cheap." Thus, the notion of pathos is one of the trickier aspects of rhetoric to master if one intends to be appropriately balanced between reason and sentiment.

The idea of logos is much plainer than ethos and pathos, though certainly no less important to Aristotle. Logos refers to the rational organization of an argument, its presentation in a reasoned, logical form. There is a sense in *Rhetorica* that Aristotle hoped that people would conduct all their discursive activity via reason only, but as he recognized that people are emotional beings—and that syllogistic logic is too demanding in every circumstance—he was aware of the value of credibility, or ethos, and emotion, or pathos, in persuasive speaking. Nonetheless, he prized logic highly and believed that logos, the logical appeal of an argument, also needed to be accounted for in a complete reckoning of rhetoric. Logos is reason personified; that is, logos can be seen as the name of the practice of the embodied human intellect presenting facts and arguments deduced from the empirical state of the world. In addition to reason, we can include emotion in our oration. We must, however, guard against strictly emotional appeals, as these will eventually fall apart if not grounded in an appreciation for the facts of the case.

Many of the handbooks on rhetoric that have been passed down from antiquity focus on the problem of logos insofar as they decry the practice of treating pathos as the ultimate measure of a persuasive appeal. They argue instead that logos, the logical matter of things, should be prominent. Aristotle's *Rhetorica*, as mentioned, is ambivalent about pathos, and to a lesser extent, it shows Aristotle's ambivalence on the matter of logos. For Aristotle, logic was the preeminent method of reasoning, and yet he was aware of our collective inability to operate exclusively as rational beings. Our emotions run away with us at times, and we need to keep our heads about us by appealing to logos whenever possible. Recall Aristotle's (1984) opening line from *Rhetorica*: "Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic" (1354a). Rhetoric, in this sense, is pathos whereas dialectic might be understood as logos, and while they are thus presented as equally important parts of the persuasive argument, there is no doubt that if Aristotle could have had his way, logos would have assumed the commanding position. This is a subject we will return to when discussing the work of the twentieth-century philosopher and rhetorician Stephen Toulmin in Lecture 9. For the present, we can say that we constitute ourselves as rhetorical speakers to the extent that we master the art of persuasion by learning intuitively how to balance the appeals of both sentiment and reason.

Conclusion

What is the point of Aristotle' *Rhetorica*? Plato, at least, offers a curious if antiquated theory about Ideal Forms and a critique, however possibly misguided, of the relation of rhetoric to epistemology or knowledge. In other words, Plato provides a theoretical argument we can sink our teeth into. With Aristotle, however, we have a long list of concepts that are divided and then subdivided into smaller and more specific concepts. Is there value in such a catalogue of rhetorical terms and concepts?

The simple answer is yes. Modern rhetoricians doing contemporary rhetorical analysis have found considerable value in the concepts Aristotle identified. In fact, quite a bit of the rhetorical analysis done today is referred to as *neo-Aristotelian* to show the debt that modern writers owe to Aristotle. Plato's criticisms of Gorgias are alive and well, but Aristotle's detailed descriptions—and particularly the idea of the enthymeme and his identification of ethos, pathos, and logos—have been used and reused by rhetoricians for centuries.

Consider the enthymeme. In contemporary society, we encounter enthymemes regularly, and just knowing that people present their positions in this fashion makes it possible to challenge arguments that may ultimately be based on faulty logic. That itself is a valuable contribution to public discourse and an important tool for critique in the analysis of political or forensic discourse. Politicians frequently rely on the "truncated syllogism"—the enthymeme—to wriggle out of difficult situations, advance a position, or criticize an opponent. For instance, a politician might say something like this:

> My opponent has deceived you in the past when he said the budget he presented was balanced when, it turns out, it was anything but. Knowing as we do, then, that his track record with the truth is questionable, how can we trust him now when he suggests that my office has been compromised by alleged links to criminal elements? His own failings clearly undermine his credibility in attacking me; therefore, I say that we should pay no mind to his allegations.

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This is a bit fanciful, perhaps, but the key point is plain. By arguing that someone who has been deceitful in the past will inevitably be deceitful in the future, my imaginary politician seeks to argue that any criticism that comes from such an individual will be tainted and untrustworthy—that a person who has been a liar in the past will be a liar in the future and, therefore, lacks ethos. Thus, the speech is both an attack on his opponent's claim to ethos as well as an example of an enthymematic argument. Such arguments are terribly common, but by Aristotle's logic, they are poorly constructed and ultimately invalid. Just because someone has allegedly been less than honest in the past does not mean that what they are saying in the present is untrue. Hence, knowing about the enthymeme has been valuable for current scholarly analysis as rhetoricians apply the concept in their analysis of modern speeches and other kinds of texts. Also, since most of us present enthymematic arguments rather than full-fledged syllogisms, it is good to know something about the appeal of this abbreviated form of the syllogism.

I mentioned ethos in this invented scenario. Here, too, the division Aristotle drew between the three concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos has been of use in modern scholarship, especially in communication studies. People who study and practice advertising, for instance, are deeply interested in ensuring that their spokesperson (the rhetor) has the appropriate ethos (credibility) to deliver the message they want to disseminate; that the appeal of the presentation has the right emotional tone for the target audience; and that the message adheres as much as is required to a logical form. Advertisers often write about ethos in the context, for instance, of celebrity endorsements, for the spokesperson must have a sufficiently high level of authority and trustworthiness. They also write about pathos in the context of the audience, exploring how best to understand the attitudes of the audience they seek to reach with their campaign. Finally, advertisers are aware that some logical form is required if the message is to be taken seriously. Should the advertisement be rigorously syllogistic, or would it be better to present an enthymematic argument? How much, or how little, emotion should be employed? Interestingly, it may be the case that in marketing, pathos is more crucial than logos, whereas in health promotion, logos may be more important than pathos. In fashion advertising, logos is entirely irrelevant, while in food marketing, it often appears in the statistical information concerning nutrition and related health properties. Political advertising is especially interesting in that ethos, logos, and pathos can switch places rather rapidly. Donald Trump's presidential campaign was relatively logos-free, for example, because it contained rather little in the way of logical argumentation. Thus, he used a good deal of pathos in the form of appealing to a particular audience with heavily coded pathetic appeals. Other candidates in other jurisdictions might argue entirely from the point of view of a logical position. The important point is figuring out how to best ensure that the message is as persuasive as possible for its specific audience, and for that reason, it is Aristotle's *Rhetorica*, and not Plato's *Gorgias*, that has been of most practical use to modern rhetoricians.

Notes

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose name you might recognize as the author of the famous poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, famously wrote that everyone is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. For an interesting discussion of this claim, see A.J.D. Porteous (1934).

2. This line is the one most often cited to reflect on the relationship between Plato and Aristotle. It is really, however, a paraphrase of something Aristotle (1984) writes in *Nicomachean Ethics*, where it appears amid a discussion of those philosophers who introduced the idea of Forms—chiefly Plato—with Aristotle wondering if it is appropriate to follow the arguments simply because he numbers them (i.e., Plato) among his friends. Aristotle (1984) summarizes this matter with the following: "It will presumably be thought better, even one's duty, to do away with what is even close to one's heart, to preserve the truth, especially when one is a philosopher. For one must love both, but it is nevertheless a sacred duty to prefer the truth to one's friends" (1096a). So, although he does not actually use Plato's name in this passage, and although the words I have attributed to Aristotle have been somewhat altered, the sentiment is preserved in the phrase I have quoted above. Technically, however, it is not a direct quotation from Aristotle but a paraphrase of what he wrote in *Nicomachean Ethics*.
3. Aristotle is also thought to have begun writing *Rhetorica,* his major work on rhetoric, in this period.
4. From *peri*, around or about, and *patein*, walking. The Greek word *peripatetikos* means one who is given to walking about. Synonyms in modern English include *wandering* and *itinerant*.
5. As might be imagined, many famous scholars and philosophers passed through the Lyceum as both teachers and students. Despite its fame as a centre of learning in the ancient world, however, the location of the Peripatetic school was eventually lost in the mists of time. Persistent rumors that Aristotle was buried in the gardens of the Lyceum circulated for centuries, though no evidence supports this claim and no such tomb was ever located. In 1996, during the construction of the Museum of Modern Art in Athens, the ruins of the Lyceum were discovered and are now open for visitors. Should you wish to visit, the Lyceum is located in a beautiful setting in the heart of downtown Athens.
6. Some commentators have noted that Socrates is a ghost-like figure in the dialogues in that he never commits to a position nor reveals anything regarding his own views. One good source for this argument is Claire Colebrook (2004).
7. What do you think is the history of the saying, "cut to the chase"?
8. I say "largely abandoned" rather than completely abandoned as several excellent stories have been published recently in which philosophical ideas are presented in a narrative form. These are not identical to the dialogue format, of course, but the strategy of using a story to present one or more philosophical arguments is common to both. Two books that follow this style are *Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy* (2007) by Jostein Gaarder (2007) and *The Vanishing Act* by Mette Jakobsen (2012).
9. For a readable, if somewhat polemical, account of some of the reasons commentators continue to raise serious questions about so-called new technologies, see Dominic Pettman's (2016) *Infinite Distraction: Paying Attention to Social Media*.
10. We have evidence, for instance, that *Rhetorica* underwent significant revision. One consequence of Aristotle's continual writing and rewriting is that the text is somewhat contradictory in places, as happens when a writer changes a thought at one place in the book but forgets to go back and make the same change elsewhere.

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Historians also believe that certain of Aristotle's books were probably lecture notes, and that this accounts for the fact that they occasionally lack examples in places where elucidation would seem to be most required. George Kennedy (2007), one of the foremost translators of Aristotle's work, has written that because Aristotle's book on rhetoric is short on illustrations, "we may be allowed to hope that when he used the texts for lecture notes Aristotle expanded and illustrated what he said and perhaps even entertained questions" (p. 3).

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11. For a similar though slightly different account, see A.K. Cotton's (2014) *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader*.
12. I am referring, of course, to Walter Ong's (1982) *Literacy and Orality*.
13. What I mean is that "markindales" and "franjelums" do not correspond to anything in the real world since I just made them up. But if all "markindales" are "franjelums" and if all "frangelums" are "poortivols," then it must follow without fail that all "markindales" are also "poortivols." The sequence and arrangement of the (form)ula is what makes it true—not whether the objects mentioned *correspond* to anything real.
14. Aristotle (1984) also provides some of his more negative remarks on the sophists in *Sophistical Refutations*, which explains the book's title. He believed that the sophists were especially guilty of using faulty reasoning in their arguments and taught these improper logical forms to their students. At one point, he says that "the art of the sophist is the semblance of wisdom without the reality, and the sophist is one who makes money from an apparent but unreal wisdom" (165a). He also mentions Gorgias by name, criticizing him for training people "by imparting to them not the art but its products" (184a). In other words, rather than offering to instruct them in a skill, Gorgias merely offered ready-made speeches that could be memorized. More important, Gorgias expressed little or no concern for the validity of these forms.
15. This is from the translation by W. Rhys Roberts (Aristotle, 2001). In the traditional referencing system, this line is given as *Rhetorica*, 1355b, 26–27. There are many translations, and sometimes the differences are striking. But many of the expert translations, such as the one by George Kennedy (2007) in the Oxford University Press edition, are more difficult for the lay reader to comprehend, although they may be more accurate for professional classicists. For instance, Kennedy (2007) translates the above passage as follows: "Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (p. 37). This is followed by a footnote explaining Aristotle's use of the Greek phrase *estō dē*, which translates roughly into English as "Let X be …" I have no objections to Kennedy's (2007) work, which is more thorough, more scholarly, and more recent than the translation I have cited. However, it is also a more difficult translation for the non-expert, especially when longer passages are cited. Hence, I will stick with the more popular Rhys Roberts's translation (Aristotle, 2001).
16. I will point out that some of the treatment of different aspects of rhetoric offered by Aristotle would be questionable according to some, though not all, modern rhetoricians. Whether a contract, for instance, can be called persuasive or convincing is a matter of debate since one could argue that a contract is closer to a deductive proposition than it is to a rhetorical appeal. However, contracts must sometimes be interpreted by judges as to their validity: Was there a meeting of the minds between the signatories? Were the

terms and conditions in accordance with existing law? Was one of the parties coerced in any way? In this case, one might suggest that presenting a contract to a judge is less definitive than it may be represented by Aristotle, and some additional appeal may be required to get the judge to agree that the contract is or is not sufficient to win the case.

17. The rhetorician Kenneth Burke (1973) has written about proverbs as "equipment for living." He means that we often use proverbs as a technique for persuasion, including self-persuasion, when we try to motivate ourselves to take action. He also notes that we will use a proverb suitable for the occasion, but that there are frequently alternative proverbs that counsel the opposite course of action. That is, proverbs are contradictory, for it seems that for most proverbs there is another with an opposing meaning. According to Burke, this is normal, especially if we ascribe to his view that proverbs are intended to be applied according to context.
18. In Leitch's case, the strategy appears ultimately to have backfired (LeRoy, 2017).

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