

ARISTOTLE RHETORIC (c.330 BCE)

Aristotle. "Rhetoric." Trans. W. Rhys Roberts. Vol. 2 of Complete Works: the Revised Oxford Translation. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. 2 Vols. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. 2152-2269.

BOOK I [KINDS OF SPEECHES AND PROOFS]

Chapter 1 [Rhetoric vs. Dialectic]

Aristotle begins by declaring that "[r]hetoric is the counterpart of dialectic" (2152). All men make use of it in order to "discuss statements, and to maintain them, to defend themselves, and to attack others" (2152). His goal here is to "give some account of the systematic principles of rhetoric itself – of the right method and means of succeeding in the object we set before us" (2155).

Chapter 2 [Rhetoric Defined]

Aristotle defines rhetoric as the "faculty of observing in any given case, the available means of persuasion" (2155). Other arts, such as medicine or geometry, "can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject-matter" (2155) but rhetoric is the "power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject" (2155).

Aristotle draws a distinction between "technical" (2155) and "non-technical" (2155) "modes of persuasion" (2155). By the latter, he means "such things as are not supplied by the speaker but are there at the outset – witnesses, evidence given under torture, written contracts, and so on" (2155). By the former, he means "such as we can ourselves construct by means of the principles of rhetoric" (2155). The latter "has merely to be used" (2155) but the former "has to be invented" (2155).

Aristotle identifies three kinds of "modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word" (2155). The first "depends on the personal character of the speaker" (2155):

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than other: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. . . . [The speaker's] character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. (2155)

The second mode of persuasion depends on "putting the audience into a certain frame of mind" (2155):

persuasion may come about through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile. It is towards producing these effects . . . that present-day writers on rhetoric direct the whole of their efforts. (2155)

The third mode of persuasion concerns the "proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself" (2155). In other words, "persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question" (2155).

Chapter 3 [Three Species of Rhetoric]

Here, Aristotle argues that rhetoric falls into "three divisions, determined by the three classes of listeners to speeches" (2159). Of the "three elements in speech-making – speaker, subject, and person addressed" (2159), it is the hearer which "determines the speech's end and object" (2159). The hearer is either a "judge, with a decision to make

about things past or future, or an observer" (2159). Members of the Assembly decide about future events, jurymen about past events while those pass judgement on the orator's skills are merely observers.

There are accordingly "three divisions of oratory – deliberative, forensic, and epideictic" (2159) which "refer to three different kinds of time" (2159) and have "three distinct ends" (2160). "Deliberative speaking [i.e. political oratory in the Assembly] urges to do or not do something" (2159) and is as such "concerned with the future: it is about things to be done hereafter that he advises, for or against" (2159-2160). The deliberative orator "aims at establishing the expedience or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action; if he urges its acceptance, he does so on the ground that it will do good; if he urges its rejection, he does so on the ground that it will do harm" (2160). All other points are "subsidiary and relative to this main consideration" (2160). "Forensic speaking [i.e. judicial oratory in the law-courts] either attacks or defends somebody" (2159) and is "concerned with the past; one man accuses the other, and the other defends himself, with reference to things already done" (2160). Forensic orators "aim at establishing the justice or injustice of some action" (2160), to which all other points are accordingly subsidiary. "Epideictic oratory either praises or censures somebody" (2159) and is "concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time, though they often find it useful also to recall the past and to make guesses at the future" (2160). The aim here is to "praise or attack a man" (2160) in order to prove "him worthy of the honour or the reverse" (2160).

[Chapters 4-15: Topics in Deliberative, Epideictic and Judicial Rhetoric]

BOOK II [SOURCES OF PERSUASION: CHARACTER, EMOTION, LOGIC]

Chapter 1

Here, Aristotle points out that he considered in chapters 4-15 of Book I the "materials to be used in supporting or opposing a measure, in pronouncing eulogies or censures, and for prosecution or defence" (2194), not least the "persuasive arguments" (2194) used in each area. For, he argues, it is "about these and on the basis of them that enthymemes are constructed, separately for each type of speech" (2194). However, "since rhetoric exists to affect the giving of decisions" (2194) the orator "must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind" (2194). It adds much to the orator's "influence that his own character should look right and that he should be thought to entertain the right feelings towards his hearers" (2194). There are "three things which inspire confidence in the orator's own character – the three, namely, that induce us to believe a thing apart from any proof of it: good sense, excellence, and goodwill" (2194). There are three causes of "[f]alse statements and bad advice" (2194):

men either form a false opinion through want of good sense; or they form a true opinion, but because of their moral badness do not say what they really think; or finally, they are both sensible and upright, but not well disposed to their hearers, and may fail in consequence to recommend what they know to be the best course. (2194)

Anyone "who is thought to have all these good qualities will inspire trust in his audience" (2194).

It is also important that "his hearers themselves should be in just the right frame of mind" (2194). For

when people are feeling friendly and placable, they one sort of thing;
when they are feeling angry or hostile, they think something either

totally different or the same thing with a different intensity; when they feel friendly to the man whom comes before them for judgement, they regard him as having done little wrong, if any; when they feel hostile, they take the opposite view. (2194)

Aristotle defines the "emotions" (2195) as "all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgements, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear and the like, with their opposites" (2195). In the case of each emotion, such as anger, the goal is to try to discover the accompanying "state of mind" (2195), the kind of people who provoke the emotion in question, and the "grounds" (2195) on which the emotion develops.

[Chapters 2-11: Arousing the Audience's Emotions]

[Chapters 12-17: Demonstrating the Speaker's Good Character]

[Chapters 18-26: Developing a Logical Argument]

BOOK III [STYLE AND ARRANGEMENT]

Chapter 1

In this Book, having considered the "means of producing persuasion" (2237), that is, the "sources of persuasion" (2237) (the character of the speaker, the emotional impact on the audience, and the nature of the argument advanced), Aristotle turns his attention to "language" (2237) and the "proper arrangement of the various parts of speech" (2237). Our "next subject will be language" (2238), Aristotle says, for "it is not enough to know *what* we ought to say; we must also say it *as* we ought; much help is thus afforded towards producing the right impression of a speech" (2238). The "first question to receive attention was naturally the one that comes first naturally – how persuasion can be produced from the facts themselves. The second is how to set these facts out in language" (2238).

[Chapters 2-12: Language]

Chapter 2 [Prose Style]

Here, Aristotle argues that "language to be good must be clear" (2239) because "speech which fails to convey a clear meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do" (2239). Clearness is "secured by using the words (nouns and verbs alike) that are current and ordinary" (2239). Language must also be "appropriate, avoiding both meanness and undue evaluation" (2239). For example, "poetical language is certainly free from meanness, but it is not appropriate to prose" (2239). Moreover, "variation makes the language appear more stately. People do not feel towards strangers as they do towards their own countrymen, and the same thing is true of their feeling for language. It is therefore well to give to everyday speech an unfamiliar air: people like what strikes them, and are struck by what is out of the way" (2239). This is particularly true of poetry where the "things there spoken of are comparatively remote from ordinary life" (2239). Last but not least, a writer "must disguise his art and give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially. Naturalness is persuasive,

artificiality is the contrary; for our hearers are prejudiced and think we have some design against them" (2239).

[Chapters 3-19: Arrangement]