

CHAPTER 3

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MEETING IN THE HOUSE OF CALLIAS

An Historical Perspective on Rhetoric and Dialectic

1. THE ANTAGONISM BETWEEN RHETORIC AND DIALECTIC

The purpose of this paper is to briefly describe and compare the original goals and perspectives of both rhetoric and dialectic in theory and in practice. But, since this is an undertaking that would surely exceed the boundaries of any single paper, the best thing to do is to start at once with working definitions of rhetoric and of dialectic that will conveniently limit the subject. Hopefully, these limitations will not impair the paper's further goal of contributing to a better appreciation of contemporary attempts to integrate rhetoric with dialectic.¹

By "dialectic" I shall understand the practice and theory of conversations; by "rhetoric" the practice and theory of speeches. Conversations, then, constitute instances of the practice of dialectic, whereas speeches constitute instances of the practice of rhetoric.

For a theory of dialectic I shall, in Section 2, turn to Aristotle's *Topics* (and *Sophistical Refutations*) to gain an insight into the various types and purposes of conversations. As to theory of rhetoric: I shall only briefly mention the goals of rhetoric, taken from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Section 3). Indeed, this paper will focus primarily on dialectic, and one must not expect an even-handed treatment of the two fields.

From the stipulations just presented it seems that rhetoric and dialectic must be pretty close; the only difference being that rhetoric deals with speeches, whereas dialectic deals with conversations. Indeed, their realms of interest do overlap, since conversations may contain speeches, and a series of speeches can often be described as if it were a conversation between their authors. This closeness accords with Aristotle's characterization of rhetoric as a "counterpart of Dialectic" (ἀντίστροφος, *antistrofos*, *Rhet.* I 1.1, 1354a1), and also as "an offshoot of Dialectic" (παράφυξ τῆ, *parafues ti*, *Rhet.* I 2.7, 1356a25),² and a "sort of division" (ὁμοίωμα, *morion ti*, *Rhet.* I 2.7, 1356a30-31) and "likeness" (ὁμοίωμα, *homoiōma*, *Rhet.* I 2.7,

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges to have profited from many discussions (mainly about Aristotle's *De Sophisticis Elenchis*) with Pieter Sjoerd Hasper, who also gave helpful comment on an earlier version of this paper (Krabbe, 2000).

² But rhetoric is also an offshoot of ethics/politics: "Thus it appears that Rhetoric is as it were an offshoot of Dialectic and of the science of Ethics, which may be reasonably called Politics" (*Rhet.* I 2, 1356a25-27). All quotes from Aristotle, as well as English translations, are taken from the Loeb Classical Library editions listed among the references.

1356a31)³ of it. There is no need, in the present context, to stress the primacy of dialectic, so evident in these quotes. Let it be enough for us to observe that, according to Aristotle, the two fields were indeed very much akin.

Yet, on the other hand, rhetoric and dialectic were very much opposed. For one thing, Plato's appreciation of rhetoric was markedly different from Aristotle's. Though what Plato's appreciation exactly amounted to remains a moot question, one may observe that it gave rise to a tradition of mutual antagonism between the two fields. In the *Gorgias* Socrates denounces rhetoric as a kind of "flattery" (κολακεία, *kolakeia*) and "the semblance (εἶδωλον, *eidōlon*) of a part of politics" (463a-d).⁴ Later on in the same dialogue Callicles denounces philosophy (and we may presume, dialectic as well) as good only for youngsters, but a ridiculous pastime for grown-up people (485a-e); Socrates is advised to drop philosophy in favor of serious business (486c).

The common reproaches to rhetoric hold that it produces feigned and untruthful speeches, addressed to man's lower instincts, rather than to reason, and possessed of unnecessary bombast and flowery use of language. Contrariwise, dialectic will be described as useless logic chopping, full of sophistry and leading to no practical gains. This was not Aristotle's point of view. The common features of and the differences between the Aristotelian conceptions of rhetoric and dialectic will be summarized in Section 4.

In Section 5 Plato's *Protagoras* will be used to illustrate both dialectical and rhetorical practice as well as their interrelatedness. The way rhetoric and dialectic are intertwined on the practical level will be specified in Section 6, whereas Section 7 points forward to an integration on the level of theory.

2. TYPES AND GOALS OF DIALECTIC

To what types of conversation (or: dialogue) did dialectic originally refer? On the practical side, one may take the Socratic dialogues as instances of dialectic exchanges. On the face of it, a Socratic dialogue most often aims at getting at the truth of some matter by answering a question like "Is X Y?" or "What is X?" (Richard Robinson, 1970, 49). Thus the dialogue would be a type of cooperative inquiry aiming at (philosophical) knowledge.

However, the practice of these "inquiries" displays many features of persuasion dialogues and even of eristic quibbling. Moreover, the Questioner (most often Socrates) displays a technique of refutation of a definitely more personal character than needed for a disinterested use of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in objective proof. In Socratic elenchus, it is the Answerer himself who is refuted, not just his thesis. Elenchus, though painful, is supposed to have beneficial effects on the soul of

³ Some manuscripts have ὁμοία, ἡμοιοα, instead of ὁμοίωμα, ἡμοιωμα, see Aristotle (1976a). This, however, does not change the meaning.

⁴ Plato's "semblance" seems not so different from Aristotle's "likeness." But, whereas Aristotle's term, ὁμοίωμα (*homoiōma*, likeness), is a neutral one, Plato's term, εἶδωλον, (*eidōlon*, semblance) carries the negative connotation of being a mere semblance and not the real thing. All Greek quotes from Plato are taken from his (1965) and English translations from his (1961) (for *Gorgias*) and from his (1991) (for *Protagoras*).

its victim. According to Richard Robinson (1970, 15): "In order to make men virtuous, you must make them know what virtue is. And in order to make them know what virtue is, you must remove their false opinion that they already know. And in order to remove this false opinion, you must subject them to elenchus." Thus the ultimate purpose of these dialogues seems to be educational in a moral sense.

Looking for some theory of types of dialogue in Aristotle, we find in his *Sophistical Refutations* (*De sophisticis elenchis*) four types of argument (λόγος, *logos*) that are used in conversation (ἐν τῷ διαλέγεσθαι, *en tòi dialegesthai*): didactic arguments, dialectical arguments, examination arguments, and eristic (contentious) arguments (*SE* 2, 165a38-39). Admittedly, this is a classification of arguments, not of types of dialogue, and the passage continues citing definitions of these types of argument that do not refer to types of dialogue. Nevertheless, the names of these types of argument can be taken to refer to types of dialogue: didactic, dialectical (in a narrower sense), examination, and eristic dialogues. These may be taken to provide characteristic (but not necessarily exclusive) contexts for the four types of arguments. Clearly, these types of argument and of dialogue correspond to various aspects of the Socratic dialogues.

A parallel passage in the *Topics* mentions three types of (conclusive) reasoning (συλλογισμός, *sullogismos*): demonstration, dialectical reasoning, and eristic (contentious) reasoning (*Top.* I 1, 100a27-101a4). These are given definitions similar to those given in the *Sophistical Refutations* of didactic, dialectical, and eristic arguments, respectively. The examination arguments are missing, but these appear to have been comprised among the dialectical arguments (*SE* 11, 171b3-6).⁵ Examination arguments are used to investigate whether an alleged expert is really knowledgeable in his field. As such they are on the one hand continuous with the Socratic elenchus, and on the other hand of interest in the light of our contemporary problems of democratic or juridical assessment of expert opinion.

Yet another type of (conclusive) reasoning is introduced in the *Rhetoric*: the enthymeme.

Though dialectic in a wide sense may be supposed to deal with all these types of dialogue, including the didactic type, where demonstrations (scientific proofs) are presented, the opening statement of the *Topics* clearly announces that this work will deal with dialectic conversations in a narrower sense: the type of dialogue where dialectic reasoning is prominent (*Top.* I 1, 100a18-24). Dialectic reasoning, again, is defined as reasoning from reputable (ἐνδοξα, *endoxa*) premises (*Top.* I 1, 100a29-30), and these are premises that "commend themselves to all or to the majority, or to the wise — that is, to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them" (*Top.* I 1 100b21-23).

More light on the goals of this type of conversation is thrown by *Topics* I 2 (101a25-b4), where Aristotle explains what purposes his study will serve. Actually, he mentions uses of the dialectic practice itself, indicating briefly how the method to

⁵ The passage in the *Topics* continues to mention a fourth type of reasoning: fallacious arguments (παραλογισμοί, *paralogismoi*) within certain sciences, such as geometry (*Top.* I.1, 101a5-17).

be set forth will support these uses.⁶ The passage gives us a somewhat better idea of dialectic conversation as a type of dialogue. It may also be read as a further division of dialectic conversation (in a narrower sense) into subtypes, where each subtype is concerned with one particular use of dialectic. Thus, one type of dialectic conversation would aim at training its participants (γυμνασία, *gymnasia*); another would deal with encounters (ἐντεύξεις, *enteuxeis*), and may be taken to comprise, or perhaps to be coextensive with, the examination dialogues; the third type would aim at philosophical and scientific purposes: the goal is to discern truth and falsehood. The third type is especially important for the discussion of the "ultimate bases of each science" (*Top.* I 2, 101a36-37).⁷

None of these subtypes of dialectic practice can easily be identified with present-day critical discussion or persuasion dialogue (Barth & Krabbe, 1982; Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984, 1992; Walton & Krabbe, 1995). Indeed the general goal of resolution of a dispute (a difference of opinion) and the participants' aims of convincing the other are remarkably absent from the picture.⁸ Not that disputes do not occur in dialectic practice. Of course they do, since many parts of a dialogue aimed at, say, inquiry can be described as attempts to convince the other. That is, they contain critical dialogues as subordinate parts, or as an aspect of what is going on. Clearly, Socratic elenchus is not successful if the victim will not, in the end, be convinced of his lack of knowledge. And in the examination dialogue, the alleged expert will try to convince the other that he really is an expert. But the primary purpose of most dialectic practices is not to convince or to persuade, but to attain at a truth of some sort by inquiry.⁹ The examination dialogue, too, may be conceived as a method of inquiry. As a theoretically established primary purpose persuasion belongs to rhetoric rather than to dialectic.

3. TYPES AND GOALS OF RHETORIC

Aristotle defines rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever" (*Rhet.* I 2.1, 1355b26-27). These means encompass not only arguments (logos), but also display of character by the speaker (ethos) and arousing emotion in the hearers (pathos) (*Rhet.* I 2.3-6, 1356a1-

⁶ According to Robin Smith (1993, 350) the uses mentioned in *Topics* I 2 are the uses of Aristotle's treatise (the *Topics*) rather than those of dialectic. Though no doubt the uses of the treatise are what is primarily at issue, I would nevertheless maintain that these uses are explained in terms of the uses of dialectic.

⁷ It is, however, a moot question whether, according to Aristotle, dialectic is capable of *establishing* any truth, let only the first principles of the sciences. Cf. Irwin (1988), who is in favor of ascribing such a capacity to dialectic, and Smith (1993) who criticizes this idea. Bolton (1994) defends the point of view that dialectic may establish things, though not in the sense of giving a scientific justification.

⁸ For the notion of a resolution of a difference of opinion or dispute see Van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992, 34). Cf. the notion of a conflict of avowed opinions in Barth & Krabbe (1982, 56).

⁹ Consequently, the meaning of the term "dialectic," when it is used, not as a neutral term for the practice or theory of dialogue, but to denote the best method to be followed in dialogue, may shift according to what is considered the best method of inquiry. This is evident in Plato. According to Robinson (1970, 70) "the word 'dialectic' had a strong tendency in Plato to mean 'the ideal method, *whatever that may be*.' In so far it was thus merely a honorific title, Plato applied it at every stage of his life to whatever seemed to him at the moment the most hopeful procedure." (Italics as in the original.)

20). Thus the definition covers a wide range of speech activities, be it that they must all be related to persuasion. Logos constitutes the core-business of rhetoric (*Rhet.* I 1.3-4, 1354a11-18), but other means of persuasion are not neglected by Aristotle. If, for the moment, we take it for granted that rhetoric pertains to speeches (for these means of persuasion could very well be used outside the context of a delivered speech), we see that according to Aristotle rhetoric does not pertain to all kinds of speeches, but only to those that aim to persuade. Later on the range of rhetoric is narrowed down to three main types or genres of speeches, each with its own ends: the deliberative, the forensic, and the epideictic; there is an alleged proof that these are all the kinds there are (*Rhet.* I 3.1, 1358a36-b8).

Earlier, Aristotle remarks on the usefulness of rhetoric. Rhetoric can be used (1) to defend proper decisions (you may be right, but you will still need to convince others, otherwise you are to blame); (2) to convince those who cannot follow scientific arguments; (3) to be able to argue both for and against the same proposition; not, indeed, in order to actually do so, but in order (3a) to have a realistic view of an issue and (3b) not to be duped by fallacies (*Rhet.* I 1.12, 1355a20-33). These points do not depend on the use of speeches, rather than conversations; the same claims would hold for a dialectic of persuasion. Both rhetoric and the dialectic of persuasion (the persuasion dialogue) share the primary goal of arriving at a shared opinion, or, more precisely, of resolving a (supposed) dispute. But, as we saw, Aristotle's dialectic is not primarily a dialectic of persuasion.

The ability of arguing for and against the same proposition leads to opportunities for a misuse of rhetoric, since one could deliberately argue for the wrong side of an issue (even though Aristotle says we should not do so, *Rhet.* I 1.12, 1355a30-31). Hence there is a black rhetoric besides the white rhetoric that Aristotle recommends. In dialectic the situation is not different, but here the black side is known by a special name: sophistry (cf. *Rhet.* I 1.14, 1355b18-21).

4. DIFFERENCES AND COMMON FEATURES

It is time to take stock of the common features of, and of the differences between, the Aristotelian conceptions of rhetoric and dialectic. Four common features merit separate mention. As we saw, right in the beginning of his *Rhetoric* Aristotle states that "rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic" (*Rhet.* I 1.1, 1354a1). He adduces the reason that "both have to do with matters that are in a manner within the cognizance of all men and not confined to any special science" (*Rhet.* I 1.1, 1354a1-3). And a little later he adds: "neither of them is a science that deals with the nature of any definite subject, but they are mere faculties (δυνάμεις, *dunameis*) of furnishing arguments (λόγους, *logous*)" (*Rhet.* I 2.7, 1356a32-34). Thus both rhetoric and dialectic stand aloof from the special sciences; their practice, if not their theory, is to some extent common to all.¹⁰ This is one important common feature.

¹⁰ In his *Sophistical Refutations*, too, Aristotle remarks that "dialectical argument has no definite sphere" (*SE* 11, 172a12) and, in particular, that examination arguments can be used by those without knowledge of a subject to test the pretensions of others (*SE* 11, 172a21-32).

Dialectic and Rhetoric

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