

ARISTOTLE AS CRITIC OF PLATO'S RHETORIC?

Some conclusions, questions and implications

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Article abstract

Plato is often understood to be merely an outspoken critic of rhetoric and Aristotle a systematizer of rhetoric. The reality is more complex. Plato's criticism is not of rhetoric *per se* but of a particular (Sophistic) kind of rhetoric; his work actually evidences a keen desire to enshrine a true rhetoric, one that will enable instruction in truth to happen. Nor is Aristotle a critic of Plato; rather, Aristotle provides a systematic approach to political discourse and human language as it is in practice. Aristotle thus establishes both the foundations for analysis of democratic political discourse and the analytical groundwork for the much later analysis of "ordinary language."

ARISTOTLE AS CRITIC OF PLATO'S RHETORIC? Some conclusions, questions and implications

GREGORY BLOOMQUIST

Plato is often understood to be an outspoken critic of rhetoric, but Plato's criticism is of a particular (Sophistic) kind of rhetoric. Plato's work actually evidences a keen desire to enshrine a true rhetoric, one that will enable instruction in truth to happen. Aristotle is neither a critic of Plato nor a systematiser of rhetoric. Aristotle seeks to provide a systematic approach to political discourse. Yet, in doing so, Aristotle does much more: he provides an embryonic analysis of human discourse *per se* and thus establishes the analytical groundwork for what will come to be called the analysis of "ordinary language."¹

Isocrates (b. 436 BC)

No discussion of Plato and Aristotle would be satisfactory without some attention first to Isocrates. Nine years older than Plato, and often classed among the Sophists as one of Plato's Sophistic targets, Isocrates resembled the Sophists in taking money for teaching, "offering instruction in the skills needed for success in public life, and in writing speeches that were models for imitation by others."² However, similar to Socrates he explicitly differentiated himself from the Sophists by asserting that he was not a rhetor but a philosopher and an artist of *logos*, not of *rhètorikè*. In fact, Isocrates was a strident critic of the "pretension of the sophists [...] who arrogantly claim to impart to students all that they need to know to be happy, successful, and prosperous" and who paid "no attention to ability or experience" by teaching "some inflexible rules, without any consideration of how these are to be applied in an appropriate way."³ In fact, Socrates himself asserts that Isocrates was on the right path.⁴

1. I have profited immensely from the insightful work of BALLACCI 2018.

2. KENNEDY 1994, p. 43.

3. KENNEDY 1994, p. 44.

4. Socrates, after noting Isocrates's then young age, foresees great things for him *if*, Socrates says, he becomes dissatisfied with his literary work and pursues the philosophy of which his mind "contains an innate tincture (279a)." The argument as to whether Socrates spoke sincerely or ironically continues to be debated. See for example the discussion in COULTER 1967, pp. 225-236.

But Socrates and Isocrates held different views of “philosophy,” views that actually create a strong resemblance of the Isocratean project in Aristotle’s writings.

For Isocrates and apparently for the Athenians of his day “philosophy” meant “any serious study conducive to fostering sound opinions and correct judgments on factors inherent in a given situation and how to cope with them.”⁵ “Philosophy” in this sense consisted of a “training of the mind” that did not need to lead to any particular career but, like its counterpart gymnastics, could lead a man to undertake any task that the *polis* might ask of him. As such, Isocrates understood philosophy to be a “comprehensive cultural, ethical, and political” *paideia* “which pivoted around a conception of practical wisdom based on the use of *logos*, or civic discourse, with ethical ends.”⁶ As we shall see, such an approach classes the Isocratean project very much along the same lines as those of Aristotle’s.

Within this *paideia* the emphasis on *logos* is crucial. For Isocrates “it is from *logos* that civilization arises and maintains itself; it is thanks to *logos* that human beings can raise their spirit and aspire to reach high ethical ends.”⁷ Kennedy summarizes beautifully this Isocratean, *logos*-centered *paideia* by asking us to imagine Isocrates’ challenge to his contemporaries:

Get students to practice themes about patriotism and virtue, about justice and temperance and courage and wisdom; have them study examples from history and choose from among these examples to illustrate their arguments. Encourage their ambitions to be great speakers. Their own characters will thereby be molded, and not only will they apply the lessons they learn in their speeches, but they will try to live up to these standards, knowing that their effectiveness with an audience will result in large part from the audience’s trust in their character. The more ambitious they are, the more virtuous they will become.⁸

It was in the name of this “philosophy” that Isocrates also criticized Socrates’s philosophical approach as wasting the time of the men of the *polis*. How, he asked, could abstract “epistemological and ontological interests” – key com-

5. BALLA 2004, p. 46. Balla is following the work of OSTWALD and LYNCH 1994, pp. 596-597.

6. BALLACCI 2018, p. 16. Isocrates is very clear that there is no “art that can teach self-control and justice to those who do not have it,” but “he does think that study of political discourse can help to stimulate and form virtue.” See KENNEDY 1994, p. 46.

7. BALLACCI 2018, p. 16. Isocrates’s emphasis on *logos* naturally draws the attention of Plato as a critic, since Plato “is concerned with the risk inherent in a *logos* incapable of saying what it really means, in the a-critical acceptance of one’s own opinions and those more prevalent in a community, and finally in the possibility that someone could take advantages of such situation.” So BALLACCI 2018, p. 18. *Logoi*, according to Plato, are inessential in that they are not what they signify but equally that they are essential means by which humans access the world. For this reason *logoi* are easily exploited if they are not grounded elsewhere than in themselves. For this analysis, Ballacci draws on the work of GADAMER 1980, pp. 22-23, 118.

8. KENNEDY 1994, p. 48.

ponents of Socrates's unique form of "philosophy"⁹ – help the *polis*? Ironically Isocrates was criticizing exactly what most later readers, including Gadamer, identify as the genius of Socrates who provided "the first example of scientific discourse," that is, discourse about what something essentially is.¹⁰

Again Isocrates is undertaking what Aristotle will do in separating out rhetoric from metaphysical speculation. Isocrates not only commends the very thing that Socrates despises and criticizes what Socrates commends but also criticizes Socrates's contention that rhetorical teaching has no proper subject matter.¹¹ Isocrates asserts that rhetoric *does* have a distinct object of knowledge, namely, "ideas," which make the *polis* itself work.¹² Aristotle, too, will find that there is a suitable rhetorical subject matter, though in his case it will be *endoxa*.

Finally, Isocrates, like Aristotle, will set forth the precise ways in which a "student must choose from available topics in composing a speech" and then "arrange the ideas and seize the right moment (*kairos*) for employing them," ultimately adorning "a speech appropriately" with "striking thoughts" or *enthymèmata*, a word that Aristotle will employ to speak about the essential building block of rhetorical logic.¹³

In short, if there is a critic of Socrates or Plato it is Isocrates, not Aristotle. It is true, as we shall see, that Aristotle adopts significant elements of Isocrates's rhetorical project. Like Isocrates Aristotle's project aims at a realistic "capacity of citizens to live together through the practice of argued discussion" as a "basis to society," and he will differentiate his rhetoric from Plato along Isocratean lines when he suggests that rhetoric is about *phronèsis*, smart and real action in the world, rather than about speculation on what is that is closer to what he develops in the *Metaphysics*. But Aristotle will achieve his ends without criticizing either Plato or Socrates in the process.

Plato (b. 427 BC): Critic of the sophists and promoter of true rhetoric

There is little doubt that "Plato... has fundamentally contributed to determine our conception of rhetoric" because "[h]e is rightly considered the most influential critic rhetoric has ever had. And, more than probably any other philosopher, he has set the tone for how rhetoric has traditionally been seen, not

9. KENNEDY 1994, p. 47.

10. BALLACCI 2018, p. 18.

11. BALLACCI 2018, p. 17. I agree with Ballacci that Socrates would surely have criticized Isocrates's belief that the rhetor needed "to appear similar to the *dèmos* to show that he accepts its wisdom in order to be able to flatter it and conquer its will." So BALLACCI 2018, p. 22.

12. KENNEDY 1994, p. 44. Later Isocrates identified a primary idea, Panhellenism: "the cultural unity of all Greeks and the development of international policy to preserve and enhance it."

13. KENNEDY 1994, p. 45.

only in relation to philosophy but also more in general to society.”¹⁴ Kennedy clearly sets forth the fundamental contrast between Plato’s understanding of true philosophy, which is about “devotion to truth, intellectual honesty, depth of perception, consistency, and sincerity,” and rhetoric, which in contrast to philosophy, is merely about “verbal dexterity, empty pomposity, triviality, moral ambivalence, and a desire to achieve self-interest by any means.”¹⁵ Richard Lanham illustrates this dichotomy by presenting, on the one hand, Plato’s philosopher as a “*homo serious* who postulates that humans have a central and irreducible self, and that live in a physical reality, which, being independent from them and functioning as a referent for them, has to be discovered in its essence and then represented and communicated clearly and faithfully,” and on the other hand, Plato’s maligned “*homo rhetoricus*, which sees reality as something public, like a stage, and as something that can be manipulated as needed rather than as something that can be discovered” and for whom “the self is a contingent entity, which assumes different forms depending on the circumstances and which can commit to a different system of values.”¹⁶

However, “the traditional view of Plato as the unyielding partisan of philosophy and inveterate opponent of rhetoric”¹⁷ is only half true. “Plato criticized sophistic rhetoric and the rhetorical practices of Athenian democracy vehemently and uncompromisingly,”¹⁸ but Plato also presents Socrates arguing for a massive education program that includes rhetoric. Most telling of all is that the vehemence and uncompromising character of Socrates’s denunciation of Sophistic rhetoric is matched and even surpassed by the rhetorical brilliance of his own rhetoric by which he sets forth his educational program.

Plato’s critique of Sophistic rhetoric

As democratic institutions proliferated in fifth century Athens, so, too, did the demand for persuasive public speakers and for those who could teach such speech, including the ability to manipulate the *dèmos* to their will. This demand, which was held in check to some extent by the circumstances of the Peloponnesian War, revived with its conclusion in the fourth century. Plato’s *Gorgias* (c. 380) appears to have been written to address this revived demand.¹⁹

In the *Gorgias* Plato sets up the eponymous character as the proponent of a rhetorical pedagogy that promises the politicians of the Athenian *polis* the

14. BALLACCI 2018, p. 13.

15. KENNEDY 1994, pp. 13-14.

16. LANHAM 1976, p. 1 as cited in BALLACCI 2018, p. 14.

17. YUNIS 2007, p. 75.

18. *Ibid.*

19. For a full discussion of the context, see YUNIS 1996.

ability to rule others through persuasive speech, ostensibly for the good of the *polis*. Gorgias's associate, Polus, asserts that this is a wonderful ability since it enables the speaker by means of *logoi* alone to have power comparable to that of a tyrant.²⁰ In the dialogue Socrates attempts to show that the rhetorical ability employed by Gorgias and commended by Polus is not at all for the good of Athens, much less their greatest good (466b).

However, it is important to note that Socrates does not impute malice to Gorgias but rather ignorance. Socrates might have said to Gorgias:

'Fair enough. You may speak powerfully and your claim that your skill is speech itself (*rhètorikè technè*) seems justified, but do you *know* anything about what you propose to speak? What does your speech want to achieve? And why?'

When Gorgias admits his ignorance – that is, that he knows nothing about the world of politics – Socrates pounces, as we can see in this paraphrase:

'Well, you see, this is the very problem with which Athens is faced! We have lots of people who know how to perform eloquently and even teach that to others. But they are only good at pleasuring their audience for whatever purpose without knowing what their good is or should be, since they haven't learned that or don't know it! This is merely entertainment, or worse flattery, or worst of all demagoguery' (cf. 462c-d).

Socrates contends that Gorgias's "purely instrumental brand of rhetoric" will leave the *polis* prey to falsehood because this rhetoric "is prone to become an instrument of demagogical manipulation."²¹ This rhetoric must therefore be condemned both morally and politically.

Nevertheless, the Sophist Gorgias is not Plato's primary target in this eponymous dialogue. Rather, the target is Callicles, a Machiavellian figure who is willing to use any measures, including rhetoric, to advance himself within the *polis*.²² Gorgias is merely a convenient and ignorant instrument that Callicles will use to provide him with the power necessary to manipulate the *polis*.²³ The rhetoric of Gorgias is dangerous precisely because it is ignorant and thus the perfect tool for Callicles. It can be used however the demagogue chooses to use it, which means in all likelihood that it will be used to lead hearers to "a passive perseverance in their prejudices [...] making them slaves" to figures like Callicles. This kind of rhetoric is no better than mimetic poetry

20. BALLACCI 2018, p. 18 summarizes Gadamer on this point: "Since human beings gain access to the world through *logos*, Plato believed that to different *logoi* correspond different existential attitudes. In particular he opposed the *ethos* of the philosopher to that of the sophist: if the former is moved always by the love for wisdom and the search for true justice, the sophist is moved by the desire to excel and gain ascendancy on the others (*phthonos*)." See GADAMER 1991, pp. 3-4, 33-51.

21. BALLACCI 2018, p. 13.

22. So, among others, BALLACCI 2018, p. 22.

23. For an overview of the *Gorgias* as presented, see YUNIS 2007, pp. 75-78.

which seduces “its audience by exciting those most reassuring passions, compassion and laughter” in order “to strengthen the strongest source of conventionalism,” namely, “love for oneself.”²⁴

The sophist is, of course, not without blame. In later works, Plato illustrates that the sophist is not merely ignorant but stands to gain from his practice. In the *Sophist* the Eleatic Stranger traces the genealogy of the sophist: he stems from “a branch of the appropriate, acquisitive family – which hunts animals, living, land, tame animals – which hunts man, privately, for hire, taking money in exchange, having the semblance of education – and this is termed Sophistry, and is a hunt after young men of wealth and rank” (223b). This is clearly not a description of someone who simply practices his trade in ignorance, though in the *Sophist* the sophist is identified as the worst kind of ignorant man, one who thinks that he knows and does not know and yet uses his ignorance for gain (229c). It is clear that in this dialogue Plato classes the sophist among the charlatans who were criticized and parodied in the centuries both before and after Plato and who could be found not only in the realms of politics and education but also in those of medicine and religion. Again, however, it is important to note that rhetoric *per se* is not the target; ignorance, willed or unwilled, compounded by trickery and falsehood, is.

Plato’s defence of a true political rhetoric

As noted, Plato’s critique of this kind of ignorant rhetoric is so ironically persuasive that it often obscures the fact that Plato also sets forth that the *polis* needs a rhetoric that leads the *polis* to an understanding that is necessary for the *polis* to reach its true end.²⁵ When employed toward that end a rhetoric can lead to truth and in the process free Athenians from self-interest (cf. *Republic* 517a). In fact, it is this true rhetoric that Socrates himself offers to the *polis* (521d), a rhetoric that enables the Socratic philosopher – the truly virtuous man who knows what is – to present the truth of what is as he is moved by the love of wisdom and the search for true justice; in doing so he will move others to the same love and the same search.²⁶ Throughout the dialogues Plato shows Socrates to be not only a master of such a true rhetoric but also one

24. BALLACCI 2018, p. 21. Ballacci here follows BLOOM’s 1991, p. 434 interpretation in *The Republic of Plato*. It is possible that Plato’s rejection of poetry may have been due to the notion that poetry would only address a problem of the body, not the real problem of the soul. If so, then he could indeed have been among the primary exponents of a kind of logotherapy for disordered souls. For an analysis of this trend in 5th century Athens, see USTINOVA 2018, pp. 43-55.

25. BALLA 2004, p. 64.

26. BALLACCI 2018, p. 18.

who invites others to an effective and forceful employment of rhetorical persuasion in the service of wisdom and justice (cf. *Statesman* 303e - 304e).²⁷

Examples of this unique and true rhetoric can be found throughout the Platonic corpus but for our purposes two may suffice. Scholars of rhetoric regularly point to Plato's *Phaedrus* as the most fascinating example of Socrates's own rhetorical display and the best explanation of why his rhetoric works so well. First, few doubt that Socrates's own rhetorical prowess is on full display in the "Great Speech" (*Phaedrus* 244a - 257a): it evidences the "sustained brilliance, expansiveness, imagination, and intensity" of his rhetorical talent.²⁸ It is a compelling depiction of "the harrowing, arduous journey of the soul towards its proper goal, the overcoming of mortality through the knowledge of Being;" however, it also reveals why true rhetoric works, namely, because its subject matter is *eros*: "The portrayal of *eros* in the Great Speech is so vivid, the narrative tension so intense, and the vision of transcendence so triumphant (250b-c) that the auditor himself acquires a desire for the very experience that is portrayed."²⁹ What shapes the rhetoric is what is presented, namely, *eros*, which is desired by the hearer himself such that all other desires, including self-love, are abandoned and what is desired. Here we see perfectly how and why true rhetoric can achieve its ends: it is an *erôtikè technè*, a "soul-moving power (*psychagôgia*)" (*Phaedrus* 261a) that awakens in the hearer's own soul a "natural desire for the good and the beautiful."³⁰

Socrates displays and encourages a rhetoric that will use not only conventional techniques, such as ordering of the parts of the discourse, the use of images and comparisons, but especially the ability of a speaker "to recognize the proper moment to speak" and "how to apply all these techniques to what the circumstances, the 'here and now,' that is, the *kairos*" demands; however, this rhetoric must constantly be guided by "philosophy and thus [be] in line with justice."³¹ In this way true rhetoric is actually "a universal art of discourse, embracing 'all things that are said'" (*Phaedrus* 261a-e).³² This assertion – that

27. As Yunis notes Socrates will even welcome the proper and forceful use of poetry, or laws, or force itself when these are in service of the truth. YUNIS 2007, p. 81 refers specifically to the *Laws*. It is noteworthy that for Plato, the rhetorical presentation of the law requires that the lawgiver be a "master rhetorician who composes preambles to the law code as a whole and to individual laws within the law code," preambles designed to persuade rather than just to compel as the laws themselves do. Nevertheless, in the same text Plato forbids litigants from using rhetoric to present their case. In fact, "even some morally ambiguous rhetorical practices – the manipulation of the emotions, for instance, or the practice of arguing on both sides of the same question – can be used by the philosopher because such use is for just reasons" (BALLACCI 2018, p. 26). In particular, Ballacci points to "the noble lie" (*Republic* 389b-c, 414b-15d).

28. YUNIS 2007, p. 31.

29. YUNIS 2007, p. 83.

30. YUNIS 2007, p. 82.

31. BALLACCI 2018, p. 25. Ballacci particularly notes in this regard *Phaedrus* 272a-b and also notes that attention to *kairos* was one of Isocrates's main tools.

32. BALLACCI 2018, p. 84.

rhetoric includes “all things that are said” – will be received by Aristotle and will have important implications for his own rhetoric as we shall see.

As such, the *Phaedrus* provides us with one of our most important clues that Plato does not blame rhetoric *per se* for the ills that plague Athens. Plato no more seeks to excise rhetoric from the *polis* than he seeks to cut loose the “recalcitrant” horse pulling the chariot in the *Phaedrus* and force the charioteer to make due with a single, well-ordered horse; rather, Plato shows how a good charioteer, in contrast to an ignorant one, is able to bring both steeds into harmony to pull the chariot. It is not rhetoric *per se*, or even comedy or tragedy for that matter, much less the emotions in the human, that have given rise to the problems facing the Athenian *polis* or humans; rather, it is self-interest, grounded in ignorance and allied with trickery, politically aimed at demagogic power, that is the problem. Plato’s call is to shape the *polis* and the human person with knowledge and truth through the use of a true, erotic rhetoric.

Plato’s dialogues do not only prescribe rhetorical tools; they are permeated by examples of brilliant rhetorical display utilizing the tools of a true rhetoric.³³ Nowhere is this use more clear than in the *Republic*.³⁴ In light of the brilliance of Socrates’s rhetorical presentation in the service of the true educational practice for the *polis* in this dialogue, rhetorical scholars again rightly caution readers of the *Republic* against an over-emphasis on Plato’s critique of rhetoric or his “censorship of the poets” and the Homeric corruption of ideals. In fact, it is here that we see most clearly how and why the philosophical leaders of the *polis* should undertake a “massive rhetorical endeavor... to control a vast range of influences” that will “shape every possible facet of the young guardians’ environment in order to influence their propensity for adopting philosophical values” (cf. *Republic* 376c - 402c).³⁵ For Socrates rhetoric is crucial to this “mass political education” project of transmitting “philosophical knowledge... and guidance... from ruling philosopher to the citizens at large” as well as to the guardians (*Republic* 590c-d).³⁶

33. “The literary qualities evident across the corpus – vividness, unpredictability, the dramatic interplay of complex characters who care strongly about their views and provoke strong reactions in the reader – contribute to basic educational goals: contesting conventional values, inculcating philosophical method, and establishing Socrates as a model” (YUNIS 2007, p. 85).

34. Testament to Socrates’s (or Plato’s) rhetorical ability is the fact that the *Republic* opens in a such a way as to lull the reader “into accepting the momentous conversation on justice that follows as arising naturally in consequence of a chance, everyday encounter.” But over the course of that “momentous conversation” one can identify the employment of “a variety of rhetorical devices...: the just city that makes it possible to see the justice of the soul ‘writ large’ (368c–e); the similes of the sun (506e–509c) and the divided line (509d–511e); the images of the ship of state (487e–488e), the cave (514a–517b), and the soul as conjoined man, lion, and many headed beast (588b–589b); the vivid descriptions of the timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical men (Book 8), which by contrast palpably demonstrate the superiority of the just man; and the myth of Er (614b–621b).” So YUNIS 2007, pp. 85–86.

35. YUNIS 2007, p. 80.

36. YUNIS 2007, p. 79.

This is not to deny that Socrates denounces contemporary, failed Athenian practices of education “shaped by Homer, tragic poetry” and “the conventional pursuits of glory, wealth, and power,”³⁷ all of which are also fundamental pillars of Mediterranean cultural systems.³⁸ But to stop there and conclude that that censorship is all that Socrates seeks to achieve is to miss Socrates’s rationale as to why this education has failed. It is to overlook his proposal that the training of the guardians must be founded not simply on an “utter confidence in the goodness of the gods and the order of the cosmos, in the value of justice and other virtues, and in the priority of the *polis* over the wants and interests of individuals” but also on a “massive rhetorical endeavor” (*Republic* 376c - 402c) that is required to communicate and pass on these values to the *demos*.³⁹ In short, the *Republic* stands as an enduring witness not only to Socratic philosophy but also to the display of a possibly Socratic, but certainly a Platonic, rhetorical practice that supports the educational project of a *polis* founded on truth.

In conclusion, while it is true that Plato’s Socrates denounces a merely instrumental, Sophistic rhetoric, it is also the case that he prescribes a true rhetoric that is the proper political and communicative tool to be used in the hands of the philosopher. An instrumental rhetoric moves men because of its appeal to their self-interest, but a true rhetoric moves the soul toward what is. Therefore, the true rhetor must be more than a manipulator of *logoi*; he must understand both what is and what the human soul is which alone can know what is and thus what is good. This assertion that true rhetoric requires an understanding not just of what is but also of the soul has important implications for Aristotle whose *Rhetoric* stands as a monument to the exploration of understanding the human soul in order to understand human discourse.⁴⁰ This art, Plato insists, can truly claim the ascription *technē*, and it is this *technē* that Aristotle will further develop.

Aristotle (b 384 BC): Critic or continuator of Plato’s rhetoric?

“If Plato is remembered in the history of rhetoric as its first and most compelling critic, argues Ballacci, Aristotle is regarded as the first to have proposed

37. YUNIS 2007, p. 80.

38. Important work on these “pillars” is being carried out in the study of the New Testament by the “Context Group” of the Society of Biblical Literature. For a pivotal text of this Group, see MALINA 2001.

39. YUNIS 2007, p. 80.

40. YUNIS 2007, p. 84. Plato insists that a true rhetor must possess a dialectical and rhetorical skill that makes known what is. This is especially important when it comes to making comparisons work, for example, in helping auditors to understand how the human soul works by comparing it to a chariot driven ignorantly or wisely and powered by an obedient horse and a “recalcitrant” one.

a systematic account of the art.⁴¹ But Aristotle does not do so “on the back” of Plato as a critic, at least not explicitly: “There are no direct criticisms whatever [of Plato] in the *Rhetoric* or *Poetics*,⁴² nor do there appear to be any of Isocrates.⁴³ However, Aristotle will differentiate what he is doing from what Plato sought to do, partly because his goals are more like those of Isocrates.⁴⁴

In spite of the somewhat confusing state of Aristotle’s three books of the *Rhetoric*, the major outlines of the book are clear. First, and contrary to popular opinion, Aristotle does not define rhetoric in terms of persuasion but rather as the skill necessary to find and use the proper *means* of persuasion. In this respect, it has a fundamentally Isocratean goal, namely, to identify and teach how one best determines the most appropriate choice of words and proper contexts (e.g., introduction, narration, refutation, conclusion). This is clearly an instrumental task.

Second, Aristotle identifies three categorical contexts in which to find the proper means of persuasion: argumentation (*logos*), the self-presentation of the one speaking (*ethos*), and the means of ensuring an impact on an audience (*pathos*).⁴⁵ As such, Aristotle’s rhetorical project is far removed from a mere rehearsal of the instrumental means of persuasion as might have been the case were he to have been writing a manual of rhetoric.⁴⁶ Rather Aristotle’s project is characterized by careful analysis of how and why the three contexts are to be interwoven, together with a determination for the proper public space in which they are to be interwoven (the court, the assembly, and the ceremonies of the *polis*).

While the interweaving suggests that its absence (for example, by emphasizing one feature alone) will produce a defective rhetorical presentation, it is also clear that the argumentative mode of rhetoric is “the most important” and defining feature of Aristotle’s rhetorical project. The opening sentence of the *Rhetoric* indicates clearly that rhetoric is the “counterpart [*antistrophos*] of dialectic (1.1 1354a1).⁴⁷ Isocrates was close but incorrect in warning King Philip against appointing Aristotle to be Alexander’s tutor since all that Aristotle would do would be to teach Alexander “disputation for its own sake” rather than for political training,⁴⁸ because, as the *Rhetoric* goes on to show,

41. BALLACCI 2018, p. 26.

42. WATSON 1909 adds that one might have expected to find them in the *Poetics*.

43. Aristotle seems to limit mention of Isocrates to forensic rhetoric (e.g., *Rhetoric* 1368a20). See also on this point, WILCOX 1943, pp. 113-133.

44. Aristotle as a disciple of Isocrates, or at least of elements of the Isocratean project, is shown in the work of DÜRING 1957.

45. The overview is developed from FORTENBAUGH 2007, p. 107.

46. See the comments on Isocrates and *Rhetoric to Alexander* in WALKER 1994, p. 51.

47. FORTENBAUGH 2007, pp. 107-108.

48. KENNEDY 1994, p. 54. While this assertion does not mean that Isocrates considered Aristotle a sophist, it is striking that the key feature of a sophist according to Plato’s eponymous dialogue is to be a “controversialist” (cf. 232b).

rhetoric is not primarily about disputation but about the determination of the appropriate rhetorical logic, or *logos*.

The emphasis on rhetorical logic, however, does not mean that rhetoric, or dialectic, is about analytical or scientific argumentation. Aristotle does recognize a logic that is scientific or analytical, one in which logical syllogisms can and must express all that can and should be expressed in any argument to establish validity and truth, one in which all premises and any conclusions must be fully expressed and assented to. But rhetorical logic is not analytical logic. Rhetorical logic finds its counterpart in dialectic as presented in the *Topics*, a logic that reasons from "reputable opinions" (*endoxa*) in any subject area (*Topics* 100a20). Rhetoric seeks to find appropriate means of argumentation among reputable or long-held ideas and probabilities rather than either analytical or scientific truths, that is, self-evident or universally agreed upon truths. As such Aristotle's rhetorical logic is neither analytical nor grounded in metaphysical knowledge. Grimaldi summarizes well the difference between Plato and Aristotle on this point:

The one major difference between the two was that Plato put [rhetoric] at the exclusive disposition of the speculative intellect as his dialogues reveal to perfection. Aristotle, on the other hand, recognized the whole area of contingent reality, an area which is neither that of Plato's World of Ideas nor of his own metaphysics. Herein man is faced not with absolutes but rather with facts, problems, situations, questions, which admit of probable knowledge and probable truth and call for deliberation before assent. It is the area in which the intelligent and prudential course of action which is most conformable to the concrete reality and truth is determined in a given instance by the specific circumstances which appear most valid.⁴⁹

The contrast between Plato's subject matter for a true rhetoric and that of Aristotle for rhetoric could not be starker: for Aristotle rhetoric is not about what is since it entails "a capacity to make judgment and argue on things about which is possible to debate: things that 'seem to be capable of admitting two possibilities,' since they are 'for the most part capable of being other than they are'."⁵⁰ For Aristotle rhetorical argumentation always remains in the realm of verisimilitude. Aristotle's rhetoric was thus most at home in "the realm of ethics and politics; where the precision and absoluteness of mathematics are not to be expected."⁵¹ However, simply because it is not mathematical or scientific in its argumentation, or grounded in absolute, metaphysical truths, does not make it sophistry, anymore than ordinary language, which is neither, is merely sophistry or ignorance. In fact, as we shall see, Aristotle's analysis of

49. GRIMALDI 1958, p. 372.

50. BALLACCI 2018, p. 28, citing ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric* 1357a.

51. BALLACCI 2018, p. 28.

the logic of rhetoric will have fundamental significance for a much later philosophical analysis of ordinary language.

In service of this end, Aristotle makes the enthymeme the “body of persuasion” or key element of his rhetorical logic. Enthymeme is the same word used by Isocrates to identify “striking thoughts,” luminous and convincing moments in a discourse with words properly chosen.⁵² But Aristotle’s enthymeme is more than that, even as it is more than a logically defective syllogism, a common misunderstanding arising from Aristotle’s own vague description of it as a “sort of deduction” (1355a8). The enthymeme is grounded in widespread ideas that are part of the cultural knowledge of what people actually believe and say (i.e., reputable) rather than grounded in what they should believe and say. As such, enthymematic argumentation is the logical point in an argument (which may be a presentation or a conversation) where a speaker believes that he and his audience will meet and from which they will move forward together in further exchanges. This point might be described as the point at which a speaker’s expression of internal thoughts or emotions – his (*thymos*) or his soul – connects with the internal thoughts and emotions of his audience. This, Aristotle understood, is where communication actually happens, where *ethos* meets *pathos* through *logos*.⁵³ Yes, of course a speaker can manipulate this network of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, and part of what Aristotle may have been trying to do was to educate students on how that happens to enable them to identify manipulation; on the other hand, however, Aristotle was almost assuredly attempting to show how a failure to grasp this intricate interweaving will also mean that a perfectly valid argument – even one that is scientific and true – can fall on deaf ears because it is uttered by untrustworthy, unreliable, or unbelievable lips, or because the rhetor is unable to connect with the audience’s knowledge drawn from their experience, or because that knowledge is inadequately drawn. What rhetoric requires then is not a “specialist knowledge” as analytical logic does,⁵⁴ nor does it require a Platonic knowledge of truth;⁵⁵ what rhetoric requires is a knowledge of plausible truths and a certain range of experience (or experimentation, *empeiria*) that allow one to understand why plausible truths are held and how to work with them, primarily though not exclusively toward a political end. Here in the case of political discourse it is most clear that what rhetoric requires is a certain shared and agreed upon subject matter since everyone in a particular cultural sphere has some experi-

52. WALKER 1994, p. 49.

53. In Fortenbaugh’s words, the speaker “must take account of what the respondent believes or at least is prepared to concede.” See FORTENBAUGH 2007, p. 108. For a helpful overview of the etymological background to the enthymeme, see WALKER 1994.

54. BALLACCI 2018, p. 29.

55. In fact, in *Metaphysics A* (1981a) Aristotle endorses the belief that “with a view to action experience seems in no respect inferior to art, and we even see men of experience succeeding more than those who have theory without experience,” cited in BALLA 2004, p. 54.

ence of some plausible truths, even if they do not have true or scientific knowledge of these same matters nor do they necessarily share them in exactly the same way with others, nor are they necessarily true (that is, universally) but only plausible in their context.⁵⁶ As we shall see, the implications of Aristotle's rhetorical structure is not limited to the three "political" contexts of the Athens of his day; rather, the implications of a grounding of rhetoric in enthymematic argumentation reaches far beyond, in fact as far as all that can be said.

Aristotle is also clear that not all rhetorical argumentation need be enthymematic, and would never likely be so. Political discourse, like human discourse in general, contains paradigmatic or pictorial logic. We have already identified excellent and compelling examples of pictorial logic in Plato's dialogues themselves, in which illustrations, examples, and comparisons are used to persuade without the use of any kind of enthymematic logic (e.g. Plato's chariot narrative in the *Phaedrus*).⁵⁷ Other examples can be found throughout the Mediterranean world, including parables taught by Jesus:

A sower went out to sow. He sowed one lot of seed in a bad context [...] another lot of seed in a bad context [...] another lot of seed in a bad context [...] and a final lot of seed – phew! – where it could grow. The result in the first was disastrous [...] the result in the second was also disastrous [...] and the result in the third was disastrous [...] but the result in the fourth was amazing! And that, my friends, is what the kingdom of God is like.⁵⁸

To coin Stanley Fish, there may be no enthymeme in this parable, but there is a conclusion, derived from comparisons, and patent to both the day labourers working the Galilean fields and the brokers responsible to the land-owner for ensuring appropriate use of seed by those labourers, seed that is always in limited supply.⁵⁹ While not everything that Jesus said is remembered, parables like this were because it was this kind of pictorial rhetorical argumentation that actually succeeded in capturing some culturally attuned audience's imagina-

56. Balla notes that the origins of the notion that experience is precisely what *is* required for true knowledge can be found in the early empiricist medical texts. For example, citing the Hippocratic treatise *On ancient medicine*, Balla highlights the author's objection to "philosophers who more or less pollute his old good discipline with 'empty postulates' like the discussions of 'things in the sky or below the earth' and, in a way which is reminiscent of Polus, invites us to acknowledge that 'medicine has long had all its means to hand, and has discovered both a principle and a method, through which the discoveries made during a long period are many and excellent'." BALLA 2004, p. 49, citing JONES 1946.

57. Paradigmatic argumentation is often inductive, but it consists of more than simply a series of examples strung together. Sophisticated paradigmatic argumentation provides a finely woven narrative that presents a compelling picture. As such, it can be called not improperly 'picture logic' as well as "example" (1.2 1356b3-5). See FORTENBAUGH 2007, p. 109.

58. The language is a paraphrase of the so-called "Parable of the sower" in Mark 4:1-9.

59. For an in-depth discussion of this parable using sociorhetorical interpretation, see BLOOMQUIST 2010, pp. 115-146.

tion. Plato asserts that a good and true rhetor must be able to develop good comparisons; in his *Rhetoric* books 2 and 3 Aristotle provides abundant examples of what good comparisons look like and why they work on the lips of some rhetors and why psychologically they have the impact that they do on some audiences.⁶⁰ The Gospels illustrate the fact that Plato and Aristotle's rhetorical convictions seem to work; Aristotle's analysis indicates how enthymematic and pictorial logic require a connection with the audience to work.

Nevertheless, it is here that we come to a striking difference between Plato and Aristotle, one that has important implications for us. While Plato was primarily concerned with a relatively sophisticated audience from the Athenian *polis*, and drew argumentation and illustration that corresponded with their level of knowledge, Aristotle was concerned to show how and why rhetoric works with any and all audiences of the *polis*. While Plato appears to assume that there is only one, true rhetoric, which is thus universal rhetoric, Aristotle assumes that there are multiple audiences and thus multiple rhetorics. For him there is no true or universal audience, only "limitations in the capacity of the audience to judge and limitations in the knowledge on which the speaker can count." As such, the range of audiences' plausible knowledge provides the "basic conditions of the realm in which rhetoric operates – the realm of 'contingency' – and as such have to be understood in order to deal properly with them."⁶¹ This suggests that for Aristotle all rhetorical discourse will likely be different one from another because the contingent knowledge base will be different in each case, either in space or in time.⁶² We might say that rhetoric always faces limits because the *polis* inhabits the contingent realm of partial knowledge. And because the discourse of the *polis* is crucial for the survival of the *polis*, discourse in the *polis* must always navigate between ultimate goods (*telè*) and plausible and debatable goods held by the members of the *polis*. There is no valid *a priori* approach to political discourse; there is only the tough, give-and-take of working with "ultimate principles and their contingent materialization."⁶³

Here resides yet another reason for Aristotle's focus on *pathos* and the need for the rhetor to understand his audience. For Aristotle, political discourse, as a subset of human communication, works best when it encourages the audi-

60. FORTENBAUGH 2007, pp. 109-110 helpfully provides a number of examples.

61. BALLACCI 2018, p. 29.

62. Aristotle consistently identifies that audience as "judges" in the case of discourse (see 1355a 14-24; 1356a; 1377b 21; 1391b 8-18; 1402b; and *passim*). So GRIMALDI 1958, p. 373. In his neo-Aristotelian rhetoric, Perelman seeks to establish a "universal audience," and that attempt is defended by scholars like CROSSWHITE 1989, p. 157-173. However, following Grimaldi's suggestion (above) and recent work in cultural anthropology, I believe that Aristotle accurately identifies why there can be no "universal audience." For a cultural anthropological criticism of attempts to find a universalized human language and human argumentation, see SHORE 1996.

63. BALLACCI 2018, p. 32.

ence to do *their* work and “fill in the blanks.” Rhetoric that requires passive foils, as one finds in Plato’s dialogues, may be suitable for some audiences but not for Aristotle. Assent is not difficult to achieve in a well-crafted scientific or analytical presented to a group of knowledgeable experts, nor is assent difficult in presenting metaphysical truths to an attuned audience. But most human discourse is not like either of these, addressed to passive foils or overwhelmingly and analytically convincing or with a uniquely qualified audience. This is especially true of the give-and-take, often chaotic, world of political discourse. As Grimaldi notes, Aristotle presupposes that good rhetoric “creates the atmosphere wherein the audience may make its own decision” because political rhetoric in particular is “preparatory for action.”⁶⁴ Political rhetoric should be crafted in such a way that the audience can draw the conclusions from the elements of the argument, including both enthymematic and paradigmatic argumentation. Aristotle’s rhetoric not only shows a profound respect for the freedom of the citizens of the *polis*,⁶⁵ but also provides a better understanding of how the soul is moved. Were analytical, scientific, or even *a priori* arguments all that were required to persuade the *polis* to act, rhetors could safely ignore the real audience and provide in an *a priori*, mechanistic fashion analytically compelling arguments.⁶⁶ In the real world, according to Aristotle, rhetors must not only be soul movers but know why and how the soul moves. For this reason, books 2 and 3 of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* are the most lengthy but unfortunately also the most overlooked in studies of Aristotle.

In conclusion, in contrast to Plato’s dialogues which contain a rebuke of rhetoric as *technè* and a call for a true rhetoric illustrated by brilliant rhetorical flourishes, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* provides us with “the first systematic philosophical defence of this art as a form of practical reason, a manifestation of *phronèsis*. It is a defence that openly vindicates the dimension of contingency as the proper dimension for politics and rhetoric.”⁶⁷ In this way, it is not only different from Plato but also from Isocrates’s suggestion that rhetors teach students appropriate examples of virtue such as can be found in the later Hellenistic and Roman period elementary school exercises for rhetoricians known as the

64. GRIMALDI 1958, p. 374. He adds: “The art or technique of the rhetorician is to perceive and present those things which make decision, and a definite decision, possible, but to stop with the presentation. The audience at this point must come in to accept or reject, to make its particular judgment to execute or refrain from action. Rhetoric, then, is preparatory for action.”

65. PERELMAN and OLBRECHTS-TYTECA 1969, p. 514, cited by BALLACCI 2018, p. 32.

66. This principle remains one of the reasons why rhetorical skill demands some ability to capture the good will of the audience (*captatio benevolentiae*) at the start of a discourse, rather than alienating an audience before an argument has even been proposed. Grimaldi’s important article is devoted in its entirety to showing how Aristotelian rhetoric cannot be conceived of as a purely rational or “intellectualistic” project.

67. BALLACCI 2018, p. 17.

Progymnasmata.⁶⁸ As scholars of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* like Grimaldi have long noted, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* cannot be read by subsuming it to his *Metaphysics* or even his *Ethics*; rather, the *Rhetoric* should be read in the same way one reads his biological treatises: as an example of careful, empirical study and observation of a particular subject matter, in this case human language, which is public and contingent. Read this way Aristotle's *Rhetoric* presents us not only with the first systematic approach to political discourse but also the first real attempt to identify how human communication works. As such it has significant implications for both a better understanding of political discourse and for our broader understanding of human communication.

Tentative conclusions and implications of an Aristotelian rhetoric

Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle all address the question "what is rhetoric?" They do so by drawing on current examples and previous reflections. To answer the question "what is rhetoric?" for each of them in the fullest way possible would obviously require more time and a more adequate display of the pre-Socratic traditions out of which Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle all worked,⁶⁹ as well as a better understanding of their own historical and cultural contexts.⁷⁰ But, what we can say from this brief presentation is quite clear.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* did provide something that neither Isocrates nor Plato provided, namely, initial guidelines for the analysis of how rhetorical discourse actually works in the *polis*. Aristotle the empiricist neither creates a manual for political discourse nor prescribes how political speech should happen; rather, he provides analysis of how and why political language does work. The analysis can be used by someone who follows the *Gorgias* to understand specifically why political language *can* manipulate and how it does so. It could also be followed by someone who wanted to understand political discourse for the sake of a better discourse within the *polis*. But in stark contrast to Plato, Aristotle presents us with a realistic attempt to find "an equilibrium between" on the one hand "abstract" and even "transcendent principles" of common good and on the other "the contingent reality of political life." In this sense Aristotle provides the first pragmatic analysis of language. This has implications not only for our understanding of discourse today but also for our understanding of Aristotle's place in the history of philosophy.

68. A collection of these in English can now be found in KENNEDY 2003. For an excellent introduction to the *progymnasmata*, see PARSONS and MARTIN 2019.

69. This tradition is explored recently in the series of essays that can be found in REAMES and SCHIAPPA 2017.

70. Kennedy helpfully indicates how Cicero sought a way to bring together the very best that we find in Isocrates and Aristotle (see *De orat.*).

While Aristotle's analysis of political discourse retained its value in aristocratic societies, like classical Athens or the Macedonia of the post-Peloponnesian war or Republican Rome or even the Virginia of the American founding or the Confederation assemblies that decided the fate of Canada in the late 1800s, the classical context is not the context of Western liberal societies today in which democracy has become a widespread political norm permeating not just the seat of government but all facets of life, from family, through workplace, to church, school, and all levels of government. But here, too, Aristotle's rhetorical study has something to offer. In fact here Aristotle's rhetorical project truly blossoms because in this evolved, democratic world we find ourselves at the highest level of lived contingency and the need to negotiate this contingency and the world of truth in public discourse that now permeates every level of human society, rendering it often yet more chaotic as voices clamor to be heard. Aristotle's rhetoric has significant potential for political arenas such as ours in which "things maintain an intrinsic dimension of unpredictability and thus of liberty, since they are the combination of accidental circumstances and of different deliberations taken by a plurality of individuals who differ in character, emotional involvement, beliefs, and so on." Aristotle's rhetorical analysis is ideally suited for our use as "an art for the polis, a civic art," one that "is not reserved for the specialists but is available to all."⁷¹ In fact, throughout the 20th century Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, and Arendt, and rhetoricians like Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman, all recognized the pertinence of Aristotle's contribution to "judging and deliberating in the realm of contingency – the realm where things happen not by necessity."⁷²

But it is for this very reason that I am surprised that Aristotle's contribution has not been more recognized in the context of the pragmatic analysis of language. Perhaps this is because too often Aristotle, and his predecessors, have been constrained and limited by contemporary scholars seeking to provide historical reconstruction of 5th and 4th century CE rhetoric rather than to consider the contemporary appropriation of this rhetoric.⁷³ Consider for example one of the 20th century's most interesting philosophical contributions, that of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which develops the dead-end at which he arrives in the *Tractatus*.⁷⁴ In the English-speaking world the translation of his *Investigations* started a "rush" towards "ordinary language philosophy" in which "the language of the street, or language shared

71. BALLACCI 2018, p. 28.

72. Summarized by BALLACCI 2018, p. 27, who notes in particular the influence of Heidegger's Marburg lectures of 1924 and 1925, as can be found in HEIDEGGER 2009.

73. SCHIAPPA 2003.

74. For an attempt to explore Wittgenstein's potential for rhetoric, theology and biblical studies, see BLOOMQUIST 2005. Elements of this talk can be found in the section on "ideological" analysis in BLOOMQUIST 2003, pp. 165-193.

with the street, was no longer, as with the philosophers they challenged, the enemy of philosophy, but its resource, and for that reason more difficult than ever to arrive at an understanding with.⁷⁵ Yet paradoxically it is this same Wittgenstein who echoes Plato's anti-rhetorical approach to Sophistic language when he writes that "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."⁷⁶ Though you can hear in Wittgenstein's words the echoes of Plato's definition of "philosophy" and of the *Gorgias's* attack on those who would bewitch audiences through language, Wittgenstein will actually follow Aristotle who does not seek a way through language to a truth that can be gained in spite of contingent human language but by the analysis of contingent uses of language. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein appears to overlook that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is his ally, a first ally, in understanding how and why language works, or at least he doesn't acknowledge that ally. Would that Wittgenstein had seen that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was more than just a prescription for how to speak! He would have saved us from attempts to turn Aristotle into a kind of one-size-fits-all manual for proper argumentation in the legal and political spheres.⁷⁷

In this regard I would assert that it is Aristotle, not Wittgenstein, who established the analytical groundwork for "ordinary language criticism."⁷⁸ For while Plato gives us both damning criticism of how language can be manipulated for political ends, as well as lofty examples of Socrates' own rhetorical prowess and ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty to which to aspire when speaking so as to inspire souls to desire the same – something that I have suggested Isocrates also wanted to do but achieved with considerably less success – Aristotle actually gives us the start of an analysis of how and why ordinary, that is, political, language actually does work in regular human conversation. This is because Aristotle sought to provide the analysis required to get at what Plato had said was the subject of rhetoric, namely, "all things that are said." For Aristotle, the context for his rhetorical project is actually "the whole area of human activity."⁷⁹ And this has huge implications for a contemporary appropriation of his work.

To take but one example of how Aristotle's guidelines are being used in just this way, consider "sociorhetorical interpretation," an approach inaugurated by Vernon Robbins at Emory University.⁸⁰ Robbins and the team of

75. CAVELL 2003, pp. 348-349.

76. WITTGENSTEIN 1958, p. 109.

77. The most egregious example is that of PERELMAN and OLBRECHTS-TYTECA 1969.

78. I agree with BALLACCI 2018, p. 17 for whom Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric is not only developed by Cicero but will also "be the point of reference for much of the recovery of rhetoric in the twentieth century."

79. GRIMALDI 1958, p. 372.

80. The primary works for understanding sociorhetorical interpretation are ROBBINS 1996a and ROBBINS 1996b.

scholars working with him have recently been exploring the ways in which insights from cognitive science can help them to further interpretation of texts, primarily ancient religious texts. The reason for this move can be found in the Aristotelian desire to understand better how the mind (soul) works and thus how humans communicate what they are thinking in local (i.e., culturally contingent) contexts. In seeking to learn “how the mind works,” Robbins and his team have relied heavily on the work of “conceptual blending” as developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner.⁸¹ In their work, Fauconnier and Turner discuss how the mind connects images and metaphors using regular patterns of blending or comparison, something that Plato and Aristotle both understood to be the fundamental challenge of good rhetoric. But, in contrast to Plato, Aristotle established and Fauconnier and Turner have shown that this is not something that only a philosopher can do; this is something that everyone does in communicating. True, some do it better than others. Not everyone can write a compelling advertisement for a worthwhile product, something that Fauconnier and Turner, as well as George Lakoff,⁸² attempt to show reveals human “intelligence,” and something that Aristotle might have seen as a fundamental feature of discourse. But all humans do so at some level. In fact, Fauconnier and Turner’s prescient work on how the mind creates these blends maps almost perfectly onto Aristotle’s understanding of rhetorical *topoi*, the stuff out of which enthymematic argumentation arises. So, whether it be at the highly sophisticated level at which philosophers and theologians of the Latin and Byzantine churches argued about how the unseen God could have a visible Son, or whether it be at popular level at which two farmers talk about the weather on the street of a small town, Aristotle’s analysis of public, contingent discourse is now being confirmed through cognitive science.⁸³

81. FAUCONNIER and TURNER 2003 and ROBBINS 2005, pp. 161-195.

82. LAKOFF and JOHNSON 1981.

83. A simple example from a quotidian event confirms the accuracy of Aristotle’s observations. Even the most detailed weather forecasts from specialists on television do not follow a scientific argument: “Nimbostratus cloud formations are those that bring about rain in our region. Nimbostratus clouds are approaching our present geographical location at a speed of 20 nautical miles / hour and will be present in our viewing area in 10 minutes. Rain will fall in our viewing area in approximately 10 minutes.” Rather a television audience that has tuned to a channel to which it has given some preliminary credence will hear: “Well, looks like we’re going to be having rain starting soon over the next day or two.” Done. That’s all it takes. A scientist of analytical philosopher, unfamiliar with prairie weather, will wonder what they could possibly be talking about. Yet, while not dialectic or scientific, for those for whom it is intended, the argument is convincing and persuasive and will take appropriate action. Some consensus of discourse is all that is necessary for communication to proceed in most civic forms and forums, unless we aim to develop a science of weather conditions. Aristotle asserted that “the more an argument becomes specific and technical, approaching the first principles of that specific topic, the more it moves away from rhetoric and comes closer to the science of that topic.” (BALLACCI 2018, p. 29, citing *Rhetoric* 1358a and 1359b).

In conclusion Isocrates's rhetoric assumed that rhetorical practice would give us political leaders but did not provide adequate protection against demagogic use of rhetoric. Plato spoke damningly against the instrumental rhetoric of his day and proposed in its place a true one. One consequence of the use of this true rhetoric in a demagogic world was that it would inevitably lead to a clash those who saw the dangers to themselves of a true rhetoric, and thus to the subsequent and inevitable execution or death of the true rhetor (cf. *Apology* 17a - 18a, *Gorgias* 522a and *Republic* 49c-e). In sharp contrast to both, Aristotle provides a rhetorical project grounded in an empirical, pragmatic approach that seeks to provide an opportunity for the analysis of political discourse and whose ultimate goal is to assist members of the *polis* to talk together. For Aristotle the *polis* needs neither Isocratean elevated rhetorical models on their own nor Socratean martyrs. What the *polis* needs is education in attending to how people talk and to the ways in which communication can be more effective. Which is why it is to Aristotle that we can and should look for help in determining fundamental trajectories that can help lead toward a systematic resolution of what Wittgenstein saw as the bewitching problems of miscommunication, problems with which we will always be beset whenever we use that fundamental tool that, as Isocrates noted, we as humans have been uniquely given to communicate intelligence to others, namely, language.

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SUMMARY

Plato is often understood to be merely an outspoken critic of rhetoric and Aristotle a systematizer of rhetoric. The reality is more complex. Plato's criticism is not of rhetoric *per se* but of a particular (Sophistic) kind of rhetoric; his work actually evidences a keen desire to enshrine a true rhetoric, one that will enable instruction in truth to happen. Nor is Aristotle a critic of Plato; rather, Aristotle provides a systematic approach to political discourse and human language as it is in practice. Aristotle thus establishes both the foundations for analysis of democratic political discourse and the analytical groundwork for the much later analysis of "ordinary language."

SOMMAIRE

Platon est souvent compris comme un critique de la rhétorique, tandis qu'Aristote comme systématisateur de la rhétorique. La réalité est plus complexe. La critique de Platon ne porte pas sur la rhétorique en soi mais sur la rhétorique sophistique; son travail témoigne en réalité d'un désir ardent de fonder une vraie rhétorique comme moyen de pouvoir enseigner la vérité. Aristote n'est pas non plus un critique de Platon. Il propose plutôt une approche systématique du discours politique et du langage humain tel qu'ils sont dans la pratique. Aristote établit ainsi à la fois les bases de l'analyse du discours politique démocratique et les bases analytiques pour le « langage ordinaire ».