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Constructionist Account Of Natural Language Communication In Aristotle's Rhetoric

While Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is in many ways a unique treaty, the uniqueness of the book is, arguably, nowhere clearer than in its original approach to natural language communication, for, interestingly enough, several of the views held in the *Rhetoric* invite the classification as more or less "constructionist". This development is astounding, for any constructionist views in general must be seen as posing a major challenge to the fundamental assumptions of Aristotle's metaphysics which is well known to have been both essentialist and realist. Yet, if the philosopher is most famous for his account of the so called "correspondence" theory of truth and its resulting ontological and epistemological ramifications, then his *Rhetoric* appears to advocate a quite different approach. This does not exhaust the list of perplexing interpretative difficulties, as the *Rhetoric* itself gives at times an impression of being somewhat incoherent, since the work, on the one hand, contains numerous admonitions that every speech should represent nothing but dry facts and, on the other, it abounds in instructions how to manipulate the audience in accord with one's needs.[1] In other words, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* could be argued to show some astonishing vacillation as to whether to include rhetoric in a legitimate philosophical system by providing it with appropriate logical tools or merely tolerate it as some sort of *malum necessarium* that no decent philosopher should ever seriously grapple with.

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[1] For a discussion of this inconsistency see J. Barnes, *Rhetoric and poetics*, In J. Barnes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, p. 262.

Consequently, the aim of the present article will be to suggest that Aristotle's rather ambiguous position about rhetoric results from his premonition that language performs *diverse* communicative functions and that the so called "representation" can only be seen as one of them. While it will be shown here that Aristotle's position in several ways seems to prefigure certain important intuitions of contemporary constructionism, we have to begin our considerations with a clear declaration that the present paper does not seek to advance the preposterous thesis that Aristotle was indeed a constructionist in the contemporary sense of the term. Let us state the obvious truth that Aristotle was an essentialist who never abandoned the realist philosophy and who never broke entirely with the paradigm of language as representation.[2] Thus, to reiterate: it has to be borne in mind that even though this article argues for the presence of certain constructionist intuitions in the *Rhetoric*, it does not fatuously purport its author to actually have been a constructionist in every sense of the word.

If Aristotle's account of the so called "correspondence" theory of truth is justly regarded as one of his most important contributions to Western philosophy, then the most frequently cited definition of it is to be found in the *Metaphysics*, where truth is defined in such a manner that "to say of Being that it is not or of Non-Being that it is, is false, whereas to say of Being that it is and of Non-Being that it is not, is true" (τὸ μὲν γὰρ λέγειν τὸ ὂν μὴ εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ ὂν εἶναι ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ τὸ ὂν εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές).[3] The fact-based approach to reality that pervades the *Metaphysics* seems to be reflected in Aristotle's castigation of the contemporary authors of manuals on rhetoric whom the Stagirite accuses of focusing exclusively on how to whip up the emotions of the crowd. Thus, Aristotle complains that his contemporaries deal with "issues that do not pertain to the matter" (τῶν ἔξω τοῦ πράγματος), since they are only concerned with how

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[2]   As Koch aptly points out, Aristotle would never accept the idea that our classifications of objects into particular genera and species are but social constructs, since the philosopher perceived them as reflections of the natural order of the universe, see A.M. Koch, *Knowledge and Social Construction*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham 2005, pp. 75–76.

[3]   *Metaph.* 1011b 26–27. See also *De int.* 16a 3–8, *Soph. elen.* 180a 26 – 180b 7, *Cat.* 12b 5–16 and 14b 14–22. While in all these works the philosopher presents formulations that differ in several important respects, what is nowadays commonly referred to as Aristotle's correspondence theory of truth emerges in one way or another already from Plato's *Sophist* (263b 4–11) and *Cratylus* (385b 7–8). For a discussion of Aristotle's theory of truth as a correspondence theory of truth, where the truth is understood as isomorphic to reality, see P. Crivelli, *Aristotle on Truth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 24–25. While the study in general is the most comprehensive and exhaustive discussion on Aristotle's view of truth that I am aware of, a good exposition of Aristotle's idea of signification is given by D. Charles, *Aristotle on names and their signification*, In S. Everson (ed.) *Companions to Ancient Thought. Vol. 3: Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 37–73.

to drive the judge into a desired frame of mind.[4] In this context, the philosopher asserts forcefully that: "calumny, pity, anger, and all such passions of the soul have nothing to do with the facts, but are merely appeals to the juryman" (διαβολὴ γὰρ καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ὀργὴ καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάθη τῆς ψυχῆς οὐ περὶ τοῦ πράγματός ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸν δικαστήν).[5] In a similar vein, the philosopher stresses that the only appropriate manner of delivering a speech is "to fight the case with nothing but the very facts" (αὐτοῖς ἀγωνίζεσθαι τοῖς πράγμασιν).[6] Nonetheless, this seeming continuity between Aristotle's account of truth and his censure of the traditional approach to rhetoric appears to be somewhat strained by those passages of the *Rhetoric* in which, as I shall argue, the Stagirite seems to be opting for a more "constructionist" approach to natural language communication. I am referring to those passages in which Aristotle alludes to the possibility of constructing truth rather than merely presenting it. Such utterances are abundant in the *Rhetoric*. Suffice it to quote his advice how to make use of arguments that concern contracts so as to "increase or decrease their importance" (ὅσον αὔξειν ἢ καθαιρεῖν) and thus "make them credible or incredible" (ἢ πιστὰς ποιεῖν ἢ ἀπίστους), depending on whether "they are useful (ὑπάρχωσι)" or not.[7] Similarly, Aristotle can also state that "the only way in which anyone can prove anything, regardless of how cogent their arguments are, is not to consider all facts, but merely those that are relevant to the matter (οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἁπάντων λαμβάνουσιν ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν περὶ ἕκαστον ὑπαρχόντων).[8] Finally, towards the end of his work, Aristotle declares that the task of the Epilogue is "to magnify (αὐξῆσαι) or minimize (ταπεινῶσαι) the facts".[9] What emerges from these remarks could arguably be characterized as some sort of constructionism, since the author of the *Rhetoric* seems to be of the opinion that frequently facts and all evidence are not merely presented but actually constructed, since the axiology of the speaker inevitably determines their ontology.

    With the situation being as it is, the present paper will aim to account for the discrepancy between the constructionist views that Aristotle seems to be holding in the *Rhetoric* and his classical account of truth that permeates the entire *Corpus*

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[4]   1354a 15–16. All references without the title of the work are to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the edition by R. Kassel, *Aristotelis Ars Rhetorica*, De Gruyter, Berlin and New York 1976. In the present paper, I have also availed myself of English translations by G.A. Kennedy, *Aristotle On Rhetoric. A Theory of Civic Discourse*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford 1991; L. Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York 1960 and W. R. Roberts, *Rhetorica: The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 11, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1924.

[5]   1354a 16–18.

[6]   1404a 5–6.

[7]   1376a 33 – 1376b 2.

[8]   1396a 33 – 1396b 2.

[9]   1419b 12.

Aristotelicum. When trying to explain the *Rhetoric's* divergence from the fact-based approach that is generally typical of Aristotle by suggesting that the book be read as an example of a more or less conscious articulation of a constructionist approach to language and communication, several things need to be kept in mind.

First of all, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a very complex treaty and its abundance of interpretative questions has triggered off a plethora of fierce debates in which numerous disparate explanations have been proposed. Accordingly, the interpretation advocated here can only be seen as yet another attempt to present a coherent interpretation of Aristotle's intricate language and communication theory. Secondly and relatedly, any effort to extract some sort of constructionism from Aristotle's philosophy must face the problem that there are many and mutually exclusive ways of understanding and defining the term.[10] For this reason, an attempt to extract some constructionist intuitions from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* can always be subject to the criticism that it is merely a subjective classification on the author's part, since the Stagirite himself would strongly object to such a label. Lastly, one should also remain aware of the general danger that lies in transposing modern concepts and imposing them onto ancient views. It goes without saying that all such attempts run the risk of cramming the object of interpretation into the self-imposed confines of the interpreter's personal views. Thus, the interpreter may inadvertently "trim" the object of their analysis so as to fit it to their preconceived picture of it. Yet at the same time, I do not think that anyone would deny the advantages of reading Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (or any other work for that matter) in such a way that contemporary problems be better grasped.[11] Bearing all this in mind, let us try to ascertain whether it is possible to attribute to Aristotle the position that every ontology is at least partially determined by some axiology, without forgetting, though, that for the Stagirite the external world exists independently of its descriptions.

Aristotle characterizes rhetoric as an ἀντίστροφος to dialectic.[12] This characterization aims to emphasize that rhetoric and dialectic are similar in that they both treat of how we reason and think. At the same time, rhetoric differs from logic due to its practical dimension and that is why the philosopher describes it as "a certain kind of offshoot of dialectic and of ethical studies" (οἷον παραφυές

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[10] See in this respect the discussion of the problem in: I. Hacking, *The Social Construction of What*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2000, pp. 36–62; V. Burr, *Social Constructionism*, Routledge, New York 2003, pp. 2–27; A. Lock and T. Strong, *Social Constructionism. Sources and Stirrings in Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, pp. 6–11.

[11] I thoroughly agree in this respect with E. Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, pp. 3–5.

[12] 1354a 1.

τι τῆς διαλεκτικῆς εἶναι καὶ τῆς περὶ τὰ ἤθη πραγματείας).[13] The fact that rhetoric deals with ethical issues is of paramount importance, for it makes rhetorical syllogisms quite unique. According to Aristotle, all our knowledge builds either on induction (ἐπαγωγή) or deduction (συλλογισμός).[14] In rhetoric, the inductive argument is the example (παράδειγμα), whereas the deductive argument is the enthymeme (ἐνθύμημα). Even if rhetoric, as any legitimate cognition in Aristotle, pivots on syllogisms and induction, it can under no circumstances become certain and scientific to the point of ἐπιστήμη, for two main reasons.

Firstly, rhetorical syllogisms are based on premises that are not necessary, but only probable and, secondly, induction can rule out neither anomalies nor exceptions. Aristotle states emphatically that "few of the premises on which rhetorical syllogisms are founded are necessary" (ὀλίγα μὲν τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐξ ὧν οἱ ῥητορικοὶ συλλογισμοί εἰσι).[15] This is due to the fact that most of the matters about which judgments and investigations are made "can be other than they are" (ἐνδέχεται καὶ ἄλλως ἔχειν), since it is about human actions that one inquires and "all human actions" (πραττόμενα πάντα) have a contingent character and "none of them is determined by necessity" (οὐδὲν […] ἐξ ἀνάγκης).[16] Thus, it becomes evident that if one considers "the premises from which enthymemes are spoken" (ἐξ ὧν τὰ ἐνθυμήματα λέγεται), one will find out that "some of them are necessary" (τὰ μὲν ἀναγκαῖα ἔσται), but "the preponderance of them are so only for the most part" (τὰ δὲ πλεῖστα ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ), and as enthymemes are "derived from probabilities and signs" (ἐξ εἰκότων καὶ ἐκ σημείων), their propositions must be of the same nature.[17] With regard to this assertion, it seems advisable to note the humanism that underlies Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. It manifests itself clearly in the philosopher's concern for the values that motivate individuals to undertake particular actions. Obviously, the philosopher strives for the true understanding of reality that is to be attained with the aid of reason and rational methods. Yet, at the same time, he is very much aware of the insufficiency of any solely objective (or: "scientific") approach to the world of humans.

These assumptions make Aristotle embrace a position that seems to prefigure contemporary anti-naturalism, for the philosopher observes that "there are premises in physics on which it is impossible to base either an enthymeme

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[13] 1356a 25–26.

[14] *An. pr.* 68b 13–14, *An. post.* 81 a 40 and *Top.* 105a 11–12. For a discussion of the two sources of all knowledge see *An. pr.* 24b 18–20, 68b 15–37, *An. post.* 100b 3–5, *Top.* 100a 25 – 27, 105a 13–14 and *Soph. elen.* 165a 1–2.

[15] 1357a 22–23.

[16] 1357a 23–27.

[17] 1357a 30–33.

or a syllogism that could be applied to ethics, and there are other premises in ethics which are entirely useless in physics" (οἷον περὶ φυσικῶν εἰσι προτάσεις ἐξ ὧν οὔτε ἐνθύμημα οὔτε συλλογισμὸς ἔστι περὶ τῶν ἠθικῶν, καὶ περὶ τούτων ἄλλαι ἐξ ὧν οὐκ ἔσται περὶ τῶν φυσικῶν).[18] The statement is crucial, as it clearly contrasts the natural world with the social one. The implications here are that nature should not be carelessly identified with culture, since the two are governed by completely disparate laws. Aristotle's insistence on the inapplicability of physical premises to ethics may be read as resulting from his conviction that culture is a result of human actions oriented to specific values and, as such, is not subject the methodology of natural sciences.[19] As a result of the fact that rhetorical syllogisms concern human actions, Aristotle appears to suggest that their rationality must, at least to some extent, be socially constructed, for what emerges from the passage quoted above is a stance that rationality is a product of various human choices that are constituted in and through social interactions. Thus, in his *Rhetoric* Aristotle does not seem to regard rationality as a pre-given and objective category that exists completely independently of human beings and their social environment, but rather treats it as a contingent variable that emerges from our social interactions. This is clear from Aristotle's focus on rhetoric as a study of persuasion.

While Aristotle views rhetoric as concerned with the means of persuasion (πίστεις), the philosopher identifies three such modes: the first depends "on the character of the speaker" (ἐν τῷ ἤθει τοῦ λέγοντος), the second "on disposing the listener in a particular way" (ἐν τῷ τὸν ἀκροατὴν διαθεῖναί πως) and the third "on the argument itself" (ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ λόγῳ).[20] This tripartition is further confirmed by the observation that "a speech consists of three elements: the speaker, the subject of the speech and the person addressed" (σύγκειται μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τριῶν ὁ λόγος, ἔκ τε τοῦ λέγοντος καὶ περὶ οὗ λέγει καὶ πρὸς ὅν).[21] This division is critical, as it shows beyond any doubt that Aristotle does not confine the art of rhetoric to logical argumentation alone. The philosopher does think highest

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[18] 1358a 18–20.

[19] At the same time, it seems worth noting that Aristotle's anti-naturalism is not as clear-cut as it may seem from the above assertion, since the philosopher can also state (1358 a 12–14) that there are topics "which are applicable in common to the issues of justice, physics, politics and many diverse species of knowledge" (οὗτοι δ᾽ εἰσὶν οἱ κοινοὶ περὶ δικαίων καὶ φυσικῶν καὶ περὶ πολιτικῶν καὶ περὶ πολλῶν διαφερόντων εἴδει), regardless of their differences. In connection with this, let us recall here that the present paper confines itself to suggesting the presence of certain constructionist *intuitions* in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, without assuming the Stagirite to fully have embraced the position of constructionism that, in fact, was only fully articulated in the 20th century.

[20] 1356a 1–4.

[21] 1358a 37 – 1358b 1.

of λόγος, since it is this mode that brings rhetoric closest to dialectic, but, at the same time, he emphasizes that it is only one of the modes that guarantees persuasion.

In what follows I would like to argue that Aristotle shows here his awareness of the fact that language performs *various* functions and that, consequently, the representational function is only one of them. I would like to buttress my argument by suggesting that Aristotle's tripartition of rhetoric may be read as an anticipation of Karl Bühler's model of language as *organon*.[22] It is common knowledge that the linguist defined language in terms of its three basic functions: representation (*Darstellung*), expression (*Ausdruck*) and appeal (*Appell*).[23] The domain of the representational function is a descriptive reference to objective reality, the domain of the expressive function is an evaluative position of the speaker and the domain of the appealing function is an impact on the listener(s). Bühler's account of language functions questions any attempt to reduce language to a mere tool for describing objective reality in an axiologically neutral manner:

> Though we do not dispute the dominance of the representational function of language, what now follows is suited and intended to delimit it. The concept «things» or the more adequate conceptual pair «objects and states of affairs» does not capture everything for which the sound is a mediating phenomenon, a mediator between the speaker and the hearer. Rather, each of the two participants has his own position in the make-up of the speech situation, namely the sender as the agent of the act of speaking, as the *subject* of the speech action on the one hand, and the receiver as the one spoken to, as the *addressee* of the speech action on the other hand. They are not simply a part of what the message is all about, rather they are the partners in an exchange […].

> Was nun folgt, ist geeignet und dazu bestimmt, die von uns unbestrittene Dominanz der Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache einzugrenzen. Es ist nicht wahr, dass alles, wofür der Laut ein mediales Phänomen, ein Mittler zwischen Sprecher und Hörer ist, durch den Begriff «die Dinge» oder durch das adäquatere Begriffspaar, «Gegenstände und Sachverhalte» getroffen wird. Sondern das andere ist wahr, dass im Aufbau der Sprechsituation sowohl der Sender als Täter der Tat des Sprechens, der Sender als *Subjekt* der Sprechhandlung, wie der Empfänger als Angesprochener, der Empfänger als *Adressat* der Sprechhandlung eigene Positionen innehaben. Sie sind nicht einfach ein Teil dessen, worüber die Mitteilung erfolgt, sondern sie sind die Austauschpartner […][24]

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[22] See Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, Gustav Fischer Verlag, Jena-Stuttgart 1934. In what follows I cite first the English translation: Karl Bühler, *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*, transl. D.F. Goodwin, John Benjamins, Amsterdam 1990 and then the German original.

[23] Ibidem, p. 28 [35].

[24] Ibidem, p. 37 [30–31].

I believe that Aristotle's tripartition of rhetoric anticipates Bühler's division of language functions, for both conceptions suggest that every description of a fact must be supported by an appropriate mode of persuasion. Thus, the Stagirite incorporates the role of emotions into his theory of civic discourse for the same reasons that Bühler refuses to reduce language to its representational function. For both thinkers language is much more than just a tool for describing reality or expressing one's thoughts. Aristotle and Bühler allow for the possibility that, to some extent, language may actually shape our everyday interactions, since for both thinkers communication implies certain construction of meaning. Whether it is a rhetorical speech or a plain act of communication, human beings are susceptible to rhetorical persuasion and that is why Aristotle blurs the distinction between the realms of rhetoric, on the one hand, and dialectic, on the other. Hence, where Aristotle and Bühler are in agreement is that every knowledge of rational discourse must be reinforced by some psychological insights, for apart from the ability to reason logically, the speaker must also be acquainted with human characters and emotions, so as to be capable of moving the hearers into appropriate emotional reactions. Accordingly, Aristotle insists that the man who has grasped all three means of effecting persuasion can not only "reason syllogistically" (συλλογίσασθαι), but also "analyze human characters and virtues" (θεωρῆσαι περὶ τὰ ἤθη καὶ περὶ τὰς ἀρετὰς) as well as their "emotions" (τὰ πάθη).[25] We can see clearly that Aristotle's account of rhetoric acknowledges the constructive power of an orator.

Thus, the philosopher explains that persuasion is achieved "through the speaker's character" (διὰ […] τοῦ ἤθους) when the speech is spoken in such a manner that it makes them "worthy of credence" (ἀξιόπιστον).[26] This means that the speaker makes themselves persuasive through the agency of their character when the speech is delivered in such a way that it makes them credible in the eyes of their listeners. While in order to present themselves in this manner the speaker must possess "practical wisdom" (φρόνησις), "virtue" (ἀρετὴ) and "good will" (εὔνοια), Aristotle underlines that these three things which inspire confidence in the speaker's character are "outside of logical demonstrations" (ἔξω τῶν ἀποδείξεων).[27] Subsequently, persuasion is achieved "through the hearers" (διὰ δὲ τῶν ἀκροατῶν), when "they are driven to feel emotion by the speech" (εἰς

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[25] 1356a 22–23.

[26] 1356a 4–6.

[27] 1378a 6–8. This raises the question to what extent ἦθος is actually a rhetorical construct, on which see A.E. Walzer, M. Tiffany and A.G. Gross, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: A Guide to the Scholarship*, In A.G. Gross and A.E. Walzer (eds.), *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 2008, p. 194.

πάθος ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου προαχθῶσιν).[28] This means that the speaker makes themselves persuasive when they manage to favorably dispose the audience to their case. It is evident that every judgment depends on the mood in which one sets the person that passes the judgment and that is why the speaker must stir up the emotions in such a way that the judgment is formed in their favor. Finally, persuasion is achieved "through the speech itself", or "through the argument itself" (διὰ δὲ τοῦ λόγου) when "the truth or the apparent truth (ἀληθὲς ἢ φαινόμενον) is shown by means of whatever is persuasive in each case".[29] With respect to the last statement, it has to be pointed out that Aristotle' insistence that persuasion be effective in each particular case shows the philosopher to want to sanction rhetoric as a proper object of philosophical investigations. It is in this context that one should place his famous definition of rhetoric as "the capacity (δύναμις) to see in each particular case (περὶ ἕκαστον) the available means of persuasion (τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν)".[30] It is noteworthy that the Stagirite characterizes rhetoric as δύναμις, not as τέχνη, or, let alone, as ἐπιστήμη. Nevertheless, the expression περὶ ἕκαστον implies that rhetoric can be applied universally to all issues and for that reason it must be studied thoroughly. If, however, rhetoric is to achieve any scientific status, then its unique and idiosyncratic strategies of argumentation must be taken into account.

Thus, rhetoric proves to require a special type of syllogism and Aristotle accordingly introduces the concept of an enthymeme (ἐνθύμημα) which is defined as a rhetorical argument from probabilities. While the premises of an enthymeme are founded on the so called "topics" (τόποι), the topics themselves could be characterized as the basic strategies of argumentation or techniques of persuasion that enable the speaker to evoke appropriate feelings in their listeners. Hence, what ultimately makes the speaker credible in the eyes of their audience is the reference to the common experience and psychological insight that are reflected in those *loci communes*. Although the topics cannot guarantee any irrefutable conclusion, rhetoric does not have to be tantamount to vulgar casuistry, for its limitations can be surmounted by applying logical procedures of argumentation. Thus, an enthymeme may be labelled as only probable, but at the same time Aristotle puts it in no uncertain terms that an enthymeme shares the logical structure with syllogism. The major difference resides only in this that one of its premises is very often omitted due to its being common knowledge or a generally accepted belief. Those "commonly held opinions" (τὰ ἔνδοξα) preclude any scientific certainty, but their simplified structure renders them easy to be understood even by an uneducated

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[28] 1356a 14–15.
[29] 1356a 19–20.
[30] 1355b 25–26.

listener. One could, therefore, also define enthymeme as a demonstration designed for public meetings, where the audience is hardly trained in philosophy: only few ordinary citizens are capable of grasping a complicated chain of inferences and that is why public assemblies require a demonstration which is less sophisticated and scientific. Aristotle calls this demonstration "enthymeme" to stress everything that takes place ἐν θυμῷ, i.e., in the mind and heart of every human. Thus, if every enthymeme is founded on premises that concern emotions, will, characters, and values, then Aristotle's *Rhetoric* clearly demonstrates that the problems of ἦθος and πάθος deserve just as much attention as purely logical argumentation.

The postulates of persuading by means of assuming the speaker's character (ἦθος) and stirring up the listener's emotions (πάθος) testify clearly to Aristotle's awareness of the fact that even though logical argumentation *is* the core of persuasion, it is impossible to reduce the entire discussion to logic. In every argumentation psychological insights occupy an equally prominent place and, consequently, neither ἦθος nor πάθος can be dispensed with, since human behavior can hardly be subject to the strict laws of reasoning only.[31] This is reflected in Aristotle's discussion of the topics. If a topic is defined as a general argumentative scheme, then it has to be emphasized that not all twenty-eight patterns of argumentation presented in the twenty third chapter of Book Two can be characterized as "rational" and "logical". The fifth topic is "based on considerations of time" (ἐκ τοῦ τὸν χρόνον σκοπεῖν),[32] the thirteenth is based "on the consequences" (ἐκ τοῦ ἀκολουθοῦντος)[33] and the twenty-eighth is based "on the meaning of name" (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος).[34] If we consider those "arguments", i.e. *locus a tempore*, *argumentum ex consequentibus* and *locus ab etymologia*, we must draw the conclusion that Aristotle was interested not only in logic but in psychology as well, for he also tried to show the "natural" or "habitual" and not necessarily "logical" ways of thinking.[35] In other words, rhetoric provides the speaker with the power to control the audience and for that reason

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[31] In this respect, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty aptly summarizes Aristotle's views in the following way: "In order to construct persuasive arguments, the skilled rhetorician must understand the beliefs and psychology of his audience; but the exemplary rhetorician is also directed by what is true and guided by a sound understanding of what is genuinely useful and right. Ideally, the best oratory addresses the minds as well as the psychology of its audience." A. Oksenberg Rorty, *Structuring Rhetoric*, In A. Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays On Aristotle's Rhetoric*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1996, p. 2. See also C. Rapp, *The Nature and Goals of Rhetoric*, In G. Anagnostopulos (ed.), *A Companion to Aristotle*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2009, pp. 582–583.

[32] 1397b 30.

[33] 1399a 12.

[34] 1400b 17.

[35] To this testifies the fact that the Stagirite seems to repudiate (1401b 29–34) the fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, when discussing the seventh fallacious topic.

not only logical, but also psychological instructions are to be found in *Rhetoric*. The Stagirite fully accepts the incontestable fact that emotions exert a tremendous influence on the process of making decisions and that rhetoric is, in practice, an ability to impose our views and values on our listeners.[36] That is why he discusses different components of speech with a view to demonstrating how a speech must be constructed, if it is to be successful, and takes into account not only strictly logical ways of reasoning but also those that are conducted, so to say, "mechanically" and "out of habit". The philosopher offers thorough analyses of typical human behaviors so as to equip the speaker with the insight that could serve as an effective means for creating the most appropriate truth.

If we say that the general objective of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is to show how and through what means one should make the most effective speeches, then it becomes clear why Aristotle recommends that the speaker "whip up" or "drive the hearer into emotions" (εἰς τὰ πάθη ἄγειν τὸν ἀκροατήν).[37] This helps also to explain why Aristotle warns that neither the reasoning of an enthymeme must be carried too far back, nor should everything be included, as it is this simplicity that "makes the uneducated more persuasive than the educated when addressing the crowd" (πιθανωτέρους εἶναι τοὺς ἀπαιδεύτους τῶν πεπαιδευμένων ἐν τοῖς ὄχλοις).[38] This is because the educated state "universal and general principles" (τὰ κοινὰ καὶ καθόλου), whereas the uneducated argue "from what they know and what is near to the listeners" (ἐξ ὧν ἴσασι, καὶ τὰ ἐγγύς).[39] A similar situation occurs when Aristotle advises that the speaker take advantage of maxims "in the light of the vulgarity of the hearers" (διὰ τὴν φορτικότητα τῶν ἀκροατῶν)[40] who love to hear a universal truth which hits upon opinions that they themselves hold about a particular case. In all those cases, Aristotle's psychological directives are supposed to provide the speaker with the most powerful tool of persuasion available and, at times, his rhetoric proves to be an amoral instrument, applicable for both good and evil ends.

In this context, Aristotle's remarks point also to a certain criticism of democracy. The important position that rhetoric had in the times of Plato and Aristotle began with Gorgias and was closely connected with the development of democratic structures. If the above quoted passages from the *Rhetoric* can be read as a critical

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[36] Incidentally, this was clear already to Plato, see M. Domaradzki, *Plato's Ambivalence about Rhetoric in the „Gorgias"*, Eos 95, 2008, pp. 19–31. I believe Garver to be right in his emphasis that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is not an argument against Plato, see Garver, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[37] 1419b 24–25.

[38] 1395b 27–28.

[39] 1395b 30–31.

[40] 1395b 1–2.

assessment of democratic decision making, then the reasons would be twofold. Firstly, rhetoricians could inveigle the masses into doing whatever they desired them to and, secondly, Aristotle, similarly to Plato, was skeptical about the possibility of educating crowds. As philosophical education on a mass scale was for him hardly feasible and as many judges were frequently undereducated and unqualified, the settlement was very often determined by the speaker's powers of persuasion. For this reason, one had no other option but to employ methods which were not right, but necessary, due to the obvious intellectual deficiencies of the audience.

Indeed, in an important passage of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle elucidates that although rhetoric deals primarily "with opinion" (πρὸς δόξαν), the subject of delivery should be studied thoroughly, emphasizing, however, that it should be done "not because it is right, but because it is necessary" (οὐχ ὡς ὀρθῶς ἔχοντος ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἀναγκαίου).[41] Aristotle's conditional agreement to incorporate rhetoric into a legitimate philosophical system becomes understandable, as the philosopher further expounds on the idiosyncrasy of rhetoric. While he forcefully asserts that the proper way of holding a speech consists in "fighting the case with nothing but the very facts" (αὐτοῖς ἀγωνίζεσθαι τοῖς πράγμασιν), Aristotle also concedes that apart from the compelling evidence provided by hard facts, other factors do effect the final result of every speech "owing to the corruption of the audience" (διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀκροατοῦ μοχθηρίαν).[42] If the appeal to rely solely on "the facts themselves" fits well with Aristotle's classical account of truth, then the remark about "the wickedness of the listeners" explains the *Rhetoric's* departure from the ideal of truth mirroring the reality. If rhetoric is concerned with "the persuasive" (τὸ πιθανόν),[43] then Aristotle must acquiesce in the fact that emotions have a considerable impact on the process of making decisions. Thus, when the philosopher supplements the strategy of logical argumentation (λόγος) with the strategy of authenticating the speaker's character (ἦθος) and the strategy of manipulating the listener's emotions (πάθος), then it happens for the same reasons that Karl Bühler's distinguishes between various language functions. Hence, the Stagirite can be assumed to have taken into account not only the representational, but also the expressive and the appealing functions of speech, for he agrees with Bühler on the necessity to emphasize the *performative* aspects of natural language communication. Although both thinkers remain within the paradigm of language as representation, their awareness of the performative dimensions of language enables them to comprehend that as certain persuasiveness is inherent in every

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[41] 1404a 1–3.
[42] 1404a 5–8.
[43] 1355b 26. See also *Top*. 149b 26–27.

use of language, it is not always possible to demarcate clearly where rhetoric ends and "legitimate" philosophical discourse begins.

Having said all this, we must also point out that Aristotle makes it clear that when manipulating the audience, the speaker should not completely disregard ethics and morality. The Stagirite constantly admonishes lest the art of persuasion be used immorally. He teaches that one ought to be able to argue persuasively on "the opposite sides of a question" (τἀναντία), not in order to do both ways, but in order to confute "another man that uses the speech unjustly" (ἄλλου χρωμένου τοῖς λόγοις μὴ δικαίως).[44] In other words, one has to be capable of creating a false enthymeme so as to defend a just case. It is in this context that certain "amorality" of Aristotle's pragmatism must be considered. Such as, for example, when the philosopher explains that when one wishes to praise, one should "always take the attendant terms in the best sense" (δ' ἐκ τῶν παρακολουθούντων ἀεὶ κατὰ τὸ βέλτιστον).[45] This means that one should be able to skillfully exaggerate by calling, for example, an irritable man "straightforward" or an arrogant man "superb". We encounter the same "amorality" when the Stagirite shows, on the one hand, what one should do when one has no witnesses on their side and, on the other hand, how one should take advantage of the situation when one actually does have witnesses and the other party does not.[46] Or, when he demonstrates how to use arguments concerning contracts in order to "increase or diminish their importance" (ὅσον αὔξειν ἢ καθαιρεῖν) and "to make them credible or incredible" (ἢ πιστὰς ποιεῖν ἢ ἀπίστους)[47]. Or, finally, when he teaches how one should act when facing the charge of perjury (ἐπιορκία).[48]

In all those cases, Aristotle calls for creating such an account of reality that fits best with the circumstances. Let it be recalled that Aristotle does not impugn realism in such a sense that he would be plainly refusing to acknowledge either human knowledge as a more or less accurate perception of reality, or the existence of the so called objective facts.[49] Rather, as already stated, the philosopher encourages that a false description of reality be constructed to defend a just cause.

If, in all the aforementioned cases, the end justifies the means, then those utterances clearly contradict Aristotle's criticism of the contemporary authors of manuals on rhetoric who solely concentrate on how to stir up the listeners'

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[44] 1355a 29–33.

[45] 1367a 37.

[46] 1376a 17–23.

[47] 1376a 33 – 1376b 2.

[48] 1377b 3–12. Needles to say, many parts of Book Three could also serve as illustrations of the afore-mentioned "amorality".

[49] As it would be typical of a contemporary constructionist. See in this respect Burr, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

emotions in the most advantageous manner. If in Book Two of his *Rhetoric*, the philosopher elaborately expounds on the strategies of arousing emotions that guarantee the speaker winning the favor of the jury, then he should not have censured his predecessors for writing about matters "external to the subject" (τὰ ἔξω τοῦ πράγματος),[50] since he is equally interested in putting the judge into a particular frame of mind. Yet, as already noted, Aristotle's initial repudiation of any appealing to emotions and his evident favoring of logical argumentation in the first parts of the *Rhetoric* can be reconciled with his profound analyses of the strategies of authenticating the speaker's character and manipulating the listener's emotions by pointing to his awareness that every logical argumentation must be reinforced by some non-rational means of persuasion.

In other words, the rhetoric presented at the very beginning of the book is some sort of an *idealization*, whereas the subsequent parts of the book confront the ideal with the sober reality. Hence, as a study of speech-making, rhetoric must deal with three issues: the means of persuasion (πίστεις), the style (λέξις) and the arrangement (τάξις) of the various parts of the speech. If λόγος refers to the content of the speech, then λέξις and τάξις refer to its form, for λόγος denotes what is said, λέξις – how it is said and τάξις – how it is ordered. Thus, it is true that favoring the rationality of rhetorical syllogism, Aristotle does criticize the traditional writers for saying nothing about enthymemes, which he perceives as the "substance" or "body of rhetorical persuasion" (σῶμα τῆς πίστεως),[51] but at the same time the Stagirite does not confine himself to rationality alone, because he realizes that it is hardly enough to know *what* one ought to say if one does not know *how* to say it in the best manner, i.e., so as to produce the best possible impression. His *rhetoric* shows that Aristotle was not oblivious to how the descriptive is inextricably entwined with the normative in language, since every language reflects the values of its user(s). If there are no pre-linguistic facts, as everything is construed by means of language, then λέξις and τάξις must also be taken into consideration. Every decision is influenced by the persuasiveness inherent in language and, therefore, every manual of rhetoric must also deal with those functions of language that result from human emotionality.

To be sure, Aristotle is an essentialist and realist. Yet, when distinguishing λόγος, ἦθος and πάθος as the three fundamental means of rhetorical persuasion, the philosopher acknowledges that it is simply not enough to wish to communicate an objective truth: when addressing a crowd, no one concerned with what is true and what is right can dispense with rhetoric, since it is just not viable

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[50]   1354a 15–16.
[51]   1354a 15.

to communicate with the masses through syllogisms alone. Every audience consists overwhelmingly of people untrained in philosophy who remain incapable of comprehending strictly logical argumentation based on complicated proofs. Moreover, ordinary people are vulnerable to deception, as it is relatively easy to manipulate their moods and emotions. Consequently, it is of utmost importance that one is able to persuade the audience so as to influence the decision making in an appropriate way and that is why Aristotle deals also with non-rational means of persuasion. He instructs the speaker in the art of moving emotions and making themselves credible, he devotes a lot of time to the issue of style and arrangement, but one must refrain from exaggerating the inconsistency of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, as from the Stagirite's perspective there is no insurmountable difficulty in reconciling rational means of argumentation, on the one hand, with non-rational means of persuasion, on the other. As a matter of fact, such a reconciliation becomes necessary the moment one has realized that every discourse is in its nature rhetorical and that, consequently, rhetoric is closely interwoven with philosophy proper, since both are mediated by language.

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Constructionist Account Of Natural Language Communication In Aristotle's Rhetoric

Abstract: While Aristotle's metaphysics is predominantly known for its essentialism and realism, the philosopher's rhetoric appears to challenge some of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the fact-based approach to reality that pervade the entire *Corpus Aristotelicum*. The present paper

argues that the presence of certain "constructionist" intuitions in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* results from the philosopher's premonition that language performs various communicative functions and that, consequently, the so called "representational" can only be seen as one of them. When proposing an interpretation of those passages in which Aristotle alludes to the possibility of constructing truth and facts rather than merely presenting them, the article suggests that Aristotle's tripartition of rhetoric be read as an anticipation of Karl Bühler's model of language as *organon*, since both thinkers regard language as more than just a tool for describing reality or expressing one's thoughts. Consequently, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* departs from the ideal of truth mirroring the reality, for the philosopher is aware of the *performative* aspects of natural language communication.

Resumen: Al igual que la metafísica aristotélica es ampliamente conocida por su esencialismo y realismo, la retórica de El Estagirita parece poner en tela de juicio ciertas suposiciones ontológicas y epistemiológicas de este enfoque hacia la realidad neutro axiológicamente que impregna el Corpus Aristotelicum entero. El presente artículo procura demostrar que la presencia de ciertas intuiciones "constructivistas" en la Retórica de Aristóteles resulta de la premonición del filósofo acerca de que la lengua desempeña varias funciones comunicativas, y la llamada "representativa" es tan solo una de ellas. Si bien en algunos fragmentos de la Retórica Aristóteles parece aludir a la posibilidad de construir la verdad y los hechos más bien frente a su mera representación, la interpretación que proponemos aquí sugiere que la tripartición aristotélica de la retórica anticipa al modelo de Karl Bühler de la lengua entendida como órganon, ya que ambos pensadores suponen que la lengua es algo más que una herramienta para describir la realidad y/o expresar sus propios pensamientos. En consecuencia, la Retórica aristotélica se aleja del ideal de la verdad como espejo de la realidad, siendo consciente, a su vez, de los aspectos performativos de la comunicación en el lenguaje natural.