

*Aristotle's Rhetoric. An Art of Character.*

EUGENE GARVER

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Reviewed by Michel Meyer

Eugene Garver's book is bound to become a classic before long, and not merely because of the amplitude of the analysis offered. It simultaneously sticks to the text and makes constant comparisons with modern authors. A full examination of Aristotle's grounding book had not been produced for a long time *probably* because many a commentator has felt that the three parts of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* were without deep structural relationships and could not be dealt with in a unitary way.

*Ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*: the orator, the audience and the discursive link between them are in fact the subject-matter of the three books of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. They give rise, respectively, to the three well-known rhetorical genres singled out by Aristotle. The role and the character of the orator, the adequacy of what he or she says to what he or she is, make the justness, the "ethics" of his or her discourse. This delineates the *forensic* genre of rhetoric. The passions—or emotions—define the receptivity of the audience to the arguments put forth. It is the realm of the *pathos*, studied by Aristotle in the second book of the *Rhetoric*. We face here the *deliberative* genre, which, being predominantly political, is more passionate than any other type of rhetorical relationship. As to *logos*, it can be studied as a function of the arguments or of the style, i.e. the arrangement of propositions. Logos covers the discursive link between *ethos* and *pathos*, between the orator and the audience. It can be 1) logical, 2) dialectical when argumentative, or 3) *epidictic* when literary or merely formal. The form, in rhetoric, gives rise to the *epidictic* genre, whereas, in logic, form would rather define syllogistic reasoning. When the subject-matter, the matter of the question, is relevant, the *logos* becomes dialectical or argumentative. Form has then two counterparts (*antistrophos*), logic and rhetoric, the *apodictic* syllogism of science and logic and the *enthymeme*, or the rhetorical inference.

Is it possible, or justified, to analyze rhetoric by reducing one's analysis to one of those three dimensions, *ethos*, *pathos* or *logos*, let alone by giving greater place to one or the other genre? In fact, it has always been done so in the past. Plato, for example, considered rhetoric from the sole viewpoint of the *pathos*, i.e. as manipulative of the audience. From this, he deduced a *ethos* and a *logos* corresponding to a manipulative rhetorical relationship. Rhetoric, therefore, could not be conceptualized as such, i.e. as the negotiation of the distance between an orator and an audience on a given question (*ethos-pathos-logos* are, on this definition, on an equal footing), but was seen by Plato as evil, because of the sophistic intention of the orator exerted upon (the passions of) the audience. *Logos* and *epidictic* genre have also, in turn, played the

leading role at some periods in the history of rhetoric. Literary rhetoric, for instance, as developed by the French from the Eighteenth Century onwards (Dumarsais, Fontanier, Roland Barthes, etc.) was based on the sole relevance of the *logos*. Here, we have a restriction or a reduction of rhetoric to the epideictic genre, as if rhetoric *were* merely literary rhetoric. As result, it developed into a catalogue of figures of speech, often arbitrary in its structure, if any. Argument theory became absorbed into the realm of logic and the passions, in turn, into that of psychology.

A rhetoric based on the *ethos* has also been developed, as unilateral as any other resting upon the *pathos* or the *logos*. Here, it is the speaker who counts, and such a rhetoric can as much give rise to a pragmatic rhetoric, developed by the linguists, as to a rhetoric based on the ends of the speaker. Ethics and expertise are the key-words here. Prudence, too.

At first, Garver's reading may sound unilateral too. But he defends his case masterfully, comparing Aristotle with contemporary thinkers as much as he carefully leads us into the three books of the *Rhetoric* where he follows the common thread imposed by the role he ascribes to the *ethos*. In fact, Garver justifies his viewpoint by relating Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to a view of ethics and politics that recurs throughout history: the care for prudence or judgment under uncertainty. Garver is already well-known for a book on *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). Rhetoric is then a practical problem, whose basic question is to know how we deliberate on a given question, in which some end is contained and a human relationship involved. Goods, i.e. ends, are multiple, as much as humans. Human beings are constantly confronted with questions of choice, with alternative goals and desires, whose consequences, if adopted, are difficult to perceive thoroughly. The desires and ends of the others increase the problematicity of the good choice, for oneself and for society at large. In a sense, life renders purposeful action problematic and rhetoric is the discourse that bears witness to that fact. Everything can then become an object of discussion, slowly or violently moving the soul towards its own end, as defined by some major passion or emotion. This outlook justifies, in Garver's eyes, all the weight he puts on the role of the *ethos*. "Rhetoric, he says, is necessary because not everything can be settled by laws and rules" (p.107). In fact, rhetoric is reasoning beyond method, it is a careful and prudent attitude towards the uncertainties of life, which aims at reaching conclusions based on the wide variety of implicit information on a given question, or on their paucity, because, too much, here, means too little.

As to the *pathos*, or the passions, they have to be taken into account in order to adequately convince an audience, and as a consequence, to account for the mechanisms of suasion. The passions reflect the various problems an audience have and feel: to be persuaded means to have an answer to one's problem. Garver, however, does not resort to that "problematological" language and he fails to see that passions are, for Aristotle, what consciousness will be for Descartes later on, namely the image of our relationship with someone else, and as a result, an image of ourselves in reaction to the others. Passion is the measure of the gap between individuals, what makes them different and also, the condition of their possible identity, as reflected by the notion of agreement. Passion is then the expression of our individuality, i.e. of our difference, as

much as it embodies our receptivity towards the answers coming from those who generate our passions in life. What is interesting, however, in Garver's analysis is the link he establishes between emotions and motion, confirming the fact that the trigger of Aristotle's whole endeavour was to explain movement in terms of being, as part of it, and therefore human movements. "Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* shows how rhetorical argument can be *energeia*; the appropriate sense of completeness here is precisely what distinguishes an activity that is complete in itself from a *kinesis* or movement that is complete only when it is over" (p.144). Rhetoric is a movement whose key is the evaluation of identity and difference; hence, the recourse to figures of amplification and minimization, that are meant to appreciate our relative position with respect to others in a given situation that poses, then, a determinate problem. The orator always wants to minimize the problematic or increase a (pre-) agreed solution deemed to be shared by the audience, at least when some agreement on (the necessity of) a conclusion is sought after. The value of such an agreement is defined by the *ethos*: it is what makes agreement valuable, and more generally, an end which is desirable for its own sake. "The end of rhetoric, "says Garver", is belief and trust, and belief and trust attach primarily to people whom we trust, and only derivatively to propositions which we believe" (p.146). I am not sure it is always the case, and on that ground, that *ethos* should receive preeminence. If we usually trust the people we have trust in, it is because there is no reason to think the contrary, i.e. because no question arises as to their credibility. Questioning seems here again the key-word to analyze rhetoric, even Aristotle's.

In spite of my reservation—*ethos* being the key to the unity of Aristotle's disparate three parts of the *Rhetoric*, subordinating *pathos* and *logos*—Garver's book is undoubtedly one of the most intelligent readings of Aristotle I have ever seen. It is full of historical and philosophical comparisons, of analogies, of contemporary examples, which makes Aristotle more alive than ever, in spite of the difficulty of his *Rhetoric*. In fact, Garver's book is a great book, not only because he has renewed the approach to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, but also because he opens new paths of thinking in rhetoric at large, by focusing on the political importance of rhetoric. It is a delight to read him and follow his arguments in detail, always full of insights and suggestions, which more than one philosopher will have to pursue sooner or later.

MICHEL MEYER  
 PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC  
 THE UNIVERSITY OF BRUSSELS  
 PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN CENTRE  
 FOR THE STUDY OF ARGUMENT

