

XVIII. Of Rhetoric

(1) Now we descend to that part which concerneth the illustration of tradition, comprehended in that science which we call rhetoric, or art of eloquence, a science excellent, and excellently well laboured. For although in true value it is inferior to wisdom (as it is said by God to Moses, when he disabled himself for want of this faculty, “Aaron shall be thy speaker, and thou shalt be to him as God”), yet with people it is the more mighty; for so Solomon saith, *Sapiens corde appellabitur prudens, sed dulcis eloquio majora reperiet*, signifying that profoundness of wisdom will help a man to a name or admiration, but that it is eloquence that prevaieth in an active life. And as to the labouring of it, the emulation of Aristotle with the rhetoricians of his time, and the experience of Cicero, hath made them in their works of rhetoric exceed themselves. Again, the excellency of examples of eloquence in the orations of Demosthenes and Cicero, added to the perfection of the precepts of eloquence, hath doubled the progression in this art; and therefore the deficiencies which I shall note will rather be in some collections, which may as handmaids attend the art, than in the rules or use of the art itself.

(2) Notwithstanding, to stir the earth a little about the roots of this science, as we have done of the rest, the duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will. For we see reason is disturbed in the administration thereof by three means—by illaqueation or sophism, which pertains to logic; by imagination or impression, which pertains to rhetoric; and by passion or affection, which pertains to morality. And as in negotiation with others, men are wrought by cunning, by importunity, and by vehemency; so in this negotiation within ourselves, men are undermined by inconsequences, solicited and importuned by impressions or observations, and transported by passions. Neither is the nature of man so unfortunately built, as that those powers and arts should have force to disturb reason, and not to establish and advance it. For the end of logic is to teach a form of argument to secure reason, and not to entrap it; the end of morality is to procure the affections to obey reason, and not to invade it; the end of rhetoric is to fill the imagination to second reason, and not to oppress it; for these abuses of arts come in but *ex oblique*, for caution.

(3) And therefore it was great injustice in Plato, though springing out of a just hatred to the rhetoricians of his time, to esteem of rhetoric but as a voluptuary art, resembling it to cookery, that did mar wholesome meats, and help unwholesome by variety of sauces to the pleasure of the taste. For we see that speech is much more conversant in adorning that which is good than in colouring that which is evil; for there is no man but speaketh more honestly than he can do or think; and it was excellently noted by Thucydides, in Cleon, that because he used to hold on the bad side in causes of estate, therefore he was ever inveighing against eloquence and good speech, knowing that no man can speak fair of courses sordid and base. And therefore, as Plato said elegantly, “That virtue, if she could be seen, would move great love and affection;” so seeing that she cannot be showed to the sense by corporal shape, the next degree is to show her to the imagination in lively representation; for to show her to reason only in subtlety of argument was a thing ever derided in Chrysippus and many of the Stoics, who thought to thrust virtue upon men by sharp disputations and conclusions, which have no sympathy with the will of man.

(4) Again, if the affections in themselves were pliant and obedient to reason, it were true there should be no great use of persuasions and insinuations to the will, more than of naked proposition and proofs; but in regard of the continual mutinies and seditious of the affections—

“Video meliora, proboque,
Deteriora sequor,”

reason would become captive and servile, if eloquence of persuasions did not practise and win the imagination from the affections’ part, and contract a confederacy between the reason and imagination against the affections; for the affections themselves carry ever an appetite to good, as reason doth. The difference is, that the affection beholdeth merely the present; reason beholdeth the future and sum of time. And, therefore, the present filling the imagination more, reason is commonly vanquished; but after that force of eloquence and persuasion hath made things future and remote appear as present, then upon the revolt of the imagination reason prevaieth.

(5) We conclude, therefore, that rhetoric can be no more charged with the colouring of the worst part, than logic with sophistry, or morality with vice; for we know the doctrines of contraries are the same, though the use be opposite. It appeareth also that logic differeth from rhetoric, not only as the fist from the palm—the one close, the other at large—but much more in this, that logic handleth reason exact and in truth, and rhetoric handleth it as it is planted in popular opinions and manners. And therefore Aristotle doth wisely place rhetoric as between logic on the one side, and moral or civil knowledge on the other, as participating of both; for the proofs and demonstrations of logic are toward all men indifferent and the same, but the proofs and persuasions of rhetoric ought to differ according to the auditors:

“Orpheus in sylvis, inter delphinas Arion.”

Which application in perfection of idea ought to extend so far that if a man should speak of the same thing to several persons, he should speak to them all respectively and several ways; though this politic part of eloquence in private speech it is easy for the greatest orators to want: whilst, by the observing their well-graced forms of speech, they leese the volubility of application; and therefore it shall not be amiss to recommend this to better inquiry, not being curious whether we place it here or in that part which concerneth policy.

(6) Now therefore will I descend to the deficiencies, which, as I said, are but attendances; and first, I do not find the wisdom and diligence of Aristotle well pursued, who began to make a collection of the popular signs and colours of good and evil, both simple and comparative, which are as the sophisms of rhetoric (as I touched before). For example—

“Sophisma.

Quod laudatur, bonum: quod vituperatur, malum.

Redargutio.

Laudat venales qui vult extrudere merces.”

Malum est, malum est (inquit emptor): sed cum recesserit, tum gloriabitur! The defects in the labour of Aristotle are three—one, that there be but a few of many; another, that there elenches are not annexed; and the third, that he conceived but a part of the use of them: for their use is not only in probation, but much more in impression. For many forms are equal in signification which are differing in impression, as the difference is great in the piercing of that which is sharp and that which is flat, though the strength of the percussion be the same. For there is no man but will be a little more raised by hearing it said, “Your enemies will be glad of this”—

“Hoc Ithacus velit, et magno mercetur Atridæ.”

than by hearing it said only, “This is evil for you.”

(7) Secondly, I do resume also that which I mentioned before, touching provision or preparatory store for the furniture of speech and readiness of invention, which appeareth to be of two sorts: the one in resemblance to a shop of pieces unmade up, the other to a shop of things ready made up; both to be applied to that which is frequent and most in request. The former of these I will call *antitheta*, and the latter *formulae*.

(8) *Antitheta* are theses argued *pro et contra*, wherein men may be more large and laborious; but (in such as are able to do it) to avoid prolixity of entry, I wish the seeds of the several arguments to be cast up into some brief and acute sentences, not to be cited, but to be as skeins or bottoms of thread, to be unwinded at large when they come to be used; supplying authorities and examples by reference.

“Pro verbis legis.

Non est interpretatio, sed divinatio, quæ recedit a litera:

Cum receditur a litera, iudex transit in legislatorem.

Pro sententia legis.

Ex omnibus verbis est eliciendus sensus qui interpretatur singula.”

(9) *Formulae* are but decent and apt passages or conveyances of speech, which may serve indifferently for differing subjects; as of preface, conclusion, digression, transition, excusation, &c. For as in buildings there is great pleasure and use in the well casting of the staircases, entries, doors, windows, and the like; so in speech, the conveyances and passages are of special ornament and effect.

“A conclusion in a deliberative.

So may we redeem the faults passed, and prevent the inconveniences future.”

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