VI

This brief study has necessarily been highly selective. In seeking to elucidate some central themes of Aristotle's political philosophy by exhibiting their connections with his ethical theory and his natural philosophy, I have been obliged by constraints of space to ignore not only the "empirical" books IV–VI (see above, pp. 252–253), but also much of philosophical interest, notably Aristotle's criticisms in Book II of various proposed ideal states (including Plato's) and his account in book VIII of the educational system of his own ideal state. I hope that this essay may stimulate the reader to independent exploration of these and other facets of this rich and complex work.

JONATHAN BARNES

9 Rhetoric and poetics

1. AN ART OF RHETORIC?

Modern philosophy does not greatly occupy itself with rhetoric. Ancient philosophy did: philosophy was sometimes hostile and sometimes friendly, but it never ignored rhetoric. Indeed, one of the questions which preoccupied philosophers was precisely the question of what attitude philosophy should take to rhetoric.

The question standardly took this form: Is rhetoric an art, a *technê*? The task of oratory, it was universally supposed, is to persuade; and good orators have the capacity to persuade by their speeches. The object of rhetoric was to study and to teach this capacity, and rhetoric is an art only insofar as it can achieve its object by intellectually respectable means. In particular, an art is a body of knowledge, practical in aim but systematic in organization, in which particular theorems and precepts are shown to follow from a relatively small set of fundamental truths. (An art is to practice what a science is to theory; and the conception of an art which I have just sketched bears an evident relation to the concept of a demonstrative science.[1]) If rhetoric is an art, then it is in principle the sort of thing which a philosopher might study.

Plato, in the *Gorgias*, had argued that rhetoric was no art – it is a mere knack, like the skill shown by a good chef. (And what is more, it is a disreputable knack.) In his *Phaedrus* he modified his view: rhetoric, as it is commonly understood, is indeed pretty contemptible; but there is no reaon why there should not be developed a "philosophical" rhetoric. Plato's reflections formed the background against which philosophers and rhetoricians argued for centuries:

1 On which see pp. 109–113.

the debate eventually ossified, but at the start it was serious and lively enough. Aristotle joined in. We are told that in the *Grylos* – a lost work written while Aristotle was still a young man – he "produced for the sake of inquiry certain arguments of his usual subtlety" to show that rhetoric was not an art;[2] we may reasonably assume that similar arguments were used in the quarrels between the Academy and Isocrates' school, quarrels in which Aristotle participated; and no doubt the many books which Aristotle devoted to rhetoric[3] continued the debate.

Of these works only the *Rhetoric* has survived.[4] We might antecedently suppose that Aristotle would here have come to the view that rhetoric *was* an art, or at any rate that it had arty parts. For why else should a philosopher write at such length on the subject? And the opening of Book I proves the supposition true:

> . . . everyone tries to discuss propositions and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others. Laymen do this either at random or from practice and acquired habit. Since both these ways are possible, the subject can plainly be handled in a systematic way – for we can ask why some speakers succeed through practising and others spontaneously; and everyone will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of an art.
> (I 1, 1354a5–11)

Aristotle's argument is fragile, but his conclusion is plain: there is an art of rhetoric.

But Aristotle's art will not look like the standard treatises on the subject.[5] For their authors have missed the main point of the subject:

> The modes of persuasion are the only true constituents of the art: everything else is accessory. But these writers say nothing about enthymemes, which are the substance of rhetorical persuasion, but deal largely with non-essentials. The arousing of prejudice, pity, anger, and similar emotions has nothing to do with the essential facts . . . (I 1, 1354a12–18)

2 Fragment 69 R³ = Quintilian, II xvii 14.
3 See above, p. 8.
4 The so-called *Rhetoric to Alexander* is not by Aristotle: scholars generally ascribe it to Aristotle's contemporary, Anaximenes of Lampsacus.
5 Of which there were many; indeed, the word "art" or "*technê*" in one use simply meant "manual of rhetoric."

Aristotle, it appears, has a purified, a "philosophical", rhetoric in mind. The function of oratory is still, of course, public persuasion, so that rhetoric itself is an art aiming, at one remove, at persuasion. But the art is austere: although arousing the emotions may well be effective in getting an audience on your side, the study of the emotions is no part of Aristotle's rhetoric – it is not, strictly speaking, a mode of persuasion.

For the modes of persuasion are forms of argument – enthymemes are the substance of the subject. Aristotle is quite clear on the matter:

> It is plain, then, that the technical study of rhetoric is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Now persuasion is a sort of proof (since we are most persuaded when we consider a thing to have been proved); the orator's proofs are enthymemes,[6] and an enthymeme is a sort of deduction . . .
> (I 1, 1355a4–8)

Hence rhetoric, insofar as it is technical or an art, studies deductions, it studies logic.

This contention seems clear enough in itself – but it would surely have surprised Aristotle's contemporaries. Their surprise would quickly have turned to perplexity; for the contention of Chapter 1 seems to be rejected in Chapter 2. Here rhetoric is still concerned with "the modes of persuasion". But Aristotle now distinguishes among these modes. First, some modes are technical and others non-technical, the art of rhetoric restricting itself (of course) to the technical modes. But the "non-technical" modes of persuasion are not, as we might imagine, such operations as the arousing of pity; rather they are items "which are not supplied by the speaker" – written testimony, documents produced in evidence, and so on.[7] As for the technical modes,

> there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.
> (I 2, 1358a2–4)

The third of these items corresponds to the only item which Chapter 1 countenanced as a mode of persuasion; and the second item looks

6 On enthymemes see below, pp. 269–272.
7 These non-technical modes are nonetheless given a brief discussion in I 15.

suspiciously like the appeal to the emotions which Chapter 1 expressly banned, a suspicion which is confirmed a few lines later at 1358a13–14.

Something is awry. Perhaps a subtler scrutiny will show that the first two chapters of the work are after all consistent with one another? Perhaps we should rather suppose that the two chapters are "doublets," one of them originally written to supplant the other, which were unconvincingly published together by Andronicus?[8] Perhaps Aristotle was in a muddle himself? Most scholars now prefer the first of these suggestions. Myself, I opt for the second.

We might in any event wonder which of the two chapters is the more appropriate as an introduction to our *Rhetoric*. Chapter 1 is hardly appropriate at all. Logic, in a broad sense, is indeed the topic of Book I of the *Rhetoric* (except for I 15) and of the second part of Book II (II 20–26). But it is not the main subject of Book II, and it is not a subject at all for Book III. Chapter 2 seems more promising: after all, it distinguishes three "modes of persuasion," and our *Rhetoric* is divided into three books – one book for each mode? The third of the three modes is "proof"; and this corresponds well enough with Book I. The second mode, the exciting of the emotions, is explicitly introduced as the topic of Book II. But the first mode, character, is not the subject of Book III.

The mode of persuasion which "depends on the personal character of the speaker" is not a matter of being generally regarded as an honest broker. Rather,

> this sort of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what a speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he speaks.
> (I 2, 1356a9–11)

That is to say, the speaker, wishing to persuade his audience that P, must show, *by what he says*, that he is a credible character – and this will itself help to persuade the audience that P. At the beginning of Book II, Aristotle observes that three things will inspire confidence of this sort: good sense, goodness of character, goodwill. But these three items need no special discussion; for the first two have already been dealt with implicitly in Book I, and the third will be dealt with under the heading of the emotions (II 1, 1378a7–20).

8 See above, p. 11.

If the third part of the tripartite programme indicated in Chapter 2 dissolves into the other two parts, the third part of the *Rhetoric* emerges suddenly from the mists:

> In making a speech you must study three items: first, the means of producing persuasion; secondly, the language; thirdly, the proper arrangement of the various parts of the speech. We have already distinguished the modes of persuasion, which we have shown to be three in number (III 1, 1403b5–10)

– it remains to discuss first language and then arrangement. Nothing in I 1 or in I 2 has hinted that this material will occupy one third of the whole *Rhetoric*; nor does III 1 explain or apologize for the new turn of events.

In sum, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 do not seem to cohere with one another; and neither chapter serves as a particularly apposite introduction to our *Rhetoric*.

However that may be, the several parts of the *Rhetoric* are plainly written on the assumption that rhetoric is an art, or at least that there are technical aspects to rhetoric. The puzzles about Chapters 1 and 2 raise some questions as to what Aristotle took these aspects to be; but they do not suggest that he was in any doubt about the existence of an art. Was he right? It is tempting to think that he was not.

First, the three books of *Rhet* do not cohere into a *single* art. I do not mean that Aristotle – or his editor – has put together a broken-backed work; rather, whether *Rhet* has arranged its subject well or badly, that subject itself is intrinsically fragmented. As the previous paragraphs have indicated, substantial parts of *Rhet* deal with logic, substantial parts deal with what might be called moral psychology, and substantial parts deal with matters of language and composition. The three topics are quite different, and they are held together only by the fact that they all aim at the same goal, persuasion. There is nothing more to unify them – no common axioms, no common concepts, no common structures. (Why should there be? How could there be?) *Rhet* does not present an art inasmuch as it does not present *one* art: it presents three.

Or rather – and secondly – it presents fragments of three arts, and of three arts which exist quite independently of rhetoric. The sections on logic have the closest connections with dialectic and in part overlap with what Aristotle says in the *Topics*; the sections

on the emotions[9] are linked both to the ethical and to the psychological writings; and Book III – as Aristotle himself indicates (III 1, 1404a37) – shares its subject matter with the *Poetics*. Rhetoric, as *Rhet* presents it, is not a constellation of three bright stars. A different metaphor is needed: rhetoric is a magpie, thieving a piece of one art and a piece of another, and then botching a nest of its own.[10]

It does not follow from this that rhetoric is not, after all, a technical subject. For we need to distinguish between two questions: Is rhetoric an art (like medicine, say, or navigation)? and: Is rhetoric a technical subject? The answer implicit in *Rhet* to the former question is NO; the answer explicit in *Rhet* to the latter is YES. Both answers seem to me to be right. (The ancient debate over the status of rhetoric was long and inconclusive in part because it never distinguished between the two questions.)

II. LANGUAGE, EMOTION AND LOGIC

Aristotle's own attitude to the content of Book III is curious.

> In speaking we should properly be satisfied if we do not annoy our audience – we should not also try to please them; for we ought in justice to fight our case with no help beyond the facts, and nothing should matter except the proof of these facts. Nonetheless, as I have already said, other things have a considerable effect on the outcome because of the deficiencies of the audience. Hence the arts of language must have a small but genuine importance . . . But not as much importance as some people think.
>
> (III 1, 1404a4–11)

Despite his apparent distaste for the subject, Aristotle has plenty to say. Much of it was no doubt inherited from the earlier writers of "Arts," which we know Aristotle to have read and in some cases summarized; but the introduction to the second half of the discussion – the account of arrangement – is polemical in tone:

> A speech has two parts: you must state your case, and you must prove it. . . . The current divisions are absurd: narration is a part only of forensic speeches – in a political speech or an epideictic speech how can there be a narration? . . .
>
> (III 13, 1414a30–38)

Is Aristotle announcing a new rhetoric, a "philosophical" rhetoric, in which all the weight is on sober proof and such items as style and arrangement are assigned a low and ancillary role?

The bluff beginning to the discussion does not in fact preface any radically new set of prescriptions; indeed, the second part of Book III reads like a rehearsal of commonplaces, of views which either were already familiar or else would not cause any great consternation. Thus there are paragraphs on the right way to compose an Introduction, on how to calumniate your opponent and defend yourself from his calumnies, on Narration, on the role of arguments, and so forth. All this may be – may have been – sound and solid advice to a would-be orator; but it is, I fear, rather dutiful and dull.

The first part of Book III discusses language, but it is interested neither in syntax nor in semantics: the orator needs to be told, above all, about good style – that is to say, about effective style, about style which will serve the persuasive ends of the art. Thus there are remarks about frigidities of style and about appropriateness of vocabulary, remarks about the way in which a speech may be made impressive or grand or brilliant, remarks about prose rhythms and the balance of periods.

Syntax may seem to peep in at one point, in the discussion of "correctness of language" in III 5. Correctness of language is said – implausibly enough – to be contained under five heads. The last two heads are simple grammatical injunctions: get your genders right; and don't muddle singular and plural. But if there is elementary syntax here, we should not infer that correctness of language is a matter of syntax. For the second head urges us to avoid vague generality, and the third urges us to beware of homonymies.

Semantics might well be thought to make an appearance inasmuch as Aristotle spends some time on metaphor. Inappropriate metaphors will make a speech frigid (III 3, 1406b5–19), whereas appropriate metaphor will add brilliance and vivacity (III 10–11). In general it is clear that

> metaphors must not be far-fetched, or they will not be understood; nor yet obvious, or they will have no effect.
>
> (III 10, 1410b31–33)

9 And also certain parts of the logical sections, namely those dealing with propositions about goodness and badness.

10 Note that Aristotle himself states that "rhetoric is a combination of the sciences of logic and of ethics" (I 4, 1359b8–9).

Aristotle produces numerous illustrative examples. He explains why certain metaphors are likely to have the desired result, while others will seem pompous or absurd. He catalogues different kinds of metaphor.

None of this yet touches on the aspect of metaphor which most concerns modern philosophers. But semantic interests might be descried in at least one text. Aristotle distinguishes metaphors from similes, in the following way:

> Similes are also metaphors – the difference is slight. When Homer says "He leapt on his foe like a lion," it is a simile; when he says of him "The lion leapt," it is a metaphor – since both are brave, he has transferred[11] the word "lion" to Achilles. (III 4, 1406b20–24)

The difference between a simile and a metaphor proper is simply this: a simile is introduced by some comparative particle such as "like" or "as." Aristotle thinks that this is a slight difference. It is tempting to suppose that he thinks that it makes no difference to the *sense* of what is said. Now if metaphors can be assimilated, semantically, to similes, and if similes are less problematical from a semantic point of view than metaphors, then Aristotle has indicated one way of dealing with the semantics of metaphor. But if this is the message implicit in the text I have just cited, it is not a message which Aristotle ever makes explicit; and it may be doubted whether, here or elsewhere in Book III, Aristotle had any interest in such semantic issues.

The emotions occupy the first eleven chapters of Book II, after which Aristotle turns to the related topic of traits of character. He deals with a number of particular emotions, one after the other, attempting in each case to explain three things: what it is to have the emotion in question; at what sort of people the emotion is typically directed; and on what sort of grounds it is typically directed against them. He begins by offering a brief general definition:

> The emotions are those feelings which change us in such a way as to effect our judgment and which are accompanied by pain or pleasure. (II 1, 1378a21–22)

11 The Greek verb is "*metapherein*", from which "*metaphora*" or "metaphor" derives.

The connection between the emotions and judgment has seemed striking: it is challenging to claim that it is an *essential* feature of, say, anger that it changes the judgments of those who are angry. Yet we should not read too much into the text. The reason why, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle refers to the effect of emotions on judgment is plain: the orator wants to persuade, or in other words to affect judgment – and stimulation of the emotions is therefore relevant to him only insofar as the emotions do affect judgment. It is hazardous to look for any profound philosophical reflection behind the sentence.

The descriptions of the individual emotions are also done with the orator's needs in mind, and we should be wary of seeing ethical or psychological theory in what is intended as practical help for public speakers. Nonetheless, readers of Aristotle's *Ethics* will find much of interest in these descriptions; and students of his psychology, who may be surprised to find that *On the Soul* pays next to no attention to the feelings, may usefully turn to these chapters of the *Rhetoric*.

Here, by way of illustration, is a summary of what Aristotle says about pity, in II 8.[12] The initial definition is this:

> Pity may be defined as a feeling of pain at an apparent evil, destructive or painful, which befalls someone who does not deserve it and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours – and to befall us soon. (II 8, 1385b12–15)

When you lose all your money in the casino, then I will only feel pity for you if I think that I – or a friend of mine – might (soon) suffer the same misfortune. This seems a doubtful claim (at least a doubtful claim about what we normally call pity); but Aristotle infers from it that if you are completely destitute or utterly self-confident then you cannot feel pity at all. (In the latter case you will not, and in the former you cannot expect that anything bad will befall you.)[13] In fact it is the old and the weak and the educated who are most prone to pity – especially if they have living parents or children or spouses.

Aristotle also infers from the definition that if you feel pity then you believe that some people are good; for you must believe that the misfortune which arouses your pity is undeserved, and hence

12 My reason for choosing pity will emerge in the section on Tragedy.

13 Presumably your friends must also be destitute or conceited – or else you must be friendless.

(dubiously) that the sufferers are good. The characterization of pity as a state of mind ends with the claim that we feel pity if we "remember similar misfortunes happening to us or our friends or else expect them to happen in the future" (II 8, 1386a2–4). This appears to modify the definition, in which case Aristotle must retract his thesis that the destitute and the conceited cannot feel pity.

The paragraph on the grounds of pity is for most of its length a standard list of misfortunes. But it ends with two interesting contentions: we feel pity if we observe

> the coming of good when the worst has happened (e.g. the arrival of the King of Persia's gifts for Diopeithes after his death); and also when nothing good has befallen a man at all, or when he has not been able to enjoy it when it has. (II 8, 1386a14–16)

The complete absence of good fortune may perhaps count as misfortune; but the late arrival of the King's presents was surely neither destructive nor painful to Diopeithes – again, the initial definition appears to need modification.

Finally, for whom do we feel pity? Only for people who are rather like us – for otherwise we shall not suppose that what befell them may befall us. Aristotle also says that we must *know* the people we pity: does he mean that we cannot pity strangers? or is he perhaps only making the trivial point that in order to pity someone, we must know – or at least believe – that they have suffered some misfortune? However that may be, we do not feel pity for people who are very close to us:

> Amasis did not weep, they say, when he saw his son being led to his death, but he wept when he saw a friend begging: the latter sight was pitiful, the former terrible. (II 8, 1386a19–21)

The closeness is presumably closeness of affection, not of blood; you cannot pity someone whom you love.

I turn now to logic. In I 3 Aristotle distinguishes the three different types of rhetoric – deliberative or political, forensic, epideictic or show oratory –, and he remarks that orators of each type will need to have various "propositions" at their command. Hence the major part of Book I, chapters 4 to 14, is an assembly of relevant "propositions," or recipes for concocting "propositions," arranged under appropriate headings. The word "proposition" is "*protasis*", a term often rendered by "premiss" rather than "proposition"; and in fact the "propositions" of I 4–14 are all to be thought of as potential premisses in rhetorical arguments or else as highly general truths the particular instances of which may serve as premisses in an orator's arguments. It is only insofar as I 4–14 are concerned with the provision of premisses that they can be regarded as contributions to logic.

There remain the general remarks on rhetorical argument in I 1–3, and the material in II 20–26. The latter chapters, and II 23 in particular, have close connections with the *Topics*, connections which Aristotle signals. In Book I Aristotle says that rhetoric is the "counterpart" of dialectic, which is the subject of the *Topics* (I 1, 1354a1); and he later remarks, with an explicit reference to this opening statement, that rhetoric is "a branch of dialectic and similar to it" (I 2, 1356a30–31). How, if at all, is rhetoric – or the logical part of rhetoric – distinguished from dialectic?

There is no general difference in principle between the types of argument used in rhetoric and elsewhere. For

> anyone who persuades by proofs uses either enthymemes or inductions – there is no other way. And since anyone who proves anything at all is bound to use either deductions or inductions, . . . it follows that each of the latter is the same as one of the former. (I 2, 1356b6–10)

Deductions, when they occur in oratory, are called "enthymemes,"[14] inductions are called "examples."[15] What, then, marks off enthymemes in particular from deductions in general, examples in particular from inductions in general?

The distinction is made implicitly in the following two texts:

> The task of rhetoric is to deal with those matters which we deliberate about without having arts or disciplines to guide us, and to deal with them in the hearing of people who cannot take in complicated arguments at a glance or follow a long chain of reasoning. (I 2, 1357a2–4)
>
> . . . we have also noted the difference between an enthymeme and a

14 In English logical textbooks the word "enthymeme" is sometimes used to mean a deduction with one or more suppressed premisses. Although Aristotle thinks that orators will and should suppress premisses in their arguments, the word "enthymeme", as he uses it, does not *mean* "argument with suppressed premisses."

15 On deduction and induction in Aristotle's logic see above, pp. 29–31.

dialectical deduction. Thus [in rhetorical speeches] we must not carry the reasoning too far back, or the length of the argument will produce obscurity; nor should we put in all the steps which lead to the conclusion, or else we shall waste words in stating the obvious. . . . We must not start from any old opinion but from those of definite groups of people, namely, the judges or those whose authority they recognize . . . We must also base our arguments on what happens for the most part as well as upon what necessarily happens. (II 22, 1395b24–1396a3)

Thus the orator's subject matter and his audience each determine, to some degree, the sort of argument he uses.

First, the audience. Speeches are heard, not read, and their audiences are not composed of subtle logicians. Hence an orator's arguments must be short and simple. (And they may properly omit material which the audience will readily supply.) Moreover, the orator must persuade an actual audience. Hence his arguments must take as premisses propositions which the audience is likely to believe or to accept. Secondly, the subject matter. Orators do not argue about technical issues: they will not attempt to prove geometrical theorems or to advance medical science. Hence they are not normally concerned with what is fixed and certain knowledge. Again, their concerns are with what men do – and in the world of action there are no exceptionless rules, and things do not invariably turn out in the same way. Hence the premisses of an orator's arguments will consist mostly of propositions which hold "for the most part."

The most interesting point here – indeed the only point of strictly logical interest – concerns these "for the most part" propositions which form the components of typically rhetorical arguments.[16]

It is about actions that we deliberate and inquire, and all actions have a contingent character – hardly any of them are determined by necessity. Again, conclusions which state what holds for the most part must be drawn from premisses which hold for the most part, just as necessary conclusions must be drawn from necessary premisses. . . . It is thus evident that the propositions on which enthymemes are based, though some of them may be necessary, will in the main hold for the most part. (I 2, 1357a25–32)

The objects of our deliberation hold for the most part; and "for the most part" conclusions depend on "for the most part" premisses; therefore the premisses in rhetorical arguments will in general hold only for the most part.

16 See also above, Chapter 4, pp. 113–115.

What of the link between premisses and conclusions? Aristotle says that

when it is shown that, certain propositions being true, a further and distinct proposition must also be true in consequence, whether universally or for the most part, this is called a deduction in dialectic and an enthymeme in rhetoric. (I 2, 1356b15–18)

In this sentence the qualifying phrase "whether universally or for the most part" appears to refer not to the conclusion of an argument, but rather to the link between premisses and conclusion. We might then suppose that a characteristically rhetorical argument would have the following form:

For the most part, P_1.
For the most part, P_2.
. . .
. . .
For the most part, P_n.
Hence for the most part: For the most part, Q.

And it is precisely the investigation of such argument-forms which will give the logical part of rhetoric a character and an interest of its own.

Alas, we look in vain in the *Rhetoric* for any such investigation.

There are the first steps towards an investigation in the *Analytics*[17] – whence it emerges that "for the most part" arguments are not, in any event, the private property of rhetoric. (In ethics all things and in physics many things hold only for the most part.) But even in the *Analytics* things are disappointing, and for several reasons. First, the suggestion that the link between premisses and conclusion might hold only for the most part is never elaborated or even suggested. (We might plausibly suspect that it makes only a phantom appearance in the *Rhetoric*.) Secondly, it is not clear that for the most part arguments contain propositions *of the form* "For the most part, P": perhaps they are simply arguments of the form "P_1, P_2, . . . ,

17 See *An.Pr* I 13, 32b5–10; I 27, 43b32–36; *An. Post* I 30, 87b19–26; II 12, 96a8–19. The explicit reference to *An.Pr* at *Rhet* I 2, 1357a30, is doubtless a later addition: above, p. 19.

P_n; so Q," where as a matter of fact one or more of the component propositions holds for the most part. Thirdly, the few things which Aristotle says about for the most part deductions are unsystematic and of doubtful validity.[18]

Fourthly, and capitally, Aristotle does not explain how we are to understand the phrase "for the most part," and his actual use of the phrase suggests more interpretations than one. Sometimes it seems to express a statistical notion: "For the most part, P" means that most As are B. Sometimes it appears to be a modal operator, so that "For the most part, P" is rather like – perhaps indeed is a special case of – "Possibly P." Sometimes it looks like an independent operator with something like the sense of "By nature." These different interpretations are hardly consistent with one another, and each would validate a different set of rules and arguments.

Aristotle saw that "for the most part" propositions have a scientific importance and deserve logical investigation. But he did not himself pursue the subject very far – certainly not in the course of his rhetorical studies.

III. POETRY

Aristotle's *Poetics* are incomplete. Our text promises a discussion of all types of poetry and breaks off after discussing tragedy and epic. There is little doubt that Aristotle wrote a second Book for the *Poetics*, which contained his reflections on comedy. Some traces of these survive in later texts, most notably in a corrupt and jejune epitome known as the "Tractatus Coislinianus;" but it is not clear how accurately the traces mark the passage of Aristotle's own feet.[19]

The first Book of the *Poetics* – or the *Poetics*, as I shall call it for short – divides into three main parts. First, an introductory section presents the general notion of artistic "imitation" (*Poet* 1) and its different species (2), and charts the supposed development of poetry (4–5). The second and main part of the work is given to tragedy: after

18 *An.Pr* makes some advances. Thus whereas *Rhet* says, indeterminately, that for the most part conclusions depend on for the most part premisses, *An.Pr* I 27, 43b32–36 specifies that the premisses must "*all or some*" hold for the most part. Yet it remains unclear whether the determinate rule is true.

19 See Richard Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* (London, 1984).

a definition and an anatomy of the subject (6), most of the discussion concerns the story or plot, which Aristotle takes to be the most important of the different "parts" or aspects of a tragedy (7–18). There are also chapters on character (15, inserted into the discussion of plot), on "thought" (19), and on diction (20–22).[20] The third part of the work discusses epic, briskly (23–24); it then raises a handful of questions about literary criticism (25); and it ends with a discussion of the relative merits of tragedy and epic (26).

The whole discussion is introduced, and united, by the notion of "imitation" or *mimêsis*. This notion defines the subject matter of the *Poetics*. For Aristotle takes poetry to be an "art" or *technê*[21] (alongside navigation and medicine and house-building and horse-breeding); and he distinguishes it from most other arts or *technai* inasmuch as it is "imitative." But it is not the only imitative art – a poet "is an imitator just like a painter or other maker of images" (25, 1460b7–8). Aristotle's imitative arts correspond, in a sense, to what we sometimes call the arts or the fine arts (literature and music and painting and sculpture and dancing and . . .); but the correspondence is rough and partial – and the differences between the Aristotelian concept and our own are perhaps more interesting than the similarities. However that may be, poetry is distinguished from the other imitative arts by its medium: poetry imitates *in language* (1, 1447a19–21).

Again, the concept of imitation explains the origin and the popularity of poetry.

> Imitation is natural to men from childhood onward, one of the advantages of men over the other animals consisting precisely in this, that men are the most imitative of things and learn by imitation. In addition, it is natural for everyone to take pleasure in works of imitation. (4, 1448b6–9)

Works of poetry will be in steady supply, since men are by nature prone to imitation and the poetic art is an imitative art. Works of poetry will meet a steady demand, since men by nature like to observe imitations. That is why poetry sells so much better than coca cola.

What is "imitation"? Aristotle offers no explanation. Presumably he supposed that his audience would be familiar with the term –

20 22 on style, 20–21 on grammar and related issues – some scholars suppose that 20–21 are out of place and perhaps not by Aristotle at all.

21 See above, p. 259.

perhaps from their reading of Plato. But in Plato, the word "*mimêsis*" is used in at least two different senses. In the first sense, imitative poetry is contrasted with narrative poetry and illustrated by the speeches in Homer's poems (or, more generally, by dramatic poetry). Here it is the characters who speak rather than the author; and the author is said to be "imitating" inasmuch as he mimics or impersonates. "From nature's fairest . . . ": there is W.S. speaking to us in his own voice. "A horse, a horse . . . ": here is W.S. putting on the mask and impersonating – imitating – King Richard III. In the second sense, all poetry is imitative, and imitation is explained as the production of a likeness of something. Designers of mock Georgian mansions are imitators in this sense. According to Plato, painters too are imitators in this sense; for the painted bed which a painter produces is not a real bed but the likeness of a bed. And so too are poets imitators; for what do they do but produce copies and likenesses of things?[22]

When Aristotle remarks that we are natural imitators, he surely has the first sense of "imitate" in mind: we are natural mimics, not natural counterfeiters. But evidently not all poetry is imitative in this sense. Hence Aristotle must after all have the second sense in mind; and indeed, at 25, 1460b7–8, he classifies poets as "makers of likenesses."

Surely poets are not makers of likenesses.[23] Of what is "From nature's fairest . . . " a likeness? Perhaps, then, painters *make* likenesses whereas poets *describe* likenesses: a landscape artist imitates nature directly, producing a counterfeit nature on his canvas; a pastoral poet imitates nature indirectly, describing in his verse a fictional nature which his mind has contrived. But this suggestion is also, or so it must seem, open to devastating objection: it simply does not fit "From nature's fairest . . . " or any number of other poems. And it is tempting to suppose that Aristotle – and Plato before him – had observed that *pictures* are likenesses, and imprudently inferred that the same thing holds of poetry.

Not all paintings are likenesses. Portraits are, or perhaps ought to be. (But what exactly is it for a portrait of Nelson to be *like* Nelson – must it be short and have part of its frame missing?) Yet few pictures are portraits. On the other hand, very many pictures – and most ancient pictures – do *represent* things: *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* is not a likeness of a lunch party, but it surely represents a lunch party, it is a picture *of* a lunch party (though there is no lunch party of which it is a picture). And just as pictures are often representative, so poetry too may be said to represent things.[24] Perhaps, then, imitation is neither mimicry nor counterfeiting – rather, imitation is representation.

22 Plato deploys the first sense in Books II and III of the *Republic*, the second in Book X.

23 Nor, evidently, are musicians. How could the Moonlight Sonata be a likeness of anything?

This is a happy suggestion, but it is not wholly adequate. Any writer may represent: indeed, a few odd forms of "experimental" writing apart all writers *do* represent. Thus Gibbon, in his *Decline and Fall*, certainly represented the degeneration of Rome; and we might say that Hume, in the *Treatise*, represented an atomistic empiricism. But historians and philosophers are not, in Aristotle's sense, imitative writers – history is sharply distinguished from poetry (9, 1451a38–b7), and Empedocles' philosophical verses are not poetry (1, 1447b15–19). For imitation differs from representation and is similar to counterfeiting, at least in this point: imitation connects with the untrue, the unreal, the fictional. In the *Centre Pompidou* in Paris you may look at an ordinary dining-chair which stands against the wall under the label "Chaise": it may be a work of art, it may represent a chair, but it is certainly not an Aristotelian imitation.

Imitation, then, is a special kind of representation: it is a matter of representing *a* so-and-so rather than of representing *the* so-and-so. It is sometimes true that you represent a so-and-so without there being any so-and-so which you represent. Gibbon represented a degenerate Empire – and there was a degenerate Empire which he represented. Manet represented a lunch, but there was no lunch which he represented. To imitate, let us say, is to represent not in the Gibbon fashion, but in the Manet manner.

This may be a useful way to put the matter. But I cannot see that it evades the dangers which the notion of "describing likenesses" supposedly runs. The Manet style of representation is a matter, so to speak, of producing a description where there is nothing in reality being described. In other words – more or less – poets imagine things

24 And music? It *can* be representative (the "Sea Interludes" from *Peter Grimes*); but most music is non-representational.

which are like reality and then describe them. The "more or less" glosses over some significant differences; but it is hard to think that the Manet version of imitation will find room for many items which the likeness interpretation excludes, or vice versa.

And we might reasonably conclude, not that Aristotle has made a hash of defining what we know as poetry, but rather that the notion of poetry which interests Aristotle – or at least, which interests him in the *Poetics* – is very different from ours. Certainly, Aristotelian poetry cannot be identified with verse and distinguished from prose: much verse is not Aristotelian poetry. Certainly, Aristotelian poetry is not to be identified with literature and contrasted with mere writing: Empedocles and Gibbon both wrote literature, yet neither wrote Aristotelian poetry. Rather, Aristotelian poetry comes close to our notion of fiction and is contrasted with non-fictional writing; for imitation is, roughly, fictional representation.

This is certainly not quite right, and it is certainly not perfectly clear.[25] But I am persuaded that it is roughly right. At any rate, it is interesting. And it also has some diverting consequences: perhaps the Trojan War really took place and the *Iliad* is not a poem after all.

IV. TRAGEDY

I shall limit my comments to the three most celebrated elements in Aristotle's account of tragedy: his definition of the genre, his account of the "tragic hero," and his theory of the "unity" of tragedy. Aristotle does not claim that these three things are the most important of his reflections; but their extraordinary influence on the later history of the subject – and on the later history of the theatre – warrants their selection here.

The definition of tragedy in Chapter 6 is presented as a summary of material already expounded.

> A tragedy is the imitation of an action which is serious and, having grandeur, complete in itself, done in language seasoned with embellishments, each appearing separately in different parts of the work, in dramatic rather than narrative form, accomplishing by way of pity and fear the catharsis of such feelings. (6, 1449b22–28)

25 Is "From nature's fairest . . ." fiction or non-fiction?

The serious nature of the action which it imitates marks tragedy off from comedy. The notion of "completeness" adverts to the unity of the piece, to which I shall return. In the next sentence Aristotle explains that by "embellishments" he means rhythm and harmony, and that the reference to "different parts of the work" indicates that some parts of the tragedy will be sung verse and others spoken verse. It is thus implicit in the definition that a tragedy is a *verse* drama.

The final clause of the definition has engaged the most critical attention. Later passages in the *Poetics* confirm a few points which we should otherwise take for granted. Thus tragedy operates "by way of pity and fear" inasmuch as it imitates incidents which arouse pity and fear (9, 1452a3–4); and the feelings may be aroused by the "spectacle," by what is actually *seen* on the stage, or else – and better – by the structure and nature of the plot (14, 1453b1–2). It is clear, too, that the pity and fear are aroused in *the audience* (or rather, in the spectators); for certain types of plot are dismissed as untragic on the grounds that they "do not appeal to our human feelings or to our pity or to our fear" (13, 1452b36–38).

When we go to the theatre and see Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, certain incidents in the play arouse our pity, and certain incidents – perhaps the same incidents? – arouse our fear. (Perhaps other emotions are also aroused, pity and fear merely standing in as representatives of their kind?) Aristotle does not say that tragic authors write *in order* to produce this effect, nor does he say that we go to the theatre *in order to* experience it; but he does say that it happens – and he suggests that its happening constitutes the raison d'être of tragedy. For when it happens, it has an effect: it accomplishes a "catharsis."

The word "*katharsis*" is used in two relevant Greek contexts: in medical texts, it refers to purgation (to the effects of emetics and laxatives); in a religious context, it refers to purification. Does Aristotle mean that tragedy rids us of our emotions, or that it refines our emotions? No text gives us a clear answer to the question, and we may wonder whether either answer is particularly plausible as an account of the effect of tragedy on its audience.

Do the spectators feel pity and fear? Well, who do they pity? Oedipus, if anyone. But on Aristotle's own account of pity, this is

impossible.[26] I can pity someone only if I know him or know that he has suffered some misfortune, and only if he is in some way close – but not too close – to me. I do not know Oedipus (there is no Oedipus to know), and I do not believe that he has suffered any misfortune. Even if I falsely took Sophocles to be reporting a story about a real king of Thebes, I cannot feel pity: Oedipus is nothing like me. Again, according to Aristotle I can pity someone only if I suppose that a similar misfortune is likely to befall me or one of my friends, and to do so soon. But I do not expect to marry my mother, or any close female relation; I do not expect to put out my own eyes, or to deprive myself of any other vital organ. Nor do I anticipate such a future for any of my friends.

What do I fear? – A fate like the fate of Oedipus, if anything. But I have never been afraid – not even in the theatre – of doing what Oedipus did; and I do not believe that many other members of an audience have done so either.

The *Oedipus* does not arouse pity for Oedipus, and it does not arouse fear of an Oedipodean fate. The theatre or the cinema may arouse genuine fear and genuine pity: a horror film may occasionally cause genuine fear (though it will usually cause rather a pleasurable frisson); and a romantic play, which half engages my attention, may lead me to dwell on the actual miseries of the middle-aged. But this is not the sort of thing which Aristotle has in mind. Indeed, he cannot have real pity and genuine fear in mind at all; for he refers to the *pleasure* which comes from the pity and the fear (14, 1453b12); and genuine pity and real fear do not cause pleasure.

He must mean that we feel a sort of quasi-pity for Oedipus, or perhaps that we quasi-feel pity for him: it is, somehow, *as though* we felt pity for him. Again, we do not fear an Oedipodean fate – but it is *as though* we had such a fear. There is no doubt that some emotions, or some quasi-emotions, are felt, or quasi-felt, in the theatre; and it seems plausible to think that tragic incidents are somehow connected to a special group of emotions, to which pity and fear belong. To this extent Aristotle is surely right. But if it is plain that we do not genuinely pity Oedipus, it is far from plain what is going on when we quasi-pity him.

However that may be, do these theatrical emotions, or quasi-

26 See above, p. 268.

emotions, have a purgative or a purificatory effect? After a performance of *Oedipus* do I perhaps cease to pity people like Oedipus, and do I cease to fear a fate like the fate of Oedipus? Or, more generally, do I cease, for a while at least, to feel any pity or any fear? Nothing like this happens to me, and I doubt if it happens to you: we are not purged by the theatre. Are we purified? Our emotions are "purified," let us suppose, if they come to be more appropriately felt – felt at more appropriate times, towards more appropriate people, for a more appropriate length, and so on. In other words, the purification of an emotion is a matter of bringing it closer to "the mean."[27] Well, are my feelings of pity and fear better balanced after a performance of *Oedipus*? Having seen a representation of great suffering, am I now, say, less inclined to fear a drop in my salary? Having seen a representation of an action which, had it been real, would have aroused intense pity, am I now, say, less inclined to feel sorry for old-age pensioners who cannot afford a second television set?

No doubt our emotions *may* be purified in this sort of way. But the suggestion that it is intrinsic to tragedy so to purify them incites three comments. First, I do not believe that tragedy *normally* has any such effect on me (or on my friends); so that the effect is at best occasional. Secondly, I doubt if tragedy is a peculiarly effective form of purification: history outpurifies fiction any day, and a five-minute film of Belsen will do more for your emotions than any number of *Oedipuses*. Thirdly, I cannot persuade myself that this is an important aspect of tragedy: to suppose that the primary reason, or even a main reason, for encouraging productions of *Oedipus* is that they clean up our feelings is to turn art into emotional therapy.

The fact that tragedies are to arouse pity and fear determines the nature of a tragic plot and hence the fate of a tragic hero. A bad man whose bad fortune turns to good will induce no pity at all: a bad man whose good fortune turns sour will arouse feelings – but not feelings of pity and fear. The fall of a good man will seem odious rather than pitiable.

> There remains, then, the intermediate kind of person, a man not pre-eminently virtuous or just, but who enjoys a high reputation and prosperity, whose misfortune is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some fault.
>
> (13, 1453a6–10)

27 On which see above, pp. 217–219.

Such a man was Oedipus.

Aristotle's analysis is not in all particulars convincing. We might suppose, for example, that the undeserved fall of a virtuous man could well, in suitable circumstances, be the sort of thing which, were it actual, would move us to pity; and, despite Aristotle's account of pity, we might imagine that the fall of a wicked man could itself properly excite pity. Again, why insist that a tragic hero be eminent and prosperous? Are there no tragedies of the little man? But the clause in the analysis which has occasioned most comment is the last clause: "by some fault."

The word for "fault" here is "*hamartia*". It is reasonably plain that a *hamartia* is not a defect of character – a *hamartia* is an event, an action, something that you do when you go wrong in some way. The misfortune of Aristotelian heroes depends on what they do.

Sins, or moral errors, are doubtless faults of a sort; and a tragic *hamartia* has sometimes been interpreted as a fault of this moral order. The fall of Adam was a tragic fall inasmuch as Adam disobeyed the commands of God and thus sinned. But the misfortune which follows the tragic fault must be an *undeserved* misfortune – otherwise it will not arouse pity. And although we may readily imagine cases in which a moral error leads to undeserved misfortune (perhaps because the misfortune is inappropriate or out of proportion to the sin), it seems clear that Aristotle does not think that his heroes will commit any moral crime. A tragic *hamartia* is simply a mistake.

Oedipus killed his father at the crossroads – hinc illae lacrimae. His *hamartia* was not the moral fault of patricide, nor even the moral fault of murder. His fault, his mistake, was his failure to realize that the man in the coach was his father.

Oedipus had no way of avoiding the mistake: he could not have found out that the man he met at the crossroads was his father. His fault was, practically speaking, unavoidable. (I do not mean that the whole thing was fated, or planned in advance by the gods – although this is a matter which properly exercises students of Sophocles' tragedy. I mean simply that, in the imagined circumstances, Oedipus had no chance to discover the truth.) Is this point a special feature of the case of Oedipus, or does Aristotle imply that the tragic fault is always and necessarily unavoidable? Some interpreters hold that he does – this is why the misfortune

is undeserved: the hero's fault is not his fault. Then the pity which tragedy inspires will be the pity we feel when contemplating the victims of bad luck: we are always at the mercy of chance, and it is precisely this aspect of the human situation which is the stuff of tragedy.

This conclusion is not required by the text. And it is a conclusion which we might prefer to resist. Suppose that Oedipus could indeed have discovered, without extended researches, that the man at the crossroads was his father, but that he did not stop to ask the right questions: might he not thus be responsible for his fault and yet still a tragic hero? (We should not argue that his misfortune would then be deserved: when an avoidable error leads to disaster it does not follow that the disaster was deserved.) Moreover, might not the tragic error flow from and manifest a defect of character? Suppose that Oedipus was impetuous and that his impetuosity led him not to ask who the man at the crossroads was. There is still a fault, a *hamartia*; but it is caused by the character of the agent (who, we may recall, is supposed not to be "pre-eminently virtuous and just").

But there is no end to speculations of this sort: the text of the *Poetics* excites them.

Finally, a word on the unity of tragedy. Classical modern tragedy obeyed – or paid lip-service to – the theory of "the three unities": unity of time, unity of place, unity of action. Crudely speaking, the time which the play takes on stage should be the same as the time which the represented action would actually have taken; the place which the stage represents should be the same throughout the play; and there should be just one action which persists for that time in that place. Of these three unities, only the last, unity of action, is Aristotelian. If a tragedy exhibits, in addition, unity of time and of place, that will simply be the accidental consequence of the fact that it represents a single action.

But why should a tragedy observe any of the unities? By definition, a tragedy imitates a "complete" action. A complete action must have a beginning, a middle, and an end (7, 1450b26). The plot or story, therefore, must have a unity. But

> the unity of a plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject; for indefinitely many things may befall one man, not all of which it is possible to reduce to a unity. (8, 1451a16–19)

No doubt – but might not the unity of the plot turn on the fact that it shows a coherent development of the *character* of a single man? (Perhaps the unity of *Hamlet* derives, in part, from something of this sort?) No, for

> tragedy is an imitation not of people but of action and of life. . . . In a play, then, people do not act in order to portray character: they include character for the sake of action. (6, 1450a16–21)

The unity of plot must therefore derive from the fact that it represents a single action.

But what does all this all amount to – what, after all, is "one" action? How are actions to be individuated? The question is of some philosophical interest – and Aristotle offers implicit answers to it in his *Physics* and his *Ethics*. But he does not address it in the *Poetics*, and he has no reason to do so. For the *Poetics* is not concerned with the individuation of actions, and its point is unphilosophical: the insistence on "one action" serves to exclude two types of plot – first, the episodic plot, in which a sequence of unrelated incidents follow one another: secondly, a layered plot, in which plots and subplots intertwine.

And why exclude such things? Is Aristotle's insistence on "one action" anything more than a stipulative restriction, either trivial or pernicious? (Trivial if Aristotle simply refuses to apply the word "tragedy" to plays which do not limit themselves to a single action; pernicious if he hopes or intends to discourage playwrights from writing more complex plots.) For my part, I prefer complexity to simplicity, and I like character as well as plot; and I find nothing in the *Poetics* which makes me fear that my taste may be puerile or perverted.

V. THE ART OF POETRY

This last reflection leads to a final question: How valuable are Aristotle's reflections on tragedy? They had some little currency in antiquity; and, for a certain period, they gained an extraordinary hold over the modern stage. Why, and how justly?

Return to the definition of tragedy and consider the reference to "different parts of the work." No doubt every tragedy will have

parts – what could be more innocuous? But a little later, Aristotle specifies what the parts must be, namely "prologue, episode, exode, and choral part, the last being divided into parode and stasimon" (12, 1452b17–18). He thus requires that every tragedy must have *these* parts – and, as it were incidentally, that every tragedy must have a chorus. In his comment on the definition in Chapter 6, he had already explained that the "different parts" will be some of them spoken verse and some of them sung. Thus a tragedy must be in verse; and parts of it must be set to music.

These claims seem curiously restrictive: must all tragedies really be in verse and have a chorus? We might perhaps admit that verse is a better medium than prose for tragedy, that a verse tragedy is likely to be aesthetically more satisfying and emotionally more powerful than a prose tragedy; but we shall surely not admit that it is actually *impossible* to write a tragedy in prose. (Still less that it is *impossible* for a tragedy to lack a chorus. – Why on earth *should* it be impossible?) What are we to do with a definition which implies that neither Shakespeare nor Ibsen wrote a tragedy?

It is no use to urge that Aristotle is defining not the English notion of a tragedy (not the English word "tragedy") but the Greek notion of a *tragôdia* (the Greek word "*tragôdia*"); and to remark that the English notion, though derived from the Greek notion, is largely different from it. That may be true enough; but it does not follow that Aristotle's account of tragedy is a decent analysis of the Greek concept. And it is hard to think that it is; for it is hard to believe that a Greek, faced with a prose *Oedipus* or an *Electra* without a chorus, would have said "But that's not a tragedy at all" rather than "What an interestingly avant garde (disgustingly novel) sort of tragedy."

Nonetheless, Aristotle's definition plainly does answer to the Greek facts rather than to the modern facts. His account of tragedy is based on a survey – or perhaps rather on an intimate knowledge – of the Greek theatre. He observed, or thought he observed, that tragedy had undergone a certain growth and development; and although he explicitly refrained from claiming that it had achieved its finished form (4, 1449a7–9), he plainly took it to be close to perfection. And he then set about describing, in general terms, the tragedies which he regarded as the best examples of the genre. The description is empirically based: it does not purport to be an account of

the Greek use of the word "*tragôdia*" (let alone of the English word "tragedy"), and it does not imply that it is *conceptually* impossible for there to be, say, prose tragedies.

There cannot be prose tragedies in the way in which there cannot be black daffodils. A botanist, interested in the daffodil, observes the plant growing; he picks what he takes to be a number of mature and near-perfect specimens; and he offers a scientific description of "the daffodil." He does not thereby give an analysis of the *concept* of a daffodil; and if he states that all daffodils must have yellow or white flowers, he certainly does not mean that it is *conceptually* impossible for there to be black daffodils. Aristotle's student of poetry is supposed to act like a botanist. Aristotle does not say as much in the *Poetics*, but his procedure in the *Poetics* is comparable to his procedure in the *Politics:*

> As in other sciences, so in politics compounds should always be resolved into the simple elements or smallest parts of the whole. . . . And if you consider things in their first growth and origin, whether they are States or anything else, you will get the clearest view of them. (*Pol* I 1, 1252a19–25)

Analyse a compound into its elements; and to do that, look at its origin and see how it grows. Aristotle supposes that States – and tragedy – are open to the same sort of scientific investigation as animals and plants. He does not suppose that tragedy – nor even that the State – is *simply* a product of nature; but he does suppose that it is sufficiently like a natural product to respond to the same method of inquiry. Hence the oddities of his definition, and of his subsequent discussions. For the supposition is false.

Aristotle's theory of poetry is defective in the way in which his theory of politics is defective: each is parochial. The reason is not that Aristotle lacked the imagination to picture different forms of social and cultural life: rather, it is that he followed, self-consciously, a certain method of study which is inappropriate to its objects.

Does this mean that the *Poetics* has, as they say, "no value for us today"? Not wholly. Aristotle's poetics had a solid basis in fact; and anyone interested in Greek tragedy will find his discussion of the phenomenon invaluable. Moreover, the *Poetics* was later used as a textbook for dramatists, and if you are interested in, say, the drama of Racine, then Aristotle will be indispensable. But unless you have these particular historical interests, the *Poetics* will be a

disappointment. If you are a playwright, you should not look there for useful rules or helpful tips. If you are interested in the nature of tragedy in general, you will learn little from Aristotle, save incidentally. If you are concerned to understand the tragic power of Shakespeare or of Ibsen or of any contemporary author, the categories within which Aristotle discusses tragedy will seem irrelevant.

VI. ENVOI

Two of Aristotle's own poems have survived. This is a loose translation of his "hymn to virtue," written to commemorate the death of his uncle-in-law Hermias.[28]

> Virtue, whom men attain by constant struggle,
> our noblest aim in life, a goddess pure,
> in Greece we deem it sweet to die for you
> or anguish and unending toil endure.
> You fill our hearts with such immortal gifts –
> dearer than parents, gold, or sleep's soft rays –
> that Hercules, Zeus' son, and Leda's twins
> aspired through labours to bring home your bays.
> For love of you Achilles and Ajax both
> left the clear day of men for Hades' night.
> For your dear sake, Atarneus' noblest son
> forsook this upper world of sun and light.
> Therefore, immortal, famed for virtuous deeds,
> the Muses nine with honour him attend,
> daughters of Memory, who thus honour Zeus,
> the god of guests, and the firm love of friends.

28 See above, p. 5. The Greek text is in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, V 7 = fragment 675 R³.

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