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Plato's Conception of Rhetoric.

by

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### Plato's Conception of Rhetoric.

Although what is now taught in our schools and colleges differs considerably from what Plato understood by the term, there is, nevertheless, in his criticism of it, much which the modern student can take to heart and apply aptly to his own discourse. However before he can understand and apply to his own day what Plato has to say about rhetoric, he must have clearly in his mind the distinction between ancient and modern rhetoric.

According to the modern conception, the rhetorician is the one who reads literature searchingly in order to find the great principles which lie behind and govern the production of successful writing or speaking, and, if he be of the teaching sort, from these principles to form rules which will aid the young author in expressing his ideas to the best advantage. The rhetorician is interested in rhetoric as a science primarily, for, in his quality of rhetorician, he is not himself a producer; he is the scientist, the critic, and the teacher. Beside

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this conception of rhetoric, there is the popular idea, entertained by those who speak of "mere rhetoric" contemptuously as though rhetoric were divorced completely from reason or even intelligence, and were only a matter of mere words. They would identify it with the production of brainless literature which has only diction or style to recommend it. This latter view is not important, however, except for comparison. In all essentials, rhetoric is now regarded as the science of expression by means of words.

To Plato, rhetoric was, on the other hand, the actual expression in words. This expression was, moreover, limited to vocal pleading in the law courts and in public assemblies, and, incidentally, to teaching young men the tricks of the trade. In ancient times the rhetorician was the orator, the teacher of oratory, and only incidentally and superficially, the theorist. In order to teach at all, he must of course have had some inkling of theory, must have inquired somewhat into the reason why certain effects could be gained in certain ways. Their sole acquirements in this line, if we can judge

from Plato's whole treatment of the Sophists, seem to have been a few merely formal rules and tricks performed by rather superficial means. Of the real causes which lay beyond lasting effectiveness, of the fundamental principles, they appear to have known nothing. We find then, that the ancient rhetorician was the practiser of an art, and that the modern is concerned with searching for the principles which make the art of expression successful, that he is the scientist who discovers the laws and lays down the rules, but who refuses to be responsible for the working out of them. The only point they have in common is that of teaching, a point which is not very essential. It can easily be seen, therefore, that this sharp distinction makes the application of Plato's thought to our own times somewhat difficult, and will result in the discovery that much of what he says is not applicable at all. Our task will be to separate all that he says about the practising of the art (which will not interest the present day rhetorician) from what may be considered the fundamental and real principles which he lays down.

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Before trying to find something of value to him, the modern rhetorician must first clear away certain confusions and contradictions which he finds in Plato's dialogues - confusions, the natural result of his being the first to write philosophically of an art, and contradictions which can often be explained when one remembers that the dialogues are the result of a whole lifetime, during which a man should have the privilege of changing his views to fit his changing experiences. In the first place Plato's opinion of the field of rhetoric varied greatly. Usually it was confined to the popular view already given of the ancient rhetorician, but frequently, partly because of Plato's passion for systematization and generalization, and partly because occasionally, for the sake of argument, he would include more, it was broadened. In his narrowest moments he limits it to the speech-making of his enemies, the Sophists; again he calls rhetoric the art of disputatious or persuasive discourse, and in the "Gorgias", although distinctly admitting that rhetoric is the art whose tools are words, he excludes from it the speech of math-

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emancipators and physicians in explaining their sciences, because their persuasion was of the sort which gave truth and not belief only. Sometimes he does not make this ethical distinction, saying curiously enough in the same dialogue, "Is not rhetoric, taken generally, a universal art of enchanting the mind by arguments: which is practised not only in courts and assemblies, but in private houses also, having to do with all matters, great as well as small, good and bad alike." And again he says, "The art of disputation," which he has identified with rhetoric, "then, is not confined to the courts and the assembly, but is one and the same in every use of language." In the Gorgias, either in a mood of displeasure with all literature or else of unusual tolerance of rhetoric, Plato includes all discourse whether written or spoken, poetry or conversation under the term "a sort of rhetoric." The fact that he pretty consistently excludes his own dialogues from rhetoric even when he calls rhetoric the art of disputation suggests a principle which may explain these apparent contradictions. When he was in a less discriminating mood, or else a more thoroughly critical and

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captious one, he seems to have lumped all expression by words under one head and said what he had to say about it. At other times, however, he seems to have discriminated between self-conscious and spontaneous expression, or rather, perhaps, between words studied with a view to creating an effect and words spoken sincerely in an effort to seek the truth without selfish design. In the latter class of course he put his own art of questioning and drawing forth an answer, in the former the despised performances of the Sophists and demagogues.

His view of the value of rhetoric varies almost as greatly because it varies with his opinion of its field. When he limits rhetoric to the speeches of the Sophists, he is most bitter in his criticism of it; when it includes all disputation he is tolerant if not admiring, when it includes poetry he is even enthusiastic in his earlier dialogues. He says somewhere there is no disgrace in writing, merely in bad writing. Finally however, in the Republic, he exiles all rhetoricians, as all poets, excepting only those who tell straightforward narrative and give simple exposition, <sup>AND</sup> ~~as~~ those who talk quietly exchanging

ideas.

Throughout almost all his dialogues, he confuses the art with the artist and condemns the one because the other is so bad. Because the Sophists who were the chief practisers of the art of rhetoric, were ignorant tricksters, insincere and selfish, he is unwilling to believe that rhetoric may be anything but ignorant, selfish and insincere. In one dialogue when a rhetorician, harddriven by Plato's dialectic, tries to take refuge in saying that the art should not be condemned because some men have made a disgraceful use of it, Plato quibbles to establish his point that the very fact that a bad use might be made of it was proof that the art was bad. True, however, in the Gorgias he makes a distinction between good and bad rhetoric in the following,

" I am contented with the admission that rhetoric is of two sorts; one, which is mere flattery and disgraceful declamation, the other which is noble and aims at the training and improvement of the souls of the citizens, and strives to say what is best, whether welcome or unwelcome, to the audience; but have you ever known such a

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rhetoric, or, if you have, and can point out any rhetorician who is of this stamp, who is he?"

Plato admits that there might conceivably be a noble rhetoric, but, because there are no noble rhetoricians, he maintains that none exists. He still refuses to distinguish between the art and the artist.

But because modern rhetoric is what it is, the modern student must make this distinction for himself if what Plato has to say about rhetoric is going to help him any. He must carefully separate what is merely bitter criticism of particular men at a particular time from what has significance for all men at any time. In the light of this distinction, Plato's unsettled idea of what constituted the theory of rhetoric becomes <sup>Less</sup> ~~his~~ important, and his uncomplimentary conception of its value loses a great deal of its significance, loses meaning in direct proportion as that meaning depended upon the character of the rhetoricians.

If this distinction is carefully kept in mind, the modern student will find a great deal to learn about rhetoric, for since Plato's ideals are high, and not only that

but often practical, he demands a great deal from rhetoric. He deals with it from two standpoints, the more formal side and that <sup>side</sup> part which is concerned more particularly with the thought.

Of the more formal side of rhetoric Plato has less to say, for he is opposed to the tyranny of many small rules which he seems to think, distract the mind of the author from the contemplation of the whole, the expression of which is the only justification <sup>of</sup> discourse. Nevertheless he allows to pass without comment the remark of a certain Prodicus who says that he has discovered the whole art of rhetoric to be the rule, "let your discourse be neither too long nor too short but of a convenient length." At first thought this rule seems as vague as the modern dictum that the paragraph should be 'of a pleasing length, dividing the page into so many parts that the reader need not be frightened away by an appearance of too great solidity.' Of long speeches Plato through his mouthpiece Socrates, is frankly and continuously scornful, although he himself sometimes occupies a great deal of space as he admits in the following quota-

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tion from the Gorgias:

" I may have been inconsistent in making a long speech when I would not allow you to discourse at length. But I think that I may be excused because you did not understand me, and could make no use of my answers when I spoke shortly, and therefore I had to enter into an explanation. And if I show an equal inability to make one of yours I hope that you will speak at equal length, but if I am to understand you, let me know the benefit of your brevity, which is only fair."

But it is the long speech which says nothing, the rambling talking for the sheer love of it, and not for the information which one conveys to which Plato objects. He urged the Sophists to be brief, because, being brief, they might be more pithy. If it were never abused, this rule would never draw the mind of the audience from contemplation of the whole; there would be no verbiage, no "fine writing", no superfluous graces to make people think "how well done", rather than "how good a thought!" But if the rule were observed too carefully the whole might be inadequately and too scantily expressed. It might even

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be falsely represented if the thirst for brevity went so far as to demand epigrams. But against this abuse of a good rule Plato would warn us in the quoted passage from the Gorgias, and by his own continual practice of making a speech long enough to gain its end.

Not dissimilar to this rule is another which Plato lays down in the Phaedrus, " \_ he repeats himself," Socrates criticises the manuscript which his friend has been reading " two or three times, either from want of words, or from want of pains; and also he appeared to me ostentatiously to exult in showing how well he could say the same thing in two or three ways." Repetition, then, in those days as now was caused by three ways: lack of vocabulary, unwillingness to exercise sufficient care, and the desire to gain a certain effect, whether of emphases, clearness, or beauty. The third motive for the use of repetition Plato apparently considers affected and unforgivable, though its successful use was considered one of the special merits of discourse. Pure reason might perhaps agree with him, <sup>SINCE</sup> for pure reason and a good memory one statement of a fact or an idea would be quite sufficient, but the average

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human mind is not made up of pure reason, and has a far from perfect memory. Plato reckoned without his psychology. If you are going to wear a stone away with water or break it with a hammer, you must assail it with many drops, beat it with many blows; and so with the mind, persistent ~~repetition of the idea~~ <sup>is necessary to produce any effective comprehension of</sup> the idea, as any school teacher knows. Plato himself continually uses the device in his dialogues to press home a thought to his audience, as can be <sup>seen</sup> in this passage from the Phaedo.

"when you say that Simmias is greater than Socrates, and less than Phaedo, do you not predicate of Simmias both greatness and smallness?"

" I do."

" But still you allow that Simmias does not really exceed Socrates, as the words may seem to imply, because he is Simmias, but by reason of the size which he has; just as Simmias does not exceed Socrates because he is Simmias any more than because Socrates is Socrates, but because he has smallness when compared with the greatness of Simmias."

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" True."

" And if Phaedo exceeds him in size, this is not because Phaedo is Phaedo, but because Phaedo has greatness relative to Simmias who is comparatively smaller?"

" That is true."

" And therefore Simmias is said to be great, and is also said to be small, because he is a man between them, exceeding the smallness of one by his greatness, and allowing the greatness of the other to exceed his smallness."

Plato would probably say that the same principle held true here as in the rule regarding length of speech—use whatever is needed to make your idea clear, and to drive it home. Used otherwise, the excellent device would develop into a mere trick of rhetoric performed when there was no psychological need, merely for the joy of playing with words. It may become, instead of a means of conveying thought, a pretty way of hiding the lack of it, of leading the hearer's mind away from the discovery of how vacant the speaker's mind really is. This illegitimate use of a good device is, I take it, what Plato

condemns.

Although Plato seems to resent repetition, feeling apparently, that one statement of a truth is enough, he is willing to admit by constant use of it, the advisability of another means of forcing home an idea to the reader, namely, that of illustration. In the Phaedrus, Socrates agrees that the speech of his companions and himself has been too abstract and willingly consents to point his remarks with illustrations. In almost all of his dialogues he constantly quotes lines from Homer, Hesiod, and other poets, he frequently bases his arguments even upon an allegory. Although he does in no place explicitly give to this method of proof by illustration authoritative utterance, his constant use of it ought, surely, to be taken as sufficient assurance that it is one of his rhetorical tenets. Plato used two forms of illustration, that of analogy with the well known matters of every day life, and, that of the myth. The analogies he draws from every occupation known to the Greeks- mathematics, animal-breeding, carpentry, medicine, cooking, and others, and most of them are used with very good effect. The myth

used figuratively to prove some difficult point, or to carry Plato over some otherwise impassable place in the argument is more poetic and attractive aesthetically, but is weak in knowledge. As Zeller says, "when Plato in these cases adopts the mythical representation, he indirectly confesses that his ordinary style would be impossible to him. His myths are consequently not only a proof of his artistic ability, and an effect of the intimate relation still subsisting between his philosophy and his poetry, but they betray the boundaries of his methodical thought. However admirable in themselves, therefore, they are in a scientific point of view, rather a sign of weakness than of strength."

Concerning the selection of material, Plato says little that is of importance. There are, he tells Phaedrus certain facts which must appear in every discussion of an idea no matter which side the author takes. These fundamental and undeniable truths correspond to the "common ground" of debate, truths which both sides admit, truths which cannot be contested, but of which each side makes a different use. Frivolous commonplaces must not be used as

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the older  
Academy".  
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Edward Zeller  
translated by  
Sarah Frances  
Alleyne and  
Alfred Goodwin.  
win. 1876

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the matter of rhetoric, mere twaddle, on the lips of all in the market place, and having no bearing on the serious import of one's discourse. Hippothales in the "Lysis" for instance, wishing to praise his young friend, is rebuked for enumerating his many ancestors and for giving an account of the wealth of the young man's family. The young writer is forbidden the use of trite themes and worn out fields, though emphasis ought to be laid on freshness of manner and treatment rather than on novelty of material.

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Much more important than any of these, as Plato thinks, is the rule for definition of terms about which there may be dispute, more important because it has more to do with clear thinking which Plato believes to be the greatest method of gaining all good. For instance, Plato says that, when one speaks of gold and iron, he need stop for no explanations because gold and iron carry the same idea to every man, and to stop needlessly to elaborate an idea already perfectly understood, would be absurd. But when one comes to speaking of justice, goodness, or love, he is on extremely debatable ground. Justice, love, goodness- each means something different to each man, and be-

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best

fore a speaker can make any headway at all in a speech about them, he must be careful to define sharply his own conception. This defining of terms requires, first of all, clear and accurate thinking on the part of the speaker, for before one can define a position accurately he must have that position clearly outlined in his own mind. Its value is greater than this, for, in addition it is conducive to clear thinking on the part of the audience, and is essential to their intelligent comprehension of the subject. It provides a check on <sup>the</sup> bombast, fine writing, and sentimentality which often are made possible by confusion of terms and the lack of a check or restraint.

When the proper material is gained, and the terms are well defined, Plato cares little about formal rules of speech. He sums up the rules generally accepted by the rhetoricians of his day, which required that a speech should be divided into exordium or introduction; the statement of facts and the witness<sup>es</sup>; the proofs; probabilities; confirmation; refutation; and recapitulation. But, although he seems willing to accept the general outline, his tone is contemptuous when he speaks of too great adherence to

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rules. Once given the thought, clear and original, and an accurate definition of terms, the form would adequately care for itself, was Plato's belief.

To provide for clearness and accuracy of thought, Plato has two principles which correspond roughly to unity and coherence, and which demand the logical processes of generalization and division. Broadly speaking, generalization works to attain the effect of a whole, its duty is to systematize a number of particular and to find what lies behind them and binds them together. This is peculiarly characteristic of Plato, this searching for unifying principles, this passion for finding the oneness which is obscured by numerous particulars. It is the essential principle of his whole philosophy and the most significant the principle which distinguishes his philosophy from that of Socrates. To work, according to its demands, the writer must find a thought large enough to embrace all the scattered ideas he has in mind; the descriptive writer, trying to draw a picture of someone, must select some central impression and make every detail count towards the developement of that. To the thinking writer or speaker,

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the reading about recent disasters in coal mines and many cases of consumption amongst textile workers will immediately bring the thought of "dangerous occupations or of responsibility of employers." It does not mean a straining effort to find some external connection between two ideas merely for the purpose of hasty composition. Having two ideas in his mind, neither of which is capable of development into a theme of the required length, the writer is encouraged to look about madly for some external link between them. There might be some legitimate relation between these ideas, but this torturing way of going about it to make a connection to order <sup>is</sup> <sub>1</sub> unpsychological, and valuable chiefly as an exercise in mental gymnastics. What Plato's principle should inspire the young <sup>writer</sup> with is <sub>^</sub> the desire to search for the definite expression of the vague, unifying thought which is actually in his mind, although not vividly present in the field of his attention.

This conception of unity differs considerably from that which is most common in modern text books. In modern thought, unity is usually regarded as a cutting-away pro-

cess rather than as a building-up one. The writer is conceived to have in his mind the whole idea plus a number of excrescences which must be removed: he has a pan of gravel from which he must wash the gold dust. This, too, is a necessary conception, and is perhaps more practical formally; but it is terrifying to the young writer, whose thoughts are pitifully few and thin at best, to be told that he must cut half of them away. Plato's principle is more organic, and better because it encourages the brain to assist in a growing process, and puts the emphasis more on constructive thought.

It might, however, be possible to think constructively enough to see the unity behind a whole world of particulars, and still to be considerably confused about the order and arrangement of the particulars as particulars. This difficulty is arranged for by Plato in his laying down of a second principle which is more specific, though, perhaps, not so widely applicable as the first. He has Socrates define it, "The second principle is that of division into species according to natural formation, where the joint is, not breaking at any part as a bad carver might,"

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and go on to say further that he is a great lover of these processes of division and generalizations which, he finds, aid him greatly both in speaking and writing. This is the principle which provides more for clearness and orderliness than for philosophic thought; this is the principle which, as Plato thinks, renders unnecessary many minor rules for order and arrangement in the actual writing, for, once ideas are clearly marshalled in a writer's mind, they cannot fail to be presented clearly, and in proper order. Now coherence, although still maintaining its place in thought, and while still insisting on the supremacy of thought, includes the manner of presentation, all the minor relation of words and sentences. It has more to do with the formal side than Plato would have considered necessary.

This principle at its best is most used in argumentative and expositive literature, for in these the subjects are most adapted to scientific classification and cool analysis, and thought is uppermost and chiefly essential. In poetry, where reason holds the minor place, and the emotions are of the greatest importance, it is

more difficult to analyse and arrange, but even here, is permitted no helter scelter profusion of details and rhapsodies. Order must reign, even in poetry and in the emotional life.

When Plato is discussing these principles, his scorn of rhetoric as he saw it, is very great, and he denies that these processes are a part of rhetoric at all. That this denial was based somewhat, on the conduct of the contemporary rhetorician is scarcely to be doubted, but it brings up an interesting problem. If it is the duty of philosophy to teach the student how to find the unity of things beneath the weight of particulars, and if, as we can scarcely doubt, it is the province of the logician to teach clear and orderly thinking, what, then, is the province and duty of the rhetorician as a teacher? Plato would leave him none. But one might say that that was the rhetorician's opportunity to encourage laboratory work in logic and philosophy.

Next in the thought Plato demands knowledge, knowledge of two sorts, first in material, and second psychological understanding of people. This is quite char-

acteristic of Plato because he held knowledge to be the virtue of virtues and the parent of all that was desirable. In the Phaedrus, Plato asserts that even if the object of rhetoric should be to deceive men, the rhetorician must have a form of knowledge, that is a keen perception of likeness and difference, because it is by a subtle passing from likeness to difference, from truth to falsity that deception is accomplished, and if a man be not familiar with these, he is liable to blunder in the passing. If a pleader in the court room desired to prove that a certain thief was innocent of the charge of theft, he would have to know the law very thoroughly in order to persuade the judges to believe the man's conduct had been quite flawless. He would start with the "like", that is, he would begin by showing where the man's character was good, and from that, by imperceptible degrees, proceed to the "unlike", the apparent proof that even his wrong acts were good. The rhetorician, if he intends to deceive, must know all things, must understand the nature of all things, for only in so far as he does have perfect knowledge, can he be sure of his foot-

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ing when he is gliding about on such slippery ground. Although as the dialogue proceeds Plato comes to the conclusion that bad and ignorant rhetoric can convince only ignorant people, still he insists that the truly successful rhetorician, the man who talks to sensible people must have knowledge. Without it, he could convince thinking people of the truth of his views. Plato would let the perfect rhetorician off with nothing short of certain knowledge of all things. If the rhetorician knew all, he would no longer be rhetorician only, but physician, shipwright, arithmetician; every trade would be his, every science, every art. Such a treasure house of virtue could be only in the brain of Plato's philosopher-king, hence the philosopher is the only perfect rhetorician. But practically, to have any one man who is omniscient is impossible, says Plato in the Republic." And whenever anyone tells us that he has found a man who knows all the arts, and all things else that anybody knows, and every single thing with a higher degree of accuracy than any other man-whoever tells us this, I think that we can only imagine him to be a very simple creature who is like-

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ly to have been deceived by some wizard or actor whom he met, and whom he thought all-knowing because he himself was unable to analyze the nature of knowledge."

If one accepts Plato's dictum that the rhetorician must have thorough knowledge, he must look for possible modification or compromise. On first thought, the most feasible plan would seem to be that of division of labor (Plato himself suggests it in the Republic in connection with something else when he planned the ideal state). Let each man gather knowledge as befits his nature and ability, and let him from the firm foundation of that knowledge speak and teach and write. But here again we have no place for the rhetorician as rhetorician, for the intelligent man will not go to any but the specialists when knowledge is so highly specialized. Plato has said again that there might be a worthy rhetoric-but there isn't. And the rhetorician is still roaming about seeking for a foothold.

There is another sort of knowledge which he must have, a knowledge not of things now, but of people. Plato puts this thought into the mouth of Socrates,

"Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul, and therefore he who would be an orator has to learn the difference of human souls—they are so many, and of such a nature, and from them come the differences between man and man." The rhetorician works with people somehow as the sculptor with his marble, or the potter with his clay. As these know what they can do with the different varieties of clay and marble, so must the rhetorician understand the personalities of those to whom he makes his appeals. He must understand that the sort of speech which may be particularly winning to one person may entirely alienate another from his cause. And he must be so clever in detecting character and in applying the right sort of speech that he can give one glance at his hearer and straightway choose the tone which will conquer him. It is not enough, however, to know the personality of the individual; that is no curious or unusual accomplishment. The real test of the ability of the orator-rhetorician comes in his knowing mob-personalities. To be able to stand before a great mass of people, each with a different personality, and in spite of their differences, still to be able to find the

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one thing which will appeal to them; then to realize that a crowd a city or two away will need quite another treatment- these will test the mettle of any rhetorician. Suppose that the physician who is used so frequently by Plato to illustrate different points, has discovered a new germ or a new way of ridding the world of an old one; his first thought, after he has fully established the value of his find, will be to explain it to the world. To his brother physicians he ~~will~~ use the highly accurate, polysyllabic, technical words which make up the vocabulary of his sort of specialists, his greatest effort will be put on the explanation of the theory of his discovery. In talking to other scientists outside his own circle, he ~~would~~ will briefly explain the unusual terms he is going to use, and proceed in what is still a scholarly, though slightly less specialized language. When the necessity of explaining the discovery to people at large is forced upon him, the physician will be compelled to abandon his scientific accuracy almost entirely, and in their own language to warn them away from his new germ, or to urge the use of anti-toxin, In these explanations of his discovery, his

experience has required of him only that he adapt his words to the intellect of his auditors. But suppose that a pestilence is raging in the country, a dread plague for which his new remedy is the only cure, and that the people, say ignorant foreigners, are suspicious of any one who cannot speak their language, sick, afraid, and crazed with terror, refused to be treated. Before he can teach or explain, he must first soothe fright, soften anger, and overcome suspicion; must appeal to their emotion before he addresses their brains.

When this understanding of psychology becomes too superficially a matter of the mere emotionalism, or becomes insincere and too dependent on what the audience thinks, Plato's tone is contemptuous. Speaking of such a superficial rhetorician he says:

"But when he understands what persons are persuaded by what arguments, and sees the person about whom he was speaking in the abstract actually before him, and knows that it is he, and can say to himself, 'This is the man, or this is the character who ought to have a certain argument applied to him in order to convince him of a cer-

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tain reason;' - he who knows all this, and knows also when he should speak, and when he should refrain, and when he should use pithy sayings, pathetic appeals, sensational effects, and all the other modes of speech which he has learned:-when, I say, he knows the times and reasons of all these things, then, and not till then, is he master of his arts."

When the rhetorician's psychological hold on the people is tempered and governed by reason, Plato has words of approval for the man who knows his audience. But he must be logical. As Plato says, "Unless a man estimate the various characters of his hearer's, and is able to divide all things into classes, and to comprehend them under single ideas, he will never be a skillful rhetorician even in the limits of human power." This sets a difficult task for the rhetorician, and makes his labor arduous. He must by no means trust to the charms of his personality to give him power to know how best to present his knowledge to different people: he must not be content, like popular heroes, to win his audience with mere smiling. He must understand thoroughly the workings of their very

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souls, the natures of all their virtues and vices. He must not have faith in the unaided thinking of a fairly coherent mind; he must labor unceasingly to train it to think with exactness and precision, and to grasp essentials, that he may attain coherence and philosophic unity. From this difficult labor no man will shrink who is really in earnest, for it only in so working that he may hope to find his speech acceptable in the eyes of God. This and this alone, is the true beginning of rhetoric-to speak words which are approved by the Knower of all. The way the orator affects other people then, is after all, of no consequence unless God desires them to be affected.

Plato's attitude towards truth is curious and varied. One of his quarrels with the speakers of his day was founded on what he felt to be their persistent and brazen disregard for the demands of truth. It irritates him profoundly that they should confessedly prefer to tell a lie which sounded probable to giving utterances to a truth which sounded like a falsehood. There actually seems to have been a rule which made the observance of

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the law of probability throughout a speech one of its peculiar merits. Against this ingenious argument, Plato spoke continually with virtuous indignation. But his own regard for truth was not always without reproach. In the first place he did not care very much for truth as represented by facts, for in his dialogues he violates all sorts of facts regarding time place and characters; and moreover he introduces myths which, so far as facts are concerned are merely pretty fabrications. Even where truth has a great deal greater significance, Plato would believe<sup>12</sup> in suppressing it on occasions. In the "Republic", when planning an ideal state, he would banish the poets because they would persist in telling unwelcome truths about great men. If Achilles sulked in his tent like a naughty child, the knowledge of his defection must be kept from children lest they think that they, too, are permitted to sulk without restraint. If Ulysses was dishonestly crafty, if a great general lacked self control, if a ruler lost his temper violently—all these things were to be suppressed, and none was to know. The poets were not allowed to represent human nature as sad, as

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sorrowing, as passionate, or as down-right wicked. Children might imitate the faults of heroes rather than their virtues if their vices were permitted to be known. Instead the youth was surrounded by representations of perfect men that they might themselves become perfect. Plato had no real faith in the moral power of truth; truth was to be regarded with suspicion until it proved itself beneficial morally. This is the only difference between his disregard of the truth, and the Sophists scorn of it, that Plato would rather have it than not, providing only he thought it morally purgative.

The whole end and aim of any sort of rhetoric, must be moral, according to Plato. The orator must not only say what is pleasing in the sight of God, and suppress truths which might give his audience a suspicion that there were bad habits they might acquire, but he was to work positively and actively to make his hearers good. No good poet, says Plato in the "Lysis", could possibly be conceived as injuring either himself or another. The moment he harmed anyone, he would cease directly to be a good poet. In the "Lesser Hippias", we are told that

the Iliad is better morally than the Odyssey because Achilles is more virtuous than Ulysses, the crafty. In the "Republic" we see the poets banished because they gave the people harmful notions about the gods, and because the moral welfare of those who took delight in them was so totally disregarded. Art as art for art's sake, Plato refused to tolerate; discourse must be more in the nature of a trap or a sermon, at least it must be literature with a well defined moral purpose. Just as the physician cared for the good of the body, refusing it things which were merely pleasant and flattering to the taste, and giving it only medicines which were curative, so the perfect rhetorician would watch over the well-being of the soul, giving it medicinal discourse, and prohibiting any flattering appeal to its less lofty appetites, refusing everything which was not conducive to its health. He will not appeal to the vanity of the people, nor to their desire to be flattered and pleased; he will not deceive them, telling them now one thing, now another, until their poor minds are quite distraught and rendered incapable of coming to any

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decision or making any judgment; he will not corrupt their minds with tales of licentious gods and pusillanimous heroes; he will not stir them up with emotions which come to no more use than destroying their courage and sapping their manliness. The wise and noble rhetorician will rather lead his audience as a shepherd does his flock, carrying for them with a more than paternal anxiety; he addresses them for their own good, not for their delight nor his own; he teaches them; unshaken by their clamor to be praised and to be permitted to think well of themselves, he tells them truths, even though they be unwelcome; he will describe, setting before them as models perfect gods and flawless heroes, that their minds may be uncorrupted by weakness, their souls, untainted by vileness.

So far there has seemed to be very little difference between the ideal rhetorician and the ideal philosopher; both must understand completely the nature of the human soul, and both must have comprehension of the whole, and ability to classify logically, knowledge, love of the truth, and a high moral purpose. The rhetorician, as

as an ideal, seems merely to come into contact with people somewhat more, and to talk more. But to differentiate them further, curiously enough, with more honor to the poet and the orator, we have Plato's theory of inspiration. If we take what he says for its face value, we have the curious situation of the ideal rhetorician being identical with the philosopher in everything except inspiration which he had as an extra boon from the gods, everything that the philosopher-king is, with this additional intimacy with, and favor of, the supreme ruler. To find that he has so honored the rhetorician and poet, makes us suspicious of Plato, and makes us ask sharply whether he can be speaking in earnest, or whether he is not being merely cleverly satiric. Bearing in mind, however, his continually expressed belief that the ideal rhetorician is an ideal only, we can perhaps accept what he says about inspiration as gravely as anything else he seems to say in favor of rhetoric and poetry. Oratory, he says, is, in its perfection, a gift of nature. One must first have the gift before the training will assist him appreciably. The true poet, and the true rhapsodist (that is the true appreciator of the

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poet) are inspired by God, and are themselves in no wise responsible for their productions. In the Ion, where he talks with a young rhapsodist who claims to be the greatest living interpreter of Homer, and who says that only Homer interests him at all. Plato very adroitly shows that the interpreter lacks real knowledge, real thought, and real understanding. He can go into a frenzy and look very foolish, but that is all," Well, Ion," Socrates is made to say drily, "What are we to say of a man who at a sacrifice or a festival, when he is dressed in holiday attire, and has golden crowns upon his head of which nobody has robbed him, appears weeping or panic-stricken in the presence of more than twenty thousand friendly faces, when there is no one despoiling or wronging him; - is he in his right mind, or is he not?" Plato then flippantly compares the poets in the frenzy of their composing, and rhapsodists in the madness of their interpretation to Bacchantic revellers at their insane orgies. Furthermore he presents the ridiculous picture of Muses, poets, interpreters, and their populace eager for culture depending one group from the other like steel shavings and iron rings from a magnet. The Muses make the poet be-

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side himself and fill him with inspiration; the poets in their turn are like demons in possession of the rhapsodists who, in their turn, perform before the people until both they and the spectators are beside themselves. And all are crazed by the inspiration, originally, given by the Muses. By reason of this inspiration, poets work without regard for rules of art or reason; their outlook is very limited because they are capable of composing only about those things for the sake of which they are inspired. One poet wrote but a single poem of worth, because his inspiration went no further. Had his production been the result of painstaking thought and clear-eyed philosophy, he should not have needed to be so restrained. True, Plato, in one place calls a "light and winged and holy thing" and asserts that "many are the noble words which poets speak concerning the actions of men," but he still regrets their lack of solid thought. The character of Ion, the young rhapsodist, was so affected, however, and so pretentious, that the flippant tone of the whole dialogue may be just in rebuke of him and <sup>his</sup> kind

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rather than in scorn of real poetry. In the "Republic" in spite of the fact that Plato is banishing the poets, his attitude towards Homer is regretful and tender. Probably he merely wanted everyone, even the favorites of the gods to come under the discipline of dialectic thought, and saw no reason why a poet should not be sane as well as the rest of mankind.

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Stripped of all philippic against the particular rhetoricians of his particular time, Plato's arraignment stands with three counts against the theory of rhetoric; first that it appeals to the love of pleasure, one of the lower desires of mankind; second that, instead of presenting realities, it presents images and imitations of the real; and third that it arouses false and undesirable emotions.

For the aim and attitude of rhetoric, Plato has nothing but scorn. True he flings an occasional pleasant word to the poet, calling him sometimes "the father and author of all wisdom" and referring to the works of Hesiod and Homer with a semblance of respect, but that is only by way of satiric jesting, like the occasional un-

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enthusiastic compliments one gives the guest who has out-  
stayed his welcome. He has continually referred to com-  
position as the art of "enchanting men's minds". In the  
Gorgias he analyzes this thought and develops a theory  
which is very degrading to rhetoric. He begins by analyz-  
ing man, dividing him roughly into body and soul. For the  
good of these parts there are two arts which administer  
to their well being. For the body, there is that art which  
made up of gymnastics and medicine; for the soul, there  
is intellectual activity divided into what Plato calls  
"legislative" and "justice", meaning perhaps concrete  
thought translated into deeds, and abstract contemplation  
and inquiry, and "flattery", the idea imitating each and  
presenting the frauds to the view as being much more  
wholesome than the originals. Something which is named by  
Plato "tiring" and which apparently includes all the arti-  
ficial beautifying arts such as wig-making, rouge-making,  
the contriving of false hair and similar devices, takes  
the place of gymnastics. Instead of the fine condition of  
body which is the result of exercise and fresh air, this  
art of tiring gives to the lazy body a false bloom and an

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artificial symmetry, concealing all defects under subtle draperies. The distinction between this "tiring" and gymnastics is obvious to us moderns because of the spreading of the gospel of open air and bodily exercise, but the distinction between medicine and cookery, which Plato says is the counterfeit of medicine, demands interpretation. To the modern view, cookery would seem to be more wholesome than medicine. Plato's use of terms however, appears to have a different meaning from ours. To him, medicine did for the body everything which gymnastics was unable to do: it was the surgeon's knife; the antidote for poison; the taking of wholesome elements into the system. That portion of our cookery which weighs and apportions food-values and takes care to provide a rational and health-giving diet would be, in Plato's view, medicine. So much will show how degraded are the false arts, <sup>which</sup> pander to the body, and will show in what esteems Plato held the corresponding arts of the soul which were sophistry and rhetoric. Rhetoric then, as Plato believes, aims only to flatter the mental and moral palate of him who hears or reads its products. It is not that Plato has any quarrel with all pleasures, it is

only sentimental gratification which he considers bad. The pleasure which the ideal rhetorician could give to the wise and sane would be admirable, and much to be desired. The foolish audience should be preserved from being debauched by the unworthy masters of rhetoric.

The next quarrel that Plato has with rhetoric or composition as a whole is one which he considers very serious. It is concerned with the reality of the ideas which we are offered in writing or speaking. A poet may describe a bed, but he cannot give us the real bed; he can only give us the image of an image of the bed. For, as Plato explains at length in the Republic, Everything which we perceive with our senses is but the shadow of the ideal thing which the Great Creator has made. Hence when one reads he is getting thrice weakened effects. His own ideas are so much the more at variance with the pattern which the Creator has made. In like manner, perhaps, are the emotions and truths which they depict or at least those which they succeed in impressing upon the reader's mind, unreal and not worth the getting. All are shadows too far removed from reality.

This brings us closely to Plato's third quarrel with rhetoric in which he says that the emotions aroused are undesirable if not positively bad. This is applicable particularly to imitative writings, that is, that literature, such as the novel and the drama, which deals with the joys and tragedies of author-created people. One reads a heart-rending tale, and weeps with pity and wrath, but both pity and wrath trickle away with the tears, and the emotion never comes to fruition in deeds. This weeping Plato scorns, "The best of us," he has Socrates say, "as I conceive, when we listen to a passage of Homer or one of the tragedians, in which he represents some pitiful hero who is drawling out his sorrows in a long oration, or weeping and smiting his breast, the best of us you know, delight in giving way to sympathy, and are in raptures at the excellence of the poet who stirs our feelings most. But when any sorrow comes to us then you may observe that we pride ourselves on the opposition quality- we would fain be quiet and patient; this is the manly part". That manly part he fears we should lose if we indulged too often in weeping over pictured griefs.

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One wishes that Plato had stopped, himself, to clear away contradictions and confusions, and to develop some of his ideas so fully that there need be no mistake about their meaning. Some of the thoughts which need to be developed are: his theory of repetition about which one would like very much to know whether he understood the psychological principle which demands repetition, and whether he was protesting against the sentimental use of it; his conception of the choice of material; and several of the minor points. His theory of unity leaves too much to the imagination, a good illustration and a more detailed explanation of the way to go about letting one's thought grow would be very valuable. In his discussion of knowledge Plato demands too much, as he himself admits, and fails to see that fairly exhaustive knowledge of a reasonable number of subjects would serve the purposes of a finite life better than omniscience. One would be puzzled where to begin speaking if he has all knowledge to choose from. And in his demand for knowledge of the audience he fails to distinguish between a sort of instinctive knowledge which is more a matter of personal-

ity, and that real knowledge which can be gained by study and thought.

Plato's discussion of the truth is most unsatisfactory and contradictory. First of all, although he himself uses different standards in his practise, he fails definitely to recognize the need. For different forms of literature are demanded varying standards of truth. For expositive and argumentative speaking and writing, for histories, scientific discussions, and all informational literature, the standard of truth is facts. If such literature should not have this sort of truth, it's value is lost. To the poet, fiction-writer, and the dramatist are given great leeway in their use of incidents; they may fabricate what they will; but they must not violate the laws of human psychology, must not teach laws of emotions and which cannot be proved in experience of actions. Moreover, Plato is, I think, deceived about the ethical danger of truth. Can truth be harmful in the eye of a philosopher? How ought heroes to be portrayed? Heroes are after all nothing but men who have not adequately and beautifully some very difficult situations.

Being men, they must have men's weaknesses, pettiness, and even vice, to some degree. Are we to omit from our hymns of praise to these men, a half of the truth which is no less true than the praiseworthy half, because forsooth, our youth should have only impressions of grace and beauty about them? The insipid, thoroughly virtuous youth of the Sunday School library volumes is not so effective an agent for reform to set before a boy as Arthur Pedennis, weak and stupid though he was. I like better the philosophy of the old testament which places before our eyes men with quite as much of the animal nature about them as the divine, There we can see how flesh can be redeemed from its grossness and <sup>be</sup> made to serve great and lofty ends, and we can feel some hope for our own imperfections. If David had been always the phenomenally pure and virtuous shepherd lad on the throne, and had never lost his ideals in the complexity of later life, how could we hope that our youth might count in the end? All truth is good if only its moral value be adequately expounded and understood. Plato failed to see that the audience must have some share in the moral responsibility;

they cannot be merely sheep.

About the same criticism can be made of Plato's demand for moral purpose. The reader and the audience ought to share responsibility. It ignores too thoroughly the share of the reader in the question, and does not remember that what will harm one person may prove a great moral benefit to another. To take a modern instance "The Easiest Way" a play recently presented, had two distinctly opposing effects; some found the heroine alluring, and her manner of life attractive; others were warned from the downward path more effectively than they would have been by any tract or sermon. Would Plato call Eugene Walter, the playwright, a noble dramatist or an evil? We cannot judge, by the author's purpose, any morals except his own. If he meant to do good, then he was good, but that does not settle the question for the thousands to whom his appeal will be made. It might be unphilosophical but would surely be more practical, to compromise on the question, demand a certain standard of decency, and beyond that allow the writer or speaker full rein. Let the public have strong meat to eat, if they are going to grow.

It is <sup>not</sup> likely to be the coddled infant that grows up most virile.

Plato's conception of the noble rhetorician <sup>is</sup> too vague, too little differentiated from the philosopher. He was to have the same knowledge, the same love of truth, the same moral purpose; he was differentiated solely by the idea of inspiration, an idea which Plato may not even have meant seriously when he writes it down. The reason for this confusion is Plato's unwillingness to place great value upon form, which really must be the rhetoricians particular province, the only one which he does not share. Plato took for granted that if one thought clearly, he could write or speak sufficiently well. But that is not necessarily true. One could hardly write well without all the essentials which Plato insists upon, but he might write or speak very unattractively, and still have them all, lacking only a sense of form and style. He left beauty out of consideration. And this is strange because he considered beauty one of the forms of the highest good, and pleasure in it would be surely be legitimate.



When he scorns rhetoric for pandering too much to more or less low pleasures and tastes, he forgets the possibilities of a noble rhetoric, and confine himself too closely to his own day. He recognized the practical necessity of making ideas appeal to the audience, and it seems curious that he did not realize that the pleasure giving power of literature is the chief method of appeal. It cannot be denied that pleasure ought not to be the sole aim of literature, but one ought to admit that it is at least one legitimate aims, particularly when its presence is necessary to produce any effect at all.

As to his criticism that a poet does not give reality, it might be contended that since the only perfect things are the patterns, the ideas, the bed which the poet gives us, proceeding from an inspired mind, might be much nearer the pattern than the shadow which we call reality. If the author is really serious in his aims and conscientious, nay lofty, in his ideals, his interpretation of reality is likely to be more real than that which the people, blinded by self-interest, can know. There would be no question about this if we were permitted

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to take the theory of inspiration seriously; for the mind which was filled with ideas straight from God would give much truer images than those which the ordinary man could make for himself.

These objections, notwithstanding, Plato has a great deal to contribute to the theory of rhetoric. In the first place his position is sound as regards the minor matters of length, repetition, and selection of material, and his demand for clear definition of terms about which there is some dispute is very valuable, particularly to the expositor and the debater. His theory of coherence is unassailable and essential to any sort of worthy production. His principle of unity is peculiarly valuable because it is constructive and organic, and will aid in the development of ideas. His demand for knowledge, if heeded, will provide fundamental interest to any literature, and give the groundwork for all other charms. Since most expression is expression to someone, then it is very fitting that the author heed Plato's advice and know his audience. As a check upon the possible evils of this, coming for instance to be enslaved by the limitations of the public

we have Plato's insistence upon moral purpose and responsibility to God. Moreover he has given us in his warning against unreal emotions and false appeals to sympathy, an important remedy for over-sentimentalism. A