

Landmark essays
on Aristotelian rhetoric

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on
Aristotelian Rhetoric

Edited by
Richard Leo Enos and Lois Peters Agnew
Texas Christian University



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Landmark Essays

In Memoriam

The Reverend
William M. A. Grimaldi, S.J.

Born: October 24, 1917

Ordained: June 22, 1947

Died: October 9, 1991

Dominius vobiscum, Father Bill . . .

About the Editors

Richard Leo Enos is Professor and Holder of the Lillian Radford Chair of Rhetoric and Composition at Texas Christian University. Lois Peters Agnew is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at Texas Christian University with a concentration in the history of rhetoric.

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Introduction

There is little doubt that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has made a major impact on our field. This impact has not only been chronicled throughout the history of rhetoric but has more recently been contested as contemporary rhetoricians re-examine Aristotelian rhetoric and its potential for facilitating contemporary oral and written expression. This re-examination has led to rival interpretations that have fueled considerable controversy. Some scholars claim that Aristotelian rhetoric has constrained rival paradigms—such as sophistic rhetoric—and has thereby limited our understanding of the relationship between thought and expression. Other scholars think the opposite, maintaining that we are only now at the stage of beginning to understand the wealth of insights offered by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. For both camps, and for all of us, a resource that provides readers with the best and most influential scholarship on Aristotelian rhetoric is welcome. We believe that current arguments concerning Aristotelian rhetoric will be more fruitful and authoritative when advanced from thorough knowledge of this scholarship.

The issues and complexities of Aristotelian rhetoric are important not only for those who do research in the history of rhetoric but for all engaged in rhetorical studies. A recent survey by Thomas Miller and published in *Rhetoric Review* (Fall 1993) reveals that the vast majority of doctoral programs in rhetoric offer at least one course in the history of rhetoric; this survey does not even begin to account for the numerous undergraduate courses offered throughout the country and abroad. There is little doubt that this collection will be valuable for both teachers and students. Our belief, as stated earlier, is that the essays provided in this volume will make readers better participants in today's deliberations about the merits of Aristotelian rhetoric in contemporary teaching and research.

Lastly, and perhaps most important of all, this collection provides teachers and students with major works on Aristotelian rhetoric that are difficult to acquire elsewhere. One example illustrates our point. The Table of Contents makes it apparent that this collection is centered around William M. A. Grimaldi's monograph, "Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric." Written in English but published in the German classical journal *Hermes* in 1972, this work is commonly acknowledged as one of this century's major contributions to Aristotelian rhetoric but is virtually inaccessible. Making available the scholarship of Father Grimaldi would, by itself, warrant a volume. To a lesser degree, this situation is true of many of the other essays in this collection. The last major collection of scholarship on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was edited by Keith V. Erickson, *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*. Published by The Scarecrow Press in 1974, this collection is no longer readily available and, of course, does not account for the research of the last two decades.

Our rationale for the order and selection of the essays is to provide a context for Aristotelian rhetoric through three sections. First, a section that offers an understanding of the history and philosophical orientation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Second, a section that emphasizes theoretical scholarship on concepts and issues central to understanding Aristotelian rhetoric. Third, a section that offers essays that examine the historical impact and consequences of Aristotelian rhetoric. The works selected under these rubrics were taken from a review of thirty-three possible entries. The essays of this final selection offer readers a coherent collection of scholarship on Aristotelian rhetoric and provide a firm foundation for advancing observations about Aristotelian rhetoric.

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***Orientations to
Aristotle's Rhetoric***

The Lost Rhetorics of Aristotle

Keith V. Erickson

The literature of antiquity in our possession represents a fraction of the works generated by ancient authors. This is true of Aristotle's works. Numerous scholars have attempted to reconstruct the "lost" works of Aristotle and to correct extant texts.¹ Philological interpretation and correction of the extant *Rhetoric* has clarified greatly Aristotelian rhetorical theory,² yet the content and philosophy of his lost rhetorics remain largely unknown. This is unfortunate as these rhetorics constitute Aristotle's earliest thinking on the subject and likely represent the nascent origins of his rhetorical theory as developed in the *Rhetoric*.³ The purpose of this article is to review philological research attempting to reconstruct and interpret Aristotle's lost rhetorics and to show, where possible, their influence upon his mature philosophy of rhetorical discourse.

Primary evidence confirms the ancient existence of Aristotle's "lost" rhetorics, although it is unclear why they disappeared and the *Rhetoric* remains.⁴ According to the testimony of ancient catalogers Aristotle authored numerous tracts on rhetoric. Diogenes⁵ lists eight titles while other catalogues list as many as nine.⁶ The lists of these catalogues are something of a mystery as little is known of their sources of information. Moreover, many of the entries appear spurious, their philological status ordinarily established by cross-referencing to primary sources. Modern scholarship recognizes four works from these lists as dealing with rhetoric; the extant *Rhetoric*, *On Rhetoric* or *Gryllus*, *Synagōgē technōn*, and *Theodectea*.

Gryllus

The *Gryllus* has attracted considerable scholarly attention.⁷ The text, however, is wholly lost (various passages of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*,⁸ though, are considered by Thillet and Chroust to be fragments or paraphrases of the *Gryllus*).

Secondary sources offer a rich base of philological evidence, however. Significantly, both Diogenes and the *Vita Aristotelis Hesychii* consider it an authentic work. Modern critics, with the exception of Valentini Rose⁹ who entertained the possibility of the *Rhetoric* being a pseudo-Aristotelian work, likewise attribute the work to the Stagirite, with Jaeger and others¹⁰ believing it to be the first literary or exoteric publication of Aristotle, authored approximately 360-359 B.C.¹¹

The *Gryllus* is philologically interesting on several counts, including its atypical title, Aristotle's motivation for composing it, and its relationship to the *Rhetoric*. The title of the work, it is generally agreed, emanates from Gryllus, the son of Xenophon who was killed at the battle of Mantinea in 362 B.C. Scholars suggest Aristotle dedicated this work to Gryllus, supposedly a close friend, and hence the title.¹² No evidence exists, however, to suggest Aristotle was even an acquaintance of Xenophon's son, making it unlikely that he wished to honor or commemorate him. Because Diogenes mentions "Aristotle had insisted that a great many people had composed epitaphs and encomia upon Gryllus, largely for the purpose of ingratiating themselves with his father Xenophon,"¹³ Thillet and Solmsen believe he may have been considerably annoyed by the behavior of these orators.¹⁴ There is little doubt that much false praise was heaped upon Gryllus by people only remotely familiar with him. Aristotle no doubt was irked by the participation of prominent rhetoricians in this favor seeking display. "This is the only possible connection between the title of this dialogue and its real subject matter—between Gryllus and rhetoric."¹⁵ Thus the excesses of orators in composing false and inartistic eulogies to Gryllus prompted Aristotle's rejoinder, apparently an anti-rhetorical position, aimed at rebuking the substance and manner of their addresses. A key to interpreting this work, therefore, lies in determining whom Aristotle was charging with the inartistic employment of rhetoric. Chroust (and others) suggest the *Gryllus'* arguments were directed principally at Isocrates.¹⁶ Chroust reasons that Isocrates might well have written one of these eulogies—reason enough to kindle Aristotle's attack as Isocrates was a long standing competitor and antagonist of the Academy.

Thillet and Solmsen, in determining the content of the *Gryllus*, reason that the work was polemical rather than doctrinal, taking the position that not all forms of rhetoric constitute art. They argue that Aristotle contrasted inartistic rhetoric with true or ideal rhetoric. Evidence in support of this thesis is found in Quintilian who reviews what appear to be Aristotelian arguments (some may be those of Critolaus and Athenodorus, also mentioned by Quintilian) concerning the relationship of rhetoric to art, and it is obvious from Quintilian's remarks that he was impressed by their strength. Hill translates the passage as: "Aristotle in his *Gryllus* produces some tentative arguments to the contrary which are marked by characteristic ingenuity. On the other hand he also wrote three books on the art of rhetoric, in the first of which he not merely admits rhetoric is an art but treats it as a department of politics and also of logic."¹⁷ Chroust further theorizes that "Aristotle must have

alleged that proper rhetoric, and not every form of rhetoric, has always been considered an art, and not merely a natural faculty or talent; that no one had ever seriously disputed this; and that the several arguments which attempted to deny that true rhetoric was an art, despite their acumen, may not be taken seriously in that they were purely dialectical performances or devices without any real merit—an intellectual veneer invented to enliven and dramatize the whole discussion.”¹⁸ Chroust implies by his remarks that Aristotle, the youthful Platonist, distinguished true from sophistic rhetoric as envisioned in the *Phaedrus*. However, in concert with the majority of scholars, Chroust sees the *Gorgias* as the source of Aristotle’s arguments. This is an intriguing issue as Plato’s attack upon the sophists not only would have served Aristotle’s purposes but would have reflected the Master as well: “Hence, it is not surprising that Aristotle, the disciple of Plato, should object to such contemptible practices as well as to the ultimate philosophic outlook underlying them. In rejecting and denouncing this type of rhetoric, Aristotle acts in full accordance with the spirit and tenets of Plato’s basic philosophic teachings.”¹⁹

The *Gryllus*, therefore, Platonically railed against the value of rhetoric as interpreted by Isocrates and his associates rather than explicating its techniques.

Quintilian’s remark that Aristotle advanced many arguments of his own making in the *Gryllus* led modern critics to theorize that he tested a new form of dialogue. Jaeger sees the *Gryllus* imitating the *Gorgias* in an “expository” rather than “dramatic” format,²⁰ although little philological evidence supports such speculation. Moreover, the *Gryllus* was to launch Aristotle’s career, as here was the perfect opportunity for him to attack a long standing enemy of the Academy, employ his mentor’s work, and to simultaneously advance and test arguments of his own making. In so doing, he likely secured the support of the enemies of Isocrates, made himself known to Plato, and tested his own powers of intellect. Chroust sees Aristotle’s opportunity to teach rhetoric arising directly from the strength of this work. He argues that the *Gryllus* probably became the occasion for Aristotle being permitted to offer this course in the Academy, since in this dialogue he seems to have demonstrated not only his qualifications as a teacher of rhetoric, but also his ability to stand up to Isocrates, a man much disliked by the members of the Academy.²¹

The *Gryllus* represents the young Aristotle responsive primarily to the philosophical considerations of Platonism, while the *Rhetoric* evidences the genetically developed thinking of a mature philosopher. Although the *Rhetoric* develops the rhetorical method, the *Gryllus* may have influenced the *Rhetoric*. As an apparently anti-rhetorical work in the tradition of the *Gorgias*, the *Gryllus* probably argued that inartistic rhetoric arouses the emotions and passions. “This argument loosely resembles Socrates’ proof that it is not an art because it can give no rational account of using the *pathe* of the hearers. The idea that there can be no *techne* of using the *pathe* clearly dictated the standard of *Rhetoric* I i, which banishes them from among the artistic proof.”²² Further, this passage suggests that the criticism of Isocrates

enunciated in the *Gryllus* was considered by Aristotle still viable some thirty years later upon the “publication” of the *Rhetoric*. “It would mean that in the preparatory period for the first stage of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle’s thought was dominated by the quarrel with Isocrates.”²³ Kennedy observes, however, that several passages citing Isocrates are mellow, if not complimentary.²⁴ This inconsistency, one among many, highlights the fact that Aristotle did not have a single theory of rhetoric. Aristotle, for example, had two theories of artistic and inartistic rhetorical devices, as Hill suggests “they were products of different environments, and they were never completely knit together.”²⁵ Moreover, though, subject specific content of the *Gryllus* probably did not find its way into our *Rhetoric*, although early drafts may have evidenced its reasoning. I. Düring, for instance, believes that major portions of the *Rhetoric* belong to the late fifties of the fourth century, or shortly after the *Gryllus*’ appearance.

Synagōgē technōn

Little is known of the actual content and thrust of the *Synagōgē technōn*, thought to be composed between 360 and 355 B.C. Spengel attempted to reconstruct portions of the work,²⁶ but much of his evidence is secondary and his conclusions speculative. Cicero is our chief source of evidence having cited and described briefly its contents in three of his works.²⁷ He tells us: “I read. . . that book of his, setting forth the rhetorical theories of all his forerunners, and those other works containing sundry observations of his own on the same art. . . .”²⁸ Primary sources, passages thought to be fragments of the lost work, are evident in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cicero.²⁹ Basically, the work constituted a history of rhetoric and rhetoricians as found in early rhetorical handbooks. Prior to Aristotle, efforts to preserve these handbooks were minimal, and following his treatment of them in the *Synagōgē technōn*, few survived beyond the fourth century. Aristotle openly belittles the shallowness of these handbooks in the *Rhetoric* (1354a12-15); can we infer, then, that he collected these works not for their historical value but for research or teaching purposes? This, of course, would be in keeping with Aristotle’s tradition of observing and cataloging relevant data when investigating a topic. “Presumably he was gathering material in preparation for his own works on rhetoric in the way that he gathered information on constitutions as part of his study of politics.”³⁰

Aristotle began the compendium with Corax and Tisias and brought it forward to Plato and Isocrates’ *Technē*.³¹ The work may have resembled an anthology suitable for lecturing on rhetoric. Whether Aristotle employed it when he lectured on rhetoric in the Academy or much later in the Lyceum is uncertain. In any event, the theories of ancient and contemporary rhetoricians apparently were outlined in detail. The *De inventione* informs us that: