Desire and Persuasion in Aristotle's Rhetoric

Daniel Tovar (Northwestern)

Traditionally, commentators have accepted a non-Humean or rationalist reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics* according to which reason can mold our more primitive, non-rational desires.[1] While many have found this interpretation appealing, it has not been clear how reason would be able to mold these desires. Furthermore, there are a number of aspects of Aristotle's moral psychology that tell against a rationalist reading, supporting instead a more Humean interpretation on which reason cannot mold our desires. For instance, Aristotle states that our ends are not established by reason but by character, and hence, by our non-rational desires (1144a8-9). Moreover, on Aristotle's account of moral development, scholars such as Myles Burnyeat and Jessica Moss, among others, argue that one's non-rational desires must be molded through a process of habituation, not through reasoning and argument (i.e. *logos*).[2] Burnyeat defends such a view in his seminal article, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good" (1980). More recently Moss (2012) has powerfully defended such a view and argued that many of the passages that have been thought to support non-Humean views in fact do not.

In what follows, I will argue against Moss and other Humean-like interpretations of Aristotle by offering the first broad account of how rationality

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[1] For example, Irwin, T. H. "Aristotle on Reason, Desire, and Virtue." *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 17 (1975): 567-578; Taylor, C. C. W. "Aristotle on the Practical Intellect." In *Pleasure, Mind and Soul: Selected Papers in Ancient Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Allen, D. J. "Aristotle's Account of the Origin of Moral Principles." In *Articles on Aristotle, volume 2*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, and Richard Sorabji, 72-78. London: Duckworth, 1976.

[2] See Sherman (1989) and McDowell (2009).

influences non-rational desire. Drawing on the *Rhetoric*, I argue that even if we assume that non-rational desire does set our ends, as Aristotle claims, reason can change those ends indirectly by altering our perceptions of what is good and bad.

The benefits of this account are twofold. First, this view will allow us to maintain a rationalist reading of the *NE* that accommodates Aristotle's troublesome comments maintaining that character, not reason, sets ends. More broadly, it will also contribute to the literature on moral education. Authors such as Burnyeat, Moss, Nancy Sherman (1989), and John McDowell (2009) have recognized habituation as the only possible means of moral education. They have suggested that if one is not habituated to desire virtuous ends at a young age, one cannot be persuaded to see those ends as worthy of pursuit in and of themselves. This is because, as they rightly maintain, the moral beliefs that motivate action require a high level of psychological commitment. If one is to be motivated to pursue an end, it is not enough to merely *believe* that it is good: one must also *see* it as an action that is in itself desirable to perform. Only habituation is capable of achieving this. In contrast to these views, I will show that reason can similarly change one's psychology. Through rhetorically adorned arguments, an orator can manipulate the way an audience sees the ends that motivate it to act, causing it to perceive as desirable what was previously not desired and vice-versa. In the case of moral belief, people who have not been brought up to desire virtue can be convinced to see virtue as a good in and of itself and worth pursuing.

The argument that follows will be developed in two parts. First, I will survey evidence in the *Rhetoric* demonstrating that Aristotle assumes that a person's ends

can be rationally altered. Scholars have never considered these passages in this light. In the second part I will demonstrate how these arguments succeed at altering an audience's ends even if we assume that those ends are set by non-rational desire.

1. Arguments About Ends

At the conclusion of *NE* 1, Aristotle plainly states that reason can alter the non-rational, desiderative part of the soul responsible for determining the ends we pursue. For the desiderative soul, he says, has a share in reason, "in so far as it is capable of listening (κατήκοον) to it and obeying (πειθαρχικόν) it" (1102b30-1). He goes on to say, "the non-rational is in a way persuaded (πείθεται) by reason" (1102b34).[3] This statement indicates that our desires, and hence our ends, can be altered by reason. However, this evidence is far from decisive. We have desires about all sorts of objects and activities, not just end-worthy activities such as health and pleasure. In this passage, it may be that Aristotle is implicitly restricting the desires subject to rational alteration to those desires for things other than ends. Thus, these statements alone do not show that reason can alter our desires for ends.

Fortunately, Aristotle's language here points us in a direction of more decisive evidence. His characterization of the desiderative part of the soul as capable of being "persuaded" recalls another work, the *Rhetoric*, which is devoted to discussing persuasion. In fact, the *Rhetoric* itself contains a passage reminiscent of this *NE* passage. Aristotle writes, "[I call] 'with reason' whatever we desire as a

[3] All *Nicomachean Ethics* translations from Rowe unless otherwise noted.

result of persuasion" (*Rhetoric* 1.11.5/1370a25).[4,5] This line is significant because the *Rhetoric* contains methods of argumentation that can be used by an orator to persuade his audience to take up new ends. However, commentators have overlooked it. Even Jessica Moss (2012), in her remarkably thorough survey of seemingly pro-rationalist evidence, does not discuss it. This is likely due to the fact that the rationalist accounts she surveys typically confine themselves to Aristotle's ethical works, particularly the *NE* and his discussions of deliberation and practical wisdom. In the remainder of this section I will discuss these arguments and show how they are meant to operate.

The *Rhetoric* is a text devoted to discussing the means of persuasion available to an orator. Among these means of persuasion is a category that Aristotle terms "deliberative rhetoric" (1.3.3/1358b8). It is concerned with investigating how to exhort and dissuade an audience to act (1.3.3/1358b8, 1.4.1/1359a30ff.). Generally speaking, Aristotle outlines two kinds of arguments available to the orator as tools of persuasion: arguments about means and arguments about ends (1.6-1.7). Arguments about means consist of arguments aimed at convincing an audience that a certain course of action (that is, a means) is to its advantage because it will allow the audience to achieve an end it already holds. The second type of argument — arguments about ends—aims to convince an audience that it ought to take up an action because that action is in itself worth pursuing; that is to say, it is an end.

[4] μετὰ λόγου δέ ὅσα ἐκ τοῦ πεισθῆναι ἐπιθυμοῦσιν.
[5] Because many of the Greek texts of the *Rhetoric* and their English translations favor citation numbers referring to the Oxford Variorum edition of 1820, I have listed these numbers along with the Bekker numbers. The *Rhetoric* translations are from Kennedy, unless otherwise noted.

Because we are interested in understanding how reason can alter ends, arguments about means are not directly germane to our discussion. However, a brief look at these arguments will be useful for clarifying Aristotle's examination of arguments about ends. Aristotle begins his examination with an account of the supreme end, i.e. happiness, which is notably similar to his discussion of the same topic in the *NE*. Everyone aims at happiness, Aristotle says, and people largely take happiness to be one of the following:

> [either] well-being combined with virtue, or independence of life, or the life most agreeably combined with security, or abundance of possessions and slaves, combined with power to protect and make use of them; for nearly all men admit that one or more of these things constitutes happiness (I.5.3/1630b14-19).

Information about the audience's ends gives the orator persuasive power in presenting an assortment of arguments. For instance, the orator can use his knowledge of the ends that the audience holds to persuade it to take up a certain action because the action is a means to those ends. Aristotle calls such actions "advantageous" (συμφέρειν). For instance, one might try to persuade one's friend to go to the dentist by saying, "you want to be healthy and going to the dentist will aid you in that pursuit. Thus, although the dentist is unpleasant, you ought to go."

Aristotle's discussion of arguments about means leads to a discussion of arguments about ends (see *Rhet*. I.7). He writes, "Since both sides in a debate often agree (ὁμολογοῦντες) about what is advantageous [to achieving a particular end] but disagree about which is more advantageous, something should next be said

about greater good and the more advantageous" (I.7.1/1363b5-8).[6] Having just argued that an orator can persuade an audience that an action is advantageous because it is a means to one of the audience's ends, Aristotle here admits that such arguments might be insufficient to successfully persuade the audience. Aristotle's point is that an audience will often agree with an orator that an end is worth pursuing and thus agree that it is to its advantage to perform an action that will lead to that end.

However, despite this agreement, the audience may fail to be persuaded on account of the fact that it sees some other end as *even more* worthy of pursuit. Consequently, the argument about means will fail to persuade the audience. For instance, imagine an orator attempting to convince an audience of farmers that they ought to vote to divert funds ordinarily used to subsidize farming expenses to fund the building of a public library. The audience might agree that reading and education are goods and therefore that a library would be to their advantage. However, such an argument would not convince farmers to support the building of a library, because they regard farming as a greater good than education. Aristotle recognizes that in order to persuade this audience, the orator would have to convince them that the end of education is greater than their livelihood. Only then would he be able to convince the audience to vote for the building of a library. Thus, the orator needs arguments capable of altering the ends that the audience holds.

In the next part, I will discuss particular examples of arguments about ends. However, before that, a clarification is in order about what has just been said. One

[6] Ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλάκις ὁμολογοῦντες ἅμφω συμφέρειν περὶ τοῦ μᾶλλον ἀμφισβητοῦσιν, ἐφεξῆς ἂν εἴη λεκτέον περὶ τοῦ μείζονος ἀγαθοῦ καὶ τοῦ μᾶλλον συμφέροντος.

might worry that if all Aristotle is offering are arguments capable of showing that one end is *greater* than another, he cannot successfully alter the audience's ends. They merely convince the audience to pursue an end it already had, albeit one that it took to be less valuable than other ends. Thus, one might conclude, the text does *not* show that Aristotle thinks that the orator can alter an audience's ends.

This objection misses the significance of the passage. One's upbringing and past experience do not merely determine the coarse distinction between what one broadly sees as good and what one sees as bad. It also makes fine-grained distinctions between what one sees as a good and what one sees as a greater good. Consider the following example. Imagine a person, Jill, who has been habituated to delight in both eating hamburgers and eating broccoli and who consequently sees the ends of tasty food and health as goods. However, based on the specifics of Jill's past experience, it turns out that she gets more pleasure from eating hamburgers than she does eating broccoli. Given this, although Jill might see both tasty food and health as goods, tasty food will be seen as more worthy of pursuit than healthy food. It is true that in isolated moments, Jill might choose to go for broccoli because she sees health as good. But whenever Jill has a choice between a hamburger and broccoli, she always chooses the hamburger because the desire for tasty food is stronger than the desire for the pleasures that comes from health. In short, one's non-rational desires determine one's ends in a fine-grained manner.

This example shows that even if all reason can do is invert one's preferences by causing one to see a particular end as better than another, this alteration is significant because it changes the ends that one ultimately acts for. Had desire been

left to its own devices without the involvement of reason, a different end would have been pursued. Thus, even if Aristotle is only saying that the orator can persuade the audience to prefer an end more strongly that it did before, this passage is significant and shows that reason can alter our ends.

However, I do not think that Aristotle is committed to such a narrow claim. Aristotle says that the audience is often in *agreement* (ὁμολογοῦντες) over what is advantageous but in disagreement about what is more or less advantageous and more or less good. There are many ways in which an audience can agree that something is good. An audience can, for instance, agree that going to the gym is to its advantage because this activity promotes heath, even if the audience is rather slovenly and never really interested in doing anything healthy. If this were the case, and if the orator were able to convince the audience that heath was a superior end to pursue, this act of persuasion would not simply be inverting the structure of their ends. The argument would persuade them to pursue a brand new end.

Having made this clarification, let us turn to examples that Aristotle provides of what I have been calling arguments about ends. Each is a consideration about how the orator can show that some particular end is superior to an end that the audience currently holds. First, let us look at the most straightforward sort of example. In it, Aristotle notes that the orator can convince an audience to take up a new end if he can show it that the end it currently holds is not an end at all, but rather a means to an end. He writes:

> (1) And if one thing is an "end" and another is not, [the "end" is a greater good]; one is sought for its own sake, the other for something else, for example, exercise for the sake of bodily fitness (I.7.9/1364a2-5).[7]

This consideration indicates that if the orator can show that what the audience takes to be good is not an end, but rather a means to an end, the orator can argue that the audience ought to abandon its original goal. Instead, it ought to adopt another goal, one that actually functions as an end.

Let us take an example from Aristotle's comments about wealth in *NE* I.3.1095a17-25 and I.5.1096a5-8. These passages indicate that many take wealth to be an end. But, as Aristotle notes, wealth is simply a means to another end and cannot function as an end in and of itself. In the context of the *Ethics,* Aristotle's audience does not need to be convinced that wealth is not an end and thus Aristotle provides no argument. However, one could argue, based on (1), that the achievement of wealth would leave someone feeling unsatisfied and looking for another end. One should not take wealth to be an end but should instead take up some other end beyond wealth.

In contrast to this first example, the majority of the suggested arguments in the *Rhetoric* grant that the end the audience holds is end-worthy. However, they maintain that there is some other end that the audience ought to pursue because,

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[7] The insertion "the 'end' is a greater good" is Kennedy's and is made necessary by Aristotle's highly compressed style in this chapter. As mentioned above, in *Rhet.* 7 Aristotle begins compiling a list of reasons for thinking that one end is greater than another. Thus he writes, "Since both sides in a debate often agree about what is advantageous but disagree about which is more advantageous, something should next be said about greater good and more advantageous" (I.7.1/1363b5-7). When he goes on to list reasons why one might consider one end to be greater than another, he does not continually repeat the fact that this is what he is doing. So when Aristotle writes that "if one thing is an 'end' and another is not" it is implied that the end is a greater good than what is not actually an end. Paraphrasing Aristotle, he says that it must be discussed what makes one good better than another. One way that one good may be better than another is that one might be an end and another a means to an end. In this case the former is greater than the latter.

given some feature it has, it is even *more* end-worthy. This is precisely what Aristotle attempts to do in this second example:

> (2) And [what precedes is greater] when one good follows [using *follows* in the sense of resulting simultaneously or successively or potentially] from another but the relationship is not reciprocal; for the use of what follows is already inherent in what precedes. Life follows from health simultaneously, but not health from life (1.7.5/1363b28-32).[8]

In this passage, Aristotle describes a relationship that two ends (what he calls "goods" here) may potentially have. It might be that these two ends—let us call them "End A" and "End B"—have a non-reciprocal relationship. This means that, if one achieves End A, one thereby also achieves End B, but if one were to achieve End B, one would not necessarily achieve End A. Aristotle suggests that if the orator finds that two ends have this relationship, the orator can formulate an argument to persuade the audience to take up End A rather than End B.

Aristotle's example of life and health shows how such an argument might proceed. If one were to achieve the goal of health (End A), it is necessarily the case that one would also possess life (End B). However, if one possesses life (End B), one does not necessarily have health (End A). Consequently, health is superior to life and one should aim at health rather than mere life.

The example above is fairly abstract, but it can easily be made more concrete. Imagine an orator who wants to convince the members of his audience that they ought to give up a part of their land for farming so that the city can better feed the population. He knows that the audience will almost certainly resist this: audience members will want to live out their current lives without interference. In other

[8] I have altered the sentence structure of Kennedy's translation for clarity.

words, the orator knows that the audience's primary aim is life. However, Aristotle notes in this passage that the orator can get the audience to change its primary end to health if he can somehow show that by taking up health as an ultimate end, the audience will, along the way, also have life. Using this strategy, the orator can argue that the audience ought to give up part of their land to farming, for farming brings not merely life but a healthy life.

Consider one further example. One might persuasively argue (regardless of whether it is true or not) that though the possession of freedom is good, one ought to work instead toward the possession of security. One might point out that the achievement of freedom does not necessarily entail the achievement of security. But in contrast, by having security, one would both safeguard one's wellbeing while ensuring one's ability to live freely. Thus, we ought to strive for having a secure state and not one that is only free.[9]

The examples above indicate a strategy that begins with an end that the audience desires and then, with the help of that end, moves the audience to a new, related end. A politician might want to argue that security is something that is good in itself and which the population needs. Recognizing that the population desires freedom, the politician can show the audience that security is better by showing them that security contains what is desirable about freedom plus more. In doing so, the politician shows the audience that this new end is better because it has greater

[9] One might object to this example by noting that security does not always entail freedom. This is true, but the *Rhetoric* is not concerned with truth. It is concerned with what might persuade an audience, so a speech along these lines is potentially persuasive (1.1.14/1355a3-4). Indeed, I have chosen this particular example because it is a line of argument that has become familiar in American political discourse and one that contemporary politicians take to be persuasive. See Obama (2013) for an example.

value, effectively persuading the audience to pursue an end that they would not have otherwise pursued.

In addition to (1) and (2), Aristotle lists a variety of other considerations that the orator can use to convince an audience to take up a new end. Most focus on a miscellany of properties that seem to qualify or disqualify something from being a superior end.[10] A single example suffices:

> (3) More generally: the hard thing is better than the easy, because it is rarer (1.7.15/1364a29).

This consideration can show that one end is better than another on account of the end's possessing a particular positive attribute. According to (3), that attribute is rarity. Gold, for instance, is valued on account of this trait. Similarly, the possession

[10] This is an incomplete list of considerations found in the *Rhetoric* (see 1.7.1/1363b6 ff.):
(1) What precedes is greater than what follows. So, Aristotle says, life follows from health; in this sense health can be seen to be a greater good than life.
(2) What is preferable in itself is greater than what is not. For instance, strength is greater than the wholesome because one does not choose wholesome for the sake of wholesome, but one does choose strength for the sake of strength.
(3) If one thing is an end, the other not, then the end is greater.
(4) What has less need than another for other things is greater (for it is more independent and one thus has less need of other things).
(5) When one thing cannot come into being without another but the latter can exist without the former the latter is the greater good, for it is more independent.
(6) A thing is greater if it is a first principle.
(7) If it is a cause and the other is not: for existence or coming to be is impossible without a cause and first principle.
(8) "If there are two causes, what comes from the greater cause is greater; and conversely, of two first principles, the first principle of the greater thing is the greater, and of two causes the cause of the greater is the greater cause."
(9) What is scarcer can be considered to be greater than what is abundant.
(10) But what is abundant can, in a different light, be considered greater than what is scarce.
(11) The more difficult is greater than what the easier.
(12) Things whose superiority is preferable are better (e.g. sight to hearing, being fond of friends to being fond of money).
(13) And combination and building up [of phrases or clauses make something seem greater].
(14) "And the things people wish to exist in reality [are preferable] to their semblance."
(15) What is less painful and what is accompanied by pleasure is greater than what is more painful or not accompanied by pleasure.

of virtue is rare and valued. Hence, in considering two ends, one might be persuaded to deem one superior to the other on account of its rarity.

In sum, these arguments show that Aristotle takes it for granted that reason can convince an audience to take up an end that they previously did not see as worth acting for. Assuming that ends are set by non-rational desire, this means that reason can alter the desires that establish our ends.[11]

2. The Psychology of Persuasion

So far I have argued that despite previous contentions, evidence from the *Rhetoric* shows that Aristotle does think that people can be rationally persuaded to take up new ends that guide their action; he presents arguments that he clearly thinks can effect such persuasion. But, psychologically speaking, how is this possible? To begin answering this question let us sketch an account of how non-rational desire is capable of setting our ends in action. Then, based on this account, we can show how reason can alter our ends.

The most straightforward way of understanding how desire sets ends is through perception. Many commentators of Aristotle's ethics suggest such an account. I have already mentioned two, Myles Burnyeat and Jessica Moss. In addition, we can include Sorabji (1980), McDowell (2009), Sherman (1908), and Tuozzo (1994), among others. Taking Moss's theory as an example, when one is habituated to an end, this habituation has both desiderative and cognitive

[11] One might object that in *NE* 10 Aristotle contradicts this conclusion when he maintains that those who are not well brought up, i.e. those who are corrupt, cannot be taught. I address this objection at the end of the paper.

consequences. Habituation causes us to take pleasure in the end and hence to desire the end to which we are habituated. In coming to desire this end, we come to *perceive* the end as something that is good and worth pursuing. When we perceive the possibility of this action in the future, this evokes a desire in us, which ultimately motivates us to act for that end. Thus, desire sets ends via perception.[12]

However, more must be said than just this. For Aristotle, action necessarily involves rationality and desire and perception are non-rational capacities. Looking at Moss again, we see that the intellect plays the role of grasping the ends that perception presents. Once an end is grasped, the intellect can then do the work of calculating how to achieve it. Aristotle's *De Anima* and its account of the relation between perception and thought supports this interpretation. For instance, there Aristotle maintains that the intellect thinks in terms of perceptual images (see *De Anima* 3.7). These images serve as the content of thought so that when we think of an object what we are doing is recalling a past perception of it (a *phantasma*). With respect to action, the view that emerges from this account of psychology is one on which perception sets our ends and the intellect simply grasps those ends.

To be sure, this view has radical consequences, at least as Jessica Moss presents it. On her view, what we experience as desirable (for Moss this is pleasure) determines what we *believe* to be good and worth pursuing. There are many ways that one could object to this admittedly sketchy account of action. However, what I

[12] Not all of these commentators have concluded that ends are non-rationally established. In particular, commentators such as Sorabji and Tuozzo have taken this sort of end-establishing perception to be a kind of rational or "intuitive" perception, i.e. *nous*. Consequently, they have maintained that *reason* sets ends. In the first chapter of my dissertation, "Perception and Motivation in Aristotle," I argue that this perception cannot be rational.

would like to suggest here is that the most radical aspect of Moss's view, the close connection between perception and thought, gives us a way of understanding how thought can influence desire and ultimately our ends. For Moss, this close connection shows that our perception of good and bad determines what we think of as good and bad. However, I will argue that this influence can go the opposite way, too. Because perception and thought are so closely linked, when we think about things in new ways, this can cause us to *see* those things in new ways, ultimately causing us to desire different ends.

Philosophically speaking, there are a number of examples that one could give to demonstrate how perception is vulnerable to reason. Perhaps the most straightforward are figures from Gestalt psychology. These figures have the potential of being seen two ways, e.g. as either a young or old woman. Initially, one may be able to see only one of the two images. But if one learns that a certain line forms the outline a woman's mouth or jawbone, one's perception of the image is transformed.[13]

I believe that Aristotle suggests that our perceptions can be altered in a similar way in the *Rhetoric.* In what follows I argue that oratorical arguments containing well-crafted metaphor can cause an audience to make connections

[13] Similar phenomena occur in aesthetic appreciation more generally. Take the case of painting. By giving the perceiver background information about the painting and asking her to focus on certain aspects of it, one can cause the perceiver to see the painting in a new way. The paintings of contemporary artist Keltie Ferris serve as an example. At first glance, Ferris seems to merely be rehashing motifs already explored by abstract expressionists such as Rothko and Hans Hofmann. However, Ferris's paintings take on a new dimension when it is pointed out that the organization and shape of the color patches are made to resemble something far more contemporary, namely artifacts that result from overly compressed digital image files. Once this connection is made, Ferris's paintings are perceived differently. They do not merely evoke the past, but illuminate the artistry in the effects of data compression algorithms and consequently become more pleasant to look at. For an example of Ferris's work and its connection with contemporary digital media see Johnson (2012).

between its perceptions. These connections can cause the audience to see a given end with new eyes, similar to the way that one can see an image or hear music differently as a result of a suggestion. My argument will have two parts. Using Moss's reading of Aristotle's psychology, I will give an account of the psychological effects of argumentation. I will subsequently discuss Aristotelian notions of stylization and show how stylized arguments are particularly effective at persuading audiences, even corrupt audiences, to take up new ends.

2.1 Psychological Interpretation of Argument

As I observed above, Moss argues that thought has a perceptual basis. When one thinks of an object, one recalls one's past experience of it in the form of an image. This means that when the orator presents the audience with an argument maintaining that a certain end ought to be pursued, we can think of him as instructing the audience to perceive or imagine that end (in the form of a *phantasma*) as pleasant and worth pursuing. If the argument succeeds and the audience comes to see the end as pleasant, then the audience will be moved.

Take as an example a line from passage (3) above: "the hard thing is better than the easy, because it is rarer." The orator might use this consideration as a guide and construct an argument persuading an audience not inclined to be healthy to pursue a healthy life. It is more difficult to lead a disciplined healthy life, he could maintain, than it is to lead an undisciplined, unhealthy life. Consequently he might argue that a healthy life is better, since it is a rarer, more refined sort of life. And by extension, when presented with a choice between eating broccoli or a hamburger,

one ought to choose broccoli, for this is the rarer choice. Psychologically speaking, by making his audience think through the argument, the orator prompts the audience to imagine a healthy life as pleasant by connecting the image of health—something the audience does not see as particularly pleasant—with the image of rarity—something that is seen as pleasant. By extension, he prompts the audience to imagine broccoli as connected to rarity and consequently makes the choice to eat broccoli appear more pleasant. We see, then, that through the connection between thought and perception, argument affects perception. By making an audience think through an argument, the orator prompts the audience to think of certain images in combination with each other, causing them to perceive those images in different ways. In the case of practical persuasion, an argument can cause an image to appear more pleasant to the audience than it previously did.

However, by itself, this argument and the resulting images of pleasurable health and broccoli are weak, easily defeated motivational forces. As I will show, this is because these resulting images will likely not appear as particularly vivid or true, especially if they are considered alongside the choice to eat something that the audience has been habituated to enjoy, such as a hamburger. The images' weakness may be partly due to the fact that the thought of health and broccoli as pleasant is new and not ingrained through habituation like the pleasure of the hamburger may be.[14] In addition, the pleasure of health offered by broccoli is likely more difficult to achieve than the gustatory pleasures offered by the hamburger. One does not

[14] We might think of it as akin to hearing an argument that numbers are part of the objective world when previously we thought they were merely ideal objects of mind. One might be convinced by the argument, but it may take a while for the objective reality of numbers to settle in.

immediately receive health by eating broccoli. Health comes with time, and one can doubt whether it is true that one will acquire it from eating broccoli. In contrast, the pleasure from a hamburger is immediately felt as one is eating. As a result, for some, the pleasure of health may seem less vivid and less easily acquired than gustatory pleasure. To present more persuasive arguments, the orator needs an additional rhetorical resource capable of enhancing the vividness of the images he evokes. The orator must present those images as truer and as exhibiting something more easily achieved than competing images. Aristotle's account of style offers just this resource.

2.2 Style

So far, I have focused on passages from the *Rhetoric* concerned with how persuasive arguments should be constructed. In contrast, turning to the topic of style (*lexis*), Aristotle begins an examination of how arguments should be presented to the audience to give them greater persuasive effect. In an ideal situation, Aristotle admits, one would not have to focus on style at all; presenting sound arguments would be enough. But in the context of the *Rhetoric*, style is especially important because Aristotle's audience is not well brought up and has unvirtuous, corrupt desires. He writes, "It is not enough to have a supply of things to say, but it is also necessary to say it in the right way, and this contributes to speech having a certain quality" (*Rhet.* 3.1.2-3/1403b15-18). For style "has great power, as has been said, because of the corruption of the audience"(3.1.5-6/1404a8). By adding stylistic

flourishes to his speech, the orator can formulate arguments that are more persuasive, especially in the face of corrupt audiences.

Aristotle's discussion of the persuasiveness of style relies on a conception of language that Aristotle briefly presents in the *Rhetoric*. "Speech," says Aristotle, "is a sign" (3.2.1/1404b3), and well-crafted speech conveys its message to the listener in a clear manner. According to Aristotle, ordinary language is the clearest, most transparent mode of communication. By contrast, poetical language uses words in unusual and surprising ways. In doing so, it makes its subject matter appear elevated, strange, and far off, "and," says Aristotle, "people are admirers of what is far off, and what is marvelous is pleasant" (3.2.3/1404b20). However, poetic speech has a downside: though it elevates the subject matter, its prolixity can obscure meaning and subjects that are represented as "far off" can appear to be fanciful and thus false.

Does this mean that the orator should use only ordinary language to persuade his audience to favor a given end? Not necessarily. As we saw above in Moss's account of Aristotle's psychology, if an audience is corrupt—i.e. not well brought up—it will be unable to see that a certain end is good and worth pursuing. Style is a way of combating this blindness. In order to overcome this corruption and succeed in effectively communicating with the audience, Aristotle argues that the orator ought to use a mixture of ordinary and poetical speech, striking a balance between the two such that the speech uses artifice without appearing artificial. By doing so, the orator will construct a speech that is clear to the corrupt audience and ultimately persuasive. As Aristotle writes,

> Many [kinds of words] accomplish this [i.e. making language seem "far-off"] in verse and are appropriate there; for what is said [in poetry] about subjects and characters is more out of the ordinary, but in prose much less so, for the subject matter is less remarkable . . . As a result authors should compose without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally. The latter is persuasive (*pithanon*), the former the opposite . . . (3.2.3/1404b12).
>
> …it is clear that if one composes well, there will be an unfamiliar quality and it escapes notice and will be clear. (3.2.6/1404B36-38).

Aristotle's thought seems to be that in using poetical-like language, the orator will be able to have the best of both poetry and prose. His language will be pleasant and alluring, but it will also appear true. The corrupt audience will be drawn to this truth and the language will thus be clear to them. As I show below, this clarity ultimately aids in learning (3.2.6/1404b35-8, 3.10.2/1410a9-15) and creates new beliefs.

Aristotle claims that metaphor is one of the most effective means of controlling the poetical aspect of language (3.2.8/1405a8). The meaning of a word is partly constituted by the manner in which it picks out its referent. Metaphor functions by substituting one word in an expression with another word that picks out the same referent in a different way. It consequently changes the way the audience thinks of the word's referent. This is indicated by Aristotle's criticism of the sophist Bryson. Bryson, Aristotle says, claims that whether a word is ugly or beautiful merely depends on the object it picks out.[15] But in truth, this is too simplistic. By signifying an object in a particular way, a word can make the same object appear either beautiful or ugly. "One word," Aristotle says, "does not signify in

[15] More accurately, Bryson says that no word is ugly in itself. Whatever word one uses to denote an object, that word will have the same meaning as any other because they will all pick out the same object. Thus, whether a word is beautiful or not, thinks Bryson, is relative to the object it picks out. In some cases a word might be beautiful because it picks out a beautiful object, in other cases ugly because it picks out an ugly object.

the same way as another, so in this sense also we should posit one as more beautiful or more ugly than another . . ." (3.2.13/1405B11-12).

To put it in a way more familiar to contemporary philosophy, if we take two words that have the same referent, the sense of those words can be distinct. One word could pick out a referent in a positive or beautiful way, the other in a negative or bad way. This feature of language gives the orator the opportunity to switch between sufficiently similar words in order to compel the audience to think about something in a particular way. Exemplifying this, Aristotle writes,

> ...if you wish to adorn, borrow metaphor from something better in the same genus, if to denigrate, from something worse. I mean, for example, since they are opposites in the same genus, saying of a person who begs that he 'prays' (εὔχεσθαι) or that a person praying 'begs' (πτωχεύειν), because both are forms of asking (3.2.10/1405A14-16).

The phrase "to beg" typically has negative connotations. Consequently, to call the act of asking for money "begging" is to present it in a negative way. To present it positively, we might describe it as praying, since praying often has a positive connotation.

Aristotle goes on to explain that metaphor can be a powerful tool for presenting ideas in a new light, since it can make meaningful and informative connections between ideas. To construct good metaphors, Aristotle suggests that meanings "should be transferred from things that are related but not obviously so, as in philosophy, too, it is characteristic of a well-educated mind to observe likeness even in things very different" (3.11.5/1412a10-14). This suggests that the connections made in philosophical discourse can also be made through metaphor. Philosophy is capable of making non-obvious connections that change our

understanding of the world. Similarly, metaphor can make non-obvious connections to enact similar changes in our understanding. Aristotle gives an example that demonstrates this ability: "Thus, Archytas said that an arbiter and an altar were the same thing; for one who has been wronged flies to both" (3.11.5/1412a13-4). By comparing an arbiter and an altar, Archytas is able to present religion and the activity of praying in a new light. Whereas one may have previously thought praying to be an honorable or pious activity, this metaphor reveals praying to be a dishonorable activity, since it is undertaken by a person in a position of weakness.

A pithy modern attempt at such metaphor comes courtesy of Geoffrey Stone, an appointed member of Barack Obama's NSA Surveillance review group. Defending Obama's January 17, 2014 speech about NSA surveillance, Stone writes, "abandoning the [NSA surveillance] program would be like throwing out your fire alarm because you haven't had a fire in seven years" (Stone 2014). In this, Stone urges us to see the surveillance not as something threatening, but as something good, as a preventative measure that functions only if is it constantly in operation.

Psychologically, the workings of metaphor are not significantly different from ordinary, non-metaphorical argumentation. Both forms of argument draw connections between two images in one's mind. However, in metaphor it is unimportant whether the connections one draws are true or logical. Rather, the aim of metaphor is to draw connections that evoke vivid mental images. When thinking of something, we think or see it in a certain way. If the audience sees praying as something good, an effective metaphor drawing a connection between praying and begging will cause the audience to see a connection between the two activities. In

doing so, the metaphor will alter the audience's perception of prayer. It will see the weakness and servility inherent in praying.

This perceptual interpretation of metaphor, i.e. that metaphor operates by changing our perception, gains support from Aristotle's discussion of effective metaphor as "bringing-before-the-eyes" (πρὸ ὀμμάτων)(3.9.1/1411b27). By "bringing-before-the-eyes," Aristotle means, "that things are set before the eyes by words that signify actuality" (3.9.1/1411b27). Thus, the phrase "bringing-before-the-eyes" is used to designate a particular way that the orator can make something apparent, such that the images evoked "signify actuality."

But what does "signifying actuality" mean? In the context of the passage, Aristotle gives examples of the sorts of metaphor that one should use (3.9). These examples have in common the aim of provoking images that seem real. They encourage the audience to imagine what is being said as actually happening or being the case. This interpretation harmonizes with Aristotle's claim above that the orator ought to use stylistic flourishes, but in a way that is unnoticeable, not artificial, and ultimately makes things clear. Metaphor that brings-before-the-eyes does just this. In bringing-before-the-eyes, metaphor presents an image to the audience that it can recognize so clearly that it cannot help but be attracted to it as an image that is real.

The value of bringing-before-the-eyes is not merely aesthetic in nature. By presenting good metaphors that conjure vivid and clear images, the orator shows truths to the audience. In doing so, the orator causes his audience to learn

(3.10.4/1410b20).[16] As Aristotle says: "To learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are pleasantest . . . Metaphor most brings about learning" (3.10.2/1410b20). This effect can be so strong that it becomes clear to the listener that he "learned something different from what he believed, and his mind seems to say, 'how true, and I was wrong'" (3.11.6/1412a21).

To sum up, rhetorical flourishes such as metaphor can be used to adorn bare argumentation to make those arguments more convincing. Well-crafted metaphor can evoke potent images in the audience's mind. Seeing these images, the audience receives a flash of what appears as an undeniable truth while also seeing that what they previously saw as true to be false.[17]

This psychological change is an admittedly mysterious event. However, it can be clarified with a non-metaphorical example that is, nonetheless, analogous to the way that metaphor operates. Imagine that one has no taste for Earl Grey tea but hears from a friend that it pairs well with a poppyseed bagel. As a consequence of this suggestion, one drinks a cup of Earl Grey while eating a poppyseed bagel. Sure enough, the tea pairs with the bagel. The flavor of the bagel has helped to 'pick out' an aspect of the tea's flavor to which one was not previously sensitive. We might even imagine one saying, "Earl Grey tastes good and I was wrong when I thought otherwise."

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[16] The orator could, presumably, convince his audience of something false. If he did so, it would be difficult to see how the audience "learns" something from him. Thus, we have two choices. We must either assume that Aristotle is taking it for granted that the orator is convincing his audience of something true, or we must take Aristotle's usage of "learning" as equivalent to something like "convincing" or "persuading." My thanks to Robert Bolton for pointing out this difficulty.
[17] See *supra* note 17.

An analogous process occurs with metaphor in persuasion. The tea-promoting friend is analogous to the orator and her suggestion analogous to the orator's speech. The decision to consume the bagel and tea together corresponds to the act of calling to mind two images suggested by a metaphor spoken by the orator. The perceptual switch that emerges from tasting the tea and the bagel together and which causes one to taste the tea as good is akin to bringing-before-the-eyes. Just as the tea drinker comes to perceive Earl Grey in a new way, by perceiving two images brought together by a skillfully crafted metaphor, the audience comes to perceive an object in a new way. As a result of this new perception, both the tea taster and the audience acquire a new belief.

Finally, to demonstrate how metaphor can function in speech to alter one's ends, let us look at a contemporary example. This is taken from a speech that George W. Bush made on September 11, 2001 in which he established for the first time a justification for a "war on terror."[18] Bush's speech begins with a series of subtle metaphors used to paint the September 11 criminals as evil, immoral monsters. He states, "Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror." And further, comparing them now to murderers, "These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat." By referring to the acts as "evil" and "acts of mass murder," Bush, by connection, paints the people responsible for these acts as evil and murderous. His characterization is important because evil

[18] Bush's usage of metaphor in his characterization of "the war on terror" has been well documented in the news media. While this metaphor occasionally verges on vulgar, it is nonetheless still subtler than the pithy one-liner from Geoffrey Stone quoted above. As such, it is closer to Aristotle's recommendation that metaphor should be unnoticed and consequently requires a longer discussion that the previous metaphors mentioned in this article.

is not simply an act. It is an essential trait; it defines one's character. In short, these metaphors increase the perceived badness of the perpetrators.[19]

Within the speech, these metaphors lower the audience's estimation of the value of achieving the end of peace in relation to security and justice. Following the metaphor, Bush clarifies that he is a supporter of peace while simultaneously juxtaposing this claim with notions of security and justice. He writes, "America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world and we stand together to win the war against terrorism." And further, "This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace" (Bush 2001). However, despite his support for it, in relation to the evil of the terrorists, the image of peace loses much of its appeal. Bush makes this apparent in a final dramatic metaphor:

> Tonight I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me" (Bush 2001).

We, and our peaceful lives, rest in the dark, deathly shadow of the terrorists. As a consequence, we must not pursue peace, but rather security and justice. Thus, in his conclusion, as in the above passage, Bush does not mention peace at all. He refers only to justice, along with an indication that in order to achieve justice, we must confront our enemies in what he earlier called a "war on terror." He says, "America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever

[19] See Lakoff (2001) for further discussion of these metaphors.

forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world."

The effect of this speech on the audience is a shift from taking up peace as an end to taking up security and/or justice as an end. The perceived value of peace is lowered when—through Bush's use of metaphor—it is juxtaposed with the evilness of the terrorists while the value of security and justice is heightened. Bush's point, then, is that we should not pursue the lower valued end of peace but rather work toward the ends of security and justice.

An Objection

Before concluding, I would like to confront the most pressing textual objection that this account faces. I sketched above a non-rationalist account of moral psychology: our non-rational desires for pleasure and pain establish our ends by causing us to perceive certain objects as good and worth pursuing or as bad and worth avoiding. On the basis of this account, I have argued that through rhetorically ornamented arguments, one's perception of the world can be changed and hence, so too can the ends that one perceives as worth pursuing and avoiding. Thus, reason can affect ends. However, the final book of the *Ethics*, *NE* 10, seems to contradict this conclusion:

> Now if words (λόγοι) were sufficient in themselves for making people decent, "Many and fat the fees they'd earn" (to quote Theognis), and justly, and words would be what had to be provided; but as it is they appear to have the power to turn and motivate those of the young who are civilized, and to be capable of bringing about possession by excellence in a character that is noble and truly loves the fine, but to lack the power to turn the majority of people towards refinement of excellence. For most people are not of the sort to be guided by a sense of shame but by fear, and not to refrain from bad

> things on the grounds of their shamefulness but because of the punishments; living by emotion as they do, they pursue their own kinds of pleasures and the means to these, and shun the opposing pains, while not even having a conception of the fine and the truly pleasant, since they have no taste of it. What kind of talking, then, would change the rhythm of their life? For it is not possible, or not easy, for words to dislodge what has long since been absorbed into one's character-traits (10.9.1179b5-19).
>
> For the person who lives according to emotion will not listen to talk that tries to turn him away from it, nor again will he comprehend such talk; how will it be possible to persuade someone like this to change? And in general it is not talk that makes emotion yield but force. Before he acquires excellence, then, a person must in a way already possess a character akin to it, one that is attracted by the fine and repulsed by the shameful (10.9.1179b27-31).

What are we to make of these passages? Both appear in a portion of the text where Aristotle is asking what his audience of aspiring politicians ought to do with their newly acquired knowledge of the greatest good. That is to say, he is asking, "How ought these politicians rule, given what they now know?" He makes a point of arguing how they *cannot* expect to rule. Just as character virtue cannot be gained by simply acquiring knowledge, one cannot expect to change a citizenry's behavior merely through words. Thus, these passages seem to conflict with my claim that an orator *can* change an audience's ends, and hence the way an audience behaves, through argument.

Yet, this conflict is merely apparent and is resolved by noting the difference in focus between these passages and Aristotle's point in the *Rhetoric*. In these passages, Aristotle's focus is on character. He writes, "For it is not possible, or not easy, for words to dislodge what has long since been absorbed into one's character-traits." In contrast, I have argued that an orator can alter an audience's *desires* and *ends*. This difference in focus eliminates the *prima facie* conflict. For even if the orator is successful in persuading his audience to take up a new end by persuading

it to see that end in a new way, the audience's character still remains alongside these new ends. Thus, we can accept that the politicians cannot change the citizenry through words, while also maintaining that one can be persuaded to pursue a new end through words.

I believe that this alone would overcome the difficulty presented by these passages. However, we do not even have to accept that reason lacks *all* ability to manipulate character, since Aristotle stops short of saying it is *impossible* for the politicians to change a citizenry through words. Rather, he says that it is "not possible, or not easy," suggesting that it *is* possible to change character—although very hard. Given the view I have presented so far, we can speculate about what Aristotle is thinking when he says that it is "impossible, or not easy." *Prima facie*, it seems impossible to dislodge one's character through words. Character is developed over a long period of time while the orator's or politician's time with the audience is brief. And it would seem impossible to re-habituate an audience in the duration of a speech.

However, there is a sense in which it *is* possible to dislodge a person's character through words, although, from a ruler's perspective, it is very impractical. In order to see this scenario, let us distinguish between two types of rhetorical success. On the first type, an orator is successful if he is able to compel an audience to pursue a given end for a particular occasion or limited number of occasions. On the second type, the orator is successful by going beyond this initial success and convincing his audience to pursue a particular end over a long period of time. By doing so, the orator convinces the audience to habituate itself to this new end,

effectively altering its character through his speech. This second type of success would admittedly be difficult to achieve, although not impossible. Moreover, its possibility is supported by Aristotle's claim that style can cause us to perceive something as true while also causing us to see what we previously believed to be false. Such a psychological alteration suggests that the orator can effect long-term change in his audience.[20] Thus, the difficulty presented by these passages has been averted. What the orator changes most immediately are the audience's ends, not its character. However, as the passages indicate, it is still conceivable that the orator could change the audience's character, just with greater effort and difficulty.

Conclusion

I began this paper with a puzzle in Aristotle's moral philosophy. By and large commentators have given rationalist interpretations of the *NE* according to which rationality can mold our non-rational desires in light of our conception of the good. However, such a view conflicts with certain passages in the *NE.* Most troublingly, Aristotle states in no uncertain terms that character and hence our non-rational desires, not reason, determine the ends that we pursue. This has led a number of commentators to suppose, against rationalist interpretations, that our ends cannot be altered by reason and are always established by desire. Yet in the *Rhetoric*,

[20] A good deal more can be said about the inability of rhetoric and specifically *logoi* to serve as a reliable tool for ruling a citizenry. To take one example, metaphor, that which above all is capable of making language (and the objects it references) seem pleasant, is not something that one can learn to craft well and hence not something that can be taught (*Rhet.* 1405a7-8). Thus, in an account of how to rule that presumably aims to establish a stable state, rhetoric would seem to be a particularly poor tool. Moreover, even if a state were successfully ruled through rhetoric, this success would be too closely tied to the skills of a particular person and hence not right for establishing a stable government.

Aristotle seems to suggest that a person's ends *can* be rationally altered. What are we to make of these seemingly conflicting passages? I have maintained that this conflict is merely apparent and that the passages can be accommodated by a rationalist interpretation of Aristotle. We can accept Aristotle's claim that non-rational desires establish the ends that we pursue yet also maintain that reason can indirectly alter those ends by altering our perceptions of what we see as worth pursuing.

My argument rests on an account of psychology at which Aristotle hints in the *Rhetoric*. On this account, desire establishes our ends through perception. When we are habituated to a particular end, we come to take pleasure in that end and thus come to desire it. This desire causes us to perceive the end as something that is good and worth pursuing. When we see the possibility of taking this action in the future, this perception evokes in us a desire that ultimately motivates us to act for the perceived end. Therefore, desire sets ends via perception.

However, according to the *Rhetoric*, through carefully crafted argument and metaphor, an orator can change his audience's perception. Argument and metaphor draw connections between objects in the audience's mind. By thinking of two things together, the audience imagines them together in the 'mind's eye,' so to speak. If the metaphor is good, the combination of images will cause the audience to see the world in a new way. For instance, by comparing praying to begging, an orator can cause the audience to see praying as something that is weak, dishonorable, unpleasant, and hence as something to be avoided. Similarly, by carefully

constructing a metaphor about virtue, e.g. courage or peace, an orator can cause the audience to perceive virtue as something pleasant and worth pursing.

We see, then, how to resolve the interpretive puzzle with which I began. We can grant Aristotle's claim that character sets ends while maintaining that reason has a role in altering these ends. By and large, character does establish our ends by determining what we see as good and bad. However, reason can manipulate our perception of the world and cause us to see as pleasant something that was previously painful and vice versa.

This account has implications beyond this interpretive puzzle. It sketches a foundation for a general account of how the rational part of the soul interfaces with the non-rational, desiderative part. Independent of concerns about ends, Aristotle maintains, as we saw above, that the desiderative part is responsive to reason. Now we can see how this might be so: the intellect can interact with our desires through perception. Through its ability to alter our perception of the world, it can alter the things that we see as worth pursuing or avoiding and hence alter what we desire. Thus, this account gives us a model on which we can maintain a strict distinction between the rational and non-rational parts of the soul while giving us a way to understand how these elements of the soul interact.

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