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The Aristotelian Enthymeme

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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

THE ARISTOTELIAN ENTHYMEME.

‘WHAT then was an enthymeme? Oxford! thou wilt think us mad to ask. Certainly we knew, what all the world knows, that an enthymeme was understood to be a syllogism of which one proposition is suppressed — major, minor, or conclusion. But what possible relation had *that* to rhetoric? Nature sufficiently prompts all men to that sort of ellipsis; and what impertinence in a teacher to build his whole system upon a solemn precept to do this or that, when the rack would not have forced any man to do otherwise!’ So wrote De Quincey eighty-five years ago¹ and proceeded to demonstrate that the enthymeme of Aristotle is something quite different. But as a writer of authority—I mean the late E. M. Cope—has striven to perpetuate the view that the enthymeme of Aristotle is almost² identical with the enthymeme of later times, it cannot be held superfluous to examine the question again.

Aristotle refers much to the enthymeme in the *Rhetoric*, but it is in the *Analytica Priora* (ii. 27) that he gives its formal definition as ‘a syllogism from likelihoods or signs’ (συλλογισμὸς ἐξ εἰκότων ἢ σημείων), i.e. the enthymeme is a syllogism of a peculiar subject-

matter. Sir William Hamilton, who had already furnished De Quincey with information on the subject, treats the question at some length in two well-known places, viz. the *Edinburgh Review* of April, 1833 (reprinted in his *Discussions*, pp. 153 f.), and in his *Lectures on Logic* (Lect. XX.), and shows that Aristotle meant exactly what he said in his definition. As one of the premisses then of an enthymeme is drawn from ‘likelihoods or signs,’ its conclusion cannot rise above probability, except in the case where a ‘sign’ is also an infallible sign or proof, τεκμήριον. The enthymeme, as Aristotle says, is a ‘kind of syllogism,’ and is naturally much used by orators, who deal extensively in ‘likelihoods or signs.’ All the references to the enthymeme in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, and the examples there given, conform to this view and to no other. One of the best accounts of the Aristotelian enthymeme is that of Grant,³ in these words: ‘The real characteristic of the “enthymeme” was its suggestive, but non-conclusive, character; for the premisses, even if expressed in full, would not be sufficient to enforce the conclusion which is pointed at.’ It is what we call a ‘consideration.’ ‘Let us observe,’ he continues, ‘some of the enthymemes in the speech of Antony:

¹ *Blackwood’s Magazine*, December, 1828.

² I say ‘almost’ because the enthymeme of later times was not limited to a syllogism ‘from likelihoods or signs,’ as Cope would of course have limited Aristotle’s.

³ *Ancient Classics for English Readers: Aristotle*, p. 81.

1. He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill :
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious ?
2. When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept ;
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.
3. You all did see, that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition ?

These three arguments are based on "signs"; acts of Caesar are adduced as showing in him a disinterestedness, a tenderness of heart, and a modesty which would be incompatible with selfish ambition. But the reasoning is not conclusive, since the acts mentioned might have flowed from other sources than good qualities of the heart; they might have been done "with a motive." However, there is fully as much cogency here as can ordinarily be expected to be found in the deductions of an orator.' It is obvious that, as Thomson remarks, 'several concurrent enthymemes are often as cogent as a demonstrative syllogism,' and that 'circumstantial evidence falls naturally into a series of enthymemes,'¹ and it *may* happen, as above remarked, and as Aristotle points out,² that an enthymeme is also a valid syllogism.

It is well known that later writers, Greek and Roman, used the word 'enthymeme' in quite a different sense from Aristotle's—indeed in various senses—three of which are mentioned by Quintilian,³ but the meaning of the word in modern⁴ as well as medieval writers is 'a syllogism with one premiss suppressed,' and it is so defined in Murray's dictionary.⁵ This also is the sense which Cope attributes to the word in Aristotle (with the understood limitation referred to in note 1 above). In his text, it is true, he adopts the view of Hamilton, but reverses his own decision in a note with the remark that the view given in

the text 'was adopted mainly in deference to the decided opinion expressed by Sir William Hamilton.'⁶ It is often said that the important part of a lady's letter is to be found in the postscript, but I have never heard that the important part of a scholar's exposition is to be found in the note. Most of this note requires to be transcribed verbatim in order that we may do justice to its merits. After the sentence above quoted Cope continues: 'I am now however, convinced that he is wrong, and return to the opinion which I had myself previously formed upon the question. If the only difference between the rhetorical enthymeme and the syllogism lay in the probability of the one and the certainty of the other, it would leave no distinction remaining between the dialectical syllogism and the rhetorical enthymeme: besides which the position is not true of the dialectical syllogism, whose materials and conclusions are all probable and nothing more. Plainly the difference between the two latter is one of *form*. The syllogism is complete in all its parts; the enthymeme incomplete; one of the premisses or the conclusion is *invariably* wanting. If further proof were needed, it would be found in this, that the relation of the example to induction is precisely similar. The example is an incomplete induction: a general inference derived from a *single instance*, instead of being collected from an exhaustive assemblage of similar instances. Again the argument, that a syllogism from probabilities expressed at full length would be just as much an enthymeme as the incomplete one, rests upon an utterly unfounded assumption, which assumes the theory to be proved, and presents us with another of those *petitiones principii* for which Sir W. Hamilton has lately become so famous (see Mill's Examination).' This note is liable to the following observations:

(1) In the statement that if Hamilton's view is correct 'it would leave no distinction between the dialectical syllogism and the rhetorical enthymeme' Cope appears to confound valid with

¹ *Laws of Thought*, pp. 247, 248.

² *Rhet.*, i. 2. 14.

³ V. 10., §§ 1, 2.

⁴ E.g., Whately, Thomson, Jevons, Joseph.

⁵ Or, instead of one premiss, the conclusion may be suppressed.

⁶ *Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric*, p. 103 and note.

invalid inference. The syllogism framed from 'likelihoods or signs' may be valid or it may be invalid. In the first case it is also a dialectical syllogism, in both cases it is an enthymeme. Let us take an example of an enthymeme 'from likelihoods' given by Clarke.¹

Fat men are good-natured ;
Horace was a fat man ;
∴ Horace was good-natured.

This is in form a syllogism of the first figure, but it is invalid because the middle term, 'fat men,' being equivalent to 'most fat men' is undistributed. The only valid inference from the given premisses is that Horace was probably good-natured, a conclusion which is not of sufficient importance for the orator. The thing to be particularly noticed is not that no valid inference can be drawn from 'likelihoods or signs,' but that the valid inference is generally useless, while the inference that is of importance to the speaker is not valid. Aristotle gives as an enthymeme from signs, 'This is a sign that he has a fever, he breathes quick.'² The syllogism here is of the second figure, in which the middle term is the predicate of both premisses :

Those who have a fever breathe quick ;
A. breathes quick ;
∴ A. has a fever.

The syllogism is invalid because in this figure one premiss, and consequently the conclusion, must be negative, which is not the case here. It is, however, a good enthymeme. If the sign is an infallible sign (*τεκμήριον*), as in the example of Aristotle, 'She is a mother, for she has milk,' we have a syllogism of the first figure which is valid and is therefore a dialectical syllogism. The syllogism here is :

All who have milk are mothers ;
A. has milk ;
∴ A. is a mother.

The dialectical syllogism is a valid syllogism, the rhetorical syllogism or enthymeme is invalid, with the exception above named, and this corresponds with the distinction between dialectic

and rhetoric, the aim of the former being to demonstrate, of the latter to induce belief. The enthymeme is often called a 'rhetorical syllogism,' but there may be enthymemes which are not rhetorical. The definition of an enthymeme being that it is a syllogism from 'likelihoods' or 'signs,' enthymemes may have their premisses drawn from particular sciences, such as medicine. Thus in the example: 'This is a sign that he has a fever, he breathes quick,' the enthymeme is not rhetorical.

(2) It is incorrect to say of the dialectical syllogism that 'its materials and conclusions are all probable and nothing more.' It is true that Aristotle does not identify dialectic with logic, as we often do. He distinguishes between dialectic as an art, in which premisses are drawn from any subject-matter, and scientific proof, where we have to do with premisses drawn from particular sciences. But the syllogism is, according to Aristotle, the universal instrument of reasoning, and every valid syllogism, whatever the subject-matter of its premisses, may be called a dialectical syllogism. Whether the premisses are in themselves true or not, is of no consequence to dialectic, though of the utmost importance to science.

(3) Before considering the main position of Cope—that the difference between the enthymeme and the dialectical syllogism (or syllogism simply) is that the former is complete in form and the latter incomplete—it may be as well to deal with the remainder of the quotation. He says: 'The relationship of the example to induction is precisely similar, the example is an incomplete induction'; and, two pages on, further explains in a short paragraph, 'As the enthymeme is an imperfect syllogism, so is the example an imperfect induction: the former omits either premiss or the conclusion; the latter instead of collecting its universal from all the known and accessible instances, contents itself with one or two, from which the universal is inferred.' But clearly the imperfection of the example is a different kind of imperfection from that of the enthymeme. The example is materially imperfect, while the enthymeme is, according to Cope, only formally imperfect,

¹ *Logic*, by R. F. Clarke, p. 357.

² *Rhet.* i. 2. 18.

and the better conclusion from the comparison is that, as the example is a materially imperfect induction, so the enthymeme is a materially imperfect syllogism. That Cope does not appreciate this is surprising. Finally, Cope seems to be utterly mistaken in writing, 'Again the argument, etc.' (the last sentence of the note quoted above). This is not an 'argument' used by Sir W. Hamilton; it is a statement of the conclusion from his arguments, and there is no *petitio principii* whatever.

Now we come to the Aristotelian statements in the *Rhetoric* which prove that Cope's view of the nature of the enthymeme is erroneous. It has already been seen that the definition in the *Anal. Prior.* gives no countenance to Cope. The passages in the *Rhetoric* are well set out and explained by Mr. G. M. Edwards in his review of Welldon's *Translation of the Rhetoric*,¹ but he might have said a good deal more than, 'the alternative opinion (*i.e.* Hamilton's) deserves at least a mention,' when he succeeds in proving that it is correct. The passages are (I give Jebb's translation):—

(1) i. 2. 13. 'Hence both the enthymeme and the example must deal with things which are (as a rule) contingent—the example, as a kind of induction, the enthymeme as a syllogism, and as a syllogism of few elements—often, of fewer than the normal syllogism (τὸ δ' ἐνθύμημα συλλογισμὸν, καὶ ἐξ ὀλίγων τε καὶ πολλάκις ἐλαττόνων ἢ ἐξ ὧν ὁ πρῶτος συλλογισμός).' This is fatal to Cope's contention, who is reduced to the explanation that here *πολλάκις* means 'always.' In fact the syllogism, as well as the enthymeme, has usually one of its premisses suppressed, except in formal treatises. The distinction made by Cope would, as Hamilton says, 'involve a discrimination of species between the reasoning of logic and the reasoning of ordinary discourse' that would not have been sanctioned by Aristotle, who wrote 'syllogism and demonstration belong not to the outward discourse but to the discourse which passes in the mind (οὐ

πρὸς τὸν ἔξω λόγον ἢ ἀπόδειξις ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ· ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ συλλογισμός).'

(2) In ii. 21. 6. Aristotle says, 'Of the maxims that have a reason added (*γνώμαι μετ' ἐπιλόγου*), some are part of an enthymeme, others are in the nature of enthymemes, but not part of an enthymeme,' while in § 2 he has already said, 'when the cause, the *wherefore*, is added, it is the complete enthymeme.' That is, he calls the same thing, first, a 'complete enthymeme' and then 'part of an enthymeme.' Cope says this is 'careless writing,' and it certainly is that in any case, but with Cope's interpretation of the word 'enthymeme' it is inexplicable, and he flounders badly in the attempt to reconcile the two remarks. If it is of the essence of the enthymeme that one premiss should always be suppressed, how is it possible, even for Aristotle, to call a syllogism with one premiss suppressed 'part of an enthymeme?' If, on the other hand, it is a syllogism 'from likelihoods or signs' which may have, and nearly always does have, one premiss suppressed, then it may be said that in § 2 Aristotle is regarding the enthymeme as it nearly always is in fact, and in § 6 as it is in theory.

(3) In i. 1. 11., after saying that the enthymeme is a 'sort of syllogism (*συλλογισμός τις*),' Aristotle goes on, 'Hence it is clear that he who is best able to investigate the elements and the genesis of the syllogism will also be the most expert with the enthymeme, when he has further mastered its subject-matter and its differences from the logical syllogism.' If, however, Cope is right in his view that there is no difference of subject-matter between the syllogism and the enthymeme, the above sentence is devoid of meaning. Aristotle defines an enthymeme as a 'syllogism from likelihoods or signs,' so that if, as Hamilton remarks, 'he over and above discriminated them by an accident of form, he would divide the genus by two differences and differences also of a merely contingent association.'

The distinction between 'likelihoods'

¹ *Classical Review*, i., p. 98 f.

² *Anal. Post.*, i. 10. 7.

and 'signs' is not always easy to maintain. A likelihood is a proposition stating what is generally esteemed true, what is true for the most part though not always, as, 'Suffering improves the character,' or, 'Fat men are good-natured.' A sign is a term used to point to something else—evidence of some further fact, as, 'Quickness of breathing is a sign of feverishness,' the sign here being the predicate of the proposition, 'Those who have a fever breathe quickly.' If the sign can be made the subject of the proposition it is an infallible sign or proof, as 'All who have milk are mothers,' or, 'All who are feverish are ill,' in other words, the possession of milk is a proof of motherhood, feverishness is a proof of illness. With all respect to Jebb, he appears to be mistaken in classifying propositions from *εἰκότα* as 'general' and propositions from *σημεῖα* as 'particular,' for both may be general—e.g. the proposition 'Fat men are good-natured' may be regarded as one from 'signs' as easily as one from 'likelihoods.'

The exposition of Cope on the two kinds of signs—(1) the sign which is as a particular to a universal, and (2) the sign which is as universal to particular, is, I venture to think, mistaken. Aristotle gives as an example of (1) 'Wise men are just; for Socrates was wise and just,' which in form makes a syllogism of the third figure, but one which is refutable inasmuch as by that figure no general conclusion can be drawn. As an example of (2) Aristotle gives, 'This is a sign he has a fever, he breathes quick,' which in form makes a syllogism of the second figure, but is refutable because the second figure can only prove a negative conclusion. Between (1) and (2) Aristotle has two examples of a sign which is a strict proof, or *τεκμήριον*—viz. 'Here is a sign that he is ill—he is feverish,' and 'She is a mother, for she has milk.' In which of the two kinds of signs does Aristotle include the *τεκμήριον*? Cope places the *τεκμήριον* under (1) and it must be admitted that Aristotle's language favours this view, but surely, as the conclusion is a particular one, not general, it must come under (2). The

conclusion that A. is ill because he is feverish is just as particular as the conclusion that he has a fever because he breathes quick, although in the former case the feverishness is an infallible sign, or proof, of illness, whereas quick breathing is not an infallible sign of fever. How then is an infallible sign or proof to be distinguished from a fallible sign? The answer is, simply by a previous induction. We know, and can only know, by induction that fever is a proof of illness, also by induction that quick breathing, though a sign, is not an infallible sign, of fever; no logical process alone can distinguish a *τεκμήριον* from a mere *σημεῖον*. Cope, however, takes as the test of a *τεκμήριον* that the terms of the proposition should be convertible. He says, 'fever and hard-breathing are not co-extensive: and therefore a sign of this kind is always capable of refutation.' But he is clearly mistaken, for fever and illness are not 'co-extensive'; a man may be ill without being feverish, and yet fever as a sign of illness is a *τεκμήριον* and not 'capable of refutation.' If a sign is a *τεκμήριον* what we can say about it is, that it will make a syllogism of the first figure.¹

Sir William Hamilton has drawn out an elaborate table to mark the various meanings of *ἐνθύμημα*, but the following is sufficient for the present purpose. In Sophocles, Xenophon, Isocrates, we find the word used for a deliberate thought, plan, suggestion of any kind. In the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, which is a little earlier than Aristotle's, and anciently attributed to him, we find the word used in a technical sense, not as one of the two kinds of rhetorical proof, but as a species of proof among other special classes of arguments, viz. 'a proof drawn from any kind of opposition (*οὐ μόνον τὰ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τῇ πράξει ἐναντιούμενα ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν*).'² Cicero, while admitting that every kind of thought may be called *ἐνθύμημα*, says that in rhetoric it is confined to arguments *ex contrariis conclusa*,³ 'a reasoning from

¹ Cope, *loc. cit.*, pp. 164, 165; Ar. *Rhet.* i. 2, 18.

² *Rhet. ad Alex.*, c. 10.

³ *Topica*, § 55. See Reid on *pro Sulla*, § 32.

contraries.' Quintilian names the two meanings assigned by Cicero, but also gives *sententia cum ratione*,¹ 'a maxim with a reason attached,' which is indeed the same as Aristotle's *γνώμη μετ' ἐπιλόγου*. He goes on, 'Hunc alii *rhetoricum syllogismum*, alii *imperfectum syllogismum* vocaverunt, quia nec distinctis nec totidem partibus concluderetur; quod sane non utique ab oratore desideratur.' Here we have the full-blown doctrine that the enthymeme is *imperfectus syllogismus*, and this doctrine is that of late Greek and Latin rhetoricians and medieval writers in general. The statement in Liddell & Scott s.v. *ἐνθύμημα*, which is correct about Aristotle's use of the word, that 'the common account that it is a *syllogism* with one premiss suppressed is much later' (i.e. than Quintilian) cannot be supported. Hamilton attributes to Rodolphus Agricola (d. 1485) the first correct interpretation of Aristotle. However, St. Thomas Aquinas, two hundred years earlier than Rodolphus, as Clarke remarks, gave the true Aristotelian teaching. It may be found in his commentary on *Anal. Post.* in these words:

'Manifestat idem in rhetoricis, in quibus persuasio fit per enthymema aut per exemplum; non autem per syllogismum vel inductionem completam, propter incertitudinem materiae circa quam versatur scilicet circa actus singulares hominum, in quibus universales propositiones non possunt assumi vere. Et ideo loco syllogismi, in quo necesse est esse aliquam universalem, aliquo enthymemate; et similiter loco inductionis, in qua concluditur universale, aliquo exemplo, in quo proceditur a singulari, non ad universale, sed ad singulare. Unde patet quod sicut enthymema est quidem syllogismus detruncatus, ita exemplum est quaedam inductio imperfecta. Si ergo in syllogismo et inductione proceditur ex aliquo praecognito, oportet idem intelligi in enthymemate et exemplo.'²

In this passage St. Thomas writes of the syllogism and the enthymeme as differing in *matter*, and when he calls the enthymeme 'syllogismus detrunc-

catus,' he is referring to *that* difference, not to a difference of form. The credit of correctly interpreting Aristotle is generally given to Pacius (1550-1635) who, on the authority of four Greek MSS first ejected *ἀτελής* as a gloss from *Anal. Prior.* ii. 27, *συλλογισμὸς ἀτελής ἐξ εἰκότων ἢ σημείων*. It is now accepted that *ἀτελής* is spurious. Facciolati, in 1724, expanded the view of Pacius. Modern writers on Logic correctly distinguish the current meaning of 'enthymeme' from that which it bears in Aristotle. Cope and Grote alone, as far as I know, maintain that the distinction between Aristotle's enthymeme and the syllogism is merely one of form, and Grote professes to be following Cope. Jebb, in his *Attic Orators*,³ agrees with Hamilton. Sir John Sandys, in his edition of Cope's *Arist. Rhet.* and of Jebb's *Translation* expresses no opinion of his own, but he has recently informed me that he now holds that Hamilton's view is the only view that can be made to suit Aristotle's own language.

It is generally considered, I believe, that the mistaken view of Aristotle's meaning is due to the interpolation *ἀτελής* referred to above, but, if so, how is the interpolation to be accounted for? Mansel calls it 'a clumsy one, designed to accommodate Aristotle's definition to subsequent views of the nature of the enthymeme, and made by a scribe not particularly well versed in Aristotelian phraseology.'⁴ But then how did these subsequent views of the nature of the enthymeme arise? I am inclined to think that the explanation is easier. *ἀτελής* was probably an interpolation, but an early one, and may have been inserted by some one quite well versed in Aristotelian phraseology. According to Aristotle the syllogism is only 'perfect,' *τέλειος*, when it is of the first figure, because he looked on that as a peculiarly evident and cogent form of argument. The second and third figures of the syllogism he considered to be 'imperfect' because they are not immediately evident by the *dictum de omni et nullo*. A scribe might therefore very

¹ V. 10. 1.

² Ed. Vatic., i., p. 141.

³ Vol. ii., p. 289.

⁴ Mansel's *Aldrich*, Appendix F.

well insert the word *ἀτελής* after *συλλογισμός* inasmuch as the enthymeme, being 'from likelihoods or signs' would never form a *συλλογισμὸς τέλειος* except in the case of a sign being also a proof (*τεκμήριον*). This word *ἀτελής* might soon be misunderstood to have reference, not to the matter, but to the form of the enthymeme, and this misunderstanding would be aided by the fact that, as might be expected, all the enthymemes given by Aristotle, by way

of example, are *ἀτελή* in both senses. The transition from an 'imperfect' syllogism drawn from 'likelihoods or signs' to any 'imperfect' syllogism, whatever its subject-matter, would present little difficulty, and it would become established that an enthymeme is a syllogism with either premiss, or even with the conclusion, suppressed.

R. C. SEATON.

Reigate.

NOTE ON *CULEX*—LINES 24-41.

IN this note I assume two things: (1) that the poem is an early work of Virgil. This seems to me to have been proved by Miss Jackson in her paper in the *Classical Quarterly* of 1911, p. 163 foll. (2) That the Octavius to whom the poem is dedicated was the future Augustus. There is one other possible candidate for the honour (see Leo's edition, p. 22), but there is an almost universal agreement that the language of these lines forbids us to think of any boy but the nephew of Julius. I use Ellis' text: fortunately the words on which I wish to lay stress are not doubtful, as are some others. Lastly, my object in venturing into a thorny path was to see if I could independently find any evidence of the date of the poem.

In these lines the poet asks Octavius to aid his efforts, *i.e.* to accept a dedication for a reason on which he lays stress, viz. that war is not the theme of the poem:

Et tu cui meritis oritur fiducia chartis
Octavi uenerande, meis adlabere coeptis,
sancte puer, tibi namque canit non pagina bellum
triste Iouis. . . .

No wars, either mythological or historical, are the subject of the poem,

Mollia sed tenui decurrere carmina uersu
uiribus acta suis Phoebō duce ludere gaudent.

Such a homely theme as mine, he says, will suffice for Octavius:

Haec tibi, sancte puer, memorabimus, haec tibi
restet
gloria perpetuum lucens mansura per aevum.

et tibi sede pia maneat locus, et tibi sospes
debita felices memoretur uita per annos,
grata, bonis lucens. Sed nos ad coepta feramur.

All this seems to me to suggest that Octavius was very young, a *puer* in the strict sense of the word. He is asked to accept the poem because the theme is not warlike but homely. His whole life is before him: he has as yet done nothing heroic, and is, indeed, not of an age to listen to tales of war and bloodshed; nay, the poet seems indirectly to suggest a hope that he may live to be a man of peace. I cannot think that such a poem, with such a dedication, could have been addressed to Octavius after he had taken his toga virilis. That event took place on October 18, 48 B.C., when the boy was just fifteen (see *Feriale Cumanum* in *C.I.L.*, vol. i., ed. 2, p. 229). His uncle from this time evidently destined him for a military life; after the African war (47-46) Suetonius tells us that he was 'donatus militaribus donis' in Caesar's triumph, though too young to take part in the campaign. In the Spanish war that followed he took part, though hindered by illness; and then he was sent to Apollonia to be ready for the impending Parthian campaign, as well as to continue his studies. Thus it is most unlikely that the *Culex* could have been dedicated to him in these years after 48; if we think of its peculiarly homely character, and the fact that it was addressed to this boy just because it was homely and not warlike, we seem debarred from any other conclusion.