Assurance, persuasion and character - an Aristotelian reading

by

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Introduction

Aristotle’s treatise on public speaking, The Rhetoric, has been an ongoing subject of study since Antiquity, although the interest it aroused in scholars has ebbed and flowed over time. As a result of these cycles of renewed interest, some of the insights it contains developed a life of their own, becoming detached from the larger corpus of Aristotelian ethical and political thought which they once were an integral part of. One such example is that of Oratory, which during the Classical and Medieval periods became an autonomous discipline with a practical scope of application, before fading into obsolescence (Rorty, 1996; see also Kennedy, 1996).

More recently, some of this transit of ideas has flowed in the opposite direction. That is to say, that facets of his philosophical work that were not originally connected to his ethical thinking, such as his reflection on representational arts discussed in the Poetics, have been used by philosophers keen on developing the Aristotelian tradition of moral enquiry in a way that accounts for contemporary conceptions of identity, agency, and personal narrative (for instance see MacIntyre, 2016).

Albeit with a much more modest aim in mind, our goal is to accomplish something along the lines of this latter trend. By drawing upon interrelated, but not very often explored concepts in Aristotle’s Ethical thought such as those of assurance, persuasion, and character, we aim provide an account of what it means to be a moral agent that still holds relevance for us today. It is worth mentioning that it is *not* the intention of this thesis to make a critique of contemporary understandings of personhood and moral agency from an Aristotelian standpoint. As such, we will not be comparing the revised Aristotelian conception of character being put forward with other contemporary conceptions of personhood that have at their centre ideas such as self, authenticity, performance, representation, and so on. Interesting as the interplay between those conceptions might be, we lack the space to pursue a project of that scope in this work. We will aim instead to provide an outline of a revised Aristotelian conception of character and show how it can be useful in providing meaningful answers to contemporary difficulties that often surface when we think and act as moral agents.

Such difficulties are not over some arcane objects of metaphysical thought, but instead relate to issues that lurk just beneath the surface of trivial questions we often pose ourselves in our day to day interactions, for which the answers we arrive at are often felt wanting. These questions include: how can I feel assured of the reasons for whatever

it is I am doing or want to do? What exactly are we talking about whenever we discuss someone's character? What does it mean to act *in* character? How far can I really step *out* of character while still "being me"? Faced with these questions, our inclination is to come up with answers that draw upon some or all of the concepts alluded above, namely those of representation, performance, authenticity and so forth. It is the language we are all steeped in and through which most of us make sense of ourselves and the world. It is however an inclination we must fight against, if we want to achieve a different perspective on the issues at hand, and avoid the common difficulties that answers that presuppose such concepts often face.

Our quest for answers will then take us on a more circuitous and less intuitive path than we would initially expect, one which we can divide in the five parts that comprise this thesis. In the first part we expand on the idea of ethical actions (as Aristotle understands them) and the related concept of assurance. In the second part we explore the concept of persuasion in Aristotle's wider theory of knowledge, and then narrow our scope, expanding on how persuasion is effected through different forms of public enquiry, namely Rhetoric and Dialectic (again, as Aristotle conceives them to be). In part three we focus on the dual Aristotelian conception of character. In part four we expand on three ideas of Charles Taylor, namely the identification-categorisation dynamic; the awareness-concealment dynamic; and the felt intuition and disclosure mechanism. In the conclusion we sum up the insights garnered from the previous sections, which help us provide an answer to the questions posed in the beginning. The extended argument that is unfurled throughout each of those parts can be summarised thus:

- Full knowledge over the motives of our actions is elusive, so most of the time we have to make do with assurance. Assurance comes about through persuasion: one is to be convinced, by oneself or others, that one's motives are the right ones.

- Regarding human motives and actions, persuasion comes about mostly through shared forms of intellectual enquiry, to wit, rhetoric and dialectic. We can further subdivide the modes of persuasion depending on how they affect the determinants of choice, namely reason and desire. In addition, Aristotle is also sensitive to what we would nowadays call the "experiential" or phenomenological aspect of persuasion, as well as the role that character plays in effecting persuasion.

- Character possesses an ethical and a rhetorical dimension in Aristotle's thinking. It is both the seat of one's ingrained dispositions and inner drives ordered towards ends, and also the main tool at the disposal of the agent to effect persuasion. It is because of the former conception that the latter is rendered possible: acting in character is inherently

persuasive because when we see others act in a way that stems from how they habitually think, feel and behave, we feel especially assured of their motives. But we all also acknowledge that acting *out* of character is not only possible, but often also persuasive in itself.

- The complex nature of character and of human motivation makes it that assurance over the provenance of our actions can be self-undermining. The reasons are manifold: we all operate under incomplete knowledge over the motives of our actions; the articulation of these motives into reasons is not a simple case of encasing into words a self-standing, objectively measurable reality, but is instead equal parts revelation and creation; ascertaining ours and other's intentions is often vanishingly elusive. Lingering uncertainty and doubt over oneself and other's motivations is then something we all have to deal with in our interactions with others.

- Assurance over motives can however also be self-validating. Familiarity with the different pathways through which persuasion affects choice makes us cognisant of the fact that there are legitimate rational *and* non-rational ways to be persuaded, which is a source of assurance for the motives we hold. Another source of assurance stems from awareness that the shared nature of persuasive discourse, emotion, and experience impose significant constraints on what ourselves and others can hold as *plausible* grounds for our actions. Conversely, an over-emphasis in ascertaining agent intention and on the experiential aspect of persuasion, to the detriment of scrutiny over the conditions for persuasion, are liable to lessen one's assurance rather than increase it.

Part One

I - Ethical actions and assurance

Aristotle lists three requirements as necessary for ethical actions to be performed: knowledge of what the agent is doing, choice of the action for the right reason, and a firm and unchangeable character on part of the agent (*NE* 1105a28-1105b1). Before we try to understand why that is, it is important to explain what Aristotle means by ethical actions. The common parallel is to compare them to a well performed purposeful action done by a virtuous agent, for instance Federer hitting a perfect crosscourt forehand that wins the point. Perfect crosscourt forehands undoubtedly exist: we see good tennis players hitting them all the time, there are countless youtube tutorials showing us how to hit them, and we ourselves may have even hit a few on occasion.

There is more to them than that, however. Ethical actions as Aristotle conceives them are quaint - at least to us moderns. In one sense they are unmysterious, in that even if we may struggle to perform them, we know they exist, that there is a right way to perform them, and that they can, at least potentially, be instantiated in real life if certain conditions obtain. This is their exemplary quality. But in another sense ethical actions *are* problematic. Because I am not Federer, I am not really hitting perfect crosscourt forehands for the same reasons he is, even if by happy coincidence I manage to hit a few really good ones in quick succession. So ethical actions also have this totemic quality to them, in that they aim to signify a specific arrangement of causative factors, that seldom, if ever, actually accord with the actual pattern of processes of reasoning, inner desires, and other intervening factors that actually brought them about (*NE* 1105b5-11; see also 1106b29-35).

Another of their characteristics that may strike us as odd is the fact that the agent who performs an ethical action can provide an explanation for why he performed it ("Rational practice and the theoretical explanation of practice [to Aristotle] are informed by the same concepts" MacIntyre 1988, p 89). This explanation is complete, as it contains in itself all the elements required for us to fully understand why the agent acted the way he did, and sufficient, in that the actions necessarily follow through from those elements provided and no further ones are required in the explanation of what brought them about (MacIntyre 1998 p 124-141 for his account of Aristotle's conception of practical rationality). In turn, for the explanation to meet those requirements of completeness and sufficiency, the following criteria have to be met when the ethical action is performed:

a) said behaviour has to originate from what Aristotle classes a rational conception of the good (for instance see *NE* 1103b31-33). This entails a peculiar form of enquiry on part of the agent, termed deliberation: a “back and forth” between the different things he values as goods and their hierarchical ordering, and how particular actions in the here and now can best achieve those goods he seeks (MacIntyre 1988, p 89-93).
b) the agent’s desires and dispositions have to entail a particular type of behaviour. The agent’s wants and his cognitive, perceptual and affective stances have to be such that the action that unfolds is determined by them in much the same way that only one particular conclusion can be drawn from specific starting premises on a deductive syllogism (Gottlieb 2006 p 222-230).

This points to the characteristic of ethical actions we alluded to earlier, namely that they are exemplary, not only of a specific behaviour, but also of a certain way of reasoning, feeling and being. They are what it is to desire, think and feel to an ideal standard, and also what it is to act in that knowledge.

Ethical actions matter a lot to Aristotle. So much so that his stated purpose in the Nicomachean Ethics and his other ethical treatises is to provide a complete account for how they come about and are actuated into behaviour (see for instance *NE* 1094a18-22; *MM* 1182b4-7; *EE* 1216b20-25). Even though they may pick out only a small portion of the agent’s everyday behaviour, their exemplary nature and explanatory sufficiency set them apart from all other actions the agent is capable of performing. However, even if we accept them as Aristotle conceives them, this straight away raises two problems: *who* exactly are these agents that walk around performing ethical actions in their daily lives; and, just as importantly, *how* do they know when they are performing them?

Aristotle’s answer to the first question is straightforward: the virtuous agent. All is well for the virtuous agent: his inner desires and dispositions are as they should be, and his rational conception of the good is *the right* conception of the good. He also deliberates aright from that sound conception, taking into account all the salient characteristics of the context he finds himself in. The outcome is that said agent *chooses* to perform ethical actions. (*NE* 1113b2-6; and also 1139a32-33). These flow naturally from him, as if he was a high-performance athlete of the self.

We need next to address the “how”. How do we know we are performing ethical actions? The short answer is we don’t. The reason why we don’t know is simply because no one starts out in life being a fully virtuous agent - we are all on some path towards it (or moving away from it). The way we can even begin to move in that direction is to have

our will guided towards the appropriate objects in the earlier stages of our lives (*NE* 1103b14-26). But as we know, soon enough in our development we are able, albeit tentatively at first, to start formulating reasons as to why we make the decisions we make. How can we know that the reasons we came up for our actions are the right ones, and that those actions are ethical? As non-fully virtuous agents, we are not in a position to outright *know*. Recall the requirements Aristotle makes for the performance of ethical actions: knowledge of the action, choosing for the right reasons, and a steady character (*NE* 1105a30-b1). We will seldom meet all those criteria at any given moment; and it is unlikely we will meet them consistently over our lives. So if we are not able to have knowledge, we will have to make do with something that resembles it but falls short, which is assurance.

Now there is an apparent contradiction in the argument at this point. We need knowledge of the action in order for it to qualify as an ethical one, but if all we can aspire to, as non-fully virtuous agents, is assurance, then it seems as though we will not be able to perform ethical actions after all. Aristotle deals with this difficulty by stating that of those three requirements, it is the latter two, choice for the right reasons and a steady character, that are determinant (*NE* 1105b1-4). This is the lead we will follow, by further exploring each of those two requirements in this essay.

Regarding the first of the two, namely choosing the action for the right reasons: different people find different types of reasons compelling. Among those reasons are those that affect choice, that is, that incline one towards a particular judgement or course of action over another. So for instance I may find the reasons why someone would quit his career in finance to become a street juggler compelling, without being personally moved by them (and therefore refraining from embracing the street performing arts myself). The central operative concept at play here is that of persuasion, that is, how can the best case possible be made for a specific point of view which is comprehensible and moving to each person (Rorty 1996, p 2). Persuasion is central to grasp how we come to develop assurance about our reasons for action. We can now see why this is so: if we are not in a position to just *know* which of our chosen actions are ethical and which are not (as we, unlike the fully virtuous agent, are not “spectators to the truth” (*NE* 1098a29)), then the path to us feeling assured that we are doing things for the right reasons is to be *persuaded* of their appropriateness. Being that we are fundamentally social creatures, in order to gain a clearer understanding of how persuasion works we need to explore the socially directed forms through which it occurs, as both the things we come to be persuaded of and how we become persuaded happen through, and in the course of, our

ongoing relationships with others. This will be the focus of the next part of the essay, where we will present how Aristotle conceives persuasion within his wider theory of knowledge; afterwards, we will pick out its characteristics through an exploration of how persuasion operates in two distinct forms of socially-directed intellectual enquiry, namely rhetoric and dialectic.

Following that we will look deeper into the second requirement, that of a steady character. We will explore what Aristotle conceives character to be, claiming that he holds two distinct conceptions of character throughout his works. One is tied to its role of effecting persuasion (we'll call it the rhetorical conception); the other to what we consider a more or less stable framework of one's determinants for thought, desire and action (we'll call it the ethical conception). Both conceptions are needed in order for us to articulate an answer to the question we initiated this section with, namely: how can we become assured that the motives for our actions are the right ones?

Summary

Ethical actions are those for which the agent can provide a complete and sufficient explanation as to why he did them. The two key criteria for the performance of ethical actions are: a) an ability to deliberate to and from a rational conception of the good; b) possession by the agent of certain cognitive, perceptual and affective dispositions.

A central feature of the explanation is that it is intelligible to the agent. This presupposes knowledge by the agent of both his own processes of reasoning and his inner desires and dispositions. It also presupposes that the correct processes of reasoning to be carried through, as well as possession of the requisite inner desires and dispositions.

Ethical actions are elusive. Their performance requires knowledge of the action, choice of said action for the right reasons, and a steady character. Possession of all three requisites consistently throughout one's life is exceedingly difficult. The latter two are of greater importance in bringing them about than the first.

As we are non-fully virtuous agents, we are not in a position to outright know which of our reasons for action are the right ones. Therefore the best we can aspire to is to be persuaded of those reasons, that is, for us to arrive at the best case possible for a specific judgement which is both comprehensible and moving to us. Persuasion occurs

mostly through socially directed forms of shared intellectual enquiry, namely rhetoric and dialectic (as Aristotle conceives them).

Part Two

I - Persuasion in Aristotle's theory of knowledge

We can begin to understand what Aristotle conceives persuasion to be by pointing to two categorical distinctions he makes in his theory of knowledge. The first is between the *human faculties of understanding* and their *objects*, that is, between how we come to know the world, from what actually is in the world (Evans 1977, p 5-6). Aristotle states that how we know is always essentially connected, thought logically independent, of what we know (Evans 1977, p 67-8). There can only be an object of knowledge if there is also a knower to know it, but the two are nevertheless distinct entities from one another. Through exercising his faculties the knower apprehends the object of understanding. It is because the faculties are distinct from their objects that we can judge their exercise to be either adequate (if we come to the conclusion that the cat is on the mat when it actually is), or inadequate (if we confuse it for a tiger, say) (Evans 1977, p 60-61).

Related to this first distinction between faculties and their objects is a second one, that in the *nature* of the objects of understanding themselves, namely absolute versus qualified. This distinction is generated by a difference in the use of the faculties of understanding in apprehending their object. An expert exercise of the human faculties produces in the knower what Aristotle classes as an *absolute* object of understanding, that is, the knower sees the thing for what it actually is. The inexpert use of the faculties produces a *qualified* object of understanding, that is, he sees the object as it appears to him (or to those who share a similar perspective) (Evans 1977, p 72-73).

These two distinctions make both the faculties of understanding and their objects essentially *relative* and *subjective* (Evans 1977, p 74-76). Relative because there is always an inescapable reference to a knower, which is a given person or group; and subjective because the object of understanding is dependent of how it appears to said knower. Nonetheless, this does not mean that we are incapable of grasping how the object of understanding is actually like; it instead entails that the study of said object has to take into account both its unqualified or absolute form (that is, how it is to be apprehended by a knower who exercises his faculties expertly), and in its qualified or relative form (that is,

how it appears diffracted through the multiple perspectives of different agents with varying abilities) (Evans 1977, p 77).

For us to be able to say that a knower has come to increase his understanding, a progression has to occur in his intellectual grasp of the objects. The progression is a move through different levels of intelligibility (Evans 1977, p 68-69) either from a lesser to a greater form of generality, or from a greater to a lesser form. Simply put, to come to know something is coming to realise that a discrete number of events forms a unifying pattern (a progression towards greater generality), or inversely that there is an already known pattern of which this particular event is an instantiation of (a progression from greater to lesser generality).

Intelligibility then comes in degrees. Moving “upwards” makes us to grasp things at a higher level of abstraction, that is, where the effects of individual perspective play a progressively diminishing role in how the object of understanding is apprehended by the knower. Moving “downwards” provides us with a view where the individual differences in perspective take a progressively bigger role in determining its object. At both ends of the spectrum we then have absolute and relative intelligibility. Despite its name, absolute intelligibility still relates to a given knower, namely him who uses his intellectual abilities expertly. Relative intelligibility is qualified according to the person or group to whom such progression is elucidative (Evans 1977, p 71-73).

To Aristotle it is the progression that matters, so to speak. Something is elucidative, or explanatory, as long as it effects this intellectual advance “upwards” or “downwards”, regardless of the starting point. So a purely relative explanation (something that is intelligible to only a given person or a group) still advances understanding, albeit in a qualified way, namely to those people to whom such an explanation makes sense, that is, which effects an intellectual progression in their grasp of the object (Evans 1977, p 93). But because Aristotle never loses sight of the conceptual possibility of absolute intelligibility, he can still claim that certain explanations are more genuinely explanatory than others, namely those at a higher level of generality (Evans 1977, p 88).

Now persuasion is independent of the level of generality of whatever it is we are persuaded of. I can be just as persuaded of something that only applies to my particular situation - that this cat I see right in front of me is on the mat - as of something that holds universally and for all time - for instance of the validity of *modus ponens* - even though the ways through which I come to be persuaded of those two things differ significantly. So in this regard persuasion is like belief, in that in principle I may be persuaded of all kinds of things, just as I may hold beliefs about a practically infinite number of states of

affairs. There is however a distinction between them, in that for someone to be persuaded of something, one must necessarily start from what one already finds plausible (Rhet. 1356a19-21). Persuasion and plausibility are thus intimately connected: I can only develop a conviction that such and such is the case if I am already willing to find such a thing *likely* to begin with. For instance, I would only be persuaded that this extremely unlikely cure from terminal cancer was miraculous if I was already willing to accept miracles as plausible to begin with. The image that comes to mind is that of stepping into an escalator: each step leads us higher up, through its own momentum, to a predetermined destination. But this is not all there is to persuasion and plausibility: developing a conviction that such and such is the case may also make certain other things I hold true up to that moment *less* plausible. So for instance if I only happen to hold scientific explanations of cures for cancer convincing, then the absence of a valid medical explanation for this unlikely cure is likely to make me question my belief in their explanatory power. *In extremis*, it could even force me to question my obdurate rejection of accepting celestial interventions as possible. Being persuaded of certain things as being the case can then both validate and/or undermine other correlate beliefs. The escalator not only goes up, but it can also go down, and in seemingly all sorts of unfathomable directions. So how can we know where we are going, that is, that we are right in being assured about the beliefs we hold?

Aristotle's distinctions between the faculties of understanding and their objects give us the conceptual resources to dig ourselves out of this predicament. To determine if something is plausible one has to be able to differentiate between what it is for something to be plausible to *someone* (or some group), from that which makes something *absolutely* plausible. This distinction mirrors the one between the between the absolute and relative (or qualified) form of the object of understanding. Absolute plausibility is like absolute intelligibility: it always refers to someone, a real (or conceptually possible) person to whom the expert use of his intellectual faculties would bring about a conviction that such and such is the case. Relative plausibility is like relative intelligibility, in that it is qualified to what the given person or group finds plausible to begin with. So in our prior miraculous cure example, what a thrice Doctorate in Theology, Medicine and Mathematical Probability would consider to be the most plausible cure for the cancer in that particular case would be absolutely plausible. Relative plausibility would be what we ourselves, with our limited knowledge and prior stock of beliefs over the matter are willing to find as the most convincing explanation for the sudden about turn in the patient's health.

The outcome of persuasion is a conviction in a particular person or group that such and such is the case. Of course, a sense of conviction will most likely be produced by that which is really convincing (*Rhet.* 1355a22-24); but what is really convincing (that is, absolutely plausible) only is so to an idealised (although conceptually possible) individual, one whose faculties of understanding are employed to the best of his abilities. Everyone else is subject to myriad factors that influence their individual and logical reactions, thus altering how they actually become persuaded (Evans 1977, p 92). The upshot is that the study of the ideal conditions for persuasion by itself does not provide a guarantee that any actual individual will be persuaded (Evans 1877, p 91). Whatever set of arguments persuade the thrice Doctorate may not convince *us*. This accords with Aristotle's own view that for us to engage in an adequate study of a given matter one has to take into account its object both in its unqualified and qualified forms (that is, both how it is apprehended in ideal conditions of experience and through a panoply of "less than ideal" ones). To figure out just how plausible are miraculous cures *to any person* the triple laureate doctor's point of view matters, but ours matters as well.

Summary

We come to know what there is in the world by exercising our faculties of understanding towards their objects. Said faculties are essentially connected to, though logically independent of, its object. The expert use of the faculties produces an absolute object of understanding - the knower sees the thing for what it truly is. The inexpert use of the faculties produces a qualified object of understanding - the knower sees the thing as it appears to him. The study of any object of understanding has to take into account both its absolute and qualified forms.

For someone to increase his understanding is for him to effect a progression in his intellectual grasp of the object. This grasp can occur either through a movement towards greater generality (in the direction of the absolute form of the object of understanding), or lesser generality (in the direction of the qualified, or relative form of the object of understanding). The former movement is more genuinely explanatory than the latter, because the closer the explanation gets to the absolute form of the object of understanding the less distorted it is by individual or group perspectives.

To be persuaded of something being the case requires the possession of a web of previously held beliefs, onto which the new belief "fits". But I can only have assurance

about of my web of beliefs if I can think of them as not only persuasive to me, but persuasive absolutely, that is, if they are to be thought as being persuasive to an person who uses his intellectual faculties to the best of his ability.

What is absolutely persuasive may not be persuasive at all to those with less than ideal faculties of understanding (i.e. all of us). So to actually understand what makes something persuasive we have to approach of object of study both in its unqualified (or absolute) form, and in its qualified (or relative) forms.

II - Persuasion in public forms of intellectual enquiry (rhetoric and dialectic)

Aristotle applied the above mentioned methodology to his study of the existing forms of public intellectual enquiry (Rorty 1996, p 1). He began by surveying the very specific forms of socially-centred debate that were prevalent in his time, namely in law courts, political assemblies, debates in public forums, academic disputes, everyday arguments between common people, and so on. He broadly divided them in two conceptually separate fields: rhetoric and dialectic, and then provided an account of those activities both in the ideal conditions for their exercise, and how they were actually instantiated in everyday life (i.e. as absolute and qualified objects of understanding, respectively).

Our study will narrow its focus on the different ways the two forms of intellectual activity effect persuasion in their intended audience. We will begin by rhetoric, and its distinctive mode of persuasion which we will call the rationality of rhetoric. Firstly we will look at the distinctive features of a rhetorical argument, and then what is it in those features that makes this type of argument persuasive to its recipients.

II.1 - First mode of rhetorical persuasion: the rationality of rhetoric

In the Topics Aristotle analyses the logical syllogism, defining it as a discourse (i.e. an argument) where the premises provide a sufficient justification for a conclusion which is different from them (*Top.* 100a25-29). The logical syllogism provides the gold standard for inference, so to speak. If the starting premises are true and the appropriate rules of

inference apply then the conclusion is also true, irrespective of anyone being persuaded of its validity or not (although the expert logician *would be* persuaded by it) (Evans 1977, p 74).

The rhetorical argument (which Aristotle calls an *enthymeme*) is a *kind* of valid deductive argument (Burnyeat 1996, p 105), that is to say, it possesses some of the characteristics of the logical syllogism, but not others. The key aspect that sets the enthymeme apart is its scope of application: unlike the logical syllogism, it does not concern itself with premisses that hold universally irrespective of what anyone thinks about their validity, but instead its subject matter are contingent things, i.e. things that can be otherwise, more specifically, human actions and their motives (Burnyeat 1996, p 93-4).

What other characteristics make a rhetorical argument distinct from his "upperclass" sibling? To begin with, the types of starting premises that form them. Rhetorical premises concern issues involving human judgements and actions, whose truth of the matter is not settled beyond dispute. Because of their open-ended nature, compelling arguments can be made for alternative judgements or courses of action over the matter at hand (Burnyeat 1996, p 107-8). And also, they are about things we can deliberate about and whose choice impacts the outcome. In real life, such premises usually take the form of maxims which circulate broadly in social discourse. They tend to present a family resemblance between them and from which a common structure can be identified (Brunschwig 1996, p 41). They can range from sweeping generalisations about individual psychology, for instance "everybody acts in their own self-interest", to mind-boggling feats of self-undermining tautology such as "brexit means brexit".

Another feature that sets rhetorical arguments apart is the reduced number of premises that constitute them (Burnyeat 1996, p 99-100). Because rhetorical arguments function as such only when acted out as discursive exchanges between interlocutors in a wider social setting bound by very context-specific rules of engagement, the number of premises for each argument is limited by the audience's ability to follow along (*Rhet.* 1395b25-29). You can only go on expounding the depths of the human drives for behaviour, or the intricacies of the workings of the European Court of Law and how its jurisdiction impinges on British Law in a public speech for so long before people start to lose interest.

Another important distinction concerns the notion of proof. Unlike logical syllogisms, in rhetorical arguments that which makes the conclusion follow from the premises only holds for the most part, that is to say, there is no logical sufficiency tying

the conclusion to the starting premises. This is because the starting premises are generalisations, likelihoods which people know or believe them to be the case (Burnyeat 1996, p 102-3). To use the example above, people know that most of the time they *do* act with only their self-interest in mind, but everyone also knows that people in some circumstances can act for genuinely selfless reasons.

These differences in turn affect the nature of the conclusions that can be obtained from rhetorical arguments. The less stringent nature of proof makes it that the conclusions only hold for the most part, instead of universally (*Rhet.* 1357*a*23-32). This in turn makes it the case that a conclusion is never fully definite; there is always room for possible objections. So for such a conclusion to be persuasive, it not only has to make a convincing case for itself, but it also has to show that the opposite, rival views, are less likely than itself (Burnyeat 1996, p 109-10). In addition, the assent the audience gives to the conclusion is largely determined by the degree to which they are willing to accept the starting premises as true. Implausible starting premises for rhetorical arguments will only on very specific occasions allow for strongly convincing conclusions, namely when the conclusion can be shown to outweigh all other rival views or courses of action (Burnyeat 1996, p 105-9).

As alluded above, a rhetorical argument is not neatly self-contained in a chain of simple premises that generate a valid conclusion. It unfolds within a wider set of institutions and practices, with different agents (and receiving audiences), which have multiple and often divergent aims. However, underlying this seeming deafening cacophony of conflicting voices, claims, counterclaims and performative gestures, Engberg-Petersen (1996, p 124-5) finds in rhetoric an unarticulated presupposition which people implicitly take for granted, which is what allows rhetoric to perform its role in effecting persuasion. This presupposition is the implicit assumption that whenever we engage in the “rhetorical language game” we are not just trying to convince our opponents, but also are involved in a common search for factual, ethical or political truths (Engberg-Petersen 1996, p 126-7).

But is this really the case? Can’t we readily conjure in our imagination the figure of the mischievous orator, one who can skilfully engage in a simulacrum of public debate, but is only really interested in advancing his own personal agenda, truth be damned? Yes, but we could argue that such an agent is not so much violating that presupposition, but instead banking on it. It is *because* most people take it to be the case that rhetorical engagement constitutes in some measure a concerted effort towards the truth of the

matter at hand that he can have any hope to persuade his audience of whatever it is he is putting forth to them.

Such an orator may want to obfuscate his audience about what his real convictions are, remain studiously ambiguous on them, gesture towards completely false ones entirely, and so on. Whatever his actual goal may be behind his actions, what he can't accomplish *in a single discursive act* is change his opponent's convictions completely, in a stable and enduring manner. And this is another presupposition which is implicitly held by all of those involved (Irwin 1996, p 148-9). Everyone takes for granted that you have to be already predisposed to believe in the existence of snake oil if you are to be persuaded by someone of its healing properties. So persuading opponents is not a clearcut case of having them share the orator's convictions point for point, but instead of bringing them over from what they themselves agree to positions more resembling his own. What a mischievous orator accomplishes, if successful, is to play down certain considerations, selectively amplify others, and even allow for new ones to emerge, within certain segments of his intended audience, by means of going through the gauntlet of public disputation and debate of his views and those in conflict with them. Of course, this by itself does not guarantee that the newly arrived at convictions track the truth: he may have just persuaded some people of a nonsensical view for some time. But by taking part in the rhetorical language game he is subjecting those same views to a collective appraisal of the grounds for holding them, as well as for the views and courses of actions they are in conflict with, which, in idealised conditions at least, *does* lead to an understanding of the matter which draws closer to the true one. In short, the generalised conviction that public ethical, political and factual discourse aims at the truth is a central assumption of the rhetorical language game, without which the "game" cannot even begin to be played by its participants (Engberg-Petersen 1996, p 125).

We can now see why the rhetorical argument can provide Aristotle with a means to show how even a logically invalid argument (a "bad" argument) can still be rationally persuasive to someone, and legitimately so. A rhetorical argument can be considered rationally persuasive (even though it falls short of the standard of logical sufficiency) if: a) it occurs in the ideal conditions of the collective "rhetorical language game" mentioned above; and b) if it advances one's understanding of the subject under debate. The way the rhetorical argument advances one's understanding of the matter at hand is by providing the listener with a set of compelling considerations which may determine the intellect to either give or withhold its assent to whatever is being proposed. Such considerations do not necessarily have to be true; the listener may end up at the end of

the rhetorical speech finding new compelling reasons that make sense to him, which are nonetheless wildly off the mark (*Top.* 172a30-36). But to the extent that they do supply the listener with arguments that sway his judgement in a certain way, we can legitimately claim that the persuasion thus effected was rational, even if only qualifiedly so (Burnyeat 1996, p 108-9).

II.2 - Second mode of rhetorical persuasion: through emotion

As we saw earlier, choice occurs as the outcome of deliberation and desire. A way through which deliberation can be influenced is through the rationality of rhetoric, as we have discussed above. However, our ability to choose can also be affected by our emotions. In order to understand how, we will briefly address how Aristotle characterises the emotions in their relation to other correlate inner states, namely perceptions and desires.

II.2 a) Perceptions, desires and emotions

Perceptions, desires and emotions form an interconnected cluster of inner states that affect a person's judgement and choices (Rorty 1996, p 15-20). We can grasp how these inner states are connected if we think of them as being organised on a rough hierarchical scale of increasing complexity, each possessing some of the characteristics of the ones underneath, as well as some additional features of their own that make them unique.

In the lower rung of the scale we have perceptions (Aristotle terms them *phantasiai*), which can roughly be understood as the ways things appear to us - which include the data of our senses but also other mental objects of thought such as memories, feelings and so on. Perceptions are not neutral and value-free (Rorty 1996, p 19); the way they appear to us (that is, the properties they manifest of the thing they are a perception of) is always dependent on who, what and where we are. What marks perceptions as distinct from judgements or beliefs is that we don't accept or assent to them (Nussbaum 1996, p 306-7), we just perceive them as they strike us. Of course we can afterwards form beliefs and judgements about them - there is someone hiding in that bush after all, once we move closer to inspect - but at first *phantasia* always appear to us as these immediate percepts (Rorty 1996, p 19).

Desires are a form of appetite, that is, they are inner states that constitute a “want” for a specific thing (Leighton 1996, p 220-27). They are intentional inner states, that is, they are about something. Their object can be virtually anything, although such an object can only be specified through one’s perceptions. Besides their object, they carry with them a particular cognitive content, namely an expectation of fulfilment. The thing they are a want of is something that in some way fulfils the desire. Because they constitute a “crave” for something, they are also action-guiding, hence being considered one of the motivating determinants of choice (*MM* 1189a25-31, and *NE* 1139a32-35). Desires have their content informed by perceptions, but the influence works both ways: because we are always in some condition of desire (Rorty 1996, p 19), what we crave also helps shape how we perceive things to be.

Emotions are reactive inner states, that is, they are a response to the ways events or conditions strike the one affected (Cooper 1996, p 246). Such events or conditions can be external or internal. They arise from one’s impression of something to have happened, or is about to happen, to oneself or others. This “impression” that gets them going is the Aristotelian *phantasia*, which is the way things strike us and that may or may not correspond to how things actually are (Nussbaum 1996, p 306). Similarly to desires, emotions are also intentional states - something about this room is making me anxious, say. But they are intentional states with distinctive cognitive aspects. One of them consists in what Nussbaum describes as intentional awareness, by which she means that emotions direct our attention to whatever it is they are an object of (Nussbaum 1996, p 303). Another aspect of the emotions tied to cognition is the fact that they embody an assessment of a given state of affairs (past, present or future) (Nussbaum 1996, p 311-12). To use fear as an example: when I feel afraid of something, there’s something in the situation I find myself in that’s making me afraid (even if I may struggle to identify precisely what that thing is); being afraid directs my attention to whatever it is that’s making me feel that way; and the reason why I feel afraid is because I anticipate a certain imminent state of affairs that I construe as being bad for me in some way (me being in physical danger, or being perceived by others as a coward, or whatever).

A further distinctive aspect of the emotions is that their object also specifies an expectation of its assuagement (Frede 1996, p 29), as well as determine a range of possible reactive behaviours to the situation thus perceived (Cooper 1996, p 251). To use the fear example again, part of what it is to be afraid involves not being able to conceive in the here and now an effective way to act which would allow me to avoid the potential harm I believe I am about to be exposed to. Courage, on the other hand, also carries with

it a recognition of a perilous situation, alongside the expectation that somehow I will be able to overcome it through some form of action that to a degree is within my control.

These expectations for fulfilment of a need we find lacking, or avoidance of something we conceive as harmful, are action-guiding, and, like desires, possess a motivating force towards their object (*Rhet.* 1378a31-b5 for the example of anger). Therefore we can say that emotions possess not only perceptual and cognitive states as their constituents, but also affective and reactive ones. And if emotions form a "bundle" of particular cognitive, evaluative and reactive responses that are all tied together (Nussbaum 1996, p 309), then it is fair to assume that specific emotions tend to have specific desires associated with them. The particular configuration of these "bundles" that shape the emotions and the desires they are associated with are peculiar to each individual, and can change over time and context, of course. Not only does each person have their own fears, but also we are not afraid of the same things throughout our whole lives. But, to the degree that a stable pattern of emotions is to be found in the agent, then one could say with some confidence that their arousal will, up to a point, affect what that person conceives as desirable courses of action in connection with the situation he finds himself in.

II.2 b) Emotions and judgement

The nexus between emotions and attendant desires, and the way that desires "frame" what we conceive as possibilities for action in a given context is but one way through which emotions can affect one's particular judgement, according to Aristotle. Now that we have briefly explored the different attributes of the aforementioned inner states, we will be able to further spell out the remaining ways through which emotions can move one to a judgement, alter the severity of the judgement, or even change it entirely (Leighton 1996, p 207-17 for the discussion below).

One such way is through perceptions. Because emotions carry expectations, they help us "put together" a given object of perception one way or other, thus shaping the overall way we discriminate certain aspects of the situation we find ourselves in as significant. Yet another way is through the experience of pleasure and pain. Emotions direct one's attention to what they are about. So the experience of a pleasant emotion sharpens one's focus on the matter under judgement; inversely, unpleasant emotions dull and redirect one's attention elsewhere (usually towards ways we can cease being pained

by whatever it is we are deliberating over). An additional way is through what Aristotle calls “connivance”. Because we know that certain emotions predispose us to judge in a certain way, we may try to overcompensate in our judgement, as we are aware of our own biases. Yet another way is through “favour and disfavour”: when we are genuinely apprehensive about which way to decide, the felt emotion can decisively “tip the scale” one way or another. And finally, emotions can change the content of the judgement itself due to their composite nature as cognitive, affective, and reactive “bundles”. Emotions help shape the ways through which we apprehend things, construe expectations about them, and determine the range of conceivable possible actions we can take over them. To quote Leighton (1996, p 209): “If John thinks Mary has unmerited good fortune, this will preclude him from pitying her when she experiences undeserved misfortune. There is no element of insincerity on John’s part: if he feels that way about Mary initially, and his reasons for thinking her fortune was not deserved stay the same, he will find it hard, if not impossible, to pity her when her luck changes for the worse (although he may convince himself to pity her for some other reason).”

II.3 - Third mode of rhetorical persuasion: through metaphor

By the use of the term “metaphor” Aristotle is gesturing to a dimension of persuasion that we would nowadays class as “experiential”, by which we mean “what’s it like from the listener’s point of view to be on the receiving end of a discourse meant to convince him of something”. His characterisation of this phenomenological aspect of persuasion is predicated on his ideas of pleasure and the function it plays in learning (for instance *Rhet.* 1371a31-b10). It also draws upon his insights about the shared nature of the communicative act of discourse, and the skill involved in the orator being able to disguise his intentions while getting his point across to others. We will look at each of these elements in turn.

An expectation of pleasure is what initially draws us, as listeners, to the orator’s discourse (Moran 1996, p 389-90). It is because we are anticipating some form of gratification that we are willing to listen to his speech to begin with. The role of pleasure in this initial stage is that of engendering in the listener a receptive mental state to ideas and chains of inference coming from the orator. The expectation of pleasure “eases one’s suspicions” and places one in a favourable state of mind towards adopting a different

perspective on things (*Rhet.* 1356a14-16). Of course, we may also willingly submit ourselves to listen to someone we strongly dislike, or already disagree with. Even in this case, however, an expectation of pleasure is pivotal in making us willing to engage with another person's views. We may want to listen to someone with views we consider to be wildly wrong and poorly grounded, but in part the reason why we would do so is because we expect to be pleasured by having our own views on the matter vindicated after being challenged by opposing arguments we find unpersuasive. The point here is that an expectation of pleasure has to be there from the beginning if persuasion is to occur later on.

For us to remain engaged throughout the speech, however, the expectation of pleasure is not enough. Such an expectation has to be materialised in actual feelings of pleasure, which have to be periodically reinforced throughout the orator's discourse. Aristotle points to two aspects of the orator's discourse which are key in engendering and sustaining pleasure in the listener: the first one is that the orator's diction must provide with the listener with something strange and unusual to marvel at (*Rhet.* 1404b10-12); and the second one is that such a discourse must provide the listener with an occasion to learn something with ease (*Rhet.* 1410b9-11).

With diction Aristotle means to convey the idea that the speaker's choice of words must evoke in his audience mental images whose strangeness engages their curiosity without repelling them at the same time (*Rhet.* 1404b10-16). They are to thread the thin line between being overtly trivial or outright absurd. To accomplish this successfully is to create in his listener what Aristotle calls the conjuring effect of metaphor, that is, to evoke in his listeners a perception of systems of resemblance (Moran 1996, p 391) that "sets the scene before the eyes" (*Rhet.* 1410b34) something which is neither too close to them, and thus unappealing in its banality, nor completely detached from their own experience, thus leaving them without a way of making any sense of it. Grasping something that feels new while at the same time remaining mildly familiar is inherently pleasurable - much the same pleasure we find in listening to someone expounding our own views on a given subject in a very articulate manner (*Rhet.* 1395b5-12).

This "golden mean" of the apt metaphor ties it with the second reason for metaphor to engender pleasure in its listeners, that of the ability to learn something with ease (*Rhet.* 1410b9-15). The effective metaphor does more than just validate our previously held beliefs, it provides us with a genuine way of making new chains of inference and thus acquire a deeper understanding of things. This new grasping of ideas is also in itself pleasurable, and more than that, it is capable of generating a certain

momentum, “as pleasure induces learning something new, which in turn, as pleasurable, induces further responsiveness and ideational activity” (Moran 1996, p 391).

The orator’s discourse is a communicative act, which if it is to be effective in persuading its listeners has to accomplish two things: it has to allure them with an expectation of pleasure, and it has to actually deliver and sustain said pleasure throughout. The workings of metaphor is a central way through which this is achieved, as we just saw. Another key element in rhetorical discourse, which in Aristotle’s view sets it apart from the purely demonstrative syllogism, is that the speaker’s assertive intention cannot be made fully manifest (*Rhet.* 1404b17-20). His point is not that it is just awkward and bad form for an orator to start his speech with “I’m going to try to convince you of this and this by means of such and such arguments, so please listen carefully”. His point is instead that the skilful orator cannot do that without imperilling the “pleasure-loop” created and sustained by the reception of successful metaphor. The images being “set before the eyes” have to lead to arguments whose conclusions are felt as being drawn by the audience members themselves, if the experience is to remain pleasurable and thus more liable to engender persuasion. A thorough spelling out in advance of the conclusion one wants to convince his listeners of, and of the key inferential steps leading to it, deprives the audience of the ability to “work out the meaning of the phenomenon” (Moran 1996, p 395) by themselves (*Rhet.* 1400b30-33). By allowing the audience to draw the implications of what is being conveyed to them, the conclusions reached will have “the probative value of personal discoveries, rather than be subjected to the scepticism of someone else’s testimony” (Moran 1996, p 396).

A further counterproductive outcome of the orator spelling out his intentions in advance is that it draws further attention to the imbalance of the roles played by all those involved (Moran 1996, p 392). Unlike in a conversational exchange where the interlocutors are in good faith, there is no “give and take” in a rhetorical speech - the direction of persuasion flows only one way, from the orator to the listener. The patterned ways of public interaction during rhetoric discourse we are all accustomed to confirm this: for instance when the orator “looses his audience”, say because of a timely heckler, or a biting retort from one of the audience members. Even in those cases persuasion does not reverse its direction from the aggrieved audience to the hapless orator. Instead, what it signals is that “the spell has been broken”, and the persuasive effect of his speech has dissipated.

In addition, awareness of that very imbalance by the audience often detracts from its intended outcome, both the listener’s, and the orator’s. How so? As we saw earlier, the

listeners approach the discourse with an expectation of pleasure. The orator, on the other hand, has a clear design on his audience, that of convincing them of something. From the listener's point of view, the fulfilment of that expectation hinges on them arriving at conclusions that feel like their own discoveries. From the orator's point of view, persuading them of those very same conclusions presupposes that he cannot spell them out in advance for them. It is by masking his assertive intentions in a cloud of ambiguity that the orator can "bridge the gap" between these divergent goals (Moran 1996, p 392).

The strategic ambiguity fulfils a further purpose still, namely that of framing the way in which the orator's intentions are construed by his audience (Moran 1996, p 395). The absence of a clear statement of purpose leaves the audience in doubt as to what the orator actually means by the things he says, and invites them to actively engage in discerning his motives. The sleight of hand being performed here is that the audience's conclusions of the orator's motivations are built upon threads that he himself has left for them to weave together. And these threads are such that, when skilfully laid out, allow the orator to present himself as possessing different intentions to different members of his audience, thus extending the reach of his message beyond those who were already "true believers" to begin with. There's a "creative indeterminacy" aspect at play here. Each member of the audience should genuinely feel like he is piecing together the orator's rationale for action based on an outside assessment of his motivations. By shifting the burden of determining what his intentions are to his audience instead of fleshing them out himself, while also tactfully leaving behind "breadcrumbs" of just what those intentions might be, what the orator manages is to diffract through each individual listener's own perspectives his own motives, which appear to each of them in their most favourable light.

Summary

The rationality of rhetoric

The rhetorical syllogism is a kind of deductive argument which presents the following characteristics: its starting premisses are centred on human actions and motives; its length is largely determined by the intended audience's ability to follow through its chain or reasoning; its conclusions are not logically entailed by the starting premisses, so they can be thought as the best case in favour (or against) a certain judgement or course of action.

Rhetorical arguments are deployed within very different socially directed forms of public enquiry. Regardless of its particular setting, we invariably find among its participants a conviction that rhetoric serves a function of helping determine the truth of the matter at hand, in addition to its role of convincing others of one's views. This assumption is an essential feature of rhetoric, as its absence leads to a breakdown of the very possibility to fruitfully engage in debate.

Persuasive rhetoric affects individual choice. It does so by providing its recipient with compelling considerations which may move him to give his assent to whatever it is that is being advanced. The very characteristics of the rhetorical syllogism and the issues under its purview make it that its conclusions do not necessarily bind its recipients, but can nonetheless still be considered qualifiedly rational.

Rhetorical persuasion through emotion

Perceptions are the way things appear to us. Desires are a "want" for something that is specified through one's perceptions, and which also carry with them an expectation of fulfilment. They are action-guiding and one of the motivating determinants for choice (the other being a rational conception of one's good). Emotions are reactive inner states which exhibit intentional awareness to what they are a response to. Like desires, they carry an expectation of fulfilment and determine a range of possible responses to the situation thus perceived. As such, they are also action-guiding: emotions predispose to certain behaviours they are usually associated with.

Ways through which desires and emotions affect judgement include: moving the agent to a given judgement by altering said agent's perception of the situation; directing the agent to or away from a given judgement through the experience of pleasure or pain; making the agent overcompensate his judgement through self-awareness of his own emotional biases; by having an emotion "tilt the scale" towards one judgement or another if the agent is genuinely unsure about which way to decide.

One way through which emotions can actually change the content of the judgement itself is by affecting the range of possible responses to a given situation the agent finds himself in.

Rhetorical persuasion through metaphor

The felt experience of listening to a rhetorical discourse can in itself elicit persuasion. The expectation of pleasure is what first captures our attention and

engenders a state of initial receptivity to discourse. Pleasure has then to be actually experienced throughout the discourse if the listener's receptivity is to be maintained. This is accomplished in two ways. First, by providing the listener with something strange yet mildly familiar that entices their curiosity without repelling them, and whose grasp is inherently pleasurable. Secondly, by offering to the listener the opportunity to learn something with ease.

The orator's discourse has to retain some ambiguity if the listener is to experience pleasure throughout the discourse. This is because the listener has to feel like he was the one who arrived at his own conclusions, in order for them to acquire for the value of personal discoveries. The orator's intentions have to remain to some extent concealed for a similar reason: so that each listener crafts his own rationale of the speaker's intentions through his own perspective.

III - Persuasion in dialectic

We move next to how persuasion is effected through dialectic. Dialectic as Aristotle understood it is markedly different from the various iterations that the concept has had throughout the history of philosophy. We will not be focusing on those. Instead, we will look briefly into what Aristotle understood as dialectic, and how he categorised it into various subforms. Similarly to what he had done regarding rhetoric, and staying true to his investigative method (Kraut, 2006), his proposed taxonomy reflects the forms of intellectual enquiry that actually existed and were practised in his own time. Afterwards we will be focusing on what makes persuasion through dialectical exchange unique, it being classed as a qualified form of rational persuasion, which is however distinct from the rational form of persuasion effected in rhetoric.

III.1 - Dialectic as Aristotle understood it

Dialectic for Aristotle is a form of intellectual enquiry that proceeds via a method of question and answer to arrive at a conclusion (*Top.* 158a15-23). Other features that are common to all sub-genres of dialectic include the type of starting premises (*Top.* 104a3-15 and 104b1-5), the rationale for the arranging and framing of questions (*Top.* 155b2-15), and its ultimate goal, which is to secure the agreement of a particular opponent on a given thesis (Evans 1977, p 75).

Aristotle then further separates dialectic into four sub-genres (*SE* 165a39-b8). Its criterion for their distinction is the aim towards which the dialectic exercise is conducted. That is to say, that although persuasion is the proximate end for all forms of dialectic, the reason *why* persuasion is being effected is what sets them apart. The first branch is didactic dialectic, an exercise conducted in the spirit of learning, which serves the function of testing the answerer's knowledge on a given subject (an obvious example being an oral exam). The second branch is competitive dialectic, which in Aristotle's time took a somewhat rigid and idiosyncratic form, an example of which we find in the Socratic dialogues (whose rules included: the questioner should aim to ask only "yes" or "no" type of questions, the answerer must answer succinctly and should not pose questions himself, and so on). Its purpose is that of testing both interlocutor's skills as dialecticians. The third branch is investigative dialectic, which when performed correctly can be used in the spirit of genuine enquiry to advance knowledge. This is the type of dialectic we will be focusing on, so whenever we mention "dialectic" it is this sub-genre we are referring to. And the fourth branch is contentious dialectic. Aristotle doesn't regard it as a genuine form of dialectic, but instead as a degeneration of the prior forms, and a type of trickery (*Top.* 161a32-b10). Examples abound from past and present times, from altercations on the school playground between bratty children, to pundits on various media talking past one another hoping to "score points". Its purpose is no longer to effect persuasion, but to denigrate one's opponent by showing him to be a bad dialectician.

The type of starting premises that are suitable for investigative dialectic are those that are considered plausible. What makes some particular view plausible, in Aristotle's view?

- the number and type of people upholding them: plausibility attaches to a view that attracts generalised consensus, or those which the experts on the matter at hand themselves consider true (*Top.* 100b20-23).
- the nature of the subject: subjects of enquiry that contribute either to choice and avoidance, or to truth and knowledge (*Top.* 104b1-5). That is to say, an issue that is liable to argumentation, i.e., whose formulation in terms of propositions and subsequent scrutiny via reasoning will yield conclusions that settle the matter under debate
- a mixture of both of the above: a controversial statement that an expert (or ourselves) hold that goes against the grain of received popular wisdom (*Top.* 104b31-35)

The framing and arranging questions in a dialectical exchange is another of its distinctive features. Unlike in the logical syllogism, where the only premises we need to pose are those required to necessitate a conclusion according to the established rules of inference, in dialectical ones we need more than the strictly necessary premises. The purposes of these extra premises vary: they help secure the universal premiss being granted; add weight to the argument; help clarify the argument; or conceal the conclusion (*Top.* 155b16-24). Concealment of the conclusion is a necessary part of dialectical deductions as it is an activity conducted *against* another person - its aim is to make someone acquiesce, through a series of yes or no questions, to premises that directly lead to a conclusion which is the opposite of what he defends (Evans 1977, p 75). So it entails making the answerer agree to premises which if he could envision the conclusion they ultimately lead to, he would refrain from assenting to them (*Top.* 156b2-9). This agonistic element makes dialectic conducted in the spirit of enquiry a delicate and difficult endeavour to sustain. The elusiveness of its goal makes it that at any point the debate can easily slide into its degenerate form, contentious dialectic (*Top.* 161a16-24). When this happens, certain "tools of the trade" generally considered "off limits" cease to be so. These include fallacious reasoning, personal attacks, asking questions with a clear aim of making the answerer lose his temper, and refusing to give assent to obvious questions (*Top.* 161a21-24).

We move next to the method of dialectic. What were to Aristotle the "rules of the game", and why are they relevant for us, being that no one nowadays actually debates in the stilted and contrived manner of the Socratic dialogues? Part of the answer is that in its procedures Aristotle finds safeguards that make the conclusions that are their outcome reputable (*Top.* 100a20-23) and effective in engendering persuasion (if conducted appropriately). So even though the particularities of his idealised method of dialectical enquiry hold mostly historical interest, their value for the human agent as a method for reaching conclusions about issues of an ethical import is still significant.

The main features of properly conducted dialectic are then as follows. There are two "players" in a dialectical debate conducted in the spirit of enquiry: the questioner and the answerer. One of them puts forth a starting thesis, usually the answerer. The questioner, through a series of questions, aims to secure premises from which he can deduce a conclusion which is the opposite of the starting thesis (Evans 1977, p 75). The starting thesis can be plausible (absolutely or qualifiedly so), implausible (absolutely or qualifiedly so), or neither. The questions placed, on the other hand, can be more or less plausible (absolutely or qualifiedly so) than the starting thesis (*Top.* 159a39-b3).

The premises being manipulated by both players are not those of the logical syllogism: they are not true and primary (or ones that follow necessarily from them), but instead are (more or less) plausible, or reputable, opinions (*Top.* 105b30-31); therefore the conclusions that follow from them do not hold necessarily, like in the case of the logical syllogism. Even though both players are arguing over opinions, there is still a correct way for the answerer to reply to the questions posed. For him to reply correctly, and hence for correct dialectical deductions to be generated, he must be aware of specific rules of inference that apply (see *Top.* 159a39-160a16). They are as follows: one, in a correct dialectical deduction the starting premises have to be more plausible than the conclusion we can establish from them. And two, the conclusion of a dialectical argument will be the opposite of the starting thesis: so in a correctly deduced dialectical argument, if we start from a plausible thesis we will end up with an implausible conclusion, and vice-versa. Because we can further qualify the starting thesis, the intermediate arguments and the conclusion as absolute or qualified, we get the following:

- from an absolutely plausible starting thesis we end up with an absolutely implausible conclusion
- from an absolutely implausible starting thesis we end up with a qualifiedly implausible conclusion
- from a qualifiedly plausible starting thesis we end up with a qualifiedly implausible conclusion (or less plausible than the starting premise, which amounts to the same thing)
- from a qualifiedly implausible starting thesis we end up with a qualifiedly plausible conclusion (or less implausible than the starting premise, which amounts to the same thing)

The second case can strike us at first as somewhat odd: how can we arrive at a *qualifiedly* implausible conclusion from an *absolutely* implausible starting thesis? We will resort to an example to show why it is so. Say your starting premise is some outlandish claim that beggars belief, for instance that the continent of Africa doesn't really exist. Your opponent, the answerer, is committed to the opposite thesis, that Africa does in fact exist. For you to have any hope of getting him to admit the non-existence of Africa you would have to resort to claims that are themselves plausible (for instance you could ask: "is it not the case that people have made mistakes about whole continents before, as when Columbus mistakenly took the American continent for India?"; or: "haven't people believed for millennia in the existence of lands that didn't actually exist, such as

Atlantis?", and so on). But no matter how many plausible supporting claims you get your interlocutor to agree on, a successful dialectical exercise that took the non-existence of Africa as its starting point would arrive at best at conclusions of variable plausibility over the failings of human cartography, on mankind's tendency to confabulate desired outcomes from imperfectly known realities, and so on. What you *wouldn't* be able to do is to get him in good faith to say "You've proven to me beyond any reasonable doubt that Africa isn't real". Because the starting premiss is absolutely implausible (as there is such an overwhelming amount of available evidence to refute it) the best that can be achieved is assent over some related, somewhat implausible beliefs.

The conclusions of valid dialectical deductions rest on the aforementioned rules of inference. In order for the answerer to apply the correct rules he needs to make a judgement over the plausibility of the thesis being advanced in each question, in order to give or withhold his assent to what is being asked. As we saw from the above example, the decision being made needs to take into account the plausibility of the starting thesis, and also that of the conclusion being sought by the questioner, so that the answerer can then "triangulate" the plausibility of the premiss being posed in the question in relation to them both. In longer dialectical arguments the "triangulation" becomes more difficult to sustain, as the longer the chain of reasoning, the harder it gets to keep all the premises in mind in order to estimate their plausibility in relation to one another. We often see this happen in the Socratic dialogues, where Socrates laboriously lays down different strands of argument over the course of the discussion which he then seemingly abandons, to suddenly "tighten the knot" and catch his opponent having to commit to something that is an evident falsehood that follows from he had agreed to earlier on (*Top.* 156a7-15). He is able to achieve because his ability to triangulate is better than his opponent's.

This is what brings the element of skill into play, and what allows us to make the distinction between the answerer who argues well from the one who doesn't. A good dialectical answerer is one who "triangulates well". The measure of his skill *is not* purely determined by the outcome of the dialectical exercise - the skilful answerer can "lose"; in fact, he is *expected* to lose, as a well performed dialectical exercise will result in a conclusion that contradicts his starting thesis (or at least can raise a host of correlate plausible claims that question one's assurance about the plausibility of the initial thesis, as we saw from the Africa example). Skill is also involved in the questioner's role, as it is up to him to formulate a sequence of questions that secure premises from which the contradictory conclusion is to be effected (*Top.* 158a25-30).

III.2 - The rational mode of dialectical persuasion

In this section we will discuss how the particular features of dialectic affect the nature of the persuasion effected through it. Dialectic is a subdivision of what we termed the rational mode of persuasion. It therefore shares the same category as the rhetorical syllogism, the enthymeme. The persuasion effected through dialectic is considered rational, in that it involves the manipulation of mental propositions through specific rules of inference, and the conclusions reached are made valid by the correct application of said rules. However, according to Aristotle it is to be considered rational in a qualified sense only (Evans 1977, p 76-77). If we bring to mind the distinctions we made earlier between expert and inexpert use of the faculties of understanding, and between absolute and relative (or qualified) objects of understanding, we can see why this is so. Because in dialectic we are trying to convince a real, actual person in front of us of a given conclusion, we can only generate a sense of conviction in him if *he* finds certain premisses persuasive. Of course, what would be a persuasive chain of argument for an expert dialectician might not be so to our actual opponent, as he may lack the mental faculties to make those inferences; and the thing we are trying to convince him of might not be liable to engender persuasion in itself (some truths may just be "hard to swallow", for instance some of the more counterintuitive assertions of modern physics). Therefore, both the individual and his logical reactions necessarily have to be taken into account by us (Evans 1977, p 77) if we are to be successful in effecting persuasion, and this is what makes it a qualified, or relative, form of rational persuasion.

Although it is a qualified form of rational persuasion alongside rhetoric, dialectic is nonetheless distinct from it. Now that we have addressed dialectic's key features, we are in a position to elaborate on why this is the case. Two elements of a more strictly logical nature are determinant in shaping how persuasion is achieved in dialectic. The first are the types of premises involved. Just about any subject can fall under dialectic's remit: whatever any actual person finds plausible (or implausible) is a legitimate topic for dialectical disputation (Evans 1997, p 51). This apparently limitless scope of dialectic sets it apart from rhetoric, which as we saw before concerns itself with issues involving human judgements and actions. However, even with this broader scope of application, dialectic still makes a lot of views "unarguable" in a given time and context: for instance, it is difficult to imagine an expert dialectician mounting a defence of evolutionary theory in Ancient times that would persuade anyone of its validity in those days.

The second element are the specific rules of inference for successful dialectical deductions. In the successful rhetorical syllogism, as we saw earlier, the conclusion can be understood as "an excellent case" for a specific judgement or course of action (Burnyeat 1996, p105). The conclusion can however be overturned at any point, if a better argument can be made for an alternative or opposing view. That's why its persuasive power is directly connected to the ability of said conclusion to not only make a convincing case for itself, but also to show that the opposite or alternative viewpoints are less likely than itself (Burnyeat 1996, p 88-91).

A good *rhetorical* argument asserts itself in part by undermining whatever conceivable alternatives to its conclusion happen to exist. A good *dialectical* argument, on the other hand, accomplishes something altogether quite different. Its rules of inference, to recall, state that the initial premises have to be more plausible than the conclusion; and the conclusion will be the opposite of the starting thesis with regard to its plausibility. Its successful exercise will upend at least some of the answerer's previously held beliefs, through a more or less circuitous path of questioning several other correlate beliefs associated with the starting premisses (again recall the Africa example). The successful dialectic process then sends ructions throughout one's web of already held convictions as one of its necessary outcomes. This is part of what Aristotle considers to be the "destructive" role of dialectic (*SE* 172a15-23 and 172a33-b1). Dialectic has the power to actively undermine one's claims to knowledge by testing the validity of its supporting theses and by showing how unstable those foundations actually are. In short, to be persuaded of something through dialectic argument is often to become *less* persuaded of one's own reasons for believing in a whole host of other opinions we held up to that point.

III.3 - dialectical persuasion through "entrapment"

Interestingly, we also find that dialectic engenders persuasion in non-logical ways. Similarly to the role emotions and metaphor played in rhetorical persuasion, in dialectic we can ascribe a significant importance to what we may call "procedural" factors, or, more simply put, "how the game is played". We'll highlight two of them.

One feature that immediately stands out is how the nature of the interaction between the agents plays such a large role in shaping the whole enquiry. In dialectic there is a permanent tension between the agonistic and cooperative elements throughout the

whole process, and both have to remain present if the process is to reach a successful conclusion. The questioner is free to devise an “attack strategy”, which may include misdirection, adding unnecessary premises, occultation of the conclusion one is aiming at, and so on (*Top.* 155a40-b7); the answerer has to reply in good faith, while being aware that a successful outcome will yield a conclusion that overturns his own starting premise (*Top.* 159a17-23). Both sides have to commit to playing what can be conceived as an inherently unbalanced game when it comes to roles and outcomes. So one could ask: what makes this game worth playing? As in rhetoric, what would make anyone willing to engage in such an asymmetrical endeavour is the shared assumption that this “language game” is capable of providing answers that reliably track the truth. At the end of the process both contenders expect to reach conclusions which in some way advance their knowledge of whatever it is they are debating over. The strict rules of engagement are the *conditions* that allow for this presupposition to be upheld throughout the process. Conversely, the supposedly more “balanced” playing field of contentious dialectic, where both can use the same tools and compete for the same outcome, is one where the pursuit of truth becomes itself an instrument for the overriding purpose of defeating one’s adversary. This reversion of the hierarchy of aims in the dialectic process is problematic, as it undermines the very possibility of the contenders to be persuaded of the conclusions thus reached. Simply put, if all you have done is showed yourself to be a better dialectician than your opponent, then chances are you will have not been able to convince him of your point of view, as both yourself and your opponent weren’t really playing to get to the bottom of something, you were both playing to defeat one another.

Another salient feature is the dual pathway through which a conclusion can be reached in dialectic. One such pathway is identical to the demonstrative syllogism: a conclusion has been successfully argued for if the premises which have been granted necessitate it. However, Aristotle also points that another successful pathway for a conclusion is reached when no further questions are deemed necessary (*Top.* 162a35-b2). Here we believe Aristotle is gesturing towards the idea of dialectic as a sequence of orchestrated mental steps that yield a desired outcome, much like a skilful chess player can execute a checkmate on his opponent through a series of carefully planned and executed moves. One’s “attack strategy” can vary in the course of the dialectical exchange, much like the chess player’s, depending on how the game actually unfolds, the opponent’s counter moves, and so on. But the mark of a successful dialectical strategy is that it gradually limits the opponent’s options, funnelling him towards a progressively smaller number of alternatives, until he has no choice but to give his assent to the

conclusion. Further support for this reading can be derived from the fact that Aristotle contends elsewhere that the answerer in a dialectical exchange is often free to argue for both alternatives (*Rhet.* 1355a29-34), that is, he may reply either "yes" or "no" to what the questioner is asking him, while still adhering to the "rules of the game" and answering in good faith, for instance, by qualifying his answer thus: "yes in some instances, but not in others" (*Top.* 160a26-28). The questioner's role will then be to tease out through further questioning the answerer's assent to whatever premise he needs securing so he can move to the next step in his chain of argument (*Top.* 156a9-10, *Top.* 156a23-26, *Top.* 156b3-9 provide different ways of achieving this aim). A successful dialectical exchange therefore has a sort of attritional nature to it, where the successive plucking away and whittling down of arguments "encases" one's opponent in assenting to a given point of view to which he can no longer envision any alternative - we could perhaps uncharitably call it a form of "persuasion through entrapment". The felt experience of being "trapped" in an argument one fought against through each step of the way puts it a world apart from the "seductive" role for metaphor (Moran 1996) that we analysed earlier for rhetorical persuasion. Whereas in rhetorical persuasion the "spell" holds as long as one does not become aware of its inner workings on oneself, in dialectic the very realisation that one has exhausted his possibilities for rational dissent would bring about conviction over the very thesis he argued against. A thorough scrutiny of the logical entailment of the arguments the answerer assented to would then be a condition for the argument to be persuasive to him.

Summary

Dialectic is a form of public intellectual enquiry that follows a question and answer method to arrive at a conclusion. Its starting premises include just about any possible topic. The number of premises needed in a dialectical argument are not determined by logical necessity, but instead by securing enough premises to force one's interlocutor to a conclusion which is the opposite of what he defends.

The dialectical argument obeys two central rules of inference: the starting premises have to be more plausible than the conclusion we can establish from them; and the conclusion of a dialectical argument will be the opposite of the starting thesis. Both the questioner and the answerer are aware that the purpose of the exercise is to overturn the starting thesis, so it is an antagonistic exercise that at the same time also presupposes the cooperation of both parties, as well as skill.

Persuasion through dialectical argument can be classed as rational as it involves the manipulation of mental propositions through the application of specific rules of inference. By use of dialectical argument we aim to generate a sense of conviction in a real person, our interlocutor. This makes it only qualifiedly rational, as we are not trying to establish a chain of reasoning that is absolutely convincing (that is, one which an idealised expert dialectician would find persuasive).

Persuasion through dialectical reasoning is distinct from the one elicited via rhetoric due to the wider scope of its premises (their remit is the plausible, and not only human actions and motives); and its successful exercise leads to conclusions that unsettle other previously held beliefs by our interlocutor (it often undermines other beliefs instead of engendering conviction in new ones).

It is the asymmetry of roles and outcomes in dialectic that allow it to become a truth-oriented endeavour. The supposedly balanced playing field of contentious dialectic (a degeneration of proper dialectic) turn it instead into a purely agonistic exercise, devoid of any common pursuit for the truth of the matter at hand.

The successfully conducted dialectical exercise channels the interlocutor towards a conclusion to which he can no longer envision any alternative, and is eventually forced to assent. The felt experience of "logical entrapment" emphasises the importance of thorough scrutiny of the arguments as a means to engendering conviction about the conclusion in the answerer (vis a vis the more manipulative modes of emotional and linguistic persuasion characteristic of rhetoric).

Part Three

I - Character as the fourth and most effective mode of persuasion

Persuasion can be understood as a sort of demonstration (*Rhet.* 1355a5) accomplished by an orator to his audience. In the previous section we studied the modes through which persuasion can be accomplished. A precondition for any of those modes to be effective is the orator being able to come across as someone with a good character (*Rhet.* 1356a4-9). One's willingness to entertain someone's arguments, to be moved by one's discourse, or to open oneself to experience the pleasurable effect of metaphor requires a receptivity from said person to the orator's overtures. For persuasive discourse

to work it needs a foothold on its intended audience, and that foothold is established through a positive judgement of the character of the person engaging them (*Rhet.* 1378a7-20).

That judgement has a content. The specific content the orator is aiming to create in his audience is twofold: he wants his audience to come to the conclusion that he, the orator, has his audience's interests at heart; and that he, when addressing them, is speaking truthfully. So to have a "good character" in the context of persuasion means something different that what we would initially expect: it is not a bland assertion such as "he's a nice person", but instead something along the lines of "he wants what I want and I expect him to tell it like it is". We saw earlier when we discussed the effect of metaphor how difficult it is to achieve and sustain a conformity between the audience's and the orator's intentions. These seldom, if ever, align, so that the need to generate the impression that they do was key in providing the pleasurable feeling engendered in persuasive discourse. So this aspect of the judgement of the orator's character is by that very reason unstable and prone to change (*Rhet.* 1377b21-1378a6). The requirement of truthfulness, on the other hand, is dependent on all parties involved committing to the rules of the language game, as we saw when discussing persuasion in both rhetoric and dialectic. And this is also a difficult equilibrium to sustain. Both of these factors point to a precariousness inherent in appraising character in the context of persuasive discourse.

A separate question is: how can this judgement of the orator's character be elicited on the audience? The obvious answer is for the orator to actually share the audience's interests and speak truthfully. But this poses a problem, as it is *because* their interests diverge that persuasion is needed to begin with. A maximally persuasive character would be one possessed by an orator who fully identifies with his audience's interests, but such a complete identification obviates the very need of an act of persuasion. So an orator needs to know *how* he can elicit that specific judgement of his character in his audience *regardless* of him actually sharing their interests and being truthful. What the orator then needs is a certain kind of knowledge of the audience's psychology. To quote Rorty (1996, p 8-9 and note 18 on p 29), the orator "does not need an accurate scientific account of how people think, feel and behave. Instead, he needs a set of more or less rough generalisations derived from experience and observation that predict how those people he's addressing are expected to behave (…) [He needs] a trove of empirically collected data on all the variations in fundamental psychological activities and functions of his audience, organised by outcome-significant categories (age, sex, political and social circumstances)". The outcome-significant categories are those that play a role in eliciting

purposeful action on the audiences' part, by engaging with their actual beliefs and desires. Simply put, he needs to know what works in engendering persuasion for the actual audience in front of him. The level of abstraction of a more systematic account, like the one we discussed previously when addressing the different mechanisms of persuasion, would fail to provide the orator with any insight into the *actual* motives and attitudes of the audience he is attempting to persuade.

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions when it comes to character in the context of persuasion: one is that character is defined relationally. It is an assessment made over a background of assumptions about the intentions of those involved, where what both take to be their own and each other's intentions matters significantly in shaping said assessment. This relational aspect to character extends to the content of the judgement of the orator's character. What the audience takes to be a "good" character, and the extent to which an orator can pass himself off as evincing said quality of character is determined by the interactions between both participants. Secondly, the appraisal of someone's character in this context is extremely precarious and prone to change, usually for the worse. Any dissonance picked up by the audience between the orator's stated intentions and his actual intentions, or vacillation in his commitment to truth can upend their assessment of his character in a lasting way. And thirdly, good character is not the particular preserve of any specific individual person. Instead, because good character is whatever actuates in the audience a positive judgement about the orator's intentions and commitment to truth, different people can elicit in their audience the very same judgement in different ways: for instance, both the Dalai Lama and Martin Lewis CBE The Money Saving Expert can be perceived as equally having a "good character", albeit for different reasons (both are truthfully committed to helping us reach Enlightenment/saving us money, respectively).

II - The other Aristotelian conception of character

There is an uneasiness in thinking about character exclusively as a way of affecting someone's judgement and emotions in a given way. We instinctively find it hard to accept that character is mostly in the "eye of the beholder"; that one's assessment of it can vary wildly according to circumstance; that it can be boiled down to this functional role of facilitating persuasion; and especially that it is something that can be detached from the individual's innermost traits and drives for thought, feeling and action, and used to endow

completely different individuals with similar attributes. And we would be correct in feeling that way, because for Aristotle character can also be described from the point of view of how it shapes one's behaviour in the light of the agent's goals. A clue into what he means by this can be gleaned on *NE* 1114b23-24, where he states: "we are ourselves somehow part-causes of our states of character". Aristotle is claiming here that character is not purely an unmediated reaction to things from without, but also to a degree something within our own making. Immediately afterwards, he says: "and it is by being persons of a certain kind that we assume the end to be so and so" (*NE* 1114b24-25), by which he means that our character largely determines our behaviour, and it does so by setting the goals said behaviour aims towards. Here we have a rough outline of the interconnections between inner traits, actions and ends, that taken together form what we could call the *ethical conception of character*.

What are its main features? To quote Rorty's (1996, p 12) definition, the ethical conception of character according to Aristotle is "a stable and enduring configuration of natural capacities, habits and desires, which are ordered by their relative strength and importance: they form an organised system of ordered preferences that structure his practical reasoning. Character can then be summarised by the ends towards which his actions strive towards". The analogy with tuning a musical instrument is helpful: "character for Aristotle is what sets the range for one's judgement, feelings, thoughts and desires, confining them within certain boundaries which direct, but do not wholly determine, one's choices" (Rorty 1996, p 13). Character sets the pitch to which our behaviour are the notes.

Another feature of the ethical conception of character is the complex interaction between its distinct components. Aristotle postulates character as possessing a hierarchical structure of first order traits superimposed by second order dispositions which affect and modify the first-order ones in various ways (Rorty 1996, p 11). So for instance a person can be said to have the first-order trait of being quick to anger, but nonetheless also be good-tempered in nature, as he possesses certain second order dispositions (such as strongly developed sense of propriety) that allow him to control his irascibility in social settings.

The traits and the dispositions do not all stand in the same relation to one another. "Many dispositions are actively magnetising because they structure what is salient or dominant in an individual's perceptual and conceptual field: they can predispose him to specific emotions" (Rorty 1996, p 11). Emotions, in turn, are strongly connected to other inner states and can have a significant effect in altering and changing processes of

judgement, as we saw earlier. So to engage in these processes of judgement is never just the "strictly rational" process of applying rules of inference to mental propositions; it is also an immersed and engaged assessment of one's emotions as one goes through it (Striker 1996, p 297-8). This process, if conducted appropriately, "refines and educates all the involved elements of practical reason, making them more discriminating and responsive, better at confronting new situations in the future" (Nussbaum 1996, p 317). Character can then be understood as the successful (or not so successful) outcome of these processes of emotionally engaged judgement over time. This reading strongly emphasises the formation of character as a developmental process, which occurs over time and throughout the entire course of one's life. In addition to its developmental nature, character can also be thought of, in Rorty's apt metaphor, as an archeological site (1996, p 11): its sedimentary nature is not a static, unchanged reality over which we have no control over, but instead something we are constantly involved in exploring and remoulding: we can bring to the surface old buried sediments, establish new foundations on top of pre-existing structures, find new meanings for older strata, and so on.

We have now sketched out two distinct conceptions of character as Aristotle understands them: the rhetorical conception, that is, character understood as the determinant factor in effecting persuasion, on which all the other modes of persuasion depend; and the ethical conception, that is, character understood as the hierarchically ordered summation of one's goals towards which the agent's actions aim towards. They are different, as we have seen, but in real life both conceptions cannot really be prised apart from one another: to act for the sake of reasons presupposes me grasping and being moved to act by those very reasons, that is, said reasons being persuasive to me, the agent. Aristotle identifies and acknowledges both conceptions of character in his works, the ethical conception being predominant in the Ethical treatises and in Politics;, while the rhetorical conception is dominant in the Rhetoric (Rorty 1996, p 13). However, Carey (1996, p 411) points out that the interplay between the two conceptions was not fully explored in all its implications by Aristotle. Said author points out that the notion of character as a dramatic construct, that is, as something that to some extent we have an ability to enact, but also distance ourselves from, is an aspect which Aristotle did not develop fully (Carey 1996, p 410-11).

Carey gives us an important thread of argument for us to follow, which we will develop over the next part of this thesis. The approach taken will be slightly different from what we have done thus far. While in the previous sections we closely followed Aristotle's lead on the matter, in Part Four we will mostly draw upon insights from an author outside

of the Aristotelian field, namely Charles Taylor. Our reason for doing so is that in our view his ideas about the articulation of meaning and the creative power of discourse, expounded on his work The Language Animal (Taylor, 2016 - p177-288) provide us with a way to expand upon the rational, emotional, and experiential domains that Aristotle identified as constitutive of persuasive discourse. This, in turn, will allow us in the conclusion to take Aristotle's dual conception of character in new directions, ones that enable us to formulate answers to the questions we started our thesis with.

Summary

For persuasion to occur the listener needs to be receptive to the orator's entreaties. This is best achieved if the listener judges his orator to possess a good character. This judgement amounts to the listener thinking that the orator has his interests at heart and is truthful in his assertions.

The skilful orator needs to be able to systematically bring about a judgement about the goodness of his character in his audience regardless of his actual intentions. To do so he needs to have knowledge of his audience's psychology. Said knowledge needs to be organised in outcome-significant categories that are effective in engaging with the audience's actual beliefs and desires in order to engender persuasion.

The judgement of character is defined relationally, in that he orator and the listener's assumptions mutually affect each other and influence their content. It is also very prone to change, in that any perceived dissonance in the orator's intentions and commitment to truthfulness easily shatter that judgement. Similar judgements of good character can also easily attach to very different people, namely to whomever instantiates those attributes of truthfulness and shared intent.

In addition to being a tool for persuasion, character can also be understood as a stable and enduring configuration of the agent's capacities, habits and desires hierarchically ordered towards ends. This ethical conception of character has the following main features: it is developmental in nature; its reasoning processes are tightly enmeshed with other inner states such as perceptions, emotions and desires; it is an open-ended and constantly revisable process over which the agent has some measure of control.

The rhetorical and ethical conceptions or character are notionally separate, but co-exist simultaneously. The interplay between the two conceptions, developed through the

lens of Charles Taylor's insights from The Language Animal, is the subject of the remainder of the essay.

Part Four

I - Persuasive discourse and the categorisation dynamic

Any orator is faced with a similar problem: who amongst his audience is persuadable, and what can he actually persuade them of? The number of people he addresses, be it one or many, does not change the nature of the problem, which is that any persuading occurs against a background of uncertainty when it comes to the audience's receptivity to his discourse. Simply put, *how* do we know what the people we are engaging with will find plausible, and *what* we can convince them of?

The answer is that for most people, for most of the time, we don't really know, so that in the absence of that knowledge we do the next best thing, which is to make rough generalisations about each individual's inner motivations and reasoning processes, and then adjust our discursive actions in light of those assumptions to favour specific desired outcomes. In short, we have to frame certain parts of human behaviour as belonging to given types. The orator has to assume certain trains of thought will be engaging to his audience but not others, that certain emotions will be aroused by his entreaties while others won't, and although this is an ongoing process, constantly being calibrated and adjusted throughout the interaction, it nonetheless requires certain assumptions to be made from the very start. Such assumptions can be thought of as the categories into which the orator's audience can be divided in, based on the outcomes he is trying to achieve. So, based on his goal, which is to persuade the persuadable amongst his audience of his viewpoint (or the closest approximation thereof), the skilled orator segments his audience in categories such as age, sex, political, social circumstances, or any others that in his view subserve that purpose (Rorty 1996, p 8).

In the context of persuasion, such categories can change over time, rather than being fixed labels attaching invariably to given individuals. Consider an orator telling his sorry tale of growing up as a child from a broken home, which, for some reason or other, fails to resonate among single mothers in the audience, which was his intended target. Now of course single mothers don't stop being single mothers when the orator stops conceiving them as a group of people with a functionally similar affective and cognitive

make-up; but the fact is that in such a scenario thinking about "single mothers" as a self-contained category with distinctive operative characteristics loses its usefulness to the orator. In the context of persuasion, then, such categories are transient, their permanence strictly tied to their perceived utility as adjuvants to persuasion by the person deploying them. When it comes to persuasion, such categories are only important as long as, and for as long as, they *work*.

The orator on the one hand needs to slot the people he is dealing with in functionally relevant categories, in order to maximise the persuasive effect of his discourse. This "slotting" is tentative at best, and hinges on a mostly speculative exercise of outcome-dependent taxonomy. But he is also aware that even if he *were* to get it right and fit his intended audience in the appropriately relevant categories, the people listening to him do not simply react to his advances as he expects them to, but also that they themselves engage in a similar exercise *towards him* - for instance, some single mothers may approvingly look back at our orator and class him as "the self-made man who overcame adversity and went on to achieve great things", while others may class him as an "overtly emotional adult who has not outgrew his childhood predicament".

This reflective exercise from the audience back to the orator has two distinctive aspects. One we have addressed previously in part Three section I, when we discussed the features of the audience's judgement of the orator's character. We identified "good character" as its central operative concept, and defined it as a commonality of interest between audience and orator, and a perceived truthfulness on the orator's part by his audience. But this is not all the judging that is going on. In an ideal scenario of maximal persuasion, when the audience is enthralled by the orator's speech, the audience's willingness to scrutinise what is being argued is mostly put to rest. But in any other scenario, whenever some friction gets between the orator and his audience, such a listener inevitably at some point will come to ask himself, "why is he saying this *to me*? Is it because of *X*?", *X* being whatever set of judgements or attributes the listener infers the orator supposes he himself has. To go back to the previous example of the orator from a broken home, it would be for someone in the audience to wonder, mid-peroration, "why is he telling me his sobbing childhood story? It must be because he expects people to respond favourably to it. Is he assuming I had a distressing childhood myself? And what if *I did* have such a childhood? What should I make of *his*?".

What is going on could then be described as a back and forth between the type of person the listener assumes is being *construed as* by the orator and the type of person the listener *sees himself as*. This back and forth can be thought of as a framing device, an

interpretative framework through which the listener can make sense of judgements and actions being put forward by the orator to him, and through gauging his own cognitive and affective responses to those judgements come to a decision as to their appropriateness. We can also think of it as a "fit". Much like testing a pair of shoes for size, what we are doing is looking for a conformity between two distinct objects, in this particular case, between two distinct sources of judgement, namely those stemming from the orator and those from the listener. However, other people's motives and actions aren't feet, that is, they are not a stand-alone entity in the world whose attributes can be objectively determined independently of who is doing the measuring. One's judgements, particularly those about motives and human actions, are inherently relational, as well as subjective. Relational because people's motives and actions are part of a wider net of other reasons, desires and a whole host of other contingent factors which they are connected to, and without which we cannot understand them; and subjective because one's *own* motives, desires, goals and so on all affect how one judges the motives, desires and goals of other people.

As such, there is no way for us to outright *know* we got those judgements right, unlike the foot in shoe situation, which as soon as we try it we instantly know whether it fits or not. This testing for adequacy of each respective judgement can only occur through a shifting of perspectives: a given judgement, or a piece of behaviour, has first to be framed as an instance belonging to a wider type, as enmeshed in a wider set which gives it its meaning and significance. Once we have "zoomed out", we can then judge its adequacy in explaining how that specific judgement or behaviour came about: that is, we "zoom back in" and appraise it in light of the overarching explanation within which it derives its sense.

The process we have been describing exhibits other significant features. For one, the roles each person plays in the process are not static - both the people who make the categorisation and the categorised can alternate in their respective roles. So for instance the orator who fails to read his audience and whose discourse "rings hollow" exposes himself to be recategorised by them as a trite, untruthful politician. Secondly, the categories themselves are also very liable to modification. The orator's attempt to frame someone or some group as belonging to a given category which evinces particular attributes may be accepted, rejected, modified, and so on, potentially creating a feedback loop of continuous interaction between the category, those who see themselves as belonging to it, and its perceived attributes.

An ever present possible outcome of this feedback loop dynamic is that of a mismatch between the taxonomy being proposed and the subjects who are thus categorised. Here's two ways of how this can play out, using the ongoing "single mother" example. Imagine that even though I raised my children without a partner, I don't see myself as a "single mother", in the way the orator conceives that particular category - be it because I had the help of my extended family in doing so, or because I always intended to be a single parent from the beginning, or for some other reason. As I don't see myself as being the person to whom the label "single mother" applies, if I discern in the orator's discourse the implication that he is aiming to persuade "single mothers", then his advances will probably fall flat on me, and will do so for a particular reason: because he's not really addressing *me,* regardless of how persuasive I happen to find what he is arguing. Once I became aware that what he is doing is attempting to pigeonhole me into a "type", something draws me away from assenting to his arguments, because I cannot but think that even if I *were* to find them appealing, they are not meant to appeal to *me* as an individual person, but to a section of a broader swathe of people whom the orator thinks I happen to belong to. Of course, it may very well be the case that even though I don't think of myself as a "single mother", I just might happen to think, feel, and act the way the orator supposes "single mothers" do - and that would be the very thing that makes his arguments so persuasive to me to begin with. But again, the awareness of a mismatch between how I assume that the orator categorises me as and the person I see myself as introduces this element of friction which makes it more difficult for me to outright assent to whatever he is advancing.

Second example. Say that I *do* see myself as a "single mother", meaning that I do make sense of certain important features of my life, such as my goals, aims, desires, and so forth through the lens of that particular aspect of my experience, in a way that is relevantly similar to how the orator conceives said type to be. So much so I even founded the (fictitious) Association "Single Household Mothers of the UK" (SHMUK), set on raising awareness to the issue, ending the stigma around single parenting, and having society give us our fair due. However, if an orator comes round to our Association headquarters, and from his speech I glean the implication that to him my "single mother" condition is what shapes my entire outlook on life, then whatever the orator is arguing will also likely remain unpersuasive to me. Now why is that? Firstly, notice how in this example, unlike the preceding one, not only does the "single mother" label "fit", but *we ourselves* also acknowledge it to be an apt characterisation. So what is preventing me from outright assenting to what is being argued in this case, then? In this particular case, we would

argue that although I would still find his arguments personally appealing, what the awareness of being pigeonholed does is deprive me of that sense that *reasons of my own making* are behind what sways me to judge certain things as being the case. If someone is preemptively taking all the inferential steps for me, in a way that makes me aware that this is what is going on, the very awareness of this lack of "actively connecting the dots" on my part impedes the very persuasion the orator is expecting his discourse to accomplish. This of course is reminiscent of the mode of persuasion through metaphor we discussed in part Two section III, where the conclusions reached need to be felt as personal achievements for us to value them as self-discoveries.

We can now draw some provisional conclusions. The mismatch we sensed in both examples is a sort of dissonance: like Dorian Gray, I am repelled by the self-image that is being reflected to me from an outside source. The judgements that ground the categorisations are relative and subjective, so the mismatch between them does not necessarily have to be caused by an objectively measured difference in the contents of the judgements themselves. As we saw in both examples, what I assume the orator thinks I am, and what I see myself as, may very well align, but still the dissonance arises. So what exactly is the cause for this dissonance? In Dorian Gray's case, he becomes discomfited because that self-image he sees in his painting is a truer depiction of himself than that he was willing to acknowledge. In the examples we have discussed, the reasons are somewhat different. Both relate to the same felt experience of being made an instrument for someone else's purposes. In the first example I am made to fit a category that I don't perceive myself as belonging to, a category which is made for purposes that are not my own, and that makes me feel I am not being addressed as a person, but solely as a member of a (to the orator) functionally relevant grouping of people. In the second case I fully acknowledge the categorisation but resent being considered as nothing more than a token of said type, which makes me feel I am not being respected as a fully autonomous person. In both cases my ability to be persuaded by what is being advanced is negatively affected.

These are just two of many possible ways through which a mismatch between self-images can affect our ability to be persuaded (Taylor 2016, p 254-55). It is worthwhile to elaborate on the opposite scenario, that is, that of a "match" between judgements. From what we have been discussing we can now see that said match *does not amount to* a complete identification between them: in the second example I saw myself as a "single mother", and that characterisation was relevantly similar to the type that the orator slotted me in and operated from, and still the dissonance between them arose. So where can the

harmony between self-images emerge from? Our previous discussion in Part Two section I allows us to formulate a tentative answer: when the conditions for maximal persuasion are met. These are dependent on three factors: identity of purpose between the orator and listener, which is to advance one's grasp of the subject at hand; that what is being advanced is persuasive in itself - that is, it genuinely advances knowledge in the person who is being persuaded; and that the faculties of understanding of those involved are used to the best of his abilities. So going back to our single mother example, such a "match" would occur if an orator came to our Single Mothers Association and expounded on how his upbringing shaped his life and helped him overcome adversity, in a way which genuinely helped those who were listening to understand *both* his and our own perspectives better; for him to do so because he was *genuinely* committed to advancing the understanding of our common condition, just like we were are choosing to listen to him for that same reason; and that both the arguments he made, and our grasp of them, were the ones most conducive to producing this very outcome. This third condition is what makes the orator have to present his views in a way which engages his *actual* audience, instead of debating the topic on a purely abstract level which may be illuminating to him, but that may fail to resonate to his real-life listeners. As such, the modes of persuasion we have been discussing throughout this thesis will inevitably be a part of his peroration, if it is to accomplish this goal.

A second provisional conclusion can now be hinted at. Namely, that the dynamics of a reflective triangulation between the type of person the listener is being categorised as by the orator and the type of person the listener sees himself as is an inescapable feature in *all* persuasive discourse. This makes us ponder what further roles can such a dynamic play in one's moral reasoning. We will briefly mention two further possibilities. One such possibility can be corrosive of my own judgements about the usefulness of those very categories I find myself belonging to, or am being classed as, without advancing anything to replace them. For instance, one can momentarily revel in experiencing a commonality of sentiment about a difficult upbringing with the orator, but if then one comes to realise that its sole purpose when it was brought up by him was as a means to "soften me up" regarding some other issue he wants me to acquiesce to, then one cannot but question what worth that shared identification actually has. Other possibilities, on the other hand, can be more potentially constructive. For instance, if after being addressed I remain unpersuaded, this may open me to further enquiries about what it is to be the type of person who *can* be persuaded by those arguments which in that circumstance left me cold. It may also open me to questions of what it would then take to persuade *me*, and

that in turn can further illuminate my own shortcomings in understanding the issue at hand, or shed more light on how others categorise me.

Summary

Persuasive discourse requires the orator to create an operative taxonomy of certain aspects of human behaviour based on their expected efficacy in bringing about the desired outcome, which is to effect persuasion. Such categories are labile and are relevant to the orator only as long as they subserve this goal.

The audience also categorises their orator. This takes the form of a judgement over their character, which is centred on an assessment over commonality of intention and truthfulness. In a scenario of less than ideal persuasion, the listener's reflective exercise does not stop at the orator, but reverts back to his own assumptions about the type of person the orator takes him to be, and how well that characterisation fits with his own self-image. It is through this interpretative framework that the listener judges the appropriateness of what is being advanced to him. Its purpose is to test for a conformity between distinct judgements. As such judgements are relational and subjective, such exercise can only be accomplished through a shifting of perspectives, where individual instances of judgements and behaviour derive their sense from being casted as belonging (or failing to belong) to a wider type.

Further features of this categorisation dynamic include the possibility of a change in roles throughout the process - the categorised can themselves categorise, and vice-versa - and the ability of each agent to dynamically respond in multiple ways to the categorisation process, potentially creating a feedback loop effect of continuous interaction between the categories, its attributes, and those involved in the process.

There is a constant risk of a mismatch between the proposed categorisation and the categorised. In the context of persuasion however, a match between categorisation and categorised is *not* achieved by their complete identification with one another, but instead in a situation where the conditions of maximal persuasion are met. These are: identity of purpose in advancing understanding on the matter; the topic being genuinely explanatory; the faculties of understanding of all those involved are used to the best of their respective abilities.

The dynamics of a reflective triangulation between the type of person the listener perceives he is being construed as, and the type of person he sees himself as are inescapable features of all persuasive discourse.

II - Appeal to emotion - the awareness-concealment dynamic

In Part Two section 2a we characterised emotions as reactive inner states which raise awareness in the person experiencing them to whatever it is that causes them. These characteristics explained the particular ways emotions can affect judgement: we saw how they may change the agent's perception of the situation; how they may direct the agent to or away from a given judgement through the experience of pleasure or pain; how they can cause the agent to overcompensate his judgement through self-awareness of his own emotional biases; and finally, we saw how an emotion may "tilt the scale" towards one judgement or another if the agent is genuinely unsure about which way to decide.

Emotions also carry with them an expectation of fulfilment and determine a limited range of possible responses to the situation from which they arise. This led us to realise that emotions can also actually *change* the content of a judgement, so that for instance if we are under the sway of a particularly strong emotion while passing judgement on a given situation, we may find ourselves incapable of reaching a conclusion we would otherwise come to if we were in a more neutral or dispassionate state.

The way emotions function makes it that in most cases we can't just outright reject whatever emotion we are experiencing at that moment and pick a different one at will, and this is because of their intricate connection with the person's value judgements, perceptions and desires that together shape how we experience the situation we find ourselves in. Experiencing indignation, for instance, shows this clearly: if you see a perceived wrong being inflicted on someone who does not deserve it you cannot at will turn said feeling into *schadenfreude*, unless your underlying judgement of said person also changes (that is, if you come to the conclusion that they *are* in fact deserving of being subjected to that wrong).

The particular characteristics of emotions present the orator intent on persuading his audience with a distinct set of problems than those discussed in the previous section. When it comes to his audience's emotions, even though the orator is starting from a position of uncertainty when it comes to his audience's specific inner emotional make-up, he is on steadier ground when it comes to the functioning of the emotions themselves. That is to say, that even though he may not know what exactly makes his audience indignant, the skilful orator can be confident in the fact that *if* he arouses a state of indignation in his audience *then* he will likely draw them closer to him, and thus closer to

his goal of convincing them. This will occur on account of the orator being able to convey a similarity in value judgements between his audience and him (they are both outraged at the same thing), which as we saw is one requisite in judging the orator to possess a “good character”, which in turn is a key factor in effecting persuasion.

Now of course it is never that simple. Indignation usually is most effective as long as the audience does not realise that they are being made to feel indignant for this very purpose. For it to work in the way intended, the audience’s focus of awareness has to be kept *on the value judgement* of the situation itself, instead of on the *underlying intent of the orator* who presents the situation to the audience. However, just because an appeal to emotion hinges on misdirection of awareness for greater efficacy with regards to persuasion does not mean that it can only work if its recipient is completely oblivious of it. Not only can awareness of the orator’s intent not hinder the persuading effect of his discourse, but even heighten it in some circumstances, for instance when an orator’s appeal to indignation which is transparently aimed at conveying both his and their moral righteousness lends further credence to it. So we have to further explore what we mean by awareness in the context of emotional persuasion to understand why that is so.

Firstly, it is important to notice that persuasion through emotional manipulation requires the orator to acknowledge that there are two distinct objects of awareness at play, as we saw above: the one that the particular emotion draws attention to, and the one underlying the whole discursive act, that of the orator’s intention. Secondly, we must also acknowledge that directing the audience’s attention to the former in lieu of the latter is key in effecting persuasion, but even if the skilful orator fully accomplishes that, focusing on one does not fully negate the other - it may also have no significant bearing on engendering persuasion, or even heighten it, as we noted. Why is that? We can discern two possible reasons for this. For one, awareness comes in degrees, it is not a yes or no matter - it can vary from us being enthralled by every utterance to hardly paying attention to whatever is being said, with various shades in between. And two, and more importantly, one can be acutely aware of both objects of attention *simultaneously*. In fact, we could even argue that our scrutiny over how our emotions are aroused by the words and actions of others is always intrinsically tied to how we appraise their intentions towards us. That is to say, that we are always in the process of entertaining these two objects of awareness whenever we engage with someone else’s speech and discursive acts: “what is he trying to get at with this?” and “how is this making me feel, and why?”. Now we may not be focusing on both, simultaneously, all the time, but we certainly move

back and forth between these two stances during the discursive exchange, as well as afterwards, when we reflect on how our conversation went, for instance.

In a similar vein to persuasion through metaphor, then, persuasion through emotional manipulation could be described as presenting an awareness-concealment dynamic. This dynamic consists in directing the audience's attention to one object in lieu of another, concealing one's underlying intention while doing so. Two issues further complicate this construal. One is that persuasion of this kind occurs within a framework of common assumptions, shared by all those involved. These include: emotional manipulation is an easily accessible and deployable resource (we all engage in it, from early childhood onwards, and we can usually sense whenever it is being used); if used in certain settings it can be particularly effective; one's effectiveness in putting them to use varies according to individual ability and choice. Taken together, these assumptions point to emotional persuasion possessing some of the characteristics of a shared "language game", which is something we explored before in part Two section II.1, albeit from a different perspective, when we discussed the underlying assumptions for the rationality of rhetoric.

The other issue that adds an additional layer of complexity to the awareness-concealment dynamic has already been touched upon. It is that awareness that one is having one's emotions manipulated does not necessarily have to be disruptive of the very possibility of becoming persuaded of something. In some cases it may even be the opposite, as for instance when we take our feelings as constituting a sort of vindication or proof of the appropriateness of whatever is being advanced to us. This heightened complexity suggests that the "language-game" is one of a turn-based nature, where emotional persuasion is not a simple case of "I'll play the feelings card on him and either it works or it doesn't", but instead is an evolving, unfolding scenario where each player has a gamut of available options, or "moves", that each of them can play in response to the other.

In these type of turn-based games to have any chance of success you have to reason strategically, i.e. you have to develop a framework where all your opponent's possible moves and the most appropriate course of action for each is mapped out in advance. Reasoning of this kind is limited by individual ability, that is, each player has a given capacity to read and anticipate his opponent's moves. A helpful way to think about what this means it is to appeal to the "level n" theory of games. To quote Michael Bacharach: "In it, players reason strategically at different "levels". A level zero player has no model of her co-player; level one players believe they are playing level zero players,

and maximise expected payoff on this belief; level two players think a co-player is level zero or level one with probabilities adding to one, and maximise expected payoff; and so on" (Bacharach 2006, p 53).

How does this construal of a turn-based language game affect our understanding of emotional persuasion? At first blush it seems to validate a "systematic doubt" approach when it comes to appraising emotional appeals to an audience. If we conceive each discursive action as a "move" which can be anticipated and parried, then one's susceptibility to be emotionally persuaded can be successfully blocked (that is, one "wins" the game), if one is able to preempt *all* of his opponent's possible moves. There are problems with this view, however, namely that there are two variables which constitute constant sources of uncertainty when we try to map out our opponent's moves: we don't know exactly what our opponent's "level of play" is; and we also can't be fully certain of what his underlying intentions are. So to win we would have to be able to outplay our opponent consistently, but to do so would require us to have a firm knowledge of what he is doing and to what end at every turn. Simply put, to win we would have to "break" the awareness-concealment dynamic by being ourselves fully aware of every conceivable move by our opponent, so that there would be nothing for him to conceal from us. But because such knowledge is practically unattainable, there is always a less than zero chance that the opponent is outplaying *us* and has managed to successfully conceal his true underlying intentions thus far, turning all of his moves up to now as no more than successful feats of misdirection on his part. There is then an obvious threat of endless recursiveness to playing the game, where one's attempts to block our adversary's attempts at emotional persuasion can always be undermined by further speculation on the opponent's actual intentions: "he knows that I know that he knows that I am going to be upset by this, which means that what he is *really* trying to achieve is (…)" and so on.

Its paranoia-inducing effects aside, there may nonetheless be some benefits to adopting this approach. One is that the agent's hyperawareness prevents any of his known routes to emotional persuasion from being exploited by others, while further undermining his opponent's availability to explore the unknown, "unguarded" ones he has yet failed to anticipate. The agent can accomplish this by constantly feeding his own emotional responses to his opponent's overtures into his mental map of his actions and motives, thus inching ever closer to that firm grasp of his opponent's level of play and genuine intentions that is the ultimate goal of the whole enterprise. But ultimately it becomes clear that "systematic doubt" in this particular context is a fundamentally unrewarding strategy for the player because *there are* legitimate ways to be emotionally

persuaded, which by fully endorsing this strategy he shuts himself up to. To go back to our single mother example, there are some things about one's life and story, such as growing up in a broken home, that *to be moved by them* is the emotional response they *should have* on us. But the never-ending scrutinising over them, due to the agent's unshakeable doubt that they can, and possibly are, being weaponised for further undisclosed ends ultimately prevents him from being able to tell apart the emotional responses he *ought to have* from the ones he is being *manipulated into* experiencing. The upshot is that the agent's assurance over the former is undermined, as there is no way to expunge the doubt that they may actually be the latter.

Summary

The skilful orator does not have precise knowledge of his audience's emotional make-up, but he does need to possess a secure knowledge on how emotions work, as this is what allows him to persuade through emotional manipulation.

Emotional manipulation works through directing the audience's attention from the underlying intent of the orator to the value judgement of the situation being discussed. However, in some cases awareness of the former may not have any bearing on engendering persuasion, or it can even heighten its effect.

In normal conditions (i.e. those that fall short of maximal persuasion) both objects of awareness are capable of being entertained by the audience, frequently simultaneously. This occurs through a process we called awareness-concealment dynamic, which possesses some of the characteristics of a shared turn-based language game.

Its turn-based nature forces each player to anticipate each player's moves and to adjust their style of play accordingly. But because no player can fully know neither the other player's intentions, nor their precise level of play, there is seemingly no way to "win without even playing". So one has to engage in the game, but as this leaves open the possibility of being outsmarted by his opponent, he would have to keep playing endlessly to be able to win decisively.

Playing the game in this manner (the "systematic doubt" approach) is ultimately flawed, because it shuts down avenues for legitimate emotional persuasion. If every "move" our opponent makes in the game is a potential red herring for an as of yet undeciphered intention he harbours, then no emotional response one experiences can be deemed appropriate.

III - The “felt intuition” and its disclosure; contriving meaningful experiences

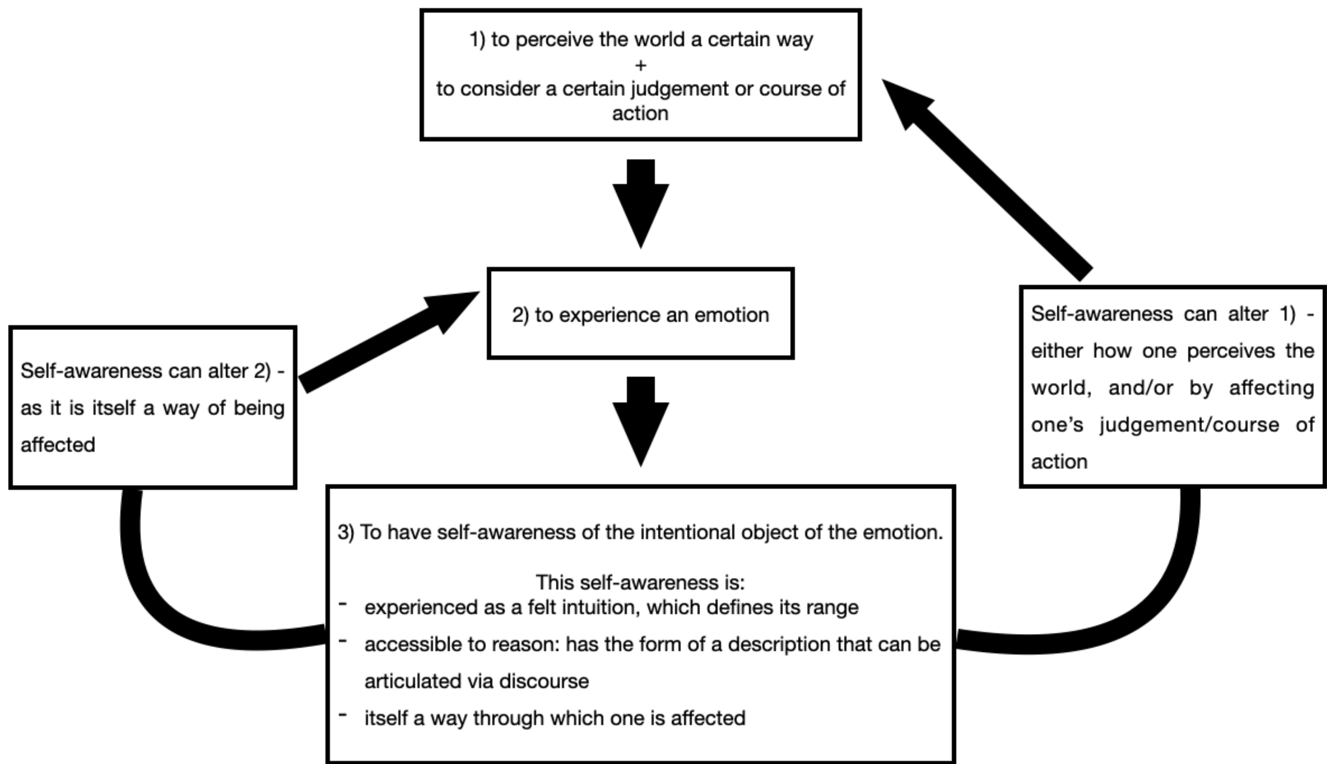
III.1 - the “felt intuition”

We saw in Part Two section II.2 that emotions have intentional objects, that is, there is some thing or state of affairs to which they are a response to. According to Charles Taylor (2016, p 180-81), certain emotions also provide the person who is experiencing them with an awareness of that intentional object, through the form of a description. For instance, I can tell straight away that the old person in front of me, fumbling about in the cash point trying to pay a utility bill, is what is making me feel impatient right now. This description - its meaning - is accessible to reason. Being accessible to reason does not mean that reason automatically “figures it out” as soon as we feel that emotion: for instance I may be feeling angry at something without being able to point the reason why (say that I am distracted looking at my phone while I wait my turn at the cash point without noticing what is causing the delay), or I may not even acknowledge that I am angry *at* something (my partner standing next to me notices I am becoming noticeably more irritated by having to wait, while I remain unaware of this). But because some emotions have this elucidative descriptive content to the person who experiences them, appeals to reason are often effective in changing said emotions, or in making someone aware that he is experiencing them. That is why if someone is experiencing anger it often works to try to talk them out of it - for instance, by drawing attention to how having to wait an extra minute to use the cash point is really not that important in the grand scheme of things, and therefore not an actual reason to feel impatient or angry at that old person.

The meaning can’t be dissociated from the affect, from the experience of the emotion itself (Taylor 2016, p 181-3). The meaning can be thought as this framework through which we can experience the affect. We may not always have a precise account of the meaning of what we’re feeling, but according to Charles Taylor we always have an immediate sense, a “felt intuition” that said meaning is within a certain range when we find ourselves experiencing it in a given situation (Taylor 2016, p 194-97). Such intuitions are felt because they are themselves ways in which we are affected. In addition, the felt intuition can also draw awareness to certain features of a given situation when I countenance certain possibilities for action, as well as it may spur me to further explore

my own nexus of values, judgements, and motives that play a role in my decision-making process.

Schematically, we get something like this:



A difficulty emerges at this point, which can be best illustrated by using Charles Taylor's murder example (Taylor 2016, p 182). He mentions that we can all easily discuss murder without being instantly repelled by it. So apparently we can countenance certain actions, or possibilities for action, without bringing to the fore the emotion which is supposedly tied to them. That is, we can be in 1), without it leading necessarily into 2). We would argue that in some cases yes, but not in others. While we *can* discuss murder dispassionately in a more abstract manner, as in the trolley problem, say, the more we flesh it into an actual scenario where a certain course of action becomes a real possibility for myself (the "what if I pushed this person right in front of me into the line as the train is approaching" kind of situation), the more likely it is that it will trigger the emotion correlated to it, 2), which in turn will bring out 3), that is, the more salient it would make the "felt intuition" of what it would be like for me to actually commit murder in the here and now.

The fact that the felt intuition, 3), can then go on to impact both 1) and 2) is intuitively appealing. Finding myself oddly calm while I ponder the murder of a stranger

next to me in real life is something I may find particularly unsettling, and perhaps revelatory of my own values towards the life of others. But what exactly is happening here? How can 3) , which was caused by 1) and 2), then itself go on to affect both 2) and 1)? To answer that we need to resort to another of Charles Taylor's concepts, that of engaged understanding. Taylor argues that the meaning of certain terms cannot be narrowed down to a purely cognitive account; instead, they are also intrinsically linked with the affect that generates them. These meanings he terms "life meanings", which can broadly be classed as those who are in some way connected to human doings in the world (me considering whether to push someone under the train), as opposed to those which can be grasped without affect, which he terms instrumental meanings (say those used to describe the material properties of things in the world). For these "life meanings" Taylor argues that the experience of the felt intuition is the only way for me to grasp the kind of intentional object they are about. So my understanding of such meaning has to be engaged - I have to be affected in a certain way for they to resonate with me, for me to get what they are about. And to get what they're about one has to share to a significant degree the outlook in which they make sense; and this in turns means being affected in a certain way when they "come into play" (Taylor 2016, p 217). That is why felt intuitions are both caused by 1) and 2), and they themselves can affect 1) and 2).

III.2 - Disclosure

Accessing the meaning of the felt intuition and making sense of it are two distinct things. Just because we experience a felt intuition does not mean we immediately grasp its meaning to us. Often the felt intuition presents itself first as a puzzle, a quandary, to the person experiencing it. In our desultory train murderer example, we saw how his lack of repulsion while contemplating that possibility could lead him to ponder what exactly his morals are (and possibly what is preventing him from going ahead with it). To understand what the felt intuition means to us, what it reveals about ourselves and our choices, we need to appeal to yet another concept from Charles Taylor, namely that of disclosure. Disclosure is tightly connected to the idea of articulacy, that is, of being able to state the content of the felt intuition as a description (Taylor 2016, p 187-194). As such it is something that usually cannot occur without words, although one can also convey them in a pre-verbal manner, through enactment (Taylor 2016, p 224-227). Why is that? A meaningful experience that changes our outlook on things cannot be confined to the pure

realm of sensation, at least if such a meaningful experience is to play an operative role in changing how we appraise, judge and feel things. This is so because (at least a part of) the way it accomplishes said change is by allowing me to come up with a way to *describe* this new way of being in the world. So for instance if I were to become a vegetarian, that change in my personal outlook would bring with it an ability to formulate an argument that would capture at least some of my reasoning behind why I no longer eat meat (argumentativeness as intrinsic to vegetarianism being something we can all assuredly take for granted).

This kind of change effected by the articulation of meanings can be understood as a revelation of things that were lurking underneath the surface. It can also be though as a transition to an error-reducing state (Taylor 2016, p 199), as such descriptions can make vivid certain nexuses of salience between phenomena that were not apparent to us before, which once we became aware of provide us a firmer handle on things. But is more than a simple revelation, because to grasp those meanings is to change the phenomenon itself, that is, how we experience and frame what is happening to us, and also our ability to deal with the situation (Taylor 2016, p 190-91). This is so on account of the tightly-knit connections and reciprocal interactions between the different domains of how I perceive, judge and act in the world (1), the emotions brought about by it (2), and the felt intuitions connected to both (3) we explored earlier.

One further central aspect to disclosure is its shareability. Now the only way we can impart the contents of a meaningful felt experience to others is either through framing them into discourse, or enacting it through outwards behaviour. But what *actually* gets through to others when we try to share our felt experience is, if we are successful, that original sense of puzzlement, of an enigma posed by that particular predicament we found ourselves in, to which that felt intuition was a response to. We can apparently only convey the “unprocessed”, not yet fully articulated meaning, so to speak. Now why is that? Why can’t we impart “pre-packaged-fully-digested-life-changing experiences” to each other, *contra* to what all the self-help books and past and present gurus apparently claim? The reason lies in the alluded transformative character of the change that one goes through when one experiences such a felt intuition. Its fully articulated, “processed” form that fully discloses its meaning necessarily has to be idiosyncratic in nature. Why? Because each one of us has to make sense of it in one’s own terms, tying it to one’s own lattice of meanings, beliefs, commitments and values, as only this way can it actuate a genuine change in outlook in the person who goes through it (Taylor 2016, p 188-191). In short, no matter how articulate you make your account of your own transformative

experience, for it to work as a meaningful experience to others it has to be apprehended *by them* as a felt intuition first.

III.3 - Contriving meaningful experiences

The quizzical, experiential nature of the felt intuition is shareable. It is all that *can* be shared, from what we just saw: after experiencing it, each person then has to disclose the meaning such felt intuitions hold for him. But if we go back to our theme of persuasion through emotions, a question arises: is it not possible that such intuitions do not actually need to come about in the way described (the 1 - 2 - 3 pathway described above) for them to be effective in engendering conviction in others, but instead the audience only has to *believe* that such was the case? Recall our story of the orator raised by a single mother: could not the orator just straight up *lie* about his upbringing in a single parent home, and imaginatively construct a story that touches all the sensitive points that a person who *did* experience such an upbringing would likely tell others? And in turn, would not this well crafted story actually impart the “felt intuition” to those susceptible to it in his audience in just the same way as if he did actually live through it? If this is so, and we have a very strong intuitive pull telling us that it is, then the effective orator is the one who can concoct “disclosures” at will in his audience, without such intuitions necessarily having to originate from his own lived experience. It would all come down to craftsmanship, one’s ability of going through the motions of skilful misdirection that are inherent to the awareness-concealment dynamic we discussed before, without any regard for whatever it is that gives those intuitions its revelatory nature in those who experience them.

To start untangling this knot, we first need to give more content to what a meaningful experience with a contrived or fabricated origin is. It will help to divide these fabricated accounts in two categories, the outright implausible ones, and the plausible. A through and through falsified meaningful experience that no one could conceivably make any sense of would necessarily be barren, as it would fail to advance any understanding for anyone. This would be so because such a hypothetical experience would not be enmeshed in the skein of values, commitments, and ways of being in the world for any person at all at that moment in time, which is the requirement for it to provide the kernel on which its disclosure would expand upon: for instance, Neil Armstrong’s felt experience of walking on the moon for someone in Antiquity.

A plausible falsified meaningful experience, on the other hand, *could* help advance one's self-understanding, notwithstanding its manufactured origins, but only if certain conditions are met. Which ones, exactly? Firstly, even a fully contrived experience has to be located within a certain range within one's own personal perceptions, desires, judgements and so on - the engaged understanding we alluded to earlier - for one to be able to provide an articulate, coherent account of it to others. So if I was trying to convince others I walked on the Moon, it would help my case if I was able to portray myself as having been an elite American airforce pilot in the Sixties, and the easiest way to achieve that would be if I in fact was such a person, as I would have a wide breadth of relevant life experiences from which I could draw upon to make my falsified account believable.

My narrative having to be rooted in a relevantly similar domain of experience is in turn connected to the second condition required for me to be able to share the content of the contrived felt experience with others, namely that such an experience has to be conceivable *to them*: only to people to whom the Moon landings are something within the realm of the possible would the felt experience of what it actually was for a human to walk there make sense. Going back to the example above, it would difficult to envision how could anyone, no matter how skilled a storyteller, or how good at persuading others, would be able to convey Neil Armstrong's meaningful experience to someone like Aristotle in his day. For all his intellectual brilliance, such a thing would seem outright impossible to him in his time, probably even more so than to an ordinary man in the Acropolis, as for Aristotle to accept such a belief would place it at odds with his laboriously constructed physical and cosmological doctrines. In short, the requirement of plausibility for their effectiveness makes it that any such contrived meaningful experiences have be relevantly tied to both the orator and audience's general outlook on life.

So we have just seen that contrived meaningful experiences can advance self-understanding, if the conditions for plausibility are met. One would then assume genuine ones, which are inherently plausible, would always achieve this (as they are grounded in actual experiences felt by actual people). However, it is frequently the case that felt intuitions with a genuine origin somehow miss the mark and fail to elicit a response. For instance, many people have had genuine "Damascene conversions" in their own lives, but their own personal outlook is such that Saint Augustine's account of his will just leave them cold and fail to resonate with them. Why is that? A possible explanation is that, as we have seen, even though a commonality of outlook is a presupposition for the

experience of the felt intuition, its articulation by each individual has to be made in terms that make sense to himself. This makes the precise spelling out of its content idiosyncratic in nature, as each person can only grasp the intentional content of someone else's account of their meaningful experience through their own engaged understanding. So it could very well be the case that a fully spelled out description of the meaningful experience by someone, no matter how vivid and clearly articulated, such as Saint Augustine's, may nonetheless fail to elicit the personal process of disclosure in a particular person who just so happened to go through a similar experience.

Summary

Certain emotions provide the person who experiences them with a felt intuition. The felt intuition is a description of said emotion's intentional object. On the one hand this description is accessible to reason via articulation through the form of discourse; on the other is itself experienced as an emotion, as a reaction to how the world affects us. We grasp this felt intuition through a process called engaged understanding: it presupposes a certain outlook on life and be affected a certain way in order to experience them; and to grasp what that intuition is about is in turn to have one's outlook on life and emotions moved by them.

The possibility of articulation through discourse of this felt intuition is what allows us to make sense of it and to share it with others. This process is both a revelation of aspects of the experience that we we here hitherto unaware, and a change in the nature of the experience itself, hence Charles Taylor calling it disclosure. We share the experience of the felt intuition, not its meaning.

Its fully articulated meaning is idiosyncratic in nature. This means that its full expression is attained by the individual enmeshing it into one's own lattice of meanings, beliefs, commitments and values. Only through this process can it engender a genuine change in outlook of the person who goes through it.

For a meaningful experience to disclose its meaning it has to be plausible. This does not mean that they have to be "genuine", but it does mean that they can only be effective if in some way they draw on a plexus of meanings, values, and general outlook on life that both orator and listener share to a significant degree.

Conclusion

Ethical actions are on one end of the spectrum when it comes to knowledge over one's motives for action. On the other end of that spectrum are actions performed in complete ignorance. Neither are often instantiated in real life - for nearly all of us, nearly all of the time, knowledge over our motives for action will fall somewhere in the middle. Some of those motives we are able to articulate into reasons, and those reasons provide an explanation as to why we act the way we do. These explanations are often self-validating, for instance, when the agent ponders over what he has done, and after doing so he arrives at reasons that provide him with additional insight over those initial motives.

We called this self-validating partial knowledge of our motives assurance. Its self-validating nature poses a problem. It is not the case that we can only feel assured of *genuinely explanatory* motives for behaviour, as we often are assured that we are doing something for a given reason but the *actual* reasons why we do it are altogether different. But it is also not the case that any motive can be made to explain behaviour by the mere fact that the agent can state it as a cause. That is why we can all distinguish between motives and pretences. So a way to state the problem is to say that the self-validating nature of assurance can sometimes be deceitful.

Now a simple way to solve the problem would be if we were able to pick apart the motives that genuinely actuate behaviour from the ones that don't. Unfortunately it is not that simple, as such an heuristic investigation over one's motives for behaviour possesses certain inescapable features, among which the following are of special interest to us:

- it is language-dependent - articulation into speech acts is a requisite for making sense of one's inner motivations, and to be able to convey it to others;
- it is a collective endeavour as much as an individual one - our self-understanding over what constitute motives for behaviour happens within a wider backdrop that sets constraints over how such an enquiry is conducted, over what are legitimate or illegitimate motives, and so on;
- it is developmental in nature - we are inducted from early life into socially acceptable ways of conducting it, which then, if successful, we further develop into more autonomous modes of self-enquiry;
- its conclusions have the nature of a disclosure - grasping one's motives is both a revelation and a creation of those very motives by the agent, as they are the product of what Charles Taylor called engaged understanding

These features point to assurance in moral reasoning as being the outcome of persuasion. Persuasion, as we saw, by operating at the nexus of reason and desire that actuates choice, allows us to explain how each individual agent can arrive at compelling motives for his judgement and actions. We looked at the different ways through which this could be achieved: by bringing forth reasons that are most compelling to that person, by affecting their emotions, by modulating the felt experience of the communicative exchange through which persuasion occurs, and so on. But persuasion works in another way as well. It can come about not only as a result of our communicative exchanges with each other, but also when we purposefully enact behaviour that signifies to others our judgements and inner states which are their supposed ground. This is led us to explore the Aristotelian idea of character as a tool for effecting persuasion.

We are likely to persuade others that the motives for our actions are what we think they are if they conform to how we habitually think, feel and behave in relevantly similar circumstances. Acting in character is inherently persuasive, and the ethical conception of character is what accounts for that. The layered, developmental nature of how we come to value certain things as ends makes it that we cannot change those ends at a whim. So whenever we advance an argument or act in a way that seemingly stems from our character we are making a very strong case as to why we judge or act in the way that we do. What makes it so compelling to others is that its rootedness in our own outlook on life portrays the motives that actuated our behaviour as the most plausible and moving *for us* at that moment in time.

But here we run into a problem. Sometimes we also acknowledge that acting *out of character* is not only eminently persuasive (think of the stern Ulysses being moved to tears by his dog's faithful devotion to him after twenty years away - the only instance when he cried, tells us Homer), but also the appropriate thing for us to do in a given situation. If this wasn't so, then moral growth would be impossible. The issue here is that character is something we not only *evince* through our judgements, thoughts, desires and actions, but also *inhabit.* That is to say, our character is something that through our behaviour, and for any number of reasons, we can to a significant degree distance ourselves from, choose to accentuate certain of its traits and mask or mimic others, contrive completely different ones altogether, and so on.

This is so because the ethical conception of character, with its sedimentary and accretive purposeful dispositions, is *what allows* for the rhetorical one to play its role in effecting persuasion. These two dimensions of character cannot be reduced to one another. Character cannot be reduced to its purely ethical conception, because moral

growth presupposes an ability to change, revise and improve upon what one values as his ends, and the only way this can be achieved is by being persuaded, by oneself and/or others, into changing them. It cannot be reduced to its rhetorical conception either, because if effecting persuasion was *the* underlying explanation for all of this person's behaviour, then that would mean that this person would value persuasion as his highest end. But that cannot be right, as what such a person would persuade others *for* would be his actual end. If he was nothing but a dissembler at heart, then *why* would Ulysses cry when he sees that his dog is the only one in his household who recognised him?

The above argument illustrates how the rhetorical conception presupposes the ethical one for it to even work as a persuasive tool. The ethical and rhetorical dimensions are then conceptually separate, but nonetheless tethered to each other. This however raises another problem: how far can one distance oneself from one's own character for the sake of persuasion? In other words, how far can you really step *out of* character while remaining *in* character? The insights we have gleaned from each section of Part Four will help us come up with an answer.

Our exploration of the requisite conditions for persuasive discourse, in Section I, showed us that although the categorisation dynamic is an inescapable feature of all persuasive discourse, we concluded that *it is not* a prerequisite for persuasion. In fact, the relation between the categorisation dynamic and persuasion goes the other way round: it is only if the conditions for maximal persuasion obtain that a "fit" between the category and the categorised can even take place. A shared commitment to advancing one's understanding of the matter; the discussion being genuinely explanatory; and everyone 's intellectual abilities being fully engaged are what makes a conversational exchange maximally persuasive to those involved. In the absence of any or all of those requisites persuasion can still be brought about, but it will always fall short of what it could be if those requisites were met.

In Section II we emphasised functional knowledge of the emotions and selective misdirection of audience awareness as pre-requisites for *emotional persuasion*. We described it as an ongoing process, which is why we characterised it as a dynamic that follows a pattern similar to a turn-based language game. Emotional persuasion can only occur if each participant is willing to engage in a tentative "give and take" over what exactly works in bringing out certain emotional responses, and what doesn't. This outcome is a consequence of each participant engaging in the process itself.

The way each person plays the game is determined by how skilfully he exercises a complex set of perceptual, affective and intellectual abilities, which among other things

involves being able to discern, preempt and counteract other players' moves. But in order to figure out which moves "work", all those involved have to some degree *share* the features that makes their exercise possible, and this goes beyond having a functional knowledge of emotions: it requires one to actually be *moved* by them. Only that way can each player make sense of their own emotional responses and that of others and strategise accordingly.

We can then say that regarding emotional persuasion, one's room for manoeuvre when it comes to stepping out of character while still remaining persuasive varies. It is dependent on each player's level of play and their relative difference. Contrivance and preempting others' emotional responses is "fair game", which gives a skilled operator a wider scope for dissembling than an inexpert one. However, you will still find two hard constraints that limit how far you can push things: one, you can only get to know what works on others if to some degree it also works on you; and two, trying to block emotions out of the picture entirely by refusing to even engage in the game is ultimately self-defeating, as it shuts down avenues for legitimate (i.e. normatively appropriate) ways of being emotionally persuaded.

In Section III we addressed the idea of the felt intuition as a bridge that connects the emotional to the rational and experiential domains of one's lived experience. We looked at the felt intuition's role in the articulation of what is like for us to be affected by something in the world, and how engaged understanding is the underlying mechanism that ushers those meaningful experiences into the domain of the sayable, thus making them shareable with others.

For the shared felt intuition to convey its meaning to the intended recipient, we stated three requisites: one, it has to be "disclosable", that is, there has to be *something* in it that allows it to be expanded into a fully articulated account that coheres with the listener's outlook on life. Two, such a shared intuition has to be *plausible* for both orator and listener. And three, they cannot be reduced to a purely rational account of them that disregards their nature as emotions, i.e. as a personal response to how things in the world affect *us*.

Each of the three requisites, taken individually, provides a wide scope for dissemblance. In fact, in contemporary life we are much more likely to encounter deformed simulacra of meaningful experiences that meet some (but not all) of the above-mentioned requisites than *actual* full-fledged meaningful experiences. Appeal to the former *as if* they were the latter is part and parcel of everyday public discourse: for instance, from holidays being repackaged as "experiences"; to corporate-speak's

adoption of New Age babble about “finding one’s purpose” and “work-life balance”; or even the widespread assumption that one’s “inner felt experience” somehow provides an unassailable claim to authority on the matter at hand; and many others. We can now see why in all such cases they ring hollow: as they fail to meet *all* the requisites of meaningful experiences in some way or other, their persuasive effect will also be less than it could otherwise have been. Interestingly, the simulacra will generally appeal to something that *is not* one such requisite, namely that the felt experience that engenders the insight be *genuine*. But we noted how if it is to be effective such a felt intuition needs to be *plausible* to all those involved, but not necessarily genuine. Contrived meaningful experiences can and do work as intended *if* the other requisites also obtain.

We then have a wide berth to “step out of character” when it comes to the articulation of our felt experience - we can even go as far as manufacturing a fully contrived meaningful experience that succeeds in its goal of being compelling and moving to others (that is the serious artist’s business, after all). But this additional leeway comes with its own peculiar set of limitations which restricts their use in a purely instrumental manner. The requirements of disclosure, shared plausibility and shared emotional resonance severely limit the amount and breadth of meaningful experiences that can successfully actuate persuasion on others.

In short, the limits for how far we can go out of character while remaining in character are determined by the conditions in which persuasion can occur. Determining the scope of those conditions has led us to some conclusions we would perhaps find surprising when we first started our enquiry: effective moral persuasion does not presuppose prior agreement over each other’s self- and other categorisation; emotional manipulation requires that all parties involved engage in the game, but endless self- and other scrutiny for yet a deeper reason underlying one’s actions is an ultimately flawed strategy; striving for genuineness and authenticity in one’s lived experiences is to look for assurance in the wrong place.

With these conclusions in mind, we can go back to our initial problem, namely that assurance can just as easily become self-undermining as it is self-reinforcing. A first preliminary conclusion is to say that there is no simple computation or procedure whose outcome would generate an unassailable assurance over our motives - that would come about only if we had full knowledge of them, which as we saw, although conceptually possible for the virtuous agent in the case of ethical actions, is usually not there to be had for most of us non-fully virtuous agents doing everyday non-ethical actions. That we act

in incomplete knowledge of our motives should not surprise us by now; their incompleteness is attributable to the fact that the articulation of our inner motives into explanations for our behaviour is always open to revision, reformulation, further questioning, and so on. But we also saw how some explanations are better than others, namely those that effect a move towards a firmer grasp of the objects of understanding they are about. In the case of assurance, something that is persuasive not only to me, but also to other individuals constitutes a first indication that such explanations may rest on steadier ground than purely subjective ones. And if this collaborative enquiry stems from a shared commitment to all those involved in advancing their understanding on the matter and exert their faculties to their full extent when doing so, then we may have additional grounds for having assurance over them.

Such explanations are always open to revision and ultimately supersession (they are always liable to what Taylor calls, citing Paul Ricoeur's expression, a hermeneutics of suspicion (2016, p 226-27)). Part of the reason for this is due to the nature of the objects of understanding such explanations are about. We saw that ascertaining the motives behind human judgements and actions has the nature of a disclosure. This means that such an explanation renders clear the underlying reasons which up to that point remained unknown to the agent, but it often does so by weaving connections between his inner motives, desires, beliefs which may have not been, strictly speaking, causally responsible for the behaviour. So the latent threat is that such explanations are wholly "made up" without being genuinely explanatory: the agent didn't "really" act for those motives, he - or his therapist, his neighbour, the judge, us watching from the sidelines, or whomever - is just making them up *post hoc* for some reason or other.

But the nub of the matter is that if they *are* genuinely explanatory, then they cannot be wholly "made up", by which we mean completely detached from the agent and his nexus of inner motivations. This is because, as we saw before, an explanation that constitutes a genuine progression in understanding is *a move towards* greater generality and necessarily *away from* the distorting effects of individual bias. So such an explanation is something that the agent himself, as well as those who are genuinely committed to grasping what actuated that behaviour, are deemed to find persuasive. An explanation that persuades the best minds on the topic in a given time and place - which includes the agent himself and his point of view - is bound to catch in its net whatever set of beliefs, motives, and inner drives for action compelled the agent to act the way he did. Again, this does not rule out that such an explanation cannot eventually be replaced or upended - but it would only be so by one which effected a progression to an ever higher level of

generality - providing a richer, fuller, even more encompassing account than the one it would be replacing.

To state that those who are eminently qualified will likely be persuaded by the conclusions they come up with if they all commit to arguing in good faith over their motives and actions is of little help to us in real life. As those conditions seldom obtain, the natural tendency is for one to feel *less confidence* in whatever conclusions were reached through the modes of shared moral enquiry, with its fractious, agonistic nature, instead of increased assurance over their validity. In short, assurance over our motives is not an issue that can be settled by a wholly abstract account that settles the *a priori* conditions in which said assurance can be brought about. We also need to look at the different modes of persuasion, and how each can lead to assurance in the actual conditions they are exercised in everyday life. This was the aim of Part two of our essay, whose main conclusions with regards to assurance we will sum up next.

Certain outcomes of the rational mode of rhetorical persuasion can produce qualified assurance over their conclusions. One such instance is when both sides are extensively argued for and one side comes out on top, that is, it is found to be genuinely compelling. Of course, a familiar argument, say the one we initially favoured, nestles in with our already held beliefs much more easily than one we were opposed to at the start or had yet failed to consider until we were first exposed to it. That's why the assurance it engenders is qualified. Such assurance is not unassailable; however, if after we tracked the provenance of what makes this new conclusion compelling to us and find *those* motives persuasive, then it can be said that it is legitimate to feel assurance over the initial conclusions.

This further questioning over what makes something compelling to us may lead us down two potential pitfalls. One such pitfall is making one's assurance contingent on what other people's designs on us are. Trying to ascertain our interlocutor's intentions is of course part of grasping *why* they are compelling reasons to us - for instance, something that apparently advances our common interests, but in reality only advances our opponent's without any benefit to ourselves is a very valid reason as to why we should *not* take his arguments at face value. But if our assurance over the conclusions is made entirely dependent on us ascertaining what our opponent's "real" motives are, then we are likely to seldom, if ever, have any confidence in whatever arguments others present to us. So a way out of this potential pitfall is to keep in mind the distinction between something that is persuasive in itself (or absolutely persuasive, that is, to

someone who is uniquely qualified to assess it) and something that is only qualifiedly so (to a given person or group). If we accept that certain reasons are inherently persuasive in themselves, then our opponent's designs on us are an important factor to take into account when scrutinising why we find his arguments compelling, but not *the* determining factor on which assurance ultimately rests.

Another potential pitfall consists in being too easily led into a false sense of assurance by an argument that just "feels right". The danger here comes from two seemingly different directions. From one side, there is the seductive role of metaphor in engendering and sustaining pleasure throughout the communicative exchange. So we may be finding something persuasive because it engenders in us the thrill of coming up with new ideas, but such a spurt of ideational activity is being instrumentally directed from without. From the other side, there is the use of emotion as an effective tool for emotional manipulation to change and/or alter our judgements. So we may be made susceptible to whatever it is that is being presented to us because certain emotional responses that affect our processes of judgement are being elicited by others for their own purposes.

Once we are aware that either of these modes of persuasion might be at work, a possible response would be to deny *any* meaningful role for such avenues of persuasion in ourselves, and consequently to deny our assent to whatever is being advanced that makes use of them. But this would be to err on the side of caution. Worse, such a course of action is just not tenable, and this for two reasons. One, it presupposes a near absolute *self-knowledge* over one's emotional inner responses and make-up (which the saintly fully virtuous agent might possess, but certainly not ourselves). And two, it presupposes a near absolute *self-mastery* over one's emotional responses, where one would be able to fully distance oneself from one's emotional responses and be able to pick them at will, as one chooses each morning which clothes to wear for the day. But this is just not feasible either, because for one, self-mastery presupposes self-knowledge, which as we just saw is virtually unattainable; and two, because mastery at emotional persuasion requires one to be able to be emotionally persuaded himself. As we saw when we discussed the turn-based language game of emotional persuasion, for one to be able to access certain emotions and deploy them operatively to persuade others, one has to a significant extent to be able to be moved by those same emotions himself. That certain appeals to emotion are persuasive is not a flaw or a weakness one leaves open for others to exploit, but instead a *precondition* for effective persuasion to even take place. And once we acknowledge that *there are* appropriate ways of non-rational persuasion, then one's assurance over the conclusions reached is not irredeemably undermined by doubts over

the legitimacy of the means through which they were attained. In short, one's road to assurance entails avoiding the twin shoals of overestimating the role of ascertaining other's intentions, and accepting that non-rational modes of persuasion can also be appropriate routes for developing conviction over one's motives.

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