

## Practical Intuition and Rhetorical Example

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### I

Let us assume with the classical philosophers that we have a faculty of theoretical intuition, through which we intuit theoretical principles, and a faculty of practical intuition, through which we intuit practical principles. This modest assumption would allow us to distinguish conceptual intuitions from perceptual intuitions. I wish to ask how we could then know if our intuitions of practical principles are true or not. Could we justify or verify our theoretical and practical intuitions in the same way? One would think not, for we assume that we have two different faculties for grasping principles of different kinds. We would thus ask what method or technique we could use to justify or to verify our practical principles. The identification of a method for this purpose would appear to be desirable, for surely we ought to have some guide for developing principles for social and political policies. All too often we find that discourse about policy abandons rationality in favor of appeals to emotion or threats of coercion.

Both Plato and Aristotle share our assumption about the division of our intellectual faculties. But Aristotle especially appears to hold a solution for our problem. He presents a rather detailed analysis of our intellectual faculties and virtues and of the intellectual disciplines. And he suggests that an art of discourse and an inductive technique might serve to justify practical intuitions about our ends. The art is rhetoric and the technique argument by example. To be sure, Aristotle does not argue that rhetorical examples serve to justify practical ends. But from what he does say, I believe that we can see how we could justify our ends with examples. After all, rhetoric is an art concerned with discourse of a practical kind, and example is an argument of an inductive sort. In contemporary jargon his analysis of example would suggest how we might discuss social and political policies by means of case studies.

## II

Philosophers of rhetoric have already argued for the importance of rhetorical theory for understanding practical activity.<sup>1</sup> But no philosopher has yet to work out in any detail how Aristotle might argue that we can use rhetorical techniques to confirm or to confute intuitions concerning practical principles. To do this, we perhaps ought to show first how Aristotle distinguishes practical intuitions. He divides the intellect into two faculties. The theoretical intellect concerns things that cannot be otherwise, the practical intellect concerns things that can be otherwise:

Let us assert that there are two parts of the soul which have a principle. The one part is that by which we see the sort of things of which the first principles cannot be otherwise, the other is that by which we see things which can be otherwise. For with respect to objects different in kind, the parts of the soul answering to each of the two objects naturally differ in kind, since the knowledge belongs to these parts in accordance with some similarity and kinship. (*Nichomachean Ethics* 6. 1. 1139a6–11, *Nichomachean Ethics* will hereafter be referred to as *Eth.* This translation and those that follow are mine)

Today we would probably say that the theoretical intellect concerns analyses of conceptions, and the practical intellect analyses of situations.

Aristotle argues that the theoretical intellect has the virtue of theoretical wisdom, which includes theoretical intuition and demonstration (*Eth.* 6. 7. 1141a18–20). Theoretical intuition grasps the first principles of science (*Eth.* 6. 6. 1141a3–8), and demonstration uses these principles to draw the conclusions of science (*Eth.* 6. 3. 1139b31–35).

But he also implies that theoretical wisdom concerns objects that are invariable. He argues that wisdom of this sort concerns objects of most worth.

From what has been said, it is clear that theoretical wisdom is both science and intuition of what is of most worth by nature. (*Eth.* 6. 7. 1141b2–3)

And in what he has said, he implies that objects of most worth are invariable. For he argues that theoretical objects are always the same, but practical objects differ for each species (*Eth.* 6. 7.

1141a20–1141b2). He also explicitly asserts that scientific principles and conclusions both concern invariable objects (*Eth.* 6. 6. 1140b31–1141a1; and *Eth.* 6. 3. 1139b19–22).

The practical intellect has the virtue of practical wisdom, which would appear to include practical intuition and deliberation. And practical intuition appears to grasp the first principles of action. But Aristotle is not completely explicit about its functions. He does clearly distinguish theoretical intuition, which grasps ultimate invariable premises for demonstration, from practical intuition, which grasps ultimate variable premises for deliberation.

Intuition concerns the ultimate facts in two ways. For intuition concerns both the first definitions and the ultimate facts, and argument does not. The intuition in accordance with which there are demonstrations grasps the definitions which are immovable and first. The intuition which is in practical arguments grasps the fact which is ultimate and variable and which yields a proposition of a different kind. (*Eth.* 6. 11. 1143a35–1143b3)

And he implies that practical intuition concerns the ends of our actions. For he also asserts that practical intuition concerns ultimate variable facts that are the first principles of our actions:

The first principles of that for the sake of which are these ultimate facts, for from the particulars arise the universals. Of these, we must therefore have apperception, and this apperception is intuition. (*Eth.* 6. 11. 1143b4–5)

He asserts in effect that practical intuition grasps the ends of our actions. For practical intuition grasps the ultimate facts, and the ultimate facts include the first principles for the sake of which we act. These first principles are universals arising from particulars.

Aristotle is quite explicit about deliberation. He asserts that deliberation concerns the means to our ends (*Eth.* 3. 3. 1112b32–34). And he uses examples from the professions, including politics, to show that we assume our ends and deliberate about our means (1112b11–16). He also illustrates problems that arise in choosing a means with a well known analogy to geometry (1112b16–24).

And Aristotle argues that practical wisdom concerns objects that are variable.

Practical wisdom concerns things human and things about which we deliberate. For this is most of all the function of a man of practical

wisdom—to deliberate well. And no one deliberates about things which cannot be otherwise. (*Eth.* 6. 7. 1141b8–11)

We have also seen that practical intuition as well as deliberation concerns variable objects.<sup>2</sup>

The practical intellect thus appears to have the virtues of practical intuition and deliberation. Practical intuition appears to supply us with universal and particular intuitions about variable ends and means, and deliberation orders our intuitions into a plan of action.

And we see that the theoretical intellect and its intuitions differ from the practical intellect and its intuitions. For theoretical intuitions concern things that cannot be otherwise, and practical intuitions concern things that can be otherwise.

### III

Aristotle is quite clear about how we establish principles of theoretical intuition. His argument suggests that we ought to use an art of discourse and an inductive technique in order to establish these principles. We may use dialectic for intellectual training and for causal discussions (*Topics* 1. 2. 101a28–34), but we may also use this art for establishing first principles for science.

Dialectic is useful with regard to the first propositions of each science. For it is impossible to discuss these propositions from the first principles proper to the science at hand, since the first propositions are the first principles of all propositions. It is necessary to discuss these propositions through opinions concerned with each science. And this function belongs properly, or most appropriately, to dialectic. For dialectic is a capacity for examination such that it holds the way to the principles of all the methods of the sciences. (*Top.* 1. 2. 101a36–101b3)

He would appear to recommend especially the technique of induction. For induction establishes universals.

... it will be useful to discuss how many species of dialectical arguments there are. There are induction and syllogism. What syllogism is, we said earlier. Induction is an approach from the particulars to the universal. For example, if the knowledgeable pilot is the most excellent, and the knowledgeable charioteer, then generally the one knowledgeable in each activity is the best. (*Top.* 1. 12. 105a10–16)

And when he discusses syllogisms, he also uses a schema to show in more detail how induction establishes principles (*Prior Analytics* 2. 23.).<sup>3</sup>

One might be tempted to argue that we could use dialectical induction to confirm our practical intuitions about the principles of our actions. But we see that we cannot. Dialectical inductions can establish only theoretical intuitions. For these inductions establish intuitions about principles of sciences. And we saw that principles of sciences are principles concerned with objects that are invariable. But we also saw that principles of action concern objects that are variable.<sup>4</sup>

#### IV

Aristotle appears to suggest that an art of rhetoric might supply us with a technique to establish principles of practical intuition. For he indicates that rhetoric is an art of discourse, and that it includes an inductive technique. Of its three means of persuasion, rhetoric essentially persuades by means of argument (*Rhetoric* 1. 1. 1354a11–31). And rhetorical argument includes enthymeme, which is deductive, and example, which is inductive (*Rhet.* 1. 2. 1356a35–11). Comparing it explicitly with dialectical induction, Aristotle explains that rhetorical example is inductive.

When we prove a proposition from many similars, this proof is induction in dialectic, and in rhetoric example. (*Rhet.* 1. 2. 1356b14–16)

Rhetoric also appears to concern objects of practical intuition, for it concerns variable objects.

The function of rhetoric is to deal with things about which we deliberate and for which we have no art. . . . And we deliberate about things which appear to admit of alternatives. About things that cannot be other than they are, either in the past, present or future, no one who takes them to be thus, deliberates about them. (*Rhet.* 1. 2. 1357a1–7)

Example would therefore appear to be a technique capable of establishing practical principles. For it is an inductive argument, and it concerns variable objects.

Yet Aristotle does not discuss example as a technique for determining practical ends. He argues instead that example serves as a

technique for determining means to our ends. Of the three branches of rhetoric, deliberate rhetoric helps us to determine a course of an action, for it urges us to perform or not to perform some action (*Rhet.* 1. 3. 1358b8–10). With rhetoric of this kind we deliberate about the usefulness or the harmfulness of proposed actions (1358b21–25). But Aristotle implies that a deliberative rhetorician merely accepts the ends of his audience. To determine these ends, a rhetorician must study the constitutions of his audience and their habits, customs, and interests (*Rhet.* 1. 8. 1365b21–25). And he argues that a rhetorician of this sort is concerned merely with means. For he reminds us that deliberation is not about ends but rather about means (*Rhet.* 1. 6. 1362a17–19).

And even though he describes example as inductive, Aristotle himself does not argue in his *Rhetoric* that example uses particular propositions to establish universal propositions. Example uses particular propositions to prove particular propositions.

Example proves a relation neither of part to whole nor of whole to part nor of whole to whole but of part to part—of similar to similar. (*Rhet.* 1. 2. 1357b26–29)

He himself uses an example to illustrate how one particular proposition might prove another particular proposition.

For example, one might prove that because he asks for a bodyguard, Dionysius wishes to establish a tyranny. For earlier Peisistratus asked for a bodyguard, when he was scheming, and when he received one, he became a tyrant. And so did Theagenes of Megara. (*Rhet.* 1. 2. 1357b30–33)

An example is persuasive because the one particular is better known than the other (*Rhet.* 1. 2. 1357b29–30 and 1357b33–34).

Nevertheless, I believe that we might be able to use example to determine ends. When we deliberate, we cannot use example to determine our ends. But may we not use example for a purpose other than deliberation? Even in deliberation argument by example does make use of a universal proposition, though not explicitly. Aristotle states that his examples of tyrants and bodyguards all fall under a universal proposition:

All these being particulars of the same universal, that he who is scheming to become a tyrant asks for a bodyguard. (*Rhet.* 1. 2. 1357b35–36)

This implicit universal premise suggests that an example may use known particulars to establish a universal, and that it may apply the universal to an unknown particular.

In his logic, Aristotle analyzes example in more detail, and he asserts there that example does prove a universal proposition. He analyzes example not into propositions but into terms.<sup>5</sup> Example shows that the major term belongs to the middle.

Example is when the major term is shown to belong to the middle term by means of a term similar to the third term. (*Pr. Ana.* 2. 24. 68b38–39)

And when he compares example with induction, he asserts again that example establishes a universal proposition, and that it applies the universal to a new particular.

Example differs from induction. Induction shows the major term to belong to the middle by means of all particulars, and it does not apply the conclusion to the minor term. Example applies the conclusion to the minor term, and it does not show the major to belong to the middle term by means of all particulars. (*Pr. Ana.* 2. 24. 69a16–19)

Even if it does not prove it by all, example still proves a universal proposition by some particulars.

Aristotle uses another political example to show how an example establishes a universal and then applies the universal to a particular. He supposes that we wish to prove that for the Athenians to fight against the Thebans would be an evil. He assumes that we must do this by proving a universal, that to fight against neighbors is an evil:

If we should wish to show that to fight against the Thebans is evil, one must grasp that to fight against neighbors is evil. (*Pr. Ana.* 2. 24. 69a2–4)

And we prove that to fight against neighbors is an evil from particulars similar to that under consideration:

Persuasion of this, one obtains from similar particulars. For example, that for the Thebans to fight against the Phocians was an evil. (*Pr. Ana.* 2. 24. 69a4–5)

We assume that war with neighbors includes an Athenian war against the Thebans:

Since to fight against neighbors is evil, and to fight against Thebans is to fight against neighbors, obviously to fight against the Thebans is evil. (*Pr. Ana.* 2. 24. 69a5–7)

He thus shows how an example establishes a universal and applies it to a particular. He also analyzes this example schematically (*Pr. Ana.* 2. 24. 68b4–69a11).

Though we may use it for deliberation about our means, we thus see that we may also use argument by example for establishing principles for our actions. For we may use an example to argue from particulars to particulars and also from particulars to universals.<sup>6</sup>

## V

But why does Aristotle not argue that examples may be used to prove intuitions about universal propositions? Aristotle appears to be less than sanguine about the desirability of changing our practical principles. He argues that our interests lie in preserving the status quo. Rhetoricians must understand the constitutions and the habits, customs, and interests of their people (*Rhet.* 1. 8. 1365b21–25). And they must pay special attention to the ends of constitutions, for people choose actions that realize these ends (1366a1–3).

Aristotle does, however, appear to allow for some use of examples to determine ends. He allows for this use not in deliberation but in education. For he asserts that in early education children should hear myths and fables that prepare them for their occupations in later life. These myths and fables ought to be imitations of those things that they will later pursue (*Pol.* 7. 17. 1336a30–34). And their occupations are, of course, the activities that will be their ends in life.

Unfortunately, he does not leave as much room for change in education as one might hope. For he recommends that education also serve the ends of a constitution and preserve it (*Pol.* 8. 1. 1337a11–21). That is, in fact, the reason why he recommends that education be public (1337a21–32).

Aristotle thus appears to allow some use of example for the determination of ends. He allows that children be told stories that illustrate their future occupations. But this determination of ends in education is limited by the requirements of an established constitution.



## VI

We would conclude then that we may use arguments by example to justify practical intuitions about our ends. Aristotle recommends the use of examples in deliberation for the determination of means, for they serve to establish particular propositions inductively from other particular propositions. But we may also use examples in discussion about policy to determine ends, for they may determine universal propositions inductively from particular propositions.

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## Notes

1. Some philosophers have argued that rhetoric in general, and Aristotle's rhetoric in particular, provides a useful model for viewing politics, especially contemporary politics. Burke, for example, argues that politics conceived as rhetoric allows each person the freedom to define values for himself or herself and to attempt to persuade other persons of his or her values, and that Aristotle's rhetoric provides useful conceptions for distinguishing the means and ends of persuasion even in political campaigns of today. See Richard J. Burke, "Politics as Rhetoric," *Ethics* 93 (1982): 45-55.

Some philosophers have argued more specifically that Aristotle himself gives rhetoric a key role in his conceptions of both ethics and politics. Self and Johnstone agree that Aristotle's rhetoric enables us to determine our moral vision and to submit our vision to the scrutiny of others and to their assent or dissent, and that his rhetoric also has close ties to the practical intellect. It concerns practical truths, for it concerns truths that are contingent and particular. And it enables us to get a good grasp of the means and ends of our actions and of our virtues and vices and our passions. See Lois S. Self, "Rhetoric and *Phronesis*: The Aristotelian Ideal," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 12 (1979): 130-45; and Christopher Lyle Johnstone, "An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the Search for Moral Truth," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 13 (1980): 1-24.

2. I would not deny that contemporary philosophers do disagree about how to interpret Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom, especially his conception of practical intuition. For alternative interpretations, one might consult John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); or Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

3. Aristotle would of course argue that the discovery of a truth is simultaneous with its justification or verification. At least, he so argues with regard to truth discovered by means of argument. And truth of this sort, he states explicitly, includes both induction and example (*Post. Ana.* 1. 1.). Truth discovered by means of perception is, however, another matter (see *Post. Ana.* 2. 19.). On this topic one might consult L. A. Kosman, "Understanding, Explanation, and Insight in the *Posterior Analytics*," ed. E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and R. M. Rorty, *Exegesis and Argument* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973), 374-92.

4. Cooper succumbs to the temptation to argue that dialectic establishes principles of action. He argues rightly that dialectic establishes the first principles of science, and that demonstration draws scientific conclusions. But he also argues that dialectic establishes the first principles of practical reasoning, and that delibera-

tion determines the means to ends. He thus appears to assume that the practical intellect has the virtue of theoretical intuition. See Cooper, esp. ch. 1, pp. 66–71.

Irwin also argues that dialectic is the way to practical principles, and he apparently means principles of the practical intellect. For he argues that dialectic and deliberation do not concern principles of different kinds. They are, in fact, the same method, and they both concern principles of action. Dialectic establishes an ultimate end and deliberation specifies it. He appears to imply that the practical intellect includes the virtues of theoretical intuition and of science. For he asserts that ethical theory is simply more abstract than practical reasoning. See Terence H. Irwin, "First Principles in Aristotle's Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2 (1978): 252–72, esp. 257–59.

5. In his rhetoric, Aristotle would appear to analyze example into propositions because his purpose is to examine it only as a means of persuasion. In his logic, he appears to analyze example into terms because his intention is to explain it more completely as a *mode of proof*.

6. We would thus appeal to the purpose of a rhetorician to decide the debate about whether an Aristotelian example serves as a *proof of particulars* or of *universals*. When we deliberate about means, we would best use an example to establish a particular proposition. But when we engage in a discussion about ends, we would best use an example to establish a universal proposition. For the details of this debate, see Gerard A. Hauser, "The Example in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: Bifurcation or Contradiction?" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 78–90; Scott Consigny, "The Rhetorical Example," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 41 (1976): 121–32; William Lyon Benoit, "Aristotle's Example: The Rhetorical Induction," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 182–92; and Gerard A. Hauser, "Aristotle's Example Revisited," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 18 (1985): 171–80.

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