

ARISTOTLE'S ENTHYMEME REVISITED

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ARISTOTLE has said that enthymemes are "the substance of rhetorical persuasion."¹ In view of the importance he has given the enthymeme, we might reasonably expect to find it carefully defined. However, although there are many hints as to its nature, the reader of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* will find no unambiguous statement defining the enthymeme. The problem is perplexing to one of the ablest of Aristotelian scholars, W. D. Ross, who writes, "The enthymeme is discussed in many passages in the *Rhetoric*, and it is impossible to extract from them a completely consistent theory of its nature."²

The problem is no less perplexing to scholars in rhetorical theory. Some of them have attempted to formulate clear definitions of the enthymeme, based on Aristotle's descriptions. The most notable recent attempt of this sort is James H. McBurney's.³ Other attempts include definitions by Lane Cooper,⁴ Charles Sears Baldwin,⁵ Thomas De Quincey,⁶

and E. M. Cope.⁷ With the exception of Cooper, each attempts to define the enthymeme by showing how it differs from the dialectical or the scientific syllogism. My purpose in this paper is to point out some difficulties in the interpretations given by these men and to suggest a possible definition which does not run counter to Aristotle's descriptions. Since Aristotle's statements, however, seem to permit some variety of interpretation of the enthymeme, further criticism and exploration seem justified.

Consider first Lane Cooper's remarks about the enthymeme. He notes the difficulty of determining Aristotle's meaning and suggests that we simply look at good speeches in order to understand what an enthymeme is. "The arguments good speakers actually use in persuasion are enthymemes," he says, and that "is the answer to our question, 'What is an enthymeme?'"⁸ Cooper defines the enthymeme, not by stating its characteristics and telling how it differs from other kinds of arguments, but by pointing to where it may be found—in persuasive speeches actually made by good speakers. This notion is important in a respect I will try to indicate later; for the moment, however, Cooper's definition is put aside because it does not help us understand precisely what the enthymeme is. It does not tell what characteristics make the enthymeme the substance of rhetorical persuasion.

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¹ *Rhetorica* 1354^a14-15. Unless otherwise indicated, references are to the Rhys Roberts translation of Aristotle's *Rhetorica* in Vol. XI of *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1946).

² W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics* (Oxford, 1949), p. 409.

³ James H. McBurney, "The Place of the Enthymeme in Rhetorical Theory," *SM*, III (1936), 49-74.

⁴ *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, translated and with introduction by Lane Cooper (New York, 1932).

⁵ Charles Sears Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York, 1924).

⁶ Thomas De Quincey, "Rhetoric," *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson (Edinburgh, 1890), X.

⁷ Edward M. Cope, *An Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric* (London, 1867).

⁸ Cooper, p. xxvii.

Baldwin is more specific. He approaches definition of the enthymeme by contrasting it with the syllogism. He holds that by enthymeme Aristotle

means concrete proof, proof applicable to human affairs, such argument as is actually available in current discussions. The enthymeme is not inferior to the syllogism; it is merely different.⁹

Baldwin later says that "abstract deduction is summed up in the syllogism; concrete deduction, in the enthymeme."¹⁰ Apparently he believes that the enthymeme is quite different from the syllogism and that the mark of difference is its concreteness.

Both Cope and De Quincey argue that the essential feature of the enthymeme is its foundation in probability and that this feature separates it from the regular syllogism. De Quincey writes:

An enthymeme differs from a syllogism . . . ; the difference is essential, and in the nature of the matter: that of the syllogism proper being certain and apodeictic; that of the enthymeme simply probable, and drawn from the province of opinion.¹¹

In *An Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Cope rather cautiously says the same: "It appears . . . that the only *essential* difference between the two is that the one leads to a necessary and universal, the other only to a probable conclusion."¹² Later, however, it will be noted that Cope changes his opinion in a startling way.

McBurney defines the enthymeme

as a syllogism, drawn from probable causes, signs (certain and fallible) and examples. As a syllogism drawn from these materials . . . the enthymeme starts from probable premises (probable in a *material sense*) and lacks *formal validity* in certain of the types explained.¹³

The essential part of this definition is the statement that enthymemes are drawn from probabilities and signs.¹⁴ McBurney emphasizes two other important features of enthymemes—the basis of the premises in probability and the lack of formal validity in many enthymematic types. On these two points, he says:

Both dialectic and rhetoric are differentiated from scientific demonstration in the fact that they deal with probabilities and do not attempt apodeictic proof in the sense that it appears in scientific demonstration.¹⁵

Perhaps no other passages in Aristotle bring out more forcibly the point that several forms of the enthymeme are *formally deficient* than these explanations dealing with the refutation of enthymemes. This is an exceedingly important point that is almost universally overlooked. Many rhetorical arguments which are perfectly legitimate in reasoned discourse and which may establish high degrees of probability, are formally deficient; i.e., they cannot be thrown into a formally valid syllogism. Many enthymemes which are wholly acceptable from the standpoint of cogent speech are formally deficient from the point of view of the apodeictic syllogism.¹⁶

Thus, except for Cooper, these writers among them hold that the enthymeme is distinctive on account of (1) its basis in probability, (2) its concreteness, and (3) its usual formal deficiency. Too, they hold that the definition of the enthymeme usually found in textbooks on logic is totally inadequate. That definition, which will be discussed later, makes the enthymeme simply a syllogism having a suppressed premise or conclusion. The task now is to show how the definitions offered by Cope and De Quincey, Baldwin, and McBurney may not adequately distinguish the enthymeme from the other kinds of syllogism (demonstrative and dialectical), al-

⁹ Baldwin, p. 9.

¹⁰ Baldwin, p. 13.

¹¹ De Quincey, p. 90.

¹² Cope, p. 102.

¹³ McBurney, p. 58.

¹⁴ McBurney, p. 66.

¹⁵ McBurney, p. 52.

¹⁶ McBurney, p. 65.

though the definitions do undoubtedly name characteristics which enthymemes usually possess.¹⁷

Cope and De Quincey try to distinguish between the syllogism and the enthymeme on the grounds that the enthymeme always must be probable, whereas the syllogism always must be certain and necessary. But a major fault attends these definitions. They fail to take account of those descriptions of the enthymeme in which Aristotle expressly states that sometimes the enthymeme does begin with certain and necessary propositions and that sometimes the conclusion is necessary. At 1357^a30-32 Aristotle says,

It is evident, therefore, that the propositions forming the basis of enthymemes, though some of them may be 'necessary,' will most of them be only usually true.¹⁸

And at 1356^b14-17 he writes,

When it is shown that, certain propositions being true, a further and quite distinct proposition must also be true in consequence, *whether invariably or usually*, this is called syllogism in dialectic, enthymeme in rhetoric. [Italics mine.]¹⁹

¹⁷ It is important to note that these authors recognize that the enthymeme is a species of syllogism. When they contrast the enthymeme and the "syllogism," they mean by the latter either the dialectical or demonstrative syllogism. Therefore, the question is not, How does the enthymeme differ from the syllogism? Properly speaking, the question is, How does the enthymeme, which is one type of syllogism, differ from the dialectical and the demonstrative syllogism? Aristotle clearly holds that the enthymeme is a kind, or species, of syllogism. At 1355^a6-8 he refers to the enthymeme as "a sort of syllogism"; and at 1356^b3-5 he says, "the enthymeme is a syllogism, and the apparent enthymeme is an apparent syllogism. I call the enthymeme a rhetorical syllogism."

¹⁸ Lane Cooper translates this passage as follows: "Let us grant that only a few of the premises of rhetorical deduction are necessarily admitted, and that the majority of cases . . . may lie this way or that." The translation by Freese (*Aristotle, The "Art" of Rhetoric*, Cambridge, Mass., 1939) reads as follows: "Few of the propositions of the rhetorical syllogism are necessary, for most of the things which we judge and examine can be other than they are."

¹⁹ Cope's translation of this passage may account for his view that probability of premises and conclusion is the essential feature of

Also, at 1396^a2-4 he says, "We should also base our arguments upon probabilities as well as upon certainties."²⁰ From these statements, it seems clear that there is no sharp distinction between syllogism and enthymeme on the basis of probability since the propositions of enthymemes may be certain and necessary.²¹

the enthymeme. Cope's understanding of the passage is substantially different, commencing with the italicized portion: ". . . either universal or general and probable, is called in the former case a syllogism, in the latter an enthymeme." He follows immediately with: "So that it appears from this . . . that the only *essential* difference between the two is that the one leads to a necessary and universal, the other only to a probable conclusion" (Cope, 102). Translations by Cooper, Freese, and Jebb agree with Roberts, however. "To conclude from certain assumptions that something else follows from those assumptions (something distinct from them, yet dependent upon their existing) either universally or as a rule—this in Dialectic is called a syllogism, and in Rhetoric an enthymeme."—Cooper. "When, certain things being posited, something different results by reason of them, alongside of them, from their being true, either universally or in most cases, such a conclusion in Dialectic is called a syllogism, in Rhetoric an enthymeme."—Freese. "When certain things exist, and something else comes to pass through them, distinct from them but due to their existing, either as an universal or as an ordinary result, this is called in Dialectic, a Syllogism, as in Rhetoric it is called an Enthymeme."—Jebb, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1909).

²⁰ Cooper's translation reads: "And he must argue not only from necessary truths, but from probable truths as well." Freese's translation reads: "Conclusions should not be drawn from necessary premises alone, but also from those which are only true as a rule."

²¹ Grote's explanation of the enthymeme indicates that some rhetorical arguments may begin with propositions which are universal and necessary and may produce conclusions which are universally true: "The Enthymeme is a syllogism from Probabilities or Signs; the two being not exactly the same. *Probabilities* are propositions commonly accepted, and true in the greater number of cases; such as, Envious men hate those whom they envy, Persons who are beloved look with affection on those who love them. We call it a *Sign*, when one fact is the antecedent or consequent of another, and therefore serves as mark or evidence thereof. The conjunction may be either constant, or frequent, or merely occasional: if constant, we obtain for the major premise of our syllogism a proposition approaching that which is universally or necessarily true. . . . The constant conjunction will furnish us with a Syllogism or Enthymeme in the First figure. . . . We can then get a con-

McBurney recognizes as the essential part of the enthymeme's definition the same description Aristotle gives in the *Prior Analytics*: "Now an enthymeme is a syllogism starting from probabilities or signs."²² He shares with Cope and De Quincey the view that the premises of enthymemes are merely probable;²³ in addition, he seems to hold that the usual formal deficiency of most enthymemes is an important identifying feature. Yet I think it can be shown that neither of these features absolutely distinguishes the enthymeme.

First, McBurney correctly observes that both dialectic and rhetoric deal with probabilities, with the contingent. As Aristotle often repeats, neither discipline deals with "things that could not have been, and cannot now or in the future be."²⁴ Neither do these disciplines treat subjects which are invariable.²⁵ Therefore, McBurney is correct in his statement, "Both dialectic and rhetoric are differentiated from sci-

clusion both affirmative and universally true." See George Grote, *Aristotle* (London, 1880), pp. 202-203.

Cope's position remains a puzzle. At several places he recognizes that enthymemes sometimes include universal and necessary propositions, yet he holds that the probability of premises and conclusion is the essential feature of the enthymeme. For example, in *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* (ed. John Edwin Sandys, Cambridge, 1877), he says, "The certain sign, the necessary concomitant, is the only *necessary* argument admitted in Rhetoric: its ordinary materials are . . . only probable." (See p. 225; also p. 271, *Introduction*.) We will note later that Cope removes some confusion by altering his position substantially.

²² *Prior Analytics* 70a9-11. Aristotle expands this definition in the *Rhetoric* (1402b12-14) to include examples along with probabilities and the two kinds of signs, fallible and complete proofs.

²³ Walter J. Ong, S.J., has recently expressed a similar view. In *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), Father Ong writes that Aristotle always understands the enthymeme as a "syllogism defective in the sense that it moves from premises at least one of which is only probable, to a merely probable conclusion" (p. 187).

²⁴ *Rhetorica* 1357a1-7.

²⁵ *Topics* 104a3-8.

entific demonstration in the fact that they deal with probabilities. . . ." ²⁶ But he infers (without sufficient warrant, I believe) that the premises upon which enthymemes are built must therefore be probable. He says, for example (continuing the sentence just quoted), that dialectic and rhetoric "do not attempt apodeictic proof in the sense that it appears in scientific demonstration." However, Aristotle indicates that there is one kind of enthymeme that meets the conditions for scientific demonstration. At 1402b18-19 he says, "Enthymemes based upon Infallible Signs are those which argue from the inevitable and invariable." Further, at 1403a10-17 he says:

It will be impossible to refute Infallible Signs, and Enthymemes resting on them, by showing in any way that they do not form a valid logical proof. . . . All we can do is to show that the fact alleged does not exist. If there is no doubt that it does, and that it is an Infallible Sign, refutation now becomes impossible: *for this is equivalent to a demonstration which is clear in every respect.* [Italics mine.] ²⁷

Therefore, whenever we find enthymemes based on infallible signs, we have before us truly demonstrative arguments, resting on inevitable and invariable premises. Such arguments, proper in both rhetoric and science, are (or may be) both materially certain and formally valid.

Further, there is some doubt about the belief, implicit in McBurney's interpretation, that scientific demonstration must always begin with universal and necessary premises. Ross points out that Aristotle is willing to construct a science

²⁶ McBurney, p. 52.

²⁷ Jebb's translation of this passage reads: "Infallible Signs, and the Enthymemes taken from them, will not admit of refutation on the ground that the reasoning is not strict. . . . It remains to show that the alleged fact does not exist. If it is shown that it *does* exist, and that it is an Infallible Sign, then there is no further possibility of refutation; for this amounts to a manifest demonstration."

upon premises that are "for the most part true." He writes:

It is noteworthy that, while Aristotle conceives of demonstration in the strict sense as proceeding from premises that are necessarily true to conclusions that are necessarily true, he recognizes demonstration (in a less strict sense, of course) as capable of proceeding from premises for the most part true to similar conclusions.²⁸

It is clear, then, that scientific syllogisms may be constructed out of highly probable premises and that enthymemes may be constructed out of certain and necessary premises. From this it follows that we cannot claim probability of premises or probability of conclusions as the essential characteristic of enthymemes.

McBurney's second point of emphasis is that many enthymemes are formally invalid, but that they still constitute rhetorical proof. He finds this significant as a distinguishing feature between enthymemes and scientific syllogisms. His point loses its significance, however, when we note that a great many scientific syllogisms are also invalid. For example, of the sixty-four possible first-figure syllogisms, only four are valid. Yet in ordinary talk we often infer successfully from several of the invalid forms. If it is true that enthymemes are usually formally deficient, it is equally true that many dialectical and scientific syllogisms, as used in ordinary discourse, are formally deficient. Hence, formal deficiency may characterize both the enthymeme and the syllogism.

Baldwin's treatment of the enthymeme—the enthymeme is concrete whereas the syllogism is abstract—is also questionable. Many syllogisms have particulars as the subjects of their conclusions, and many enthymemes have abstract ideas as the subjects of their conclusions.

The classic example of the syllogism has "Socrates is mortal" as its conclusion. It could hardly have a more concrete subject. Also, an enthymeme with "Let justice be done" as its conclusion could hardly have a less concrete subject.

Perhaps Baldwin's statement that enthymemes are concrete means that such arguments, when successful, always require a specific human commitment or action. But concreteness in this sense is not peculiar to the enthymeme alone, since dialectical syllogisms sometimes require commitment to conclusions and action in accordance with those conclusions. Indeed, Aristotle says that dialectical inquiry "contributes either to choice and avoidance, or to truth and knowledge."²⁹ If the conclusions of dialectical arguments contribute to truth and knowledge, then intellectual commitment to conclusions is required of those who accept premises. If the conclusions contribute to choice and avoidance, then acts of choice and avoidance are logically required. Therefore, concreteness is not an essential feature of the enthymeme, although, as Baldwin suggests, most enthymemes probably are concrete.

In summary, the following points may be made about the enthymeme. (1) The enthymeme is a species of syllogism which differs in some way from the demonstrative and the dialectical syllogism. (2) The essential difference is not to be found in the probability of its premises, because Aristotle's statements indicate that (a) some enthymemes have as their premises propositions based on "the inevitable and invariable," and (b) some scientific syllogisms may have as their premises propositions that are "for the most part true." (3) Neither is the essential difference to be found in the formal de-

²⁸ Ross, p. 74. See also *Posterior Analytics*, Book II, Ch. 30.

²⁹ *Topics* 104^b1-3.

iciency of enthymemes, because (a) Aristotle holds that some enthymemes (those based on infallible signs) are equivalent to strict demonstrations. Furthermore, (b) in ordinary discourse we often infer successfully by using formally deficient dialectical or demonstrative syllogisms. (4) Finally, the essential difference is not to be found in the concreteness of enthymemes, because (a) this feature does not always characterize enthymemes and (b) it sometimes characterizes other kinds of syllogism.

It is no doubt true that most enthymemes are probable, formally deficient, and concrete. Since not all enthymemes exhibit these features, however, it is impossible to claim any or all of them as the distinctive mark of the enthymeme. Precisely what, then, is the difference between the enthymeme and the demonstrative or dialectical syllogism? If we answer this question, we may be in a good position to formulate a consistent definition of the enthymeme. In the following paragraphs I wish to suggest an interpretation which I believe is in agreement with Aristotle's statements.

In the *Prior Analytics* Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of premises—the demonstrative and the dialectical. Because his distinction provides an important clue to interpretation of the enthymeme, I quote the passage in full.

The demonstrative premiss differs from the dialectical, because the demonstrative premiss is the assertion of one of two contradictory statements (the demonstrator does not ask for his premisses, but lays them down), whereas the dialectical premiss depends on the adversary's choice between two contradictories. But this will make no difference to the production of a syllogism in either case; for both the demonstrator and the dialectician argue syllogistically after stating that something does or does not belong to something else. Therefore, a syllogistic premiss without qualification will be an affirmation or denial of something con-

cerning something else in the way we have described; it will be demonstrative, if it is true and obtained through the first principles of its science; while a dialectical premiss is the giving of a choice between two contradictories, when a man is proceeding by question, but when he is syllogizing it is the assertion of that which is apparent and generally admitted, as has been said in the *Topics*.³⁰

In this passage there are two features which distinguish demonstrative premisses and syllogisms from dialectical premisses and syllogisms. First, the demonstrator *asserts*, or *lays down*, his premises without regard to the wishes of any opponent. On the other hand, the dialectician *asks for* his premises. Instead of laying them down, he seeks the consent of his adversary about them; he gives his adversary "a choice between two contradictories." The first and most important distinction, then, is that the demonstrator lays down his premises, whereas the dialectician asks for his premises.³¹ Second, the main requirement for demonstrative syllogizing is that a premise be "true and obtained through the first principles of its science." On the other hand, the main requirement for dialectical syllogizing is that a premise be apparent and generally admitted.

We should note here that, although the premises of dialectic and rhetoric need not be true and need not be obtained through the principles of some science, it is quite possible that some of them are of this character. Scientific propositions—such as Newton's laws—are often popularized and made part of the class of statements from which the orator draws his premises—the class of

³⁰ *Prior Analytics* 24^a21-24^b12.

³¹ Cope writes that the philosopher, or investigator, proceeds without regard to any respondent; "the man of science is not allowed to choose which side of an alternative he will take." However, the dialectician "depends upon the concessions of his opponent" (*Introduction*, pp 75, 78).

statements which are apparent and generally admitted. Also, the orator may use special lines of argument which properly belong to other disciplines, including the sciences.³²

Several statements in the *Rhetoric* indicate that enthymemes differ from demonstrative syllogisms in the same way that demonstrative premises differ from dialectical premises. At 1355^a27-28 Aristotle says, "We must use as our modes of persuasion and argument, notions possessed by everybody." Also, at 1395^b31-1396^a4 he writes:

We must not, therefore, start from any and every accepted opinion, but only from those we have defined—those accepted by our judges or by those whose authority they recognize. . . . We should also base our arguments upon probabilities as well as upon certainties.

And at 1402^a33-34 he says: "The materials of [rhetorical] syllogisms are the ordinary opinions of men." The practitioner of rhetoric, then, does not lay down premises, but like the dialectician he asks for them. The premises he asks for are notions already possessed by his audience.

We have, then, two kinds of syllogism, demonstrative and dialectical-rhetorical. One important difference—perhaps the essential difference—between the two lies in how premises are secured. In demonstration they are laid down; in dialectic and rhetoric they are asked for. We need now to distinguish between the dialectical syllogism and the enthymeme.

The difference between the dialectical syllogism and the enthymeme is partly the consequence of a difference in the functions or purposes of the arts. Dialectic, says Aristotle, "is a process of criticism," and criticism is its chief

function.³³ On the other hand, rhetoric discovers the available means of persuasion, and persuasion is the chief function of rhetorical discourse. Both dialectic and rhetoric ask for their premises (which may or may not be certain and necessary); but they ask for premises with different ends in view. Dialectic must ask for premises because criticism cannot begin until the parties involved agree on some propositions. Rhetoric must ask for premises—must begin with premises held by the audience—because persuasion cannot take place unless the audience views a conclusion as required by the premises it subscribes to.

The dialectical syllogism differs from the enthymeme also according to the kind of response made by the respondent and by the audience when each is asked for premises. The nature of this difference will be noted shortly. For the moment, let us distinguish among the three species of syllogism in the following way: (1) Demonstrative syllogisms are those in which premises are laid down in order to establish scientific conclusions; (2) Dialectical syllogisms are those in which premises are asked for in order to achieve criticism; (3) Rhetorical syllogisms, or enthymemes, are those in which premises are asked for in order to achieve persuasion.

It was stated near the beginning of this paper that recent theorists, including E. M. Cope, have tended to reject the definition of the enthymeme as a syllogism having one or more suppressed premises. In his *Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Cope holds that the essential difference between the syllogism and the enthymeme is that the former "leads to a necessary and universal, the other only to a probable conclusion." He holds also that the definition of the enthymeme as a syllogism having a sup-

³² "In proportion as a speaker uses specific arguments, he is deserting the province of rhetoric; but in view of the comparatively small number of general arguments available Aristotle allows the speaker to use specific arguments as well" (Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 271).

³³ *Topics* 101b2-4.

pressed premise, is totally inadequate, since the suppression of a premise is not essential to the enthymeme. These views are presented in the text on pages 102 and 103. In a lengthy footnote on page 103, however, Cope alters his view drastically:

The view of the distinctive characteristic of rhetoric given in the text was adopted mainly in deference to the decided opinion expressed by Sir W. Hamilton. I am now however convinced that he is wrong, and return to the opinion which I have myself previously formed upon the question. If the only difference between the rhetorical enthymeme and the syllogism lay in the probability of the one and the certainty of the other, it would leave no distinction remaining between the dialectical syllogism and the rhetorical enthymeme: besides which the position is not true of the dialectical syllogism, whose materials and conclusions are all probable and nothing more. Plainly the difference between the two latter is one of *form*. The syllogism is complete in all its parts; the enthymeme incomplete; one of the premisses or the conclusion is *invariably* wanting.

Thereafter, in the text, Cope refers to the enthymeme as an "imperfect syllogism"³⁴ and reiterates the view expressed in the footnote quoted above. For example, at one place he writes:

The enthymeme is deduced from a few premisses . . . and often (always, I believe; else what remains to distinguish it from the dialectical syllogism?) consists of fewer propositions (including the conclusion) than the primary or normal syllogism.³⁵

Cope's change of opinion seems to have been prompted chiefly by his recognition that, given his earlier definition, he could not distinguish between the dialectical syllogism and the enthymeme. Earlier he had said that the enthymeme leads to a probable conclusion, whereas the syllogism leads to a necessary conclusion. However, he observed that the dialectical syllogism also

leads to probable conclusions. Therefore, the enthymeme is confounded with the dialectical syllogism. In order to separate the two, he returned to the position he had previously repudiated—that the enthymeme is an incomplete syllogism. In justifying this latter view, he writes that there is no need for the rhetorician to state all his premises,

because if any of these is already well known—and the propositions of the rhetorician *are* well known, being popular and current maxims and opinions, and generally accepted rules and principles, which he uses for the major premisses of his arguments—there is no occasion to state it at all; the listener will supply it for himself.³⁶

There are two difficulties in Cope's revised definition of the enthymeme, provided we consider the enthymeme as the chief instrument of rhetorical persuasion. First, if we understand the enthymeme as simply a syllogism having one or more suppressed premises or a suppressed conclusion, then we have to maintain that whenever Socrates omits a premise or whenever he lets his adversary draw the necessary conclusion, he is at that moment practicing rhetoric instead of dialectic, regardless of how concise and rigorous his argument. We must also maintain that whenever an orator fully states his premises and conclusion, he is at that moment practicing something other than rhetoric.³⁷ Because of these difficulties, it seems to me that the definition of the enthymeme as

³⁶ Cope, *Introduction*, p. 158.

³⁷ Cope's position leads him directly to this consequence. Note especially the last line of this quotation from his *Rhetoric of Aristotle*, p. 221: "I will repeat here, that the enthymeme differs from the strict dialectical syllogism only in *form*. The materials of the two are the same, *probable* matter, and of unlimited extent. . . . The difference between the two is simply this, that the dialectician rigorously maintains the form of the syllogism, with its three propositions, major and minor premiss and conclusion: the rhetorician *never* expresses all three—if he did, his enthymeme would become a regular syllogism."

³⁴ Cope, *Introduction*, p. 105.

³⁵ Cope, *Introduction*, pp. 157-58.

an incomplete syllogism must be rejected, unless we use the term "incomplete syllogism" in a special sense.

The second difficulty in Cope's definition is the inadequacy of the reason he gives to support it. He holds that the orator need not state all his premises because the listener already knows most of them and will supply them for himself. Undoubtedly this is a good practical reason which adequately explains why most enthymemes do in fact have suppressed premises. But is this reason strong enough to explain Aristotle's claim that the enthymeme is the substance of rhetorical persuasion? It seems to me that the reason is not strong enough, because rhetorical persuasion can occur whether an orator vocalizes both or only one of his premises. The success or failure of rhetorical persuasion does not turn upon the suppression of a premise but upon something more fundamental, which I will try to point out shortly.

If we use the term, "incomplete syllogism" in a special sense, however, I believe it expresses very nearly what Aristotle means by the enthymeme and avoids the difficulties which attend Cope's definition. Let us understand the term in this sense: To say that the enthymeme is an "incomplete syllogism"—that is, a syllogism having one or more suppressed premises—means that the speaker does not *lay down* his premises but lets his audience supply them out of its stock of opinion and knowledge. This does not mean that premises are never verbalized, although to verbalize them often amounts to redundancy and poor rhetorical taste. Whether or not premises are verbalized is of no logical importance. What is of great rhetorical importance, however, is that the premises of enthymemes be supplied by the audience.

The same thought may be expressed in a different way. An orator or a dialectician can *plan* a rhetorical or dialectical argument while sitting at the desk in his study, but he cannot really *complete* it by himself, because some of the materials from which he builds arguments are absent. The missing materials of rhetorical arguments are the premises which the audience brings with it and supplies at the proper moment provided the orator is skillful. The missing materials of dialectical arguments are the premises which the respondent supplies when he chooses between contradictories. The relationship of practitioner of rhetoric to audience and of practitioner of dialectic to respondent is precisely the same: In either case, the successful building of arguments depends on cooperative interaction between the practitioner and his hearers.

But we must note an important difference between the forms of interaction which occur in rhetoric and in dialectic—a difference which further clarifies the distinction between the dialectical syllogism and the enthymeme. In dialectic, the interaction between speaker and respondent takes the form of question and answer, and the respondent vocally contributes premises for the construction of dialectical syllogisms. The aim of dialectic is criticism—often the aim is criticism of the respondent's own position; since arguments are formed from premises supplied by the respondent, dialectical arguments have the virtue of being self-critical. Probably there is no more effective way of appraising one's own opinions than the activity of dialectic, because when one assumes the role of respondent and answers the dialectician, one supplies premises from which damaging conclusions may be drawn. The respondent in fact builds a

case for or against his own position; he criticizes himself.

The interaction between speaker and audience must have a different form in rhetoric, however, because continuous discourse by the speaker does not allow him to obtain premises from his audience through question and answer. The speaker uses a form of interaction which has its "counterpart" in dialectic, but instead of using question and answer to achieve interaction, he uses the enthymeme, which accomplishes for rhetoric what the method of question and answer accomplishes for dialectic. The speaker draws the premises for his proofs from propositions which members of his audience would supply if he were to proceed by question and answer, and the syllogisms produced in this way by speaker and audience are enthymemes.

The point to be emphasized, then, is that enthymemes occur only when speaker and audience jointly produce them. Because they are jointly produced, enthymemes intimately unite speaker and audience and provide the strongest possible proofs. The aim of rhetorical discourse is persuasion; since rhetorical arguments, or enthymemes, are formed out of premises supplied by the audience, they have the virtue of being self-persuasive. Owing to the skill of the speaker, *the audience itself helps construct the proofs by which it is persuaded*. I believe this is the reason Aristotle calls enthymemes the "substance of rhetorical persuasion," and it may be the reason for Lane Cooper's remark that we will find enthymemes in the *actual* speeches of good speakers.³⁸

³⁸ It may be worthwhile to note that this interpretation of the enthymeme—and of the whole sphere of rhetorical discourse—provides a sound theoretical justification for that kind of speech criticism which studies the audience and relevant aspects of its context as carefully as it studies the speaker and his preserved speeches. According to this interpretation, a recorded speech is only partially a speech. The

In this paper I have examined three common interpretations of the enthymeme. One interpretation emphasizes the content of its propositions and holds that the distinctive feature of the enthymeme is the material probability of premises and conclusions. A second interpretation emphasizes its formal structure and holds that the enthymeme is distinctive because usually it is formally deficient. The third interpretation emphasizes its relationship to human affairs and holds that the distinctive feature of the enthymeme is its concrete relationship to human thought and conduct. These interpretations were rejected because each failed to separate the enthymeme from other kinds of syllogism. Each failed to name a truly distinguishing feature.

I have suggested a fourth interpretation which emphasizes the manner of construction of the enthymeme, rather than content, form, or relation. In addition to avoiding the difficulties which attend the other interpretations, I think this view succeeds in focusing upon the unique function of the enthymeme in rhetorical persuasion. This view holds that the enthymeme succeeds as an instrument of rational persuasion because its premises are always drawn from the audience. Accordingly, I offer the following as a tentative and exploratory definition. The enthymeme is a syllogism based on probabilities, signs, and examples, whose function is rhetorical persuasion. Its successful construction is accomplished through the joint efforts of speaker and audience, and this is its essential character.

complete speech is the actual speech which occurs when speaker and audience interact, either cooperatively or not. Therefore, a sound speech criticism of past speeches must reconstruct the actual speech, and this requires detailed study of the particular audience to determine the premises it would or would not have supplied.

