AMBIGUITAS INSTEAD OF *AMBIGERE;* OR, WHAT HAS BECOME OF *INVENTIO* IN HOBBES.

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In Hobbes's *Briefe of the Art of Rhetoric*,[1] the first sentence of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* I.2, containing the definition of the art, is rendered thus:

> *Rhetorique*, is that Faculty, by which wee understand what will serve our turne, concerning any subject, to winne beliefe in the hearer.
> (Hobbes 1986, 40)

This definition presents rhetoric as a purely self-serving art. Quentin Skinner (1996, 257) remarks in this context that there is nothing in Aristotle that corresponds to such a claim. In a similar spirit Wilhelm Hennis (1963, 100) had noted that Hobbes's version deviates characteristically from Aristotle's original.

Let us see why this is so. We may start by comparing Hobbes's version with an authoritative translation and propose to use G. Kennedy's *Aristotle: On Rhetoric* for this purpose:

> Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see <*theorēsai*> the available <*to endechomenon*> means of persuasion <*pithanon*> (Aristotle 2007, 37).

Assuming the expression 'to win belief in the hearer' to be a semantically acceptable rendering of '*pithanon*' (what wins belief in the hearer is a 'means of persuasion')[2] and disregarding minor differences

between the two versions (understand/see, faculty/ability, etc.), the responsibility for any incongruence between the *Briefe* and its original seems to lie in the choice of the expression 'what will serve our turn' as corresponding to *endechomenon*. Now *endechomenon* means 'possible' in either a material or a formal sense of the term, i.e. it may mean 'allowed', 'admitted', or ' logically possible' (Liddel Scott Jones 1996, s.v. *endechomenon*). There seems to be no way of extending the dictionary meaning of this term so as to cover 'what will serve our turn', an expression of self–interest, mostly used in a pejorative sense (Skinner 1996, 257, n.45). It follows that, as regards *endechomenon*, Hobbes's translation is wrong; or at least it is wrong if the term is here to be taken literally. But does Hobbes take it literally? It can plausibly be argued that he reads *endechomenon* as a trope, that for him in this particular context a term meaning 'possible' or 'available' represents a polite way of referring to self–interest, i.e. an euphemism. The rationale of such a reading might be reconstructed as follows: saying that in rhetoric one is looking for what is simply available or possible, would be understating what one really does: the aim of rhetoric being victory, what one looks for, in exercising this art, is, naturally enough, the means to such an end; that is, one looks for what will serve one's turn. Thus in translating *endechomenon* as 'what will serve our turn', the *Briefe* substitutes the meaning conveyed by the trope (euphemism) for the literal meaning of the trope word.

The conception of the aim of rhetoric this rationale presupposes is explicitly stated in the next chapter of the *Briefe*:

> …because the end of *Rhetorique* is victory; which consists in having gotten *beleefe* (Hobbes 1986, 41).

This phrase is Hobbes's addition to the text of the *Rhetoric*, and according to the editor of the *Briefe*, Harwood, it is "an important interpretation of the function of rhetoric" (Hobbes 1986, 41, n.5) – an interpretation that Skinner will characterize as blatantly un-Aristotelian (Skinner 1996, 257).

Aristotle does not refer explicitly to persuasion as the *aim* of rhetoric anywhere in the *Rhetoric*; and, in a passage prefiguring the definition of the art he actually denies that obtaining persuasion is the *function* of rhetoric:

> its function [*ergon*] is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case, as is true also in all the other arts; for neither is it the function of medicine to create health but to promote this as much as possible; for it is nevertheless possible to treat well those who cannot recover health" (Aristotle 2007, 36).

Most Renaissance commentators have read this passage with Cicero's distinction between the duty and the end of rhetoric in mind:

> But the duty [*officium*] of this faculty appears to be to speak in a manner suitable to persuading men; the end [*finis*] of it is to persuade by language" (Cicero 1993, 15).

Cicero goes on to argue for his distinction, referring to the medical example, in a manner reminiscent of the *ergon* passage in the *Rhetoric*. It should be noted that this distinction, which the young Cicero obviously derives from some Greek – most probably Stoic – source, has become one of the most repeated adages of Latin rhetorical theory through the ages; one finds it in the first pages of almost every rhetorical treatise, from Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis* to C. Soarez's De Arte *Rhetorica* (see Martianus 1997, 160; Soarez 1569, 1 *recto*)

Ergon is thus interpreted as the Ciceronian 'duty'. But there is something missing here: unlike Cicero, Aristotle seems to introduce the notion of *ergon* absolutely, and not as opposed to or distinguished from a notion of 'aim'. In order to preserve the symmetry of their interpretation, Renaissance and early modern theorists tend to supplement the "missing part" of the opposition in their commentaries. So Ioannes Sturmius:

> and he (sc. Aristotle) distinguishes between *ergon kai telos*. He calls ergon *to kathēkon*, the duty. *Telos* he calls the aim" (Sturmius 1570, 13 *recto*).

Sturmius not only adds the "missing part" of the distinction, he even "quotes" it and its synonyms in Greek. There is of course no mention of *telos* in the Greek text in question, and no *kathēkon*, which is hardly an Aristotelian term at all. Sturmius translates the *de inventione* into Greek and reads it back into the *Rhetoric*. In the commentary accompanying his edition of Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, a book well known to Hobbes, Th. Goulston formulated the idea as follows:

> its duty is not to persuade, …, but to look up everything, from every possible point of view (*omnia omnino videre*), that might contribute to persuasion: persuasion, on the other hand, is the end, which is something separate from this duty" (Aristotle 1809, 248).

So a phrase such as "the end of rhetoric is persuasion" or "getting beliefe" is at any rate a commentator's gloss. In inserting it into the *Briefe* Hobbes does no more than follow the mainstream exegetic tradition of his time – his own contribution being in the emphasis placed on victory, regarded here as a synonym of 'getting beliefe'. But Hobbes does deviate, and quite significantly, from this exegetic tradition in that he derives the definition of the art *from its end*, and not from its function or duty. Goulston is quite clear on this point: "the definition of rhetoric is derived from its duty" (Aristotle 1809, 249) – which, in the light of the distinction just mentioned, is tantamount to saying "and not from its end". And this deviation of Hobbes's is at the same time a blatant misrepresentation of what Aristotle wanted to say; G. Kennedy calls the *ergon* passage an anticipation of the definition proposed a few lines later (Aristotle 2007, 37 n. 32). Its role is exactly this: to justify beforehand a definition of rhetoric given in terms of *endechomenon pithanon*, that is in terms of possibility, and to make clear that it is to be read as pertaining to the *ergon*, and not to the end of the art. In the *ergon* passage Aristotle tells us what he means by his definition: and this is not what Hobbes translates; in a sense it could even be regarded as its direct opposite.

The art of rhetoric is therefore an ability (*dunamis*), the exercise of which moves in the realm of possibility. It looks for what can be said in favour of every possible subject, from every possible point of view: *omnia omnino videre*. Of course, such an exploration can, and eventually will, be used in the composition of one's actual speech, that is, eventually it will 'serve one's turn' to win belief in the hearer. Only this 'eventually' is not part of the *ergon* of rhetoric, and therefore it is no concern of the art of rhetoric proper, as defined through this *ergon*. Thus conceived, the art of Rhetoric stops one step before the actual speech and its effects, and does not take into consideration the factual interests of the speaker. Hobbes, on the other hand, defines the art in precisely those terms which Aristotle had chosen to leave out: the actual effectiveness of the speech, the self–interest of the speaker.

It has already been noted that the *Briefe* is a biased piece of work. Quentin Skinner observes, for example, that "his <sc. Hobbes's> translation of Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* omits the entire section in which Aristotle speaks of the crucial importance of taking steps to make a good impression on one's audience" - and this because Hobbes maintained that "the establishment of *ēthos* is an irrelevance, not merely in the natural sciences, …but in the moral sciences as well" (Skinner 1996, 285). But altering the definition of the art is something on a different scale altogether. Hobbes knows his ancients well enough to know the importance of definitions in classical philosophy. Indeed there are cases, and the *Rhetoric* is one of them, where the definition is the theory itself, *in nuce*.

The *dispositio* of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* I.2 follows a pattern that one finds also in the *Topics*, and in the *Prior Analytics*: the definition of the art, as identified with the purpose of the treatise, forms the very opening phrase of that part of the work (be that a chapter, as in the *Rhetoric*, or a book, as in the *Topics* and *Prior Analytics*) which exposes in a systematic way the pure theory of the art. In fact, the initial phrase serves as a blueprint for the exposition, which takes the form of an explanation, one by one, of the terms used in the definition and of the notions these terms presuppose. Change a single word in this opening phrase, and you will get a different exposition of a different theory.

As can be seen in the case of *ēthos* highlighted by Skinner, there is no real difficulty in rationalizing a partial modification of a theory: we can always formulate a statement, a rationale, to which this modification corresponds. Things are different when it comes to omitting, or radically misrepresenting, a definition such as the one in *Rhetoric* I.2. This is not a move that can be easily supplied with an explicit rationale, because it concerns the very identity of the thing we are referring to. Which raises some difficult, and at the same time interesting, questions: can there be a statement corresponding to, and rationalizing, such a misrepresentation (or modification) of the definition? What is the ingredient, or the ingredients, of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that Hobbes wants to eliminate, or neutralize, thereby, and why?

It is worth noting, in this connection, that the definition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* I.2 has not been altogether immune to criticism. Quintilian finds it flawed, chiefly because it leaves out the results of the exercise of the art: "some are not concerned with results at all, like Aristotle, who says that 'Rhetoric is the power of discovering all

the persuasive elements in a speech '" (Quintilian 2001, Books 1-2, 357). Interestingly enough, Aristotle himself, considering how he proceeds in analogous occasions, would seem to endorse such a criticism. In *Politics* I, for example, there is a definition of chrematistic, the art of acquisition, which is couched in terms comparable to those of the *Rhetoric*:

> … its function <*ergon*> is to be able to discern <*dunasthai theorēsai*> from what source a large supply can be procured". Here too, then, 'being able to see the possibilities' is the function, or the duty, of the artist. But having said that, Aristotle goes on to add: "as this art is supposed to be creative <*poiētikē*> of wealth and riches" (Aristotle 1959, 43).

And we could say that this is the definition proper of chrematistic - that which explains why its function is the exploration of that particular field of possibilities. Compared to this definition, that of *Rhetoric* I.2 seems incomplete: it lacks the 'because' - it lacks the reference to the product of the art.

We can use the definition of chrematistic as a model for reconstructing the missing second part of the definition in *Rhetoric* I.2; the result would be something like the following:

> … as this art is supposed to be creative of persuasion.

This can in turn be analysed in terms of successfully defending the views or the interests of the speaker. Our reconstruction of the missing part would thus yield something quite similar, if not identical, to the definition proposed in the *Briefe*. It is as if the definition of rhetoric were broken in two, Aristotle and Hobbes holding one piece each, but affirming it in a way that excludes the other's piece. What could be the motives of such parallel exclusions?

The definition of *Rhetoric* I.2 is also meant as a cathartic move: Aristotle tries to keep the theory free from any extra-technical element, and that would be difficult if he were to include in the definition any, even implicit, reference to success or victory; a success-oriented definition of the art would inevitably tend to justify all the means used in obtaining persuasion, even the extra-technical ones. This is why Aristotle's definition keeps its distance from the actual performance and the result of the rhetorical speech. This attitude could be described as

a form of *epochē, avant la lettre. Epochē* is a suspension of judgement. The content that in the actual judgement would be affirmed as real, or true, subsists in the *epochē* as a possibility, co-present with the possibility of its opposite. Indeed, in this theory, this sphere of possibility is the presupposition of all judging, a latent presupposition that only *epochē* can bring to light. In a like manner, all possible lines of argument, the pro and the contra in a given case, coexist in the art, as defined in the *Rhetoric*; thus defined, the art constitutes the presupposition of actual persuasive speech. The compossibility of the pro and contra, that is, in essence, the in *utramque partem disputare*, appears thus as something interwoven with the logical - or dialectical - fabric of rhetoric, i.e. as something that is difficult to explain away either in terms of interests and passions, or in terms of a defect of language.

A beginning of an answer to the questions raised above would then be that the *Briefe* does not tolerate Aristotle's 'piece' of the definition of rhetoric, because that would imply the recognition of an intrinsic logical value to *in utramque partem disputare* - something inconsistent with Hobbes's deprecatory attitude to this rhetorical practice (Skinner 1996, 320).

When we nowadays speak of logic in rhetoric, we usually refer to some lesser sort of logic - that is, we inquire into questions concerning the validity of the rhetorical means of proof, such as the enthymemes, examples etc., and weigh our findings against some standard of 'good' logic. This is one aspect of logic in rhetoric – indeed, it is one the discussion of which was inaugurated in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* I.2, as a part of the pure theory of the art - but it is not all of it. We deduce, more or less validly, our conclusions from premises which in rhetoric, as in dialectic, have to be propositions acceptable to the hearer or interlocutor. Finding or formulating such premises is the work of invention, that is, essentially, of the system of *topoi*: a *topos* is, according to the definition so acutely formulated by J. Brunschwig, a machine for making the premises for a given conclusion (Aristote 1967, xxxix). Sara Rubinelli will justify the use of this metaphor for definitional purposes by invoking the universal applicability of the *topos*, as well as the fact that it "describes a way of constructing an argument by focusing on the formal structure of its constituent propositions" (Rubinelli 2009, 14). It is in this sense, as universally applicable and formal, that the topical procedure of invention qualifies for the characterization 'logical'.

The structure of a topical system of invention comprises:

(**a**) a list of basic concepts or categories;

(**b**) an inventory of questions and/or propositions to which the hearer or interlocutor is known to assent, that is things that are already accepted (Aristotle's *endoxa*), and

(**c**) a repertoire of operations, by means of which one aims at establishing a (logical or quasi-logical) connection between some element of the inventory (b) and the conclusion that the speaker wants to make acceptable; these operations employ as constants the elements of list (a).

In Aristotle's *Topics* list (a) consists of the four *predicabilia* (definition, genus, proper, accident). In Cicero's *De oratore and Topica* there is instead a more elaborate system of classification, starting with two categories, intrinsic and extrinsic, of which the extrinsic is further subdivided so as to produce categories related to definition, to the relation of parts to whole, to "things which are somehow related to the subject at issue" - which in turn produces the most important set of subdivisions comprising such notions as 'genus', 'species', 'similarity', 'antecedent', 'effect' - etc. The Renaissance tradition of invention (Rudolph Agricola, Petrus Ramus) follows, more or less, the Ciceronian model.

The above tripartite structure is a generic schema, applying to the Aristotelian, Ciceronian and Renaissance versions of the topics. Now, when the moderns speak of topics, and of invention, they usually focus on (b), the inventory of current opinions, to the detriment of the logical and systematic ingredients of the theory (Skinner 1996 263-265). This reduction of invention to the commonplace or to prejudice, that is, to dogmatism as opposed to criticism, or as opposed to doubt, does not do it justice. Invention is important to the Renaissance reformers of the *Trivium* precisely because it is at its best when dealing with lost cases, or when problemizing things. One of the best synoptic illustrations of invention I can think of is the court scene in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. When the scene opens, we know that Antonio, the merchant of Venice, has no case. The bond he signed states that if he fails to pay a certain amount of money at a certain date, he must let his lender have a pound of his flesh. As he did not pay in

time, the merchant has to yield the pound of flesh, to be taken nearest his heart: this decision is as certain as the application of a simple rule. Stating that the insolvent debtor must pay the penalty is almost tautological. It takes the knowledge of the young doctor Balthazar (Portia) to turn this tautology into an antilogy. Her knowledge, as a doctor, consists in invention: she applies something like Cicero's list (**a**) above and stops at 'effect' - because there she finds the premise she is looking for: the effect of cutting the flesh is shedding blood and shedding the blood of a Venetian citizen is a punishable offence. It is thus the logic of invention that can transform an instance of 'rule applying' that presents itself as univocal to something quite ambiguous, a *quaestio*: Shylock may have his pound of flesh, because this is the law, but the shedding of Venetian blood, which is the effect of this act, will cost him his fortune, and eventually his life, this also being the law.

So the practice of invention, as a logical system or as a logical machine, produces difference. Now, this same practice also forms some sort of space of communication between the opposing parties - and even a condition of impartiality, the difference notwithstanding. In Cicero's *De oratore*, a dialogue between lawyers concerning their art, there is a passage where the most practically minded of them all, Antonius, describes what he actually does in order to study a case and prepare his speech. He first meets, he says, with his client *en tête à tête*, so that the latter may speak more freely, and he argues to him the case of his opponent,

> so that he may argue his own, and openly declare whatever he has thought of his position. Then, when he has departed, in my own person, and in perfect impartiality, I play three characters (*tres personas unus sustineo summa animi aequitate*), myself, my opponent and the arbitrator" (Cicero 1942, v.1, 275).

This is like a magnification of Aristotle's definition in *Rhetoric* I 2: playing at defending one's case, and then the case of the opponent, is an exercise of the "ability in each particular case to see the available means of persuasion." Hanna Pitkin glosses this role playing in Cicero's *De oratore* as follows: "he puts himself in their places, like the detective trying to outguess the criminal by asking 'What would I do if I were he'?" (Pitkin 1967, 25) It seems, however, that in rhetoric, as Cicero and Antonius with him understand it, there is more to this identities game than putting oneself into the opponent's place, as one

is advised to do when planning a strategy, e.g. in chess, or when employing tactics such as the detective's: these substitutions presuppose a more or less homogeneous or univocal set of rules, which determine the meaning of the elements (the pieces, the moves) of the game. Cicero's theory of invention is, on the other hand, embedded in the theory of *status* (see Tobias Reinhardt *in* Cicero 2003, 5f) where such a homogeneity or univocity need not be supposed as an initial condition. The theory of *status* is a controversy-oriented system of thought that accepts difference rather than identity as a starting point. The system's nuclear concept is the *quaestio* (roughly, an issue). What is at stake in a *quaestio* is not simply the truth or falsity of a proposition, but also the identity of what is involved in it.

The standard example used for teaching the *status coniecturalis* (that is, when what is at issue – the *quaestio* - is whether something happened or not) runs as follows:

> In the forest Ajax, after realizing what in his madness he had done, fell on his sword. Ulysses appears, perceives that Ajax is dead, and draws the bloody weapon from the corpse. Teucer appears, sees his brother dead, and his brother's enemy with bloody sword in hand. He accuses Ulysses of a capital crime" ([Cicero] 1964, 35).

If Ulysses pleads 'not guilty' to this accusation, that is if his having done it or not becomes the object of a *quaestio*, no description of his acts can be taken as obvious or '*comme allant de soi*'. The 'same' act can be described as 'murdering Ajax' or 'trying to help Ajax': which means that once the machine of *quaestio* has been set in motion, the things it concerns are no longer 'the same'. This 'creating of *dissensus*' is quite similar to the effect of *paradiastole*, the rhetorical technique of producing antithetical (re-) descriptions of the same act, or the same situation – a technique which, as Q. Skinner has shown, has had a major role in shaping, *ex oppositione*, Hobbes's moral theory (Skinner 2004, 116). It could be argued that the *quaestio*-engendered *dissensus* is even more radical than that of *paradiastole*, inasmuch as it is not restricted to values, virtues and vices, but affects also purely descriptive statements. But there is also an antithesis here: *Paradiastole* is an inherently negative notion – as a species of ambiguity it cannot but be regarded as defect or a weakness of discourse. On the contrary, in the Ciceronian theory of invention, *quaestio*–engendered *dissensus*

is not something negative. The verb connected to *quaestio* is *ambigere*. Something *ambigitur*, means that this something is at issue. *Ambigere* is to be distinguished from its cognates, *ambiguus*, *ambiguitas* in this important way: it is not perceived as an obstruction to communication, it does not belong to the defects of discourse, but rather to its conditions - for in order for there to be discourse at all, first there must be a subject of controversy (*aliquid, de quo ambigitur*), says Quintilian, in a passage meant as an exposition of Ciceronian theory (Quintilian 2001, Books 3-4, 89).[3]

These two notions, *quaestio* and *ambigere*, are of primary importance for Cicero: in the context of a discussion concerning the unity of discourse – that is, concerning whether philosophical and rhetorical discourse are separate domains and irreducible to one another, or whether they can be regarded as a continuum - it is in terms of *quaestiones* and *ambigere* that Cicero will construct his argument in favour of the homogeneity of all discourse. The difference between the two discourses is presented as a difference between two types of *quaestiones*: rhetoric (both forensic and political) is the discourse that deals with *quaestiones* involving particulars (e.g. whether this man has committed theft or not), while philosophy's *quaestiones* are free of any reference to specifics (e.g. is there a god, are the senses deceiving us).[4] Cicero argues that the two discourses form a continuum, because all things, that is all things we can discuss about, are the same as regards their fundamental property: this fundamental property is no other than *ambigere* – which in this way is affirmed as the basis of all discourse:

> Accordingly, every matter that can be the subject of inquiry and discussion involves the same kind of issue (*omnis igitur res eadem habet naturam ambigendi*) whether the discussion falls in the class of abstract deliberations or of things within the range of political and legal debate (Cicero 1942, v.2, 89).

There is no limit, in principle, to the scope of difference a *quaestio* engenders. In cases such as the *status coniecturalis* example above, we may say, e.g., that Teucer and Ulysses see things with different eyes, or even that they belong to different, that is mutually incommensurable, worlds. It is worth noting, however, that in the Ciceronian scheme the practice of *inventio* forms also a means of communication between the potentially incommensurate positions thus constituted:

Antonius's mask-bearing provides an illustration for such transiting. Mask-bearing does not presuppose that the positions moved between are reducible to a common denominator, i.e. it does not demand of its objects (nor does it project on them) a certain degree of sameness: instead, it consists in a process of discontinuous self-change. This schema from the *De oratore* can be read in the light of a classical *topos* of controversy, the trial of Orestes, in Aeschylus's *Eumenides*. Here the opposition between the matriarchal Furies and the patriarchal Apollo is the archetype of a conflict between two incommensurable and irreconcilable universes. In Aeschylus's play, the possibility of judgement cannot, and does not, suppose some alleged *tertium comparationis* between those two; when Athena proposes herself as a judge in this trial, it is her lack of identity or, what comes to the same, her multiple identity that she will invoke in her favour: she is a woman and not a woman, and then a man and not a man (Aeschylus 1989, 67). Thus, she can identify to the one as well as to the other of the parties; impartiality is not a view from nowhere, but the ability, the faculty (*dunamis* in the *Rhetoric's* definition) of changing places, or of changing masks.

One shall look in vain for traces of this logic of difference in Hobbes. His "attack on '*inventio*'" (Skinner 1996, 257-267) concerns, as we have already mentioned, an invention reduced to the list of commonplaces. In his view, the controversies that Classical and Renaissance tradition analyses in terms of status theory are nothing more than the products "of a faculty" whose function is "to wrest the sense of words from their true meaning" (Hobbes 1840, 6-7). Difference becomes a synonym of semantic instability, the elaborate metalanguage of *ambigere* thus ceding its place to mere ambiguity. This constitutes a complete reversal. As we have already noted, ambiguity and the concepts related to it are negative notions; ambiguity is a loss of univocity, and it points to its restoration in the same way that privative concepts point to that of which they are privations, e.g., in the same way the term 'disease' points to 'health' – or to 'cure'. And indeed the use of a concept like *paradiastole*, considered as a radical defect of discourse, a dangerous threat, poses almost automatically the demand of its neutralization (Skinner 2004, 124) - which will come in the form of some identity-securing foundational theory. What is important here is that while the correctness and the coherence of such a theory may depend on its analytic rigour and the like, its value as a theoretical proposal will always equal its value as a 'therapy', that is, it will depend on a decision: the decision to regard controversy as

nothing more than the result of some sort of semantic instability, interpreted in this context as a failure, a weakness or a threat.

Substituting the identity-oriented metalanguage of semantic instability for that of *ambigere* is a move that is not explicitly justified in the work of Hobbes. One might argue that such a justification is not needed for someone like Hobbes for whom the sixteenth century reform of the *Trivium* was an event that could be taken for granted. This reform was a sort of new deal: it allocated invention, as the logical part of rhetoric, to logic [i.e. to dialectic: the seminal work in this direction being the *De inventione dialectica* of Rudolph Agricola, (= Agricola 1992), whose title adequately expresses its main thesis] leaving rhetoric with the "part of words" – elocution and delivery. So if Hobbes's concern is rhetoric, it is with words that he will have to do, and not with the logical schemas of invention.

Even if this be true, it does not account for the misrepresentation of the definition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1.2 in the *Briefe*. The most vociferous herald of the *Trivium* reform in the 16th century had been Petrus Ramus. To him the idea of the redistribution of content between rhetoric and dialectic was something of an *idée fixe*: this did not prevent him from recognizing the obvious, that there is a logical part (namely invention) in the *Rhetorics* of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian - even if he did so in order to denounce their works as theoretical malformations, because, as he kept repeating, Rhetoric should not contain this part (see Ramus 1986 *passim*, Ramus 1992 *passim*). Now, if Hobbes were to follow Ramus's example, recognizing the logical part in traditional rhetoric while denouncing its inclusion in it, he would be led to admit the separate existence, if not the worth, of something like *inventio dialectica*, that is, of a logic of difference. And it seems that this is precisely what Hobbes did not want to do. In 'not seeing' Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, it is actually the Humanist logic of difference that he tries to keep out of sight.

The answer to our initial question - if there can be a statement rationalizing Hobbes's treatment of the definition of *Rhetoric* I.2. - must therefore be negative. The substitution of *telos* for *ergon* is an operation that has to remain as furtive, as is the elimination of the Ciceronian-Humanist invention in Hobbes's work. We have already seen that the reference to possibility (*to endechomenon*) in the Aristotelian definition may be interpreted in the sense of the duality of the *in utramque partem disputare*. Such a definition of rhetoric might put to the test Hobbes's 'tactics of ignoring'; that is why it has to disappear, so quietly.

NOTES

1. A synopsis of Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, dictated by Hobbes to his pupil, William Cavendish, in Latin. The only accessible version of this writing is the English translation, anonymously published in 1637 – and which counts as the first English translation of Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*. The edition used here is that of J.T. Harwood (Hobbes 1986). Lately the authorship of the English translation has been contested (cf. Skinner 2004, 4, n.27 and 179, n. 15) on the grounds of internal evidence, i.e. considering what Hobbes was more likely to have written. This paper may also be read as a contribution to this discussion.
2. McKeon 1936, 30 uses this expression in his rendering of the definition: "Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the faculty by which in any subject we are able to win belief in the hearer;" Conley 1990, 166, thinks that the use of this expression by Hobbes represents "a slight alteration in the definition of rhetoric".
3. "nam primum opportet subesse aliquid, de quo ambigitur". Translation D. Russell: "First, there must be something which is the subject of doubt". I translate *aliquid de quo ambigitur* as "subject of controversy". Cf. Viano 1995, 201: "*Infatti, la prima condizione necessaria è che ci sia qualcosa, su cui esistono pareri controversi*" and Quintilien 1865, 105: "*car il faut d'abord qu' il y ait un objet de controverse*."
4. These are, in the technical jargon of status theory, the *quaestiones finitae* and *quaestiones infinitae*, or *hypotheseis* and *theseis*.

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