Aristotle begins the Rhetoric with what at first glance must qualify as one of his most evidently fallacious arguments. He infers from the fact that persuasion can be done by chance and experience and habit that it can be systematized, and then concludes that it can be done by art:

Since both chance and habit are possible, it is clear that matters can be reduced to a system (δοσολογεῖν)... and such an examination all would at once admit to be the function of an art (1354a7-11).

This argument seems to rely on the tacit premise that if anything can be done by chance and habit, it can be reduced to a system and done artfully. (To call such an examination the function of an art is to identify the search for causes with a rational capacity for making, Aristotle’s definition of τέχνη at Nicomachean Ethics 1140a9-11.) But were such an implication a correct license for inference, we would be entitled to be confident that arts existed for everything that we do through chance and habit, and we could then infer that an art of loving existed, an art of being charming, of acting gracefully or with non-chalance, an art of extracting confessions through torture, and an art for all kinds of things Aristotle himself elsewhere says cannot be the subject of art, such as finding metaphors and giving pleasure. But
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each of these kinds of action is a means of producing the end of rhetoric, viz. persuasion, that, according to Aristotle, falls outside the art of rhetoric. On the basis of these opening lines alone, Aristotle would have no grounds for holding that some efficacious means of persuasion lie outside the art of rhetoric, nor that these \( \varepsilon \tau \varepsilon \chi \nu \omega \alpha \) can at the same time be outside the art yet used by its practitioners. Perhaps most threatening, such an argument, by the excessive strength of its underlying warrant, seems even to prove that virtue can be taught: virtuous activity is one of those things that is engaged in sometimes by chance, sometimes by experience and habit; it should then follow that virtue can be systematized, and hence practiced, and acquired as the result of teaching and art.

The Rhetoric as a whole sorts its way through this potential minefield by constructing a new kind of art, which is practical rather than productive, an art which is a kind of doing rather than making.\(^2\)

While poetic arts (including that side of rhetoric which can be conceived as a poetic art) are of the universal (e.g., 1356b30-37; see also Ethics 1180b8-29; Politics 1254b6-12), the practical art of rhetoric will have as its “function to deal with things about which we deliberate, but for which we have no art” (1357a4). The act of artful persuasion becomes, in Aristotle's analysis, an \( \varepsilon \nu \varepsilon \rho \gamma \varepsilon \omega \alpha \) rather than a \( \kappa \iota \nu \nu \sigma \omicron \zeta \) which leads to an end—a state of being persuaded—distinct from the act itself. To the extent that Aristotle's art of rhetoric is practical rather than poetic, he can employ practical rather than poetic criteria and so exclude as atechtical some means of producing the effects at which the art aims, no matter how successfully they bring about that end. To that same extent, artful rhetorical activity will not be a substitute for practical wisdom (\( \phi \rho \omicron \nu \nu \sigma \varsigma \varsigma \varsigma \)), and Aristotle will have blocked the inference, apparently sanctioned by the opening, that virtue can be taught.

\^[2\]. This, and the rest of the assertions in this paragraph, are large and controversial claims. I argue for them in greater detail in Garver 1986 and Garver forthcoming.

it is the token of genius (\( \varepsilon \upsilon \theta \omicron \omicron \omicron \zeta \)). For the right use of metaphor means an eye for resemblance.” (I am grateful to Wendy Olmsted for pressing this analogy, and for other difficulties raised with my argument.) For just one example of more stringent criteria for the existence of an art than just a rational capacity for making, see Nicomachean Ethics 1153a23: “It is no accident that there is no art whose function it is to produce a pleasure; an art never produces an activity but the capacity for an activity. Still, the arts of perfumery and cookery are generally considered to be arts of pleasure.” Also apposite is the observation in Posterior Analytics 87b19: “There can be no demonstrative knowledge of the fortuitous.”