

## Rhetoric to Alexander

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RHETORIC TO ALEXANDER\*\*††

*E. S. Forster*

†1[Aristotle to Alexander. Salutation.

You write that you have often sent persons to me to urge upon me the project of noting down for you the principles of public speaking. It is not through indifference that I have put off doing so all this time, but because I was seeking how to write on this subject with more exactitude than any one else who has concerned himself therewith. It was only natural that I should have such an intention; for just as you are desirous to have more splendid raiment than other men, so you ought to strive to attain to a more glorious skill in speech than other men possess. For it is far more honourable and kingly to have the mind well ordered than to see the bodily form well arrayed. For it is absurd that one who in deeds excels all men should in words manifestly fall short of ordinary mortals, especially when he knows full well that, whereas among those whose political constitution is democracy the final appeal on all matters is to the law, among those who are under kingly rule the appeal is to reason. Just as their public law always directs self-governing communities along the best path, so might reason, as embodied in you, guide along the path of their advantage those who are subject to your rule. For law can be simply described as reason defined by the common consent of the community, regulating action of every kind. Furthermore, I think that you are well aware that we praise as good men and true those who employ reason and prefer always to act under its guidance, while we abhor as savage and brutish those who act in any matter without reason. It is for this reason too that we punish wicked men when they show their wickedness and admire the good when they display their excellence. Thus we have discovered a means of preventing possible wickedness, while we enjoy the benefits

of existing goodness. In this way we escape annoyances which threaten us and secure advantages which we did not previously possess. Just as a life free from pain is an object of desire, so is wise reason an object of contentment.

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Again, you must realize that the model set before most men is either the law or else your life and your reason. In order therefore that you may excel all Greeks and barbarians, you must exert yourself to the utmost, so that those who spend their lives in these pursuits, using the elements of excellence in them to produce a beautiful copy of the model thus set before them, may not direct themselves towards ignoble ends but make it their desire to partake in the same excellence.

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Moreover, deliberation is the most divine of human activities. Therefore you must not waste your energies on subordinate and worthless pursuits, but desire to drink at the very fountain-head of good counsel. For what man of sense could doubt that, while it is a sign of foolishness to act without deliberation, it is the mark of true culture to accomplish under the guidance of reason anything that reason commands? It is plain to see that all the greatest politicians of Greece resort to reason first and then to deeds, and further that those who have won the highest repute among the barbarians have employed reason before action, knowing full well that the consideration of expediency by the light of reason is a very citadel of salvation. It is reason which we must regard as an impregnable citadel, and not look on any fortress built by man as a sure safeguard.

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But I hesitate to say another word, lest I should seem to be writing for effect, bringing forward proofs of facts which are fully known as though they were not generally admitted. I will therefore say no more, after mentioning only one topic, in enlarging on which one might spend one's whole life, namely, that reason is the thing wherein we are superior to all other animals; and we who have received the highest honour which heaven can bestow will have this above other men. For all animals display the appetites and desire and the like, but none save man possesses reason. Now it would be most strange if, when it is by virtue of reason alone that we live happier lives than all other animals, we should through indifference despise

and renounce that which is the cause of our well-being. Though you have long been exhorted thereto, I urge you to embrace with the utmost zeal the study of reasoned speech. For just as health preserves the body, so is education the recognized preserver of the mind. Under its guidance you will never take a false step in anything that you do, but you will keep safe practically all the advantages which you already possess. Moreover, if physical sight is a pleasure, to see clearly with the eyes of the soul is a thing to be admired. Again, as the general is the saviour of his army, so is reason, allied with education, the guide of life. These, then, and like sentiments I think I may well dismiss at the present moment.

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In your letter you urge me not to let this book fall into other hands than yours, and this knowing full well that, just as parents love their own offspring more than supposititious children, so those who have invented something have more affection for it than those to whom the discovery is merely imparted. For men have died in defence of their words, as they have died for their offspring. For the so-called Parian sophists, because what they teach is not of their own production, in their gross indifference feel no affection and barter it away for money. For this reason I exhort you to watch over these precepts, that while they are yet young they may be corrupted by no moneys, and, sharing in your well-ordered life, when they come to man's estate, may win unsullied glory.

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Following the lesson taught by Nicanor, we have adopted from other authors anything on the same subjects which was particularly well expressed in their treatises. You will find two such books, one of which is my own, viz. the Oratorical Art which I wrote for Theodectes, while the other is the treatise of Corax. The other points connected with public and forensic exhortations have all been dealt with specially in these treatises. So in these commentaries written expressly for you you will find material for amplifying these two treatises. Farewell.]

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1 · Public speeches fall into three classes, deliberative, epideictic, and forensic. They are of seven kinds, being employed in persuasion, dissuasion, eulogy, vituperation, accusation, defence, and inquiry either by itself or in relation to

something else. Such are the different kinds of discourses and their number. We shall employ them in public harangues, in lawsuits about contracts, and in private conversation. We shall treat of them most conveniently if we take them each separately and enumerate their qualities, their uses, and their actions. And first let us discuss persuasion and dissuasion, since they are used most of all in private conversations and in public harangues. To speak generally, persuasion is an exhortation to some choice or speech or action, while dissuasion is the prevention of some choice or speech or action. Such being the definition of these things, he who persuades must show that those things to which he exhorts are just, lawful, expedient, honourable, pleasant, and easy of accomplishment. Failing that, when he is exhorting to that which is difficult, he must show that it is practicable and that its execution is necessary. He who dissuades, by pursuing the opposite course, must exert a hindering influence, showing that the proposed action is neither just nor lawful nor expedient nor honourable nor pleasant nor practicable; if he cannot do that, he must urge that it is toilsome and unnecessary. All actions can have both these sets of attributes applied to them, so that no-one who can urge one of these two sets of fundamental qualities is at a loss for anything to say. It is for these qualities therefore that those who seek to persuade or dissuade must look. I will now attempt to define them one by one and show whence we shall supply them for our discourses.

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That which is just is the unwritten custom of all or the majority of men which draws a distinction between what is honourable and what is base. We may take as examples the honouring of parents, doing good to one's friends, and returning good to one's benefactors. These and similar duties are not enjoined upon mankind by written laws, but they are observed by unwritten custom and universal practice. So much for just actions.

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Law is a common agreement made by the community, which ordains in writing how the citizens ought to act under every kind of circumstance.

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Expediency is the safeguarding of existing advantages, or

the acquisition of those not already possessed, or the riddance of existing disadvantages, or the prevention of harm which threatens to occur. For individuals you can divide up expediency according as it applies to the body or the soul or external possessions. For the body, strength, beauty, and health are expedient; for the soul, courage, wisdom, and justice. External possessions are friends, wealth, and property. The contraries of these are inexpedient. For a community such things as concord, strength for war, wealth, a plentiful supply of revenue, and excellence and abundance of allies are expedient. In a word we look upon anything of this kind as expedient and the contrary as inexpedient. Honourable things are those from which good repute and creditable distinction will accrue to the doers. Pleasant things are those which cause joy. Easy things are those which are accomplished with the least expenditure of time, trouble, and money. Practicable things are all those which admit of performance. Necessary things are those the execution of which does not depend upon us but takes place as it were by some necessity divine or human. Such, then, is the nature of things just, lawful, expedient, honourable, easy, practicable, and necessary.

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It will be easy to speak about such subjects by the use of the considerations mentioned above and by ones analogous to them and by ones opposed to them and by employing judgements pronounced by the gods or by men or by judges of repute or by our opponents.

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We have already described the nature of that which is just. The following are cases where there is an analogy to that which is just: 'As we consider it just to obey parents, on the same principle it behoves sons to imitate the actions of their fathers'; or again, 'As it is just to do good in return to those who do good to us, so it is just to abstain from harming those who have done us no ill'. It is by this method that we must get analogies to justice. Then we ought to make it plain from contraries in the following way: 'As it is just to punish those who do us a wrong, so it behoves us to do good in return to our benefactors'. You will discover what is just in the judgement of men of repute by a consideration such as the following: 'Not only do we hate and

do harm to our enemies, but the Athenians also and the Lacedaemonians judge that it is just to punish their enemies'. By following this system you will often discover what is just.

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We have already defined the nature of that which is lawful. When it serves our purpose we must introduce the law itself, and any case of analogy to the written law. For example, 'As the lawgiver punishes thieves with very serious penalties, so we ought to inflict heavy chastisement on those who deceive, for they steal away the understanding'; or again, 'Just as the lawgiver has made the nearest relatives the heirs of those who die childless, so I ought in the present case to have authority over the possessions of a freedman; for since those who set him free are dead and I am the nearest relative of the deceased persons, I am justified in assuming control over their freedmen'. This is an example of the way in which an analogy to that which is ordained by law is obtained. The following is an illustration of what is contrary to that which is lawful: 'If the law prohibits the distribution of public property, it was clearly the judgement of the lawgiver that all who divide up such property are doing wrong; for if the laws ordain that those who govern the state well and justly should be honoured, they clearly regard those who make away with public property as deserving of punishment'. The nature of the lawful is thus clearly shown by taking cases of the contrary. It can be demonstrated from previous judgements by a consideration such as this: 'Not only do I hold that the lawgiver made this law to cover such cases as these, but on a former occasion, when Lysithidas gave an explanation similar to that which I am now putting forward, the jury voted in favour of this interpretation of the law'. By this method we shall often be able to demonstrate what is lawful.

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The nature of the expedient itself has already been defined. We must, as in the cases already mentioned, introduce the expedient, wherever it is available, into our arguments and often bring it to light, pursuing the same method which we employed for the lawful and the just. The following would be instances of analogies to the expedient: 'As in war it is expedient to station the bravest men in the front rank, so in the state it is



advantageous that the wisest and justest men should be the leaders of the people'; or again, 'As it is expedient for the healthy to be on their guard against disease, so too in communities which live in harmony it is expedient to provide against possibilities of faction'. By following this method you will be able to make many analogies to the expedient. The expedient will also be clear if you take contrary cases such as the following: 'If it is advantageous to honour good citizens, it would be expedient also to punish the wicked'; or again, 'If you think it inexpedient that we should make war unaided on the Thebans, it would be expedient to make the Lacedaemonians our allies and then make war on the Thebans'. This is the method by which you will demonstrate the expedient by arguing from the contrary. You can discover what has been judged to be expedient by judges of repute by considerations such as the following: 'The Lacedaemonians, when they had conquered the Athenians, thought it expedient not to enslave their city, and on another occasion the Athenians and Thebans, when it was within their power to depopulate Sparta, thought it expedient to allow the Lacedaemonians to survive'.

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