

# Structuring Rhetoric

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Despite having been written at different times, patched together of different pieces, and being far from the most elegant or perspicuously organized of Aristotle's writings, the *Rhetoric* forms a relatively coherent and familiar structure. In preparing a handbook for the rhetorician, Aristotle proceeds as he does for a discussion of any craft. He articulates a theory of its practice by locating it in a field of related activities; he formulates the proper end of rhetoric and distinguishes its varieties; and he analyzes the materials and techniques of the craft, the forms and premises of persuasive arguments, the psychology of audiences, and the techniques of style. Because he thinks previous authors on rhetoric have misunderstood the scope and therefore the primary concerns of the craft, Aristotle uncharacteristically gives his predecessors short shrift: he announces he must start the subject afresh (1354a1–3 ff.).<sup>1</sup>

## THE AIMS OF RHETORIC

The proper aim of rhetoric is that of finding the best available means of persuasion, whatever the subject may be (1355a4 ff., 1355b26 ff.). Since the most effective exercise of any craft or faculty is conceptually connected to fulfilling its norm-defined aims, Aristotle's counsel is directed to guiding the master craftsman who is responsive to the larger issues that surround the exercise of his skill: he is a rhetorician speaking about important matters to those authorized to affect them. Aristotle's advice to the rhetorician imports the results of this philosophic investigation: the *Rhetoric* presupposes and is implicitly informed by Aristotle's logical works, by his philosophy of mind and his theory of action; it is also strongly conjoined with his political and ethical theory. But while the

rhetorician relies on these theories, he is not himself a philosopher, logician, statesman, or moralist.<sup>2</sup> In order to construct persuasive arguments, the skilled rhetorician must understand the beliefs and psychology of his audience; but the exemplary rhetorician is also directed by what is true and guided by a sound understanding of what is genuinely useful and right.<sup>3</sup> Ideally, the best oratory addresses the minds as well as the psychology of its audience.<sup>4</sup> Aristotle chides the authors of earlier handbooks on rhetoric for concentrating primarily on techniques for swaying the emotions of judges and legislators, instead of first and primarily considering the best modes of persuasion. Enthymemes and metaphors are most convincing when they are clear and plausible; and even maxim-ridden speeches are most persuasive when their assumptions and conclusions are reasonable (1355a4–1355b7). Aristotle wryly complains that addressing the emotions of a judge is like warping a ruler before using it. The best orator does not manipulate beliefs in order to make the worse appear to be the better course, but rather presents the best case in a way that is comprehensible and moving to each type of character (1113a30 ff.). In suiting his arguments to his audience—presenting a course of action as gloriously noble to the young and as prudent to the elderly—the rhetorician need not be lying.<sup>5</sup> Aristotle’s ethical works are meant to show that the best life is—in principle, under ideal circumstances, and in the long run—also the most pleasant, the most expedient, and the noblest (1140a25–28, 1142a1–11, 1359a30–1363b4). As long as his rhetoric is also constrained by what is true and what is best, the rhetorician will not “warp the ruler.”

But like all abilities and crafts, rhetoric can be used well or ill. As the existence of clever villains attests, sheer intelligence is not sufficient for virtue; so too, highly successful but canny and corrupt orators attest to the undeniable fact that not every brilliant rhetorician is a *phronimos*. A clever huckster might be skilled at presenting himself as a trustworthy ally and wise advisor, without ever coming close to being a *phronimos*. Even if—in principle—the best way to seem wise and good is to be so, even if you can’t fool all of the people all of the time, still you can fool plenty of people most of the time.

Nevertheless even the most debased forms of rhetoric presuppose some knowledge of logic and of ethics. The successfully perverse uses of a craft depend on the techniques and knowledge required by its exemplary exercise. The sophist must know the structure of sound arguments in order to mimic them; the huckster has to know the marks of virtue in order to parade it. Just as the concept of “belief” is essentially linked to that of “truth,” so too the concept of “decision” is essentially linked to that of “good,” and “persuasive” is essentially linked to “soundly argued.” The opaque object of every decision is a genuine good; the opaque object of

every belief is a genuine truth. Deciders and believers want the intentional objects of their decisions and desires to hit their real—and not merely their notional—objects.<sup>6</sup> Since even a debased audience aims at the opaque objects of its desires—at the real (and not merely the apparent) good—it implicitly wants its rhetoricians to be, and not merely to seem, good. It is for these functional normative reasons that the rhetorician must know how to present himself as substantively intelligent and virtuous, rather than merely as cleverly skilled at rhetoric. He must not only convince his audience that his arguments are sound, but also that, like the physician, he has their real interests—and not merely their surface desires—at heart (101b5 ff.).<sup>7</sup>

But this attempt to make the rhetorician seem ethically respectable is surely too easy; after all, rhetorical skills might be conceptually and normatively linked to knowledge of what is good and what is true, without the practice of rhetoric requiring such knowledge. The successful rhetorician might only need to know how to mimic what the various types of audiences—the young, the old, democrats, aristocrats—take to be indications of practical wisdom. Aristotle's point about the ethical directions of rhetoric is not the overly strong claim that every successful rhetorician must be a *phronimos*; but it is also not the relatively weak claim that, like all crafts, rhetoric is directed to its best and most successful exercise.

To see how Aristotle charts a middle ground—and how he links rhetoric and politics—we need to turn to the three types of rhetoric and their primary instruments of persuasion.

### THE VARIETIES OF RHETORIC

The three types of rhetoric—ceremonial (*epideiktikon*), forensic (*dikanikon*), and deliberative (*sumbouleutikon*)—are distinguished by their aims and audiences. While many forms of argument (e.g., dialectic and the enthymeme) and some kinds of knowledge (e.g., psychology) are common to them all, these differences prescribe some specialized strategies of argumentation and some specialized knowledge (1358a36–1359a5).

#### *Epideictic Rhetoric*

Superficially at least, epideictic rhetoric is typically ceremonial. Addressed to a general audience, it is directed to praising honor and virtue, censuring vice and weakness. Because it is largely concerned with matters that are not under dispute, amplification (*auxesis*) provides its most suitable arguments. To persuade an audience to celebrate what is noble and to condemn what is shameful, the epideictic rhetorician must be familiar with what the audience takes as indications and signs (*sēmeia*) of those

virtues which, like justice and courage, they find exceptionally useful (1366a28–1366b12). But because epideictic rhetoric also has a latent, important practical and educative function, Aristotle wants to bring at least some of its uses under the aegis of deliberative rhetoric. Since praise and blame motivate as well as indicate virtue, they are also implicitly intended to affect future action. The deliberative rhetorician can—by turning a phrase—use *encomia* to counsel a course of action. “If you intend to praise, consider what you would have suggested; if you intend to suggest (*hupotheschai*), consider what you would praise” (1368a6 ff.).

Aristotle’s books on ethics provide some background psychology for epideictic oratory: in describing an admirable or despicable deed (*ergon*), the rhetorician relies on the criteria for voluntary action.<sup>8</sup> But since the ethical works are primarily focused on the character (*ēthos*) of the *phronimos*, they do not provide material for *encomia* of admirable deeds that may be performed out of character (1367b25–1368b). Nor does general discussion of *akrasia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7—introduced to solve an embarrassing philosophical problem about how a person can voluntarily act against his beliefs about what is best—help the epideictic rhetorician identify and describe vicious and contemptible deeds.

#### *Forensic Rhetoric*

Intended to establish individuals as guilty or innocent of specific actions, forensic rhetoric is directed to judges. To be persuasive, the rhetorician’s arguments and descriptions must take into account the commonplace psychological opinions (*endoxa*) of typical judges, their beliefs about the motives of various types of characters and the occasions on which they might be tempted to break the law. Because “the past most admits of demonstration (*apodeixin*) and causal explanation (*aitiaîn*),” Aristotle says that the enthymeme is “best suited to forensic rhetoric” (1368a30 ff.).<sup>9</sup> He understands the persuasiveness of such arguments extremely broadly: an enthymeme can indicate what a reasonable person is entitled to infer about what happened and how it happened. So, for instance, a rhetorician might argue that if the suspect’s footprints were at the scene of the crime, his fingerprints on the knife, and he had long harbored a murderous hatred for the victim, it is reasonable to conclude that he was guilty of murder.

The discussion of forensic rhetoric introduces psychological generalizations that Aristotle had not elsewhere treated in a more rigorous and philosophical manner. The ethical works are focused on character traits rather than on specific actions; and on virtue rather than vice and weakness. Like the epideictic rhetorician, the forensic rhetorician relies on a general theory of voluntary action. But to establish the guilt (or inno-

cence) of the accused, he needs to represent that person's motives in some detail. The list of (what are commonly thought to be) the causes of action is surprisingly heterogeneous and long; chance, nature, compulsion, character, reasoning, energetic feistiness (*thumos*), and appetite (*epithumia*) (1369a5 ff.).<sup>10</sup> Aristotle's dismissal of chance, nature, and compulsion is quick: such causes remove the action from the sphere of what is "up to us." Equally casually, he says that the causes of voluntary actions—those that are formed by character-based habits, reasoning, and desire—appear to boil down to the desire for what is seen as good (*agathon*) or beneficial (*ta sumpheronta*) and for what seems pleasurable (1369b20 ff.). He has, as he says, already discussed the means by which a deliberative rhetorician can persuade an audience that a course of actions is beneficial (1.6–7.1362a15–1365b21). He therefore turns to a long and phenomenologically acute but unsystematic description of the many kinds of activities and situations whose pleasures might lure a person to injustice (*adikia*) (1.11).

The *endoxa* concerning pleasure are summarized in *Rhetoric* 1.11–12 (1369b32–1373a39): it is believed to be "a kind of motion (*kinēsis*) of the soul (*psychē*), a sudden, perceptible settling (*katastasis*) to its natural (*phusin*) condition." This view seems in direct conflict with the philosophical analysis presented in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10, where Aristotle denies that pleasure is a kind of motion (1173a32 ff., 1174a18 ff.), arguing that it is an activity in accordance with nature (*energeia kata phusin*) (1153a14 ff.).<sup>11</sup> The discrepancy between the two accounts should not be surprising: they play quite different explanatory roles. The discussion of pleasure in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7 and 10 is a direct continuation of a central theme of the *Ethics*: an examination of the connection between virtue and the goods that constitute *eudaimonia*.<sup>12</sup> Since pleasure is thought by many to be among those goods, if not actually the paramount good, it requires a thorough philosophic examination. But Aristotle is, in the *Rhetoric*, primarily concerned with typical *endoxa* about the role of pleasure in motivating unjust actions. Whatever the philosophic truth about pleasure may be, the rhetorician must—beyond the obvious issues of fact that arise in such cases—limit himself to considerations that roughly accord with judges' opinions. It is for this reason that the analysis of pleasure as a source of unlawful or unjust actions in *Rhetoric* 1.11–12 does not accord—and (oddly enough) should not accord—with what Aristotle thinks is the truth of the matter.

But since not even the lure of pleasure is by itself sufficient to cause action, Aristotle turns to a discussion of the psychology of various types of agents. To construct a plausible accusation or defense, the forensic rhetorician needs to represent the psychology of specific types of persons, as they might be young, powerless, and ambitious, or middle-aged,

wealthy, and jealous. He can ignore the general differences between varieties of vice (*kakos*) and *akrasia*: in establishing guilt or innocence, it doesn't matter whether the accused is vicious or just weak. What matters is the likelihood of whether the accused—an impulsive young man, in debt, without resources, and disowned by his family—has voluntarily broken the law. The forensic rhetorician also needs to represent the circumstances under which it seems safe to be unlawful, common beliefs about the kinds of people who can be injured without risking retribution (1.12).

### *Deliberative Rhetoric*

Deliberative rhetoric is directed to those who must decide on a course of action (members of the Assembly, for instance) and is typically concerned with what will turn out to be useful (*sumpheron*) or harmful (*blaberon*) as means to achieve specific ends in matters of defense, war and peace, trade and legislation. Since the advice of the deliberative rhetorician implies predictions about the outcomes of various policies, his conclusions are in principle testable. The deliberative rhetorician who wishes to retain his reputation as trustworthy must pay attention to what is, in fact, actually likely to happen. It is this feature of deliberative rhetoric—that it is more bound by reasonable expectations about the future than about current beliefs about responsibility—that marks the significant character of deliberative rhetoric; it explains why Aristotle is so eager to distinguish its arguments from epideictic and forensic rhetoric.

This explains why Aristotle makes deliberative rhetoric the focus of his analysis: it most clearly reveals the primary importance of truth as it functions *within the craft of rhetoric itself*. Since the deliberative rhetorician persuades an audience to form decisive judgments (*kriseis*) that are actually likely to affect their interests, he has the enormously difficult task of aligning his audience's conceptions of their *eudaimonia* with his own judgment about how various policies are actually likely to affect their welfare, whatever their beliefs may be. Vivid and well-known examples (*paradeigmata*) of similar events—events that are presumed to indicate what is likely to happen in the future—are the best sorts of arguments for deliberative rhetoric.

In the interest of preserving the distinctions among deliberative, forensic, and epideictic rhetoric, Aristotle warns rhetoricians against confusing issues of benefit and harm with those of lawfulness (*to dikaion kai to adikon*) and honor (1358b23). Considerable disagreement continues about whether Aristotle thinks that issues of justice are (a) irrelevant to deliberative oratory or (b) relevant but subsidiary. Certainly Aristotle thinks that the virtues—and justice among them—constitute as well as

serve *eudaimonia*.<sup>13</sup> Still, the general conceptual connection between what is just and what is fundamentally beneficial is compatible with the independence of the two sorts of arguments. As Thucydides' account of the Mytilenaeen dialogue amply demonstrates, the kinds of considerations that demonstrate the benefits of a specific policy are markedly different from those that show it to be just.

Although the rhetorician ideally attempts to direct his audience to a course that would promote their real interests, not even the best rhetorician need intend to educate his audience, to structure their ends or interests, or to promote their *eudaimonia*, all things considered. To sustain his reputation as a trustworthy guide in political matters, the exemplary rhetorician need not be a philosopher or a *phronimos*. He needs rather to be able to take advice from a philosophically oriented *phronimos*, who counsels him on standard issue fears and desires, on conditions for responsibility, on how to construct sound arguments. Call that person "Aristotle." And call his advice, "*The Rhetoric*." We can now turn, as Aristotle himself does, to some of his advice about modes of persuasion that all rhetoricians share and the kinds of knowledge that they all require, independently of their specific aims and audiences.

#### DIALECTIC AND RHETORIC

As a technical skill, rhetoric is a counterpart (*antistrophos*) of dialectic (1354a1); Aristotle also calls it a part of dialectic (*morion*) similar to it (*homoiōma*) (1356a31–32).<sup>14</sup> A double connection ties dialectic and rhetoric. First, the *philosophic* analysis of the craft of rhetoric proceeds dialectically: it evaluates previous opinions on the subject, reflecting on the extent to which they save and explain the phenomena. Since he thinks his predecessors have misunderstood the subject, Aristotle cannot follow his usual courteous practice of reconstructing their rationale, attempting to systematize their views. But although he must start the subject afresh, Aristotle attempts as best he can, given the unscientific and problematic character of the subject matter, to integrate previous opinions into his own analysis. While he denies that forensic and epideictic oratory provide the primary models of rhetoric, he grants that they are important, independent species. And although he denies that rhetoricians are primarily concerned with swaying the emotions of their audiences, he manifestly thinks that this is an important feature of rhetorical argument. Second, the *rhetorician* himself relies on the results, the methods, and the skills of dialectic. Like the dialectician, the rhetorician does not have a distinctive, specific subject matter (1354a1–12, 1355b32 ff.). He depends on—and must skillfully use—a heterogeneous collection of accepted and often conflicting opinions for the details of his arguments: general *endoxa*

about *eudaimonia*, the opinion of strategists about what is genuinely dangerous in battle, the views of philosophers about criteria for voluntary action, and the views of experienced legislators about what sorts of laws are enforceable. Like the dialectician and the sophist, the successful rhetorician must be able to construct contrary arguments: he must first represent and then refute the considerations that appear to weigh against his position.<sup>15</sup>

Although rhetoric absorbs the skills of logic, dialectic, and sophistical argument, it differs from them in some important respects (1359b9 ff.).<sup>16</sup> It differs from logic in that it addresses contingent particulars and from dialectic in having more specific aims. Dialectic encompasses both theoretical as well as practical inquiry: it can serve as “a process of criticism that provides a path to general principles” (101b3–4). Rhetoric is more narrowly practical: it attempts to bring an audience to a decisive judgment in such a way that they will not easily be swayed to a different course (104b1–4, 1356b32–1357a1, 1359b31–1396a2). It is for this reason that Aristotle remarks that “rhetoric is an offshoot (*paraphues*) of ethics (*tēs peritā ēthē pragmateias*) that can justly be called politics” (1356a26). Offshoots carry nutriment in both directions; *phronimoi* and *politikoi* need to be able to persuade their fellows to cooperate. For his part, the rhetorician needs to understand what people want, in wanting happiness; he needs to be able to represent the motives of lawlessness; and he should know how various political systems shape the beliefs and desires of their citizens.<sup>17</sup>

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RHETORICAL PERSUASION

Besides sharing certain forms of argumentation, all rhetoricians are served by an understanding of psychology. Rough empirical generalizations about the psychology of various types of audiences and the folk-psychological beliefs of his audience serve as instruments of persuasion; they also provide significant substantive premises for all sorts of arguments.<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle distinguishes three interconnected dimensions of persuasion (*pistis*): *ēthos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Each of these interdependent avenues to persuasion explain the dominant place that Aristotle accords psychology in the *Rhetoric*.

First, the knowledge of psychology enables the orator to present himself as having a trustworthy *ēthos*. Second, it enables him to address the interests of his audience persuasively. Third, it provides some of the basic premises for his arguments.

Since we have already touched on the first point, we can, like Aristotle, be brief about it. The character of the speaker is manifest in his dis-



course—in what he says and how he says it.<sup>19</sup> It is implicit in the way he argues and in the way he addresses the character and emotions of his audience (1356a5 ff.). Particularly when he might seem to speak from his own interests or on his own behalf, the rhetorician must establish his credibility, his intelligence (*phronēsis* and *eunoia*), and character (*aretē*) as such traits might be perceived by his audience. Of course, land mines surround the phrase “perceived by his audience.” The rhetorician must understand his audience’s perspective: he shows himself to be trustworthy in their eyes by showing that he understands their interests. His success in urging a defensive military policy depends on his presenting himself as a reliable judge of what is worth fearing; and this in turn depends on his knowing what his audience considers dangerous. While it is possible to fake an honest manner, it is exceedingly difficult to maintain a reputation for *phronēsis* without actually giving a considerable amount of sound advice. A vulgar rhetorician might for a time succeed in dazzling an audience by playing to their preconceptions. But a few persuasive speeches do not make a successful rhetorician. Since a rhetorician’s reputation is, over the course of time, at least in part measured by the consequences of the policies he recommends, it would be difficult for a vulgar rhetorician—one who has only pandered to immediate desires, without considering the real interests of his audience—to sustain a reputation for either good sense or virtue.

Still, Aristotle’s solution allows for the possibility that a vulgar rhetorician might succeed in fooling the citizens of an extremely corrupt state for a long time. Such citizens systematically fail to understand their own well-being. They might, for instance, so deeply prefer wild luxury to a soundly continuing *paideia* that they would not recognize the harm of following the advice of a vulgar rhetorician who urged them on to ever greater luxury. Indeed it is one of the signs of a hopelessly bad polity that its citizens are no longer able to distinguish a vulgar rhetorician from a *phronimos*. The dark side of what is usually considered Aristotle’s optimism is that a polity gets the rhetoricians it deserves; and the distress of a corrupt polity is deepened by the rhetoricians it favors.

The second reason for including an extensive discussion of psychology follows from the aim of rhetoric. Since the point of rhetoric is to influence the kind of judgment (*krisis*) that is effectively an evaluative decision, rhetorical arguments are presented in the form of practical deliberations (1357a1–2). Judicial decisions, legislative enactments, praise, and blame express decisions that are, as we would say, performative actions.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the arguments of philosophical dialectic that form opinions (*doxa*), or in the *mimēseis* of dramatic action that produce *katharsis*, the judgments formed by rhetorical persuasion carry the weight of decisions (1355a5 ff.). They are not only true or false, soundly or wildly derived,

but also appropriate or inappropriate, reasonable or silly, germane or irrelevant to the situation. But since choice requires the conjunction of thought (*dianoia*) and desire (*orexis*) (*DA* 3.10; *NE* 6.2), the rhetorician must influence the desires as well as the beliefs of his audience, even when there are *phronimoi* among them. It is entirely appropriate—and indeed necessary—for the rhetorician to address the character of his audience: he crystallizes their general ends into specific desires.<sup>21</sup> The orator's speech—what he says and how he says it—links the character and desires of his audience to the decisions and actions the orator wants them to take (1355a20 ff.).

The third reason for Aristotle's including a detailed discussion of *ēthē* and *pathē* among rhetorical *topoi* is that pretheoretical psychology provides useful information for practical deliberation.<sup>22</sup> Like the poet, the rhetorician needs rough generalizations to represent the thoughts and desires, speech and action of many different types of agents, as they would be perceived by his audience. In urging the Assembly to send a belligerent rather than conciliatory delegation to a rebellious colony, the rhetorician must give a plausible account of the probable psychological effects of both policies on that particular colony. Here again, the deliberative rhetorician faces the enormously difficult task of coordinating his best understanding of what is, in fact, likely to happen with the folk-psychological beliefs of his audience, and to do this in a way that persuades.

Aristotle can send readers to *De Anima*, the *Politics*, and the ethical works for general propositions about practical reason and the teleological structure of action. Like the pre-theoretical biology of which it is a branch, the psychology of the *Rhetoric* hardly qualifies as a theory, let alone as explanatory scientific knowledge. But descriptive psychology is even further from rigor than descriptive biology: our psychology—the formation of attitudes and motives—is “up to us” (*eph hēmin estin*) to an astonishing degree (*DA* 3.3.427b15–21). Indeed rhetoric, politics, and poetry would have virtually no place if this were not so. Since human psychology is also strongly affected by education and political circumstance, its generalizations are not only qualified by constitutional psychophysical factors but also by other complex subvariables: age, sex, and temperament in a democracy or in the members of a specific class in an aristocracy.

The psychology that is essential to the *Rhetoric* suffers from yet a further restriction. Unlike the analysis of *aisthēsis* and *phantasia* in *De Anima* and the characterization of *phronēsis* in the ethical works, the discussion of character and the emotions in the *Rhetoric* does not proceed by describing an ideal type. The rhetorician is concerned with the typical psychology of the ambitious youth or the power-hungry demagogue rather than with the idealized psychology of the *phronimos* or that of the relatively noble tragic protagonist.<sup>23</sup> Even the best deliberative rhetori-

cian attempting to persuade his audience of significant benefits and dangers can only rely on rough generalizations about the psychology—the interests, motives, and habits—that might be typical of potential allies and enemies. He can only address the fears and hatreds that are typical of various audiences, presenting considerations that are, at best, only likely to move them to pity or emulation. Instead of resembling a quasi-scientific treatise on breeding the best, most fertile chickens, the *Rhetoric* is like a treatise telling farmers how to get ordinary chickens to lay good eggs. For all of that, Aristotle is not one to shy away from giving important advice based on rough generalizations where it can be usefully given.

#### ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF CHARACTER (*ĒTHOS*)<sup>24</sup>

##### *The Constituents of Character*<sup>25</sup>

The dispositions and habits that constitute character are layered in a veritable archaeological site. Some traits—like being hot-tempered or slow-witted—are constitutionally based; other derive from a person's social condition (as those with power are said to be serious and dignified [2.16–17]); yet others are formed by an individual's polity (as citizens in a democracy are said to love liberty). Still others (the habits that constitute the virtues and vices, for example) derive from individual education and experience (1114b26 ff.).<sup>26</sup>

As described in the *Rhetoric*, a person's character combines relatively specific first-order traits with a variety of second-order dispositions. Among the first are the love of honor typical of the young, the love of liberty typical of citizens in a democracy, and the suspiciousness of the elderly. Some second-order traits are modifiers or modalities of first-order traits (as the intensity with which the young love and hate; the feebleness of the emotions of the elderly); others are dispositions to acquire specific first-order traits (because the elderly are fond of themselves [*philautoi*] they are disposed to being small-minded and primarily guided by considerations of utility). Many second-order dispositions (*hexeis*) govern or control first-order *hexeis*. However difficult it may be, a constitutionally irascible person can, in principle, be good-tempered; this requires that he control some of his first-order traits. Many *hexeis*—particularly the cognitive components of the virtues and vices—are actively magnetizing because they structure what is salient or dominant in an individual's perceptual and conceptual field: they can predispose him to specific emotions. (For instance, someone who habitually perceives situations as dangerous is especially liable to fear; someone preoccupied with honor or wealth is especially liable to envy or emulation; someone who habitually notices slights is disposed to anger.) Both first-order and

second-order character traits typically appear along a continuum of paired contraries. The various *hexeis* that form an individual's character fall somewhere on a scale between affability and surliness, between extravagance and miserliness.

Can two individuals have roughly the same character, but one be virtuous, the other not? Not surprisingly, Aristotle's answer is: in one sense, no, and in another, yes, depending on the generality with which their traits are described. To the extent that a person's character includes habits and ends that arise from individual experience and circumstance, his character is as wholly individuated as anything within an Aristotelian frame can be. So described, an individual's character includes the specification of his virtues. But for other purposes—like those of the *Rhetoric* for example—individuals can be adequately characterized by their general features. To say of someone that he is a powerful young democrat or an old aristocrat is to locate a range of his general traits, a rough guide to his typical thoughts, habits, and desires. In this sense, two individuals of the same character type can differ in virtue, in the specific ways that their ends form their desires and actions.

Putting words in his mouth, we can now present a rough first approximation of Aristotle's account of character. A person's character consists of those long-standing actively dispositional qualities and traits—his natural capacities and habits—that (by setting the general direction of his desires and the range of his passions) direct his choices. It is his nature and his second nature.<sup>27</sup>

### *The Structure of Character*

A person's character, particularly as it structures his evaluative judgments and choices, is not just a heap of heterogeneous qualities: natural capacities, habits, and desires. After all, the old as well as the young can be concerned with matters of honor; the young as well as the middle-aged can be concerned with matters of security; the citizens of a democracy can be concerned with matters of wealth as well as of liberty. Character is a stable and enduring configuration of these, structured in an order of relative strength and importance.<sup>28</sup>

But there are distinctive measures by which the ordering of strength and importance takes place. The distinction between *hexis* and *diathesis* is introduced as a distinction between relatively enduring qualities and those that are hard to change. A relatively enduring quality (like health) might be easy to change, while one of short duration, like recently acquired knowledge, might be difficult to change.<sup>29</sup> A habit that is strong by one measure might be relatively weak by another. And while reason certainly has priority over perception by most measures of importance, perception might well have priority over reason in strength.

The first approximation to Aristotle's account of character must, therefore, be modified: character is the configuration of hierarchically ordered, long-standing, actively dispositional qualities and traits—a person's capacities and habits—that (by setting the general direction of his desires and the range of his passions) direct but surely do not determine his choices. In one way, therefore, a person's character can be summarized by his ends: they form an organized system of ordered preferences, the structure of his practical reasoning. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle puts the importance of this aspect of character very strongly. Choice (*prohairesis*), he says, involves reasoning toward an end; it requires the combination of thought (*dianoia*) and desire (*orexis*) (NE 1.1.1139a32 ff.). Since thought moves nothing, choices require a combination of thought and *ēthos*. The ultimate source (*archē*) of action is the person (*anthrōpos*), presumably conceived as a structured unity of his character traits. For the purpose of understanding deliberation and choice, a person's character is a structured unity of a special kind, the union of reason and desire.

#### *Character and Dianoia*

Are there two, perhaps even three conceptions of character, having no bearing on one another?<sup>30</sup> In the *Rhetoric*, character is described as constituted by those traits that are organized in archaeological layers of deep-seated dispositions, that are ordered by their relative persistence and strength, and that—like laziness or timidity—have no apparent bearing on the person's ends (1113a30 ff.). But in the ethical works, character is manifest in the hierarchy of ordered desires or preferences that—together with *dianoia*—determine choice and action (1139a32 ff.). In this sense, a person's character reveals his ethical standing as virtuous or vicious. How—if at all—is archaeological character (irascibility, impulsiveness, mistrustfulness) summarized or expressed in the preference rankings that affect *prohairesis* and that determine a person's ethical standing?

In one way, it would appear that there is—and should be—no relation between a person's character and his thought (*dianoia*). Because *nous* and thought are, by definition, truth-oriented, they are not—or at any rate should not be—affected by the archaeological aspects of a person's character. We can distinguish two levels of desire (*orexis*) and *dianoia*. The higher levels are best exemplified in the practical reasoning of the *phronimos*: his desire is right, his thought is true, and they coincide in such a way that the source of his deliberation can be indifferently called *oretikos nous* or *orexis dianoetikē* (desiring-thought or thought-defined desire) (1139b5–6). His archaeological character is compatible with his rational preferences. In one way, the thought of the *phronimos* is unaffected by any

lower-level traits—age, wealth, or the specific features of the polity in which he lives. Indeed he would not qualify as a *phronimos* if they did affect his thought. But the relation between the *phronimos*' character-*hexeis* and his preferences can also be described in another way: his archaeological character is adequately expressed in desires that are entirely compatible with the truth-bound directions of his *dianoia*. His intellect (*nous*) permeates or guides those aspects of his reasoning that—like perception and imagination—might be affected by his archaeological character.

This way of characterizing the *ēthos* of the *phronimos* raises an extremely difficult question, one that Aristotle did not himself address directly. Are all *phronimoi* identical for practical purposes, despite their historical and political differences? On the one hand, the *phronimos*' desires are formed by what is good and what is true, rather than by the practices of his *polis*. On the other hand, the ends and practices of his *polis* not only set the frame of his deliberations, but also partially constitute his preferences. The *phronimos* is an historical and politically located person. Aristotle provides a reconciliation of these apparently conflicting conditions. The ends of his *polis* figure in the deliberations of the *phronimos* because they provide substantive objective directions and constraints on his practical reasoning, rather than because they formed his character. In a sense all *phronimoi* are alike, and in a sense they are not, depending on the level of generality with which their characters and preferences are described. All *phronimoi* are, for instance, committed to preserving the integrity of their *polis*; and all are committed to an objective inquiry into what integrity requires. Nevertheless, as their polities differ, one *phronimos* might reasonably favor the restriction of trade, while another might favor its expansion.

But this solution only allows for some differences between Athenian and Spartan *phronimoi*. Can two Athenian *phronimoi* differ on trade policy? Can their clusters of virtue differ? The *phronimoi* described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* would seem to be identical: there is no sign of Aristotle thinking that the virtues might be sufficiently in tension so that the balance of virtues of one *phronimos* might, for instance, tip toward courage rather than *sōphrosunē*, while that of another might tip in the opposite direction. But the description of the *phronimos* in *Nicomachean Ethics* is strongly idealized. Aristotle could acknowledge that in an ordinary polity, two trustworthy *phronimoi* might differ in the balance of their virtues, and in the balance of their advice.

So much for the *phronimos*. For the rest of us, matters are more complicated, the fit between our thoughts and desires is not so neat. Each type of character has its own perspective on what is desirable, seeing it as noble, or as expedient, or as pleasant (1113a30 ff.). The practical reasons of ordinary folk, however intelligent and astute they may be, is

influenced by their character-*hexeis*, their age, social status, and polity.<sup>31</sup> Their desires are not only constrained by such character traits but also directed and strongly specified by them. This does not mean that their characters completely determine their desires. After all, many fortuitous circumstances, including, for instance, the speeches of rhetoricians, enter into the full specification of their desires.

We are now in a position to understand why the psychology of the *Rhetoric* does not include a separate discussion of desire. The descriptions of character have already specified the archaeologically based desires and *dianoia* of each character-type. They have specified the active habits and dispositions that focus attention, the characteristic patterns of salience and interpretation that elicit specific desires and emotions. Given a dangerous situation, the young are likely to be challenged, and to delight in being challenged; given the very same situation, the elderly are likely to foresee and to fear disaster.

#### EMOTIONS (*PATHĒ*)

The psychology of the *Rhetoric* forms a neat pairing of character and emotions as, respectively, the active and passive features that affect a person's judgment and choice. Aristotle stresses the active aspect of character: a person's *hexeis* form and direct patterns of salience in his perceptions, thoughts, and desires. Character sets a pattern of activity that does not necessarily require any external intervention for its exercise. By contrast, *pathē* derive from contingent and fortuitous changes brought about by external causes.<sup>32</sup> Aristotle's definition of the emotions in the *Rhetoric* ("those modifications [*metaballontes*] which bring about changes [*diapherousi*] in [a person's] judgments and are accompanied by pain and pleasure" [1378a21]) develops the central motif of his general definition in the *Metaphysics*: *pathē* are exogenous and contingent changes that affect a person's judgment and motivation.<sup>33</sup> For all of that, a person's character—his deep-seated dispositions—defines his relative susceptibility or immunity to a specific range of emotional responses: a proud man is susceptible to anger, a courageous man finds little to fear.<sup>34</sup> Since political systems influence character, freedom-loving democrats are more prone to be jealous of those better off than are the citizens of an aristocracy.

Psychological passions—passions narrowly conceived as emotions—are individuated by the way they affect us (*diakheimenoi*), by their typical causes, objects, and rationales (1378a22 ff.). But if emotions are themselves changes, of what are they changes? *Pathē* have double-entry bookkeeping: they are identified by a conjunction of physical and psychological changes that themselves generate further changes (*DA* 403a3–403b18; *Motu* 701b12–13; *Sensu* 436a10b2). The division of labor in the

study of the physiology and psychology of *pathē* does not limit the *physikos* to “purely material causes,” as if there were such things.<sup>35</sup> The astute *physikos* should, for instance, be able to distinguish the physical changes that occur when the blood around the heart boils in anger from those that occur when the blood around the heart boils from a high fever. Similarly, the psychologically astute rhetorician can tell the difference between the psychological changes that attend the angry thought that one has been unjustifiably injured and the equally painful changes that occur with the self-pitying thought of such an injury. Presumably, the former, but not the latter, generates a desire for revenge, along with the pleasurable anticipation of revenge—presumably also involving calculative *phantasiai*.

Because Aristotle’s discussion of the individual passions in *Rhetoric* Book 2 is limited to those features that are relevant to the rhetorician’s craft, he does not raise the kinds of questions that might seem germane to a philosophic account. How can the temporally prior psychological causes of an emotion also be among its necessary individuating constituents? How can thinking oneself to have been unjustly injured be both an (efficient) cause of anger and also among its (formal) individuating constituents (one’s blood boiling *at* the thought of an unjustified injury)? Aristotle’s standard laconic answer to questions of this sort—general questions about the relation between some efficient and some formal causes—is: in one sense they are identical in being; in another, they are different in definition. If that answer seems unsatisfactory, or at any rate, tantalizingly incomplete, it presents a problem in Aristotle’s general theory of explanation, rather than in his theory of psychology. Beyond saying that they often coincide (*Phys.* 2.7.198a24 ff.), Aristotle seems unconcerned about just how—if at all—efficient and formal causes are related to one another.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, he would regard that question as confused and regressive. The schema of causal explanations is basic. Asking for an explanation of the relation among its dimensions carries the air of (what we would call) a category mistake. It is like asking for an explanation of the relation between measurements of height and width, one that would also explain how it is possible that the height and the breadth of a point coincide.

Another apparently germane philosophical question also carries the weight of an unnecessary apprehension. We need not worry about whether Aristotle’s account of the desires that typically attend *pathē* might, in the end, be susceptible to hedonistic reduction. Although *pathē* are accompanied by pleasure and pain, their motivational force is not always governed by them. We do not need a motive to set about reproducing, thinking, or participating in political life; we are set to engage in these activities when the appropriate occasions present themselves. Under proper conditions, we find them pleasurable, but we do not engage in