

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Ethics* and the Ethos of Society

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ONE CERTAINTY in Aristotelian studies is that Aristotle rejected the Platonic theory of Ideas because it was not doing what it had been devised to do: that is, to account for phenomena of three kinds, ethical, epistemological and ontological.¹ The time when this rejection took place and the depth of the change it effected in Aristotle's own philosophical views are debatable;² but the fact of that rejection is as clear as anything in the Aristotelian corpus.

In rejecting the theory of Ideas, Aristotle had to face a series of *aporiai*, among them the following: what reality can the philosopher examine in order to ascertain ethical values?³ This *aporia* did not arise for those who held that Plato's theory sufficed to account for ethical phenomena, since these thinkers would take the view that the Forms, the highest realities, included ethical values.⁴ But it did

¹ See H. F. Cherniss, "The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas," *AJP* 57 (1936) 445-56, rpt. in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. R. E. Allen (New York 1965) 1-12 (references will be to the reprint). Cherniss asserts (pp.1-2), "The phenomena for which Plato had to account were of three kinds, ethical, epistemological, and ontological. . . The dialogues of Plato, I believe, will furnish evidence to show that he considered it necessary to find a single hypothesis which would at once solve the problems of these several spheres. . ."

² See I. Düring, "Aristotle on Ultimate Principles from 'Nature and Reality': *Protrepticus* fr. 13," and C. J. de Vogel, "The Legend of the Platonizing Aristotle," both in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century*, ed. I. Düring (Göteborg 1960). Both writers argue against the thesis of Werner Jaeger and his school that Aristotle changed from a youthful Platonic philosophy to one increasingly non-Platonic.

³ The *aporia* is broader than I describe it, since it extended to every realm of value, as Whitney J. Oates holds in *Aristotle and the Problem of Value* (Princeton 1963) 4. Oates is following Jaeger, who earlier had claimed that "When the theory of Forms was abandoned being and value fell apart": *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, transl. Richard Robinson 2 (Oxford 1948) 83. I am here restricting my investigation of the *aporia* to its ethical side.

⁴ Cf. Cherniss, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 3: "The 'dialogues of search', by demonstrating the hopelessness of all other expedients, show that the definitions requisite to normative ethics are possible only on the assumption that there exist, apart from phenomena, substantive objects of these definitions which alone are the source of the values attaching to

arise for Aristotle and had to be solved before (or perhaps as) he formulated that part of political science that came to be known as 'ethics'.

Aristotle solved this *aporia* by discovering two sources for the study of ethics: the ethos of society and the *ἔνδοξοι ἄνδρες*.⁵ Of the two sources, the principal reality the philosopher can and must examine if he is to develop the study of ethics is the ethos of society. For Aristotle this means the character of the group, its disposition both to evaluate in a certain way a situation involving choice and to go about making that choice. A society's ethos is to it just what an individual's ethos is to him. Just as each man has his own ethos, so each society has its own peculiar ethos, and the better the ethos the better the society.⁶ We get to know the ethos of a society in the same way we get to know the ethos of the individual, through its deliberative acts of choice.⁷

That Aristotle regarded the ethos of a society as the principal reality that will give the philosopher what he needs for his systematic ethical study is clear, first, from the demands Aristotle makes on those who are to study ethics. A beginning student must be experienced sufficiently in the life of the society to know how people praise and find value in certain courses of action and how they censure and do not find value in others; he must be brought up in a particular way from youth with good training and habituation; and he must have both a

phenomenal existence. The possibility of ethical distinctions, then, implies objective differences which can be accounted for only by the hypothesis of substantive ideas." Cherniss refers to *Euthphr.* 15c11–e2, *Lach.* 199E, *Lys.* 222E and 218c–220b5, *Chrm.* 176A, *Hp.Mi.* 376b. I take it that by the time of the writing of the *Phaedo* (e.g. 65d) and *Republic* (504A, 505A, 507B, 520c, 540A) the ethical aspect of these Ideas had been formulated. In the later dialogues, this aspect is not emphasized, in part because the dialogues concern themselves more with epistemological and ontological problems. Aristotle, however, did not lose sight of the ethical dimension of the theory; he refers to it in his discussion of the origin of the theory (*Metaph.* 987b1, 1078b17, 1086b3) and in his critique of the Idea of the Good (*EN* 1095a26–30, 1096b31–1097a14). Unlike others of the treatises, neither ethical treatise begins with an historical view of the subject (except for the discussion of the Idea of the Good). Therefore, the contrast I describe between the ground of ethics for Plato and that for Aristotle is not drawn in any detail by Aristotle himself.

⁵ These 'illustrious men', that small group which can hardly be mistaken in their views of human life (*EN* 1098b27–29), will be considered later in this paper.

⁶ *Pol.* 1337a14–18: τὸ γὰρ ἦθος τῆς πολιτείας ἐκάστης τὸ οἰκεῖον . . . αἰεὶ δὲ τὸ βέλτιον ἦθος βελτίονος αἴτιον πολιτείας.

⁷ *Rhet.* 1366a14–15: τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἦθη φανερά κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν . . .

character possessing kinship with virtue and the ability to recognize his own passions and resist them when he ought (*EN* I 1094b27–1095a4, 1095b4–8, II 1104b8–13, X 1179b23–1180a1).

All of this indicates that the beginning student of ethics has already been introduced into a system of values with regard to the conduct of his life. As his study continues, he clarifies this system and investigates its principles and consequences, but does not change it in any significant way.⁸

The second indication that Aristotle saw the ethos of society as the embodiment of standards for human conduct is found in the method he uses in the investigation of ethical questions. This method is manifest in the discussion of continence in a passage from one of the books common to both the *EE* and the *EN* (*EN* VII 1145b2–7). Aristotle writes that in this discussion, just as in the others, one must consider the *phainomena*, that is, either the empirical data, or better, “things that men are inclined or accustomed to say on the subject.”⁹ One must consider the problems connected with the subject and eventually show the reasonableness of the *ἔνδοξα*, the universally or commonly accepted opinions. “For if the difficulties were to be undone and the commonly accepted opinions preserved, the matter would have been clarified sufficiently.” Aristotle clearly proposes to discover the essence of continence (and later of incontinence, endurance and softness) by making use of the opinions shared by men in the society.

Aristotle describes this same method in *EE* I (1216b26–35). Here he writes that in matters concerning human virtues and actions and the end of human life, one must try to get firm persuasion (*ζητεῖν τὴν πίστιν*) through arguments, using *phainomena* as evidence and examples. What is most desired is that all men appear in agreement with the things to be said (*πάντας ἀνθρώπους φαίνεσθαι συνομολογοῦντας*) or at least that the agreement be relatively complete. He continues: *ὅπερ μεταβιβαζόμενοι ποιήσουσιν· ἔχει γὰρ ἕκαστος οἰκεῖόν τι πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐξ ὧν ἀναγκαῖον δεικνύναι πως περὶ αὐτῶν· ἐκ γὰρ τῶν ἀληθῶς*

⁸ Cf. Joseph Owens, “The Ground of Ethical Universality in Aristotle,” *Man and World* 2 (1969) 180: “*Paideia*, meaning education and culture, is what equips the individual to make the right moral decision in each case and to grasp the ethical principles in a way that will allow them to function as premises from which conclusions may be drawn in the manner of an authentic science. Hence the importance of correct habituation from earliest childhood on. Through this habituation are the moral starting points acquired.”

⁹ G. E. L. Owen, “*Τιθέσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα*,” in *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J. M. E. Moravcsik (New York 1967) 171. The passage I am treating is elucidated pp. 169–73.

μὲν λεγομένων οὐ σαφῶς δέ, προϊούσιν ἔσται καὶ τὸ σαφῶς, μεταλαμβάνουσιν ἀεὶ τὰ γνωριμώτερα τῶν εἰωθότων λέγεσθαι συγκεχυμένως. These lines I understand as follows: "This (*i.e.*, arriving at agreement) they will do if they are led to it (or persuaded); for each one has something of his own (*i.e.*, his own view) relative to the truth. And from these (various views) it is necessary somehow to formulate an explanation about these matters (presently under discussion, *viz.* ethical questions). For from what is stated truly but not clearly will come what is stated clearly too, at least for those who go on to exchange what is more evident for what is usually said confusedly." Here again, then, just as in the earlier example, the beginning point consists of the things customarily but confusedly said, and from this point the philosopher advances toward greater clarity, which will in turn increase agreement and conviction.

There are many other examples of the use of this method; at times it is discussed or at least mentioned, but more frequently it is simply used.¹⁰ The outcome of all this is that on those occasions when Aristotle's method in ethics becomes evident, that method is seen to be one of searching out appropriate data in the ethos of society. One can conclude, then, that for Aristotle the ethos of a society is the principal reality to be studied and ordered by any philosopher who undertakes to produce an ethical treatise.

One could philosophically investigate and formulate ethics, Aristotle demonstrated, without having recourse to the Forms or to the Idea of the Good. But did giving up the theory of Ideas force one to accept the utter relativism Aristotle attributes to Protagoras (in *Metaph.* 4.5–6)? If this was the price to be paid, then surely Aristotle would have thought it too high. Yet if the ethos of a society is the ultimate ethical reality, how can one avoid making man and his society the measure of all values and, inevitably, the measure of everything else as well?

¹⁰ See J. Donald Monan, *Moral Knowledge and its Methodology in Aristotle* (Oxford 1968) 96–104, where many of the examples of the use of the method are listed. One instance, overlooked by Monan, where, it seems to me, the method is used and named, is found at *EN* 1129a5–7, at the beginning of the inquiry into justice and injustice: ἡ δὲ κέψις ἡμῖν ἔστω κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν μέθοδον τοῖς προειρημένοις. δρώμεν δὴ πάντα τὴν τοιαύτην ἕξιν βουλομένους λέγειν δικαιοσύνην κτλ. R. Gauthier and J. Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque*² II (Louvain 1970) 330, rehearse the dispute (between Jackson and Grant) over whether these lines do in fact refer to the same 'method' as that in 1145b2–7, quoted above. They hold they do not, agreeing with Grant that the lines are concerned with "the fixing of the meaning of terms," but admitting neither view is certain.

Perhaps the way out of this new *aporia* lay in determining the manner in which the ethos is generated, in answering the question, “Why does the ethos come to be as it is?” I believe it was in great part to ask and answer this question that Aristotle wrote the *Art of Rhetoric*. He wanted to see how persuasion works (as contrasted with education or teaching, for which most people are not fitted); to discover what is going on when persuasion is being used effectively; to investigate the functioning of rhetoric in a society; and to determine the technical rules for effective persuasion. And in carrying out this task, it seems to me, Aristotle is at least implicitly maintaining that the exercise of the art of rhetoric establishes in a society its ethos. The ethos of a society is as it is because speakers using rhetoric persuade the members of the society in a certain way about questions of good and evil, of virtue and vice. If the speakers were to convince differently, then the ethos would be different. Not that Aristotle claims that one speaker, or even one group of speakers, creates *ex nihilo* an ethos; any society already has its own. The speaker at most modifies or changes this ethos, itself the result of the efforts of other speakers, whether orators or advice-giving friends, or parents or others responsible for guiding children, all of whom have in a sense used the art of rhetoric. (That everyone in some way uses this art Aristotle maintains in *Rhet.* I 1354a3–6.)

Note that of the three species of rhetoric Aristotle distinguishes (deliberative, epideictic and forensic), the first two are immediately relevant to his aim in the *Rhetoric* of studying the genesis of a society’s ethos, but the third is not. The first species is rhetoric *par excellence*, *i.e.*, deliberative or political rhetoric, used when the hearer is a judge of future things, as contrasted with forensic (the rhetoric of the law courts), used when the hearer is a judge of things past (*Rhet.* I 1358a36–b6). Deliberative rhetoric was completely neglected by writers before Aristotle, so he claims, and it is to this species that he has the most original contribution to make (1354b22–31). This rhetoric is the most valuable in a society since, in comparison with forensic rhetoric, this is “a nobler business and fitter for a citizen” (*καλλίωνος καὶ πολιτικωτέρας τῆς δημηγορικῆς πραγματείας οὐσης* 1354b24–25).

Along with the translators, I take it that this species of rhetoric, which includes both exhortation and dissuasion (*προτροπή, ἀποτροπή*), is designated indifferently as deliberative (*συμβουλευτική*) or political (*δημηγορική*, the rhetoric for speaking before the assembly of the

people), though the latter may be somewhat narrower in extension. *δημηγορία* had had a pejorative meaning for Plato; it was, as Ast points out (*Lexicon Platonicum s.v.*), “oratio s. expositio copiosa et continua quae non verum, sed speciem auditorumque delectationem et gratiam spectat”; in other words, simply ‘clap-trap’ (*LSJ s.v.*). Aristotle by associating *δημηγορία* with counsel and deliberation gave it a new meaning and so salvaged it.¹¹

That Aristotle held that the exercise of the art of deliberative rhetoric establishes in a society its ethos is clear from what he has to say about this rhetoric. Rhetoric in general is defined as “the faculty of observing about each matter what is possibly persuasive” (*τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν* 1355b25–26). Deliberative rhetoric is the faculty as it is specifically concerned with what people deliberate about: “Now the political or deliberative orator’s aim is utility (*τὸ συμφέρον*); deliberation seeks to determine not ends, but means to ends, *i.e.*, what it is most useful to do” (1362a17–20). This description eliminates from the ambit of deliberative rhetoric every ultimate end (like happiness), because such ends are recognized but not mulled over. The description includes in the ambit of deliberative rhetoric every possible future course of action, all those not ultimately telic but often intrinsically valuable actions that make up the life of an individual man and of the society he forms with others. Deliberative rhetoric, therefore, aims to persuade people about the useful and the harmful (*τὸ συμφέρον καὶ βλαβερόν* 1358b22), to persuade them that a certain future course of action is useful and advantageous, that it is good and praiseworthy and ought to be chosen, or that another course of action is useless and disadvantageous, that it is bad and deserving of censure and ought to be avoided.

A process involving deliberative rhetoric would go something like this: a choice has to be made between two possible courses of action. Deliberation is necessary since it is not clear which action is good, or

¹¹ Friedrich Solmsen, *Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics* (New York 1954) xiv, states that in the treatise on rhetoric Aristotle “actually reforms the subject and gives it a philosophically respectable standing.” Gauthier and Jolif, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.10) II.907, have failed to see the import of this reform. Commenting on the expression *λόγους δικανικούς τε καὶ δημηγορικούς* (*EN* 1181a4–5), they write: “Les politiciens se contentent de faire de la politique en ‘manoeuvres’ en prononçant ou en écrivant des discours destinés à être prononcés devant les tribunaux ou devant l’assemblée du peuple . . . ; mais pour désigner ces discours, Aristote emploie des mots péjoratifs: ce sont des discours ‘procéduriers’ (*δικανικοί*) ou ‘démagogiques’ (*δημηγορικοί*).” This is hardly accurate.

which of the two is better in case they are both good. The speaker who has the responsibility to guide in deliberation himself deliberates. He bases his deliberation not on scientific knowledge but on a type of opinion, since this is a question not about some universal truth but about a particular possible future event.¹² On the basis of his deliberation he comes to a conclusion about which course of action is worthy of choice. As he addresses the group, he presents his arguments in as persuasive a manner as he can, recalling that his own moral character is one of the most effective means to win the trust and agreement of the group he is addressing (1377b28–1378a19). He does not attempt to construct a scientific proof, but uses instead such rhetorical devices as the enthymeme and (as especially effective in deliberative rhetoric) the example or paradigm (1418a1–2). He is attempting to persuade his hearers, not strictly to prove his case, since most people are not capable of following the lengthy discussions needed in a proof, and even if they were he has nothing more than opinion to share with them.

Aristotle sums up the rôle of rhetoric in this way: “The function (of rhetoric) is concerned about those things about which we deliberate and for which we have no arts, and is aimed at those listeners who are not able to keep a lot of things in mind at once, nor to reason through a long argument” (1357a1–4).

If what I have been claiming about the important rôle of deliberative rhetoric in society is true, then this rôle ought to be clearly reflected in Aristotle’s description of this rhetoric (*Rhet.* I chs.4–8). And such indeed is the case. Three of these chapters, with the exception of a brief technical segment to be discussed later, form a substantive Aristotelian treatise on value.¹³ Since this material is substantive,¹⁴ it does not pertain to the art of rhetoric, but is included

¹² Jaakko Hintikka, “Time, Truth and Knowledge in Ancient Greek Philosophy,” *AmPhilosQ* 4 (1967) 1–14, investigates the reasons why “for Aristotle there could not be any genuine knowledge of sensible particulars, but only of universals” (p.8). Cf. Suzanne Mansion, *Le jugement d’existence chez Aristote* (Louvain 1946) 108–24, where the type of opinion we are concerned with is contrasted with ‘knowledge’.

¹³ In this section of *Rhet.* I, chs.4 and 8 are borrowings from the *Politics*: ch.4 deals with matters of government that might concern a political speaker (ways and means, war and peace, defense, imports and exports, legislation) and ch.8 with four kinds of *πολιτεῖαι*. Because they are concerned with these specific issues from *Pol.* they can be omitted from the present analysis.

¹⁴ By the ‘substantive’ content of the treatise I mean the material that pertains to the actual use and functioning of the art of rhetoric as opposed to what concerns the art itself

in the treatise on rhetoric “for the sake of example” (*παραδείγματος χάριν*).¹⁵ Thus this material is not immune, as a mere collection of the various methods actually used in rhetoric would be, from questions of right and wrong. Nevertheless, the content of these chapters has frequently been called ‘popular’ in contrast to the more ‘philosophical’ treatment afforded these same issues in other treatises. While the language is less ‘ethical’ than it is in the *Ethics* (as the treatment of the emotions in *Rhetoric* II might be described as less ‘psychological’ than is the treatment of them in the *De Anima*), it does not follow that this material must be less philosophical, or wrong, or even inexact. For Aristotle to propose a wrong or inexact standard of values to the speaker here would be tantamount to his proposing a wrong description of pity or envy in *Rhetoric* II. In either case, the misled speaker’s effectiveness would necessarily be lessened.

This discussion of value starts with a description of what is said to be the basis for exhortation and dissuasion, happiness: ἔστω δὴ εὐδαιμονία εὐπραξία μετ’ ἀρετῆς (1360b14). After other possible descriptions of happiness there follows a list of its parts, twelve of them, of which the last is ἀρετή. The question arises: was Aristotle serious about this description of happiness and its parts? It is necessary, of course, to my thesis about the rôle of deliberative rhetoric to maintain that he was. This view, though, is not gratuitous; it is supported by the evidence. The first description of happiness, while not expressed in the language of ethics, is not contrary to what is found in the ethical treatises. εὐπραξία μετ’ ἀρετῆς, taken in the sense of ‘right action with virtue’, is quite an adequate description of happiness, provided one recall not only what is said in *EN* I but more particularly what is said in *EN* X ch.8, where the concept of happiness in a secondary sense (*δευτέρως* 1178a9), the happiness of the good man in society, is described and justified. Further, while it is true that Aristotle does not go into the subject of virtue at this point in the *Rhetoric*, he puts the

(the technical content of the treatise). Characteristic of the technical passages are: indifference to the means of persuasion studied, provided they are technically apt (1355b15–16; 1367a33ff; 1395a7–10); indifference to the conclusion (1355a35–36). Characteristic of the substantive passages are: care about what means of persuasion are used (1354a25–26; 1400a37–b4, 1416b4–8); concern about the conclusion arrived at (1355a31: οὐ γὰρ δεῖ τὰ φαῦλα πείθειν).

¹⁵ 1360b7, near the beginning of ch.5. Aristotle uses the same expression (1366a32) in introducing another substantive section about καλόν and ἀρετή, a section we will note in the study of epideictic rhetoric.

subject off only to treat it in a more proper place, *viz.* under epideictic rhetoric (*Rhet.* I ch.9).

Still, the elements of happiness other than virtue appear to some commentators too prosaic to be taken seriously: good birth, plenty of friends, a happy old age, health, beauty, strength, large stature, athletic powers. Can these really constitute Aristotle's analysis of happiness? One must notice, however, Aristotle's comment (1360b24–25): οὕτω γὰρ ἂν αὐταρκέστατος εἴη, εἰ ὑπάρχοι αὐτῷ τὰ τ' ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ ἐκτὸς ἀγαθὰ. This seems to mean that having the sum of all these elements is a sufficient condition for being happy; after all, who would refuse to admit that a person who had all twelve of these elements was in fact happy? It does not follow that each of them, by itself, is a necessary condition for happiness; to be without athletic powers hardly seems to entail being doomed never to be happy. Yet even in *EN* Aristotle maintains that there are external goods the possession of which is a necessary condition for happiness, so that if even one of them is missing a man can hardly be happy: for example, if he lacks children, or children with virtue, or good birth, or companions (1099a31–b8).

This description of happiness, then, is really not unlike what we would have expected from Aristotle on the basis of what one knows of him from his other works. The same holds true of his treatment of the next subject, the study of the elements of *συμφέρον* and *ἀγαθόν* (*Rhet.* I ch.6). These must be studied since the aim of the deliberative speaker is τὸ *συμφέρον* and this is *ἀγαθόν*. What follows is typical Aristotelian doctrine: the description of the good as οὐ ἐφίεται πάντα; the relationship between being good and being praiseworthy; the inclusion of virtue among praiseworthy things, etc. There follows a comparison of goods, of levels of value (ch.7). As a basis for this discussion, Aristotle repeats with slight variations the description of the good given earlier: that good is τό τε αὐτὸ αὐτοῦ ἔνεκα καὶ μὴ ἄλλον αἰρετόν, καὶ οὐδὲ πάντ' ἐφίεται and that good is a τέλος (1363b13–16). Using this description, Aristotle is able to formulate rules to determine and prove the relative value of good things.

The bulk of these chapters deals with substantive issues concerning happiness, good, and the comparison of values. And as has been pointed out, this material does not form part of the art of rhetoric but is included as an aid to the speaker when he actually puts the art into practice. We must recognize, however, that there is at least one

segment (in ch.7, 1365a10–33) which is clearly technical, *i.e.*, part of the art of rhetoric, and as such is immune from questions about right and wrong or good and evil. The reason for this immunity is that by definition the art is *δύναμις . . . τοῦ θεωρῆσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν* (*Rhet.* I 1355b25–26); the art merely judges the means used in persuasion on the basis of their technical aptitude for persuading. A failure to recognize the differences between the substantive content and the technical content of the *Rhetoric* has led to a good deal of confusion in the evaluation and interpretation of the treatise. If one expects merely what is technical, then he is surprised to see Aristotle taking a point of view about society and its *ethos*. If one expects the whole treatise to be substantive, then he is scandalized to see the ‘amoralism’ in the technical passages, such as the one here in *Rhet.* I ch.7, where the techniques suggested for making anything look better seem mildly deceptive.

What has been said about Aristotle’s description of deliberative rhetoric does seem, then, to support the view that Aristotle saw this species as a form of rhetoric which in part furnished the explanation for the *ethos* of society. Another form is epideictic rhetoric, which is used when the hearer is not a judge at all, but a spectator (*θεωρός* 1358b6). It is difficult to find a term to use for this species. According to C. S. Baldwin, “Of the various translations of Aristotle’s *ἐπιδεικτικός*, ‘demonstrative’ is flatly a mistranslation, ‘oratory of display’ is quite too narrow a translation, and ‘epideictic’ is not a translation at all. The nearest word in current use is ‘*panegyric*’, which is all right as far as it goes.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, ‘epideictic’ has won out among the translators, even though one has to go to a dictionary larger than *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate* to find the word. Fortunately, finding examples of the use of this rhetoric is easier than naming it; they might include, as Baldwin suggests, the Gettysburg address, other commemorative addresses and many sermons.

Like deliberative rhetoric, for Aristotle epideictic is important to the development of the *ethos* of society. Epideictic rhetoric is concerned with praise and blame, and meaningful praise inevitably involves virtue and the noble (*τὸ καλόν*) since these are both *ἐπαινετά*. Aristotle accordingly develops his brief account of epideictic rhetoric (*Rhet.* I ch.9) in a serious way, and in a way that is strikingly parallel

¹⁶ Charles Sears Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York 1924) 15 n.14.

to his study of value in *Rhet.* I chs.5–7. For the sake of brevity, I will merely mention the steps in the first part of the account (1366a23–1367a33): (1) after a brief introductory remark on praise and blame, Aristotle signals that he is departing from the technical treatment of rhetoric to give a substantive account of the objects of, and motives for, praise, *παραδείγματος χάριν*; (2) τὸ καλόν is carefully described; (3) ἀρετή is introduced as an instance of καλόν and ἐπαινετόν; (4) two descriptions of virtue are offered; δύναμις ὡς δοκεῖ ποριστικὴ ἀγαθῶν καὶ φυλακτικὴ, καὶ δύναμις εὐεργετικὴ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων, καὶ πάντων περὶ πάντα; (5) eight forms of virtue are named; (6) a description is given of the virtues and their opposite vices, except that the opposite of φρόνησις is not named and σοφία itself is not described;¹⁷ (7) things productive of virtue are considered; (8) noble actions in general are described; (9) noble things are described.

Up to this point about midway through the chapter everything is substantive Aristotelian doctrine which, though described in a different way from that found in the other treatises, does not conflict with what is found in them.¹⁸ But at 1367a32 there is a change to a technical point of view; suddenly we are being told how to depict a cautious man as though he were cold-blooded or treacherous, or a stupid man as though he were honest. This technical point of view alternates with the substantive up to the end of the chapter. But these technical

¹⁷ W. D. Ross notes in the apparatus of his Greek ed. of *Rhet.* (Oxford 1959), “σοφία an omittendum? non definitur in loco sequente (ll. 9–22), neque est δύναμις εὐεργετικὴ (l. 4).” There is no textual evidence for omitting σοφία, and while it may not be a δύναμις εὐεργετικὴ it surely is a δύναμις ποριστικὴ ἀγαθῶν (as 1371b26–28 makes clear), and the two descriptions of ἀρετή can be taken disjunctively. One might speculate that Aristotle’s refusal to say anything more about σοφία in this context is a clue to the seriousness with which he has written the other descriptions in this chapter.

¹⁸ E. M. Cope, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle with a Commentary I* (Cambridge 1877) 159 §4, provides an example of how some would dispute this point: “The definition of virtue here given (1366a36–b1) compared with the celebrated one of *Eth. Nic.* II 6, init., and the detailed treatment of the list of virtues and the meagre and incomplete account here given of them, contrasted with the elaborate and ingenious analysis of them in the third and fourth books of the same work, is a most striking illustration of the difference between the point of view and method of treatment in the popular Rhetoric and comparatively scientific Ethics. For example, the definition here given coincides in no single point with that of the Ethics. It regards virtue solely on the side of its usefulness, probably because this feature of it is likely to produce the greatest effect upon the popular mind. Instead of a *ἔξις* it is a mere *δύναμις*, an undeveloped faculty or power—this is most expressly denied in *Eth. N.* II 4, 1106a5. . .” Yet in the ch. cited from *EN*, in denying that ἀρετή is a δύναμις, Aristotle has a very distinct meaning of *δύναμις* in mind (1105b23–25). The word, of course, has many meanings, and at least one of them can include ἀρετή (cf. *Metaph.* 1019a23–26).

segments aside, the chapter does indicate the importance Aristotle attributed to epideictic rhetoric in shaping social attitudes with regard to virtue and the noble.

Thus as deliberative and epideictic rhetoric as envisioned by Aristotle are used in a society, the members of the society become habituated to find value in certain types of action and not find value in others, to praise certain kinds of men and their deeds and to censure others. There develops in a society a certain unanimity about things which are useful and good (*δμόνοια περὶ τὰ συμφέροντα* EN 1167b2–3) which Aristotle, without attributing it to rhetoric, calls 'political friendship'. There develops, too, common patterns of speech about human life and activity, and common opinions (*ἔνδοξα*) about questions of value.¹⁹ There comes into being a set of unwritten laws, such as those telling one to show gratitude to those doing good to him, to return good to them, and to stand ready to help friends.²⁰ Finally, and along the same lines, there comes to be a fund of maxims (*γνώμαι*), 'old sayings', rules of thumb about activities, about what is to be chosen or avoided with respect to human activity.²¹

All that I have been describing is precisely the ethos of the society, that reality to be studied by the philosopher in formulating an ethical system. As I have maintained, Aristotle viewed ethical values as real since they are constituents of that ethos, and he thereby succeeded in eliminating the need for the theory of Forms as the basis for ethical study. Whether he had succeeded in avoiding utter relativism was another question, and I suggested that we look for the answer by determining the manner in which the ethos of a society originated. But if this ethos originated due to the use of rhetoric on the part of speakers in the society, and the ethos takes the form it does because

¹⁹ See Monan, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.10) especially ch.5, "Implicit Doctrine of Moral Knowledge in the Nicomachean Ethics," where Monan investigates the data Aristotle looks for in these customary speech patterns and opinions.

²⁰ See Max Hamburger, *Morals and Law: the Growth of Aristotle's Legal Theory*² (New York 1971) 100: "Starting from the dichotomy, written and unwritten law, right and wrong, he (Aristotle) subdivides unwritten law into two categories, unwritten law belonging to the moral sphere and unwritten law belonging to the legal sphere proper. Under the first head fall acts which spring from an exceptional degree of goodness or badness and are accordingly attended by censure or by praise—by the infliction of dishonor or by honor or rewards. . . This sort of unwritten law does not belong to the legal sphere itself but rather to the domain of morals; it has been aptly defined as belonging to the sphere of social opinion."

²¹ *γνωμολογία* is taken up in *Rhet.* II ch.21.

of the way they persuade about questions of good and evil, the prospect of Aristotle's system being in the end utterly relativistic seems even closer at hand.

The fact is that the problem about utter relativism has not been solved, but merely pushed back one level. But it was necessary, I believe, to push it back in this way in order to see the implications of the safeguard against relativism that Aristotle at this point adopts. This safeguard is his thesis that there is an inclination on the part of men toward the truth. This thesis is asserted clearly in *Rhetoric* I (1355a15–17): “. . . Men are sufficiently disposed towards what is true and most of the time they attain the truth” (οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς τὸ ἀληθὲς πεφύκασι ἰκανῶς καὶ τὰ πλείω τυγχάνουσι τῆς ἀληθείας).

This disposition may be clarified by two examples of other dispositions described by Aristotle in identical language (πεφυκέναι πρὸς . . .).²² First is the disposition or aptitude of a pentathlete toward both strength and swiftness (*Rhet.* 1361b10–11); to be a pentathlete requires that one have this aptitude, since the pentathlon consists of contests of strength and swiftness. Second, there is the disposition or tendency men have toward self-indulgence, a tendency consisting in the greater ease we find in being self-indulgent than in being temperate, at least until we have been trained in virtue (*EN* 1109a14–16).

By analogy with these dispositions, we can see that men's being “disposed sufficiently toward what is true” consists in their having an aptitude and tendency toward the truth. They can either come to possess the truth through scientific study, the construction of proofs, or—and this will be the more common case in view of people's limitations—they can recognize the truth when confronted with it, particularly when it is presented in a persuasive manner. They will recognize it, not always, but for the most part unless something hinders that recognition. And this aptitude toward the truth must extend not only to matters of fact but to questions of value as well.

The instances where Aristotle restates this thesis are too numerous and clear to leave any doubt about its importance for him. He describes ‘good’ in *Rhet.* I (1362a23), just as in *EN* I (1094a3), as “that which all things desire (ἐφίεται).” Later in the same first book of the *Rhetoric*, he expands this description of ‘good’ as “that which all men desire; but ‘the many’ seem to be the same as ‘all men’ ” (1363a8–10).

²² These are two examples cited by H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* 833a13–15 s.v.

Both these instances have to do with value; still later in the same book the thesis is extended to matters of fact: "What either all or most men of practical wisdom (*οἱ φρόνιμοι*) or the majority of people or the finest people (*κράτιστοι*) would judge or have judged to be a greater good, must be so, either simply or to the extent they judged according to practical wisdom. This is usual also for other matters. For what a thing is and how large and of what sort—all of these are just as knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) and practical wisdom would say they are" (1364b11–16).

Aristotle has often been understood as saying what most or all people think is good is good, and the reason it is good is that they think it is (something like an 'interest theory of value').²³ But this interpretation, if not false, is at least misleading. What Aristotle is saying is that what most or all people think is good is good, and the reason they think it is good is that it is good and not the other way around (something like a 'value theory of interest'). If Aristotle's meaning is at all obscure regarding questions of value, it surely is not obscure regarding questions of fact. For if most or all people agree about the essence, size or quality of a thing, they are right, not because their agreement constitutes the essence or size of a thing, but because only if the actual essence or magnitude of the thing is such as they judge it to be is there sufficient reason for their agreement.

This thesis that man has an inclination toward the truth appears also in the ethical treatises. The passage cited above from the *EE* (1216b26–35) agrees with the following from the *EN*: "Those who object that that at which all things aim is not necessarily good are, we may surmise, talking nonsense. For we say that that which everyone thinks really is so; and the man who attacks this belief will hardly have anything more credible to maintain instead" (1172b35–1173a2, Oxford transl.)

So consistently does Aristotle maintain this thesis about man's aptitude for the truth that Owen can write: "*Ἐνδοξά* also rest on experience, even if they misrepresent it. If they did not, Aristotle could find no place for them in his epistemology; as it is, an *ἔνδοξον* that is shared by all men is *ipso facto* beyond challenge."²⁴

²³ See William K. Frankena, "Value and Valuation," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 8 (New York 1967) 231: "Aristotle, von Ehrenfels, and Perry claim that value is the relational property of being an object of desire or interest (an interest theory of value) . . ."

²⁴ Owen, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) 175.

And it seems to me in this thesis Aristotle found the ultimate safeguard available to him against utter relativism, because the thesis eliminated the possibility that the ethos be the result merely of the whim of each society as the society is persuaded by speakers to make one or other decision; the thesis demands, rather, that the ethos result from the recognition of truth as presented by persuasive speakers.²⁵

This thesis completed Aristotle's analysis of ethos, ethics and rhetoric, and based that analysis on the finality of man and mind toward the truth, a finality Aristotle took to be the firmest ground of his entire philosophy (*Metaph.* I 980a21).

But must we conclude that for Aristotle there are not deviant societies? Yes and no. In the *Politics* he writes of such societies, but not without offering an explanation for their deviation: that these societies are malformed as they are because of the efforts of demagogues or tyrants seeking their own private gain (*Pol.* III ch.6, V ch.6). Yet these are societies in name only, since they lack the unity and coherence necessary for a true society. Destitute of justice, they cannot last (*Pol.* 1332b27–29).

If my conclusion about Aristotle's analysis of ethos, ethics and rhetoric is correct, then there are three consequences for Aristotelian studies worth noting, consequences I will merely mention briefly. First, the ethical treatises are put in a different light from that in which they are often viewed; they can be seen really to display what has aptly been called their 'objective relativism'.²⁶ Aristotle's presentation of ethics is relativistic, relative, that is, to the ethos of the society. Yet it is not utterly relativistic, since the ethos has to meet the demands of some sort of truth. While it may be correct that the *EN* "has nothing to say about natural law, beyond the basic suggestion that there is a naturally right way of acting,"²⁷ and that "le thème de la nature n'est pas un thème de la morale d'Aristote,"²⁸ and that "one of the most refreshing features of Aristotle's ethics is its almost total lack of connection with his metaphysics,"²⁹ if in fact ethics is

²⁵ See *Rhet.* 1355a21–22, where Aristotle describes the naturally greater suasive force of things just and true.

²⁶ John Herman Randall Jr, *Aristotle* (New York 1960) 252.

²⁷ Vernon J. Bourke, *History of Ethics I* (New York 1968) 41.

²⁸ Gauthier and Jolif, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.10) I.244.

²⁹ Moravcsik, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) 10, quoting a remark attributed to J. L. Austin. For an opposing view, see Thomas Gould, "The Metaphysical Foundation for Aristotle's Ethics,"

relative to the ethos and this latter must be conformed to truth, then it follows that ultimately underlying ethics is something like 'an order in nature'. This may not be the only feature of Aristotle's ethical treatises, but it surely is one to be taken into account.³⁰

The second consequence is that the interplay of ethos, ethics and rhetoric sheds some new light on an apparent conflict in Aristotle of democratic versus aristocratic tendencies. I mentioned the *ἔνδοξοι ἄνδρες* earlier as a source for ethical studies, but put off until now any further inquiry into that source. It is true that Aristotle does often appeal to a small, especially gifted group in arriving at a conclusion about some ethical matter: the *χαρίεντες* and *σοφοί*, for example, when there is question of what it means to live well (*EN* 1095a18–22), and those who are *λόγου ἄξιοι* when there is question of whether *ἀρετή* and *φρόνησις* are connected with happiness.³¹ Is it inconsistent to do that, and still hold that the ethos of society is the principal source for ethical studies? I think not. The situation here is very much like one described by Aristotle in the *Politics* (III ch.13). There he held that if one man is so preeminently superior in goodness that there can be no comparison between his goodness and political capacity and that of the rest of the society, then there is no alternative but to make him permanent ruler and "for all the others to pay a willing obedience to the man of outstanding goodness" (1284b32–34, transl. Barker). But such a god among men is not easily found, nor is his worth readily tested if he is found. So practically, Aristotle admits,

in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. John P. Anton with George L. Kustas (Albany 1971) 451–61. Another recent commentator, W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory* (Oxford 1968) 43, 44, says "there are connections" between Aristotle's ethical and metaphysical doctrines, but does not say what he considers them to be.

³⁰ See Düring, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 53: "The combination of biological and ethical speculation made it from the outset impossible for Aristotle to imagine the eternal forms as having separate existence; he identified 'existence' and 'physical existence' and thought of form as being realized in the continuous, *ἀειγενές*, process of creation, and of a scale of values corresponding to the *scala naturae*. In his ethics he paved the way for the concept of *physis* as norm." Joachim Ritter ("Le droit naturel chez Aristote," *ArchPhilos* 32 [1969] 416–57) makes a similar point, indicating that it is vain to look for an order in nature in Aristotle as though it were *a priori* separate: "... Aristote n'admet ni un juste qui en tant que principe intérieur de moralité détermine l'action de l'individu par la conscience d'un devoir, ni un principe du droit existant par soi qui serait le fondement et la règle de la législation. Le 'droit', pour Aristote, se présente toujours sous la multiplicité des mœurs, coutumes, habitudes, dans la cité comme dans la famille" (p. 440).

³¹ *EE* 1216b2. Cf. *Top.* 100b21–23: *ἔνδοξα δὲ τὰ δοκοῦντα πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς σοφοῖς, καὶ τούτοις ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς μάλιστα γνωρίμοις καὶ ἐνδόξοις.*

one must turn to the people; "each individual may, indeed, be a worse judge than all the experts; but all, when they meet together, are either better than experts or at any rate no worse."³² For the study of ethics, in a similar manner, if ultimately judgements of value are based on something like an order in nature, then Aristotle must be able to envision one man or a few men so superior in their wisdom and goodness, their refinement and insight, that they alone could serve as the source of ethical study. But again, to find such men and test their worth is a difficult task; one turns out of necessity to the ethos of society as his prime source. Still, when one has at hand the views of such *ἔνδοξοι ἄνδρες*, he makes use of them, recognizing that their views form a real, if limited, source for the development of ethical studies.

The final and perhaps most important consequence to be mentioned is that the *Rhetoric* is a work of a different sort from what it has often been thought to be.³³ It is not a *Physics* nor a *De Anima*, as one would not expect it to be. But it is the work of a serious thinker and requires an interpretation that takes that into account. By way of illustration, I have tried to sketch above how this interpretation

³² 1282a15–17, in *The Politics of Aristotle*, transl. with introd., notes and appendixes by Ernest Barker (Oxford 1946) 126. Barker notes on the phrase 'when they meet together', "The people at large have the merit of a good collective judgement not as a static mass, but when they are dynamic—in other words when they assemble, and when the process of debate begins. It is thus not an unfair gloss to suggest that Aristotle by implication assumes that the dialectic of debate is the final foundation of the principle of popular government, so far as he accepts that principle. In other words, democracy is based on discussion."

³³ William W. Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Emotion," *ArchGeschPhilos* 52 (1970) 40, refers to writers who have viewed Aristotle's treatment of the emotions (*Rhet.* II) as superficial. For many of these, the whole treatise is superficial or merely 'practical'. This is the view taken by W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* V (New York 1959) 267, and by Oates, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 335, and expressed in a typical manner by Francis D. Wormuth, "Aristotle on Law," in *Essays in Political Theory Presented to George H. Sabine*, ed. Milton R. Konvitz and Arthur E. Murphy (Ithaca 1948) 58: "... two considerations make the passages in the *Rhetoric* of doubtful value as evidence of Aristotle's opinions. To begin with, the book is intended to teach rhetoricians to plead cases; and Aristotle in fact offers arguments on both sides of the question. . . We are not obliged to believe that the *Rhetoric* is doing anything more than reporting the stock phrases of current oratory . . ." Compare W. Rhys Roberts, "Notes on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," *AJP* 45 (1924) 351: "Aristotle's object (in *Rhet.*) is to show how truth and justice may be aided by the effective use of public speech." Hamburger, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.20) 39 n.1, asserts that "the *Rhetoric* contains many of Aristotle's most accomplished formulations in matters of law and equity, passages that may well constitute his crowning statements on legal theory."

might proceed for one part of the work (*Rhet.* I, chs.5–7). This approach to the *Rhetoric* can be extended to all three books, but will require a much longer work than the present. For the present I conclude that the *Rhetoric* is a treatise on a subject Aristotle himself took seriously enough to spend a good part of his life studying and teaching, and that one reason for his taking it seriously was the power he saw in it for the shaping of the ethos of society.

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