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## STYLE, CHARACTER, AND PERSUASION IN ARISTOTLE'S *RHETORIC*

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### *Abstract*

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* leaves a number of unanswered questions, among them the nature of the relationship between verbal style and *êthos*, or character, as a means of persuasion. Statements throughout the *Rhetoric* suggest a connection between manner of expression and persuasive character, but Aristotle's ideas in this area are underdeveloped. Here we argue that Aristotle's stylistic theory, while not demonstrably inconsistent with the technical proof through character, cannot be made to conform neatly with it in most salient respects. Though Aristotle does not explicitly identify style as a means through which the speaker may convey the impression that he possesses positive intellectual or moral qualities, he does recognize a role for *lexis* in the expression of generic character traits and is aware that an inappropriate style will damage the speaker's credibility. Hence, attention to style is important for the presentation of a *plausible êthos* and, in this limited respect, style does contribute to the maintenance of persuasive character. This conclusion must be inferred from passing remarks in the *Rhetoric*. The absence of a more fully developed theory is curious in light of the availability of examples from the discourse of Attic logographers like Lysias, a speechwriter universally praised by later critics for his mastery of *ethopoeia* (character portrayal).

Of all the ideas laid down by the classical rhetoricians, the concept of *êthos* has proven to be among the most durable. This is vouched for by the recent swelling of interest in *êthos* in several areas of the humanities—we refer not only to the numerous philosophical and philological rereadings of the classical sources, but also to the work of literary critics who now commonly thematize the expression of "character" in works of prose fiction, to the scholarship in composition that has sought to adapt the concept of *êthos* to the teaching of writing under the category of voice or stance, and to recent analyses of the

Internet and computer-mediated communication that have made *êthos* a central problematic, usually under the rubric of “credibility.”<sup>1</sup> In all of these disparate inquiries, Aristotle is regularly credited as the originator of and primary classical authority for the theory of rhetorical *êthos*. But while the general parameters of Aristotle’s account are well known—in the *Rhetoric*, the presentation of character is identified as one of the three types of artful proof (*pistis entekhnos*), consisting of the speaker’s display of practical intelligence, moral excellence, and good will—many particulars of Aristotle’s account remain murky. Despite sustained work by classicists and historians of rhetoric, the complexity of Aristotle’s thought, combined with the problematic state of the text of the *Rhetoric*, have left *êthos* even now the source of lively disagreement.<sup>2</sup> Of particular interest in this paper is the question of the relationship between *êthos* and style (*lexis*), a subject of apparently lesser importance addressed in *Rhetoric*, book 3. Does Aristotle attribute a character-constructing function to style, or is style merely a tool for expressing ideas clearly, as he at times suggests in book 3?

To illuminate Aristotle’s position on this issue, we first outline the fundamental features of the proof through character as discussed in the first two books of the *Rhetoric*, noting in particular those passages suggestive of a connection between style and character. We then examine the passages on *lexis* (*Rh.* 3.1–12) that may be construed as speaking to the topic of “ethical” proof. Throughout the discussion in these first two sections, we identify points of indeterminacy that complicate the reconstruction of Aristotle’s views on style and character and contribute to the current dissensus among scholars of the text. We argue that while Aristotle does not explicitly identify style as a means to express the three components of persuasive *êthos*, he does recognize a role for *lexis* in maintaining the semblance of plausibility and suggests that an inappropriate style will damage the speaker’s credibility. This conclusion indicates a rift between the Aristotelian theory of style and a properly technical understanding of the proof through *êthos*. At the same time, it points to an undoubtedly significant role for style in achieving persuasion. In the final section of this paper, we attempt to clarify this role by considering the rhetorical practice of the Greek speechwriter Lysias, whose reputation for skillful characterization (*ethopoeia*) points to the recognition in later classical

thought of the connection between style, character, and persuasion. Although Aristotle does not address the subject of *ethopoeia* directly, some of his comments prefigure this later development.

### *Character and Style: Rhetoric, Books 1 and 2*

A fundamental difficulty for the interpretation of the proof through character concerns the identification of the passages of the *Rhetoric* that actually speak to the issue. The word *êthos*, its cognates, and derivatives (plural *êthê*, adjective *êthikos*, adverb *êthikôs*) occur in disparate contexts throughout all three books.<sup>3</sup> The term is applied not only to the speaker but to groups of people—evidently, potential audience members—when it is used to designate collections of characteristics shared by individuals living under a particular form of government (*Rh.* 1.8) or of similar age and life experiences (2.12–17). The adjective *êthikos*, “ethical” or “character-full,” is also found occasionally as a modifier of discourse or language (*logos*) itself.<sup>4</sup> Opinions have varied as to which of these passages provide actual description of persuasion through character *qua* technical proof. E. M. Cope offered one proposal, suggesting that there are three distinct “kinds” of *êthos* in the *Rhetoric* (Cope 1867, 108–13). The first relates to the character of the speaker and corresponds to the artistic *pistis* announced in *Rhetoric* 1.2: “Of the *pisteis* provided through speech there are three species: for some are in the character [*êthos*] of the speaker, and some in disposing the listener in some way, and some in the argument [*logos*] itself” (*Rh.* 1.2 1356a1–4; see also 1.9 1366a25–29, 2.1 1378a7–20; unless indicated otherwise, translations of passages in Arist. *Rh.* that are longer than a few words are taken from Kennedy 1991). The second type of *êthos* is that belonging to states or to people of similar age or fortunes (i.e., the *êthê* discussed at *Rh.* 1.8 and 2.12–17). Cope believed this kind to be distinct from the *pistis* derived from the character of the speaker, and to be useful primarily for the construction of emotional appeals (for conciliating the audience) (110–11). The third type is that “belonging to style” or “dramatic ethos” and covers those occurrences of the term in book 3 which Cope took to involve the effective portrayal of characters appearing in the discourse, especially in the narrative section (i.e., *Rh.* 3.7 1408a25–32 and 3.16 1417a15–36) (112–13).

Cope's classification has exerted considerable influence on more recent scholarship,<sup>5</sup> but it has not escaped criticism. Several commentators have argued, for example, that Aristotle's account of the *êthê* of potential audience members at 2.12–17 must surely be related to the speaker's construction of appeals from character.<sup>6</sup> In a different vein, Jakob Wisse faults Cope's account for creating the misleading impression that the word *êthos* has more than one meaning in the *Rhetoric* (Wisse 1989, 60). Despite these areas of disagreement, however, several features of Aristotle's proof through character seem relatively uncontroversial. Most important are the following:

1. The proof through character is effected "on account of the speech" (διὰ τοῦ λόγου) and not through the prior reputation enjoyed by the speaker (see *Rh.* 1.2 1356a4–14, with Braet 1992, 311; Kennedy 1999, 82).
2. The proof through character entails the speaker *appearing* to be a "certain sort of person."<sup>7</sup> Aristotle is not particularly interested in the speaker's actual or genuine character but rather in the artistic presentation of the sort of character that will be persuasive to the audience he is addressing (cf. Garver 1994, 193–97).
3. The qualities of character conducive to persuasion are three in number and a mixture of moral and intellectual traits. The three qualities are *phronêsis* (intellectual capacity or practical wisdom), *aretê* (moral excellence), and *eunoia* (good will).<sup>8</sup>
4. Persuasion through character *qua* technical proof is a rational process: the speaker's display of *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* provides a "'warrant' for the factual and argumentative content of the speech" (Wisse 1989, 33). Aristotle's concept is "rational" in the sense that it assumes, and does not seek to interfere with, the audience's exercise of impartial judgment when making inferences, based on what a speaker says, about the speaker's reliability or trustworthiness. Aristotle's concept is thus to be distinguished from emotional appeal. As William Fortenbaugh explains: "The speaker presents three attributes which a sober-minded audience looks for in a credible speaker; and when the facts of the case are difficult to determine, the audience regularly and reasonably believes the speaker who exhibits wisdom, virtue, and goodwill . . . [In contrast to emotional appeals] there is no attempt to bend the mind of the listener."<sup>9</sup>

While scholars generally agree on at least these features of Aristotle's account of the proof through *êthos*, there is broad disagreement concerning the extent to which the speaker's choice of language—or verbal style—figures in the communication of character. It is, of course, a common (and ancient) presumption that "style is the man [*sic*] himself,"<sup>10</sup> and it may well be, as Perelman

and Olbrechts-Tyteca observe, that "for many people, speech is the most characteristic manifestation of the person" and that "clarity and nobility of style will act in [the speaker's] favor" (1969, 316–17, 320, emphasis added). The question is whether Aristotle himself makes this link and views style as bearing on the audience's assessment of the speaker's trustworthiness. More specifically, to be consistent with accounts of the *pistis* through character elsewhere in the *Rhetoric*, it would need to be shown that style can be employed to convey the sense that the speaker is intelligent, virtuous, and/or well disposed towards his audience.

Several passages in books 1 and 2 suggest a link between style and the *pistis* through character, but Aristotle's language is typically so obscure as to leave them open to diverse interpretations. Consider an early statement on *êthos*, *Rhetoric* 1.2.4 (1356a5–6), which George Kennedy translates as follows: "[There is persuasion] through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence."<sup>11</sup> The phrase "spoken in such a way" (οὕτω λεχθῆ) might be construed to denote a speaker's manner of expression, and on this reading style would be identified as a means of effecting the proof through character. Kennedy flatly rejects this interpretation, however, asserting in a footnote to the sentence that Aristotle "is not thinking of style and delivery but of the thought and contents" (1991, 38n41; cf. Smith 2004, 12). This reading would suggest an interpretation, namely, that Aristotle's concept of persuasion through character is solely a matter of invention, involving the thought, matter, or content of the discourse, but not its verbal style or manner of presentation in delivery. It should be noted, though, that Kennedy provides no support for this reading; it is still possible that Aristotle is indeed thinking of style in his remark at 1.2.<sup>12</sup> The remainder of the sentence—"for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly [than we do others] on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt"—could be interpreted in terms of both content and style. One can imagine the content of a message producing an impression of fair-mindedness, as in a speech in which an opponent's views are represented accurately. At the same time, style can affect impressions of fair-mindedness, as well. Characterizing an opponent with an unflattering epithet, for example, is a stylistic choice that could

in many circumstances create a negative impression of a speaker's character.

Kennedy's explanatory note on *Rhetoric* 1.2.4 imposes an interpretation at variance with a contrary view and should be understood in light of a broader dispute concerning the integrity of the treatise as a whole. On one side of the issue are scholars who subscribe to the view that the *Rhetoric* is an essentially unified treatise, one that presents a conceptually coherent theory. This group includes William Grimaldi, Larry Arnhart, and Eugene Ryan, all of whom have claimed that the analysis of style in book 3 is integrated with the notion of the three *pisteis*, including the proof through character. Grimaldi, for example, states that "language [or style] is instrumental for developing *ethos*," and both Arnhart and Ryan follow him closely on this point.<sup>13</sup> In support of this position, Arnhart points to *Rhetoric* 3.7, the chapter devoted to stylistic propriety (*to prepon*). There, Aristotle treats propriety of style under three headings; style will be appropriate, he says, "if it expresses emotion and character and is proportional to the subject matter."<sup>14</sup> The triplet here—emotion, character, and subject matter—certainly appears to call the three *pisteis* to mind.<sup>15</sup> Arnhart accordingly holds that 3.7 provides evidence that "style should be an integral part of the substantive argument of a speech, for it should support all three *pisteis*—*pragma*, *pathos*, and *ethos*."<sup>16</sup>

Others, including Kennedy, view the *Rhetoric* as a somewhat discontinuous work that shows signs of having developed over a considerable period of time. These scholars generally agree that the proofs through both *êthos* and *pathos* were later additions to Aristotle's rhetorical theory but that most or all of the chapters on style were composed separately and perhaps early in his career.<sup>17</sup> Although it is possible that earlier material was revised to take account of later developments, William Fortenbaugh and Jakob Wisse have both suggested that the chapters on style have not been revised in this fashion. Indeed, Wisse claims that book 3 shows an almost wholesale ignorance of the theory of the three *pisteis*.<sup>18</sup> Fortenbaugh, who has worked tirelessly to reconstruct the *Rhetoric*'s development through several stages and to elucidate Aristotle's notion of persuasion through character, has argued that most of the material in book 3 belongs to the earliest stratum of the text and reflects interests and concerns quite separate from the mature theory represented by the proofs

through *êthos* and *pathos*.<sup>19</sup> By the logic of Fortenbaugh's argument, Aristotle's theory of style would have little to do with the concept of persuasion through character *qua* technical proof. In short, when book 3 is considered apart from books 1 and 2, the *pistis* through character consists in the audience's inference of the speaker's credibility from *what* is said and not *how*, a point neatly encapsulated in Kennedy's note on *Rhetoric* 1.2.4.

The phrase at 1.2 1356a5–6 is emblematic of the treatise's more general resistance to easy assumptions about the persuasive function of style. Although Aristotle does not expressly identify style as a way of generating the proof through character in the passage, he does not explicitly delimit his discussion to matters of content, either. The idea that style may have a role to play in the expression of persuasive character is suggested by other remarks in 1.2, especially in the idea that the *pistis* through character is the result of the speech and not of a speaker's prior reputation. This assertion emphasizes the artistic (that is, constructed or "invented") nature of *êthos* as a means of persuasion. Kennedy conjectures that Aristotle's restriction of the means for building *êthos* to the speech itself may reflect the cultural practice of Greek defendants pleading their own case in court. Lacking external authority, impressions of character would have to come from the speech itself. To illustrate his point, Kennedy presents the example of Lysias, who "had great success in conveying a favorable impression or [*sic*] moral character (*êthopoia*) in the many speeches he wrote for defendants" (1991, 38n43). Kennedy's mention of Lysias is suggestive in that it points to a connection between the sort of persuasive character Aristotle is describing and the rhetorical achievements of Lysias, achievements that later critics clearly recognized and related explicitly to Lysias' prose style (a point to which we shall return). Aristotle himself makes no such connection here, but his emphasis on character as an *artistic* creation, produced "through the speech," is on its face consistent with a theory that would link *êthos* to style.

In 1.2 Aristotle observes that "character is almost, so to speak, the controlling factor in persuasion."<sup>20</sup> If character is indeed that significant to the persuasive process, identifying and explicating the means by which it is constructed would seem to be of paramount importance. Presumably, the ability "to see the available means of persuasion" entails an understanding of the means through which the artistic proof is effected.

Aristotle takes up the matter of means of execution in book 2. Having identified *êthos* as a mode of proof in book 1, Aristotle in book 2 provides his well-known delineation of the elements of persuasive character as well as his catalogue of types of character found in audiences. At *Rhetoric* 2.1.2, Aristotle emphasizes *êthos* as a distinct form of proof, stating that when judging a case, it is necessary to consider not only the argument but also whether “the speaker seems to be a certain kind of person” (1377b24, 26; see note 7 above). With this statement, Aristotle decisively separates *êthos* from *logos*, suggesting that the former is constructed through non- or extra-logical means. Aristotle confirms this point in the familiar passage 2.1.5, wherein he states: “There are three reasons why speakers themselves are persuasive: for there are three things we trust other than logical demonstrations. These are practical wisdom [*phronêsis*] and virtue [*aretê*] and good will [*eunoia*]” (1378a6–9). A perceived absence of any one of these traits can negatively affect the audience’s appraisal of a speaker’s *êthos*. If a speaker appears incapable of forming sound opinions, fails to display morally virtuous qualities, or is suspected of not acting in the interests of the audience, he or she will be less worthy of credence. On the other hand, “a person seeming to have all these qualities is necessarily persuasive to the hearers” (1378a15–16; Kennedy trans., emphasis added).

In *Rhetoric* 2.1.7, Aristotle addresses the ways in which speakers might convey impressions of the three elements of *êthos*, stating that “[t]he means by which one might appear prudent and good are to be grasped from an analysis of the virtues; for a person would present himself as being of a certain sort from the same sources that he would use to present another person; and goodwill and friendliness need to be described in a discussion of the emotions.”<sup>21</sup> In explaining the means by which a speaker can create the appearance of practical wisdom, virtue, and good will, Aristotle directs readers to other sections of the *Rhetoric*, starting with his discussion of virtues in book 1, chapter 9. At the beginning of that chapter, Aristotle acknowledges that in describing the virtues, he is indirectly addressing the means for constructing character: “[A]s we speak of these, we shall incidentally also make clear those things from which we [as speakers] shall be regarded as persons of a certain quality in character, which was the second form of *pistis*; for from the same sources we shall be able to make both

ourselves and any other person worthy of credence in regard to virtue” (*Rh.* 1.9 1366a25–28). From Aristotle’s list of virtues, we see what makes a speaker trustworthy—qualities such as self-control, liberality, magnanimity, and courage. These are surely sources of persuasive character, but in Aristotle’s analysis at *Rhetoric* 1.9 they are presented as bare *topoi*. Aristotle does not address the specific means by which such *topoi* can be developed into persuasive proof. If speakers want to appear trustworthy, what should they say, and how should they say it? Eugene Garver offers a good example of what might be said on this subject: “Attempts to persuade directly through an appeal to character are prone to backfiring, as in the notorious, ‘Trust me; I’m not a crook’” (1994, 195). In this case, the speaker, Richard Nixon, recognized the type of character he needed to construct (law-abiding and, so, trustworthy) in order to be persuasive, but his chosen method of presenting that character—a hyper-direct style of expression—failed to produce the intended impression (or perhaps more accurately for Nixon, failed to mitigate against prevailing impressions).<sup>22</sup> One can only speculate about why Aristotle elects not to develop his own discussion beyond the simple identification of virtuous character traits.

While *Rhetoric* 2.1.7 points readers to an analysis of the virtues as a source for impressions of practical wisdom and virtue, it refers them to a study of the emotions for impressions of good will and friendliness. In 2.4, Aristotle considers the emotion of “friendly feeling” (*philia*), defining the quality as “wanting for someone what one thinks are good things for him, not what one thinks benefits oneself, and wanting what is potentially productive of these good things” (2.4 1380b35–1381a1). This definition is consistent with Aristotle’s explanation of good will in 2.1.5; a speaker who possesses the best advice (a good thing) will share that advice; to withhold that advice is to lack good will, or friendly feeling. A speaker can grasp the signs indicative of good will from Aristotle’s identification of the various characteristics of friends, which include, among other things, shared joys and griefs, friends and enemies, and beliefs about what is good and bad. Those toward whom we are friendly are also, according to Aristotle, pleasant to pass time with, good-humored, and not quarrelsome. Conveying such characteristics doubtless involves stylistic choices, but Aristotle mentions no such choices. The same is true in the discussion of *kharis*,

or kindness, in *Rhetoric* 2.7. There, Aristotle gives a rare, albeit terse, response to the question of method: namely, how does one create an impression of unkindness? The means identified by Aristotle are content-oriented, centered on the mention of actions that show a lack of good will, such as knowingly rendering a service of little value to someone. The implication here is that mentioning such actions with respect to one's opponent will create a negative impression of character, specifically a lack of good will.

Several remarks in different parts of the *Rhetoric* indicate that, for Aristotle, the creation of a particular impression of character depends not only on an analysis of virtues and emotions, but also on understanding the character of audiences. This is ostensibly the purpose of book 2, chapters 12–17 (see note 6 above, with Kennedy 1991, 163–64). In this section, Aristotle identifies characteristics of groups of people—for example, the young, the old, those of noble birth—that a speaker might find useful in endeavoring to adapt his or her own character to that of the audience. In these chapters we find an early formulation of what Kenneth Burke called identification. Notably, it is a sense of identification achieved through linguistic means—that is, by speaking in the manner of those addressed. As Aristotle explains, “since all people receive favorably speeches spoken in their own character and by persons like themselves (ὥστ’ ἐπεὶ ἀποδέχονται πάντες τοὺς τῷ σφετέρῳ ἦθει λεγομένους λόγους καὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους), it is not unclear how both speakers and speeches may seem to be of this sort through use of words (χρῶμενοι τοῖς λόγοις)” (*Rh.* 2.13 1390a25–28).

The phrase χρῶμενοι τοῖς λόγοις (“through the use of words”) suggests a correlation between a speaker's manner of verbal expression and the audience's assessment of the speaker's character. Of course, *logoi* (words, language) are the means through which content is conveyed, and perhaps Aristotle is primarily interested in content here, in how the speaker may present himself as “like” his audience through *what* he says. However, his descriptions of various types of character point to considerations of both content and style. In his description of aged people, for example, Aristotle identifies verbal peculiarities that distinguish them from the young: “for through having lived for many years and having been more often deceived and having made more mistakes themselves and since most things turn out badly, [the

old] assert nothing with certainty and all things with less assurance than is needed. And they ‘think,’ but they do not ‘know’ anything. And being doubtful, they always add *perhaps* and *maybe* and say everything that way, but nothing definitively” (*Rh.* 2.13 1389b14–19). This passage recognizes not only substantive character traits and experiences of the old but also a characteristic manner of expression. That is, it gives advice on *how* one should speak when endeavoring to adjust one's character to that of the audience. As Burke remarked with regard to identification, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (1969 [1950], 55). Aristotle's passage provides both content- and style-related resources for audience adaptation and identification through (the perception of) shared *êthos*.

To illustrate the ideas on the adjustment of character to suit one's audience implied in Aristotle's remarks, consider a modern example: Clarence Darrow's closing argument in the infamous Leopold and Loeb case of 1924. The sixty-seven-year-old Darrow, seeking to spare his two young and apparently remorseless clients from the death penalty, reflects Aristotle's advice precisely in his plea to the judge:

I have found that years and experience with life tempers one's emotions and makes him more understanding of his fellowman. When my friend Savage [one of the prosecutors] is my age, or even yours, he will read his address to this court with horror. I am aware that as one grows older he is less critical. He is not so sure. He is inclined to make some allowance for his fellowman. I am aware that a court has more experience, more judgment, and more kindness than a jury. (166–67)

The direct content-oriented appeals to character illustrated in the passage above are reinforced throughout the text by Darrow's style. True to Aristotle's observations, Darrow creates the impression of a man who understands the limits of his knowledge, posing rhetorical questions and offering no definitive answer (e.g., “Is he [defendant Richard Loeb] to blame that his machine is imperfect? Who is to blame? I do not know.”). The example of Darrow (one of undoubtedly many that a person could find from ancient to modern times) helps to illustrate the ways in which Aristotle's comments in 2.12–17 encompass both style and content in the presentation of character.

One additional section of book 2 suggests that style has a role in the expression of persuasive character, yet Aristotle's comments once again blur the line between style and content. In 2.21, Aristotle treats the subject of maxims, which he defines as assertions about preferred actions. He mentions a number of specific ways in which the use of maxims is related to character. For example, when Aristotle addresses the propriety of using maxims, his criterion is based on the age and experience of the speaker: "Speaking in maxims is appropriate to those older in years and on subjects of which one is experienced, since to speak maxims is unseemly for one too young, as is storytelling; and on matters in which one is inexperienced it is silly and shows lack of education" (*Rh.* 2.21 1395a2–6). Clearly, there are negative consequences for using maxims inappropriately. Conversely, the well-chosen maxim—one that reveals moral purpose and confirms the assumptions of hearers—can make a speaker's character appear better, as Aristotle indicates a little further on (2.21 1395a24–25: "And his character [would appear] better (τὸ δὲ ἦθος [φαίνεται] βέλτιον) [if he were to say] . . ."). In an apparent nod to style, Aristotle states, "One should make moral purpose clear through the choice of diction (or "style") (δεῖ δὲ τῆ λέξει τὴν προαίρεσιν συνδηλοῦν)" (2.21 1395a26–27; Kennedy trans. adapted). He concludes the chapter with the observation that maxims make a speech ethical, explaining that "speaking a maxim makes a general statement about preferences, so that if the maxims are morally good, they make a speaker seem to have a good character (χρηστοίθη φαίνεσθαι ποιούσι τὸν λέγοντα)" (2.21 1395b7).

Although the use of maxims might be construed as a stylistic consideration, this conclusion is complicated by Aristotle's description of the way maxims function. In his introductory comments on *Rhetoric* 2.21, Kennedy (1991, 182) observes that maxims as Aristotle understood them are "tools of logical argument," as opposed to stylistic embellishments, which was the understanding of the related Latin *sententiae* advanced by Quintilian. Placing maxims squarely in the realm of logical argument would provide support for Garver's view of *ethos* as the "by-product" of sound argumentative reasoning (see note 22 above), yet one wonders if the question needs to be either/or. As a possible alternative, one might think of maxims as argumentative figures of the sort identified by contemporary theorists

such as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.<sup>23</sup> Of course, the validity of this inference can be determined only after a closer examination of Aristotle's theory of style.

### *Style and Character: Rhetoric, Book 3*

The nebulous relationship between style and character that emerges in books 1 and 2 is no easier to pin down after reading book 3. As was discussed in the previous section, Aristotle acknowledges in books 1 and 2 that the words one chooses can make character more credible or appealing, suggesting that style plays a role (albeit, a role of uncertain significance) in producing the proof through character. Aristotle confirms this tenuous link at the outset of book 3, where he states that "it is not enough to have a supply of things to say, but it is also necessary to say it in the right way, and this contributes much toward the speech seeming to have a certain quality" (*Rh.* 3.1 1403b15–18). Although Aristotle neglects to specify the particular quality of the speech resulting from the "right" stylistic choices, or how a speech of such quality is related to *pisteis* or means of persuasion, he nonetheless states that the selection of the right words is a crucial consideration.<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after acknowledging the importance of style, however, Aristotle complicates matters by presenting a very different perspective, giving the impression that book 3 and consideration of *lexis* is "Aristotle's grudging concession to a demand that he produce a complete art" (Fahnestock 2000, 166). "True justice," he asserts, "seeks nothing more in a speech than neither to offend or entertain; for to contend by means of the facts themselves (αὐτοῖς . . . τοῖς πράγμασιν) is just, with the result that everything except demonstration is incidental" (3.1 1404a4–7). From this austere perspective, style emerges as a matter of minor importance. By and large, a dualistic view of style prevails: style (*lexis*) is separate from thought (*dianoia*) and subordinate to it.<sup>25</sup> The primary function of style—to express thoughts clearly—is ancillary though not unimportant. Aristotle's summary remark that aspects of presentation—style and delivery—are "forms of outward show and directed at the audience (φαντασία . . . πρὸς τὸν ἀκροατήν)" (3.1 1404a11–12; Kennedy trans. adapted) further reinforces the separation

of word and thought, substance and ornament. Interpreted in isolation, the later sections of 3.1 offer no indication that style contributes to the creation of persuasive *êthos*.

Nevertheless, the remaining chapters on style contain several passages that can be construed as bearing, in a rather vague way, on the audience's perception of the speaker's character. Take *Rhetoric* 3.2.1, for example, wherein Aristotle identifies the qualities constitutive of stylistic excellence: "[L]et the virtue of style [λέξεως ἀρετή] be defined as 'to be clear' (speech is a kind of sign, so if it does not make clear it will not perform its function)—and neither flat nor above the dignity of the subject, but appropriate" (1404b1–4). In his parenthetical statement regarding the importance of clarity, Aristotle connects style to the general sign-function of language (*logos*). As Aristotle observes elsewhere, signs (*sêmeia*) are themselves an element in persuasive proof, most notably in logical proof through enthymemes (see 1.2 1357a-b) but also in ethical proof. Recall *Rhetoric* 1.9.1, where Aristotle states that through speaking about virtue and vice, "we shall incidentally make clear those things from which we [as speakers] shall be regarded as persons of a certain quality in character, which was the second form of *pistis*" (1366a25–27). The relationship between style and *êthos* expressed here is of the indirect sort described by Garver (see note 22 above). A speaker identifies a logical proposition about virtue (or presents a fitting sign of that virtue), expresses it clearly to listeners, and is deemed worthy of credence as a result. Without clarity of style, the proposition and its resultant logical and ethical appeal will be lost on listeners.

In addition to clarity, 3.2.1 specifies two other, equally important, constituents of stylistic excellence: a level of ornamentation suitable to the subject, and appropriateness. (In *Rh.* 3.5, Aristotle identifies a fourth principle: speaking good, idiomatic Greek, or *to hellênizein*.) Aristotle subsequently makes a number of connections between well-chosen words (i.e., those that exhibit the qualities of effective prose style) and perceptions of character. For example, he advocates the use of rather ordinary language, arguing that "authors should compose without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally. (The latter is persuasive, the former the opposite; for [if artifice is obvious] people become resentful, as at someone plotting against them, just as they are at those adulterating wines)" (*Rh.* 3.2

1404b18–21). According to Aristotle, artificial speech—i.e., a showy, non-transparent, "poetic" style—reveals a speaker to be a person of a certain type, namely, a type not to be trusted. If a speaker composes in an unobtrusive or "natural" manner, on the other hand, the effect will be persuasive; his or her character will seem plausible to listeners. Aristotle illustrates with the example of the actor Theodorus, who, unlike other actors, really seems to be the character he is portraying; he is, in short, believable. Although Aristotle focuses on delivery in the Theodorus example, he clearly intends it to extend to the issue of word choice as well, arguing that speaking "in character" is "well done if one composes by choosing words from ordinary language" (*Rh.* 3.2 1404b24–25).<sup>26</sup>

Aristotle's comments on transparency align style with the portrayal of character, although it is unclear how, precisely, Aristotle believes ordinary, "unnoticed" composition effects persuasion. Artificial wording is connected to both (unpersuasive) *êthos* (by contributing to the impression that one intends to deceive listeners, "as at someone plotting against them . . .") and *pathos* (by putting listeners in a resentful state of mind). Whether there is a direct connection between *êthos* and style, or whether perception of a speaker's *êthos* is affected indirectly through *pathos*, the speaker who fails to compose without being noticed runs the risk of creating a negative impression of character. The appearance of practical wisdom, virtue, and good will cannot be maintained if the speaker's performance is not plausible.

In taking this position, Aristotle clearly recognizes style's capacity to *damage* the speaker's credibility; indeed, this basically negative correlation may be the most salient connection between style and *êthos* in *Rhetoric* 3. Book 3, chapter 3, for example, is replete with examples of ineffective or "frigid" style, including neologistic compound words ("many-faced heaven"), outlandish diction ("wretchedlessness"), unsuitable or redundant epithets ("wet sweat"), and inappropriate metaphors ("pale and bloodless doings"). As Aristotle indicates, such word choices will result in a loss of clarity (3.3 1406a33–34, 1406b8); we can reasonably infer from Aristotle's comments elsewhere that this lack of clarity obscures the signs from which *pisteis*—including the proof through *êthos*—are produced. Aristotle cautions not only against loss of clarity but also against the impropriety of obvious artifice, which he again associates with poetic style. Regarding compounds,



for instance, Aristotle follows a series of examples with the negative assessment that “[a]ll of these seem poetic because of the doubling” (3.3 1406a5–6). Aristotle condemns poetic diction even more strongly in his discussion of epithets: “In poetry it is appropriate to speak of ‘white milk,’ but in speech such things are not only rather unsuitable, but if used immoderately they convict [the writer of artificiality] and make it clear that this is ‘poetry’” (3.3 1406a12–14). Repeatedly in book 3, Aristotle warns against excessive elevation in the form of diction suited to poetic themes or a prose rhythm that comes too close to verse, apparently because poetry reveals rather than conceals art; its artifice shows.<sup>27</sup> The art of rhetorical prose, by contrast, requires the concealment of art. Aristotle’s frequent injunctions against a style that is too “artificial,” too “poetic,” while they relate directly to a standard of propriety by which the speech artifact is judged, bear also on the audience’s assessment of the speaker. As was noted earlier, listeners will recognize when the style is implausible. They will be on guard against signs of dissimulation, and any obvious efforts to sweeten the style will result in a negative appraisal of the speaker.

Besides the inferences that can be drawn from Aristotle’s account of violations of stylistic norms of clarity and naturalism, the critical passage relating style to *êthos* is found in *Rhetoric* 3.7, the chapter devoted to propriety of style (*to prepon*). “The *lexis* will be appropriate,” writes Aristotle, “if it expresses emotion and *character* and if it is proportional to the subject matter” (3.7 1408a10–11; emphasis added). Aristotle’s advice on making style proportionate to subject matter is rather perfunctory: don’t discuss serious matters in a casual way or trivial matters in a solemn manner, or you run the risk of creating a comic and laughable effect. The account of the style “expressive of emotion” (*lexis pathêtikê*) begins in comparable fashion. The style will be appropriate if it appears to express the emotion that the matter discussed should or would typically evoke; for example, the style will be that of “an angry man” if the topic is insolence, of “one who is indignant” if the discussion concerns “impious or shameful things,” or “submissive” if the topic is “pitiable” (3.7 1408a16–19). Aristotle’s description of the *effect* of this “emotional style,” however, cuts deeper and constitutes a rather lavish account of the psychology of persuasion. If the speaker’s expression of emotion is sincere—that is, if it *appears* sincere and appropriate to the matter under discussion—the emotions

of the audience members will be similarly aroused. This emotional arousal, in turn, interferes with their efforts to assess the speaker’s claims. Even if the case presented is weak, the audience acquiesces out of sympathy for the speaker (1408a19–25).

Aristotle then turns to the “style expressive of character” (*lexis êthikê*).<sup>28</sup> Beginning without clear transition from previous remarks on the “emotional style,” the passage runs as follows:

Proof from signs is itself expressive of character (καὶ ἠθικὴ δὲ αὐτῆ ἢ ἐκ τῶν σημεῖων δεῖξις), because there is an appropriate style for each genus and moral state. By *genus* I mean things like age—boy, man, old man—or woman and man or Spartan and Thessalian, and by *moral state* (ἔξις) the principles by which someone is the kind of person he is in life; for not every moral state works to determine the character of one’s life. If, then, a person speaks words appropriate to his moral state, he will create [a sense of] character (ποιήσει τὸ ἦθος). A rustic and an educated person would not say the same things nor [say them] in the same way. (3.7 1408a25–32; Kennedy trans. adapted)

Careful readers of the passage have acknowledged the confusion that results from the highly compressed thought and expression (e.g., Hagen 1966, 30–33; cf. Woerther 2005, 26–29), a difficulty witnessed also in the number of competing and incompatible interpretations of the “ethical style” it purports to describe. Two fundamental points remain in dispute. The first issue concerns the referent of *êthos* in the *êthikê lexis*: whose “character” is being expressed in the style expressive of character, that of the speaker or of some other? The second point of contention concerns the kind of *êthos* being expressed: is this simply an acknowledgment that style should vary according to the nature of the person speaking or, rather, does the passage call more specifically for a style that manifests a persuasive *êthos* or character which the audience will look upon with favor? Examination of the various answers that have been proffered will enable us to confront the relationship, if any, between the *êthikê lexis* and the technical proof through character.

A connection with the *pistis* through character is most relevant when the description of the *êthikê lexis* is taken to refer to style as a means to reveal the *speaker’s* character. But while many scholars have considered the *êthikê lexis* as manifesting the speaker’s character,<sup>29</sup> only a few have endeavored to connect it to the technical proof through *êthos*. One of these is Arnhart who, as noted previously, considers the chapter on propriety of style as demonstrating the ways style “should

be an integral part of the substantive argument of a speech." He sees, therefore, a close connection between style and the entechnic *pisteis*, arguing that just as in the "emotional style" listeners infer from the speaker's manner of expression what they believe to be the speaker's actual emotions, and thence to the "truth" of his words (*Rh.* 3.7 1408a16–23), they will reason in similar fashion to a judgment of the speaker's character (Arnhart 1981, 170). Eugene Ryan goes even further. Drawing on a notion derived from Aristotle's ethical theory, Ryan contends that the Stagirite holds a view that "there is already built into ordinary language . . . a system of [ethical or moral] values"; from this, Ryan attempts to show that style of necessity "carr[ies] with it a demonstration of the moral outlook of the speaker" (1984, 175). The significance of the *êthikê lexis* at 3.7, Ryan concludes, is as a support to argumentation: because "the speaker cannot escape the ethical texture of language . . . [h]e had better . . . use it in his argumentation. If he does use it skillfully, he can convince the hearers both that his arguments are cogent and that he himself is a good man (i.e., a man who shares certain moral views with his listeners)" (177).

The interpretations of Arnhart and Ryan describe a close link between the *êthikê lexis* and the technical proof through character. Both assume that the audience will read qualities of the speaker off the style of his speech. Moreover, both interpret the ethical style as a means to increase the persuasiveness of the speaker's arguments because it ensures that the speaker is perceived as a person of good moral character or, at least, of a character acceptable to the audience. Though plausible to a point, closer examination of Aristotle's account of the *êthikê lexis* and of his stylistic theory as a whole show that Arnhart and Ryan considerably overstate the connection between style and the proof through character. Arnhart's interpretation fails to account for the fact that the description of the *êthikê lexis* contains no hint of the qualities of character essential to the proof elsewhere in the *Rhetoric*—*phronêsis*, *aretê*, *eunoia*. Ryan's interpretation follows from a questionable reading of 1408a25 ff., where Aristotle observes (in Kennedy's rendering) that "[t]here is an appropriate style for each genus and moral state," and that if "a person speaks words appropriate to his moral state, he will create a sense of character."<sup>30</sup> Ryan takes the clause, "there is an appropriate style for each genus and moral state" as referring to the "genus and moral state" of the audience. On this

reading, the speaker is being urged to use language expressive of a moral outlook that somehow resonates with the values of the auditors (so also, Baldwin 1924, 25, 32). The idea has parallels elsewhere in the *Rhetoric*,<sup>31</sup> but the notion of adapting one's language to the ethical values of the audience is not signaled in Aristotle's account here. The character of the audience *could* be relevant, but the passage as a whole makes better sense if the clause is taken to refer to the "genus and moral state" of the speaker or perhaps of a person being represented in the discourse. If the ethical style is taken as expressive of the speaker's character, the idea in this passage is not that the speaker should adapt his style to match the "genus and moral state" of the audience, but rather that he should use a style suited to *his own* age, level of education, and settled habits.

In support of this reading, Aristotle continues by observing that "a rustic and an educated person would not say the same things nor [say them] in the same way" (3.7 1408a31–32). Aristotle here intimates that the audience will assess the speaker based on assumptions connected with more or less immediately observable characteristics, and that stereotyped distinctions attaching to a speaker's "visible character" will relate not only to content (say *the same things*) but also to style (*in the same way*).<sup>32</sup> Although Aristotle here mentions no specific features of the style of, for example, the educated old man or the young rustic, he alludes to a few such features elsewhere. Recall Aristotle's description of the character of the old ("they always add *perhaps* and *maybe* and say everything that way, but nothing definitively") and his advice on using maxims ("to speak maxims is unseemly for one too young, as is storytelling; and on matters in which one is inexperienced it is silly and shows lack of education"). Near the end of *Rhetoric* 3.11, Aristotle discusses hyperbole in a similar fashion, observing that, "Hyperboles are adolescent, for they exhibit vehemence . . . Thus, it is inappropriate for an older man to speak [in hyperbole]" (3.11 1413a28–b2). The point urged in all of these passages is the need for the speaker to employ a style that conforms to the audience's expectations of persons of a similar sort—that is, to perform "true to type."<sup>33</sup>

A different, but perhaps equally tenable interpretation of 3.7 is possible, however, when the *êthikê lexis* is understood to refer to the dramatic depiction of persons appearing in the speech rather than the

styled expression of the speaker's character. As noted above, Cope considered the *êthikê lexis* under the general rubric of "*êthos* belonging to style," and believed that Aristotle meant by it the suitable portrayal of opponents or some third person(s), especially in the narrative section of the speech. Others have endorsed this view.<sup>34</sup> On this account, Aristotle's remarks on the *êthikê lexis* constitute a nascent theory of *ethopoeia*, or dramatic characterization, which would become an important concept in later rhetoric and literary criticism.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation leaves little doubt about the question of the character-expressing style's relationship to the technical means of persuasion through *êthos*—Wisse, for example, asserts that the ethical style, "*has nothing to do with ethos as a means of persuasion*, but is concerned with the convincing portrayal of characters appearing in a speech."<sup>36</sup>

In a variation of this view, Kennedy suggested that this passage addresses the need for the logographer to adapt the style of the discourse to suit the character of his client (1963, 90–91). The idea that Aristotle has the logographer-client relationship in mind was thrown in doubt, however, by Elaine Fantham, who pointed out that Aristotle's mention of women and non-Athenians (Spartans; Thessalians) means that he "cannot be discussing how to characterize a client," as women and foreigners were not allowed to speak for themselves in the Athenian courts (Fantham 1973, 271–72). Fantham thus concludes that the passage describes "how to include narrative quotations in the style of those quoted." From this perspective, the *êthikê lexis* need not have anything to do with the character of the speaker nor with the proof through character.

The account of the *êthikê lexis* at *Rhetoric* 3.7, for all its irreducible ambiguity, cannot be said to describe a stylistic means of effecting the *pistis* through character, as some have suggested. Rather, Aristotle's primary concern in the passage is with propriety, or more specifically, with *plausibility*. Emphasis falls on speaking *in* character rather than the artistic presentation of particular qualities of character. Thus, in the style "expressive of character," "character" should be understood as a collection of neutral external attributes rather than a combination of specifically *positive* moral and intellectual traits associated elsewhere with the technical mode of persuasion through character. On this point, it is noteworthy that nowhere in the account of the ethical style or in the larger discussion of *lexis* is the projection of a speaker's *epieikeia*,

*eunoia*, *aretê*, or *phronêsis* invoked as a goal to be sought through stylistic means. Whereas the proof through character described in books 1 and 2 is produced by saying things which indicate that the speaker is "of a certain sort," in the chapters on style, the aim is to give the *speech* "a certain quality." In 3.7 and elsewhere in book 3 this "certain quality" is a composite of clarity, refined unobtrusiveness, and a sense of propriety maintained through a verbal style that corresponds to the speaker's visible character type. If Aristotle's account authorizes inferences from the quality of the speech (its style) to that of the speaker (character), this process is nowhere presented in a way that makes it consistent with the technical proof through *êthos*.

#### *Ethopoeia: Styled Character after Aristotle*

To reconstruct the connection between style and character in the *Rhetoric* it has been necessary to attend not only to what Aristotle states explicitly, but also what he implies, alludes to, or even omits. In this final section, we pause to consider one omission more closely: the example of Lysias, whose reputation for persuasive style was, according to the later critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus, "common knowledge" (*Lys.* 10). Of particular interest here is Lysias's mastery of *ethopoeia*, the term used by rhetoricians of later antiquity to refer to both the technique of character portrayal in speechwriting and dramatic narratives as well as the standard ancient prose composition exercise of character impersonation.<sup>37</sup> In both of these related senses, *ethopoeia* was described as demanding the careful coordination of style and character.

As a technical term of rhetorical art, *ethopoeia* post-dates Aristotle. However, several passages of the *Rhetoric* discussed earlier clearly prefigure this development of the idea of "character making"—for instance, when Aristotle observes that composing in an appropriate style will "create character" (ποιήσει τὸ ἦθος) (3.7 1408a30).<sup>38</sup> Aristotle occasionally refers to the activities of speechwriters (see 3.7 1408a34, 3.12 1413b13; cf. 2.11 1388b22), which suggests that he was aware of the practice of character portrayal by logographers. Despite this rich source of exempla, however, Aristotle never mentions Lysias by name and his references to Attic logographers are uninformative; as

in the case of Theodorus the actor, he prefers to cite examples drawn from dramatic poetry.<sup>39</sup>

To explore how the connection between style and character was construed in later antiquity, we turn to the work of Dionysius, who first lauded Lysias for his skill in *ethopoeia*.<sup>40</sup> Today, one would be hard pressed to find a commentary on Lysias that failed to mention this characteristic of his work.<sup>41</sup> As noted by Stephen Usher (1974, xii), Dionysius's analyses of Lysias and the other Attic orators filled a gap left open in book 3 of the *Rhetoric*. In his analyses of practical oratory (almost wholly absent from the *Rhetoric*) Dionysius expresses what could be called the mature classical view of the relationship between style, character, and persuasion in Greek rhetorical theory.

Writing roughly three hundred years after Aristotle, Dionysius introduces the concept of *ethopoeia* in section 8 of *On Lysias*, where he observes: "I . . . ascribe to Lysias that most pleasing quality which is generally called characterization." He continues: "I am quite unable to find a single person in this orator's speeches who is devoid of character or vitality (οὔτε ἀνηθοποίητον οὔτε ἄψυχον)." Lysias, that is, creates characters who are life-like and believable dramatizations of human agents. Dionysius is more pointed with respect to client portrayal in the comments that follow, wherein he identifies the elements necessary for effective characterization:

There are three departments or aspects in which this quality [*ethopoeia*] manifests itself: thought, diction, and composition (διανοίας τε καὶ λέξεως καὶ τρίτης τῆς συνθέσεως); and I declare [Lysias] to be successful in all three. For not only are the thoughts he ascribes to his clients worthy, reasonable and fair (χρηστὰ καὶ ἐπιεικῆ καὶ μέτρια), so that their words seem to reflect their good moral character, but he also makes them speak in a style which is appropriate to these qualities, and which by its nature displays them in their best light—clear, standard, ordinary speech (σαφῆ καὶ κυρίαν καὶ κοινῆν) which is thoroughly familiar to everyone. (*Lys.* 8; Usher trans. adapted)

In describing Lysias's ethopoetic skill, Dionysius notes that the speechwriter excels at creating an impression of moral excellence precisely by making clients speak in a style indicative of such excellence—the speaker appears to be persuasive through thoughts and words that express moral character. Simple, clear, seemingly artless language, which Aristotle recommends in general for oratory, is uniquely well suited to the expression of that character. Dionysius's

account of the role of style in the expression of persuasive character is actually consistent with Aristotle's, just more systematically organized and explicit. The clear and conversational style is essential for convincing character portrayal, not just for reasons of propriety (which Dionysius addresses separately in *Lys.* 9), but also because it best displays the qualities of persuasive character, specifically, in making the speaker appear equitable and fair.

With respect to stylistic propriety, Dionysius praises Lysias's ability to adapt his language to the speaker, subject, and audience, echoing Aristotle in his explanation of suitable portrayal: "For characters differ from one another in age, family, background, education, occupation, way of life and in other respects: Lysias puts words in their mouths which suit their several conditions" (*Lys.* 9).<sup>42</sup> Yet Dionysius makes clear that propriety is not the only virtue of Lysias's style, noting in later sections how that style contributes to persuasion. In *Lysias* 19, Dionysius discusses the speechwriter's handling of the three Aristotelian *pisteis entekhnoi* in the narrative sections of his speeches. After noting Lysias's expertise in the argumentative use of evidentiary proof, Dionysius asserts that Lysias is skilled, as well, in constructing proofs from character (ἐκ τῶν ἠθῶν πίστεις) for his clients, particularly with respect to moral qualities.<sup>43</sup> In support of his view, Dionysius observes of Lysias:

He often makes us believe in his client's good character by referring to the circumstances of his life and his parentage, and often again by describing his past actions and the principles governing them. And when the facts fail to provide him with such material, he creates his own moral tone (αὐτὸς ἠθοποιεῖ), making his characters seem by their speech to be trustworthy and honest (πιστὰ καὶ χρηστὰ). He credits them with civilized dispositions (προαιρέσεις . . . ἀστείας) and attributes controlled feelings (πάθη μέτρια) to them; he makes them voice appropriate sentiments, and introduces them as men whose thoughts befit their status in life, and who abhor both evil words and evil deeds. He represents them as men who always choose the just course, and ascribes to them every other related quality that may reveal a respectable and moderate character (ἐπιεικῆς . . . καὶ μέτριον ἦθος). (*Lys.* 19)

Dionysius's overview of Lysias's strategies neatly encapsulates many of Aristotle's teachings on character. Persuasive proof through character is revealed through choices (*proaireseis*) that make a speaker appear honest, just, and trustworthy.<sup>44</sup> Such impressions may be conveyed through a description of actions taken, of the circumstances of one's

life, or of certain qualities possessed by the speaker, or they may be conveyed by the speaker's "moral tone." The speechwriter is thus both an inventor and a stylist, expressing character through content/thought (*dianoia*) and verbal form/style (*lexis, sunthesis*).

In his analysis of Lysias, Dionysius not only links style to the expression of persuasive character, but he identifies a particular type of style best suited to such expression. Just as he seems to have gleaned the virtues of character from Aristotle, so too his remarks on diction and composition accord nicely with Aristotle's "virtue of style." Dionysius praises Lysias in general for his pure vocabulary, lucidity, vividness, and simplicity, but with respect to characterization, he focuses in particular on the natural, spontaneous-sounding quality of his style, a conversational quality that Kennedy has aptly described as the "purified mimesis of everyday speech" (1989, 184). Dionysius observes that the charming and persuasive style of Lysias seems "not to be contrived or formed by any conscious art. . . . Yet it is more carefully composed than any work of art. For this artlessness is itself the product of art: the relaxed structure is really under control, and it is in the very illusion of not having been composed with masterly skill that the mastery lies" (*Lys.* 8). In his essay on Demosthenes, Dionysius terms this transparent, simple, unadorned style "plain," identifying Lysias as "the man who perfected it and realized its potential as a distinct style" (*Dem.* 2). In the same passage, Dionysius contrasts the plain style of Lysias with the grand style of Thucydides, stating that the latter has the power to startle the mind, the former to soothe it. The grand style can induce tension and strain, the plain relaxation and relief. While the grand style expresses violent emotion, the plain conduces to moral character.<sup>45</sup> Dionysius here makes an explicit connection between the plain style and the expression of character, specifically morally virtuous character, indicating that *ethos* has a corresponding character of style, or at least one that is especially well suited to its expression.

### Conclusions

We have argued that the connection between style and the technical "proof" through character is rather loose and ill defined in

Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. We conclude that Aristotle's discussion of style, while not demonstrably inconsistent with the technical proof through *ethos* described elsewhere in the *Rhetoric*, cannot be made to conform neatly with it in most salient respects. As indicated throughout book 3, style is "virtuous" largely to the extent that it is inconspicuous. Judgment in this respect is based on consideration of the subject matter, the emotions plausibly evoked by the subject matter, and identifiable (external) attributes of the speaker. A conspicuous or inappropriate style will arouse the audience's suspicion of the speaker, and thereby compromise the reception of the speaker's arguments. Aristotle is clear that an ineffective (unclear, overly poetic) style can diminish the audience's trust in the speaker, but he generally neglects to describe an active role for style in *bolstering* the speaker's character. Rather, his theory is founded on the principle that an artful style is that which succeeds in preventing the speaker's character—his or her intelligence, moral goodness, or goodwill—from becoming an object of scrutiny.

Nevertheless, even though Aristotle does not explicitly identify style as a means through which the speaker may convey the impression that he possesses positive intellectual or moral qualities, he does recognize a role for *lexis* in the expression of generic character-traits and is aware that an inappropriate style will damage the speaker's credibility. Hence, attention to style is important for the presentation of a plausible *ethos* and, in this limited respect, style does contribute to the maintenance of persuasive character.

Christopher Carey has observed that in contrast to his slightly fuller discussion of character in the *Poetics* (see especially *Po.* 15), Aristotle's account of the character-full style in the *Rhetoric* shows that he "has not thought through the implications for rhetorical theory of the notion of character as a dramatic construct" (Carey 1996, 411). Our study confirms Carey's suspicion about Aristotle's stylistic theory. Significantly, although later rhetoricians would generally fail to maintain or understand Aristotle's distinctions between the three *pisteis* (see, e.g., Grimaldi 1980–1988, 2:188–89; Wisse 1989; Fortenbaugh 1992, 240–44), they were quick to correct Aristotle's apparent oversight and described a more prominent role for style in the communication of a credible persona—this is illustrated in the writings of Dionysius, discussed here, but also in the work of figures such as Cicero, Quintilian, and Hermogenes of Tarsus. Even the later critic

Demetrius, who like Dionysius follows Aristotle's stylistic doctrines very closely, recognizes that style inevitably reflects the *êthos*—even the “soul” (*psukhê*)—of the author (*Eloc.* 227). Aristotle makes no direct statement of this *topos* in the *Rhetoric*, but his nascent ideas about character and style clearly prefigure these later developments.

### Notes

1. The essays and bibliography collected in Baumlin and Baumlin 1994 provide a sample of the many applications of the concept of *êthos* in literary criticism and composition studies. In the field of speech communication, see now Hyde 2004. For representative work employing *êthos* in the critical study of the Internet, see Gurak 1997; Miller 2004.

2. Standard, older treatments of *êthos* in the *Rhetoric* include Cope 1867, 108–13; Süß 1910, 125–225; Sattler 1947; Kennedy 1963, 91–93. Several details in these accounts are corrected in more recent studies, e.g., Lossau 1981, 139–61; Wörner 1984; and Braet 1992, and many of the works cited in text and notes below. Of late, philologists have focused especially on pre-Aristotelian sources for the concept of persuasion through character; see Schüttrumpf 1993; Fortenbaugh 1992, 211–20; 1994a; cf. also Hellwig 1973, 251–321, who concentrates on Plato, and Fortenbaugh 1996a, 158–61. On the transformation of Aristotelian *êthos* in the later Classical tradition, especially in Cicero, see Fantham 1973; Gill 1984; May 1988; Wisse 1989; Fortenbaugh 1988, 1994b; Schüttrumpf 1994; Calboli Montefusco 1994; Enos and Schnakenberg 1994; and Hughes 1994.

3. See Kassel's index (1976, 223–24). Grimaldi (1980–1988, 2:184–85) presents a list of such occurrences, but classifies them in accordance with his own somewhat peculiar interpretation of the concept of the *pistis* through character. For helpful discussion of Aristotle's use of the terms ἦθος and ἠθικός, see Verdenius 1945 and, now, Woerther 2005.

4. ἠθικός λόγος at, e.g., *Rh.* 2.18 1391b20–23; 2.21 1395b13; 3.17 1418a15, 18; see also 1.8 1366a10. Also, ἠθικῶς λεκτέον at 3.17 1418a38–39, and the unusual passage at 2.21 1395b13: . . . ἠθικῶς γὰρ ποιεῖ τοὺς λόγους. ἦθος δ' ἔχουσιν οἱ λόγοι, ἐν ὅσοις δῆλη ἡ προαίρεσις (the use of maxims “makes speech ‘ethical’.” *Speeches have êthos* insofar as deliberative choice is clear”); cf. 3.16 1417a21. Fantham (1973, 270n9) presents a helpful discussion of these and related passages; see also Woerther 2005.

5. See, e.g., Fantham 1973, 268n7, 271–72; and May 1988, 2–3. Slightly different classifications have been proposed; see Kennedy 1963, 91–93; and Süß 1910 (both tripartite schemes). Antoine Braet lists, in addition to the speaker's *êthos*, four other “manifestations of *êthos*”: the *êthos* of the accused in a lawsuit (at *Rh.* 1.10 1369a), of forms of government (1.8 1366a), of people of the same age and fortunes (2.12–17), and “dramatic *êthos*” (3.7 1408a, 3.16 1416b–1417b). Braet observes that “there are several connections between these manifestations of *ethos* and the *ethos* of the speaker. Yet, they should not be confused, as for instance Grimaldi does” (Braet 1992, 318n19).

6. Grimaldi 1980–1988, 2:183–89; see also Fantham 1973, 270, 273; Lossau 1981, 143–45; Braet 1992, 319n21, 319n28. For the contrary view, see, e.g., Hellwig 1973, 260; Wisse 1989, 9–43; Garver 1994, 284–85n1; Fortenbaugh 1996b, 185–87.

7. The Greek phrase is ποιῶν τινα φαίνεσθαι; see *Rh.* 2.1 1377b24, 26, 29; also 1.8 1366a10 and cf. 2.1 1378a14–19; 2.21 1395a22; 3.1 1403b11–12.

8. *Rh.* 2.1 1378a7–20. At 1.2 1356a4–14, *epieikeia* (“fair-mindedness, uprightness”) is the only quality identified as making the speaker worthy of trust (*axiopistos*). Fortenbaugh 1996a presents a novel interpretation of this apparent shift in Aristotle's thinking on *êthos*.

9. Fortenbaugh 1996b, 180. Wisse claims that up to 1988, modern commentators (excepting Fortenbaugh) had failed to see clearly the difference between this rational conception of proof through character and an appeal to the sympathy of the audience (Wisse 1989, 3, 34–35, 60–65). For further discussion of the contrast between proof through character and emotional appeal in Aristotle, see Fortenbaugh 1991; Fortenbaugh 1992, 226 f.; Wisse 1989, 33–35; Grimaldi 1990, 77; Calboli Montefusco 1994, 70.

10. Epitomized in the Comte de Buffon's oft-misconstrued remark, “[L]e style est l'homme même” (Buffon 1972 [1753], 17). For a complete history of the *topos*, with some consideration of its appearance in the history of rhetoric, see Müller 1977.

11. 1.2 1356a5–6: διὰ μὲν οὖν τοῦ ἤθους, ὅταν οὕτω λεχθῆ ὁ λόγος ὥστε ἀξιόπιστον ποιῆσαι τὸν λέγοντα.

12. The often-helpful commentaries of Cope and Grimaldi do not address this crucial sentence. In personal correspondence, Professor Kennedy defended the interpretation presented in his note to the phrase: “As to Aristotle's initial description of *ethos*, my understanding of the Greek and of the context—his highly austere, idealistic, and impractical notion of rhetoric as seen from some academic retreat, not from the Athenian agora—lead me to continue to think *ethos* here does not involve style or delivery. When he wrote the beginning of Book 3 he grudgingly modified his view somewhat. Of course style and delivery are very important in projecting *ethos*, and not only *ethos*, but *pathos*, and even *logos*. It is, after all, the style and delivery that secure clarity (or help obscure the subject if that is what the orator wants to do)” (e-mail message to Richard Graff, 15 August 2004).

13. Grimaldi 1972, 50; cf. Arnhart 1981, 163–77; Ryan 1984, 151–81. Grimaldi's attempt (1972, 49–52) to demonstrate that the chapters on style, like books 1 and 2, emphasize the integration of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *pragmalogos* is unconvincing, amounting to a series of allusions to passages (or whole chapters) of *Rhetoric* 3.1–12 where, in fact, we can find only the vaguest conceptual or terminological echoes, and sometimes even less. Other scholars have suggested a connection between style and “ethical” proof without necessarily arguing for the overall unity of the *Rhetoric*; see, e.g., Sattler 1947, 57–61; and Hellwig 1973, 267–71.

14. 3.7 1408a10–11: τὸ δὲ πρέπον ἔξει ἢ λέξεις, ἐὰν ἡ παθητικὴ τε καὶ ἠθικὴ καὶ τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις πράγμασιν ἀνάλογον.

15. Even Friedrich Solmsen sensed a connection between the three *pisteis* and the three aspects of stylistic propriety (1974 [1941], 283). For an explicit rejection of the connection, see Wisse 1989, 48.

16. Arnhart 1981, 169. Grimaldi had said the very same thing (1972, 50–51 and 50–51n52).

17. Scholars of this opinion frequently point to the evidence suggesting the original autonomy and independent development of book 3 on *lexis* and *taxis*. Diogenes Laertius, in his catalog of Aristotle's works, lists a treatise "On Rhetoric" in two books followed by a separate treatise "On Style" in two more (D. L. 5.1.24). For discussion of this issue, see Moraux 1951, 97, 103–04; Kennedy 1963, 103; Kennedy 1991, 299–305; Wisse 1989, 333–36.

18. Wisse 1989, 49, 55. It is true that Wisse claims a degree of conceptual consistency for the *Rhetoric*. However, his view of book 3 is more line with the developmental perspective. He sees only one passage consistent with the "rational" conception of proof through character in all of book 3 (at 3.17 1417b34–38). For his views on the composition of the *Rhetoric* and the developmental hypothesis, see 1989, 9–13, 333–36.

19. Fortenbaugh 1991; 1992; 1994a; 1996a; and 1996b. For Fortenbaugh's view of the date and development of the chapters on style, see especially Fortenbaugh 1986, 246, and Fortenbaugh 1996b, 172–73, 188.

20. 1.2 1356a13: ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ὡς εἰπεῖν κυριώτατην ἔχει πίστιν τὸ ἦθος. The underlined phrase is generously qualified; *pace*, e.g., Garver 1994, 192, Aristotle does not really call *ēthos* the most powerful proof. Compare the remark at 1.1 1355a5–8, where the enthymeme is described as "generally speaking, the strongest of the  *pisteis* (ὡς εἰπεῖν ἀπλῶς κυριώτατον τῶν πιστεῶν)." Kassel brackets the comment—a near-perfect parallel to 1.2 1356a13—as a possible later addition by Aristotle.

21. In an explanatory note on *Rhetoric* 2.1.5–7, Kennedy claims that good will is actually an aspect not of *ēthos*, but of *pathos* (1991, 121n2), which he says is evident from Aristotle's comment in 2.1.7 that "good will and friendliness need to be described in a discussion on the emotions." Kennedy's conclusion, however, is contradicted by the first line of 2.1.5. Contrary to Kennedy, we interpret 2.1.7 as an indication of overlap between *ēthos* and *pathos*, with impressions of good will being linked to the arousal of certain emotions. Just as Aristotle directs readers to a study of virtues for the construction of practical wisdom and virtue, he directs readers to a study of emotions for the production of an impression of good will.

22. Garver contends that "with the exception of devices like the maxim, there are no special methods for *ēthos*, as there are for *pathos* and *logos*" (1994, 195). That is, the proof through character does not have a special method of its own; rather, it is generated "as a by-product . . . [of] the speaker's argumentative and deliberative ability" (192). Thus, while Garver's Nixon example does not seem to be offered as a remark on style *per se*, it illustrates a point related to the one we are making here about the basically indirect connection between style and character.

23. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca recognize the ornamental function of some devices of style but note that when figures cause a change in perspective, they function argumentatively. One example of an argumentative figure is allusion, which creates a sense of communion (akin to identification) between speaker and audience; they note that maxims function in a similar way. See Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 165–70, and Graff and Winn 2006.

24. The persuasive implications of a speech "having a certain quality," unarticulated by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* 3.1, are suggested by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in their discussion of the act-person relationship: "In treating the relationship between act and person, the speech, considered as an act of the speaker, deserves

special attention, both because, for many people, speech is the most characteristic manifestation of the person and because the interaction between speaker and speech plays a very important part in argumentation. Irrespective of his [*sic*] wishes . . . a speaker runs the risk of being intimately connected with his speech" (1969, 316–17).

25. For a nuanced analysis of the "style/substance" split in *Rhetoric* 3, see Halliwell 1993.

26. For consideration of Aristotle's conception of ordinary or "natural" prose style, see Graff 2005.

27. Cautions against the use of poeticisms in rhetorical prose occur at, e.g., 3.1.9; 3.2.1; 3.3 *passim*; 3.4.2; 3.6.3; 3.8.3. For further discussion of the prohibition against poetic diction in *Rhetoric* 3, see Graff 2005.

28. Aristotle refers to the "ethical" and "emotional" styles (*lexis ēthikē* and *lexis pathētikē*) again at *Rh.* 3.12 1413b10, but there offers no further elucidation of the concepts. On the meaning of *ēthikē lexis* in Aristotle and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, see Lockwood 1929 (with Fantham 1973, 270n9); and Woerther 2005, 25–33.

29. E.g., Lockwood 1929; Gill 1984, 155; Carey 1996, 410–11, none of whom connect the style expressive of character with the proof through character. Cf. also Wörner 1984.

30. 3.7 1408a26–27, 30–31: ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ ἀρμόττουσα ἐκάστῳ γένει καὶ ἔξει. . . ἐὰν οὖν καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα οἰκεῖα λέγη τῇ ἔξει, ποιήσει τὸ ἦθος.

31. *Rh.* 1.8 1366a9–15 and 2.13 1390a24–28 advise the speaker to adapt to the *ēthos* of the audience. A passage of the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* appears to provide an even closer parallel: "If you wish to compose a speech which will be elegant, you must take care as far as possible to adapt the character of your speech to that of the men [who deliver the speech? in the audience?]. You will achieve this, if you observe their character, whether noble or petty or ordinary" (22 1434b28–31; our trans.) (ἄν δὲ ἀστειὸν γράφειν θέλης λόγον, παραφύλαττε ὡς μάλιστα ὅπως τὰ ἦθη τῶν λόγων ὁμοιοῦν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις δυνήσῃ. τοῦτο δὲ ποιήσεις, ἂν ἐπιθεωρῆς τὰ μεγάλα τῶν ἠθῶν καὶ τὰ ἀκριβῆ καὶ τὰ μέτρια.); see Cope's note on this passage (1867, 434).

32. The *ēthikē lexis*, that is, "relates to such external features of 'character' as age, sex, nationality or degree of education; these are, presumably, features that can be conspicuously brought out in vocabulary or phrasing" (Gill 1984, 155). Compare D. A. Russell's remark that "'style' in modern usage is very much an individual matter. We think of it as a kind of finger-print, unique to every individual . . . Yet the [Senecan] maxim, *talis oratorio qualis vita*, a way of saying that 'speech reflects life,' seems to be of a different application altogether. It asserts that speech is an indication of the moral characteristics of the speaker, marking not his individuality, but his type. This is in accordance with the general ancient view of character" (1995, 131). For more on the priority assigned to "visible character" in classical Greece, see Worman 2002.

33. Compare also *Rh.* 2.22, where Aristotle observes that uneducated speakers are more persuasive before a crowd, because, unlike the educated, they do not reason abstractly but rather with particulars close to their own experience. Aristotle thus recommends that, "one should not speak on the basis of all opinions but of those held by an identified group" (2.22 1395b32–33).

34. See Cope 1867, 112–13; Cope 1877, 3:76; Fantham 1973, 270–72; May 1988, 3; Wisse 1989, 48; Hughes 1994, 212–13; Fortenbaugh 1994a, 1522.

35. As we discuss in the final section of the paper, *ethopoieia*, or character portrayal, is a skill for which the logographer Lysias was especially praised.

36. Wisse 1989, 48, emphasis added (see also 55). Others denying any connection between the *êthikê lexis* and the technical proof through *êthos* include, e.g., Gill 1984, 165; Calboli Montefusco 1994, 70n21. Braet calls the relationship between “dramatic ethos” and the speaker’s character “problematical” (1992, 319n29).

37. For details about *ethopoieia* as a composition exercise, see Kennedy’s (2003) translation of the progymnasmata of or attributed to Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Nicolaus, and John of Sardis. According to Kennedy, evidence suggests that the progymnasmata were used in fourth-century Greece, yet Aristotle makes no specific mention of the exercises in the *Rhetoric* (xi).

38. Cf. 2.21 1395b17: speaking in maxims “makes the speaker seem to have good character” (χρηστοτόμη φαίνεσθαι ποιοῦσι τὸν λέγοντα); 1.2 1356a5–6: the proof through *êthos* is effected through “speaking in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of trust” (ὥστε ἀξιόπιστον ποιῆσαι τὸν λέγοντα).

39. For a discussion and interpretation of the paucity of *exempla* drawn from practical forensic and deliberative oratory in the *Rhetoric*, see Trevett 1996; Trevett calls the omission of Lysias “particularly striking” in light of the speechwriter’s prolific career and his mastery of character depiction, “an aspect of oratory in which Aristotle shows a particular interest” (1996, 377). See also Graff 2001, who considers the stylistic implications of these omissions.

40. In looking to Lysias as a model that Aristotle could have used to develop his ideas on style and character more fully, we are making a move similar to that of Fortenbaugh, who discusses how Aristotle *might* have used Aeschines as an example of how to characterize an opponent negatively (Fortenbaugh 1992, 230). According to Fortenbaugh, the negative characterization of an opponent is a notable omission in the *Rhetoric*.

41. See, e.g., Jebb 1893; Usher 1965; Hagen 1966; Dover 1968; Carey 1989; Russell 1990; Todd 2000.

42. In a footnote to this passage, Usher (1974, 37n1), directs readers to *Rh.* 2.12–17. For further discussion of Aristotelian-peripatetic influence on Dionysius’s theory of prose composition, see also Bonner 1938; Usher 1974, xi–xiv; Wooten 1994. Dionysius’s passage continues with remarks on Lysias’s skill in adjusting his style to that of the *audience* as well: “Similarly, with regard to his audiences [Lysias’s] words are gauged to suit their several dispositions: he does not address a jury, a political assembly, and a panegyric audience in the same style” (Usher trans. adapted). On this idea in Aristotle, see above.

43. Notably, Dionysius emphasizes only moral qualities in his discussion of rhetorical proof through character. His only mention of good will occurs in his commentary on the speech *Against Diogeiton* (*Lys.* 32). In his analysis of the introduction of that speech, Dionysius remarks that the themes Lysias addresses produce an impression of fair-mindedness, which in turn secures the good will of listeners.

44. Dionysius returns frequently to the ideas of *epieikeia* (reasonableness, uprightness; compare, e.g., Aristotle, *Rh.* 1.2 1356a6–12) and *chrêstos* (goodness, worthiness; compare, e.g., *Rh.* 2.21 1395b16–19), and also to *metrion* (moderation, fairness), which is, again, thoroughly Aristotelian, though not used in *Rhetoric* in contexts specific to the proof through *êthos*.

45. D.H. *Dem.* 2: καὶ εἰς πάθος ἐκείνη προαγαγεῖν, εἰς δὲ ἦθος αὐτῆ καταστήσαι. On the “ethos/pathos distinction,” see Gill 1984.

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