

Interpretation

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The Virtues and the Audience in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

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Abstract: The virtues as described in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* differ from their description in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. This is due neither to manipulation on Aristotle's part nor to a rhetorical necessity. The virtues of the *Rhetoric* complement those of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, introducing the question of the benevolence of the virtues and showing an active concern for the varied audiences of the rhetor, not as a morally neutral presentation, but so that truth, justice, and community may play a part in the political life of the city.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is considered to be the stepsister to his other political works, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*. However, this stepsister contributes telling arguments that her other sisters do not mention, and that expand our views about politics. For example, the virtues as they are discussed by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, in comparison with the discussion of the virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,¹ are quite different in many ways. We will examine these discussions of the virtues in order to see if we can discover the reasons for such divergent descriptions, and whether this divergence itself throws light on Aristotle's intentions in the *Rhetoric*.²

¹ Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925); *Aristotle's "Art of Rhetoric,"* trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). References to the *Rhetoric* will be preceded by *Rh*. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, rev. ed., trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934); *Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics,"* trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). References to the *Nicomachean Ethics* will be preceded by *NE*. On a few occasions, I have amended all of these translations with my own.

² In this paper, I will confine the comparison of the *Rhetoric* to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. T. H. Irwin, "Ethics in the *Rhetoric* and in the *Ethics*," in *Essays on Aristotle's "Rhetoric,"* ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), in his discussion of the *Rhetoric* subsumes all of Aristotle's works on ethics under the title "Ethics."

The morality of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* teaching is one example of what needs to be explored. It may seem that Aristotle intends to present a morally neutral rhetoric. There are reasons to make this inference, which must be taken into account: in the process of explaining what rhetoric is, and advising incipient rhetors, Aristotle gives advice which could be used equally by the decent and by the unscrupulous. Aristotle recognizes this by giving a defense of his advice: "If someone using such a capacity of argument should do great harm, this, at least, is common to all good things—except virtue" (*Rh* I.i.13 1355b3–5; however, virtue *is* "misused" in the *Rhetoric*, as we shall see). Further, he says rhetors "should be able to prove opposites, as in syllogisms"; but he follows this with another disclaimer: "not that we should do both (for one ought not to persuade people to do what is base), but so that the way things really are should not escape us, and that we ourselves be able to refute the one who makes unjust arguments" (*Rh* I.i.12 1355a28–30; see also I.vii.13 1364a17–23, and II.xxiii.14 1399a10–16). Thus, he understands that one might question the morality of such a teaching, in answer to which he needs to show that he has considered this ethical question.

Nevertheless, the debate has raged for centuries—even into the twenty-first century—about whether and why Aristotle has or has not given an amoral or nonvirtuous teaching on rhetoric.³ And there are other reasons for this than that given above. Another example is that he castigates the sophists for playing on the emotions in their speaking, but then he gives many instances of how one might use the audience's emotions to "prove" an argument (*Rh* I.i.5 1354a25; II.i.8–9 1378a 21–30).

³ Cf. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Is There an Ethical Dimension to Aristotelian Rhetoric?," in Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's "Rhetoric,"* 129: "The intrinsic moral neutrality of rhetoric"; Jamie Dow, *Passions and Persuasion in Aristotle's "Rhetoric"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10: "Aristotle's view of rhetoric is not value-neutral.... And yet, the normative element in his account of rhetoric is limited. Thus...we should not look to the *Rhetoric*—as some have—to provide an 'ethics of rhetoric.'... Nevertheless, the *Rhetoric* does express Aristotle's view of why rhetoric is an expertise valuable to the state and worth cultivating in individuals"; Daniel DiLeo, "Aristotle on Maxims, the Insufficiency of Rhetoric, and a Fundamental Problem of Politics" (paper presented at the Northeast Political Science Conference, 2017), 21: "We must ask why readers of the *Rhetoric* might want to find some ethical guidance for the art, whether it might be Aristotle's intention to induce a desire in his initial audience for that ethical guidance"; Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's "Rhetoric": An Art of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 11: "Rhetoric, [Aristotle] tells us, is a faculty that proves opposites, that allows us to argue both sides of a question.... Yet we all—ancients and moderns—act as though there must be more to rhetoric than that. The question is how much more"; Janet M. Atwill, *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 195: "Productive knowledge [*technē*], for Aristotle, is concerned with making, *poiēsis*, characterized by both epistemological and ethical indeterminacy."

Prior to the comparison between the virtues of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and of the *Rhetoric*, some background is necessary. Aristotle refers in the *Rhetoric* to two very different previous presenters or teachers of rhetoric: Socrates and the sophists in Athens. The sophists were much in demand by those who sought advancement in politics, and who saw the means for advancement in speaking effectively.⁴ In addition to the critique above, Aristotle censures the sophists, or “the compilers of the arts of speech,” for speaking “mostly outside the subject of the argument” (*Rh* I.i.3–5 1354a15–25). In a number of Platonic dialogues, we witness the arguments of the sophists—not to mention the dialogue devoted to the sophist (in part because in that dialogue the sophist is very difficult to catch). An example of a sophist familiar to many is that of Thrasymachus in the *Republic*: “I affirm that the just is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger” (338c).⁵ As if to comment on Thrasymachus’s assertion, Aristotle says the sophist is defined not by his ability to speak, but by his considered (moral) choices (*proairesei*) (*Rh* I.i.14 1355b18).⁶

Socrates anticipates Aristotle’s moral criticism of the sophist, for example, in his criticism of sophists like Gorgias (*Gorgias* 448e–454e, 460e–461a). But while Aristotle appears as an ally of Socrates against the sophists, he is also competing against Socrates himself on the question of appropriate rhetoric. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that the rhetor must have complete knowledge of the soul, and proceed in a scientific manner (*Phaedrus* 269d–270c). This has often been taken to mean that Socrates requires the true rhetor to be the philosopher.⁷

⁴ J. W. Roberts, *City of Sokrates: An Introduction to Classical Athens* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 222–23, says that it is difficult to overemphasize the effect of the immigration of the sophists into Athens. Bettany Hughes, *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 171, writes: “the Athenians of this period seemed to delight in a show-stopping rhetorical tour de force.... Sophists traveled long miles to exploit Athens’ market.” Thus, a teaching like Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* was urgently needed.

⁵ Socrates’s refutation is effective, through his use of dialectic. Aristotle begins the *Rhetoric* by saying that rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic (*Rh* I.i.1 1354a1), but Socrates’s dialectic is itself surely rhetorical.

⁶ See Engberg-Pedersen, “Ethical Dimensions,” 130, for his explanation of this use of *proairesis* in dialectic and in “sophistic.”

⁷ Among those who have inferred this are Stephen Halliwell, “The Challenge of Rhetoric to Political and Ethical Theory,” in Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s “Rhetoric,”* 186, 177; and Dow, *Passions and Persuasion*, 35. See *Phaedrus* for Socrates’s description of what the true rhetor must know (e.g., 273d–e, 277b–c). It is important to recognize, though, that this philosophic rhetoric for Socrates must occur only in private speech, taking into account the differences in human souls. Mary Nichols, “Aristotle’s Defense of Rhetoric,” *Journal of Politics* 49, no. 3 (1987): 660.

It will not be surprising that Aristotle presents a view of rhetoric that is a mean between the sophists or those who write “handbooks” on rhetoric, on the one hand, and Socrates, on the other. Aristotle rebukes the sophists for “performing their tricky business” [*kakourgei*] (*Rh* III.ii.7 1404b38). On the other hand, Aristotle implies that the rhetor does not have to be a philosopher, does not have to know deeply. In fact, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* seems to supply the philosophy needed to give his art of rhetoric a solid grounding.⁸

Thus Aristotle’s teaching can be seen as a mean between what Socrates says rhetors should do and what the sophists in fact do. Socrates says rhetors should speak to different souls differently, and he says that one can only do this in private (*Phaedrus* 275e). Aristotle, however, shows how one may speak to different souls in a public manner (*Rh* II.xii–xiii 1388b32–1390a28). The sophists play on the emotions “outside the subject.” Aristotle shows how evoking the emotions may appropriately be a part of rhetoric when properly used (*Rh* II.i.4 1377b30–1378a7). He also explains what is required for speaking to the subject (*Rh* I.i.10–11 1354b27–1355a3, 19–21).

Though not the first mention of the virtues in the *Rhetoric*, the most fruitful place to begin to examine them is the exposition of the virtues, and their definitions, in I.ix.5–13 (*Rh* 1366b2–22), the knowledge of which, Aristotle says, will allow rhetors to speak persuasively to others. This is especially true in epideictic rhetoric, which involves praise and blame, where arguments will be made on the basis of the virtues (*Rh* I.ix.1–2 1366a24–33).⁹ He begins by defining virtue: “Virtue is held to be the ability to provide and protect good things, an ability to do *many and great benevolent deeds* [*euergetikē*]—even of all things pertaining to everything” (*Rh* I.ix.4 1366a35, emphasis added).¹⁰ Right away, we see an element of virtue not mentioned in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: its capacity for benevolence. Aristotle goes even further: “The greatest virtues necessarily are those which are *most useful to others*, if indeed virtue

⁸ C. D. C. Reeve, “Philosophy, Politics, and Rhetoric in Aristotle,” in Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s “Rhetoric,”* 199: “the rhetorician knows something about persuasive arguments, but qua rhetorician he is not in the business of generating the premises of those arguments. . . . He needs to know which of them are true. . . . But he does not need to know, as the scientist does, *why* they are true” (italics in original). Regarding Aristotle supplying philosophy, see below.

⁹ The two other types of rhetoric are deliberative (speeches given in the assembly, to determine a course of action or to make a special decree) and judicial (in a court of law, to determine guilt or innocence).

¹⁰ The reader is invited to work out what Aristotle means by the phrase “even of all things pertaining to everything.”

is the ability to do benevolent deeds" (*Rh* I.ix.6 1366b5, emphasis added).¹¹ There is even an implication of self-sacrifice in Aristotle's description of the virtues: "All those virtuous actions someone carries out not for his own sake [are noble]. So too all those things that are good simply that someone does on behalf of the fatherland, while overlooking his own [good]" (*Rh* I.ix.17 1366b36–1367a2).¹² By contrast, the virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, while they imply a social context, and include the virtuous actor in that society, are practiced for the sake of the noble, that is, one's own nobility. Indeed, "justice *alone* of the virtues is 'the good of others'" (*NE* V.i.16 1130a4, emphasis added).¹³ Perhaps the *Rhetoric* emphasizes benevolence to entice the goodwill of the audience, which would attract them to virtue (cf. *Rh* II.iv.1–2 1380b35–1381a3).¹⁴

In listing and defining the virtues in *Rhetoric* I.ix (there are, in fact, three lists here), Aristotle does not at first point out the distinction between the moral and the intellectual virtues, as he does in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; his lists are incomplete regarding both kinds of virtue; and he does not follow the order of moral virtues that appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

¹¹ Compare Aristotle's definition of the prudent person in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "It seems to belong to the prudent person to be able to deliberate nobly about things good and advantageous *for himself*...about the sorts of things conducive to living well in general" (*NE* VI.v.1 1140a25–29, emphasis added).

¹² Irwin, "Ethics in *Rhetoric*," 169, suggests that "the audiences that an orator addresses," will not be troubled by the conflicting claims of eudaemonism and self-sacrifice, since both are easy to accept on a "commonsense" basis.

¹³ Regarding justice as the sole virtue that is the good of others (*NE* V.i.16 1130a4), it is interesting to note that "justice" is the first virtue mentioned in each of the three lists (tables) of the virtues in *Rh* I.ix.

¹⁴ If benevolence could be considered to be *advantageous* to the audience, a case for its persuasiveness could be made. Halliwell, "Challenge," 181: "[In the *Rhetoric*] advantage is...the supreme concern of deliberative oratory...it is a standard by which 'all men are persuaded.'" (Cf. Thrasymachus's remark, quoted above.) We must follow the different paths that benevolence takes in Aristotle's further discussions.

TABLES OF THE VIRTUES¹⁵1. *Rh* I.ix.5 1366b2–4

VIRTUE
Justice
Courage
Moderation (<i>sōphrosunē</i>)
Munificence (<i>megalopropeia</i>)
Magnanimity (<i>megalopsuchia</i>)
Liberality
Gentleness (<i>praotēs</i>)
Prudence
Wisdom

2. *Rh* I.ix.6 1366b5–9

VIRTUE AS BENEFACTION	
The just	Especially honored, useful
The courageous	Especially honored, useful
Liberality	The liberal give freely, and do not quarrel over money

3. *Rh* I.ix.7–13 1366b9–22

VIRTUES AND OPPOSITES	
Justice—in conformity with the law	Injustice—in opposition to the law
Courage—in danger, as the law commands and in submission to it	Cowardice
Moderation—bodily pleasures, as the law commands	Licentiousness
Liberality—does good in matters of wealth	Avarice (<i>aneleutheria</i>)
Magnanimity—produces great benevolence	Smallness of soul
Munificence—produces greatness in expenditure	Smallness of soul and penny-pinching (<i>mikropepeia</i>)
Prudence—an intellectual virtue, which enables one to deliberate well about good and bad (things) said to bear on happiness	—

¹⁵ The moral virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in order are courage, moderation, liberality, munificence, magnanimity, ambition, gentleness, friendliness, truthfulness, wit, justice. The order of the intellectual virtues is scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), art (*technē*—making), prudence, intellect (*nous*), wisdom.

In the first list (*Rh* I.ix.5 1366b2), an enumeration only, justice is named first, followed by courage. Moderation follows courage, but, unlike in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, munificence and magnanimity precede liberality. The first list is completed by gentleness, prudence, and wisdom. Nine virtues (seven moral and two intellectual) are mentioned in this list, of which magnanimity is the central virtue.¹⁶ In the short second list (*Rh* I.ix.6 1366b5–9), which one could call the “usefulness list” (“necessarily the greatest virtues”: *Rh* I.ix.6 1366b3–4), Aristotle explains that the just and the courageous “are especially honored, the latter being useful to others in war, the former in peace as well” (*Rh* I.ix.6 1366b7–9). Liberality is the only other virtue mentioned in these comments on the usefulness of the virtues, “for the liberal give freely and do not quarrel over money, which is the chief object of other men’s desire” (*Rh* I.ix.6 1366b10–12).¹⁷

Immediately following this emphasis on the usefulness of the virtues, in a third list (*Rh* I.ix.7–13 1366b9–22), Aristotle explains the operations of the virtues and names their opposites—although, unlike in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, only one opposite is named for each virtue. (We see an exception to this single naming below.) There are, however, only seven virtues in this list—gentleness and wisdom have strayed from the rhetorical fold, although they do appear in the text at other times.¹⁸ The first three are justice, courage, and moderation. Aristotle says of each of these virtues that they are inextricably tied to the law: justice, “according to the law”; courage, “as the law commands, and in submission to the law”; and moderation, “as the law commands.” If justice here is described as the virtue through which each is given

¹⁶ Larry Arnhart, *Aristotle on Political Reasoning* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), 207n9, discusses the section on the virtues (I.ix) in some detail. In the first list, the list which begins with justice, ends with wisdom, and has magnanimity in the center, he observes that this order “might be intended to suggest that the clash between justice and wisdom can be mediated through magnanimity.”

¹⁷ The mention of these “useful” virtues is repeated in Book II, where Aristotle says that we love such people for their readiness to be helpful (*Rh* II.iv.8 1381a21–24).

¹⁸ Arnhart, *Political Reasoning*, 107n8, explains the absence of gentleness (*praotēs*) by its later designation as a passion. Yet it is called a virtue, in a way, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (IV.i.1–2 1125b26–30). Regarding the absence of wisdom in the third list, Arnhart says that since Aristotle is discussing epideictic rhetoric here, “the implication may be that it is easier for a rhetorician to praise a man for his prudence than for his wisdom. . . . [People] regard [wisdom] as useless since, in contrast to prudence it is not concerned with human goods but with things eternal” (*Political Reasoning*, 80). He also suggests that wisdom is not in the third list because the focus of Aristotle’s discussion of the virtues in the *Rhetoric* is their benefit to others, and the audience is less likely to be moved by a virtue that is beneficial to the holder of the virtue rather than to the audience. In any case, Aristotle makes frequent reference to both gentleness and wisdom later in the *Rhetoric* (e.g., a rather long section on gentleness at *Rh* II.iii.1–12 1380a5–1380b6). One might take the disappearance of *sophia* in the third list as an affirmation that philosophy does not have to be the provenance of the rhetor.

his own according to the law, this is not, therefore, “the whole of justice,” the legislation founding a regime and setting out its laws, but the post-legislation lawful, as these two kinds of justice are distinguished in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (V.i.12–13 1129b11–19). The rhetor apparently does not advise the legislator—yet another indication that Aristotle’s rhetor is not the philosopher. What Aristotle says about courage here is interesting, too, that it “submits” to the law: we are not accustomed to thinking of courage as submitting to anything; submission to the law might put us in mind of citizen courage, the first of the types of “so-called” courage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Citizens seem to endure dangers on account of the legal penalties and reproaches involved, as well as on account of the honors at stake” (*NE* III.viii.1–3 1116a17–30). As for moderation, it is difficult to think of anything less subject to the law than the senses of touch or taste—even though there are certainly sumptuary laws which vary greatly from society to society, as do laws concerning sexuality, laws which might well be a topic for rhetoric. Aristotle, however, does not mention the laws as a guide to moderation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; rather, one is moderate “according to right reason” (*NE* III.xi.8 1119a20). Justice, courage and moderation in the *Rhetoric* seem to refer to the legal, rather than to the ethical, concern with virtue.¹⁹

Aristotle may attach these three virtues to the law for two reasons. The first is that rhetoric always occurs in the context of the law and of the politics of the community. Although it can be used in all subjects, it cannot be free of the law, whether in the assembly or the law court (*Rh* I.i.7–8 1354a35–1354b18). Second, it must always be acutely aware of what the conventions or opinions are of the society in which it is practiced—which mostly stem from its laws, and which are held by most people. Rhetoric, not to say the rhetor himself, is shaped by its society (*Rh* I.viii.5–6 1366a7–14).²⁰ But these attachments to the law do not appear in any of the explanations of the rest of the virtues named in this list: the law cannot dictate the requirements of the next virtue, liberality (otherwise we would call liberality “redistributive taxes”), any more than it can dictate those of the rest of the virtues on this explanatory list, no matter how much the rhetor is informed by the law, or the virtues are shaped by the law. Yet the rhetor must know these other virtues and whatever relation they may have to the law.

¹⁹ This would seem to put these three virtues in the service of forensic, rather than epideictic, rhetoric.

²⁰ Although, as Nichols, “Defense,” 660–61, points out, “common opinion is not homogeneous. . . . [Its] elements. . . may be in contradiction with one another and. . . in varying degrees reflect some element of the truth.” The rhetor must recognize this, and educate the audience, in order to promote community and agreement.

Liberality (*eleutheriotēs*) is the fourth (and central) virtue here. About it, Aristotle says no more than that it is “productive of good things [*eu poiētikē*] regarding money” (*Rh* I.ix.10 1366b16). This phrase does not emphasize giving, as does the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which would have been more closely in accord with the notion of benevolence (*NE* IV.i.7 1120a10–15). But the omission of the notion of giving may be meant to indicate a problem with benevolence itself. For we see that liberality also seems to be used in its alternate sense as “free” (in a subsequent place *in this same chapter*—and there three times), where it might well contradict the notion of virtue as existing for others. This occurs in a long discussion of what things are noble (*Rh* I.ix.26–27 1367a28–32): “And possessions which are unprofitable [*akarpa*] [are noble]; for they are more liberal [*eleutheriōtera*, free].... In Sparta, long hair is noble: it is a sign of liberality [freedom]; for it is not easy to perform servile work with long hair. Nor should one work at a manual [*banauson*] art: *the liberal [free] person does not live for others*” (emphasis added). Although we readily understand the eleemosynary character of liberality, we cannot ignore the statement that the liberal person does not live for others. This contrast between liberality/freedom and benevolence might explain its central or more hidden position in this list. It may perhaps be a sign that benevolence is not the essence of the virtues.²¹ There may, however, be another explanation for the emphasis on benevolence: it may instead be related to the different audiences in the *Rhetoric* from those of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.²²

Magnanimity exchanges its *Nicomachean* place with munificence, following liberality. “Magnanimity is a virtue productive of great benevolent deeds” (*Rh* I.ix.11 1366b22), seeming to stand for all virtue as it was defined earlier (above; *Rh* I.ix.4 1366a35). This is not contrary to what Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Greatness *in each virtue* would be [intrinsic to] the magnanimous” (*NE* IV.iii.15–16 1123b30–1124a3, emphasis added), but there he does not speak of benevolence. Thinking of the possible deeds of the magnanimous, it is not easy to think of them as performed with a benevolent objective.²³ Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* is giving a different message to the student rhetor and to careful readers about the character of the virtues. Not all of them fit easily into the benevolent category. But presenting the virtues as benevolent may be the best way to gain a wider audience.

²¹ We have seen that Aristotle has said, “The greatest virtues necessarily are those which are most useful to others, *if indeed* virtue is the ability to do benevolent deeds” (*Rh* I.ix.6 1366b5, emphasis added). See note 14 with text, above.

²² This is discussed further below.

²³ Liberality is welcomed everywhere; magnanimity, not always and everywhere.

Later in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle shifts from the imposing description of magnanimity here to other generalizations about magnanimity that could not possibly fit the passages on this virtue that occur in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For example, in the *Rhetoric*, he connects magnanimity to the emotion of emulation (*zēlousi*).

Emulation is pain at the evident presence of highly honored goods in those to whom one is similar in nature, which one is oneself capable of attaining—pain due to the fact that he does not possess them.... Emulation is decent and characteristic of those who are decent...who, owing to emulation, fit themselves to obtain such goods.... Necessarily, then, those are emulous who claim themselves worthy of good things *that they do not possess*; for no one claims himself worthy of what appears to be impossible. Thus, the young *and the magnanimous* are emulous. (II.xi.1–2 1388a27–b3, emphasis added)

There is little evidence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle thinks the magnanimous man looks to a role model or to a rival whom he emulates, still less a number of them (cf. *NE* IV.iii.16 1124a3–5; IV.iii.26 1124b23–24). And it is difficult to understand what “fitting oneself to obtain” magnanimity, or its honors, might mean—can a person *fit oneself* to magnanimity?—much less why an already magnanimous person would be emulous.²⁴ This passage also seems to present the magnanimous as more desirous of honor than he is in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where even honor bestowed by the serious gives him only a measured pleasure, “for there could be no honor worthy of complete virtue.... He will also despise dishonor, for no dishonor can justly attach to him” (*NE* IV.iii.17 1124a6–13).

It is also difficult to imagine the *Nicomachean* magnanimous in pain about anything connected to “highly honored goods.” Of course, he must wait for the occasion of rare and great dangers, but he cannot be in pain while waiting, because “great honors” have to be worthy of *him*, and even these honors are a small thing to him (*NE* IV.iii.18 1124a18).

Magnanimity is one of the two great virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (munificence is the other), which by their name alone would preclude widespread participation: not all those who wish to be virtuous can qualify for them. However, Aristotle in most of the *Rhetoric* seems to treat magnanimity as if it were a very ordinary thing. A bit later, he attributes magnanimity to

²⁴ Still less than emulating would the magnanimous be willing to praise another (*NE* IV.iii.31 1125a5–8). Reeve, “Philosophy, Rhetoric,” 201, has difficulty imagining the magnanimous engaging in any epideictic rhetoric, calling such a thing “comic relief.”

“the young” in general—rather than separating youth and magnanimity as he seems to do in the emulation passage—and for surprising reasons. “The young,” he says, “are magnanimous, for they have not yet been humbled by life, and they have not experienced other [harsh] necessities. And there is magnanimity in deeming oneself worthy, which comes from great hope” (*Rh* II.xii.11 1389a32–33). Aristotle is speaking in this passage of characteristics of the young which the rhetor could use in persuading them. Thus he would again seem to be speaking of a large number of people. But it is difficult to conceive of someone magnanimous ever being daunted by being humbled—he seems rather to embrace life in its opportunities for great deeds, and even in misfortune (*Rh* I.ix.31 1367b15–16; cf. *NE* IV.iii.18 1124a14–15).²⁵ Nor is it easy to see why the magnanimous would need hope: his whole being is *certain* that he is worthy of great things (*NE* IV.iii.9 1123b16–18). “Hope” does not exist in the repertoire of the *Nicomachean* magnanimous: confidence in his worth, and knowledge of the truth, do (*NE* IV.iii.23 1124b5). Hope does not even have a place in great misfortune for the magnanimous, for he will not “be deeply grieved by bad fortune” (*NE* IV.iii.18 1124a16).

To understand the difference between the discussions of magnanimity in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*, we need to look at the rhetor's audience. While it is certain in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that there are very, very few who are truly magnanimous, many in the rhetor's audience would be pleased to be spoken to as if they were magnanimous, especially if they were “emulous” of highly honored goods.²⁶ Aristotle refers in Book III of the *Rhetoric* to “the fallacy of consequence,” meaning if a person does or is something, one can reach the false conclusion that that person has a characteristic which he in fact does not possess. “For instance...[it is said that Paris] was magnanimous, because he despised the company of the many, and passed his time alone on [Mount] Ida. For because the magnanimous are such, this one could be held to be magnanimous” (*Rh* II.xxiv.7 1401b24–28). Suggesting that the magnanimous were hopeful would help the audience apply the fallacy of consequence to themselves.

²⁵ Aristotle says the same thing, and in almost the same words, at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but he “dilutes” magnanimity by adding “good birth” (*gennadas*) as an antidote to misfortune (*NE* I.x.12 1100b30–33). His discussion of evincing magnanimity in misfortune is one of the few points of agreement about magnanimity, apart from its “standing for all the virtues,” in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*.

²⁶ The fact that Aristotle speaks of the young as “emulous” calls into doubt whether the emulous are always in fact *capable* of attaining highly honored goods.

This supposition might be fortified by what Aristotle says about the next virtue on this list, munificence (*megaloprepeia*): “Munificence is a virtue which is productive of greatness in expenditure” (*Rh* I.ix.11 1366b17). Only in the discussion of this virtue does Aristotle give *two* opposites (and both on the same side of the mean). We are amazed to find that these opposites are not only paltriness (*mikroprepeia*) but also smallness of soul (*mikropsuchia*), the word that is usually associated with magnanimity or greatness of soul, and which has just been named in the same table as the opposite of magnanimity. This quality might be meant to be understood by those who are munificent, certainly a larger number than the magnanimous, as putting them in the ranks of the magnanimous. The reverse of this confusion of virtues arises when Aristotle later suggests that “for the purpose of praise or blame, [the rhetor] must take the things near to favorable qualities as if they were the same...the arrogant [*authadē*] as if they were *munificent* and dignified” (*Rh* I.ix.29 1367a38–b1, emphasis added).²⁷ Although we might expect arrogance to be nearer the favorable qualities of *magnanimity* and dignity, the arrogant would nevertheless be gratified to be spoken of as if they were participants in any of the ranks of the greatly virtuous.

Yet this passage has another peculiarity: it also shows a misuse of the virtues that Aristotle had earlier claimed not to be possible. This may be impossible in deed, but not in speech, for Aristotle here shows how for the purposes of praise and blame, “those in excess [may be favorably spoken of] as possessing the corresponding virtue, the reckless as courageous, the profligate as liberal” (*Rh* I.ix.29 1367b1–3), and, as we have seen, the arrogant as munificent. In altering the virtues to apply to their corresponding vices, the virtues themselves are distorted. Precisely in rhetoric itself, Aristotle shows us that the virtues may indeed be misused. But this may not be immoral if it acts as an inducement for “extreme” characters to turn toward the virtuous mean.

The final virtue in the explanatory list, prudence, is enlightening, not only about the *Rhetoric*, but about Aristotle himself.²⁸ “Prudence is an

²⁷ Some have even emended the text of the *Rhetoric* to read “magnanimous” for “munificent”—a strong indication of the mixing of these great virtues in the text (e.g., Irwin, “Ethics in *Rhetoric*,” 172n32, following E. M. Cope, *An Introduction to Aristotle’s “Rhetoric”* [London: Macmillan, 1867]).

²⁸ We notice that, although Aristotle gives the opposite for all the other virtues he explains here, he gives no opposite for prudence. Prudence is an intellectual virtue, and thus not spoken of as a mean between extremes, though in this list, he gives only one opposite of the other virtues (except for munificence, and the opposites of munificence are on “the same side” of the extreme), as if even these virtues were not the mean of two extremes. The opposite of prudence, imprudence (*aphrosunē*, *aphrōn*) is not mentioned anywhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The only intellectual virtue that is given an opposite in Book VI is art (*technē*) (*NE* VI.iv.6 1140a21–23).

intellectual [*dianoias*] virtue, according to which one is able to deliberate well about the good and bad things said to bear on happiness" (*Rh* I.ix.13 1366b19–21).²⁹ This definition does not seem necessarily to indicate benevolence. Moreover, in the explicitly *political* sections of the *Rhetoric*, through which the rhetor understands most, if not everything, about the character of his audience *as a whole*, and where benevolence might be practiced (political topics: *Rh* I.iv.1–13 1359a30–1360b2; topics about political regimes: *Rh* I.viii.1–7 1365b22–1366a23), prudence is not mentioned, though we would have expected it there, given the discussion of prudence in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (cf. VI.viii.1–2 1141b24–28: "The political is the same characteristic as prudence, but their essence is not the same"). But in his discussion in the *Rhetoric* of pleasure and the pleasant, Aristotle brings prudence in at a very high level: "And since ruling [*archein*] is very pleasant, it is pleasant also to be held to be wise, for being prudent is the mark of a ruler, and wisdom is knowledge of many wonderful things" (*Rh* I.xi.27 1371b27–28). Yet here he speaks of prudence in ruling as pleasant, rather than benevolent—or self-sacrificing.³⁰ Once again, we wonder about how the virtues in the *Rhetoric* are grounded in benevolence.

Reading the *Rhetoric*, we are struck by how often prudence seems to stand apart from the good. This is understandable in the sense that prudence shows the way, and as such is prior, to the good³¹—though Aristotle goes further in separating them:

Matters pertaining to character [*ēthei*] follow on each sort of character...speaking on the basis of the choice [one has made] [*proaireseōs*]: "But I wished it, for this is in fact what I chose. But if I did not benefit by it, it is [nonetheless] better." For the former statement belongs to a prudent person, the latter to a good [person]. For the prudent is held to be in pursuit of the beneficial [*ōphelimon*]; the good in pursuit of the noble. (*Rh* III.xvi.8–9 1417a22–28)

In his discussion of happiness in Book I ("a certain target for pretty much all people": *Rh* I.v.1–2 1360b4–7), although he says it contains external goods and goods of the soul, he says very little about the goods of the soul—which might well be less important than external goods for rhetorical

²⁹ Here is the only distinction made in I.ix between the moral and the intellectual virtues. This is also the only mention of happiness in this section

³⁰ Cf. Bartlett, *Rhetoric*, 282 s.v. "prudence," who seems to disconnect prudence in general from rhetoric.

³¹ And in *Rh* I.ix.13 1366b21–23, Aristotle, as we have seen, defines prudence as allowing people to deliberate well about the good.

arguments—and cites good reputation (*eudoxia*) as “being supposed by all to be serious or to have the sort of thing that all—or the many *or* the good *or* the prudent—aim at” (*Rh* I.v.8 1361a25–26, emphasis added). The prudent seems to be distinguished from the good, as if one could be good without being prudent, or vice versa. Later, when he discusses good reputation, along with honor, as pleasant, he says they are “among the most pleasant things,” because their attribution causes “each person...to imagine himself...serious,” especially when “asserted by those he supposes to be telling the truth, such as...the prudent rather than the foolish [*aphronōn*]” (*Rh* I.xi.16 1371a10–13). Here, although we might have expected it, the good are not mentioned at all. However, in the vexingly obscure chapter vii of Book I, the chapter of the greater and lesser (which discusses how to argue which good or advantageous thing is greater), prudence is the touchstone of judging what the greater good is (*Rh* I.vii.3 1363b13–15; I.vii. 21 1364b12–19). If prudence is “in pursuit of the beneficial,” it might even be considered in the *Rhetoric* to be greater than the good.³²

In Book II, prudence comes into its own. As the preface to his discussion of how to approach the emotions within the subject, and to praise character to his audience, Aristotle tells us that the speaker himself must appear to have good character. Apart from their demonstrations (*apodeixeōn*), the three qualities the speakers themselves must evince to be credible in what they say and the advice they give are “prudence and virtue and goodwill [*eunoia*]” (*Rh* II.i.5 1378a7), prudence being necessary to form correct opinions (*Rh* II.i.6 1378a12–14; virtue is necessary for them to state their opinions in their speeches; goodwill for them to advise well).³³ Moreover, “the means whereby they may appear prudent and serious must be inferred from the classification [*diē(i)rēmenōn*] of the virtues; for in order for a given person to make himself appear such he would employ the same means as he would in making others appear so” (*Rh* II.i.7 1378a17–19). The virtues the speakers must praise in others are also the ones they themselves must appear to have in order to be persuasive.

³² And perhaps also in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “It is not possible to be good in the authoritative sense without prudence, nor is it possible to be prudent in the absence of moral virtue” (*NE* VI.xiii.6 1144b31–32). But “virtue in the authoritative sense does not arise in the absence of prudence” (*NE* VI.xiii.2 1144b18).

³³ Halliwell, “Challenge,” 180, remarks on the “striking and seemingly sharp separation of *phronēsis* and *aretē*” when Aristotle discusses the three persuasive parts of the rhetor’s character (prudence, virtue, and goodwill), such a separation implying “that a speaker may possess the first without the second.”

We have come full circle: the “classification of the virtues” is none other than our list and explanations of the virtues which led us to examine them (I.ix). Prudence and the moral virtues are important for persuasion or proof, but also for the apparent character of the speaker. In rhetoric, the intellectual virtue of prudence guides the moral virtues and those who would use them for themselves and others in their activity of persuasion. But which prudence, and which moral virtues? We have seen that there are many discussions of the virtues in the *Rhetoric* which disagree with those in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. A major answer to this disparity lies in the different audiences for the two books. Rhetoric is speech addressed to a wide audience, who Aristotle often says might not understand complex arguments, or follow long ones (e.g., *Rh* I.ii.12 1357a1–5).³⁴ Moreover, he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that while speeches can make “a lover of the noble receptive to virtue, yet speeches are incapable of exhorting the many to nobility and goodness” (*NE* X.ix.3 1179b5–11). The virtues as discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* would be seen by the many as stern and restrictive. The many in democracy prefer freedom (*Rh* I.viii.5 1366a6). To appeal to such an audience, the virtues must be shown in a different aspect than they are shown in an appeal to the decent.³⁵

“A different aspect” of the virtues does not mean a false aspect. Courage as serving the city and its laws, or the benevolence of magnanimity are indeed different aspects of these virtues—the military fights to preserve the city, and the law is necessary to bring the military into existence; the honors bestowed on the magnanimous express gratitude as well as admiration—aspects that would be convincing to a wide audience (cf. *Rh* I.i.12 1355a25–29).³⁶ Commentators have remarked that Aristotle does not follow the requirement of Socrates that the rhetor must have philosophic knowledge

³⁴ Nichols, “Defense,” 668–69: “The premises that he uses—the views he expresses, for example, about virtue or justice—must be comprehensible to common opinion if his arguments are to be successful.” Maxine C. Hairston, “Aristotle’s Enthymeme in the Classroom,” in *Rhetoric and Praxis*, ed. Jean Dietz Moss (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 62–63, argues that the enthymeme (the rhetorical—and shortened—form of syllogism) has a rhetorical form and purpose. “Aristotle says that [in enthymemes], the links in the chain must be few, for the listener will supply the missing premises that are common knowledge. . . . Basing an argument on an enthymeme necessarily involves drawing the audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and experience into the structure of the argument. . . . The very fact that the rhetor does not need to articulate them establishes a bond of intimacy and trust between speaker and listener. That bond enhances the speaker’s ethical appeal and predisposes the listener to yield to persuasion.”

³⁵ Irwin, “Ethics in *Rhetoric*,” 168, has a slightly different explanation: “[The reason that the virtues differ] in the *Rhetoric* and the *Ethics* is Aristotle’s desire to prevent the *Rhetoric* from raising puzzles about common beliefs, which require moral philosophy to solve them. . . . Otherwise we are confused and therefore at the mercy of the sophists.”

³⁶ The many may also see a different aspect of the truth. Cf. note 21 above.

to be a credible rhetor (*Phaedrus* 277b–c).³⁷ But as we have suggested previously, Aristotle himself supplies philosophy as an underpinning to his teaching of the nonphilosophic but surely political rhetor. Aristotle's philosophic understanding includes the widening of moral virtue from the way it is presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to include its aspects that point more clearly to the benevolent ways in which virtue may be presented to a wider audience not eligible for virtue,³⁸ and by which the rhetor may ease the tension between the virtuous and the many, and may lead the many to a greater appreciation of the virtuous, if not to a greater receptivity to virtue itself (*Rh* I.iv.5 1381a12–14).³⁹

As if following his own advice in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle presents the virtues in a way that makes *him* appear to have virtue, specifically the virtue of prudence. Moreover, his prudence shows his own benevolence. First, as was said, he is benevolent to the many by giving them a more favorable (and interested) view of the virtues. They may thus be more open to accepting a statesman who is just and who aims for the good of the community.⁴⁰ Second, he is benevolent by showing his own prudence to the serious citizen, who will be less suspicious of the merits and morality of those rhetors who are civic minded. They may learn to judge and thus to benefit from these rhetors. Third, the incipient philosophers receive his benevolence by seeing the importance of prudence to philosophizing about the political things, of which rhetoric is surely a part. Aristotle indicates to them how to understand the manner of philosophic writing, and a way of speaking publicly to different souls or audiences. Finally, the student rhetors learn that they can be

³⁷ Engberg-Pedersen, "Ethical Dimension," 129, asserts that the rhetor needs philosophic, or at least political philosophic, knowledge; but see 138, and Reeve, "Philosophy, Rhetoric," 199. DiLeo, "Maxims Insufficiency," 6, says that "we can also guess that [Aristotle's] intended audience included potential philosophers," but he also says that the *Rhetoric* was "within the philosopher's project of providing an education suitable for free citizens...an education that reinforced the conventional decency of 'the noble and good' and equipped them for statesmanship." See note 8 with text, above.

³⁸ Arnhart, *Political Reasoning*, 80: In the *Rhetoric*, "although [Aristotle] does not have to directly contradict the doctrines of the *Ethics*, he does have to stress those elements of virtue that are in accord with and in service to the community, rather than those elements that are more private and more independent of the community."

³⁹ DiLeo, "Manipulative Maxims," 11, finds in the maxims of rhetoric (Book III) manipulations of the audience, rather than different aspects of the virtues. He asserts, however, that "Aristotle does not surrender to the amorality of sophistic rhetoric." His view of Aristotle's end is "in the short term, a broader perspective as provided by the *politikē* on the part of wise and effective speakers, in the longer term, an education that can instill a broader perspective on the part of the citizens as well...[although] this two-part solution is not without problems of its own."

⁴⁰ Nichols, "Defense," 676: "In writing a *Rhetoric* about speech that aims at the advantageous and the just, Aristotle is therefore trying to strengthen political community."

proponents of truth and justice, and still become successful rhetors. Aristotle is sensitive to the audience of the rhetor; and his own audience includes the whole of the human souls.

The *Rhetoric* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* combine the different aspects of virtue in such a way that one cannot ignore either work if one is to seek the truth.

For it belongs to the same capacity [*dunameōs*] to see both what is true and what resembles the truth; at the same time, *human beings have sufficient natural capacity* when it comes to what is true and *for the most part* they do chance upon the truth. Hence, being able to aim at the generally accepted opinions belongs to one who is similarly skilled also as regards the truth. (*Rh* I.i.11 1355a14–18, emphasis added)⁴¹

But the ambiguity of this quotation implies that it does not belong to Aristotle's student rhetors to seek the truth further than to guard the truth, and the justice that stems from it, as they are led to this task by Aristotle. Aristotle believes that rhetors who are dedicated to the truth and to justice can be strengthened by a correct teaching of rhetoric. They need Aristotle, and therefore are not the philosophers that Socrates demands. Rather, they are the decent citizens, who some suggest may even become statesmen.⁴² Their heightened rhetorical powers added to their intimation of the truth would give them confidence to enter into the political activities of deliberation, judging or praising the good things that political figures should do, or have accomplished. These advocates might increase in numbers through the encouragement and the teaching of the *Rhetoric*.

We return to the question whether Aristotle's teaching on rhetoric is moral or immoral. Does Aristotle also advise those who would misuse his teaching? He does not say what those who need no persuasion to do what is bad might do with his teaching.⁴³ If they can misuse it, why does Aristotle

⁴¹ Engberg-Pedersen, "Ethical Dimension," 131: Aristotle does "not wish to say that all the *endoxa* [of the rhetor] is true. Still, when generalized the point does help Aristotle meet the Platonic challenge, since its general validity corresponds with the idea that rhetoric is as such part of a general process that both aims to discover the truth and is generally successful in doing this." I believe that the student rhetor is moved by this thought, without understanding it in its fullness.

⁴² Nichols, "Defense," 657: "[Aristotle] saw rhetoric as a means for statesmanship rather than a tool of despotism. . . . The statesman uses rhetoric in order to convey the ambiguous truths of political life." Cf. Bartlett, *Rhetoric*, 223, "For the more knowledgeable a rhetorician becomes about the specifics of politics, the more he becomes, not a rhetorician at all, but a statesman." See also 223n6.

⁴³ Bartlett, *Rhetoric*, 274, agrees that there will be those more concerned "by the technical refinement than the moral exhortation. . . . But there will be rhetoric with or without Aristotle's intervention. . . and

write his teaching openly? In understanding Aristotle's prudence, we perceive that his teaching is moral. The reason has to do with Aristotle's main goal in life: the truth. He believes that the truth will triumph over those who would "persuade others of base things" (*Rh* I.i.12 1355a32).⁴⁴

Rhetoric is useful because what is true and what is just are by nature superior [*kreittō*] to their opposites, such that, if the judgments [rendered in a given instance] do not accord with what is proper, it is necessarily the case that they are defeated on account of [the advocates] themselves. And this is deserving of censure. (*Rh* I.i.12 1355a21–24)⁴⁵

Rhetoric, the advocate and guardian of the truth as Aristotle presents it and teaches it, might be an urgent study, not only for his time, but for ours, as well.⁴⁶

Aristotle does what he can...to yoke [rhetoric] to decent ends."

⁴⁴ Cope, *Introduction*, 403–4: "In rhetoric we may be able to state what is to be said on both sides of the question, and show how an argument may be turned against an opponent; not to *misuse* our skill and knowledge, to throw dust in the eyes of a jury, to promote injustice or screen the wrong doer, but to *use* it in the interest of justice and truth, for the benefit of society and for a moral end" (emphasis in original).

⁴⁵ This last clause supplies the reason for Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. However, the clause is in dispute: Bartlett, *Rhetoric*, 9n22, following a commentator, translates "that they are defeated on account of their opposites [i.e., by falsehood and injustice]," but notes "that they are defeated on account of [the advocates] themselves" is used by other translators and commentators. His translation raises a problem: If "what is true and what is just are by nature superior to their opposites," why would they be defeated *except* because of the weakness of their advocates? The Greek is *anagkē di' autōn hēttasthai*, "they are defeated on account of them" (or "they are inferior to them"—a translation which could generate a much longer speculation!).

⁴⁶ DiLeo, "Maxims Insufficiency," 23: "The need today is particularly acute for the education of leaders with a firm grasp of *politikē* combined with the art that enables them to win the support of the citizenry."