

INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVE AND POLITICAL CHARACTER

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CONSIDER THE PROBLEM OF INTEGRITY: we all aspire to be true to ourselves, to be today what we were yesterday, to fulfill our promises. One way of addressing the need for integrity, the need to be a whole person, is to think about what it would take to make an intelligible narrative out of one's experiences. As Charles Taylor writes, "It has often been remarked that making sense of one's life as a story is . . . not an optional extra; that our lives exist also in this space of questions, which only a coherent narrative can answer."¹ What is intelligible about a human life, on this view, is its life story.

Taylor's point is intended to seem commonsensical and even commonplace. The extent to which it is true, though, depends on how we take "our lives." Taylor is correct to point out that the modern self is a self that aspires to the unity of a narrative, that sees in a coherent life narrative the realization of the individual's authentic existence. Yet even the possibility of making sense of a life as a single, unified narrative is explicitly denied by Aristotle in his thematic treatment of narrative unity in the *Poetics*:

A narrative (*mythos*) is not one, as some think, if it is about one. For many, even infinite things happen to one, from some of which there is no one. So even the actions of one are many, from which many no one action is brought about. For that reason it is likely that those poets err who compose a Heracleid, a Theseid, and these sorts of compositions. For they think that since Heracles is [one], it fits for the narrative [about him] to be one.²

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¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 47.

² Aristotle, *Poetics* 8.1451a16–23. I have aimed in my translation to capture the indefiniteness of Aristotle's Greek. I think it is important to translate Aristotle's "one" literally, without the word "individual," which carries with it many anachronistic connotations, some of which it will be my business to discuss here. References to Aristotle are to the Oxford Classical Texts, apart from those to the *Art of Rhetoric*, for which I have used *Aristotelis Ars Rhetorica*, ed. Rudolf Kassel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976). All translations from the Greek are my own, except as noted.

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An epic or tragedy, in Aristotle's account, must have a kind of unity that a single life does not. A tragedy, he explains, portrays a single action, by showing us the kind of characters that make this action plausible or intelligible. One way to ensure that one's narrative fails to take a determinate form is to concern oneself with the entire life of an individual.³

For Aristotle the problem of the unity of a life may be insoluble, since he posits no future state or final judgment to bring our multiple episodes of action and passion to a satisfactory conclusion. Instead, the problem of integrity becomes the problem of the unity of character through a life. The unity of character is the principle subject of political philosophy, and, as we shall see, of rhetoric. The self is to be made one as a self of a certain sort, of a certain character, and character is made in presenting oneself to others as a certain kind of human being. The speaker who would persuade the public must maintain a unity of himself at one time, a unity of thought, word, and deed.⁴ He must maintain a unity of himself through time in order to maintain his reputation as an honest and competent speaker, what we in English might call "a man of character." This self is unified in political action, and the problem of presenting oneself as such a unity is described by Aristotle in the *Art of Rhetoric* as the problem of *ēthos* or character. The narrative conception of the self, by contrast, cannot be separated from the modern valorization of individuality and society at the expense of citizenship and politics.

Aristotle's concept of human integrity can be expounded simply by the customary translation of *ēthos* as "character," a translation of one Greek word, seemingly, by another. In its original meaning in Greek, *charactēr* is an impression, as in the impression of a seal, or of a die on a coin. Just as an impression is a "surface phenomenon," something superficial, so too *charactēr* is a certain appearance. It is

³See Aristotle, *Poetics* 23.1459a21–b7; and compare Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 159.

⁴In Aristotle the problems of rhetoric, ethics, and politics are really male problems, though they may include the problems of governing women. For this reason—and following Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xv—I use the male pronoun to reveal this reality. On the thorny issues raised for rhetoric and for our understanding of the rhetorical situation by the modern politics of gender see my *Gender and Rhetoric in Plato's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

the impression that gives the pieces of metal that share it an equal value or makes all documents so impressed equally valid. Such an impression is a common quality that distinguishes a class at the expense of particularizing or individualizing features. The metaphor of *character* as an aspect of the self occurs in Greek also, though Liddell, Scott, and Jones give as one meaning of the Greek word in this metaphorical use “type or character (regarded as shared with others) of a thing or person, rarely of an individual nature.”⁵ A character in this sense is recognizable because it is something that can be the same in different people. Character and *ēthos* answer the question not who someone is but what sort of person someone is: to speak in the language that comes to us through the Latinization of Aristotle’s categories, character and *ēthos* are matters not of substance or essence, nor mere accidents, but qualities.⁶ We tend to think that the real man is hidden in the intentions, but for Aristotle it is precisely because intentions (*boulēseis*) are typically hidden that we look to character to assess the man whose statements or actions we must judge.⁷

To be of a kind wholly, to have a unified character expressed in all of one’s actions, is, as we shall see, a difficult and rare attainment. To maintain this unity, it will turn out, something has to be given up, for unification in and through political action cannot comprehend all the possible aspects of a human life. Butcher’s comment on the

⁵Liddell, Scott, and Jones (1990), s.v. *character*.

⁶Compare Christopher Gill’s distinction between personality, which includes “the concern for the person as a unique individual” and character, the self as “bearer of character traits which are assessed by reference to general moral norms”; Christopher Gill, “The Character-Personality Distinction,” in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Christopher Pelling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Greek interest in a man’s biography, Stephen Halliwell writes, “is qualified and colored by the tendency to see him as an exemplar of general, ethical qualities—qualities, that is, which are not uniquely his”; Stephen Halliwell, “Traditional Greek Conceptions of Character,” in *Characterization and Individuality*, 56. On character as ethical quality in Aristotle’s *Poetics* see Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics* (London: Duckworth, 1986), 164.

⁷See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8.1178a30–1 and following; *Poetics* 6.1450b8–9. In “The Meaning of *ēthos* in the *Poetics*—A Reply,” *Hermes* 115 (1987): 175–81, Eckart Schütrumpf writes, citing *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.15.1163a22, that “The intentions, actualized in the *proairesis*, decide on men’s *ēthos*” (177 n. 9), but the link between intention (*boulēsis*) and *proairesis* is not made in this text. I would say rather that men’s characters are the manifestation of their decided preferences (*proaireseis*), which in turn emerge out of the multiplicity of their wishes, wills, or intentions (*boulēsis*).

translation of *ēthos* by “character” is entirely to the point: “If we would speak of character in its widest sense, as including all that reveals a man’s personal and inner self—his intellectual powers no less than the will and the emotions—we go beyond the meaning of the Aristotelian *ēthos*.”⁸ In particular, unification in character cannot comprehend certain features of a human life that we moderns cannot help but regard as desirable and worthy—religious sentiments that go beyond the conventional pieties, refined aesthetic sensibilities, romantic passions. The Aristotelian man of unified character is whole in the sense that he contains no contradictions, but by virtue of what he lacks he is in a way hollow, all surface; he is whole but not full. We have learned from Rousseau, and more directly from Benjamin Constant, to use the hollowness of this political man *par excellence* as the basis for a critique of political life both ancient and modern.⁹ Yet it is possible to turn this critique on its head, as it were: insofar as the life of unified character is still valorized and pursued, modern societies still have within them political possibilities.

In a sense, it is obvious that politics has a place in modern society, since our concepts of “politics” and “the political” can be given meaning in terms of concrete, present-day, social realities. Yet we must also raise the question of the place of politics in modernity from a historical or etymological perspective. The word “politics” comes into modern languages as a transliteration from the Greek, but it is by no means obvious that we can really have politics as the Greeks of the Classical period, and especially the Athenians among whom Aristotle lived and taught, understood it. We customarily translate the Greek word *polis*, from which our word “politics” is derived, by “city-state,” and yet the Greek *poleis*, whether democratically or oligarchically governed, lacked the centralized apparatus of coercion that characterizes states both ancient and modern.¹⁰ We, however, live in states, and one may ask whether politics is present in our interactions with the state that stands apart from us and governs us. The state has

⁸S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed. (London: MacMillan, 1911; New York: Dover, 1951), 340.

⁹See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), bk. 1, 39–41; Benjamin Constant, *The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and their Relation to European Civilization*, part 2, chaps. 6–8; *Essay on the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns*; both in Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

taken over the questions of external defense and internal regulation of conflict that Greek citizens arbitrated themselves through politics, that is to say, through deliberation and collective decision.¹¹ As Josiah Ober writes, in Athens “a citizen remained free because he, along with his fellows, defended himself by political means against those forces that constantly threatened to subject him to the will of another.”¹²

Yet the state would seem to be not a site for political action but an alternative to it. To pick a central point of difference, the state makes nearly all decisions through procedures that emphasize the hierarchical adjudication of written documents, in place of the collective, collegial adjudication of oral presentations. Nearly all of the things that the citizens of a Greek *polis* did for themselves through politics the state does for us through regular, impersonal, bureaucratic administration.

Since, according to Aristotle, ethics is a part of *politikē*, political science, or political philosophy, if we lack politics we must ask whether we lack ethics as well. One answer might be that ethical life, the life of the virtues, is possible today in communities smaller than the noncommunity that is the modern liberal state.¹³ Yet hardly any of us live in small communities whose members join together in all the salient aspects of life, including the collective governance of violence against internal deviants and external enemies.

For Alasdair MacIntyre the claim of the modern state to provide its citizens with a meaningful identity, or anything worth dying for, rests on a mere “conjuring-trick” performed not by a true account but

¹⁰ See R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (1939; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 59–64; Moshe Berent “*Stasis*, or the Greek Invention of Politics,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 331–62.

¹¹ What distinguished ancient democracies from ancient oligarchies and aristocracies was not the nature of political rights among those who possessed them, but rather the proportion of the possessors of those rights to the citizen body as a whole, and the extent to which those rights were themselves differentiated by class.

¹² Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.

¹³ See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; idem, “A Partial Response to My Critics,” in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); idem, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Paul Carus Lecture Series, vol. 20 (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1999), 129–46.

by the "image-making resources of rhetoric."¹⁴ At the same time, MacIntyre recognizes that the allegiance claimed by the *polis* or by the medieval free city was itself "imagination-informed" because these communities were themselves imaginatively constituted.¹⁵ The political is, in fact, always and everywhere a rhetorical performance, and the image of community and a common good is true insofar as the performance is successful. The community that deliberates is constituted by common goods, goods that are made present to the audience and made common goods for them through rhetoric. Consider Lincoln's prophecy, in the peroration of his first inaugural address: "The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."¹⁶ Those who perished in the common struggle for independence and republican government died for the good of a unified American people that secession would impiously dissolve. If the use of rhetoric to manufacture a political identity makes that identity fraudulent, then all political communities, whether ancient, medieval, or modern, ought to be condemned as spurious. Conversely, once we admit with MacIntyre that public life in the rhetorical, manufactured *polis* was genuinely meaningful, we should examine the applications of rhetoric in modern society for the traces of political potential.

In deriding rhetoric MacIntyre is more modern than he may realize, forced by the post-Cartesian and especially post-Kantian attacks on persuasion to repudiate what was still central to the human condition from Augustine to the humanists of the Renaissance.¹⁷ More than 130 years ago Edward Cope described our difficulty with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* thus:

Judged by the standard of our modern notions of its value and importance, rhetoric might seem to be a subject rather below the dignity of a

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Poetry as Political Philosophy: Notes on Burke and Yeats," in *On Modern Poetry: Essays Presented to Donald Davie*, ed. Vereen Bell and Laurence Lerner (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1988), 149.

¹⁵ MacIntyre, "Poetry as Political Philosophy," 154, 157.

¹⁶ Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address," in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New York: De Capo, 1990), 588.

¹⁷ See for example MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 46.

philosopher and unworthy of his express notice and study: but there were many peculiar circumstances in the social life of Athens during the latter part of the fifth century, and down to Aristotle's own time, which might well have the effect of attracting universal attention to this art.¹⁸

We find it easy to say, even today, that the ancient Greeks put a peculiar value on rhetoric, and we acknowledge more grudgingly that they put a peculiar value on politics. One wonders, therefore, whether one sign of the attenuation of our political life, when "political" is understood in its original sense, is our ready disparagement of rhetoric.

To understand the production of character or *ēthos* through speech we must first consider the fundamental paradox inherent in the rhetorical situation. In rising to speak, a speaker marks himself out from his many listeners by speaking, at the same time that he must show himself as part of the many in his interests and affections. To accomplish this, Aristotle says, the orator must show his audience that he possesses three traits of character. These three traits are practical knowledge (*phronēsis*), virtue (*aretē*), and benevolence toward his audience (*eunoia*). The orator needs to manifest his virtue in order to show that he grasps what is really good for his audience and does not have a perverted view of their good.¹⁹ He needs to show himself to be benevolent toward his audience, so that his listeners are

¹⁸ Edward Meredith Cope, *An Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric* (London: Macmillan, 1867), x.

¹⁹ Quite often we judge a public figure not by his success at preserving what we cherish but for his sense that it deserves to be cherished. Garry Wills explains the popularity of the Reagans' practically fruitless defense of traditional values thus: "[Ronald Reagan] did not really take people back to the past, but he made a dizzy rush toward the future less disorienting. He did so by clinging uncritically to notions that reassured people, despite their lack of practical impact. Neither the sexual nor the drug revolution was reversed, or even held static, by the Reagans' exhortation to 'Say No,' but these developments were made somehow endurable by being treated as anomalous. Reagan made it possible to live with change while not accepting it"; Garry Wills, *Under God: Religion and American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 35–6.

For an important example of a moral perversion, as Aristotle sees it, see *Eudemian Ethics* 7.15.1248b37 and following; *Politics* 2.9.1271b7–10, 7.14.1333b5 and following, 7.15.1334a40–b5. In these passages the Spartans are said to believe that virtue is desirable not because it leads to noble actions, but because it helps its possessors to attain what is naturally good. This is a perversion possessed by the audience as a whole which would tend to make them find unpersuasive an orator who was truly virtuous and thus endorsed an action on the grounds that it was virtuous, and all the more virtuous for bringing no profit but reputation to the doer or his regime.

confident that he advises them for their own good. Finally, the orator needs practical knowledge in order to know what is to be done both in the specific case at hand and in the more general political situation.²⁰

The paradox is that the orator must simultaneously show himself to have special knowledge while in his interest and affection remaining one of the people. Quite how special the orator is claiming to be in virtue of his knowledge can be seen in the most striking passage in Demosthenes' *On the Crown*:

It was evening, and a messenger came to the presidents announcing that Elatea had been captured. . . . The city was in an uproar. At dawn, the presidents called the Council into the Council-chamber, and you made your way to the Assembly, and before the Council could get down to business and form the agenda, all you people were seated up on the Pnyx. Next the Council entered, the presidents reported the message that had come in to them, they introduced the messenger, and he spoke. Then the herald asked, "Who wishes to address the Assembly?" No one approached. The herald asked repeatedly, but still no one stood up, though the generals were there, and all the orators, and though your fatherland called with her common cry to the one would speak for her salvation. For the legally appointed cry that the herald hurled forth, this cry it is right to believe is the common cry of your fatherland. Well, had your city needed those who wished her to be saved, all of you and the rest of the Athenians would have stood up and made your way to the platform. For all of you, I think, wished that she be saved. If the wealthy had been needed, the Three Hundred would have stood up. If those who are both wealthy and benevolent toward the city had been needed, those who later laid out those great expenses would have stood up, since they did later lay out these expenses using their wealth and out of benevolence. But, it seemed, that moment and that day did not call for the man who was merely wealthy and benevolent, but for he who had followed these matters from their beginning and deduced why Philip had done these things and what he wanted. For the one who did not know these things, nor had foreseen them when they were still distant, neither were he benevolent nor were he wealthy would he know what was to be done, nor would it be possible for him to advise you. I then appeared, I approached, and I addressed you.²¹

To know what many do not know separates one from the many, and gives one the special burden to prove that one shares in their concerns. As Josiah Ober writes, "He who thrusts himself forward to the [speakers' platform], abandoning his place in the mass, had by that act declared an individuality that was potentially suspect. His motive in choosing to address the people might be self-interest, rather than a

²⁰ See *Rhetoric* 1.4.1359b16–1360b1.

²¹ Demosthenes, *On the Crown*, secs. 169–73.

desire to further the interests of the state as a whole."²² In a democracy, to know what is to be done makes one automatically one of the few, the elite, who have prepared themselves through the study of politics in general and recent events in particular. Even (or especially) in a democracy the people know that these are elite competencies, and at the same time are justifiably suspicious of the elite since the elite are presumed to have very different interests from the people at large.²³ In having something uncommon to say the speaker must combat the assumption that he has uncommon interests in the affairs at hand. Those who know are always presumed by the many to have some class interest, as one can see in popular political culture from Aristophanes' *Clouds* down to latter-day conspiracy theories about the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission.

To combat these presumptions the orator must show that although he is a member of the elite in his qualifications he is a man of the people in his sentiments and mores.²⁴ The orator must do this in his speeches: this task is the rhetorical problem of *ethos*.

Now some speakers come to the rhetorical situation with a reputation, an opinion of their character among the audience, earned not by previous good advice but by previous good deeds. But this is, if sometimes relevant, inessential. What is crucial to the rhetorical situation is the opportunity it provides to show character in the speech. "Character," says Aristotle "provides just about the most powerful proof," and it is the business of the art of rhetoric to show how speeches can show forth the character of their speaker.²⁵ The

²² Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 296–7, and see also 155; Sian Lewis, *News and Society in the Greek Polis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 105.

²³ On the many and the few in Athenian political rhetoric see Ober, *Mass and Elite*; idem, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Harvey Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). Sian Lewis notes that if an Athenian orator gives a source for a fact about another city the source is almost always a man of standing; Lewis, *News and Society*, 86.

²⁴ Compare *Rhetoric* 2.1.1377b25–9 with Thucydides 6.12.

²⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.2.1356a13, and for an example of such a showing forth see 2.21.1395b12–17. Aristotle states famously that the political community ought not be so large that the character of those who address the public are unknown to most of their audience (see *Politics* 7.4.1326b14–20). The Athenians, however, did not have newspapers, which philosophers at least since Hegel have seen as a pillar of the modern state.

principal purpose of expressing *ēthos* in one's speeches "lies in making it seem that all that we say derives directly from the nature of the facts and persons concerned and in the revelation of the character of the orator in such a way that all may recognize it."²⁶

Because issues of character are ever present in the rhetorical situation, the impersonal force of arguments must always be weighed in the same pan as the speaker's reputation for prudence, honesty, and public feeling. We usually think of appeals to feeling or character as deviations or perversions from impersonal, rational argumentation. The privative etymology of "impersonal," however, implies that something has been removed from an "im-personal" argument. It would be more accurate to say that impersonal reason is a derivative or reduced form of ethical argumentation. It is hard to see this point in the glare of the reputation that impersonal reason has acquired from its supposed use in modern natural science and mathematics. Yet the organization of science as a social enterprise requires scientists on whom we can rely to report their observations accurately, and mathematicians on whom we can rely to write papers that correctly sketch the fully formalized proofs that human life is too short to read, much less produce.²⁷ Such reliability is a trait of character, so even in science impersonal reason is derived from ethical argumentation, in that we accept the impersonal argument only because we have come to trust its author as a reliable reporter of facts and minor details of arguments.

For Aristotle, men only have characters in what they say, or in what they do that can itself be made to appear in public speech.²⁸ Eugene Garver writes that "the character of the speaker is what is re-

²⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.13.

²⁷ Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Science and Civility in Seventeenth Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Philip J. Davis and Reuben Hersh, *Descartes' Dream: The World according to Mathematics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

²⁸ One can therefore radicalize Humphry House's statement that in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the characters in a drama "only exist as characters in what they say and do"; *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1956), 72. What House notes as the Aristotelian view of drama is true of actual public life, and not merely its theatrical re-creation.

vealed in the speech."²⁹ This is true, but in a much stronger sense than he means. There is nothing else to character—whatever else there might be in the life of the one whose character it is—except what can be revealed in the speech.

In stating the point thus, I depart from the usual view: it is almost a commonplace of the literature on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to make a distinction between the real character of the speaker and the speaker's artful character, and it is frequently claimed that for Aristotle the rhetorical art enables the speaker to put on a mask of good character in order to persuade.³⁰ In Garver's own account this distinction between the orator's real character and the character that he should craft into his speeches depends on a feature of forensic rhetoric, that the advocate in a trial must win our trust, but we do not expect that he "mean what he says."³¹ Yet in making this appeal Garver brings forward no textual evidence from Aristotle, but instead relies on features of modern (and Roman) court proceedings lacking in fourth-century Athens. The Athenians did not permit citizens to be represented in court—a forensic speaker spoke either as a personal prosecutor, whether on behalf of his own cause or the cause of the city, or as a defendant *pro se*. They had no notion that a suspect was entitled to the best possible defense from the best possible advocate (indeed, they frequently punished those who in court assisted scoundrels) and felt little need to require proofs of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt because they judged every case as a matter not only of justice but also of the public interest. Since every speaker spoke on his own behalf, either for the sake of his private interest or his supposed public interest as citizen, the Athenian jury judged the merits of his speech, and thus his case, in the

²⁹ Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 51.

³⁰ See for example George E. Yoos, "A Revision of the Concept of Ethical Appeal," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 12, no. 1 (1979): 41–58, who speaks of Aristotle's "emphasis on feigned *ethos*"; James L. Kinneavy and Susan C. Warshauer, "From Aristotle to Madison Avenue: *Ethos* and the Ethics of Argument," in *Ethos: New Essays in Critical and Rhetorical Theory*, ed. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994).

³¹ Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, 195–6.

light of the apparent merits of the speaker. Garver's appeal is thus anachronistic and must therefore be rejected.³²

Aristotle never makes a distinction between artful or apparent and real character.³³ The closest he comes is to acknowledge that "since all accept speeches that are spoken in their own character or similar to it, it is not unclear how we employ our speeches so that we and our speeches will appear their sort."³⁴ We can certainly shade our speeches somewhat to correspond to the characteristics of the audience. Yet since knowing what virtue looks like is part of actually being virtuous, our ability to appear trustworthy is dependent, if only partially, on actually possessing the qualities of men who can be trusted by a certain audience. Just as the typical way to appear knowledgeable is to possess the relevant knowledge together with the rhetorical skill to make one's knowledge manifest, so too the typical way to appear of good character is to possess the proper qualities and the skill to ensure that those qualities are revealed in what one says.³⁵

It is true that the speaker must attempt to assimilate his character to the character of his audience, but this too is a form of ethical proof. Take as an illustration Aristotle's discussion of the speaker who seeks to persuade an aged audience. Now the old do not merely love advantage more than honor;³⁶ they believe that to love advantage more than honor is an aspect of the character of virtuous men. They thus fear lest even the speaker who speaks only in terms of advantage

³² One might say that Garver has gotten Greek *ēthos* confused with Latin *persona*. The Roman rhetorician Quintilian, by contrast, tells us that *ēthos* is "a word for which in my opinion Latin has no equivalent"; *Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.8, cited by Richard Leo Enos and Karen Rossi Schnakenberg, "Cicero Latinizes Hellenic *ēthos*," in *Ethos*, 192. Indeed, Aristotle's notion of proof through the character of the speaker as central to the art of rhetoric plays little or no role in, for example, Cicero's *De Oratore*. See for example 1.19, where the Academic Charmadas is said to have claimed that the knowledge of how the orator can be such a man as he desires to seem "lay thrust away and buried deep in the very heart of philosophy, and these rhetoricians had not so much as tasted it with the tip of the tongue."

³³ As Jan Swearingen writes, "Aristotle neither defines nor implies the notion of a selfhood, authenticity, or essential identity for a speaker or actor, a univocal 'true' self that contrasts with the voice and character taken on for rhetorical speech or acting"; C. Jan Swearingen, "*Ethos*: Imitation, Impersonation, and Voice," in *Ethos*, 121.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.13.1390a25–8.

³⁵ Pace Cope, *Introduction*, 248–9 n. 1.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.13.1389b13–1390a25.

and disadvantage harbors a secret love of honor. The man most successful at showing himself to prefer advantage to honor will, other things being equal, be the most successful at persuading an audience of the aged. The speaker will be most naturally persuasive if he truly loves advantage more than honor. Similarly, Aristotle claims in regard to the passions that "those who are themselves agitated agitate and those who are enraged most truly anger others."³⁷ By nature all three modes of proof—argument, character, and passion—work most effectively when they are genuine. Deception can and certainly does occur, but rhetoric is not the skill of deceiving; it is the skill of communicating or making manifest.³⁸

Character in the context of the true art of rhetoric is the same *ēthos* that is the subject of Aristotle's ethical philosophy. Instead of contrasting real with merely artfully apparent character, we are more faithful to the phenomena of political life Aristotle sought to explain if we see as the central or essential meaning of character in both ethics and rhetoric the character that generally ought to appear in artful speeches, if the speeches are correctly written, and if the audience is not corrupted in its judgments of character by its own vices.³⁹ Under the influence of Cartesian dualism, we assume that to articulate character in one's speeches is to present something that is external and other to one's inner, real self.⁴⁰ We readily combine this post-Cartesian disdain for the world of human appearances with our conception of the narrative self. Thus we come to believe that the speaker uses rhetoric in general and ethical proof in particular to hide rather than

³⁷ *Poetics* 17.1455a31–2; for a helpful discussion see Niall Rudd, "Theory: Sincerity and Mask," in *Lines of Enquiry: Studies in Latin Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 170–4.

³⁸ Such a skill should not be exercised too openly, as Aristotle advises: "And introduce yourself right away as being of a certain sort, so that they will look on you as this sort, and your opponent [as being of a certain sort]—but do this invisibly"; *Rhetoric* 3.16.1417b7–8. What is to be concealed here is not one's true character but one's art in making one's own character and that of one's opponent appear to the audience.

³⁹ See *Rhetoric* 1.1.1355a20–3; Larry Arnhart, *Aristotle on Political Reasoning: A Commentary on the "Rhetoric"* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), 11, 27–8. Garver himself comes close to recognizing this when he says, "In a flourishing polis, and in artful rhetoric at its best, *logos* and *ēthos* are aligned," and that "the moral virtues in Aristotle's hands look more like rhetorical and strategic skills than a modern reader might expect"; Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, 171, 214.

⁴⁰ Swearingen, "Ethos: Imitation, Impersonation, and Voice," 129.

to reveal his story.⁴¹ This peculiarly modern cynicism ignores the fact that pretense could only be effective if it were rare—lying, or pretending to virtues or knowledge that one lacks, can only help a speaker if nearly all speakers nearly all of the time are speaking in order to reveal the truth about themselves and the matter under discussion.⁴²

Yet surely there are limits to what even an ethically virtuous speaker can hope to convey in his speeches to an ethically uncorrupted audience. Indeed, it is a crucial aspect of the rhetorical situation that the audience always fears something is being hidden from them: opposing orators frequently endeavor to persuade them that the speech they just heard arose from private, hidden interests or was corrupted by the previous speaker's private, hidden vices. It should come as no surprise that for Aristotle the most powerful of all topics at producing paradoxes in politics is to draw out the contradiction between men's public praise of the noble and the just and their private wish for the advantageous.⁴³ That is to say, one can make the other speaker utter paradoxical or unbelievable things by appealing from his open to his secret professions or vice versa.⁴⁴ Private conduct, not only private opinions, affects public judgment: there is every evidence that the Athenians were as fascinated with the sexual misbehavior of

⁴¹ The central difficulty for us in assessing Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric is that Aristotle continually connects the normative back to the normal while we tend to see the normative as superordinate or extraordinary; see for example Jürgen Sprute, "Aristotle and the Legitimacy of Rhetoric," in *Aristotle's Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David J. Furley and Alexander Nehamas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 121; C. D. C. Reeve, "Philosophy, Politics, and Rhetoric in Aristotle," in *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996). In consequence, Aristotle's claim that the true and ethically worthy speech is typically more persuasive than the false but artfully expressed one (*Rhetoric* 1.1.1355a20–4, 37–8) is often misunderstood as "idealistic" and therefore dismissed as naive.

⁴² See Ruth W. Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 13–14; Richard Posner, *An Affair of State: The Investigation, Impeachment, and Trial of President Clinton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 142, 187.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.23.1399a28–32.

⁴⁴ See Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations* 12.172b35 and following; Edward Meredith Cope, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle with a Commentary*, ed. John Edwin Sandys, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1877), 2:274–5 ad *Rhetoric* 2.23.16.

political figures as are present-day Americans, though the transgressions that brought obloquy were not the same then as now.⁴⁵

Though the speaker should have nothing special to hide, he must have something special to say. The trouble is that the constraints on public debate (including the time constraint) are such as to make the fullest disclosure of reasons impossible. If reasons can only be partially disclosed or clarified, the reasons that are disclosed will always be insufficient. If the audience can spot the insufficiencies but cannot fill the gaps on their own, giving reasons may make one's claims less persuasive. Witness the seemingly strange proposal of Themistocles recorded in Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution*:

When Nicodemus was archon, on the pretext that after the metal-workings in Maroneia were discovered, a hundred talents was made by the *polis* from these works, some repeatedly advised the people to distribute the cash, but Themistocles prevented it. He wouldn't say on what he would use the funds, but told them to lend one hundred talents to the wealthiest of the Athenians, a talent to each. Then, if the manner in which it was expended proved satisfactory, the expense would be the city's, but otherwise the funds would be repaid by the borrowers. Receiving the funds on these conditions, he had a hundred triremes built, each of the hundred wealthy having one built. With these ships, they waged a sea-fight at Salamis against the barbarians.⁴⁶

P. J. Rhodes, in his magisterial commentary, claims that "[The] story that the money was lent to rich citizens on trust, with no publicly declared purpose, fails to carry conviction, if only because nothing would be gained by secrecy."⁴⁷ The explanation for secrecy is rhetorical: Themistocles, according to this story, had more confidence in the persuasive power of his reputation, in his *ēthos*, than he did in the power of the reasons that he was prepared to offer. As Chester Starr writes:

⁴⁵ See Aeschines' *Against Timarchus* and the literature that has grown up around it following K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); especially Michel Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); David M. Halperin, "The Democratic Body: Prostitution and Citizenship in Classical Athens," in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1989); and David Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* sec. 22.

⁴⁷ P. J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 278.

Citizens in the Greek *poleis* were evidently not to be swayed primarily by specific assessments of political intelligence. Far more important would have been their belief that a leader *did* have better information or least adequate information for the course he proposed. They accepted him as a man of foresight and sound counsel.⁴⁸

In proposing to dispose of the silver secretly, Themistocles relies on the faith (in Greek, *pistis*) that the people put in the elite and their elite knowledge.

To maintain that faith by showing forth one's character requires one to deny, and best of all really lack, even creditable but unpublicizable motives. The best political man has nothing to hide, so that nothing can be disclosed. Whatever the merits of the political life, in the Aristotelian presentation the most thoroughly political life is not without its costs.

Who, then, is the best statesman, as dictated by the need to possess a character that can be presented fully? This political man is unusually well informed but does not have special technical knowledge that he cannot publicly share. He must, however, know how to make use of those who are specialists. He has, most important, no stuff for scandal, and no attachments, interest, or friendships that could be seen to conflict with the common interest. He is unusual only in his good judgment and understanding of events, his loyalty to his country, his power to make a decision, and his concern to do those things that ought to bring him the highest reputation in political life.

This is, in significant respects, an unattractive picture of a human being. It is preeminently political. The best man of this sort is hollow; there is no whole man to grasp or study, no treasures of a rich inner life hidden under a public persona and thus available to be revealed by "the pick-locks of biographers." He is remarkable for his good qualities rather than for the peculiar details of his individual life story, and his good qualities are those that are present in numerous others, though these others possess fewer of these qualities and possess them to lesser degrees. For all his virtues, the man of this kind is dull, both intellectually and, one might say, aesthetically, because his character, while admirable, is distinctive only in those qualities that make it admirable. One can tell a story about how such a man grew from a child into a man of good character, but each such story is more or less the

⁴⁸ Chester Starr, *Political Intelligence in Classical Greece*, Memnosyne Supplementum 31 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 36.

same as all the others of its kind. A collection of such stories would be dull, repetitive, hagiographical rather than biographical—not because this collection would conceal what was interesting about its subjects, but because apart from their deeds and speeches, all similar in kind, there would be nothing interesting about them to reveal.

The man of good character probably will not rat on his friends, though he may abandon them should they no longer merit his friendship or patronage,⁴⁹ and he would fight, fiercely if somehow unwillingly, in his regime's unjust war. Thus not all the qualities of such a man are judged favorably by modern tastes—we moderns value friendship as a social rather than political relation, and we believe that even claims based on the welfare of one's fellow citizens must be subordinated to the universal moral law.

The self as constituted in a narrative is simply more interesting since it promises a unification of more aspects of a human life than can the unification of a life through time by character in the Aristotelian sense.⁵⁰ Each of us aspires to a unified full self because we would like to believe that each of us is important enough to have a coherent and complete story of his own. The man of good character does not think that anyone could possibly be that important, unless he were a god, or a fatherland made flesh, as were the kings of old.⁵¹

⁴⁹ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.3.1165b13–22.

⁵⁰ In an approach that parallels the one taken here, David Burchell uses Cicero's *De Officiis* to demonstrate that the multiplicity of legitimate *personae* made a space for plural selves that the narrative conception would foreclose; David Burchell, "Civic Personae: MacIntyre, Cicero, and Moral Personality," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 101–18. Burchell's assimilation of Aristotelian *ethos* to performed personality (116–17), however, cannot be accepted for the reasons I have given above.

⁵¹ As Christopher Pelling writes, "The nearest ancient parallel to a modern 'complex personality' is perhaps afforded by divine 'personalities'"; "Childhood and Personality in Biography," in *Characterization and Individuality*, 239 n. 74. Arnaldo Momigliano links the Greeks' increasing interest in biography, narratives of a single life through its course, to the increasing pre-eminence of kingship and especially tyranny as forms of rule. Biography first appears in Ionia under Persian domination in the early fifth century, and then reemerges with the rise and triumph of kings and mercenary generals throughout the Greek world in the fourth. See *The Development of Greek Biography*, expanded edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 34–6, 45.

No doubt, Benjamin Constant was correct to claim that our lives are richer and fuller for being less political. "The progress of civilization," Constant writes, "the commercial tendency of the age, the communication among peoples, have infinitely multiplied and varied the means of individual happiness."⁵² These richer lives are made possible by the pluralism of modern civil society, which encourages its members to develop their individual talents according to their individual predilections. As we can learn from the crucial role of the novel in the formation of modern civil society, the narrative conception of the self offers the best starting point for understanding how these tastes and talents are formed within and despite the mores and institutions that structure our social world.

Character is produced by the efforts of public men to persuade us through ethical proof that they are worthy of the public trust. When we know what we want or what we need, we demand effectiveness rather than virtue, and rightly. We need politics in its original sense when we have no choice but to choose whom to trust, when we must hear others attempt to clarify our own needs and relate them to the uncertainties of the future. We citizens then work the machinery of political life to ensure that these others, those who speak while we listen, understand our true needs, are concerned to seek their fulfillment, and are capable of charting our collective course amid the shifting complexities of our political existence.

Constant himself admits that political liberty, "the liberty of the ancients," is the indispensable guarantee of individual liberty, "the liberty of the moderns."⁵³ Our demand, as citizens, for public accountability and responsibility from some members of the state apparatus is in large part a demand for officials to act in constant accord with norms of character. Ethical unity remains fundamental to our ideal of political virtue in itself or of political life as a life worth living among the multiplicity of life choices available in modern society. For citizens—and political philosophers—the Aristotelian conception of the

⁵² Constant, *Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation*, part 2, chap. 6; translation slightly modified from his *Political Writings*, 104.

⁵³ Constant, *Liberty of the Ancients*, in *Political Writings*; see esp. 323. On the paradoxes and ironies of Constant's call for political engagement see Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), chaps. 1 and 2.

unity of the self through character is thus still central, to the extent that the collective narrative of a political community resists dissolution into a multiplicity of personal life stories.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ An earlier version of this paper was delivered at a panel on "Philosophy and Poetry" at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, jointly sponsored with the North American Chapter of the Society for Greek Political Thought. I would like to thank my fellow panelists George Anastaplo, Norma Thompson, Joseph Macfarland, and Katherine Philippakis for their comments; Alasdair MacIntyre, Clifford Orwin, Irad Kimhi, Alkis Kontos, Daniel Doneson, Alberto Spektorowski, Eyal Chowers, Anna Kochin, and members of the Tel Aviv Seminar in Political Philosophy also gave helpful advice. Research for this paper was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellowship, and a Metcalf Fellowship from Victoria College of the University of Toronto.

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