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# Proof-Reading Aristotle's *Rhetoric*\*

## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a new interpretation of the first chapter of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and of Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric throughout the treatise. I defend the view that, for Aristotle, rhetoric was a skill in offering the listener "proofs" (*pisteis*), that is: proper grounds for conviction. His arguments in the opening chapters of the treatise state and defend this controversial, epistemically-normative view against the rival views of Gorgias, Thrasymachus and the rhetorical handbook writers, on the one hand, and against those of Plato, on the other. Aristotle defends his view on the basis that rhetoric is a skill in discharging an important role in the state – the role of helping citizens to good publicly-deliberated judgements.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, rhetoric, proof, Plato, Gorgias, Thrasymachus.

## Introduction

This paper defends a particular understanding of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The central claims are that in this work, Aristotle has a consistent view of rhetoric: as an expertise in producing 'proofs' (*pisteis*) – understood as "proper grounds

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\* ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS NOTE.

for conviction” – for the speaker’s audience, and that he first states and defends this view, and then sets out in detail the elements of rhetoric thus defined. This normative view of rhetoric derives, I claim, from Aristotle’s view that rhetoric was a skill in discharging an important role in the state – namely a role contributing towards good judgements in lawcourts and political assemblies. Aristotle is here seen as standing in opposition primarily to more mechanical, non-normative views of rhetoric, seen most clearly in Gorgias and Thrasymachus among his near-contemporaries, and characteristic of the handbooks on rhetoric circulating in Aristotle’s day.<sup>1</sup> But equally, he rejects more “high-minded” accounts of rhetoric, such as the suggestion in Plato’s *Phaedrus* that the speaker exercising rhetorical expertise must know the truth about his subject matter so as to be able to ensure that the conviction he brings about in listeners be true (or, if he chooses, false).

Defending the proposed interpretation involves rejecting several rival views of the *Rhetoric*. Aristotle’s view of rhetoric is not inconsistent.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it

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1 Cf. *Rhet* 1.1, 1343a11-13, AUTHOR’S A 391-6, and below – section 1.

2 Many commentators have seen the treatise as setting out incompatible perspectives on rhetoric (typically finding an austere, more moralised perspective in 1.1, and a more permissive, pragmatic view elsewhere). Of these, some find in this a virtue, an exploration of perspectives in tension (Cope 1867; Halliwell 1994; Schütrumpf 1994; Sprute 1994; differently Grimaldi 1972; Kennedy 1985), others find incoherence (Barnes 1995; Solmsen 1929; Wisse 1989). In defending the view that throughout the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle holds a single consistent view, this article attempts to undermine one important part of the case against the unity of the treatise.

value-neutral, as some have thought.<sup>3</sup> And yet, the normative element in his account of rhetoric is limited. Thus, on the interpretation defended here, we should not look to the *Rhetoric* – as some have – to provide an “ethics of rhetoric”, that is, an account of how rhetoric ought (virtuously) to be exercised.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the *Rhetoric* does express Aristotle’s view of why rhetoric is an expertise valuable to the state and worth cultivating in individuals. Moreover, since his view is that rhetoric is a skill in providing *proper* grounds for conviction, the use of some manipulative speaking techniques (including some championed by, for example, Thrasymachus) will not count as exercising rhetoric at all.<sup>5</sup>

In sections 1-4, I set out from the text of the *Rhetoric* an account of Aristotle’s position, and how he sought to defend it. Sections 1 and 2 defend the proposed attribution to Aristotle of a consistent normative account of rhetoric, defined in terms of “proof”. Section 3 explores in more detail the understanding of this key term (Gk. *pistis*) as “*proper* grounds for conviction”. Section 4 further argues that in *Rhetoric* 1.1 Aristotle’s understanding of rhetoric is not only asserted (and

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3 Cf. in different ways, Carey 1996; Oates 1963; Rapp 2002a, 2002b, 2009, 2012, in line with Powell’s description of rhetoric as the “ancient art of spin” Powell 2005.

4 Pace e.g. Garver 1994; Irwin 1996; Wörner 1990.

5 The position canvassed here lies in the tradition of the ancient and Arab commentators (on whom cf. Black 1990) who saw the *Rhetoricas* concerned above all with the logic and epistemic credentials of persuasive speech (indeed, in the copies used by the Arab commentators, it seems often to have been bound in with the *Organion* in a single volume). Cf. Allen 2001, 2007; Burnyeat 1994 for contemporary interpreters taking this view.

deployed against rival views), but defended on the basis of rhetoric's role in the state. Section 5 explores the merits of Aristotle's view over its rivals.

Understanding rhetoric as an expertise in discharging an important role in public life arguably allows Aristotle to account for the value of rhetoric more convincingly than is possible on Thrasymachus's and Gorgias's view, but without being committed to the impossibly idealised picture of rhetoric set out in Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*.

1.

Aristotle, I claim, saw rhetoric as an expertise in producing "proofs" (*pisteis*), understood as proper grounds for conviction. Such a position is quite distinct from the views of Gorgias, Thrasymachus and the handbook writers on the one hand, and those put forward in Plato's works on the other. Gorgias and Thrasymachus saw rhetoric as a collection of techniques for wielding power over an audience by speaking to them, specifically the power to produce conviction in one's listeners, irrespective of whether they do well to be so convinced. Whereas Aristotle, I claim, saw rhetoric as an expertise in giving listeners *good* grounds for conviction ("proofs", *pisteis*) – only techniques that met this criterion would count as rhetoric, in his view. Plato's works convey the insistence that to count as a *technê*, rhetoric must have some account of how conviction is successfully brought about, and the suggestion that this is a matter of understanding human psychology so as to know how different kinds of

speeches will affect different kinds of souls. Aristotle, as we shall see, partly accepts this requirement, but draws not on a merely descriptive psychology of how conviction can be successfully produced, but on a *normative* psychology of how humans do *well* to be convinced. Accordingly, his theory sets out various kinds of “proof” (*pistis*) that rightly incline humans to be convinced. Aristotle disagrees with the Platonic view of the aim of rhetoric – in Plato, it was the production of virtue in the souls of listeners, for Aristotle, it is well-founded judgements in the listeners. Rhetoric, for Aristotle, aims at an *epistemic* good. Since Aristotle does not agree with the Platonic view that the expert orator should be in a position to control whether the audience’s convictions are true or false, he does not hold that the orator needs to know the truth about his subject matter. For Aristotle, the listeners’ judgements will be well-founded through being formed on the basis of good grounds for conviction (“proofs”, *pisteis*), and providing these requires, in turn, not knowledge of the truth, but rather a grasp of plausible starting points for the listeners’ deliberations in the form of “reputable opinions” (*endoxa*) related to the subject at hand.

Rhetoric 1.1, 1354a11-16

Central to this sketch of Aristotle’s distinctive view of rhetoric is the claim that, for him, rhetoric was an expertise in providing *proper grounds for conviction*. I want to argue, on the basis of evidence from *Rhetoric* 1.1 and elsewhere, that this was indeed Aristotle’s view of rhetoric (and that this is a correct gloss of his

Greek term *pistis*), and explore how we should characterise his view of how rhetorical methods could provide such proper grounds for conviction. In the section 2 below, I will consider how such a view might be defended, starting from a consideration of how Aristotle actually *does* undertake to defend his view.

The bulk of *Rhetoric* 1.1 is taken up with a polemic by Aristotle against those who had written instruction handbooks for those with ambitions in public life, who needed to be able to succeed both in assembly debates, and in the courtroom. I've called them the "handbook writers". They typically seem to have called their works "The Art (or Expertise) of Making Speeches" (*technê logôn*).<sup>6</sup> Aristotle introduces his case against them by affirming (what Plato had once denied)<sup>7</sup> that there is a genuine expertise of rhetoric. But as a result of this he must immediately insist that this does not constitute an endorsement of the kind of views and techniques peddled by the handbook writers. It's as though he was saying, "Sure, Socrates was wrong in the *Gorgias*: there *is* an art of making speeches. But don't think I'm talking about the kind of thing that you find in these handbooks labelled as an 'Art of Making Speeches'." In support, he advances a number of arguments to show that the techniques of the handbook writers do not deserve to be called an expertise in rhetoric.

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6 Cf. 1354a12

7 *Gorg* 462b8-c3, 465a2-5.

The arguments of 1354a11-18 can be summarised as follows.<sup>8</sup> Since the expertise of rhetoric is exercised entirely in the production of “proofs”, or proper grounds for conviction, the handbook-writers’ lack of attention to the main way of providing such proofs (i.e. enthymemes: rhetorical arguments presenting relevant “considerations”), and their preoccupation with irrelevancies that can’t possibly contribute to proof, indicate that they have told us virtually nothing about the expertise in question.

Aristotle expresses his substantive view of rhetoric at 1354a13:

*For it is only the proofs (πίσταις) that belong to the expertise (ἐντεχνον), other things are mere accessories (προσθηκαι).*

And for the arguments to work, the term “proofs” (πίσταις) here must be understood as meaning proper grounds for conviction – that is, he is expressing the view that exercising the expertise of rhetoric constitutively involves conforming to some normative standards. He uses this view to adjudicate what things do and don’t constitute exercises of rhetoric, ruling in enthymemes, and ruling out the techniques with which the handbook writers were preoccupied.

If these arguments are sound, the best that can be said for the contribution of

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<sup>8</sup> A more detailed defence of this interpretation is offered in AUTHOR’S-B.

these predecessors of Aristotle, the handbook writers, is that they have thought lots about accessory features of rhetorical practice. What they have failed to do is set out the essential features that explain success when the expert rhetorician persuades by deploying his expertise.

However, the effectiveness of these arguments against their targets is subject to an important qualification. Aristotle seems here to be merely *asserting* his own position against the handbook writers' views of rhetoric. If it is the views of Gorgias, Thrasymachus and their followers that Aristotle is criticising,<sup>9</sup> they surely would simply reject his view of rhetoric. On their view, rhetoric's power is like that of a strong wrestler or a magic spell or a violent enemy: it produces its result without needing to render that result in any sense proper. Whether conviction has been *properly* produced is, on this view, an entirely separate question from whether conviction has been produced by an exercise of rhetorical expertise. At this stage in the treatise, Aristotle has offered no arguments against these competing views and in favour of his own. Nevertheless, if his view *can* be supported appropriately, he will have a powerful case against them. So, in section 3 below, I will try to show that Aristotle has good reasons for accepting it.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Solmsen 1938, Rapp 2002a 2.30-34, AUTHOR'S-A, AUTHOR'S-B.

First, however, I wish both to address an important objection against the position canvassed here, and to explain how the view of rhetoric discerned in these opening passages of the treatise is reflected in Aristotle's later statements characterising the nature, function and goal of rhetoric.

The nature of rhetoric and the sense of "πίστις" between 1.1 and the rest of the *Rhetoric*.

The opening arguments of *Rhetoric* 1.1 seem to require the acceptance of the following:

(RHET) Rhetoric, for Aristotle, is an expertise in producing *πίστεις*.

(PIST) "πίστις" means proper grounds for conviction.

However, it has sometimes been doubted that Aristotle adheres to these consistently through the *Rhetoric*. In particular, it is often claimed that the meaning of "πίστις" changes between 1.1 and the rest of the treatise.<sup>10</sup> Against this view, I will attempt to show that it is perfectly plausible to read the treatise preserving throughout a consistent view of the nature of rhetoric and the sense

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Primavesi 1987; Rapp 2002a; Solmsen 1929. A change in view or an inconsistency between 1.1 and the rest of the treatise has historically been suggested on a variety of grounds, of which this is one. It is sometimes linked with the supposed inconsistency about emotion-arousal addressed in AUTHOR'S-A. If these can be explained, the motivation for embarking upon the (hugely problematic) project of assigning different parts of the work to different periods of Aristotle's thought is considerably undermined. The residual issue of whether the use of logical terms is consistent between the chapters cannot be addressed here.

of “πίστις”.

This ought to come as no surprise, since there are a number of references back from 1.2 to 1.1 (e.g. 1355b33, 1356a31), suggesting that Aristotle at least saw these two chapters as part of a continuous whole, and a number of references back to book 1 from book 3 in passages that exhibit awareness of the contents of both chapters.<sup>11</sup>

In both the first and second chapters of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle characterises rhetoric in terms of the *pisteis*, i.e. as proposed in RHET: that the techniques belonging to the expertise have to do with the *pisteis* (1.1: 1354a13, b21, 1355a3-4; 1.2: 1355b35, 1356a20-33),<sup>12</sup> and also as an expertise that consists in an ability “to see the possibly persuasive” (1.1: 1355b10-17; 1.2: 1355b25-34).<sup>13</sup>

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11 E.g. esp. 3.14, 1415b4-9 and 25-26. But note also how 3.1, 1403b6-13 recapitulates the analysis from 2.1 of technical *pisteis* into three kinds, and how within the same section b18-19 and 1404a5-7 echo the emphasis in 1.1 on relevance and on using the facts to prove one’s case. The sections on *taxis* seem to reflect this same division (e.g. 3.17, 1418a12-21, a38-40 show awareness of the need for *pathos* and *ethos* proofs), but equally strongly echoes the sentiments of 1.1 on *diabole*, relevance and the centrality of proving your case with the facts (3.13, 1414a31-37, b7-8; 3.16 *passim*).

12 Notice that 1355b35’s analysis of *pisteis* follows immediately and naturally (there is no indication of a change of subject) from a definition of rhetoric itself, and that at 1356a20 claims about the nature of the *pisteis* are presented as grounds for conclusions about rhetoric as a whole.

13 Notice that the distinction at b15-16 between what is really and what is apparently persuasive is incomprehensible in its context, on the view that “persuasive” (πιθανόν) means no more than ‘effective in producing conviction’. It must mean something like

Since, on any understanding of what *pisteis* are, they are things that are intended to produce a persuasive effect on the mind of the audience, so it is perfectly natural to move from talk of *pisteis* to talk of “things that are persuasive”. Aristotle seems in both of the first two chapters to move easily between these two ways of speaking about rhetoric’s core, as though they were simply two closely related ways of speaking about the same thing, one focused more on the content of the speech, the other focused more on its effect on the audience. If so, Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric at 1355b25-6 as a “capacity to see the possibly persuasive” is not a denial of RHET, but simply another perspective on it. And we can see both from the easy transition back to the language of *pisteis* at b35, and from 1356a20-33, that he still thinks of rhetoric as centrally about producing *pisteis*, i.e. that he is still committed to RHET.

Does the sense of *πίστις* change between 1.1 and the rest of the treatise?<sup>14</sup> The answer, I claim, is that it doesn’t, and that Aristotle uses the word in more-or-less its ordinary Greek sense throughout, sharpening this up somewhat in one important passage (1355a3-18) to be discussed below. At no

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‘persuasive by reason’ (cf. *DA* 3.3, 428a22-23; *Rhet* 1.2, 1356b28-30), such that rhetoric is an expertise in seeing what audiences will take to be reason-based grounds for persuasion (whether or not they are correct to do so).

14 Rapp 2002a, 34–5, argues convincingly against a range of different interpretations, and defends the view, adopted from Primavesi 1987, that Aristotle in 1.1 uses *πίστις* quotationally (zitierend), and then gives the term a different sense in 1.2. My concern here is to reject this in favour of an ordinary Greek sense, though one somewhat different from the “unterminological sense” that Rapp rejects.

point, I contend, does he use this term in a technical sense, nor does he stipulate a meaning for it.<sup>15</sup>

When, 13 lines into the treatise, Aristotle writes, “only the *pisteis* belong to the expertise,” he clearly cannot be using this term in a way that presupposes his own theory to be unveiled several pages later. He must be using the term in some sense he can expect his readers to be familiar with already. One possibility is that it carries its ordinary, everyday sense. But another is the ingenious suggestion, defended by Primavesi and Rapp, that it is used allusively to mean roughly, “the things that previous writers assigned to the section of the speech they called ‘πίστεις’.”<sup>16</sup> That “αί πίστεις” was a familiar term among teachers of rhetoric for a particular part of a speech is corroborated somewhat by its appearance in the *Rhetoric* itself at 3.17, 1417b21<sup>17</sup> as a way of introducing discussion of the section of the speech devoted to proofs. The employment of such a sense in 1.1, a part of the *Rhetoric* explicitly concerned with previous theorists of rhetoric is not by itself implausible. Indeed, if one considers

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15 The stipulation of meaning taking place at 1355b35-9 is of ἄτεχνα and ἐντεχνα. This distinction enables Aristotle to express his position more precisely, clarifying his looser assertion at 1354a13 (“the *pisteis* alone belong to the expertise”). None of this, however, indicates a change in the *sense* (as opposed to the *reference*) of πίστις. Indeed, the unqualified phrase “αί πίστεις” is used again shortly afterwards at 1356a21 where it clearly refers only to the technical *pisteis*.

16 Primavesi 1987, 36-38; Rapp 2002a, 34-5.

17 Theodorus’ list of parts of the speech employs the slightly different terms πίστωσις and ἐπιπίστωσις (Plato *Phaedr.* 266e3-4).

1354a13-14 in isolation, this sense may make for quite a plausible reading. But, in the end, there are decisive objections. The first is that πίστις at a15 cannot be read in this way, which saddles the interpretation with an awkward and unheralded shift of the term's sense within 2 lines and between its first two uses in the treatise. The second is that this interpretation turns a13-18 into a series of loosely connected *complaints*, rather than (as canvassed above) a carefully constructed pair of closely-related *arguments* to a single conclusion. The third objection is that this suggestion is needlessly complicated and undermotivated, since the ordinary sense of πίστις yields a perfectly satisfactory, indeed superior, understanding not only of this passage but of uses of the term elsewhere in the treatise. Indeed, *whatever* other possibilities there may be for the meaning of the term in 1.1, if it can be shown that the ordinary sense is plausible both for this chapter and for the rest of the treatise, there must be a strong presumption in its favour.

What, then, is the ordinary sense of πίστις? Consider the following passage of Aristotle, from a context with no particular connection to the discussion of rhetoric, and in which πίστις is clearly not part of a specialist technical vocabulary.

*The knowledge (γνώσις) of the soul admittedly contributes greatly to the advance of truth in general, and, above all, to our understanding of Nature, for*

*the soul is in some sense the principle of animal life. Our aim is to grasp and understand (θεωρῆσαι καὶ γνῶναι), first its essential nature, and secondly its properties; ...To attain any assured knowledge (τινα πίστιν) about the soul is one of the most difficult things in the world. (De Anima 1.1, 402a4-11, transl. J.A. Smith)*

Aristotle's point here can scarcely be that it is supremely difficult to find anything to say about the soul that could be convincing to people, since people then as now both had and were susceptible to acquiring all kinds of convictions about the soul. His point must be that it is hard to find things that *merit* conviction, things that are a firm (in the sense of proper) basis for pursuing knowledge (γνῶσις). Hence πίστις here must simply *mean* something that merits conviction.

Similarly, then, in *Rhetoric* 1.1, Aristotle can rely on πίστις having this normative sense quite independently of whether he is engaging dialectically with a tradition of technical writing on rhetoric because this is simply part of the ordinary meaning of the word, when it is used to refer to what produces confidence. This can be seen in both philosophical and non-philosophical usage from around the same period.<sup>18</sup> Understanding the term in this way makes

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<sup>18</sup> One interesting philosophical example is from Parmenides fragment B1, 30, where a normative sense is extremely plausible. In Aristotle, see especially *Top* 100b19-21, 103b3-7; *Soph. Elench.* 165B27. In non-philosophical prose, the evidence from the orators is

sense of the connection made frequently in ancient authors between πίστις, especially its use in such phrases as “πίστιν ἔχειν” (to be convincing) and the cognate adjective πιστός (*trustworthy*).<sup>19</sup> We argued above that the normative sense proposed in (PIST) was required by the arguments of the opening chapter: the contemporary usage of the term shows this to be simply its everyday meaning.

That this is the meaning of πίστις in 1.2 receives some additional support from the following. Following the characterisation of rhetoric at the start of 1.2 as a capacity to see the possibly persuasive in each thing (itself entirely consistent with the view of rhetoric in 1.1, as we have shown), Aristotle draws attention to a feature that makes it different from other expertises. That is that it has no particular subject matter. In making this point, he observes that other expertises are (i.e. make their possessor), in their own domain, “competent to teach and persuade” (διδασκαλική καὶ πειστική, 1355b29), whereas the implication is

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particularly relevant and instructive. Among uses of πίστις to refer to what produces conviction, I have yet to find a single instance incompatible with the proposed normative reading, and several that require it: cf. esp. Lysias 1.19.6, 12.10.1, 18.19.5, 19.32.2, 25.17.2; Isocrates *Antidosis* 125.5, *Busiris* 31.5, *Helen* 22.2, *Paneg.* 110.2, *Phil.* 91.8; Lycurgus *in Leocr.* 79.4, 80.2, 127.12; Demosthenes 23.116.4, 23.117.2-7, 29.40.8, 30.26.1. In several cases, where it is qualified by an adjective (e.g. *ικανή, μεγίστη, τσσαύτη*), it is clear from the context that the aspect of the meaning of πίστις to which the qualifier draws attention is its indicating epistemic merit, not merely persuasive effectiveness. Demosthenes’ use of the phrase “τεκμήριον καὶ πίστις” (29.40.8, 30.26.1) similarly suggests that it is part of the sense of the term to indicate that what it refers to *merits* conviction.

19 Aristotle makes this connection explicitly in *Top.* 100b18-23.

that rhetoric is, by virtue of its being a capacity to see the possibly persuasive, competent to persuade (πειστική) in *any* given domain. If here all that was meant by ‘competence to persuade’ were *de facto* effectiveness in persuasion, Aristotle’s point would be far from compelling – Plato’s *Gorgias* calls attention to the fact that in large gatherings experts are less persuasive than non-experts that have expertise in rhetoric.<sup>20</sup> And only a page before this passage, Aristotle himself observes that “before some people, even if we had the most precise knowledge, it would not be easy to persuade them by using it in your speech” (1355a24-5). Presumably the sense in which expertise brings persuasiveness is precisely that it brings an ability to offer genuinely supporting justifications for the expert’s claims. Their *de facto* persuasiveness will vary considerably depending on the circumstances of each case. Now if this is right, then even in these opening sentences of 1.2, since Aristotle is suggesting that the rhetoric’s persuasive power across every domain has an important similarity to the persuasive power of each expertise in its own domain, we get a hint that this persuasive power will be about providing proper support for the orator’s claims, not merely devices that are *de facto* effective in getting people to believe things.

After a brief discussion of rhetoric in terms of what is ‘persuasive’, Aristotle

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<sup>20</sup> *Gorgias* 458e6-459c2. This is particularly relevant given that the juxtaposition of ‘teaching’ and ‘persuasion’ in connection with the expertises (*technai*) here is surely supposed to recall the discussion of *Gorgias* 453d7-454a5.

reverts to talking about the *pisteis* at 1355b35: “proofs can be divided into technical and non-technical proofs” (b35-6). We should notice two things. The first is that this first use of “αί πίστεις” cannot mean the section of the speech called ‘the proofs’, it must mean simply proofs; and since it picks up from the talk of “the persuasive” (*to pithanon*) in the preceding paragraph, it cannot be a way of referring to a section of the speech by specifying its contents. The second is that this sentence seems to presuppose some previous discussion of “the proofs”: and it seems most natural to suppose that it simply picks up on the discussion of the proofs in chapter 1. If so, we should expect “αί πίστεις” to mean the same in both places.

Another passage that suggests continuity in the meaning of the term between 1.1 and 1.2 is 1356a20-34. The passage argues that since the *pisteis* are of such-and-such a kind, it turns out that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and politics, and a kind of part of dialectic. Notice firstly that this inference makes far better sense if *pisteis* are central to rhetorical skill (our claim (RHET) above). Secondly, the inference from the nature of the *pisteis* to a close similarity between rhetoric and dialectic recapitulates what was said in chapter 1 (as Aristotle himself observes at 1355a31-2), and strongly suggests that the meaning of πίστις has not changed between the two chapters.

A final passage to consider in this connection is 1356b26-34. In this section,

‘persuasive’ (πιθανόν) is unselfconsciously paired with trustworthy (πιστόν) (1356b29) and seems to be some kind of epistemic standing; and it is paired also with ‘reputable’ (ἔνδοξον) (b34). It is seemingly simply assumed that the kind of persuasiveness Aristotle is talking about will derive from some kind of trustworthiness or reputability. This is perfectly natural if, as I am claiming, Aristotle is committed throughout to rhetoric’s being an expertise in providing proofs (RHET), understood as proper grounds for conviction (PIST).<sup>21</sup>

Understanding the term πίστις as meaning ‘proper grounds for conviction’, as proposed in (PIST), is thus not only the ordinary meaning of the word in Greek, it is also required by the argument of 1.1, and makes very good sense of its use in 1.2 (indeed, the passages cited above can plausibly be taken to offer positive support to this interpretation). This conclusion receives confirmation from book 3. It is clear that book 3 of the *Rhetoric* reaffirms both the classification of proofs into three types from 1.2 (3.1, 1403b9-13; 3.17, 1418a12-17) and the emphasis from 1.1 on the centrality of proof and using the facts to fight one’s case (3.1,

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21 These may also explain Aristotle’s emphasis on πίστις and what might be plausibly seen as his suppression of the term πειθώ and cognates until well into the treatise (the first use in reference to rhetoric is at 1355a30). That the delay in the use of these terms is surprising and calls for explanation is suggested by the very close association between rhetoric and cognates of πειθώ both in Aristotle, and in the preceding Platonic treatments of rhetoric (e.g. *EN* 3.3, 1112b14; Plato, *Gorgias* 452e-453a; *Phaedrus* 270b8, 271b4-5.). The suggestion is that, although Aristotle would not deny that rhetoric was concerned with persuading, he initially uses πίστις to the exclusion of πειθώ in order to make clear that his view of rhetoric centred on the provision of proofs, not simply on successful persuasion.

1403b18-20, 1404a5-7; 3.13, 1414a30-36). And in this context, it is clear that *πίστις* means, as in 1.1, rhetorical *arguments* that provide some kind of demonstration of the conclusion for which they are offered as support (3.13, 1414a30-36; 3.17, 1417b21-34). For example, at 1414a30-36, Aristotle takes it as obvious that the orator's task of 'demonstrating' (*ἀποδειξαι*) his conclusion will be discharged by providing 'proofs' (*πίστεις*). All of this lends support to the proposal (PIST) that throughout the treatise, by '*πίστις*' Aristotle means proper grounds for conviction.<sup>22</sup>

### Aristotle's overall characterisation of rhetoric

I now wish to show that in a number of key passages where Aristotle expresses his understanding of what rhetoric is, its function, goals and methods, the view he expresses is consistent with, and in many cases confirms the understanding of rhetoric and the nature of the *pisteis* I am attributing to Aristotle.

Aristotle's first characterisation of the nature of rhetoric comes in the first lines of the treatise.

*Rhetoric is a counterpart to dialectic. For both are concerned with things that*

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22 One might additionally note that where, both in and outside the *Rhetoric*, *πίστις* is used to refer to the state of being convinced, this is closely associated by Aristotle with its being a response to reason and argument, e.g. *Rhet* 1.1, 1355a5-6, *De Anima* 3.3, 428a17-23.

*are such as to be, in a way, common to everyone to get to know, and that relate to no specific body of knowledge. This explains why everyone also, in a way, possesses something of both. For, to an extent, everyone engages in criticising and maintaining an argument and in defending and accusing people. Now in the general population, some do these things at random, others because of practice do them from ability. Because both of these are possible, it is clear that there would also be a way of doing these things methodically. For where success is achieved by some because of practice and by others from their own ability, it is possible to study the explanation for this: and just such a thing all would agree is the function of an expertise (τέχνης). (1354a1-11)*

Here, he emphasises that rhetoric, in common with other *technai*, explains its possessor's non-accidental, method-based, success in achieving some goal. Rhetoric's sphere of operation is not precisely specified, but that it is pursued in settings of public deliberation such as law-courts is gestured at in the reference to "defending and accusing people" (a5-6).

The nature of rhetoric is further indicated in the emphatic alignment of rhetoric with dialectic (a1), and it is clear that the basis for this similarity is the centrality of *arguments* to both.<sup>23</sup> The very next sentence in the text has already been discussed at length.

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23 Cf. Allen 2007.

*These days, those who put together 'Arts of Speaking' have provided us with scarcely a part of it. For it is only the proofs (πίστεις) that belong to the art, other things are mere accessories. (a11-14)*

It confirms that Aristotle sees rhetoric as an expertise to which the proofs are central, and this suggests that it is precisely the role of reasoning and arguments that he sees as the central component both of dialectic and of this closely-related expertise used in “defending and accusing”. Indeed, this impression is specifically confirmed in the next chapter, when he describes rhetoric and dialectic as “certain capacities for providing arguments” (1356a33-34), and uses the importance of reasoning (τὸ συλλογίσασθαι, 1356a22) to rhetoric as a reason for thinking that rhetoric is not merely a kind of offshoot of dialectic (οἷον παραφθές τι, a25), but a kind of part of dialectic and similar to it (μόριόν τι τῆς διαλεκτικῆς καὶ ὁμοί[ωμ]α, a30-31).

It is in this context that we should read Aristotle’s explicit statement at the start of 1.2 on the nature of rhetoric.

*Let rhetoric be an ability in connection with each thing to see what is possibly persuasive. For this is the function (ἔργον) of no other expertise.(1355b26-28)*

Aristotle had just specified the “function” (ἔργον) of rhetoric in very similar terms (1355b10-11), and although these formulations by themselves leave open what could count as “persuasive”, it is clear from the context just described that he has in mind an ability to see the possibilities for persuasive *arguments*.

Accordingly, Aristotle’s view about the goal of rhetoric (strictly, the goal rhetoric enables its possessor to secure)<sup>24</sup> is that it is to secure some particular judgement by offering proof (πίστις) or demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) of it (1354a26-28, b30-31). What type of judgement it is the orator’s goal to secure will depend on the type of speechmaking in which he is engaged (1.3, 1358a36-1359a6). Thus, forensic speakers are aiming to convince their listeners that an action was just or unjust, deliberative speakers that some course of action is beneficial or harmful, and epideictic speakers that something or someone was fine or base. When Aristotle touches in passing on the goal of rhetoric at the start of each of books 2 and 3, he simply says that it is “for the sake of a judgement” (ἕνεκα κρίσεώς, 1377b20-21), or “with a view to [the audience’s] conviction” (πρὸς δόξαν, 1404a1). One final passage to consider with regard to the goal of rhetoric is Aristotle’s introduction in book 3 to his treatment of ‘arrangement’ (τάξις), i.e.

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24 Rapp 2009 organises his discussion of the goals of rhetoric in terms of a modern distinction between “internal” and “external” goals. This doesn’t match Aristotle’s use of terminology, of course. All of Aristotle’s remarks about the “goal” (τέλος) and “function” (ἔργον) of rhetoric, and hence the discussion here, are concerned with the “internal” goals of rhetoric. Aristotle’s views on the “external” goals of rhetoric are expressed in terms of how it is “useful” (χρήσιμος), and emerge in passages where he touches on the role of public speakers in the state. These topics are discussed below in section 3.

of the parts of a speech.

*There are two parts of a speech. For it is necessary both to say what the issue is on which one will speak, and to demonstrate it (ἀποδείξειν). That is why it is impossible having said something not to demonstrate it, or to demonstrate it without having first said it. For the one who demonstrates demonstrates something, and the one who introduces something introduces it in order to demonstrate it. And of these, the one is a statement and the other a proof (πίστις), just the same as if one had distinguished these as thesis and demonstration. (3.13, 1414a30-34)*

Aristotle is, of course, not literally specifying that a properly-constructed speech have only two parts (he discusses six parts in the section of book 3 introduced by this paragraph). He is rather indicating, presumably, that these are the two essential parts that a speech is bound to contain, given the nature and purpose of speechmaking. But if so, this confirms that here too Aristotle's view of rhetoric makes proof (πίστις) central to the expertise, and characterises that proof as "demonstration", a characterisation that at the very least suggests the provision of good grounds for the speaker's claim.

The exact significance of Aristotle's use of terms such as "demonstration" (ἀπόδειξις) in characterising rhetorical proof is the subject of the next section.

For now, my concern is to have shown that there are good grounds for supposing that Aristotle's commitment to a view of rhetoric in which it is an expertise in offering proper grounds for conviction is not only required by the initial arguments of the *Rhetoric* 1.1, but also makes good sense of how he characterises the expertise throughout the treatise.<sup>25</sup>

3.

### Aristotle's Theory of Proof (1355a3-18)

To claim that rhetoric, for Aristotle, was a skill in producing *pisteis*, and that we should understand these to be "proper grounds for conviction" is to invite questions about what standards Aristotle thought something had to meet in order to count as "*pistis*". This section addresses these questions.

### A theory of *pistis*: what constitutes proper grounds for conviction?

Aristotle, as we have seen, clearly thinks that material irrelevant to some issue

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<sup>25</sup> Arguably, such a view gains support from attention to the things Aristotle lists as *non-technical pisteis* (i.e. proofs that require no technical skill to develop, but are simply available ready to be used by the speaker), in his discussion of these at 1355b35-39. He does not include things of dubious evidential value, such as the family or race of the speakers, even though these might help bring about the desired verdict. He does include things that are good reasons (at least in the view of Aristotle and his contemporaries) in favour of some particular verdict: written laws, witness statements, written agreements, evidence obtained under torture (cf. Mirhady 1996, Thür 2005, *Rhet* 1.15, 1376b31-1377a7d and *Rhet. ad Alex.* 16) and statements made under oath.

cannot qualify as proper grounds for conviction of the orator's proposed view of that issue. Irrelevance is an impropriety that excludes material from being a possible *pistis*. On the other hand, Aristotle seems to allow that there are things that would count as exercises of rhetorical skill despite being sufficiently objectionable that they should not be done.<sup>26</sup> Thus, not every way of lacking propriety rules something out as a *pistis*. So, what should we think Aristotle supposes is required for something to count as a *pistis*? The answer I propose might be roughly summarised thus: an orator presents listeners with proper grounds for conviction of his conclusion just if what he presents to them is – by their lights – good reason for adopting the conclusion he is recommending.<sup>27</sup> A more precise formulation is as follows.

### Proposed Characterisation of Aristotelian *Pistis*:

1. A *pistis* consists of premises<sup>28</sup> acceptable to the audience that stand in such a relation to the conclusion for which they are offered as a *pistis* that if one accepts (and persists in accepting) the premises, it

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26 cf. 1355a29-31: Rhetorical expertise involves being *able* to argue both sides of the case, even where actually to do this shouldn't be done because it would be to persuade people of things that are inferior or base "οὐ γὰρ δεῖ τὰ φαῦλα πείθειν" (a31). Cf. also 1355b2-7: rhetoric can be used wrongly and cause great harm.

27 This rough summary is intended only as an approximation to the view I am recommending.

28 Since both *logos*-proofs (1359a6-10, 26-9; 1377b16-20) and *pathos*-proofs (1378a26-9) involve premises, it seems reasonable to infer that *êthos*-proofs also do.

would be an exercise of good judgement to be inclined towards accepting also that conclusion because of those premises. (cf. 1355a3-14: *pisteis* require skill in dialectic)

2. A *pistis* is comprised of things that are reputable, and it is a device by which they confer good standing<sup>29</sup> on something else, namely the conclusion. (cf. 1355a4f. *Pistis* is a demonstration of a kind)
3. A *pistis* aims at inclining the listener to accept the conclusion<sup>30</sup> as a result of sensitivity to the reputability of of the premises and the relation in which they stand to the conclusion. (cf. 1355a4f. *Pistis* is a demonstration of a kind)

My main concern in this characterisation is to state more precisely what it is about a *pistis* that makes it *proper* grounds for conviction. Accordingly, in what

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29 It is unclear what the correct Aristotelian terminology would be for the epistemic good standing of a conclusion of a sound argument from reputable premises (and we do well to note that not only rhetorical arguments but systematic enquiries in ethics, for example, involve starting from premises that are reputable rather than known). Still, it is clear from both the *Rhetoric* and the *Posterior Analytics* that Aristotle's view is that rhetorical arguments are structurally similar to the (ideal) case of scientific demonstration, where the epistemic merits of the premises of a sound demonstrative argument serve to deliver conclusions that are in sufficiently good epistemic standing to count as understanding (ἐπιστήμη). I am grateful to Terry Irwin for highlighting this issue.

30 It is in this sense that Aristotle can allow that the proximate goal of rhetoric is to persuade. cf. *EN* 3.3, 1112b14, and below n.58.

follows, I will be mainly concerned with parts 1 and 2.

In some key passages in *Rhetoric* 1.1, Aristotle emphasises that the orator's exercise of his craft should not corrupt the listener, indeed it should assist him in making good judgements aimed at the truth.<sup>31</sup> On the above formulation, the orator's presentation of *pisteis* does this by helping the listener to undertake a process of inference that has two important features. One is that the premises are ones that are reputable. The other is that the process of inference itself proceeds correctly such that, given appropriate premises, it serves to increase the good standing of the conclusion.

#### Rhetorical, Dialectical Expertise and the Nature of *Pisteis*: 1355a3-18.

The following passage confirms this proposal.

*Since it is plain that the expert method is concerned with the proofs [Gk. pisteis], and proof is demonstration of a kind [Gk. apodeixis tis] (for we are convinced most of all whenever we think a thing has been demonstrated), and a rhetorical demonstration is an enthymeme, and this is pretty much the most important of the proofs, and the enthymeme is reasoning of a kind [Gk. sullogismos tis], and it is the job of dialectic (either dialectic generally, or one*

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31 Cf. 1354a24-31, and below section 3. Note that such a view undeniably has significant normative content, but is considerably less high-minded than some competing views of rhetoric attributed to Aristotle.

*of its parts) to consider alike all reasoning, it is clear that the one who is best able to discern this – from what and how a piece of reasoning comes about – would also be best skilled in enthymemes, provided he also grasped the features of the enthymeme and how it is different from cases of logical reasoning.*  
(1355a3-14)

This passage presents many difficulties, not all of which can be discussed here. What I hope to show is that, on any plausible understanding of its argumentative structure and key terms, a number of points emerge about the nature of rhetorical *pisteis*.

Firstly, Aristotle is concerned to show that it is experts in dialectic who are best placed to possess an expertise in rhetoric. This is clearly the conclusion emphatically announced at a10-14.<sup>32</sup> (Compare also the treatise's opening slogan, "Rhetoric is the counterpart to dialectic!" 1354a1.) Hence the section serves as a kind of sales pitch for his own teaching, with Aristotle suggesting that one should learn rhetoric from someone like him whose expertise makes

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32 This is confirmed by the clear echoes at a14f. of Plato *Phaedrus* 260-273, especially 273d2-6.

Aristotle's care at 1355a14-18 (discussed in ch. 5 below) to insist against Plato's Socrates that the expert orator need not know the truth about his subject matter is best explained by supposing that his main point in a3-14 was that expertise in dialectic enables expertise in rhetoric. Since Socrates had said something rather similar, Aristotle might easily have been misunderstood as endorsing the *Phaedrus* position, hence the need for clarification. Cf. *Phaedrus* 270a-c and 271a-272b in the light of 266b-d, esp. d1-4.

him well placed to furnish the necessary foundation in dialectic. The basis for his argument is the nature of rhetoric (as concerned with providing *pisteis*) and hence the nature of the *pisteis*. The crucial point for our purposes is that Aristotle's argument here – however we trace it out in detail – is based upon the nature of *pisteis* (a3-5). A *pistis* is of such a kind, and the most important (component?) of the *pisteis*, enthymeme, is of such a kind that it is experts in dialectic that are best placed to master them. What is it about expertise in dialectic that helps with enthymemes and *pisteis*? Aristotle explicitly says at a11 that it is a matter of being able to discern “from what and how a piece of reasoning comes about” (ἐκ τίνων καὶ πῶς γίνεται συλλογισμός). So, *pisteis* are such that their successful production is a matter of knowing something about how reasoning works, and something about the selection of materials for reasoning.<sup>33</sup> My contention is that the crucial aspect of understanding “how reasoning comes about” is understanding the inferential relations that may obtain between the elements of a piece of reasoning: particularly, understanding how these may stand to one another as premises to conclusion such that if one accepts (and persists in accepting) the premises, one is urged towards accepting also the conclusion. This feature is precisely what is needed for skill in producing enthymemes and *pisteis* generally, i.e. for being good at rhetoric. And it is a central skill of dialectic. The other aspect of dialectic that is a key

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33 Thus, the meaning of this phrase here matches that of the almost identical phrase at *An. Pr.*

1.4, 25b26-27.

requirement for rhetorical expertise is an ability to select premises for an argument to the desired conclusion – an ability “to discern ... *from what* ... a piece of reasoning comes about”. Obviously part of an ability to discern the right premises is an ability to see their inferential relations to the conclusion. But if this were all that was intended by this phrase, it would make the “from what” and the “how” of all almost identical. It is more likely that what Aristotle has additionally (and perhaps principally) in mind here is the dialectician’s ability to identify premises that not only stand in the right inferential relations to the conclusion, but are *acceptable to the listener*. These two features of dialectical skill mentioned specifically by Aristotle here help to illuminate the nature of the *pisteis* with which the passage starts. They confirm what was proposed in our characterisation of *pistis* set out above. A *pistis* consists of premises that are acceptable to the listener and that stand in the right kind of relations to the judgement for which they are offered as a *pistis*.

A second feature that sheds light on what a *pistis* is the claim that a *pistis* is “a demonstration of a kind”, or “some sort of demonstration” (a4-5).<sup>34</sup> For on any plausible interpretation of this claim,<sup>35</sup> a demonstration (even one that is strictly-speaking defective in certain ways) will be a device by which the

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34 cf. Burnyeat 1994 13-30. For the present point, nothing depends on the interpretation of *tis*.

35 The original sense of *apodeixis* to mean simply ‘show’, ‘make public’ or ‘reveal’ (e.g. Herodotus 1.1; cf. Barnes 1969 78) is not a plausible candidate here. However stringent, technical or otherwise the sense is in this passage, it is clearly a case of “showing that”.

reputability of the premises confers good standing on the conclusion. It is for this reason that demonstration is a suitable instrument for teaching, learning and persuasion (*An Post.* 1.1, 71a1-2, a9-11; cf. *Rhetoric* 1.2, 1355b26-35). This is an important addition to what we have already seen. For in certain kinds of dialectical reasoning, the practitioner's purpose can be merely to undermine a key thesis or set of premises introduced or accepted by their interlocutor, by showing that the premises entailed an unacceptable conclusion, were inconsistent with each other, or were inconsistent with the key thesis.<sup>36</sup> Reasoning can have this limited function, even when it uses acceptable premises. But demonstration aims at something more. Demonstration aims at the acceptance of the conclusion. So, in claiming that *pistis* is some kind of demonstration, Aristotle is saying that it is comprised of things that are reputable, and that it is a device by which they confer good standing on something else, namely the conclusion.

Thirdly, it seems that we can say something stronger about the connection between *pistis* and demonstration. We see this in the way Aristotle supports his claim that *pistis* is *apodeixis tis* (a4-5). The supporting reason given is that we are convinced (*pisteuomen*, a5) most of all when we take it that something has been demonstrated. On a very literal interpretation, Aristotle has a rather poor argument here. He would be making an inductive generalisation from the cases

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. e.g. *Top.* 8.4-5, 159a16-37; *Soph. El.* 2, 165a38-b11, and, for discussion, Allen 2007.

of greatest or best *pistis* (*pisteuomen malista*, a5) to a conclusion about *pistis* generally. On a more plausible reading, however, Aristotle's argument is about what is essential to *pistis*. What he seems to have in mind is that the most successful cases of *pistis* illuminate what it is about a *pistis* that makes it successful or unsuccessful, i.e. what makes it a *good* example of *pistis*. The view thus illuminated is that a *pistis* is successful to the extent that the conclusion is demonstrated, and this shows us that every *pistis* must involve some degree of demonstrative success on pain of being so bad as a *pistis* that it is not a *pistis* at all.<sup>37 38</sup> The suggestion is not simply that being a demonstration is one thing among many that can make a proof a good proof, but that *what it is to be a good proof* is (at least in part) a matter of its credentials as a demonstration. This would constitute a good justification for a conclusion about the nature of proof itself: that it is demonstration of some kind (a5). What might Aristotle intend by

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37 Aristotle is not here affirming that every case of *pistis* is a *defective* case of demonstration, "only a sort of *apodeixis*, ... not as it were your full-blooded specimen, not something from which you can expect everything that you would normally expect from an *apodeixis* ..." Burnyeat 1994 13. Otherwise, cases of the kind he cites apparently as the most successful kind of *pistis* at a5-6 would risk not only failing to attain that accolade, but failing to be cases of *pistis* at all, making nonsense of the argument. The difficulty is avoided if we take the force of Aristotle's assertion here to be not the negative claim that *pistis* is no more than a defective demonstration, but rather the positive claim that *pistis* is demonstration of at least that relaxed, less-than-full-blooded kind.

38 Cf. LSJ *v.sub 'tis'* I.A. This interpretation thus accommodates the merits of the *alienans* reading by allowing that the kinds of demonstration over which this expression ranges might include the less-than-full-blooded kinds of demonstration that are central to the *alienans* reading: defective demonstration perhaps, but demonstration in some sense nonetheless. Cf. Burnyeat 1994 13-39.

such an assertion? On the most obvious conjecture,<sup>39</sup> two aspects are central: one relates to the premises, and the other concerns the way the demonstration proceeds from them to the conclusion.<sup>40</sup> If this is right, then – as in our proposed characterisation of Aristotelian *pistis* – Aristotle is committed to the view that the more reputable the premises are to the listeners, and the tighter the inferential relation between premises and conclusion, the better the *pistis*, and to the view that any proof must involve exhibiting these features to at least some degree.

Together these features of Aristotle’s argument at 1355a3-14 suggest that the understanding of *pistis* proposed above does indeed capture Aristotle’s view. They also make clearer the sense in which *pistis* is ‘proper grounds for conviction’, and suggest that “proof” – while not perfect – has some merit as an English translation of “*pistis*”.

We see this account of proper grounds for conviction reflected in what Aristotle says elsewhere in the *Rhetoric* about the kinds of premises needed for rhetorical

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39 Clearly this is not the point at which to reach for his technical account of demonstration from the *Posterior Analytics*. What is appealed to here is an everyday understanding of what it is to have something demonstrated. cf. Burnyeat 1994 esp. 13-14.

40 These do, in fact, have their more stringent counterparts in Aristotle’s technical account in the *Posterior Analytics* (71b20-24): the self-explanatory character of the axioms, and the necessity with which what is demonstrated follows from them.

argument. Premises need to be persuasive or reputable<sup>41</sup> to the kind of people being addressed (1356b33-4), and this is a matter of their either being intrinsically plausible to them (*pithanon kai piston*, b29) or being shown to follow from things that are intrinsically plausible (b29f.). This, typically, is a matter of the premises being recognisable to listeners as the kind of thing they are accustomed to using in sound deliberation (1356b37f.). Seemingly, for premises to be reputable and for them to be agreed are distinct, but both can contribute to making an argument persuasive (1357a12-13). Such premises may consist in likelihoods of various kinds (1357a34-b25) or of examples with a similarity to the case in question (1357a7-21). Interestingly, although premises for rhetorical proofs could be intrinsically plausible or inferred from things that are, Aristotle deems it necessary to clarify that this does not require the orator to go back to first principles in the relevant subject matter. To do so would either confuse the listener with an argument too long to follow (1357a3-4, a10-12, a16-23), or would in fact involve a departure from exercising *rhetorical* expertise into the exercise of an expertise in some particular subject area (1358a2-26). Premises should be such that listeners are disposed to regard them as reputable, either by their being intrinsically plausible to them already, or because they can be quickly inferred from things that are. Finally, there is the obvious point that

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41 *Endoxon* at 1356b34 appears to be used as simply a synonym for *pithanon*, used immediately before this at b28. It seems to be given a slightly more precise sense at 1357a12-13 where having premises that are 'agreed' seems to be distinct from and correlative to having premises that are 'reputable' (*ex endoxôn*).

Aristotle's phrases "*to (endechomenon) pithanon*" – the (possibly) persuasive (1355b15f., b26, b33f.; 1356a12f., a20, b28-9; 1403b19) and "*ta hyparchonta pithana*" – the existing persuasive things (1355b10-11) – typically refer simply to features of the circumstances surrounding the forensic case or political proposal with which the orator is concerned. On our proposed account of *pistis* these are those features (or combinations of features) that the listeners are disposed to regard as true or likely (and hence reputable to believe), and which stand (and can be presented as standing) in the relevant kind of relation to the speaker's conclusion. In this way, Aristotle can insist that "the things referred to" (τὰ ὑποκείμενα πράγματα) by the speakers have an influence on the effectiveness of their case. Things that are "true" and "better" will generally yield the better argued and more persuasive side of a debate (1355a36-38). Indeed, he summarises his treatment of the *pisteis* as a treatment of "what things give the facts themselves (αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα) their persuasiveness" (1403b19), and insists that it is right for the speaker to 'fight using the facts themselves' (1404a6; cf. also 1416a37).

There is thus considerable textual support for the characterisation of Aristotle's understanding of *pistis* set out above. However, this view faces some difficulties, and it will be important to show how these can be addressed. These relate firstly to Aristotle's inclusion of "apparent enthymemes" among proofs that proceed through the argument itself, and secondly to his recommendation

that the orator use premises the speaker knows or believes to be untrue.

### Apparent Enthymemes

It is clear that in 1.1, 1.2, 2.24 and elsewhere Aristotle recognises that genuine “proofs” sometimes proceed through inferences whose propriety as inferences is merely apparent (hereafter, “fallacies”), and that mastery of these is part of the expertise of rhetoric.<sup>42</sup> He devotes a whole chapter to these “apparent enthymemes” at 2.24. Their inclusion seems to cast doubt on the above characterisation of Aristotelian *pistis*, since it requires a relationship between the premises and conclusion such that the premises provide *genuine* (and not merely apparent) support to the conclusion.

Of course, there are a number of reasons why one might suppose that the expert orator ought to know about plausible fallacies. This might be in order to recognise and undermine them when an opposing speaker makes use of them.<sup>43</sup>

Equally, if the abilities and knowledge that constitute the expertise of rhetoric involve the ability to distinguish among plausible inferences the good ones

42 Cf. “the apparently persuasive” 1.1, 1355b15-16; “apparent demonstration (δεικνύναι)” 1.2, 1356a4, a36; “the apparently <true>” 1.2, 1356a20; “apparent enthymeme” 1.2, 1356a35-b4, 2.24, 1400b34-37. That these belong to the expertise of rhetoric is explicit at 1355b15-16, and follows from the fact that proofs by apparent enthymeme are one kind of proof through the argument itself. That Aristotle is recommending their use seems clear from 2.24, “useful” (1401a8), “one should do whichever is the more useful” (a26), unless we are somehow to understand these recommendations conditionally.

43 Cf. what Aristotle says about knowing how to argue both ways on an issue: 1.1, 1355a29-33.

from the bad, they will inevitably involve some knowledge of and ability to deploy the latter.<sup>44</sup>

Still, these do not explain how fallacies could constitute ‘proper grounds for conviction’, which I argued above is the *meaning* of *pistis*. This is best explained by paying attention to what is meant by “apparently persuasive” (φαινόμενον ... πιθανόν, 1355a15-16) and “apparent enthymeme” (φαινόμενον ἐνθύμημα, 1356b3-4, 1400b35-36). It was noted above that since not all things persuasive or all enthymemes are merely apparent in this way, there must be something that the merely-apparent cases appear to be. What is this? The most obvious answer is that they appear to be good inferences, i.e. they are taken to be so by the audience. We might next note that Aristotle doesn’t seem to recognise “apparent” cases of every type of proof. It is only proofs through the argument itself (1356a1-4) that include apparent as well as real “demonstrations” (δεικνύναι, a4). The most natural thing to think here is that when listeners are attending to “the argument itself” and mistakenly believe the inference from premises to conclusion is good, then in adopting the conclusion, they do something that would be an exercise of good judgement, *were their beliefs true*. The false belief in the correctness of the inference functions as a premise in an argument that *is* then properly inferred from premises some of which are false. Thus although some set of premises *p* does not entail or

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Metaph.* Θ.2, 1046a36-b7.

support  $q$ , if the subject mistakenly believes that  $p \rightarrow q$ , the inference from both  $p$  and  $p \rightarrow q$  to  $q$  is correct. The fault in the overall argument lies in the false belief in the truth of  $p \rightarrow q$ . But this simply makes the use of apparent enthymemes unexceptional within Aristotle's view of rhetoric, according to which expert speakers get audiences to move from premises that are reputable to them, but may not be true, to conclusions that those premises, if true, would support.

Accordingly, there will be a certain kind of use of rhetoric that makes extensive use of fallacies mistakenly believed by audiences to be good inferences. As Aristotle explains, this is to rhetoric what sophistic arguments are to dialectic.

*Additionally, [it is clear] that the same expertise covers seeing both the persuasive and the apparently persuasive, just like the syllogism and the apparent syllogism in the case of dialectic too. For the nature of sophistic lies not in the capability deployed, but in how one chooses to deploy it. Except that here one will be a "rhetorician" on the basis of their knowledge, and another on the basis of their choice. Whereas there one is a "sophist" on the basis of their choice, and a "dialectician" on the basis not of their choice but of their capability. (1.1, 1355b15-21)*

Aristotle's point here is about the way in which the term ῥήτωρ (literally: orator, here translated "rhetorician") does double duty as a term for the person

possessing the expertise (τέχνη) of rhetoric, and for the person who chooses to deploy this expertise with a particular aim. This is in contrast to dialectic where there are separate terms for the person with the expertise (“dialectician”, διαλεκτικός) and the person with the distinctively competitive aim (“sophist”, σοφιστής). But in both cases, the competitive and less scrupulous manner of deployment is nonetheless a deployment of the same expertise (dialectic, rhetoric). So, just as “sophistic” is a deployment of dialectical expertise that makes extensive use of merely apparent syllogisms (cf. *Soph. El.* 164a20-165b11), so there is a kind of deployment of rhetoric that will similarly make extensive use of merely apparent enthymemes that are, as Aristotle puts it, only “apparently persuasive”.

One might worry, then, about a kind of manipulation where a speaker might take advantage of audience beliefs (whether about the correctness of an inference, or about any other matter) that he *knows* to be false, to get them to assent to his desired conclusion. Can such a technique still count as providing proper grounds for conviction, and thus count as an exercise of the expertise of rhetoric? This is the subject of the second difficulty facing the proposed account of Aristotelian *pistis*.

The proposed characterisation of *pistis* and the use of premises not believed by the speaker

It is striking that the proposed account of proof offered above does not exclude the use by the speaker of premises that he *himself* does not take to be true or reputable. All that is required is that proofs consist of material that the *listeners* are disposed to regard as reputable, and that *if true* are good grounds for judging the conclusion true. It might be worried that this leaves open the possibility that besides any good purposes the expertise of rhetoric might serve, it was equally well suited to perverting the course of justice or leading the assembly astray by appealing to popular beliefs that the speaker knows to be misleading misconceptions. The worry is justified, but only up to a point. Aristotle is optimistic about the extent to which popular views track the truth (1355a14-18), and is happy to allow that even if the fallibility of popular beliefs allow the unscrupulous practitioner opportunities for leading the citizens astray, that same set of beliefs will generally be affording *more* and *better* opportunities to the other side of the debate to persuade the citizens of what is true and right (1355b36-8).

However worrying or otherwise this is, it certainly seems to be Aristotle's view. There is a much-discussed example at *Rhetoric* 1.9, 1367b22-27 of the kind of unscrupulous practice in question, an example which is sometimes cited as

showing that Aristotle's view of rhetoric had no normative content.<sup>45</sup> In fact this passage creates a difficulty only for more idealised accounts of rhetorical expertise sometimes attributed to Aristotle,<sup>46</sup> and fits nicely with the view of *pistis* offered here.

*Since praise is made on the basis of actions, and what is distinctive of the good man is what is done from choice, you are to try to show that he acts from choice, and it is useful that he be taken to have done these actions on many occasions. This is why coincidences and things that happen by chance are to be taken as if they were by choice, for if many similar things are produced, they will be thought a sign of virtue and choice. (1.9, 1367b22-27)*

This is probably the best example of such underhand practice. It is difficult to deny that Aristotle is endorsing the practices described in this passage: his use of the gerundive 'to be taken' (*lêpton*) seems clearly a prescription to the orator to proceed in this way.<sup>47</sup> But does this violate Aristotle's earlier restrictions on

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45 e.g. Schütrumpf 1994 123-7. His list of "morally questionable tricks" includes also 2.24 (discussed below) and 2.21, 1395a8-10, where Aristotle's point is surely just that it can sometimes be important to state something more crudely or sweepingly than is really the case, presumably in order to convey the force of the point. Note that even here, Aristotle is careful to confine such a strategy to the opening or closing summary, not the proofs section.

46 e.g. Irwin 1996 esp. 142-46: Irwin even cites this passage at 163 but seems not to see the difficulty for his position; Wörner 1990.

47 A gerundive that is undeniably prescriptive occurs 3 lines earlier 'you are to try' (*peirateon*), and there are myriad other examples throughout the *Rhetoric*.

what can count as a *pistis* and hence on what counts as an exercise of rhetorical expertise? It is possible to read this instruction charitably simply as advice to the orator not to be too fussy about whether each action in a series of apparently similar actions was by chance or by choice. Or it may be that the advice concerns cases where it is hard to know the exact motives for a series of similar actions: Aristotle advises the orator to allocate the ‘benefit of the doubt’ in the way that suits his case. Still, let us adopt a less charitable reading for the sake of testing our proposed account of *pistis*, since this passage has sometimes been read so.<sup>48</sup> To take an example, I praise Helen as being compassionate (having the virtue of compassion), and cite her numerous trips to the hospital visiting the sick – despite the fact that I know that in several of these cases the fact that the people she visited were sick and in hospital was a matter of coincidence – she was in fact collecting debts from several of them.

Aristotle here describes this kind of case as a sign-argument (1367b27 *sêmeion*),<sup>49</sup> where the sign in question is in fact a sign for two related things:

*Sign:* that Helen went often to the hospital and visited the sick.

*Signified 1:* that Helen makes fully-fledged *prohairesis* to visit the sick in hospital, i.e. that she chooses these actions because they are cases of visiting the sick in hospital, and chooses them from a

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48 e.g. as “direct instructions to lie” (Schütrumpf 1994 125).

49 For a full treatment of this theme, cf. Allen 2001.

character-disposition.

*Signified 2*: that Helen is compassionate

For this argument to be a *pistis*, and to be the kind of thing that counts as an exercise of the expertise of rhetoric, it must on our account satisfy two requirements. The first is that the 'persuasive feature' (*to pithanon*) in this case be presented as itself something that the listener will find reputable, the second is that it be something that, if true, makes it an exercise of good judgement to suppose that Helen is compassionate. In this case, absent any special reason to disbelieve it, the listeners are likely to regard the sign, that Helen went often to the hospital and visited the sick, as believable simply on the basis of the speaker's testimony. The problem is supposed to arise in the way this fact is related to the beliefs that Helen is compassionate and that she makes *prohaireseis* to visit the sick in hospital. For simplicity, we will refer only the former of these. The difficulty is that there is a deception here: the implication is that Helen's coincidental visits were caused by her compassion, when in fact they were not, and the speaker knows they were not.<sup>50</sup> That Aristotle countenances the deceptive use of rhetoric is taken to show that he does not think that exercising rhetoric involves meeting some normative standards. But this is simply a mistake. Aristotle's suggestion in this passage does not (even on the least charitable reading) violate the specific normative conditions proposed

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50 Such deception seems objectionable by Aristotle's lights as well as our own: *NE* 2.7, 1108a19-23; 4.7, 1127a17-26.

above for something's being a *pistis* and hence being an exercise of rhetoric. This is because the fact that Helen has visited the sick in hospital many times simply is good grounds for supposing that she is compassionate. The move from believing the sign to believing the signified is wholly proper, even though there is no guaranteed connection at all between sign and signified, and certainly the sign does not guarantee the truth of what it is appropriately taken to signify. It is an exercise of good judgement on the listeners' part if they judge Helen compassionate on the basis of this sign. Aristotle's language here is non-committal about whether this is genuine case of a sign (*sêmeion*) – he says that many similar things “will be believed to be” (*doxei*) a sign of virtue and choice. This might imply that he thinks this is not a genuine case of a sign, since the coincidences were not caused by virtue or choice. But equally he may simply be showing that what is important in deploying this kind of proof is what the listener thinks. Either way, this example meets the key criteria for *pistis* set out above, and specifically that what the audience believes would, if true, make it an exercise of good judgement to believe the speaker's proposed conclusion. Accordingly, it is entirely compatible with producing genuinely rhetorical proofs that these use material that the speaker does not himself believe.<sup>51</sup>

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51 This holds whether the speaker thereby behaves badly or not. Note that the use of premises one believes to be flawed need not always be deceptive or insincere. An atheist might persuade an audience of Christians by appeal to the authority of Christ or the Bible, without himself recognise their authority.

4.

I have recommended attributing to Aristotle a normative view of rhetoric very different from that of Thrasymachus, Gorgias and the handbook writers who followed them. We will see below that his view also has the resources to resist the Platonic demand that the expert orator know the truth about his subject matter. Nevertheless, it is the handbook writers that are the focus of attention in the early arguments of the *Rhetoric*. And it is to these that I now return to uncover Aristotle's attempts not merely to assert but to justify his proposed view of rhetoric.

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### Aristotle's Justification of his Proof-Centred view of Rhetoric

Aristotle's proof-centred understanding of rhetoric is expressed succinctly at 1354a13-14, in a claim that plays a pivotal role in his opening arguments against the handbook writers.

*Proper grounds of conviction are the only thing that belong to the expertise of rhetoric.*

That is to say, that the techniques or methods in which the expertise consists are methods of identifying proper grounds for conviction and providing them to listeners.

As was noted, this claim is initially unsupported. We would perhaps expect to find that Aristotle returns to offer a defence of this view of rhetoric. I propose that this is exactly what he does. One indication to that effect is that about a page later, Aristotle himself says, "Since it is evident that the method that belongs to the expertise of rhetoric is concerned with proofs ..." (1355a3-4). It is not plausible to suppose that this claim was "evident" all along, so it must be that something in the intervening page or so constituted a basis on which it is *now* evident.

I'm going to sketch how I think he defends his view, and then return to the text of *Rhetoric* 1, where I think we find Aristotle offering an array of arguments against the handbook writers which appeal to just the kind of picture I am about to sketch.

A sketch of Aristotle's view of the relationship between rhetorical expertise and the proper functioning of the state.

States – plausibly all states, but certainly the Greek *poleis* of Aristotle's day – need orators (public speakers). This is because in order to function well it is

necessary for citizens to confer, deliberate and come to decisions. This includes deciding on laws and state policy, and coming to verdicts in the lawcourts. For citizens to make judgements about the merits of courses of action, or of each side's case in a law suit, the case for each of these has to be made.

Rhetoric, then, is an expertise in discharging public speaking roles in the state – specifically, it is an expertise in helping citizens to arrive at good publicly-deliberated judgements in line with the speaker's proposal,<sup>52</sup> by making the case one way or another in relation to some proposed verdict,<sup>53</sup> so that a judgement can be made as to its merits (often in comparison with the merits of some rival proposal).

Note that when Aristotle talks of an expertise (Gk. *technê*), what he means is something like what we call 'know-how', that is to say that having an expertise

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52 Reflection on what the *technê* of rhetoric serves to produce is invited right at the start of the *Rhetoric*, when Aristotle says that, "as all would agree", an expertise should account for non-accidental success (*epitunchanousin* 1354a9). But success in what? What exactly is the product whose successful production will be accounted for by this expertise? Aristotle's answer seems to be that it is good publicly-deliberated judgements by citizens in line with the speaker's proposal. Aristotle eventually identifies rhetoric's goal explicitly at 1358b1-2, with the whole of 1.3 devoted to explaining how this works in each kind of rhetoric. More briefly, at 2.1, 1377b20-21, he says, "rhetoric is for the sake of a judgement (*heneka kriseôs*)."  
Cf. also 1.2, 1357a1-2 where rhetoric's function is discharged only in relation to things that are the objects of deliberation.

53 "Demonstrating the matter, that it is or is not the case, that it happened or did not happen."  
1354a27-28.

explains your non-accidental success at something (as indeed Aristotle reminds us in the first 10 lines of the treatise). So, having an expertise in cobblery is what explains your non-accidental success in making or repairing shoes. Accordingly, the techniques involved in the expertise of cobblery will be predominantly concerned with working leather. What, then, does rhetoric enable you to succeed in doing? The formulation offered above provides, I believe, Aristotle's answer. Rhetoric enables you to succeed non-accidentally as a public advisor, helping citizens towards certain good publicly-deliberated judgements. Accordingly, the techniques involved in rhetoric will be concerned solely with proper grounds for conviction in relation to whatever the subject under consideration is.

Before examining how this picture emerges from Aristotle's arguments against the handbook-writers, I should comment briefly on two concerns that might be raised about this strategy.

Firstly, one might worry that justifying the view that rhetoric is solely concerned with providing proper grounds for conviction by appeal to a view of rhetoric as an expertise in discharging this kind of public role simply pushes the justificatory question further back. Why should we think that this is the right account of what rhetoric helps its possessor to accomplish? One might answer this worry on Aristotle's behalf by insisting that, although there may be many

other competing conceptions of “rhetoric” and its goals, it is rhetoric thus defined that is the skill most worth cultivating in oneself and others, and it is for the exercise of this skill that it is worth making institutional provision within the state. In short, he is offering an account of the kind of rhetoric that is worth having.

Secondly, one might worry that, since all that is required of the premises of *pisteis* is that they be acceptable to listeners, there is nothing to guarantee that good inferences from such premises will improve the judgements of listeners, and hence nothing to guarantee that rhetoric will benefit the state’s public deliberations. This will seemingly hold only where the premises are true.<sup>54</sup> One might answer this worry by insisting that deliberating using good inferences rather than bad is already to have deliberated better, regardless of the merits of the premises. No doubt Aristotle would have agreed with such a response, though there seems no trace of such a view in the pages of the *Rhetoric*. But such a response is only applicable where the relevant comparison is between good inferences and bad from the premises in question. Whereas the comparison relevant to whether the state benefits from the exercise of Aristotelian rhetoric is between making good inferences from premises acceptable to the citizens, and making *no* such inferences. Here it is doubtful that it is better to form further – possibly false – beliefs than to form no additional beliefs. Aristotle’s conviction

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<sup>54</sup> I am grateful to COLLEAGUES3 for helpful discussion of this issue.

of the beneficial effects of rhetoric seems to rest instead upon an optimistic assessment of the contingent tendencies of humans to believe the truth. In Aristotle's account (1355a21-b7) of why rhetoric is useful or beneficial (*chrêsimos*), much of the space in the text is devoted to how rhetoric enables the judgements of the judges to reflect the natural superiority of what is true and good (a21-24). The latter are "generally easier to prove and more likely to convince" (a38). A few lines earlier he asserted, "human beings themselves are naturally inclined towards the truth and usually do attain the truth." (1355a15-17) Rhetoric, then, involves helping citizens to reason well from premises that are, in Aristotle's view, likely to be true.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, they are particularly likely to be true if they are acceptable to many people, not just to some given individual.<sup>56</sup> And if reasoning well from existing beliefs tends to make one's overall set of beliefs more coherent, this is likely to improve the proportion of true to false beliefs in the set in the case where the beliefs in the

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55 It is true that in the *Rhetoric* as a whole, Aristotle's view of the orator's typical audience includes disdainful and elitist sentiments, as well as the optimistic and "democratic" sentiments expressed in the passages referred to here. However, there is nothing in Aristotle's more disdainful views that undermines the key claim here, that for Aristotle, premises that are commonly held to be reputable will tend to be true. Cf. 1354b8-11 (listeners' private likes and dislikes cloud their judgement); 1355a24-29 (some listeners can't be persuaded "from the most precise knowledge", but must be persuaded through the "commonplaces"); 1357a3-4, 11-12 (listeners are "simple" and cannot cope with long trains of reasoning); 1403b34-5, 1404a7-8, 1415b4-8 (because of the depravity of the listeners, attention must be given to delivery, to attracting listeners' attention, and to various other crowd-pleasing devices).

56 Cf. 1356b33-34.

initial set are mostly true.

I return now to the task of showing that the view sketched above does indeed match Aristotle's view of rhetoric's purpose, and that these are the grounds on which he seeks to justify his account of what rhetorical expertise is an expertise *in*. Throughout the section 1354a18-1355a3, we see Aristotle appeal to just such a picture of the role and value of rhetoric in the state. That is to say that this is a view he both endorses himself and can presuppose in his readers.

In the argument appealing to the rules of well-governed places like the Areopagus (1354a18-21),<sup>57</sup> it is taken to be obvious that a well-functioning state should not eliminate the possibility of exercising genuine rhetorical expertise: it would thereby forego vital contributions to public deliberation. And it is equally obvious, on this view, that it is appropriate to have safeguards against the misuse of opportunities for public speaking in the state, where the purpose of those opportunities is the improvement of publicly-deliberated judgements through the exercise of genuine rhetoric. Since it is clear that these rules and safeguards *would* rule out the handbook writers' techniques, those cannot have been techniques of rhetoric.

Similarly, the carpenter's ruler simile (1354a24-6) and the argument from the

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<sup>57</sup> The argument is discussed in more detail in AUTHOR'S-B.

speaker's role (1354a26-31) both presuppose and appeal to the assumption that the success of the speaker in his role requires the preservation or promotion of the success of the judges in theirs. In cricket, the fact that the batsman ought not to play deliveries wide outside the off-stump, and that he would be playing poorly if he did, does not mean that it is not part of the bowler's business to bowl deliveries there. The difference between this example and Aristotle's orator is precisely that in cricket the bowler aims at the batsman's failure in his role, whereas Aristotle's orator aims at (or at least he must ensure) the judges' success. This becomes a natural thing to accept only if you suppose, as I am proposing Aristotle did, that the proper functioning of the judge in deliberation and judgement is central to the role and purpose of the speaker.<sup>58</sup>

So, my suggestion is that in these arguments we see Aristotle partly setting out and partly presupposing a view of rhetoric and its place in the state in the light of which it makes sense to claim that the techniques of rhetoric are entirely concerned with proofs or "proper grounds for conviction".

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58 Conceivably, one might read a26-28 and a28-31 as two more-or-less independent reasons for thinking that the state is right to ban irrelevant speaking. Even on this suggestion, the first of these reasons still seems to require the kind of view of rhetoric I am suggesting. But the second might not: that the juror has an important role in the state, and that this might be threatened by speakers addressing topics other than the issue at hand (specifically the legality and severity of the issue), is already good reason for the state to take action to prevent this threat, specifically by prohibiting irrelevant speaking. No view of the speaker's role need be presupposed. Still, this does not strike me as a preferable reading of the passage.

This suggests a way of reading the conclusion of this passage of argument (1354b16-22) that is more integrated than those suggested by previous commentators,<sup>59</sup> and which helps to make sense of how Aristotle has achieved by 1355a2, not just a devastating criticism of the handbook writers, but (as he claims) a justification of his own position. He claims at 1355a3f. that it is now obvious that the expertise of rhetoric is concerned with providing proper grounds for conviction. The extent to which he has argued for this conclusion we will consider below. But we propose here a reading of 1354b16-22 that shows how the passage of argumentation concerned with the proper role of judges contributes to his basis for the claim at 1355a3ff..

*If this is correct, then it is obvious that it is an expertise in irrelevance that is the thing discussed by those who give definitions of other matters, such as what the introduction or narrative should contain or each of the other parts of the speech (since in them they busy themselves with nothing except how to put the judge into a certain condition) but set out nothing about the proofs that belong to the expertise, that is to say the means of becoming good at enthymemes.*

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59 Possible exceptions: Kassel's text has parentheses around b19-20 ("since in them .. condition"), which suggests that he reads the following clause ("but set out ...") as coordinate with "give definitions of other matters ..." (b17f.), following Jebb 1909 *ad loc.*, cf. Kassel 1971, 1976, both *ad loc.*. This is consistent with – thought does not require – the interpretation I am proposing here.

Exactly what is claimed and on what basis in this passage has sadly not received much scholarly attention.<sup>60</sup> This is surely not because it is all luminously clear. In looking at this passage, and how it is connected to its surrounding context, I hope to canvass the merits of the following claim. Aristotle here concludes not just that the handbook writers' techniques were for irrelevant speaking, but also that he was correct in his previous claim<sup>61</sup> that the handbook writers have told us next to nothing about the proper constituents of rhetorical expertise. He has now given us grounds to suppose what he had previously merely asserted, namely that rhetoric is concerned with giving proofs, and turns out to consist, at its core, in a skill in enthymemes.

The argument, I suggest, runs as follows:

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60 The passage is cited twice in the *Symposium Aristotelicum* volume (Furley and Nehamas 1994), but on both occasions this is little more than a passing mention. Cope 1877 has nothing on this except a misunderstanding mentioned below. Neither Grimaldi 1980 nor Rapp 2002a offers help on these points.

61 This claim is, in my view, announced at 1354a11-13, argued for between that passage and the passage currently under discussion, 1354b16-22, at which point his demolition of their work is complete. They had set out an expertise not in rhetoric but in irrelevance. There is then a brief passage about how all this sheds light on their (otherwise puzzling) preference for forensic over deliberative speaking. Some of these conclusions then re-appear in the summary passage 1355a19-20, though it is disappointing for my interpretation that what I claim is the main conclusion of the chapter up to this point (that the handbook-writers have told us little about rhetoric) is not reaffirmed here in this summary.

Once it is established (b16)

- a. what the role of the orator is (a role in discharging which rhetoric is the relevant expertise), and,
- b. in particular, on what kinds of subject it is appropriate for the speaker to exercise his rhetorical expertise by speaking,

the following become obvious (b16)

1. that it is an expertise in irrelevance that the handbook-writers have offered (b16-17)
  - in particular: the clarification of appropriate topics on which to deploy rhetoric highlights the irrelevance of the things that most concerned the handbook-writers (b17-20); and
2. that (therefore) they have told us virtually nothing about the genuine constituents of rhetorical expertise (b20-21),
  - which in fact is a matter of becoming good at enthymemes (b21-22).

On this way of understanding the argument, I suggest Aristotle underlines the progress made not just in negative polemic, but, more positively, in justifying the central tenet of his own view of rhetoric. His claim that rhetoric is an expertise in giving proofs, a claim that played such a pivotal role in Aristotle's

opening arguments (and for which no supporting argument was initially offered), has now been given much more substantial support since its original assertion at 1354a13.

Aristotle previously had merely asserted that rhetoric was an expertise in providing proof. He has now shown that if you accept that rhetoric is the expertise that enables a person to be successful as an advisor in public deliberations, you should agree that its exercise consists in providing proofs. During the course of these arguments, he has appealed to a number of assumptions that support the view that rhetoric is indeed an expertise in discharging this advisory role within the state. One such assumption is that the orator's success itself requires the good deliberation of the judge. Another is that orators should properly be barred from irrelevant speaking. And yet another is that orators should be confined to the *facts* of the case at hand, that is, to the aspects on which they have a distinctive advisory contribution to make. Once we attend to some of the contours of rhetoric's role in the state, it becomes clear that it is bound to consist in producing proofs, that producing enthymemes will be a characteristic exercise of rhetoric, and that skills for irrelevant speaking contribute are not part of the expertise at all.

5.

Comparing Aristotle, Plato, and Gorgias and Thrasymachus on rhetoric.

It should now be clear how Aristotle positions himself against the handbook writers, whom I take to represent in Aristotle's day the tradition of Gorgias and Thrasymachus.<sup>62</sup> The difference between his account of what rhetorical expertise consists in and theirs comes down to a difference in their views of the nature and value of rhetoric itself. The handbook writers saw rhetoric as a skill for exercising power over others, whose value consisted principally in its value *to its possessor*. By contrast, Aristotle took a wider view, showing how the expertise possessed by speakers is valued not only by those speakers but by others too. His view involves seeing rhetoric as an expertise for whose exercise states make provision – states invite speeches by protagonists in lawsuits, and by proponents and opponents of political policies. States encourage speechmaking, and value the development of skill in this area, because this is seen as contributing to the quality of civic judgements. Audiences listen to speakers similarly with the aim of improving their judgements on the issues addressed. Even Aristotle's view of rhetoric's value to its possessor derives in part from what is valuable about the judgements subsequently formed by listeners. Rhetoric is valuable to the speaker because it enables them to gain the verdict they desire, and in such a way as to constitute an *endorsement* of their own position, because judges deliberating soundly adopted their recommended

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62 Cf. Solmsen 1938, Rapp 2002a 2.30-34, AUTHOR'S-A 391-6, AUTHOR'S-B 111-12, *pace*

Solmsen 1929 215.

point of view for the reasons they offered. In this way, Aristotle's view accounts in a unified way for the value of rhetoric to the speaker, to the listener, and to the state as a whole.

The follower of Thrasymachus or Gorgias may still insist that the expertise they describe is entitled to be called "rhetoric" or "the art of speaking". Aristotle's position against them can be understood either as the claim that what he describes better captures the concept of the public speaker's expertise, or as the claim that, even if there are several different skills that might be called "rhetoric", the expertise he describes is the most valuable for the state to foster, for listeners to value in speakers, and for speakers themselves to develop and exercise.

Aristotle's arguments, especially in the opening chapter of the *Rhetoric*, are deployed principally against the handbook writers. But in a number of passages, he indicates his awareness of rival Platonic views on rhetoric.

Within Plato's *Gorgias* (462b-c), Socrates denied that rhetoric was a *technê* because it offered no principled account of why and how its techniques worked. Even within that dialogue, that seems to function as an objection to what was proposed as a *technê* by Gorgias and others, rather than ruling out entirely the possibility of a *technê* of speechmaking. The *Phaedrus* takes up the task of

exploring what such a *technê* might be like. Accordingly, by the time Aristotle is writing the *Rhetoric*, the view that there was a *technê* of rhetoric does not seem to have been very controversial. Thus, at the start of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle concludes in a mere 11 lines that there must be a *technê* of rhetoric in order to explain the consistent non-accidental success of some orators.

Also in the *Gorgias*, the requirement is expressed that rhetoric have a good aim. Otherwise, rhetoric will either turn out to be something shameful (464e2-465a2) or possibly may fail thereby to be a *technê* at all (501b3-5, 504d-e). Again, this seems a good objection to Gorgias's rhetoric, seen as a kind of power to achieve whatever seems expedient to its possessor, whether or not this is actually good. The better alternative that Socrates has in mind is that rhetoric aim at justice and self-control in the souls of the citizens (504d-e). The Aristotelian view I have argued for above gives rhetoric a good goal, but it is different from that envisaged by Socrates. It is rather the goal of well-grounded judgements by citizens in contexts such as law-courts and assemblies. Aristotle, not implausibly, supposes that generally the available evidence will provide better grounds for judgements that are true or correct than for judgements that are false or wrong.<sup>63</sup> Hence, rhetoric as Aristotle understands it aims at something good because it aims to affect the judgements of listeners in ways that systematically incline them towards judgements that are true and good. This

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<sup>63</sup> *Rhetoric* 1.1, 1355a15-17, a21-b7.

makes perfect sense if rhetoric aims at well-founded civic judgement, and exercising rhetoric is a matter of providing proofs based on available evidentially-relevant facts.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues that any genuine expertise in rhetoric requires for its exercise the knowledge of the truth about one's subject matter. This may be motivated simply by a worry that otherwise persuasive argument will risk simply transmitting the flaws in the audience's existing beliefs onto any new convictions they are persuaded to form. But this requirement seems more likely to be motivated by the idea that rhetoric should put its possessor in control of whether the audience's beliefs turned out true or false.<sup>64</sup> Aristotle does not seem to recognise the requirement that the expert orator know the truth. Indeed, two passages in the *Rhetoric* can be plausibly interpreted as a rejection of precisely

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<sup>64</sup> The requirement is advocated at 261d-262c and recapitulated briefly at 273d-e, in response to the proposal attributed to Tisias that the orator need know not the truth about his subject but what will seem likely to his listeners. The requirement cannot be that unless he knows the truth, an orator will be unable to persuade someone to accept some given claim, since even within the dialogue the example of Socrates persuading Phaedrus that he should get a horse for fighting enemies (260b-d) shows that this is possible despite the ignorance of both parties about what a horse was. Of the various interpretative options available for explaining what motivates the requirement, the view that the orator needs to know the truth in order to be in control of whether the listener's views turn out true or false is suggested by 262b5-c3. There, as elsewhere, it is emphasised that the orator should be able to deceive (if he chooses) but escape deception himself, on pain of not having a genuine *technê* at all. This suggests that rhetoric is here seen as a skill that puts its possessor in control of whether their listeners' beliefs (and their own) turn out true or false.

this Platonic requirement.

At 1355a10-14, Aristotle concludes that it is the person skilled in dialectic who will be best able to master the skills of rhetoric:

*[given the preceding argument] it is clear that it is the person who is best able to see how and from what elements reasoning proceeds, that would also be best at enthymemes, provided they grasp additionally the features of enthymemes and how they differ from logical exercises in reasoning.*<sup>65</sup>

He supports this with the following argument.

*For what is true and what is similar to the truth belong to the same capacity to see, and at the same time human beings themselves are naturally inclined towards the truth and usually do attain the truth. That is why being good at hunting down what is reputable<sup>66</sup> is a mark of the same kind of person as being good at hunting down the truth. (1355a14-18)*

This seems to be a way of saying that the ability of the philosopher to find the truth (by making inferences from starting points) and the ability of people to form judgements based on what is likely (by making inferences from plausible

65 The final phrase, “*logikous sullogismous*” is hard to translate, but seems to mean pieces of reasoning where the focus is on the validity of the argument, such as in pure dialectic (or peirastic). Cf. *An. Post.* 93a15 (the only other use of this phrase in Aristotle). The differences Aristotle has in mind in this passage may include that enthymemes aim at the adoption of their conclusion, not merely at showing what follows from what, and that in enthymemes the truth of the premises may recommend the conclusion without necessitating it.

66 The wording here subverts the pejorative use of *στοχαστικός* at *Gorgias* 463a7, where Socrates claims that rhetoric is an untechnical knack of guessing at what will please people.

starting points) are the very same ability. And both are essentially reliable, insofar as the starting materials – the plausible views (*endoxa*) – are grounded in humans' general ability to hit the truth for the most part, and insofar as the inferences proceed correctly. So, the ability of the true rhetorician and the ability of the philosopher are the very same thing – not in the way Plato thought in the *Phaedrus*, by requiring that both philosopher and rhetorician possess knowledge of their subject matter, and indeed of a whole lot else, but rather by requiring only plausible starting points from both, plus good inferences from these (of the kind dialectical expertise would endorse).

If this is a correct interpretation, then the argument serves to justify the conclusion that preceded it by showing that (leaving aside the “additional” things mentioned at a12-14) the understanding of dialectic is *sufficient* for an understanding of rhetoric (or, strictly, of enthymemes). The argument shows specifically that there is no additional requirement that the rhetorician know the truth about an issue to be able to exercise genuine rhetorical expertise in producing enthymematic arguments for some particular view on that issue.

There is a further argument at 1355a24-29 for why rhetoric as Aristotle understands it is more useful than persuasion based on knowledge of one's subject matter.

*[Rhetoric is useful because ...] Additionally, before some people, it would not be*

*not easy, even if we had the most exact knowledge, to be persuasive using it. For knowledge-based argument belongs to teaching, and this is impossible, rather we must develop our proofs and arguments via the commonplaces, as we said also in the Topics about encounters with the many.*

It is plausible to suppose that Aristotle is here arguing against the view found in Plato's *Phaedrus* (261d-262c, 273d-e), discussed above, that exercising rhetorical expertise requires knowledge of one's subject matter. If the Platonic view Aristotle opposes here is that in order to persuade using any argument that proceeded by similarities one must know the truth of one's subject matter, the argument seems apposite. With some people, a similarity to the truth about the matter in question will not make something persuasive. Rather, with them, one needs to start from very general notions on which everyone agrees (the "commonplaces" - *ta koina*). Thus, knowledge of the truth does not help, and is less useful in such contexts than what Aristotle takes rhetoric principally to involve, namely the elements of dialectic – the abilities to identify plausible starting points, and to reason well from these. However, it was suggested above that the Platonic requirement that the expert orator know the truth was so that the expertise would put them in control of whether the convictions they secured were true or false. Aristotle, does nothing to show that it would not have some distinct valuable role within rhetoric along these lines. This argument at 1355a24-29 is confined to showing that such knowledge of the truth would not assist the speaker in *the process of convincing* some popular audiences.

Aristotle in this way distinguishes his understanding of rhetoric from that of the handbook writers, Gorgias and Thrasymachus, on the one hand, and from Platonic views of rhetoric on the other. He offers arguments for the superiority of his own preferred view, and I have sought to trace how he intends these arguments to work.

### Conclusion

I have argued that in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle understands rhetoric to be an expertise in helping listeners to well-deliberated judgements by making the case for some particular view of the matter. Of the various skills concerned with public speaking, it is this expertise, Aristotle contends, that is of greatest value, whether considered from the point of view of the state, the listener or the speaker. This sets his agenda for the treatise as a whole. He sees that an expertise in helping listeners to well-deliberated judgements will be essentially an expertise in providing them with “proofs”, proper grounds for conviction, and he sets out to offer a systematic account of what *that* skill / expertise is, and how to acquire it.

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