

# Theoretical Inconsistencies in Aristotle's Treatment of *Pathos*

Mohammad Ahmadi 

School of Law, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

Email: Moahmadi@aoni.waseda.jp

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## Abstract

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* presents a number of internal inconsistencies, many of which stem from its nature as a compilation of lecture notes developed over several decades. As a result, the terminology employed across different sections is not always consistent, and the work appears to address multiple audiences, ranging from students of dialectic to aspiring orators. Certain parts of the text—such as the treatment of emotion in Book II and much of Book III—likely originated as independent lectures and were later incorporated into the treatise without full conceptual integration. These structural and conceptual inconsistencies are reflected in specific topics throughout the work and are particularly evident in Aristotle's treatment of *pathos*, or emotional appeal. This paper identifies and analyzes four major inconsistencies in Aristotle's account of *pathos*:

- 1) The status of *pathos* as a persuasive proof: In the opening of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle appears to downplay *pathos* as a legitimate *pistis* (proof), yet later chapters—particularly in Book II—assign it a central role in rhetorical persuasion.
- 2) The relationship between *pathos* and the enthymeme: Although Aristotle associates the enthymeme strictly with *logos*, he does not clearly indicate whether emotional appeals can be integrated into this deductive structure, leaving the relationship between *pathos* and rational reasoning unresolved and ambiguous.
- 3) Incomplete application of the tripartite analysis of emotion: Aristotle proposes that each emotion should be examined through a triadic framework—comprising the subject's state of mind, the object of the emotion, and the contextual circumstances. However, in his treatment of several specific emotions, this structure is applied only partially, and in one instance, omitted altogether.
- 4) Audience character and rhetorical strategy: Chapters 12 - 17 of Book II, which outline the emotional and behavioral traits of various demographic groups, create interpretive uncertainty by overlapping concerns traditionally associated with both *pathos* and *ēthos*.

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## Keywords

Aristotle, Rhetoric, *Pathos*, Enthymeme, Emotional Appeal, *Pisteis*

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### 1. Introduction

In its early development, rhetoric emerged from practical necessity, with its teachers initially providing straightforward instructional tools to aid inexperienced speakers. Over time, however, it evolved into a more complex and autonomous intellectual discipline. Among those who contributed most significantly to this transformation, Aristotle occupies a central and enduring position. He systematized rhetorical theory, offering one of the most comprehensive treatments of persuasive appeals—known as artistic proofs (Greek: *pistis*, plural: *pisteis*). While rhetorical instruction existed among the pre-Socratics and Socratics<sup>1</sup>, particularly among sophistic rhetoricians such as Gorgias, Corax, Thrasymachus, and Protagoras, it was Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that provided the most structured and influential framework. If rhetorical theory reached its fullest classical formulation in the fourth century BCE, it did so largely through Aristotle's contributions. His seminal work, *Rhetoric*, a compilation of lectures delivered over approximately forty years (c. 367-323 BCE)<sup>2</sup>, has been profoundly influential in shaping the conceptualization of persuasive speech. In this treatise, Aristotle (2007: 1.2.1) defines rhetoric as an intellectual process of searching for and discovering *pisteis*<sup>3</sup>—or, in essence, inventing them<sup>4</sup>. As such, *pisteis* form the centerpiece of Aristotelian rhetorical theory, and *Rhetoric* primarily instructs orators on how to construct these persuasive appeals. Unlike non-artistic proofs, which exist independently of the speaker's invention, *pisteis* must be deliberately designed and invented by the orator. Aristotle (2007: 1.2.3) identifies three such artistic proofs—also known as the

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<sup>1</sup>Ancient sources suggest that Empedocles was among the first to promote the study of rhetoric (see Aristotle, 1984, F 65 R<sup>3</sup>; Brunschwig, 1994: pp. 62-65; Preus, 2017: p. 193). However, the earliest rhetorical handbooks are attributed to Corax and Tisias, followed by Gorgias, who is reputed to have studied under Empedocles. While no complete texts by Corax or Tisias have survived, fragments of Empedocles' poetry remain, along with several extant rhetorical works by Gorgias—including his extended critique of Eleatic philosophy. These accounts indicate that treatises on practical rhetoric were already in circulation and that rhetoric was actively taught, particularly by figures later classified as Sophists, as evidenced in the works of Plato and, earlier, Aristophanes. For evidence of this, see Plato, *Phaedrus* (Plato, 2005: 266c-271c); Aristophanes, *Clouds* (Aristophanes, 1998: ll. 889-1125); Isocrates, *Against the Sophists* (Isocrates, 2000a: §19); Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 2007: 1.1.3); and Cicero, *Brutus* (Cicero: 1939: XII. 46).

<sup>2</sup>According to Kennedy (1999: p. 60), Aristotle's earliest draft of his lectures on rhetoric was likely written around 350 BCE while he was still a member of Plato's Academy. With Plato's encouragement, he is believed to have begun offering a public course on rhetoric in the afternoons, in part as a response to the rhetorical teachings of Isocrates.

<sup>3</sup>According to Grimaldi (1972: pp. 59-61), the term *pisteis* (πίστεις) is not used consistently throughout Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Grimaldi identifies three distinct meanings of the term. The interpretation he endorses stands in contrast to the traditional view, which treats the *pisteis* as three interdependent modes of persuasion: *ēthos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

<sup>4</sup>All references to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* are to the second edition of Kennedy's translation and follow the citation method: book, chapter, and section.

ethical, emotional, and rational appeals of rhetoric.

This paper focuses exclusively on *pathos*, the emotional mode of persuasion, and investigates the theoretical inconsistencies in Aristotle's treatment of this appeal. It begins by examining how *pathos* is conceptualized both within Aristotle's own rhetorical framework and within the broader rhetorical tradition. It then critically evaluates the contradictions and ambiguities found within *Rhetoric* itself, as well as the tensions inherent in Aristotle's theoretical framework. These inconsistencies can be broadly categorized into four areas: 1) Aristotle's apparent opposition to emotional appeals in Book I; 2) the ambiguous relationship between *pathos* and the enthymeme; 3) the inconsistent application of the tripartite model Aristotle himself proposes for analyzing emotions; and 4) his treatment of emotional dispositions among various age groups and social classes in Book II.

## 2. *Logos, Pathos, and Ethos in Aristotle's Rhetoric*

Aristotle discusses artistic and non-artistic proofs (canon of *invention*) comprehensively in Books I and II of *Rhetoric*, and addresses the canons of *style*, *arrangement*, and *delivery* more briefly in Book III (see [Figure 1](#)). In the second chapter of Book I, he divides persuasive means into artistic and non-artistic proofs. Non-artistic proofs refer to forms of evidence that are utilized rather than invented by the speaker. These include testimony from free witnesses, evidence extracted from slaves under torture, written contracts, documents, and other forms of direct evidence, which Aristotle examines in detail in the final chapter of Book I. Artistic proofs, on the other hand, are considered "artistic" because they are created, discovered, or provided by the speaker. These proofs lie at the heart of Aristotle's rhetorical theory, as he ([Aristotle, 2007: 1.2.1](#)) defines rhetoric itself as the process of discovering and inventing means of persuasion.

The artistic means of persuasion are three in number: *ethos*<sup>5</sup>, *pathos*<sup>6</sup>, and *logos*<sup>7</sup>. This threefold division, as stated before, is at the basis of the first two books of the *Rhetoric*, in which rational arguments as well as *ethos* and *pathos* receive extensive treatment. *Ethos* is defined as the speaker's ability to establish a credible personal character that enhances the persuasiveness of their speech. *Pathos* refers to

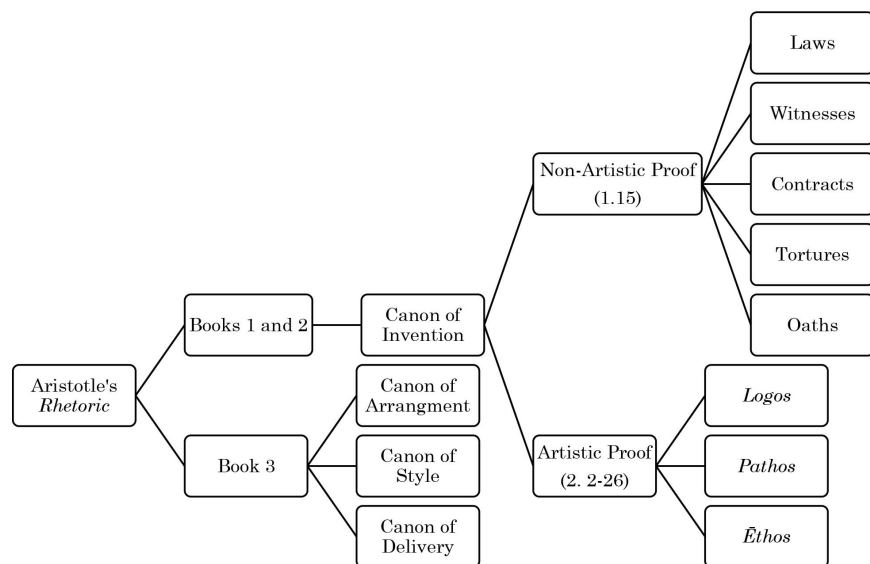
<sup>5</sup>Chamberlain (1984: pp. 99-101) explains that in early Homeric usage, *ethos* (ἦθος) referred to "haunts" or the habitual spaces where people and animals move. Over time, the term evolved to signify both the geographical location of a city and the characteristic traits its citizens developed as part of their civic identity. This semantic shift suggests that ancient writers understood the city as a "center of belonging" that shapes individual character through communal practices and education. For a more detailed linguistic and semantic analysis of *ethos* in pre-Aristotelian literature, as well as Aristotle's specific interpretation of the term, see [Woerther \(2007b\)](#).

<sup>6</sup>The Greek verb *páskhein* (πάσχειν) means "to undergo," "to experience," or "to suffer," and more broadly, "to be in a particular state or condition." Its cognate noun *pathos* (πάθος) retains this semantic range. For further discussion, see [Green \(2006: p. 574\)](#) and [Stavru \(2020: pp. 143-160\)](#).

<sup>7</sup>The Greek word *logos* (λόγος) originally referred to language, discourse, or the general use of words. Over time, its meaning expanded to encompass reasoning and rational thought. An earlier sense of *logos*—associated with counting, calculation, or providing an account—may have shaped its later philosophical interpretations, particularly in relation to logical discourse and structured argumentation. For further discussion, see [Wells \(2006: p. 475\)](#) and [Rico \(2024: pp. 17-43\)](#).

the speaker's power to evoke emotions in the audience. *Logos* represents the speaker's ability to demonstrate truth—or an apparent truth—through persuasive arguments.

The second book of *Rhetoric* is dedicated to the artistic means of persuasion. In Chapters 2 - 11, Aristotle analyzes a series of emotions; in Chapters 12 - 17, he examines various character types based on factors such as age, class, wealth, and power; and in Chapters 19 - 26, he discusses logical arguments, including paradigms, maxims, enthymemes, topics, fallacies, and refutations. All of these elements are presented pedagogically, with the expectation that their study will equip students with the skills to speak more effectively and develop a deeper understanding of rhetorical dynamics in various situations.



**Figure 1.** The structure of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

### 3. Theoretical Inconsistencies in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: Causes and Context

The sentiment that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is both difficult to read and challenging to interpret is shared by nearly all who have engaged with the text. Like other surviving Aristotelian treatises, *Rhetoric* is essentially a collection of lecture notes intended for instruction at his school, written in a highly compressed and nonliterary style. It is likely that during his lectures, Aristotle elaborated on the written material, clarified complex points, answered questions, and facilitated discussions. As a result, *Rhetoric* presents significant interpretative challenges. In particular, the text poses two general difficulties. One arises from an apparent inconsistency between Aristotle's initial discussion of rhetoric in the opening chapters and the treatment of the subject that follows. The second concerns inconsistencies in his use of some key rhetorical terms (see Grimaldi, 1972: pp. 59-61; Kennedy, 1994: pp. 53-55). Most of these inconsistencies appear to stem from the fact that *Rhetoric* was written over an extended period and only partially revised to form a

cohesive whole. This idea was first proposed in 1923 by Werner Jaeger, who argued that inconsistencies across several of Aristotle's treatises—not just *Rhetoric*—could be explained by different layers of composition, reflecting various stages of his intellectual development. Jaeger's thesis gained widespread influence, and in 1929, one of his students, Friedrich Solmsen, applied this multi-layered composition theory specifically to *Rhetoric* (Solmsen, 1929), identifying three distinct chronological layers within the text<sup>8</sup>.

Recognizing that *Rhetoric*, like most of Aristotle's treatises, was written over different periods, we should not impose an artificial consistency on the text. Aristotle likely never conducted a final revision of the entire work for publication (see Brandes, 1968: pp. 482-491; Wisse, 1989: p. 11; Kennedy, 1996: pp. 416-424). As a result, words—including technical terms—are not always used with consistent meaning, and ideas developed in one section are not always fully reconciled with discussions elsewhere in the text. Further complicating the matter is the diversity of Aristotle's intended audience. His school likely attracted a broad range of listeners, not only young men training to become philosophers but also aspiring politicians and individuals who needed to evaluate speeches in civic or legal contexts. Quintilian (1920: 3.1.14) notes that Aristotle began offering lectures on rhetoric in response to Isocrates' growing successes in the field, and that he delivered these lectures in the afternoon—unlike his more philosophical lectures on metaphysics and ethics, which took place in the morning. This suggests that his lectures on rhetoric were likely intended for a broader audience than those delivered in the morning. Different sections of *Rhetoric*, then, appear to be directed at different types of audiences. The opening chapters of Book I seem to address students who had already studied dialectic and were being introduced to rhetoric as a complementary discipline. Other sections—particularly those containing practical guidelines on speech composition—may reflect the audience of his early public lectures, likely students seeking to refine their rhetorical skills (see Kennedy, 1999: p. 78). This multiplicity and diversity of audiences adds yet another layer of complexity to *Rhetoric*. The inconsistencies within the text can thus be attributed not only to its composition over different periods but also to the varying audiences Aristotle may have addressed at different times<sup>9</sup>.

One of the most significant inconsistencies in *Rhetoric* is Aristotle's treatment of the emotional mode of persuasion, *pathos*, which is the central focus of this paper. As will be shown in the sections that follow, Aristotle's account of emo-

<sup>8</sup>Determining the exact dates of composition for different parts of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is likely impossible. Although Solmsen's analysis has been influential, it has also been met with criticism, even from scholars who accept the idea that Aristotle's work developed over time. Consequently, several alternative theories have been proposed about the different stages in which the *Rhetoric* was written and revised. For a critique of Solmsen's theory, see Barwick (1966: pp. 234-245); for a more detailed discussion, see Wisse (1989: pp. 10-11). For a detailed overview of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship on the dating and composition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, see Brandes (1989: pp. 1-7).

<sup>9</sup>Another factor that contributes to the difficulty of reading and interpreting the *Rhetoric* is its grounding in the legal and political culture of classical Athens, along with its frequent, often unexplained references to a wide corpus of Greek rhetoric and poetry, much of which has not survived.

tional appeals introduces notable theoretical tensions that call into question the internal coherence of his rhetorical system. These inconsistencies may, in part, reflect the gradual evolution of Aristotle's rhetorical theory and the progressive refinement of his thought over time. At the same time, they may also stem from the diverse pedagogical aims and intellectual contexts in which *Rhetoric* was developed, as well as from the different levels of conceptual rigor and practical applicability that each context demanded, in particular, the varying degree of emphasis each context placed on specific aspects of rhetoric according to the nature of the audience Aristotle sought to address<sup>10</sup>.

Before addressing these inconsistencies directly, it is important first to examine the broader historical development of *pathos* within the rhetorical tradition, as well as Aristotle's own conception of the term. Examining how *pathos* was treated by earlier thinkers and how Aristotle redefines or repositions it within his framework will provide essential context for understanding the contradictions in his theory.

## 4. *Pathos* in the Rhetorical Tradition

### 4.1. Pre-Aristotelian Theories of *Pathos*

Many of the concepts and insights presented by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* were groundbreaking at the time. One key distinction between his work and earlier rhetorical handbooks lies in the status he assigns to *ēthos* and *pathos*. Aristotle (2007: 1.1.3) himself notes that the rhetorical theory of his time placed considerable emphasis on *pathos*, or the arousal of emotions in the audience. However, it appears that pre-Aristotelian handbook writers primarily restricted *pathos* to the peroration, the concluding section of a speech (see Solmsen, 1938: pp. 391-392; Kennedy, 1971: pp. 63, 69; Wisse, 1989: pp. 14, 86). In practice, however, as Conley (1982: pp. 308-309) observes, orators did not limit their use of *pathos* to the epilogue alone (see also Woerther, 2007a: p. 66). Aristotle's major contribution to rhetorical theory was the promotion and elevation of *pathos* (alongside *ēthos*) from a mere element of the peroration—or, in the case of *ēthos*, an element of the prologue—to a fundamental artistic proof on par with *logos*. In his rhetorical framework, *ēthos* and *pathos* are not merely confined to the prologue and epilogue, as they were in earlier rhetorical handbooks (see Solmsen, 1938: p. 400; Wisse, 1989: p. 86). Instead, all three *pisteis*—*logos*, *ēthos*, and *pathos*—are to be distributed throughout the speech, allowing them to be employed in any part as needed and as the situation demands.

<sup>10</sup>According to Brunschwig (1994: pp. 57-96), the inconsistencies in the *Rhetoric* stem primarily from the nature of the work itself. As he argues (Brunschwig, 1994: pp. 88-89), the *Rhetoric* is not a static theoretical treatise that simply applies pre-established concepts from the *Topics* or *Posterior Analytics*. Rather, it is a work in progress—a text in which Aristotle actively redefines and reshapes his conceptual framework in the course of writing. The *Rhetoric*, in this view, bears visible traces of Aristotle's ongoing reorganization of material inherited from the *Topica* and *Analytica Posteriora*. The text reveals the process of theoretical evolution, and the reader can observe the development of Aristotle's thought as it unfolds. In this sense, Aristotle invites the reader to participate in his intellectual process—to reconstruct the reasoning steps by which he formulates and articulates various aspects of rhetorical theory. The *Rhetoric* thus becomes not only a study of persuasion but also an exercise in theorization, with the reader positioned as a collaborator who experiences the very conceptual tensions Aristotle is attempting to resolve.

One of the few Greeks who attempted to theorize the role of *pathos* in rhetoric before Aristotle was Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, who was renowned for delivering emotionally charged speeches and for his ability to both arouse and dispel anger (see Smith, 1927: pp. 280-285). Thrasymachus is believed to have written an entire treatise on *Appeals to Pity* and authored a rhetorical handbook containing model openings and closings for students to memorize and emulate (see Plato, 2005: 267c9; Aristotle, 2007: 3.1.7; Sprague, 1972: pp. 86-93; Green, 2006: p. 575). He is likely among the earliest figures to suggest that emotional appeals are most powerful at the beginning and end of speeches<sup>11</sup>. A similar perspective appears in *Rhetoric for Alexander* (Aristotle, 2011: 34, 1439b-1440b), a treatise likely written around the same time as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (see Kennedy, 1994: p. 50). This work also advocates for the use of *pathos* in the closing of a speech, and does not treat it as an independent means of persuasion. Despite these early Greek efforts to conceptualize *pathos* in theoretical terms, the prevailing approach remained largely practical, as numerous examples demonstrate how *pathos* was effectively utilized in speeches. While technical guidelines recommended placing *pathos* in the closing, in practice, nearly all rhetors—from Demosthenes to Dinarchus—felt free to employ emotional appeals throughout their speeches (see Green, 2006: p. 575; Woerther, 2007a: p. 66). This aligns with Aristotle's perspective, as his rhetorical framework does not impose restrictions on the placement of *pisteis* within a speech. Unlike earlier handbook writers who advised against using *pathos* within the body of a speech, Aristotle's system permits—and even favors—a distribution of *pisteis* determined by the specific demands of the rhetorical situation. If, as often happens in practice, it is effective to use *ēthos* or *pathos* in the body of a speech, this is entirely compatible with Aristotle's rhetorical framework.

#### 4.2. *Pathos* in Aristotle's Theory of Persuasion

Aristotle identifies *pathos* as one of the three principal sources of artistic proof, alongside *ēthos* and *logos*. He provides the most comprehensive analysis of *pathos* in the Greek world, examining its role in influencing human behavior through two key mechanisms—both intrinsically linked to the concepts of pleasure and pain (see Robinson, 1989: pp. 77-90; Frede, 1996: pp. 258-285; Dow, 2015: pp. 145-181) (Figure 2). First, *pathos* serves as a motivation for wrongdoing, encompassing strong emotions and desires—both pleasurable and painful—that can drive individuals to act in morally or legally questionable ways (see Aristotle, 2007: 1.10-12). Emotions such as anger, jealousy, or greed may provoke harmful actions, while love or ambition may lead individuals to defy societal or legal norms. Aristotle highlights how these powerful emotions can override reason and disrupt rational deliberation, making them a potent rhetorical tool when employed strate-

<sup>11</sup>According to Aristotle (2007: 3.1.7), Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, in his *Appeals to Pity*, emphasized the importance of effective—possibly emotionally charged—delivery. However, it remains uncertain whether his treatment of the subject focused exclusively on delivery, or whether it also encompassed aspects of emotional style and specific techniques for generating *pathos*; see Smith (1927: p. 285).

gically<sup>12</sup>. Second, *pathos* plays a crucial role in shaping judgment, influencing how individuals form opinions and make decisions (see Aristotle, 2007: 2.2-12). As Aristotle (2007: 1.2.5) notes, “we do not give the same judgment when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile.” A person’s emotional state—whether dominated by fear, pity, or joy—directly affects their perception of an issue, altering their stance based on whether they experience pleasure or pain (see Aristotle, 2007: 2.1.4, 2.2.8). This capacity of *pathos* to influence judgment underscores its importance in rhetoric (see Konstan, 2006: pp. 34-38; Copeland, 2021: pp. 160-167). By appealing to an audience’s emotions, orators can shift perspectives, sway opinions, and ultimately guide listeners toward a particular conclusion.

The dual function of *pathos*—as both a driver of action and a determinant of judgment—naturally extends to its most crucial role in rhetoric: shaping the audience’s emotional state. In *Rhetoric*, *pathos* is primarily associated with the effect it produces on the audience (see Aristotle, 2007: 1.2.3). Among the three modes of persuasion—*logos*, *ēthos*, and *pathos*—it is *pathos* that is specifically intended to impel an audience to act. This is because *pathos* operates by evoking emotional states or creating strong incentives for accepting a new opinion. By its nature, *pathos* is audience-centered, drawing its persuasive strength from its ability to deliberately elicit emotional responses. This explains why Aristotle devotes much of the second book of *Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 2007: 2.12-17) to analyzing how factors such as age and economic status influence an audience’s susceptibility to different emotions, motivations, and lines of argument.

In the earlier part of the second book (Aristotle, 2007: 2.2-11), Aristotle also explores the nature of individual emotions and the strategies for evoking them. According to Kennedy (2007: p. 113), these chapters contain “the earliest systematic discussion of human psychology”<sup>13</sup>. Solmsen (1941: p. 42) further notes that Aristotle’s innovation lies not only in granting *pathos* equal status alongside logical argumentation but also in his detailed analysis of various emotions in Chapters 2 - 11 and the conditions under which they may be either aroused or subdued<sup>14</sup>.

Aristotle’s systematic discussion of emotions in Chapters 2 - 11 is largely struc-

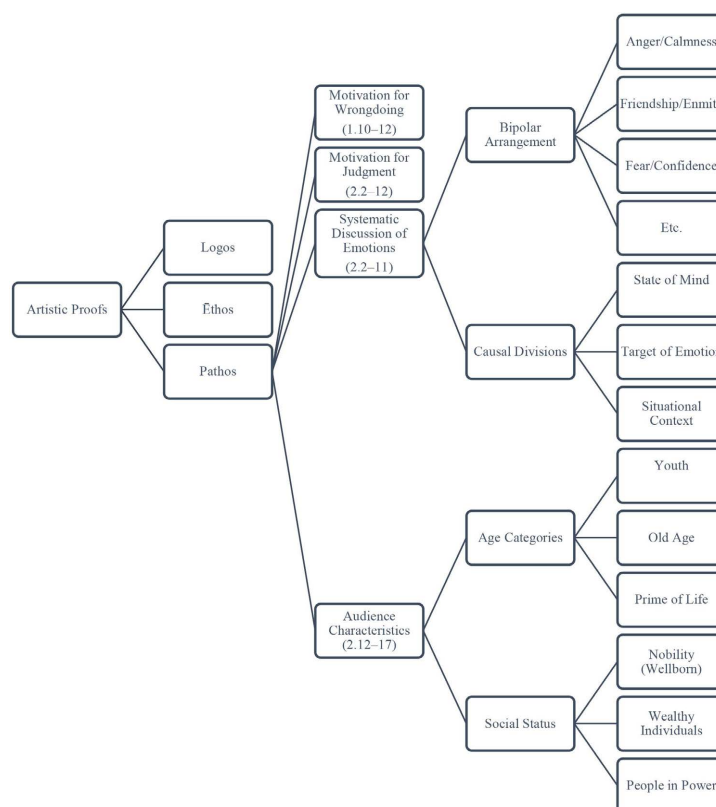
<sup>12</sup>The view that powerful emotions constitute harmful false judgments or irrational impulses aligns with the outlook of the ancient Stoics (late 4th century BCE to mid-3rd century CE), who regarded passions as distortions of reason. A similar treatment of emotion appears in Cicero’s *On Invention*, which reflects Stoic influence. This perspective is further echoed in Neoplatonism (3rd to 6th centuries CE), where the renunciation of emotion is seen as essential to the soul’s liberation from contingent attachments and its ascent toward divine perfection. For additional information on this subject, see Copeland (2021: pp. 7-9, 173-175).

<sup>13</sup>As Kennedy (1994: p. 60; 2007: p. 113) notes, the discussion of emotions and audience characteristics in Chapters 2 - 17 was likely part of an earlier, separate study, possibly unrelated to rhetoric, and was later incorporated into *Rhetoric* with only minor revisions.

<sup>14</sup>The account of emotions in *Rhetoric* Book II is distinctive in several respects, setting it apart both from other ancient theories of emotion and from Aristotle’s treatment of emotions in his other works. For further discussion, see Heidegger (2001: p. 178), who, in his interpretation of the passions in Book II, explicitly challenges the traditionally marginal status assigned to the *Rhetoric* within the Aristotelian corpus. Heidegger argues instead for its restoration to a central position in Aristotle’s philosophy—placing it on a level of significance comparable to the *Physics*. See also Gross (2005: p. 252) and Copeland (2021: pp. 160-168).

tured in bipolar terms—he categorizes emotions into opposing pairs, such as anger/calmness, friendship/enmity, and fear/confidence. Each emotion is treated as the opposite of another, meaning that one can suppress its counterpart. Grimaldi (1980: p. 49) explains that Aristotle contrasts emotions in this way “as an effort to see them more fully by viewing them from different perspectives.” However, this emphasis on oppositions sometimes results in imprecise pairings, leaving certain emotional relationships unclear<sup>15</sup>.

In addition, Aristotle analyzes each emotion in Chapters 2 - 11 through three key causal factors: 1) the state of mind of the person experiencing the emotion, 2) the individuals toward whom the emotion is directed, and 3) the circumstances or situations that give rise to it. His discussion, therefore, focuses on who can experience a particular emotion, toward whom it may be directed, and the mental conditions that give rise to it. Under these three categories, Aristotle frequently provides general examples and occasionally supports them with maxims or literary references, particularly from Homer. As a result, Book II of *Rhetoric* offers a systematic, handbook-style guide to the nature, causes, and characteristics of human emotions, along with rhetorical strategies for eliciting them. The goal is to equip students of rhetoric with techniques for appealing to an audience’s emotions, since an orator who aims to influence emotions must first understand their nature and the conditions under which they can be triggered or subdued.



**Figure 2.** *Pathos* in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*.

<sup>15</sup>For example, envy is paired with an unnamed emotion; see Aristotle (2007: 2.10-11).

### 4.3. *Pathos* in Post-Aristotelian Rhetoric

As previously noted, Aristotle considered *pathos* an artistic proof, essential for effective persuasion. His analysis of emotions treats them as core drivers of communication, elevating them to a theorized domain of rhetorical inquiry. Through this, Aristotle established a doctrinal foundation for understanding emotion as integral to rhetorical proof. After Aristotle, however, rhetoric evolved into a diverse and dynamic system, rather than remaining a unified doctrine. Thus, the role of emotion within rhetorical theory changed. Later sources moved away from Aristotle's focus on emotional reasoning toward stylistic strategies for emotional evocation (see Copeland, 2021: pp. 9-10). Emotion became variably situated—sometimes as part of invention, other times as a property of style, and often confined to the peroration, though occasionally permitted throughout a speech (see Woods, 2015: pp. 253-265).

While some of Aristotle's works were more or less continually known from his lifetime onward, others, including the *Rhetoric*, were rediscovered in different stages long after his death. Students of the Peripatetic School, especially Theophrastus—his successor as head of the school—continued Aristotle's rhetorical studies and adapted some of his ideas. However, Theophrastus' writings on rhetoric have not survived (see Kennedy, 1994: pp. 84-87). Aristotle's personal library, which likely included unpublished works such as the *Rhetoric*, was inherited by Theophrastus and later moved by his student Neleus to Scepsis in Asia Minor (see Kennedy, 2007: pp. 305-309). There, the scrolls remained with Neleus's family, hidden and deteriorating, until around 100 BCE, when they were sold to the bibliophile and librarian Apellicon of Teos. He brought them to Athens and produced faulty copies for circulation. The original scrolls were later transported to Rome around 83 BCE, where the Greek grammarian Tyrannion edited them and Andronicus of Rhodes published them (see Wisse, 1989: p. 153; Guthrie, 1981: p. 64; Kennedy, 2007: pp. 305-309). This may have marked the point at which the *Rhetoric* became available. Although some copies may have existed in private hands, there is no firm evidence that the *Rhetoric* was read between the early third century and its publication in Rome. This is generally confirmed by the absence of references to the work prior to Cicero's *On the Orator*, written in 55 BCE (see Kennedy, 1994: p. 63).

This inconsistent transmission had significant implications for the *Rhetoric's* reception. In the two centuries between Theophrastus' death and Andronicus's edition, developments in rhetorical theory had progressed to the point that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* seemed outdated upon its reappearance in Rome and was excluded from mainstream rhetorical curricula (see Brandes, 1989: pp. 4-6). The system that emerged instead became foundational for both Greek and Latin rhetoric through late antiquity and into the Middle Ages. The most innovative elements of Aristotle's rhetorical theory—such as the enthymeme, the system of topics as general strategies of persuasion, and the three artistic proofs (ethical, emotional, and ra-

tional appeals)—did not survive intact, although some elements and aspects may have persisted through oral transmission (see Copeland, 2021: pp. 169-171). While the terminology of *logos*, *ēthos*, and *pathos* entered the rhetorical lexicon of later writers, the precise understanding of these terms evolved over time and across cultures.

Current scholarship suggests that the Aristotelian notions of *ēthos* and *pathos* were absent from post-Aristotelian handbooks until the mid-first century BCE (see Wisse, 1989: pp. 80, 103). Among later writers, only Cicero, in his mature treatise *On the Orator* (Cicero, 1942: 2.27.115), appears to revisit Aristotle's framework, dividing invention into *logos*, *ēthos*, and *pathos*, and once again placing *ēthos* and *pathos* on equal footing with rational argumentation (see also Solmsen, 1938; Solmsen, 1941; Wisse, 1989: p. 2). In *On the Orator*, Cicero (1942: 2.44.185-2.53.214), through the character Antonius, describes emotions as social behaviors that speakers may use to arouse or calm their audiences—especially in legal contexts—echoing Aristotle's idea of *pathos*. Aside from this work, which revives Aristotle's three modes of persuasion in a form closely resembling their original structure, other Greek and Latin writers—though they frequently mention Aristotle and imply familiarity with his treatise—exhibit little direct influence from the *Rhetoric* (see Kennedy, 1999: p. 93). This is also true of Cicero's earlier treatise, *On Invention*, where his references to Aristotle suggest only second-hand knowledge of the *Rhetoric* and possibly no direct influence (see Copeland, 2021: p. 170). Even so, emotion is still treated as part of a system of invention—a platform for building proof (see Cicero, 1949: 1.25.36). Like Aristotle, Cicero in *On Invention* assigns a central role to emotion in rhetorical proof, treating it as a stable component of invention. He also provides a set of rules for incorporating emotional appeals in the peroration, reserving emotional persuasion for that final section, where it was traditionally considered most appropriate (Cicero, 1949: 1.53.100-1.56.109; see also Woods, 2015: pp. 253-265). Here, as in pre-Aristotelian rhetoric, *pathos* is tied to the epilogue, where emotions—especially pity—are to be aroused.

The anonymous *Rhetoric for Herennius*, written around the same time as *On Invention* (86-82 BCE), shows no direct or indirect evidence of familiarity with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Attributed to Cicero until the fifteenth century, it treats emotional appeals in the peroration in a manner that overlaps with *On Invention* (Cicero, 1954: 2.48), although in less detail. The *Rhetoric for Herennius* (Cicero, 1954: 4.7.11-12) also emphasizes the emotional power of figurative language, presenting vivid, emotive examples to illustrate and explain rhetorical figures. Thus, in *Rhetoric for Herennius*, *pathos* becomes associated with the expressive dimension of emotional style. Rather than serving as an independent mode of persuasion, emotional appeal is situated within the realm of style, functioning as a means of enhancing delivery and impact rather than as a core persuasive strategy.

In Quintilian's *The Orator's Education*, there is general awareness of Aristotle's

*Rhetoric*, but it did not significantly inform his rhetorical framework (see Wisse, 1989: p. 59; Kennedy, 1994: p. 63; Fortenbaugh, 1994: pp. 183-191). Although Quintilian may have consulted the *Rhetoric*, it did not lead him to substantially revise his views, and it had minimal influence on his teaching. In his work, the distinction between *pathos* and *ēthos* disappears; he treats them as alternative emotional modes for the orator to employ—one calm and composed, the other excited and agitated. He (Quintilian, 1920: 6.2.8-20; see also Green, 2006: p. 580) classifies all emotions into two categories, using the Greek term *pathos* for intense emotional disturbances and *ēthos* for gentler emotions that cultivate goodwill. Also, like Cicero, Quintilian reserves passionate appeals for the peroration, where they are deemed most appropriate.

Cicero's *On the Orator* and *Quintilian's Orator's Education* were not influential sources for rhetorical theory in the Middle Ages and thus failed to introduce Aristotelian notions into the period (see Copeland, 2021: pp. 4-6). Among classical treatises, only *On Invention* and *Rhetoric for Herennius* provided the Latin Middle Ages with a principal understanding of rhetoric. *On Invention* remained widely known and circulated throughout late antiquity and into the Middle Ages and was among the most frequently copied Latin texts by the twelfth century (see Copeland, 2021: p. 4). This treatise shaped medieval conceptions of rhetoric and influenced understandings of the place of emotion within it. However, Cicero's treatment of emotion as an inventional topic receded as opportunities for political and judicial oratory declined, and rhetoric came to serve more bureaucratic and procedural functions (see Marrou, 1965: pp. 412-450; Leff, 1982: pp. 71-78; Copeland, 2021: p. 55). Consequently, the role of emotion as a source of rhetorical proof diminished, and its inventional function was overshadowed by its function in stylistic theory. What was lost was the conceptual language for treating emotion as a social behavior essential to rhetorical persuasion.

With the marginalization of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the psychological dimension of rhetorical persuasion also faded. As a result, the theoretical link between emotion and proof—so central to Aristotle's system—was significantly weakened, and the function of arousing emotion became a matter of style. From the sixth to the fifteenth centuries, rhetorical handbooks emphasized the stirring of emotions through vivid language and powerful prose rhythms, where stylistic choices targeted emotional response (see Webb, 1997: pp. 112-127; Copeland, 2021: pp. 47-57). The Aristotelian tradition, therefore, was not a continuous one, and Aristotle's tripartite division of proofs (*pisteis*) rarely found its way into later rhetorical systems<sup>16</sup>. Even in the thirteenth century, when Aristotle's *Rhetoric* re-entered the Western intellectual horizon through Latin translations, it did not significantly alter the dominant Roman rhetorical tradition, nor did it find a place in practical rhetorical

<sup>16</sup>Apsines of Gadara, Martianus Capella, and the Anonymous Seguerianus are among the few exceptional figures who extensively incorporate Aristotelian concepts after Cicero. For further discussion, see Wisse (1989: p. 314) and Kennedy (1994: pp. 63, 224).

instruction (see Kennedy, 1994: p. 63; Copeland, 2021: pp. 6-7). As important and influential to rhetorical thought as it later became, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* remained, at best, a marginal presence in Western intellectual history until the Renaissance. Throughout this entire period, *pathos* remained largely overlooked as an independent proof. Only in the eighteenth century did emotional appeal regain theoretical prominence—particularly through figures, such as George Campbell (Campbell, 1990), who revisited and reexamined the role of emotion in persuasion.

## 5. Inconsistencies in Aristotle's Treatment of *Pathos*

### 5.1. Apparent Opposition to Emotional Appeals in Book I

As stated earlier, there was little theoretical discussion on *pathos* in rhetoric before Aristotle, and by his time, emotional appeals were likely already viewed as a form of manipulation (see Plato, 2005: 261a-b). This may explain why Aristotle begins *Rhetoric* by criticizing earlier handbook writers for their focus on *pathos*, arguing that they placed too much emphasis on emotional influence while neglecting other key aspects of persuasion, particularly the enthymeme (see Aristotle, 2007: 1.1.3). He explicitly condemns attempts to sway judges through emotions, asserting that it is improper to “wrap the jury by leading them into anger or envy or pity” (Aristotle, 2007: 1.1.5). Aristotle considers such appeals mere accessories rather than fundamental components of rhetorical proof. At least in the first chapter of *Rhetoric*, he appears to define rhetoric as a process of guiding an audience toward a particular recognition, stance, or course of action, primarily through the construction and deployment of enthymemes. In this framework, enthymemes constitute the essence and core of effective persuasion, while all else—including *pathos*—is, as Aristotle states, “accessory to enthymeming” (Aristotle: 2007, 1.1.3). This suggests that, at least in this chapter, Aristotle does not regard *pathos* as an essential component of rhetorical art, which presents an apparent contradiction with his concept of the three artistic proofs. In other words, Aristotle's strong opposition to persuasion achieved through emotional manipulation, as well as his critique of earlier rhetorical theories, stands in tension with his extensive treatment of *pathos* in Book II. There, he elevates *pathos* to the same level as *logos* and *ēthos* as a fundamental means of persuasion and devotes a significant portion of the book to specific emotions, dedicating individual chapters to anger, friendliness, fear, shame, kindness, pity, indignation, envy, emulation, and their opposites. The contradiction is evident and likely stems from the fact that *Rhetoric* underwent multiple revisions as Aristotle developed or changed his views (see Kennedy, 1971: p. 82). Additionally, the work lacks a final revision, which explains the gaps and inconsistencies (see Section 3). Thus, what Aristotle says about *pathos* in 1.1.3 may reflect an earlier stage of his thought (see Barwick, 1922: pp. 1-62; Solmsen, 1929: pp. 226-229; Wisse, 1989: p. 74), before he had fully developed his rhetorical theory.

It is clear that the rejection of *pathos* in the first chapter of *Rhetoric* cannot

be reconciled with its later recognition as an essential persuasive appeal, on par with rational arguments, in the rest of the work. However, scholars have attempted to explain this apparent contradiction in various ways. For instance, Braet (1992: p. 317) argues that Aristotle explicitly states in 2.1.2 that *ēthos* and *pathos* must be treated equally with *logos* because the object of rhetoric is judgment. According to him, Aristotle's philosophy holds that judgment does not occur on rational grounds alone. Instead, choices are determined not only by reason but also by evoking the emotions of the decision-maker. Consequently, a speaker addressing a judge cannot rely solely on logical argumentation, even in an ideal setting with a rational judge. Similarly, Corbett and Connors (1999: p. 18) observe that while Aristotle may have wished for rhetoric to rely exclusively on rational appeals, he was pragmatic enough to recognize that individuals are often persuaded by their emotions, and he never denies that *pathos* is successful in practice. If rhetoric is, as Aristotle defines it, "the art of discovering all the available means of persuasion," then, as Corbett and Connors (1999) argue, he had to include an examination of emotional appeals in his rhetorical theory.

Another notable attempt to explain the contradiction between the first chapter of the *Rhetoric* and the rest of the work is Brunschwig's interpretation, which views the *Rhetoric* not as a fixed system but as a work in motion (see footnote 10). According to Brunschwig (1994: pp. 88-90), the *Rhetoric* is a text in which Aristotle is continually reworking and redefining concepts inherited from his earlier logical works, and he is gradually expanding the definition of *pistis* from logical reasoning (*logos*) to include *ēthos* and *pathos*. He suggests that if we understand the *Rhetoric* from this perspective—as a work in progress rather than a comprehensive and final system—then there is no contradiction between Book I, Chapter 1, where Aristotle offers a more purely intellectual and logical conception of rhetoric, which implies identifying technical proofs with enthymemes, and the rest of the work, where he introduces *ēthos* and *pathos* as technical proofs (see also Woerther, 2007a: p. 65)<sup>17</sup>. It remains to be said, however, that despite these scholarly attempts to justify Aristotle's initial downplay of *pathos* and his later inclusion of it among the means of persuasion, the fact remains that the first chapter of the *Rhetoric* explicitly rejects emotional appeals as unfair and irrelevant. Efforts to reconcile this rejection with his later recognition of *pathos* as a legitimate rhetorical tool find no support—at least within the text of the first chapter.

## 5.2. The Ambiguous Relationship between *Pathos* and the Enthymeme

Another major inconsistency in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* lies in the varying degree of

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<sup>17</sup>Brunschwig (1994: p. 89) also provides further evidence highlighting the importance of *ēthos* and *pathos* in Aristotle's view, as reflected in the text of the *Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 2007: 1.2.4-5).

emphasis he places on the enthymeme<sup>18</sup> as the basis of deductive proof and its relationship to the emotional mode of persuasion (*pathos*). It remains unclear whether, in Aristotle's view, the enthymeme can incorporate *pathos* as a legitimate component of rhetorical argumentation or whether the two remain categorically distinct. In general, Aristotle appears to treat the enthymeme as separate from *pathos*, confining it to logical reasoning and purely rational discourse. As noted in Section 5.1, in the opening chapter of *Rhetoric*, he explicitly acknowledges only logical proof, implying that the enthymeme serves no function beyond rational argumentation. In chapter 2, he further reinforces this by closely associating rational proof (*logos*) with the enthymeme, stating: "And all [speakers] produce logical persuasion by means of paradigms or enthymemes and by nothing other than these" (Aristotle, 2007: 1.2.8)<sup>19</sup>. This suggests that, for Aristotle, the true art of rhetoric is primarily concerned with rational demonstration, and that the only proper proof in rhetorical discourse is the enthymeme, which he calls "the body of persuasion" (Aristotle, 2007: 1.1.3). Other forms of proof, such as appeals to character (*ēthos*) or emotion (*pathos*), are considered indirect and merely supplementary, and function independently of enthymematic reasoning, either through direct statements that are not part of the argument or indirectly through style and delivery (see Cope, 1867: pp. 99-100; Solmsen, 1941: p. 39; Kennedy, 1971: pp. 95-99; Sprute, 1982: pp. 58-67; Woerther, 2007a: p. 66). This may explain why Cope (1877: p. 6) concludes that, for Aristotle, *logos* is theoretically the only true and proper method of persuasion.

Further support for this strict separation between the enthymeme and *pathos* is found in Book III of *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle explicitly warns against combining logical reasoning with emotional appeals.

<sup>18</sup>In enthymemes (rhetorical syllogisms), a speaker derives specific conclusions from general affirmative or negative statements, moving from general premises to a conclusion (as in the syllogism of logic). Enthymemes often appear as compound sentences, where clauses are joined by coordinating conjunctions such as "for" or "so," or linked logically by conjunctive adverbs like "therefore," "hence," or "consequently." They may also take the form of complex sentences, with clauses connected by subordinating conjunctions such as "since" or "because" (see Corbett & Connors, 1999: p. 57). As Aristotle (2007: 1.2.13, 2.22.3) notes, enthymemes in actual speeches are rarely expressed in their full logical form. Instead, a speaker may omit a premise so commonly accepted by the audience that stating it explicitly becomes unnecessary, creating a shortened form of deductive reasoning (a truncated syllogism) based on implied knowledge or shared assumptions (Aristotle, 2007: 1.2.13). In some cases, even the conclusion alone is stated, particularly when the orator can rely on a strong sense of unity and agreement among the audience. For this reason, Aristotle (2007: 1.2.13) emphasizes the importance of understanding the commonly held beliefs of the audience (*endoxa*), as these frequently serve as the unstated premises of enthymemes. Such premises are broadly accepted by the audience and generally assumed to be true (see also Dufour, 1931: p. 20). For more detailed discussions on the notion of enthymeme in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, refer to: Sprute (1975; 1981; 1982), Conley (1984), Burnyeat (1994), Rapp (2002), Woerther (2007a), and Copeland (2019; 2021: pp. 165-169). It is worth noting that in Isocrates' *Panathenaicus*, the word enthymeme is used to describe complex, elaborately structured sentences (Isocrates, 2000b), while in the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (Aristotle, 2011, 1430a23 ff.), it referred to a rhetorical argument based on contrast or opposition. Aristotle adapted the term and narrowed its meaning to a specific type of argument.

<sup>19</sup>Although the enthymeme is not the only form of rhetorical proof—Aristotle also discusses *paradeigmata* (examples)—he argues that the enthymeme is more persuasive and more highly valued by audiences (Aristotle, 2007: 1.2.12).

“And when you would create *pathos*, do not speak *enthymemes*, for the *enthymeme* either ‘knocks out’ the *pathos* or is spoken in vain. (Simultaneous movements knock out each other and either fade away or make each other weak)” (Aristotle, 2007: 3.17.8).

Here, Aristotle clearly cautions against using enthymemes when the primary goal is to evoke emotion, suggesting that logic and emotion function separately, and that the enthymeme is ineffective for emotional persuasion. Based on such passages, many scholars have concluded that *pathos* and the enthymeme cannot be merged in Aristotle’s theory, and that emotional appeals are non-argumentative by nature (see Cope, 1867; Süß, 1910; Lossau, 1981; Sprute, 1982; Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1987). According to this interpretation, only *logos* is properly enthymematic, while *pathos* operates outside the realm of rational argumentation, through means such as reported speech, maxims, testimonies, or narratives that prompt the audience to experience certain emotions primarily by the effect of imitation<sup>20</sup>.

Despite textual evidence that seems to support the mutual exclusivity of enthymeme and *pathos*, some scholars argue that Aristotle may have allowed for the integration of emotional appeals within enthymematic reasoning (see Lunsford & Ede, 1984: p. 44; Walker, 1994: p. 60). Although Aristotle explicitly states that rational arguments take the form of the enthymeme, he does not explicitly deny that *pathos* can also be structured enthymematically. In fact, nowhere in *Rhetoric* does he definitively state whether emotional appeals must take the form of narratives or may also be expressed within enthymemes (see Barwick, 1922: pp. 18-22; Wisse, 1989: p. 26). Moreover, while Aristotle closely associates *logos* with the enthymeme, he never, throughout the entirety of *Rhetoric*, substitutes *logos* for enthymeme or uses the two terms interchangeably. This distinction suggests that, although the two are intimately connected, they are not identical (see Fortenbaugh, 1975: pp. 17-18; Wisse, 1989: p. 66; Braet, 1992: p. 314). Building on this ambiguity, several modern scholars—including Barwick (1922), Grimaldi (1972), Conley (1982), and Copeland (2021)—argue that *pathos* can, in fact, be expressed through enthymematic form. Solmsen (1938: p. 393) and Grimaldi (1980: p. 350) in particular contend that Aristotle does not reject *pathos* in 1.1.3 but rather criticizes earlier handbook writers for failing to consider how *pathos* might interact with logical reasoning. According to this view, Aristotle saw the emotions discussed in Book II not as independent rhetorical strategies to establish persuasion, but as resources for constructing emotionally charged premises that can be incorporated into enthymematic reasoning; in other words, as means by which to create logical arguments (see Grimaldi, 1972: pp. 147-151; Conley, 1982: p. 305; Braet, 1992: p. 314; Meyer, 2005:

<sup>20</sup>For examples of how *pathos* is employed in a non-enthymematic form—such as through the orator’s display of personal emotion, the narration of emotional experiences, or the portrayal of particular behaviors and attitudes—see Woerther (2007a: p. 66), where she cites passages from Demosthenes’ *On the Crown* and *Against Meidias*.

pp. 85-90; Kennedy, 2007: p. 114; Green, 2006: p. 585). A key passage cited in support of this interpretation (see, e.g., Woerther, 2007a: p. 60) is Aristotle's own statement at the end of Chapter 1 in Book II, where he notes that his discussion on emotions serves as a series of propositions or premises: "Just as we have drawn up a list of propositions [*protaseis*] on the subjects discussed earlier, let us do so about these and let us analyze them in the way mentioned" (Aristotle, 2007: 2.1.8). Another supporting argument, as Copeland (2021: p. 160) observes, is that Aristotle's treatment of emotions precedes the detailed exemplifications of enthymemes in Book II, Chapter 22—precisely in order to lay the groundwork for them and to provide the material on specific subjects needed for constructing enthymemes (see also Walker, 2000: p. 175). From this perspective, the emotions discussed in Book II function not as an alternative to *logos*, but rather serve as a strategic component for argumentation, offering rhetoricians a repertoire of emotional cues that can be embedded within logical structures to enhance and reinforce persuasive impact (Conley, 1982: p. 304; Woerther, 2007a: pp. 55-68; Copeland, 2021: pp. 158-168)<sup>21</sup>. Aristotle's treatment of emotions in Book II, Chapters 2-11, therefore, provides a catalog of premises from which the speaker may directly draw and integrate into rhetorical argumentation to construct enthymemes. In this light, Aristotle approves of using emotion to shape an audience's attitudes, but only when it is integrated and employed in conjunction with *logos*. Emotions, in this sense, serve as raw material—the very matter of proof—to be employed through the rhetorical device of the enthymeme.

In support of this view, Grimaldi advances the argument further by asserting that all three modes of persuasion—*ēthos*, *pathos*, and *logos*—can be understood as dimensions of the enthymeme (Grimaldi, 1972: pp. 59-61; Grimaldi, 1980: p. 350). Rather than viewing them as discrete elements, he sees them as interwoven components of a unified rhetorical strategy, dynamically interconnected and functioning as inseparable strands in rhetorical persuasion. On this account, the enthymeme is not merely a logical form but a dynamic structure capable of carrying the three persuasive appeals as its materials. The enthymeme becomes the organic and mechanical necessity through which all other aspects of persuasion can operate. It ceases to be merely the instrument of reason or rational proof, as commentators have traditionally interpreted it by distinguishing it from *ēthos* and *pathos*. On the contrary, in this perspective, the enthymeme becomes the very vehicle of speech—what Grimaldi (1980: p. 352) calls "something more than an act of reason, a vehicle to carry persuasion" (see also Grimaldi, 1972: pp. 16-17). According to this interpretation, *Rhetoric* should be read as allowing all three persuasive ap-

<sup>21</sup>According to Wisse (1989: p. 22), in only four of the fifteen emotions discussed in Book II does Aristotle's instruction suggest a combination of enthymeme and *pathos*; in the remaining cases, he appears to imply that emotions may be conveyed through other, non-enthymematic means. This suggests that Aristotle likely regarded both enthymematic and non-enthymematic expressions of *pathos* as valid within his rhetorical theory.

peals to take an enthymematic form, with the enthymeme ideally uniting all three elements<sup>22</sup>. The appeals are not separate aspects of discourse but are embedded within the enthymeme, functioning as mutually reinforcing elements in the act of persuasion (see Solmsen, 1938: p. 393; Grimaldi, 1972: p. 26; Copeland, 2021: p. 158). Thus, *pathos* is not opposed to rational proof and is not an alternative to *logos*, but a strategic component of argumentation—capable of being structured enthymematically and fundamentally connected to rational discourse (see Mirhady, 2007: pp. 56-61)<sup>23</sup>.

### 5.3. Inconsistencies in the Tripartite Framework of Emotional Analysis in Book II

As discussed earlier, Aristotle's treatment of individual emotions in *Rhetoric* Book II, Chapters 2 - 11, is structured according to a tripartite framework. Here, Aristotle offers a detailed and concrete typology of fourteen emotions. Each emotion is to be examined under three distinct headings: 1) the mental state or disposition of the person experiencing the emotion, 2) the objects or persons toward whom the emotion is directed, and 3) the circumstances or causes that give rise to the emotion. This tripartite schema is intended to clarify not only who is susceptible to a given emotion, but also toward whom the emotion is typically directed, and under what conditions it arises. Aristotle explicitly states that a thorough understanding of the emotions involves answering these three core questions. In his own words:

There is a need to divide the discussion of each [emotion] into three headings. I mean, for example, in speaking of anger, what is their state of mind when people are angry, against whom are they usually angry, and for what sort of reasons; for if we understood one or two of these but not all, it would be impossible to create anger [in someone]. Similarly, in speaking of the other emotions (Aristotle, 2007: 2.1.8).

This methodological plan—the canonical tripartite structure—is, according to Aristotle's own declaration, intended to underpin his analysis of the emotions throughout Book II. He insists that examining all three components is essential for effective emotional persuasion: the internal state, the object, and the cause. Omitting any one of these elements, therefore, undermines the orator's ability to

<sup>22</sup>For criticism of Grimaldi's thesis that assigns a primary role to logical argumentation and assumes that *ēthos*, *pathos* and *logos* provide the source material that must then be organized and shaped through the enthymeme, refer to Wisse (1989: pp. 24-25); Brunschwig (1994: pp. 57-96); and Woerther (2007a: p. 64).

<sup>23</sup>Among scholars examining the relationship between *ēthos*, *pathos*, and the enthymeme, a third group proposes a more moderate approach. These scholars argue that *pathos* may be incorporated into the structure of the enthymeme, while also acknowledging that it can be conveyed and expressed through other rhetorical means. In other words, they adopt an intermediary position between the traditional view—which maintains a strict separation between logical proof and ethical or emotional appeals—and the more modern view, which treats all three artistic proofs as structurally integrated within the enthymeme. For representative discussions of this position, see Wisse (1989), Braet (1992), Brunschwig (1994), and Woerther (2007a).

fully understand or successfully arouse the intended emotion in an audience. However, despite Aristotle's commitment to this analytical framework, a closer examination reveals inconsistencies in its application across different chapters. While many of the emotions—such as anger, fear, and pity—are analyzed more or less systematically using the tripartite model, the analysis of certain emotions deviates from it. For example, as [Woerther \(2007a: pp. 56-57\)](#) observes, the chapter on calmness fails to discuss the proper object of the emotion. Aristotle omits the analysis of the kinds of people toward whom calmness is typically directed. Similarly, in the chapter on confidence, he does not clearly outline the triggers of the emotion or the persons who inspire it, leaving out a key component of the tripartite structure. More strikingly, in his treatment of kindness, Aristotle appears to abandon the tripartite model altogether. [Grimaldi \(1988: p. 128\)](#) notes that this chapter is “the most loosely constructed of all” in Book II and diverges from the descriptive logic evident in the other chapters. Rather than analyzing the emotion in terms of internal disposition, object, and cause, Aristotle focuses instead on what constitutes kindness, defining it in terms of the beneficent actions of the person experiencing the emotion. This shifts the analytical focus to the recipients of kindness (i.e., those in need) rather than to the mental or situational dimensions and aspects typically analyzed in the other chapters. As Grimaldi explains:

“It defines χάρις (*kharis*: kindness) in terms of the actions of the person experiencing the emotion; this is unique among all the definitions of the emotions. Then, unlike the other chapters, it analyzes these actions in terms of those who would be the recipients of the emotion. Even in this last analysis, which might seem to be a development of the division πρὸς τινας (those toward whom men feel kindness), Aristotle occupies himself only with recipients who exemplify certain specific kinds of need which illustrate the definition. He does not assume the definition and present us with general classes which exemplify the kind of people toward whom the emotion is felt.” ([Grimaldi, 1988: p. 128](#))

[Kennedy \(2007: p. 137\)](#) similarly notes the deviation:

This short chapter differs from others on the emotions in that it focuses on what *kharis* (kindness) is, neglecting the state of mind of those who exhibit it, and in that its concluding paragraph deals with how to make an opponent seem to lack kindness.

Thus, although Aristotle was largely faithful to his proposed analytical structure, his execution is at times inconsistent, and in several cases, one or more components of the tripartite model are missing. This inconsistency may be explained in several ways. One could argue that, in Aristotle's view, not all emotions lend themselves equally well to the tripartite framework. Certain emotions—perhaps due to their conceptual ambiguity or complex modes of social expression—may have resisted systematic categorization. Alternatively, Aristotle may have considered some aspects of particular emotions to be either self-evident or less essential for rhetorical practice and, therefore, omitted them.

Also, as noted earlier (see Section 3), it is possible that these inconsistencies stem from the compositional history of the *Rhetoric* itself. Since the work likely developed over an extended period and may not have been subjected to thorough revision before dissemination, some structural irregularities were perhaps never corrected.

#### 5.4. Structural Ambiguity in Aristotle's Account of Audience Character in Chapters 12 - 17

Another notable inconsistency related to *pathos* arises in the six short chapters (12 - 17) of *Rhetoric* Book II, where Aristotle examines the defining traits and dispositions of various demographic groups. These chapters address the characteristics of different age groups—the young, the old, and those in the prime of life—as well as various social classes, including the high-born, the wealthy, and the powerful. Aristotle outlines how members of each group tend to think, feel, and behave, offering a psychological profile of their typical emotional responses and cognitive tendencies (Aristotle, 2007: 2.12-17). The underlying assumption is that understanding these patterns enables the orator to tailor persuasive appeals more effectively to specific audiences. However, the precise rhetorical function of these chapters remains unclear, and their inclusion in the *Rhetoric* seems to serve more as a pragmatic aid to the orator than as a fully integrated component of Aristotle's theoretical framework. Rather than expanding the conceptual foundations of rhetorical theory, these chapters appear to provide practical guidance—inserted to enhance rhetorical effectiveness—without being systematically connected to the larger tripartite structure of *ēthos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

Structurally, Chapters 12 - 17 appear somewhat disconnected from the surrounding material, as nothing in the preceding sections of Book II suggests that an audience-focused discussion is about to follow. Consequently, it is uncertain whether these chapters should be classified under *pathos*, given their focus on emotional predispositions, or under *ēthos*, due to their treatment of character. This structural and conceptual ambiguity has given rise to a long-standing scholarly debate, and scholars have been divided on how these chapters should be interpreted.

One interpretive tradition—dominant in the nineteenth century and still occasionally upheld—argues that these chapters fall under the category of *ēthos* (Barwick, 1922; Kroll, 1940; Solmsen, 1941: p. 42). According to this view, an orator must understand the character of the audience in order to establish personal credibility and appear ethically persuasive. By demonstrating insight into the audience's disposition, the speaker enhances their own character in the eyes of the listeners, thereby reinforcing and strengthening *ēthos*. However, this interpretation is not without problems. As Wisse (1989: p. 37) points out, *ēthos* in Aristotelian rhetoric refers specifically to the character of the speaker and how their trustworthiness is conveyed through the speech itself. In contrast, Chapters 12 - 17 focus not on the speaker's credibility but on the psychological and emotional

tendencies of the audience. From this perspective, the material seems more directly related to *pathos*, since it equips the orator to manipulate or activate the emotions of the audience more effectively. Gill (1984: p. 153) similarly emphasizes that these chapters are less concerned with the speaker's moral character and more with the emotional dynamics of the audience. Wisse (1989: p. 38) ultimately concludes that both interpretive approaches hold merit. While the chapters primarily concern the emotional receptivity of the audience—a concern aligned with *pathos*—they also reflect an understanding of audience psychology that can indirectly inform the speaker's projection of *ēthos*. For this reason, Wisse proposes that the chapters be considered an appendix to both *ēthos* and *pathos*, recognizing their hybrid status within Aristotle's rhetorical framework. Kennedy (1999: p. 89) likewise acknowledges this dual relevance, suggesting that these chapters resist easy categorization and should be interpreted in light of their practical utility rather than forced into rigid theoretical boundaries. They reflect Aristotle's pragmatic orientation in the *Rhetoric*—a concern with what actually works in persuasion, even when such material does not fit neatly within his formal divisions.

## 6. Conclusion

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* exhibits a number of internal inconsistencies, many of which can be attributed to the nature of the work as a compilation of lecture notes written over the span of several decades. As a result, the terminology used in one part of the treatise is not always consistent with that used elsewhere, leading to conceptual mismatches and ambiguities. Moreover, different sections of the *Rhetoric* appear to be directed at different audiences—ranging from students of philosophy to aspiring orators—which contributes to variations in tone, purpose, and pedagogical approach. In addition, certain parts of the text, such as the treatment of emotions in Book II and much of Book III, seem to have originated as independent works that were later incorporated into the broader treatise as supplements, rather than as parts of a fully unified theoretical system. These general inconsistencies are mirrored in specific topics throughout the text, with the concept of *pathos* offering a particularly illustrative case.

As this paper has shown, Aristotle's treatment of *pathos*, or emotional appeal, is marked by four major theoretical inconsistencies. The first emerges from the opening chapter of the *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle appears to downplay the role of *pathos*, denying it the status of a legitimate *pistis* (proof) on par with *logos*. Yet, in later chapters—particularly in Book II—he devotes substantial attention to the strategic use of emotions in persuasion, thereby granting *pathos* a more significant position within his rhetorical framework. This shift suggests a tension between Aristotle's theoretical definitions and his practical observations of persuasive discourse.

The second inconsistency concerns the ambiguous relationship between *pathos* and the enthymeme. Since the enthymeme is explicitly associated with *logos* in Aristotle's system, it remains unclear whether emotional appeals can be incorpo-

rated into this deductive structure. While some passages suggest that *pathos* and enthymeme should remain separate, other interpretations—supported by modern scholars—argue that emotional content can be embedded within enthymematic reasoning through emotionally charged premises. Aristotle offers no definitive resolution to this issue, leaving readers to infer whether and how emotional persuasion can be reconciled with rational argumentation.

The third inconsistency appears in Aristotle's application of the tripartite framework for analyzing emotions, which he proposes at the end of Book II, Chapter 1. Aristotle suggests that a thorough understanding of the emotions—necessary for effective persuasion—requires analyzing them from three angles: the internal state, the object, and the cause. While he outlines this framework clearly and largely adheres to it in Chapters 2 - 11 of Book II, his implementation does not always uphold the model. In his treatment of calmness and confidence, for instance, a key component of the tripartite structure is omitted, and in his discussion of kindness, he departs entirely from the model he previously prescribed.

The fourth inconsistency arises from Chapters 12 - 17 of Book II, which detail the emotional and behavioral characteristics of various demographic groups, including different age groups and social classes. The rhetorical purpose of these chapters remains ambiguous: Are these profiles meant to help the speaker enhance their *ēthos* by demonstrating insight into audience psychology, or are they intended to guide the effective deployment of *pathos* by anticipating emotional responses? Scholars remain divided, with some attributing these chapters to the domain of *ēthos* and others to *pathos*. As Wisse and Kennedy suggest, the material likely serves both purposes, though Aristotle himself does not explicitly clarify its intended function.

These four inconsistencies—*pathos* as either subordinate or central to rhetorical proof, its ambiguous relationship with the enthymeme, its at times incomplete analysis within the tripartite framework, and its unclear association with audience character—highlight a broader tension within Aristotle's *Rhetoric* between theoretical prescription and practical application. They suggest that rigid theoretical categories such as *logos*, *ēthos*, and *pathos* do not always align with the complex and dynamic realities of rhetorical practice. These inconsistencies serve as a reminder for contemporary rhetorical theory and argumentation that persuasive discourse often resists strict theoretical compartmentalization. Effective rhetoric must instead navigate the dynamic interplay of reason, character, and emotion in ways that are responsive to context, purpose, and audience. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, though foundational, thus leaves open important questions about the status and function of emotional appeal—questions that remain central to both classical scholarship and contemporary rhetorical theory.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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