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Ενθυμημα as the Heart (and Body) of the *Rhetoric*:
A Plea for a New English Translation
(with Thoughts toward a Discussion about a Future Dissertation Project)

Topos . . . accords with Aristotle's fondness for visual imagery. . . . Neither in Topics nor in Rhetoric does Aristotle give a definition of topos, a sign that he assumed the word would be easily understood; he does, however, give his own special twist to its meaning.

--**George A. Kennedy**, "The 'Topics' of Syllogisms and Enthymemes," *On Rhetoric*

In actual fact the word πίστις in Aristotle's text will not sustain the univocal interpretation (i. e. proof, way of proving) which has been imposed upon it. The assumption of such a univocal meaning has generated some of the difficulties about the coherence and unity of the text. In reality the word pistis has a number of meanings in the text, and it is necessary to discriminate among them for an understanding of the text and the meaning of enthymeme.

--**William M. A. Grimaldi, S. J.**, "The Centrality of the Enthymeme"

In view of the importance he has given the enthymeme, we might reasonably expect to find it carefully defined. However, although there are many hints as to its nature, the reader of Aristotle's Rhetoric will find no unambiguous statement defining the enthymeme.

--**Lloyd F. Bitzer**, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited"

Scientists, philosophers, political scientists, and scholars of the various language arts have long noted Aristotle's profound contributions to their respective fields. The single most important reason for his widespread and enduring impact is Aristotle's precise and persistent ability to define and to classify the subjects of his study. Hence, Aristotle not surprisingly begins the *Rhetoric* with definition. However, Aristotle nonetheless creates a peculiar difficulty for the scholars who examine classical Greek rhetoric (and who must study it now mostly in translation): in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle leaves undefined (and rhetoricians have left absolutely untranslated) the central term *ενθυμημα*.

Moreover, the difficulty is compounded by Aristotle and then by rhetoricians. First, Aristotle is doing something more than either defining or classifying when he begins by saying "Ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἐστὶν ἀντιστροφὴ τῆ διαλεκτικῆ." That is, he is also opening up (neither

merely descriptively nor at all prescriptively) a communicative process that demands the very human engagement of other people. In the process, he actually de-classifies those who are engaged in ῥητορικη (and in its αντιστροπηος,¹ τη διαλεκτικη) as universally “all people” (i.e., “απαντην . . . διο και παντες . . . παντες γαρ”). Furthermore, Aristotle un-defines (or he at least takes advantage of his readers’ need not to define) when he begins calling “ενθυμηματων” the very things other “writers say nothing about” though “ενθυμηματος,” Aristotle himself does say, are (A) a “body” of “πιστεως”²; (B) an “αποδειξις³ ῥητορικη”; and (C) “a sort of syllogism” (The Greek quoted is from Freese’s edition 2, 4, 9; English from Kennedy’s translation 30-31, 33). Hence, Aristotle complicates the difficulty of leaving his central term undefined by involving other people in its presumed and its probable uses.

Second, rhetoricians today compound the problem of Aristotle’s more-or-less implicit *ενθυμημα* by failing or refusing to translate the key term. Of course, on the one hand, the benefit of keeping the term *in* the Greek, so to speak, is to allow it to retain all of the original senses as expressed in the earliest contexts. Likewise, supposedly, connotations of the target word in translation would likely lose or, worse, violate the original connotations of the ancient Greek term as source (whether the target language is Latin, or any modern language such as today’s spoken Greek, English, Italian, German, French, Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese or other languages used now to study classical-Greek rhetoric); more could always be said about the dangers of translation. Perhaps, on the other hand, *ενθυμημα* in transliteration is already a translation (at least in the languages that allow for such)⁴ With respect to the rhetorical term *στασις*, for example, Otto Dieter suggests that “Truly, stasis doesn’t need to be translated into English by rhetoricians: it has already become a perfectly good modern English word, defined by Webster as meaning ‘a standing still’” (215). Of course, Dieter seems not to take his own assertion too seriously because he has said, “To begin with, *stasis* is not an untranslatable term.

The complaint that there is no equivalent for it in a modern language is never voiced except by English scholars. Every student of Indo-Germanic philology knows that *stasis*, as well as *status*, comes from the root STA, *to stand*” (214). The complaint, then, might well apply to *ενθυμημα* as well; moreover, further below, we will discuss the English “equivalents” for Aristotle’s central term as used in pre-modern Greek. For now, we speculate that “English scholars” see no need for translating the key word.

Ironically, however, not translating Aristotle’s undefined *ενθυμημα* creates for rhetoricians difficulties not the least of which is noted by George A. Kennedy. Kennedy observes that “Modern scholars often misunderstand Aristotle’s concept of an enthymeme or warp it for their own puposes” and suggests that those interested “see the excellent critique by Robert N. Gaines in Gross and Walzer (2000:3-23)” (34). Fascinatingly, Gaines focuses his overview of rhetorical interpretations on Aristotle’s central term because of the following:

First, enthymeme is the most intensively studied of all Aristotelian subject among communication and English scholars. Second, enthymeme has significantly influenced the understanding of practical discourse in both communication and English. Finally, enthymeme studies provide numerous instances of theoretical research in communication and pedagogical as well as research in English. (5).

Gaines’s choice allows him to be impressively comprehensive and most fairly “representative” (18). He explains that “On account of the historical importance of Aristotle and the place of enthymeme in his Rhetoric, the enthymeme was of keen interest to American rhetoricians from the early 1920s onwards” (7). Nonetheless, neither Gaines nor any other scholar he finds in one and only one of “a pair of interpretive approaches”⁵ (19) sees fit to use English to translate *ενθυμημα* according to their explicitly theorized interpretation, whichever their approach.

Certainly, rhetoricians and other English scholars applying rhetoric could translate Aristotle's key term, and with arguable benefits.

The term is translatable into English. In fact, scholars of the Greek classics and Bible translators have translated *εὐθυμημα* clearly and successfully. Here we note a few texts of writing where the term is used and has been translated. As the appendix shows, the word appears in Hesiod's *Work and Days* once; and in Homer's *Odyssey* twice and his *Illiad* six times. Furthermore, *εὐθυμημα* was used by the Jewish translators of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, the Septuagint (or LXX), forty times. Following this, the New Testament writers employed the word four times.

In each case, translators have rendered *εὐθυμημα* by an English word that conveys a human thought process or capacity. For Homer's and Hesiod's *εὐθυμημα*, the English terms used are *mind*, or *heart* or *thought*. For the Septuagint, the English translator Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton uses the same English words as have been used for Hesiod and Homer; but he also uses *desire*, *soul*, *purpose*, *conceive*, *consider*, and *bear in mind*. Furthermore, Brenton employs terms with negative connotations such as *imaginations*, *devices*, and *to dote*, in the contexts of idolatries.⁶ For the New Testament uses of *εὐθυμημα*, the English translators of the King James Bible also chose the negative *devices* once but the more positive *thought* and *think* the other four instances.

The range of English words used to translate *εὐθυμημα* is not wide. More than that, none of these various terms would, I believe, fail entirely to convey adequately some of the many senses of *εὐθυμημα* in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. More than that, an English translation of Aristotle's treatise that actually translated into English his undefined central term would allow for the kind of readily insights that Aristotle's Greek audience had.

A linguistic theory such as tagmemics, moreover, would account for the various contextual issues that Aristotle demands. That it, the choice of which English term (within a small range of possibility) best fits a context would be determined by the factors that Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike have explicated. In particular, these include the “dimensions of linguistic choice” (chapter 13) and the various “writer and reader” issues they note (chapters 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) in their *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. Likewise, the kind of attention that George Lakoff and Mark Johnson give to metaphor would be useful in understanding an English *εὐθυμημῶν* for Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. Lakoff and Johnson begin by saying, “Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language” (3). However, they show “that metaphor pervades our normal conceptual system” (115) and “is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious” (239).

These statements, interestingly, have similarities with Aristotle’s statements about the *εὐθυμημῶν*. Obviously, Aristotle is willing to discuss something universal, something ordinary, about which other “writers say nothing” (Kennedy 31). Further, he is willing to refer to the ordinary something by a word so ordinary that he and his readers may implicitly define. That ordinary something is very akin to *mind, heart, soul, thought, desire, and even imaginations and devices*. A new English translation of the *Rhetoric* that actually translates *εὐθυμημῶν* thusly, I argue, give “body” and “mind” back to Aristotle’s theory.

Notes

¹ Rhetoricians, if reluctant to translate *ενθυμημα*, have variously translated into English the word *αντιστροφηος*. When wanting to keep the Greek without translation, the common practice of translators is, rather, to transliterate the terms in English (i.e., *enthymeme* and *antistrophos*); likewise, theoreticians and historians who are not translators per se, still find convenient the use of transliteration when discussing terms in theory. Jeffrey Walker, for example, does this in his lengthy observations about the development of the rhetorical *enthymeme*.

A long quotation of Walker is excerpted below to show, also, his discussion of the ways *αντιστροφηος* has been translated:

As I hope to suggest, however, the notion of “enthymeme” does mark a difference. As Green has argued, Aristotle’s grand premise that rhetoric is an *antistrophos* of dialectic (*Rhetoric* I.I 1354a) has, over the centuries, been the locus of interpretive controversies all too easily masked by the conveniently vague compromise used in most English translations, namely that rhetoric is a “counterpart” of dialectic. “Counterpart” suggests a loose equivalence, a loose analogy. *Antistrophos*, however, means something more specific (and more difficult to pinpoint): perhaps, as Green suggests, “a reciprocal and rule-governed transformation.” Rhetoric and dialectic are indeed related to each other, as are the enthymeme and syllogism, but the relation is one of systematic difference as well as similarity. The enthymeme, in short, is to the syllogism (or to “Toulmin logic,” for that matter) as rhetoric is to dialectic: not merely its “counterpart,” its loose equivalent, but its *antistrophos*, its differing sister. (171)

² *Πιστεως* is a term that rhetoricians have been much more willing to define. However, William M. A. Grimaldi, S. J. notes there are many different meanings of the word in the *Rhetoric*. Likewise, James L. Kineavy shows that the ways rhetoricians have translated Aristotle’s *πιστεως* in the *Rhetoric* are hardly the way theologians and Bible scholars have translated the word in the New Testament. And I have show elsewhere (in an unpublished paper) how English translators of Homer and Hesiod and the Septuagint have translated *πιστεως* not in the ways rhetoricians have rendered the term, but rather with the meanings that New Testament translators have brought it over into English.

³ John Henry Freese, W. Rhys Roberts, and George A. Kennedy all translate *αποδειξις* as “demonstration.” Freese’s publisher (Loeb Classic Library, Harvard University Press) also places the Greek original on the left hand pages of his translation, with the English placed opposite on the right hand pages. Kennedy, also in an effort to keep the Greek present somewhat, uses the transliteration in brackets with not infrequent translator notes; for example, he does the following: “demonstration [*apodeixis*]²⁰ . . . 20. Aristotle’s technical term for logically valid, scientific demonstration” (33).

Like Walker, Kennedy provides some discussion on *ενθυμημα* (i.e., “*enthymēma*”) although Kennedy’s translation of the *Rhetoric* allows him only much briefer notes. In a paragraph, Kennedy discusses what “[e]nthymeme literally means”; how it is “used by Isocrates”; where the term appears in *Rhetoric for Alexander*; how in “*Prior Analytics* 2.27 Aristotle defines enthymeme as ‘a syllogism from probabilities or signs’” and how he uses it slightly differently

“in 1.2.8 . . . 1.10.1, 3.17.15” and so forth; and finally the ways “[m]odern scholars often misunderstand Aristotle’s concept of an enthymeme or warp it for their own purposes” (34).

⁴ Please see note 3 above on how Kennedy uses transliteration with translation. But what I am describing here is transliteration that *is* the translation.

⁵ A brief excerpt here may fairly represent Gaines’s conclusion:

On the one side (19) . . . for readers who elect this [first interpretative] approach, the task is to confront the *Rhetoric* as a specific disciplinary proposal, to cooperate with Aristotle’s assumption that contextual particulars will be supplied, and ultimately to judge what seems useful and what does not.

On the other side, readers may attempt to comprehend and apply rhetorical theory that is accessible in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. The object here is for the historically situated reader to understand the significance of the *Rhetoric*. (20)

⁶ I believe Brenton may have been looking at the King James translation choices for some of his decisions about how to translate the Greek. And yet, the King James translators of the seventeenth century AD were, of course, working with original Hebrew texts as were the translators of the Septuagint in the middle of the third century BC.