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***Pistis*, Persuasion, and *Logos* in Aristotle**

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Abstract: The core sense of *pistis* as understood in *Posterior Analytics*, *De Anima*, and the *Rhetoric* is not that of a logical relation in which cognitively grasped propositions stand in respect to one another, but the result of an act of socially embedded interpersonal communication, a willing acceptance of guidance offered in respect to action. Even when *pistis* seems to have an exclusively epistemological sense, this focal meaning of *pistis* is implicit; to have *pistis* in a proposition is to willingly accept that proposition as a basis for some kind of activity (albeit possibly theoretical) as a result of some kind of communicative act. This is in accordance with Aristotle’s understanding of argumentation as a social practice, entered into in order lead others to certain actions, for certain ends. Understanding *pistis* in this way allows us to understand how it is that *pistis* admits of quantitative variation.

Keywords: Aristotle, persuasion, rhetoric, reason, argumentation

Logic, Argument, and *Pistis*

There is more to argument than what is studied by logic. Logic regards arguments as bare inferential structures, “disregarding the actual reasoning processes and the contextual surroundings in which they take place”.¹ Such a study neglects many aspects of inference and argument of philosophical interest; these have been the concern of argumentation theorists. They have emphasized that argumentation is a cognitive and social act which people do, and any adequate understanding of argument must make the interpersonal aspect of argument central to its analysis.² This is one of the main teachings of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as well.

¹ Van Eemeren–Grootendorst–Henkemans (1996) 6.

² “Argumentation is a *social* activity, which in principle is directed at other people. Of course, the social nature of argumentation is most clearly evident in a discourse between two or more interlocutors. All the same, even when people are conferring with themselves, contemplating the pros and cons of their own ideas, their conduct is basically social . . . [attempting] to meet the outspoken or tacit reactions of others” (van Eemeren–Grootendorst–Henkemans 1996, 3).

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It was Aristotle himself who formalized logic. The work in which he did so, the *Prior Analytics*, was presented as a propaedeutic to the epistemology and philosophy of science worked through in the *Posterior Analytics*.³ Its concerns however are not divorced from those of the *Rhetoric*. Like the everyday beliefs that are the basis of civic life, scientific knowledge comes about by means of a kind of argument (demonstration). Because argument plays a leading role in the process by which both kinds of belief come about, Aristotle's epistemology and philosophy of science call for integration with his more general theory of argumentation. Little scholarship has been devoted to this task. Perhaps scholars have been dissuaded by Aristotle's own words, for he sharply distinguishes rhetorical and dialectical arguments, on the one hand, from scientific arguments, on the other. Aristotle makes abundantly clear that the inferences with which rhetoric is concerned, enthymemes, fall short of the formal criteria of syllogisms. Furthermore, enthymematic premises do not satisfy the criteria of necessity and causal priority that must be met by true demonstrative premises.⁴ This might suggest that those interested in logic and the nature of scientific explanation of necessary features of the world have little to learn from the *Rhetoric*, and that the epistemology presupposed by the *Analytics* has little of interest for those interested in Aristotle's rhetorical theory. To think so, however, is a mistake. Demonstrations, like rhetorical speeches, are communicative acts, by virtue of which one person teaches and another learns, and accordingly need to be ultimately understood in the context of Aristotle's more general views of *logos* as a communicative practice. The knowledge that comes about through demonstration, like the ethical knowledge which is instilled through the practice of rhetoric, can only be understood as resulting from a social practice.

Different branches of philosophy study different kinds of cognition. Argumentation theory studies how people come to be persuaded in the context of their social life; epistemology and philosophy of science studies how people come to know. Contemporary philosophy is coming to the realization that these two areas are closely related; the growing field of social epistemology studies the acquisition

3 "We must begin by saying with what our inquiry is concerned and what [branch of knowledge] it belongs to: it is concerned with demonstration and belongs to the science of demonstration". *APr.* I 1.24a10–11.

4 "An enthymeme is a syllogism of a kind" (*Rhet.* I 1.1355a8 and II 24.1400b35–1401a1). An enthymeme is a "degenerate deduction that can be applied". "An enthymeme is a syllogism from likelihoods or signs" (*APr.* II 27.70a10). Burnyeat (1994) 10–21, (1996) 94–96 has defended this translation of *tis sullogismos*. The sense is that an enthymeme is a "degenerate deduction that can be applied to contexts where conclusive proof is not to be had" (18).

of knowledge as a social process embedded in shared communicative practices.⁵ Aristotle himself integrates epistemology and the study of interpersonal communication, as can be most clearly seen in his rhetorical theory. The appointment of citizens to office is the sort of matter with which rhetorical speeches are concerned, for it deals with an action about which people deliberate. That a certain candidate is qualified is, for Aristotle, a factual matter, insofar as the qualified will be virtuous, and virtues are real dispositions that people may or may not possess. This fact that someone has these qualifications is not a matter of demonstrative science (as it concerns contingent particulars), but, like science, it is understood on the basis of foundationally known truths. But a speech by which someone can come to know this fact, providing a source or justification for my private evaluation of the candidate's qualifications, cannot be sharply distinguished from a rhetorical speech inducing its audience to action. Rather, its primary goal is to persuade me to act in a certain way, to vote in a certain way, and it is a successful act of communication only if it results in such action. In this case, persuading others to act in a certain way, within a certain social context, is more basic than the persuasion to believe that something is true. Propositions with ontological import, supported by valid inference are one aspect of the activity of *logos* whose primary concern is shared action.⁶

Consider Aristotle's teleological explanation of why, in contrast to other animals which have *phone*, adequate for the indication of pain and pleasure, only human beings have *logos*. He tells us that *logos* "reveals the advantageous and the harmful, and accordingly, the just and the unjust" (*Pol.* I 1.1253a8–18).⁷ Human *logos* has the purpose of guiding other members of the community to useful and noble actions.⁸ This passage is a bit of an embarrassment for those who understand the political life as instrumental to the primary good of *theoria*, which culminates

5 For example, suppose someone tells me that it is raining. A traditional empiricist account would have it that I infer that it is raining on the basis of the past reliability of such reports. The claim of some social epistemologists is that my belief that it is indeed raining immediately follows. See Schmitt (1998).

6 For an example of such an approach in contemporary rhetorical theory, see Crosswhite (1996) 3: "The theory the book develops is justified not by logical or metaphysical standards, but by the degree to which it accomplishes worthy social aims. In fact, the book reinterprets logic itself as a social–ethical ideal". Aristotle would not, however, concur with Crosswhite's further assertion that metaphysics is "a particular social–historical strategy to defend reasoning". Rather, it is Aristotle's metaphysics that grounds his proto–social epistemology. It is a metaphysically robust account of human nature that grounds his understanding of human beings as both political and rational, according to which the political and rational are necessarily mutually implicated.

7 See also *Pol.* VII 13.1332a38–b9, where *logos* is taken to be intrinsically associated with the *pistis* that arises through social interaction.

8 See also *GA* V 7.786b23–25 and *DA* II 8.420b29–33.

in an individual's cognitive grasp of how things are. Yet it must be taken seriously. Rationality for Aristotle is derivative of speech, speech is something that people do, and they do it in order to persuade people to do other things.⁹

This is not, of course, to deny that Aristotle understands theoretical activity to partially consist in discursive thinking structurally parallel to propositional speech, which in turn represents reality as it is. There are seams between Aristotle's metaphysics – according to which human beings are social, physical organisms that do physical things – and his philosophy of mind and logic, which seem to require propositions and beliefs to have the status of being a kind of entity, which sits ill with his ontology insofar as they do not fit neatly into any of the categories. But as much as possible these need to be integrated; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* needs to be understood in light of the rest of his writings and vice versa.

Pistis is a term importantly employed in both contexts. A clear understanding of what the varieties of *pistis* are and how they are related is necessary for integration of Aristotle's rhetoric and his epistemology. The term refers to the cognitive state of an auditor of a successful rhetorical speech as well as of a demonstration. The term *pistis* “can be rightly translated as proof, argument, reasoning, persuasion, belief, trust, faith, conviction, obligation, and confidence”.¹⁰ Understanding this term as employed in the *Posterior Analytics* simply as “belief” or “conviction” involves major interpretative difficulties, primarily because *pistis* is said to come in degrees, but belief, a propositional attitude, is binary; one either believes a proposition or one does not.

In order to support the thesis that Aristotle's theories of demonstration and rhetorical argument are two aspects of an integrated account of argument, inference, belief, knowledge, and action, the present paper considers the term as employed in epistemological context of the *Posterior Analytics* in light of the way Aristotle uses the term in the *Rhetoric*. I argue that the term is what Aristotle would call a *pros hen* equivocal.¹¹ Like “healthy” or “being,” it can mean many different

⁹ For a similar view concerning *logos*, restricted to its use in *Ethica Nicomachea*, see Burnet (1914) 6–7.

¹⁰ Garver (2004) 3.

¹¹ *Pros hen* equivocals are “not all referred to in respect to one thing nor as species of a single genus, nor in a totally equivocal way. For they are all referred to with reference to one that is primary, as is ‘medical’; for we say that a soul, body, instrument, and action are medical, but it is what is medical in the primary sense that is strictly speaking medical. The primary one is that of which the definition is contained in all, for example a medical instrument is one that would be used by a medical practitioner, but the definition of the tool is not implicit in that of the medical practitioner. So in all cases we look for what is primary” (*EE* VII 1236a16–23). Following Owen (1960), the literature on *pros hen* equivocity has been enormous. See especially Shields (1999) and Ward (2008).

things, but all of its senses derive from a core sense to which implicit reference is made, and none of the derivative senses can be fully understood without a recognition of that. The core sense of *pistis* as understood in *Posterior Analytics*, *De Anima*, and the *Rhetoric* is not that of a logical relation in which cognitively grasped propositions stand in respect to one another, but the result of an act of socially embedded interpersonal communication, a willing acceptance of guidance offered in respect to action. Even when *pistis* seems to have an exclusively epistemological sense, this focal meaning of *pistis* is implicit; to have *pistis* in a proposition is at least in part a willingness to accept that proposition as a basis for some kind of activity (albeit possibly theoretical) as a result of some kind of communicative act.

***Pistis* Comes in Degrees**

As noted above, *pistis* is sometimes translated as “belief.” Belief is normally understood as an all or nothing affair. One either believes or one does not. If one believes, and the belief has the appropriate justification behind it, one knows. To talk of degrees of belief is to make a categorical mistake. That is not of course to deny that there can be degrees of certainty. But such cases are standardly dealt with by understanding the propositional content as qualified by probability. To believe that it will rain tomorrow, without certainty, is the same as believing that it is likely to rain tomorrow. It is not to believe only a little bit that it will rain tomorrow.¹²

This notion of belief is not wholly unfamiliar to Aristotle. He refers to the taking of something as true as a *hupolepsis*,¹³ which, in accordance with its core, literal sense (“grasp”) is an all or nothing affair. *Pistis* as Aristotle employs it, however, is

¹² An alternative way of dealing with such issues is to supplement the notion of belief with that of a different propositional attitude: credence. The one who strongly suspects that it will rain tomorrow does not believe that it will rain, but has a higher degree of credence in regard to the proposition that it will rain than she does to the proposition that it will not rain. The advantage of this account is that it does not require a mysterious act of will prior to belief in a less than certain proposition; rather, one’s degree of credence needs to reach a tipping point, after which belief automatically follows. McCready-Flora (2011) understands Aristotle’s notion of *pistis* as something like credence. I suggest below that this view commits Aristotle to an implausibly complex account of human perceptual belief.

¹³ Moss and Schwab (2019) argue convincingly that for both Plato and Aristotle *hupolepsis*, not *doxa*, corresponds to ‘belief’ as employed in contemporary epistemology, “the generic attitude of taking something to be the case”.

neither synonymous with *hupolepsis* nor can it be a necessary and sufficient condition, for Aristotle makes clear that *pistis* comes in degrees.

At *APo.* I 2.72a25–32 Aristotle writes:

Since we have *pistis* in and know a fact (*to pragma*) only by virtue of having the sort of deduction that we call a demonstration, and this is so by virtue of the fact that those [premises] on which the deduction is based are so, the principles must not only be already known, either all or some of them, but must be known to a greater extent. For it is always the case that that by which something belongs [to something else] belongs to it more. So if we know and have *pistis* in something by virtue of the principles, we know and have *pistis* in them to a greater extent, because we know the posterior things, too, through them.¹⁴

On this basis Aristotle concludes that there must be maximal *pistis* in regard to the principles of the sciences. They are *ametapeista*; the *pistis* that we have in them cannot be overturned (72a32–b4).

The context of the passage is Aristotle's review of the requirements for demonstration, the sort of inference that serves to reveal the causes of universal necessary truths. The principles at issue are the ultimate premises of these demonstrations; these premises express the ultimate causes of the conclusions. At 71b30–33, Aristotle emphasizes that the principles must be more known (*gnorimos*) than the demonstrated conclusions; the idea is that if a feature of the world is to be made intelligible by showing why it must be the case, it can only be on the basis of showing how it logically follows from certain truths that do not themselves demand an answer to the question of why they are the case. The intelligibility of the premises imparts intelligibility to what is inferred on their basis. Aristotle's argument for the existence of such truths (*APo.* I 3.72b18–32) sets the pattern for subsequent foundationalist arguments: if there were no such foundations, demonstrative inference would be either infinite or circular, and on such bases "one could prove anything". *Topics* I 2.101b9–4, however, on one plausible reading, indicates that one comes to know the principles themselves through inferences of a different sort, that is, through dialectical arguments. The premises of dialectical arguments are not scientific principles (for these are the conclusions of the dialectical arguments at issue), but are *endoxa*, beliefs that are held by most people, or by those whose expertise is recognized. Dialectical argument is not linear, for which reason these inferences serve as coherentist justifications of the principles.¹⁵ This is the case whether Aristotle ascribes a certain *prima facie* epistemological validity to the *endoxa*,¹⁶ or whether he thinks that which views are commonly held within one's community is an accidental matter. Either way, the

¹⁴ Here and elsewhere the translation is by the author.

¹⁵ See Goldin (2013).

¹⁶ Bolton (1990).

principles of the sciences need to be argued for, and the premises of such an argument will have a kind of special epistemological status that the scientific principles themselves will not have, at least in the case of those who have not yet achieved expertise in the sciences. Aristotle's way of putting it is to say that these premises are better known to us but less well known in themselves.¹⁷ Scientific principles, in contrast, will be better known in themselves but less well known in respect to us.

Aristotle uses comparatives to indicate that *more* foundational objects of knowledge have *more* intelligibility than less foundational objects of knowledge. Can we understand Aristotle's assertion that we have *more pistis* in the principles in a parallel manner? If so, Aristotle's point would be that the *pistis* we have in the principles is the foundation or cause of the *pistis* that we have in the demonstrative conclusions. Insofar as there are no principles of the principles, the *pistis* we have in the principles would be generated from the principles themselves. This is apparently the interpretation of Philoponus, who calls the first principles of the sciences *autopistoi*, sometimes translated as "self-evident."¹⁸ The phrase ultimately derives from Proclus, who employs it in his commentary on Euclid's *Elements* to refer a feature of the Euclidean principles, that they are *kataphaneis* (75.16–17) or *enargeis* (194.7; 255.17) (evident, manifest) in their own right. The idea here would be that the principles do not require justification, but the truth of derivative propositions is justified on the basis of the principles. Such an interpretation, according to which the more intelligible premises are foundational to justification, is untenable, for Aristotle takes first principles to be foundational in the order of explanation, not in the order of justification.¹⁹

McCready-Flora recognizes that *APo.* I 2.72a25–32 talks about *pistis* as something that can come in greater or lesser degrees and accordingly takes *pistis* to be something analogous to our "credence." What exactly this credence is, on his account, is unclear, but it seems to be something like a disposition or inclination to believe a proposition. It is not binary and accepts the more and less. If one gives enough credence to a proposition, a threshold is passed, and one believes it. McCready-Flora understands the process by appealing to the metaphor of

¹⁷ *Top.* VI 4.141b2–142a12; *APr.* II 23.68b35–37; *APo.* I 2.71b32; *Phys.* I 1.184a16–20; *Metaph.* Z 3. 1029b3–12.

¹⁸ McKirahan (2008) *passim* renders it as "self-guaranteeing" but this suggests that on Philoponus' understanding of Aristotle, a proposition is to be initially approached with skepticism and ought not be accepted unless it comes with a guarantee, which is derived either from its own character or from some other source. This brings to mind Stoic epistemology, according to which a proposition must be assented to, on the basis of some evidence, prior to belief, and there is no evidence that Philoponus understands Aristotle in this way.

¹⁹ Burnyeat (1981).

hydraulics; given enough pressures, things pop, and belief results.²⁰ Given multiple premises, it makes sense that some premises might have more credence than a single proposition that is justified on their basis. The problem remains however that according to Aristotle, the principles of the sciences do not justify the demonstrated conclusions; they explain them. Aristotle maintains that sometimes it is the demonstrated conclusions that justify the foundational premises, as when, in Aristotle's famous example, we prove that the planets are near on the basis of the fact that they do not twinkle (*APo.* I 13.78a30–38). These derivative propositions would seem to be the ones with more credence.

Moss and Schwab likewise recognize that *pistis* comes in degrees and hence cannot be the same as *hupolepsis*. They tentatively suggest that “perhaps then *pistis* is related to *hupolepsis* as the conscious psychological manifestation or accompaniment of the epistemic state: conviction or confidence”.²¹ But this interpretation, according to which every belief is accompanied by a feeling of surety or security, lacks textual or philological support.

In an earlier paper, I offered the following proposal: the *pistis* that Aristotle has in mind at 72a25–32 is not the conviction that a principle holds, but that it is, in fact, a principle.²² I now see more clearly now that such a noetic grasp has qualitative superiority, but Aristotle is here saying that the scientist has the same cognitive relation, *pistis*, to both principle and derivative proposition, but has it to a greater degree in the first case.

So what does Aristotle mean by *pistis* here? In order to clarify this we first turn to consider the term as used outside of epistemological contexts: in pre-Aristotelian philosophical writings, in Aristotle's *De Anima*, and in his *Rhetoric*.

Pistis as Pros Hen Equivocal

Pistis is derived from *peithein*, to persuade. *Peithein* has the active sense; *pisteuein* the passive (Mourelatos 1970). In Homer and in other pre-philosophical Greek literature, *pistis* is an attitude of trust, arising through speech, by which one can be led by another.²³

²⁰ McCready-Flora (2011) 168. Although in personal communication McCready-Flora promises a more adequate account in future publications, I here cite the dissertation because of its importance in being one of the few attempts to account for what Aristotle means in taking *pistis* to admit of degrees.

²¹ Moss and Schwab (2019) n. 63.

²² Goldin (2013) 212–213.

²³ See Mourelatos (1970) 144–146.

The first philosophical use of the notion *pistis* in which it carries some epistemological weight is found in Parmenides' poem. In the exposition of the way of Truth the goddess repeatedly invokes *pistis* as that by which coming to be is excluded from what is (8.12–13 and 27–28). Fragment 2 declares that Peitho attends truth. It would ill fit the guiding metaphor – that of the goddess leading the youth through open gates – to take this to be a reference to the unshakeable cognitive grasp of self-evident logical truth. Rather, as Mourelatos has argued, “the use of the peith-words in Parmenides suggest that the cognitive concept of ‘belief’ (at least in Greek thought) depends on a paradigm of ‘faith’ and ‘trust’”.²⁴ Our knowledge that “it is” arises not through a solitary evaluation of the truth value of propositional content but through an *elenchus*, a type of persuasion through working through inferences in language.

Pistis, in this sense, is the goal of the rhetorician. As Plato's *Gorgias* makes clear, the goal of rhetoric was commonly taken to be the influencing of the actions of others, whether in the service of others, as when he says that he convinces the patient to submit to the knife (456b), or for the acquisition of power.²⁵

We turn to Aristotle. *DA* III 3 concerns the psychological faculty of *phantasia*, often translated as “imagination.” This faculty encompasses a great deal; it is what is responsible for those cognitive acts that go beyond perception and integration of perceptual information, but do not involve the exercise of intelligence or knowledge. Aristotle argues that *phantasia* is not a variety of *doxa*, for “*pistis* accompanies *doxa* (since it is not possible to have *doxai* in those things for which one does not have *pistis*), yet, while *pistis* is not found in any wild beast, *phantasia* is found in many of them. Another point is that *pistis* is entailed by every *doxa*, and having been convinced (*to pepeisthai*) is entailed by every instance of *pistis*, and

²⁴ See Mourelatos (1970) 163.

²⁵ The exception that proves the rule is Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*. Gorgias' speech reverses the conventional condemnation of Helen by virtue of a radical re-understanding of *logos*, not as something that one follows of one's own accord, but as a compelling force. That this is presented as paradox shows that the standard notion of *pistis* is one of willing guidance from another and what that other says, not cognitive compulsion. For Plato, too, *pistis* has a root sense of reliance and trust, even in epistemological passages. In the Divided Line of the *Republic* (511e), *pistis* is a kind of placeholder, meant to distinguish that by which we relate to things from that by which we relate to their images. Plato's point cannot be that our conviction concerning sensible images lacks the sort of justification available in the case of our conviction concerning physical objects. That is not Plato's concern. I suggest that the distinction between things like apples and the images of apples is that the former have a kind of pragmatic use for us. I suggest that Plato chooses the term *pistis* to indicate this difference in stance to us. Although neither the reflection of the apple nor the apple itself is a real apple, insofar as neither conforms to Parmenidean standards of being, our actions *depend* on taking the apple to be what it appears to be, in a way that is not the case for the image. Reaching for the apple results from a kind of trust that things are what they seem.

logos follows every instance of persuasion, but while *phantasia* is found in some wild beasts, *logos* is not” (DA III 3.428a19–b4). *Doxa* is here identified as the cognitive state of one who has *pistis*; *hupolepsis* is a more general cognitive state, the genus to which *doxa* belongs. Aristotle goes on to argue that it is possible to have a *phantastia* that is contradictory to a proposition in respect to which one has *pistis*. Building on the etymology of *phantasia*, according to which *phantasia* denotes the faculty by which something appears (*phainetai*) as something or other, Aristotle offers as an example that “the sun appears (*phainetai*) to be a foot across” yet “there is conviction (*pisteutai*) that it is greater than the inhabited world”. The faculty of *phantasia*, then, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being capable of *hupolepsis*. *Hupolepsis* is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for *pistis*.²⁶

In the example at hand, the object of *phantasia* seems to be a that-clause, a proposition, “the sun is a foot across,” which is formulable in language.²⁷ *Hupolepsis*, on this account, is like *phantasia*, a propositional cognitive attitude, but unlike *phantasia* it requires a form of cognition unique to human beings.²⁸ Because *phantasia* may lack *pistis*, as it does in nonhuman animals, *pistis* is not simply a grasp of a proposition as true. That which is involved in *pistis*, but not *phantasia*, is being guided to grasp the proposition as true, by means of a certain activity that is an exercise of rationality, a kind of discourse. Animals can be led to change their minds, but not in this way, as it involves *logos*, which is absent from animals. So, we are led to ask: What it is to have *logos*, if not the ability to grasp propositions? *Logos* cannot have the sense of inference; if that were the case, why would Aristotle claim that *doxa* of what one perceives necessarily results from inference?²⁹ *Logos* also has the sense of “language”; Aristotle’s stock sample definition of a human being as an animal having *logos* is less accurately translated as “rational animal” than “an animal that speaks”. But how is language required for having a *doxa*? As I already noted, Aristotle does not think that language is necessary for the grasp of

²⁶ Aristotle is not saying that a *hupolepsis* entails *pistis*, as is suggested by Moss and Schwab (2019). *Pistis* requires something more. That something more, I argue, is the proclivity to act or make some sort of commitment in accordance with one’s *hupolepsis*, resulting from some communicative act.

²⁷ See Modrak (1989) 101.

²⁸ For textual evidence that supports this claim, see *De Ins.* 2.460b18, 26–27; DA III 3.428a12–15; *De Motu* 7.701a32; on this see Bolton (2005). An alternative account, developed by Wedin and endorsed by Caston, understands *phantasia* as “representation” (Caston 2006; Wedin 1988). This attributes to Aristotle the unlikely view that among animals only human beings are aware of facts.

²⁹ McCready-Flora (2011) 13–59 argues that Aristotle’s point here is that *doxa* requires the rational evaluation of potential beliefs, by gauging the credence that is to be placed in each. I find this implausible, as it would require that all beliefs (*doxai*) arise from such evaluations, including the most straightforward *doxai*, as that there is an apple before one.

propositional content. *Logos* must be understood as what Aristotle says it is when he explains why only human beings have *logos*. It is a communicative act by which members of a community persuade each other to act in certain ways. In some cases (for example, the *phantasia* that the sun is more than a foot across), what one is being led to is a kind of inner affirmation, and the speech that does the leading might be one's own inner speech,³⁰ but the root sense of a rational agent's being willingly led by rational discourse is again at play. This state of being rationally led by what another says is the core sense of *pistis*, in relation to which other senses are to be understood. *Pistis* is a *Pros Hen* equivocal; what Owen would call the "focal meaning" of the term *pistis* is this sense of being so led.

***Pistis* and Rhetoric**

We turn to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in which the term *pistis* is especially prominent. Rhetorical speeches are distinguished primarily by the context in which they are uttered; one person speaks before others, attempting by his or her speech to lead others to do certain things, within the context of the life of the political community.³¹ *Pistis* is a common term in this work, referring both to the cognitive state aimed at within the auditors and the resources³² by which the speaker induces that state. We have seen that the term primarily refers not to a propositional attitude but to the state in which one is guided by *logos* to act in a certain way. We shall see that this is the focal sense of *pistis* in the *Rhetoric* as well, although this is not often reflected in how scholars translated the term. Even scholars like Garver and McCabe (who have emphasized that the *Rhetoric* concerns itself with the sorts of arguments that cannot be abstracted from their social and political contexts and the concrete aims in which those arguments are uttered) nonetheless are apt to translate *pistis* in either the sense of being a

30 Aristotle discusses a kind of inner speech when he says that one part of the soul has *logos* insofar as it directs another part of the soul, which has *logos* insofar as it can be persuaded to follow (*EN* III 2.1102b13–30).

31 Aristotle seems to distinguish rhetorical arguments (enthymemes) not on the basis of the social context in which they are given but on the basis of the nature of their premises: the premises are for the most part, not necessary, and concern the sort of thing about which we deliberate (*Rhet.* I 2. 1057a14–33). But this gets things backwards, insofar as it suggests that rhetorical arguments are useful in practical contexts insofar as its arguments concern the sort of contingencies that we encounter in deliberation. Rather, rhetoric is primarily concerned with action, which is why the sorts of premises it employs are the sorts of premises that are appropriate when deliberating (contingencies).

32 Grimaldi (1957), (1972) 59–68, (1980) 349–356 holds that *pisteis* include both source material and means; his argument is countered by Wikramanayake (1961).

means, with a logical term like “proof,” or the sense of being an end, with an epistemological term like “conviction.”³³ Terms like “proof” or “conviction” are not incorrect translations but terms like “proof” or “conviction” suggest that a speaker leads an auditor to action by means of uttering a *logos* with a determinate cognitive content abstracted from the embodied and social reality of the communicators, evaluated by the auditor on “logical” grounds, and, once accepted, inserted as a premise in a practical syllogism. Unfortunately, there is no English term or phrase that will serve as a fitting translation for *pistis* as both cognitive state and means for inducting that cognitive state, though perhaps “rational guidance” might be close, insofar as the term “guidance” is contrasted with compulsion, and refers to both that which guides and the state in which one is guided.

The introduction to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* tells us that the “rhetorical study, in the strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated”.³⁴ He clarifies the relationship between inference and *pistis* in the following chapter with these famous lines:

There are three kinds of *pistis* offered by *logos*. For some consist in the *ethos* of the speaker, some in the manner in which the listener is disposed [to act], and some in the *logos*, insofar as it proves or seems to prove something. *Pistis* comes from the *ethos* when the *logos* is related in a way that makes the speaker out to be worthy of *pistis*. We have *pistis* in relation to worthy people more, and more quickly, than in relation to others, this is true on the whole true about anything, and is absolutely true when there is no precision to be found but there is room for disagreement. This very thing must come about from the *logos*, not from presuppositions concerning what sort of person the speaker is. It is not the case, as some writers on the art of rhetoric would have it, that the worthiness of the speaker is not to be considered a matter of the [rhetorical] craft, since it contributes nothing towards being worthy of *pistis* [to *pithanon*]; rather, *ethos* is so to speak the most important kind of *pistis*.

³³ See for example McCabe (1994) 141: “Rhetoric is about conviction (*pistis*) and conviction is demonstration of a kind – for we are convinced most of all when we accept that the point has been demonstrated”.

³⁴ Aristotle here reinforces the link we have already seen in the *Posterior Analytics* between *pistis* and demonstration, but here, as elsewhere in the *Rhetoric*, *apodeixis* cannot have a technical sense, neither the sense in the *Posterior Analytics*, according to which the premises must express causes (I 2.71b19–22), nor that found in the *Topics*, according to which the premises must be true and primary in order of justification, that is, such as to warrant *pistis* without being inferred on the basis of anything more basic (I 1.100a20–b19). This is because the premises of rhetorical enthymemes are not all unquestionable, and those that are unquestionable are so only for certain auditors listening to a particular speech. Aristotle here, as elsewhere (on which see Lloyd 1992), employs *apodeixis* in an older, looser sense, to refer to a certain kind of proof that does not necessarily conform to the strict standards of the *Posterior Analytics*.

Pistis arises on account of the listeners when they are guided [*proachthosin*] by the logos into a pathos. The decisions [*krisis*] that we offer when we are upset are not the same as those when we are feeling good; and likewise, when we are feeling love and feeling hate. . . . People have *pistis* on account of the logos when we have proven a truth (or an apparent truth) from considerations that have *pistis* [*ek pithanon*] about the matters at hand. (*Rhet.* I 2.1356a1–20)

Ethos, pathos, and rhetorical argument (enthymeme) work together seamlessly, as integrated components of a single rhetorical speech. Human beings are such that when they deliberate together, their estimation of the virtue of the speakers and their emotional reactions are under normal circumstances reliable (albeit not infallible) gauges of the truth of the premises, and, accordingly, of the conclusions that follow from them.³⁵ Rhetorical arguments can be misleading, sometimes intentionally so, but that does not invalidate them as a means for public deliberation.

Ethos, pathos, and enthymeme have *pistis* as their goal, and for this reason each is called a *pistis* (in a derivative sense). We are told elsewhere by Aristotle that this *pistis*, the goal of rhetorical speech, is threefold, insofar as there are three types of hearers, classified on the basis of the task before them in the political context in which they find themselves as auditors: “The listener must be either be a spectator or one who makes a decision (*krites*), and this decision concerns either past or future events. The one whose decision concerns future events is a member of the assembly, the one who decides about past events is a member of the jury: while the one who makes a determination concerning the skill of the rhetorician is a spectator. So necessarily there are three kinds of speeches given by rhetoricians (1) deliberative, (2) judicial, (3) and ceremonial” (*Rhet.* I 3.1358b2–8). The role of the first kind of auditor is to take part in decisions about what course of action to take. The role of the second is to decide who did what, in a legal context. The role of the third is to praise or blame. All of these kinds of actions necessarily rest on the determination of certain

35 “If the rhetorician succeeds in presenting himself as a trustworthy person, the audience forms a second-order judgment that what is put forward by a credible person should be accepted”. Rapp and Wagner (2013) 25. Surely Aristotle recognized the importance of such second-order judgments in evaluating the reliability of the assertions of others. He himself takes certain assertions to have the status of *endoxa* on account of the expertise or virtue of their speakers. But I differ from Rapp’s view that an audience necessarily forms a second-order assertion when the character of a speaker contributes to the *pistis* of a rhetorical speech. Just as the default is for a child to believe a parent, without an independent evaluation of his credulity, so too the speech of one whose words manifest good character may exercise *pistis* in an unmediated way. See Schmitt (1998) and Garver (1994) 146: “It is . . . obvious why character or *ethos* persuades: the end of rhetoric is belief and trust, and belief and trust attach primarily to people whom we trust, and only derivatively to propositions which we believe”.

beliefs (what, in *DA*, Aristotle calls *hupolepseis*).³⁶ But these determinations are for the sake of actions (a military strike, a legal conviction, the bestowing of an honor, verbal or otherwise). Here, again, *pistis* is to be understood as guidance by which an auditor is willingly led by speech to perform a certain action.

This explains why ethos, pathos, and enthymeme are all *pisteis*, in the derivative sense of being means. They are all ways in which a speech is employed to rationally guide others. This is because ethical character, for Aristotle, is a disposition to set for oneself certain ends and to deliberate concerning how to achieve those ends, and it is by reason that we do that. Although pathos involves an element of bodily response to stimuli, it also involves a rational apprehension of the nature of that stimulus, which is why the passions to which one is subject are a sign of one's character. Further, pathos is often by its nature a disposition to act in a certain way.³⁷

Aristotle identifies enthymeme as a *pistis* in the sense of being a means by relating it to *pistis* in the sense of the goal to be achieved in the auditor:

[I]t is clear that the method that is internal to the art concerns *pisteis*, and *pistis* is a kind of demonstration, for we have *pistis* (*pisteuein*) to the greatest extent when we take something to have been demonstrated), and an enthymeme is a rhetorical demonstration – and this is, so to speak, the most important of the *pisteis*, and an enthymeme is a kind of syllogism,³⁸ and it belongs to dialectic – either as a whole or part of it – to look into every kind of inference, equally. (*Rhet.* I 1.1355a3–10)

This passage raises a cluster of problems. Aristotle says that a *pistis* is a kind of discourse that leads to *pistis*. Aristotle says that there is *pistis* (as a cognitive state) in the highest degree when it arises by virtue of that sort of *pistis* that we call a demonstration, an *apodeixis*. Aristotle is here using the term *apodeixis* to refer to

³⁶ This is why at *Rhet.* II 1.1377b20–24 Aristotle says that rhetorical speeches are aimed at members of the audience making a *krisis*, a discrimination. But every choice (*prohairesis*) rests on determining the facts of a circumstance, so there is no reason to claim, as does Rapp (2009) 583 that “the aim of rhetorical persuasion is a certain judgment (*krisis*), not an action or practical decision (*prohairesis*)”. In a sense every decision is a *krisis*, for it is a rational determination that this, rather than that, be done. See Smith (1998) 49: “Indeed, what results from taking counsel about a course of action is called a *prohairesis* in the *Ethics* but called a *krisis* in the *Rhetoric*. The only difference would seem to be that a private taking counsel with oneself is more the concern of the *Ethics* whereas public taking counsel with others is more the concern of rhetoric, in particular, of *sumbouleutike* or consultative rhetoric”.

³⁷ As Garver (1994) 145–146 puts it, “Why emotion persuades is clear. Most emotions include some disposition to act as part of their definition. When the rhetorician evokes an emotion, the disposition to act follows”.

³⁸ The sense is not the enthymeme is a determinate species of syllogism (as, on the traditional interpretation, it is a syllogism leaving premises unstated), but that it is an inference that does not necessarily meet strict standards of deductive validity. It is a syllogism, sort of. On this see Burnyeat (1994, 1996).

a kind of argument that is aimed, not at strictly theoretical knowledge, but also at inducing others to act in a certain way. This usage has ample precedent. As Barnes has emphasized in the context of his argument that the *apodeixeis* discussed in the *Posterior Analytics* are essentially didactic, the root sense of *apodeiknumi* is “to show” or “to make public”.³⁹ Thus, in a number of pre-Aristotelian medical texts, various explanations of physiological conditions are referred to as “demonstrations”, even though they fall far short of necessity and other conditions for demonstration in the narrower sense.⁴⁰ The medical authors show both the nature of certain illnesses and ailments, and, at the same time, their medical expertise, in public speeches intended to persuade the auditors to choose them over their rivals when needing to consult a physician. Similarly, in calling an enthymeme a demonstration, Aristotle is employing this older, more inclusive sense of demonstration, which comprehends both the proofs and explanations offered by scientists and other experts, and inferences employed in rhetorical speeches. Certain syllogisms are demonstrations in the narrower technical sense on account of certain features of their premises: they can have a special epistemological status and indicate states of affairs with a foundational ontological or causal status. But they and other arguments that are demonstrations in a looser sense play a central role in rhetorical theory on account of their unique and important effect on their auditors.

An enthymeme is a *pistis* because it is a *logos* that persuades. In accordance with Aristotle’s understanding of the nature and purpose of rhetorical speeches, and the prevailing nontechnical pre-Aristotelian sense of the term, a *pistis* by which the rhetorician convinces another is not primarily to be understood as an abstract formal structure of linked propositions that has a justificatory role within an internal body of cognized propositions; it is rather a discourse by which one person is willingly led by another to do one of the three sorts of actions with which rhetoric is concerned: to make a decision concerning the affairs of the polis, to convict or to acquit, or to praise or blame. *Pistis*, understood as the cognitive result in the auditor that is the result of the effective use of all three varieties of *pistis* in

39 Barnes (1969) 138–139, reprinted as (1975) 78–79.

40 As Lloyd (1979) 86–102 has argued, these same texts were akin to the rhetorical displays (*epideixeis*) of the sophists and professional orators. They employ the techniques of rhetoric, and their main function often seems less the revelation of how things are than the establishment of the expertise of the speaker, in contrast to that of his rivals. The goal in such cases is reliance on the speaker, in medical and perhaps other social contexts. Given that there is no sharp boundary between demonstration as a formal explanatory structure and demonstration as persuasive speech, the demonstrations of the doctors were first and foremost a verbal action leading to *peithein*, persuading another.

the sense of means, is the state in which the auditor is led by rhetorical speech to perform one or more of these kinds of actions.

Aristotle defines *logos* in the strict sense as a matter of significant discursive communication (as *Int.* 4.16b26–28 puts it). An enthymeme, though, is more than a *logos*; in calling it a demonstration (*Rhet.* I 9.1355a4–7) Aristotle is noting that it is an inference that at least to some extent⁴¹ conforms to standards of rationality. This is why appeals to ethos and pathos that effectively influence the audience's beliefs or behavior, but do so without a proper enthymeme, fall outside of the rhetorical art (*Rhet.* I 1.1354a11–18). Enthymeme, which Aristotle calls the guts (*soma*) of *pistis* (*Rhet.* I 1.1354a15), is not just any manner of influencing by words, but must be *rational* guidance. As rational, it must conform to certain norms.⁴² Put otherwise, the goal of *pistis*, toward which rhetorical speech is oriented, is not merely an external action, it must be an action that is arrived at through rational deliberation. Whether or not that goal is reached is the measure of the effectiveness of the speech. *Pistis* as guidance can be understood as more or less effective, which is why it admits of quantitative variation. The *pisteis* that result from ethos and pathos will likewise admit of degree. For ethos and pathos too admit of quantitative variation. The speaker can be more or less virtuous. The auditor can be more or less emotionally affected by a speech. It stands to reason that these quantitative differences can lead the auditor to be more or less susceptible to acting as the speaker wishes.

We have seen that, according to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, ethos, pathos, and enthymeme are called *pisteis* insofar as they lead to *pistis*, in the sense by which the term refers to the result of effective rhetorical communication. *Pistis* is *pros hen* in relation to the disposition to heed a certain speaker, and then do what she leads one to do, within a political context.⁴³ *Pistis* is the result of an act of communication that leads to some action.

This has implications for Aristotle's epistemology and philosophy of mind. The communication that leads to *pistis* might be overt, as when one human being speaks to another, but for all his aversion to metaphor, Aristotle is not shy about talking about one aspect of the soul speaking to another: the inner *logos* too is a communicative act (Burnet 1914). A mere *hupolepsis* might have the status of a

⁴¹ On this qualification see Burnyeat (1994, 1996).

⁴² See Dow (2005) 37–57.

⁴³ As González (2006) 118 puts it, "If rhetoric studies the means for persuasive speech, surely its practical goal is to persuade or dissuade the audience; hence, in its *polis* setting and at the level of civic action, rhetoric becomes a legitimate object of interest in the study of 'animal motion,' though here the *zoon* in question is one that possesses *phone* and *logos* and is eminently *politikon*".

passing thought, considered as a kind of inner communication in which some state of affairs is registered, but in which there may be little in the way of causal efficacy; I suggest that Aristotle intends to contrast *pistis* with such a *logos* when he calls it a “strong *hupolepsis*” (*Top.* IV 6.126b18). It has *some* strength; how much strength depends on various factors (including but not restricted to, the *pisteis* of ethos, pathos, and enthymeme). A high degree of *pistis* involves some cognitive force; less *pistis* involves less force, perhaps not enough to counter the pull of an animal desire largely devoid of *logos*.⁴⁴ Aristotle makes this explicit in arguing that *doxa* can overpower knowledge in regard to action.⁴⁵ As we have seen, *doxa* is the cognitive correlate of *pistis*. By definition, *doxa* involves being led to perform an action of some kind. There is no reason why this might override a mode of belief (*hupolepsis*) that is more divorced from the potential to act. The degree of *pistis* has nothing to do with whether one’s cognitive attitude in regard to a proposition has reached a level by which one subscribes to or believes it; it has to do with whether it is such as has enough strength to suffice for being responsible for doing something.⁴⁶

Pistis and Demonstration

Can the term *pisteuein* in the *Posterior Analytics* passage discussed above be understood along these lines? To be sure, it is hard to see how *pistis* that results from, say, a geometrical demonstration is fundamentally social. Nonetheless, we ought to remind ourselves that there is no place in Aristotle’s ontology for free-standing theoretical bodies of propositions structured by entailment relations. A proof, like an enthymeme, a rhetorical syllogism, is a *logos*, something that one says. A science, considered as a body of demonstrations, is constituted by the things that people say when teaching or explaining, and this happens within a social context.

This is not to deny that there is a difference between the sorts of demonstrations offered by the medical writers and those offered by mathematicians. The student can see for herself the truth of the principles of the mathematicians, for

⁴⁴ Desire with *logos* is a result of *pistis*; see *Rhet.* I 11.1370a18–27. For desire exercising a pull without *pistis* opposed to *logos* with *pistis*, see *EE* II 8.1124b1–2.

⁴⁵ See *EN* VII 3.1146b26–30.

⁴⁶ Cf. van Eemeren–Grootendorst–Henkemans (1996) 4: “Argumentation is aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader”. ‘Acceptability’ comes very close to the core sense of *pistis* if one understands ‘standpoint’ here as a stance orienting one toward action, not, as they understand it, as an “opinion . . . about a specific subject” (2).

which reason they are considered by the Neoplatonists to be *autopistoi*, self-evident. This is not the case with medical first principles; those are established on the basis of how well they work in explaining the phenomena that need explaining, in comparison to the principles advocated in rival accounts.⁴⁷ No doubt this is why rhetorical techniques are found in the medical texts, while they would be out of place in a mathematical text. The speaker is not only saying “this is how things are”; he is also saying “trust me, not those others”. The need for such trust becomes even more acute in the context of deliberative rhetoric, where a speaker can induce trust only through attending to ethos in addition to the logical force of the argument.⁴⁸ Aristotle contrasts the sort of *pistis* involved in deliberation from which one holds in regard to the theoretical sciences: “The reason why mathematical *logos* do not involve *ethe* is that choice is not present, for there is no ‘for the sake of which’” (*Rhet.* III 16.1417a19–21). Nonetheless, in each case principles are secured through the same kind of cognitive grasp: *noesis*, which, as a number of scholars in recent decades have urged, cannot be understood in Aristotle as a kind of self-certifying intuition, but as an achievement by which one comes to see that a certain principle will supply a certain middle term allowing for a demonstration.⁴⁹ Aristotle makes no distinction between *noesis* in the case of medicine and that at work in mathematics. Each arises through a demonstration which is a *pistis*, leading us to rely on and trust the expertise of the teacher, as well as the group of scholars with whom the teacher is allied. This is why at *Rhetoric* I 1.1355a24–27 Aristotle emphasizes that in the absence of the resources of rhetoric, scientific expertise (that is, command of the formal elements of demonstration) might be insufficient for bringing about *pistis* in an uneducated audience. “Even if one had the utmost in scientific knowledge, for some people, persuasion on that basis is not easy. For scientific *logos* is teaching, but <in this case> this is impossible”. There must already be trust in the experts.

Aristotle himself displays this sort of trust when, in regard to the question of the number of heavenly spheres that must be posited, he defers to mathematical authority (*Metaph.* Λ 8). This is not, of course, to say that the notion of confidence or trust in the veracity of the propositional content of what is said is absent in

⁴⁷ Because rhetorical and dialectical contexts do not permit theoretical teaching, the arguments found in those contexts must rest on views all share in common; see *Top.* 101a31–34, 159a28–30 and *Rhet.* I 1.1355a24–29.

⁴⁸ As Garver (2004) 142 writes, “when ethos is the most important source of belief, we believe what someone says largely because we trust the person making the assertions”.

⁴⁹ See Leshner (1973); Sorabji (1993).

Aristotle's thought, but there is a continuity between that trust and the socially embedded persuasive speech of those who say those things.⁵⁰

The noetic grasp of a first principle is not blind reliance on authority. One does in fact come to see the truth of a first principle for oneself. But, although Aristotle never works this through, he surely recognized that such a grasp arises from and remains embedded in a social context of teachers and learners.⁵¹

This is why the *pistis* in derivative propositions is less than that in the principles. The trust that a conclusion has been demonstrated is derived from the trust in the principles, which, to be sure, are derived from how the elements of the network of derived conclusions hang together with themselves and with experience, but also from the epistemic authority earned by the teacher or expert who identifies them as principles, an authority, reinforced, as the case may be, by *ethos* and *pathos*.

Conclusion

There is no such *thing* as a proposition, for Aristotle. There are *logoi*, and *logoi* are actions, sayings. (Thus, at *Int.* 4.16b26–28, Aristotle defines *logos* by putting it in the category of a sounding, a *phone*.) The whole of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is based on a conception of *logos* as something *said*, by one person to another, for the sake of

50 On this cf. Garver (2004) 111, 126: “Just as the Greek word *pistis* applies to people whom we believe and trust and equally to propositions that we believe, authority too applies to people as well as propositions. . . . Just as *ethos* can be either created by speech or by such externals as antecedent reputation or the trappings of power, so there are rational or irrational authorities. There can be personal authority with no propositional content or claims to truth: charisma is a standard name for such authority”. Garver goes on to argue that ethically responsible obedience involves following the reasoning of the authority (*ibid.*). This overstates things a bit. I might not be able to follow the scientific research establishing a connection between human activity and potentially catastrophic climate change, but that does not mean that accepting the scientific consensus, and modifying my personal and political choices accordingly, is ethically irresponsible. Rather, in a well-functioning society, the ethically responsible thing to do is to trust in recognized authorities. Aristotle himself does so, in deferring to *endoxa* that lie outside of his own areas of expertise.

51 The point is made well by Reeve (unpublished) 22: “[It] is only within scientific communities or communities of knowledge that, through complex processes of habituation and teaching, they are produced: we learn science from other scientists (X 9 1180^b28–34). But communities of knowledge, both in Aristotle's view and in reality, are parts of the political community and are regulated and sustained by it”.

certain socially embedded aims.⁵² People speak in order to influence the actions of others. People say these things in the context of a *polis*, the necessary precondition for nearly all teaching and learning. Aristotle's understanding of the relationships holding among speech, thought, and action is parallel to that of Isocrates, who famously declared that "none of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom" (*Nicocles* 3.8).⁵³ Speech, in its social context, is prior to thought, and thought is prior to the action of the *phronimos*. The fundamentally social nature of *logos* and *pistis* is often submerged in the way in which Aristotle discusses logic, language, and learning, but an adequate account of Aristotelian epistemology must appreciate how he understands knowledge to be grounded in communicative practices.⁵⁴

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⁵² I grant that *logos* has content, and that content can also be referred to as a 'logos'. I further grant Aristotle's logical writings focus on *logoi* in a way that suggests that they are to be reified as structured entities unto themselves. This, however, sits poorly with his more general metaphysics, according to which only substances are things.

⁵³ οὐδὲν τῶν φρονίμως πραττομένων εὐρήσομεν ἀλόγως γιγνόμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἔργων καὶ τῶν διανοημάτων ἀπάντων ἡγεμόνα λόγον ὄντα (Isocrates, *Nicocles* 3.8, tr. Norlin 1980).

⁵⁴ An earlier version of this paper was read at the Marquette Summer Seminar on Aristotle and Aristotelianism, June 29, 2016. My thought on these matters has benefited from discussion at that time, conversation with Michael Wreen and Ian McCready-Flora, as well as the comments of three anonymous reviewers. I am also grateful to Jacob Terneus for editorial assistance.

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