ETHICAL PROOF: ARGUMENTS FROM CHARACTER

As regards the orator, the qualities which will most command him are courtesy, kindness, moderation and benevolence. But, on the other hand, the opposite of these qualities will sometimes be becoming to a good man. He may hate the bad, be moved to passion in the public interest, seek to avenge crime and wrong, and, in fine, as I said at the beginning, may follow the promptings of every honorable emotion.

—Quintilian, Institutes XII 42

ANCIENT RHETORICIANS knew that good arguments were available to them from other sources than issues. As early as the fourth century BCE, Greek teachers of rhetoric gave suggestions about how a person’s character (Greek ethos) could be put to persuasive uses, and rhetorical theorists continued to discuss the uses of ethical proofs throughout the history of ancient rhetoric.

We use the terms character and ethical proof in this chapter to refer to proofs that rely on community assessments of a rhetor’s character or reputation. According to Webster’s dictionary, the English word character retains three of the important senses it carried for ancient rhetoricians: (1) “the pattern of behavior or personality found in an individual or group”; (2) “moral strength; self-discipline, fortitude, etc”; (3) “a good reputation.” The modern term personality does not quite capture all the senses of the ancient Greek term ethos, since it carried moral overtones and since, for the Greeks, a character was created by a person’s habits and reputation rather than by her experiences.

To give our readers a sense of how effective this proof can be and how important it was to ancient orators, we quote at length from the opening of Isocrates’ Panegyricus:
Many times have I wondered at those who first convoked the national assemblies and established the athletic games, amazed that they should have thought the prowess of human bodies to be deserving of so great bounties, while to those who had toiled in private for the public good and trained their own minds so as to be able to help also their fellow humans when they apostrophized no reward wheresoe'er, when, in all reason, they ought rather to have made provision for the latter; for if all the athletes should acquire twice the strength which they now possess, the rest of the world would be no better off; but let a single man attain to wisdom, and all men will mark the benefit who are willing to share his insight. Yet I have on this account lost heart nor chosen to abate my labors, on the contrary, believing that I shall have a sufficient reward in the approbation which my discourse will itself command. I have come before you to give my counsels on the war against the barbarians and on concord among ourselves. I am, in truth, not unaware that many of those who have claimed to be sophists have rushed upon this theme, but I hope to rise so far superior to them that it will seem as if no word had ever been spoken by my rivals upon this subject. (1-3)

Contemporary rhetors may shy away from such unabashed praise of themselves. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that in this passage Isocrates established his character as a very serious man whose important work is underestimated. At the same time he separated himself from persons who had spoken less well than he does.

To create a persuasive ethos is not easy. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that ethos always manifests itself to listeners or readers, whether a rhetor is aware of it or not. Consider, for example, the following account of the decision made by television anchor Dan Rather to interview Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq, during a period in which the United States was threatening war against that country:

RATHER TREASONOUS DAN

By Tom Marsland

Before discussing Dan Rather's seditionist behavior while interviewing the Butcher of Baghdad, let us reflect on a more pristine, though equally dangerous era.

May 20, 1944 (with bells clicking): "Entschuldigen Sie, wenn ich unterbreche. Herr Fuehrer! The American newswoman Mr. Edward R. Murrow is here to see you... and you'll receive him now, mein Fuehrer?" "Ja, Major Budowitz, show him in." "Willkommen in the Fatherland, Herr Murrow."

"Most kind of you, Herr Reich Fuehrer. May we begin?"

"Ja."

This dialogue seems alien to you? It ought not! The date, May 20, 1944, was less than three weeks away from D-Day, the Allied counter-invasion of Adolf Hitler's Europe.

Hitler's Third Reich brazened the original moniker "Axis of Evil" triumphantly. (2-4)

Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East and on into history's annals of depravity.

No legitimate American journalist would EVER have visited this evil barbarian, who sought our extermination. Especially one of such high standing as Edward R. Murrow.

Had that occurred, I daresay his professional life would have lasted about six seconds. He may even have faced a firing squad back home... I really think he might have met a traitor's demise.

Which brings us to the topic of CBS TV's alpha male. Dan Rather. Comrade Rather did more than meet with this generation's Hitler; he delivered a softball interview to human history's No. 1 murderer of Muslims, Saddam Hussein.

Can we agree that Islam has done little to promote good will in the West these past 20 months? That being said, I truly wish only health and prosperity upon all peace-loving Muslims. I will go out on a limb here and state my belief that these same conditional warm fuzzies are shared by an overwhelming majority of Americans.

However, this group ought not be extended to embrace terrorists, rapists, mass-murderers, rubber-barons, torturers or Democrats. OK, so I'm just kidding about the Democrats... sort of.

(Note for my friends on the left: This is the part of the article dedicated to humor—a decidedly Republican concept. I've observed.)

That Rather is comfortable in these ideological environs is disturbing at least, tragi-coot at most.

What has happened to our American press? It is the "American press," is it not? It's not the "World press" or the "Europress," or is it? CBS, ABC, NBC, and CNN have all at least toyed with these notions of hyper-fuzziness. Not sure that's a word, but you get the point.

Back to our "Rather treasonous Dan."

What does one ask a Hitler hours before D-Day or a Hussein hours before Desert Storm? Shall we bury our heads in the sand and pretend the stain of Auschwitz was non-existent?

It was in fact repugnant, even to the unthinking masses, and though the chumps spewed their puerility night and day, there existed even then anti-war, peace-loving pacifist WWII protesters, albeit in modest numbers.

I believe our intelligence services know of Hussein's Auschwitz and the world will soon know, too, but Dan Rather has no "common man" defense. Mr. Rather is a highly compensated (seven figures per year) super-journalist at the top of his trade... nary a courtroom on the planet would excuse his ignorance, much less his hyper-tolerance of ill-doing.

"Evil" as our president espouses in unusually poignant moral clarity, given his top-dog status in the body politic.

I am not certain Rather committed treason—perhaps sedition. Perhaps he even has the force of First Amendment law on his shiny side. But is it moral? NO, NO, NO! Does he care about morality? I'll let his actions speak for themselves.

In a few days, thousands more people will die because of Rather's mass-murdering, Nelson-tainting ploy. When the war commences, watch Dan Rather! He called the mass-murdering Hussein "Mr. President" and disrespectfully referred to his own President Bush as simply "Bush."

(5-6)
THEOS IN ANCIENT RHETORICS

The term ethos was used in several ways over the long history of ancient rhetoric. The author of the Rhetoric to Alexander cautioned rhetors to be careful about their personal conduct, "because one's manner of life contributes to one's powers of persuasion as well as to the attainment of a good reputation." (XIII 1445b 30). This passage implies that a rhetor's ability to persuade is connected to one's or her moral habits—a connection that was more fully developed by Roman rhetoricians. Aristotle, in contrast, was not so concerned about the way rhetors lived as he was about the appearance of character that they presented within their discourse (Rhetoric 1 i 1366a).

Perhaps in keeping with Plato's injunction that rhetors must know what kind of souls men have (Phaedrus 271d), Aristotle also provided a long list of the "characters" of audiences, depending on their age, status, and so on.

Aristotle's student, Theophrastus, wrote descriptions of possible character traits, a practice that critics later called ethicopia ("fabricating character"). These descriptions typically begin with a definition and list examples of behavior that typified the character being described. Here, for instance, is Theophrastus's account of the character of a tactless person:

Now tactlessness is a pain-giving failure to hit upon the right moment, and your tactless person...will accept a busy friend and ask advice. or command a sweetheart when she is sick of a lover. He will approach someone who has gone bail and ask it, and ask that person to be his security for a loan and will come to bear witness after the verdict is given. Should you bid him to a wedding, he will inveigh against womankind. Should you be but now returned from a long journey, he will invite you to a walk. He is given to bringing you a merchant who, when your bargain is struck, says he would have paid more had you asked; and to rising from his seat to tell a tale all abroad as if such as have heard it before and know it well. He is forward to undertake for you what you would not have done but cannot well decline. If you are sacrificing and put to great expense, that is the day he chooses to come and demand what you owe him. At the flogging of your servant he will stand by and tell how a servant of his hannoied himself after such a flogging as this, at an arbitration he will get

would dance, lay hold of another who is not yet drunk enough to behave foolishly. (XII)

Theophrastus's characters were probably used to teach students how to analyze character, and they provided moral instruction as well. Later on, Hellenistic teachers of rhetoric encouraged their students to compose "characters" for historical or fictional persons as part of their rhetorical exercises (see Chapter 15, on the progmentesma). Aristotle recognized two kinds of ethical proof: invented and situated. The distinction probably depends on Aristotle's prior distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic proofs, or invented and found proofs (1335a).

According to Aristotle, rhetors can invent a character suitable to an occasion—this is invented ethos. However, if rhetors are fortunate enough to enjoy a good reputation in the community, they can use it as an ethical proof—this is situated ethos. But it is, nevertheless, a proof that is extrinsic to the issue, that is simply found in a rhetorical situation. Interestingly enough, this distinction parallels two primary senses of the term character in ancient Greek: character could be invented by means of habitual practice; but it also referred to the community's assessment of people's habitual practices. Thus a given individual's character had as much to do with the community's perception of his actions as it did with his actual behavior.

Today we may feel uncomfortable with the notion that rhetorical character can be constructed, since we tend to think of character, or personality, as stable and fairly stable. We generally assume that a character is shaped by an individual's experiences. The ancient Greeks, in contrast, thought that character was constructed not by what happened to people but by the moral practices in which they habitually engaged. An ethos was not finally given by nature, but was developed by habit (bias). Thus it was important for parents and teachers not only to provide children with examples of good behavior but to insist that young persons practice habits that imprinted their characters with virtues rather than vices. The notion that character was formed through habitual practices endured throughout antiquity. Quintilian devoted many pages of the Institutio to the importance of carefully selecting a teacher for very young children, a teacher whose character would suit a suitable example for them and whose practices would develop positive moral habits in them (1 1 4).

Since the Greeks thought that character was shaped by one's practices, they considered it to be much more malleable than we do. Within certain limits imposed by class and gender restrictions, one could become any sort of person one wished to be, simply by engaging in the practices that produced that sort of character. It followed, then, that playing the roles of respectable characters enhanced one's chances of developing a respectable character.

According to Quintilian, Roman rhetoricians who relied on Greek rhetorical theory sometimes confused ethos with pathos—appeals to the emotions—because there was no satisfactory term for ethos in Latin (VI 1 8). Contemporary rhetorical theory, which refers to the Latin term pathos (pathos) and Quintilian
simply borrowed the Greek term. This lack of a technical term is not surprising, because the requirement of having a respectable character was built into the very fabric of Roman oratory. Early Roman society was governed by means of family authority, and so a person's lineage had everything to do with what sort of ethos he could command when he took part in public affairs. The older and more respected the family, the more discursive authority its members enjoyed. Under the Republic and the Empire the family requirement suffered a bit, but it was still necessary for someone to maintain a reputation for good character in order to be heard. In fact, Quintilian equated the skillful practice of rhetoric with a good character: "No person can speak well who is not good." (II xvi 35). Cicero, the practitioner, was more sympathetic to the Greek position that a suitable ethos could be constructed for a rhetorical occasion, although in De Oratore one of the participants remarks that "mentes, resculptures or reputabile lite" are "qualifications easier to embellish, if only they are real, than to fabricate where non-existent" (II xlii 182).

In later antiquity, ethos became associated almost wholly with style. Hellenes of Tarsus, for example, furnished a long list of the virtues or characters of different styles—simplicity, modesty, solemnity, vehemence, and so on—that was read and used by students well into the Renaissance.

Contemporary discussions of rhetoric often overlook the role played by ethical proofs, despite the fact that Americans are very much interested in the character and personal habits of public figures. Americans don't talk as much as they used to about persons having a good character, but apparently they still care about such things. The "character issue" is regularly raised in presidential elections, although in this case "character" ordinarily refers to a candidate's personal moral choices: Has he been faithful to his spouse? Has he used drugs? Ancient rhetoricians were not so interested in private moral choices like these as they were in the virtues that counted in public affairs: courage, honesty, trustworthiness, modesty, intelligence, fairness-mindedness.

The ancient interest in character is still useful because it highlights the role played by this important kind of proof in contemporary rhetorical exchanges. In this chapter, we review the ancient rhetorical advice about ethos that is still useful or interesting to modern rhetors, and we freely adapt some of it for contemporary use. Ethical rhetorical effects are varied and subtle, and we have not attempted to exhaust the enormous store of ancient teachings about them. We have tried to give a sufficiently full treatment to alert our readers to the persuasive potential contained in this sort of ethical proof.

**Invented Ethos**

Contemporary discourse is often composed of very large audiences, and so it is often the case that the rhetor does not know the people to whom she will speak or write. Thus she cannot use whatever situated ethos she enjoys among those who know her as a means of ethical proof. So she must rely upon invented ethos.

A rhetor who uses invented ethos, you will recall, constructs a character for herself within her discourse. In an essay entitled "Finding My Place in Black America," Gloria Nauden invented an ethos for herself by recalling remarks made to her by others:

"Excuse me, what are you?" As a person of mixed heritage, Black and Korean, I get asked this question several times a day. Sometimes rudely, most of the time innocently. But, I'm always open to educating others about what it means to be Black and Asian.

Among Blacks, I get this kind of reaction: "You look so exotic and different" (pickup line); "It's not too often you see an Asian person at a Black function" (ignorantly curious). "You know, I just got back from China" (So what?), and "My ex-boyfriend was Black and Philippine" (So you have an Asian fetish?). Then there are the rude taunts, they go like this: "She thinks she's Black"; "I can't stand when Chinese people try to act Black."

The worse incidents are when I'm called a "war baby," a reference to the children who were fathered by American soldiers and left behind in the streets and orphanages of Vietnam. In fact, my father, in his homeland, and came to the United States with me when I was a year old. They have been married for 30 years.

Among the worst of all scenes is when I'm called a "chink." Recently, I was at a new hot spot among young Black professionals, the BET Soundstage restaurant in Largo, Md., which is owned by BET Holdings Inc. I am the entertainment director and helped develop the restaurant. But one guest felt comfortable in trying to make me feel unwelcome.

I was in "the box" house, he said, taking great pride in this Black-owned venture. Chinese people have slanted eyes "because you're always squinting, being in everyone's business," the brother said. He complained that he was sick of "chinks" like me coming to the United States and trying to take over and that his people are responsible for building this country. Shocked and angry and hurt, as usual, I wanted to deal him. I wanted to let him know that I was the "sista" who had given the restaurant all its Flava. But even as I told him, "My father is Black. I am Black," he jeered and walked away, making an obscene gesture.

I want people like him to know that I am a very confident, proud and passionate person. I want people to know that my genetic code is Black and Korean, but I consider myself an African American. This mostly has to do with how I was reared. Unlike Tiger Woods, who grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood, I grew up in a public housing complex in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. It was a Black neighborhood and my mother and I stuck out like sore thumbs. (Emerge, August 1995, 67)

By implication, Nauden established that her identity is quite different and much more complex than the ethnic identities that others attempt to construct for her. She demonstrates her own ability to shift among personas. Her use of first person and her frank admissions about her feelings construct an ethos that indicates that she is honest and trustworthy.
tor whose mixed heritage nonetheless causes confusion in insensitive others, which in turn brings difficulty and pain to her.

Aristotle taught that the character conveyed by a rhetor was most important in cases where the facts or arguments were in doubt, "for we believe fair-minded people in a great extent and more quickly [than we do others] on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt." (Ii 1356a). In other words, people tend to believe rhetors who either have a reputation for fair-mindedness or who create an ethos that makes them seem fair-minded. This is especially true in cases where, as Aristotle said, there is room for doubt.

Aristotle saw three possible ways in which rhetors could make ethical mistakes. First, through lack of practical sense, they do not form opinions rightly. That is, rhetors could be so inexperienced or so uninformed that they simply don't draw the right conclusions. Second, through forming opinions wrongly, they do not say what they think because of a bad character. That is, even though rhetors know the right answer or the right course, they may hide it from people because of some character flaw, such as greed or dishonesty. Third, they are prudent and fair-minded but lack good will so that it is possible for people not to give the best advice although they know what it is. That is, rhetors may not care about what happens to the people they represent, and so they do not give good advice even when they could. These, Aristotle wrote, are the only possibilities for a failed invention ethos.

The first ethical lapse still afflicts rhetors, but it doesn't seem nearly so serious as violations of the second and third requirements. These mistakes describe behavior that is unrelated to the stronger moral sense that failure to develop a persuasive character. Dishonesty, greed, and selfishness were (and still are) considered immoral when practiced by anyone, rhetor or not. Unfortunately, it is possible for these vices to be reflected in a discourse ethos. A rhetor named Ken Macrorie fabricated the following example of a failed invention ethos:

Unquestionably the textbook has played a very important role in the development of American schools—and I believe it will continue to play an important role. The need for textbooks has been established through many experiments. It is not necessary to consider these experiments but, in general, they have shown that when instruction without textbooks has been tried by schools, the virtually unanimous result has been to go back to the use of textbooks. I believe, too, that there is considerable evidence to indicate that the textbook has been, and is, a major factor in guiding teachers' instruction and in determining the curriculum. (277)

The ethos in this piece fails all three of Aristotle's tests: the rhetor doesn't show evidence of having done the necessary homework, and as a result, his honesty can be questioned, as can his good will toward his audience.

To put Aristotle's ethical requirements in positive terms, rhetors must seem to be intelligent, to be of good moral character, and to possess good intelligence by demonstrating that they are well informed about issues they discuss. They project an appearance of good moral character by describing themselves or others as moral persons and by refraining from the use of misleading or fallacious arguments. Rhetors project good will toward an audience by presenting the information and arguments that audiences require in order to understand the rhetorical situation.

Demonstrating Intelligence by Doing the Homework

Rhetors can create a character that seems intelligent by demonstrating that they are informed about the issues they discuss, and by refraining from using arguments that are irrelevant or trivial. General audiences can be assumed to be relatively uninformed about difficult or technical issues, so in this case rhetors must take special care to convince an audience that they are well informed without overwhelming their listeners with details.

Consider the following editorial by Nicholas D. Kristof entitled "God, Satan and the Media":

Claims that the news media form a vast liberal conspiracy strike me as utterly unconvincing, but there's one area where accusations of institutional bias have merit: nearly all of us in the news business are completely out of touch with a group that includes 40 percent of Americans.

That's the proportion who described themselves in a Gallup poll in December as evangelical or born-again Christians. Evangelicals have moved from the fringe to the mainstream, and that is particularly evident in this administration. It's impossible to understand President Bush without acknowledging the centrality of his faith. Indeed, there may be an element of messianic vision in the plan to invade Iraq and "remake" the Middle East.

Robert Fogle of the University of Chicago argues that America is now experiencing a fourth Great Awakening, like the religious revivals that have periodically swept America in the last 330 years. Yet offhand, I can't think of a single evangelical working for a major news organization.

Evangelicals are increasingly important in every aspect of American culture. Among the best-selling books in America are Tim LaHaye's Christian "left behind" series about the apocalypse; about 50 million copies have been sold. One of America's most prominent television personalities is Benay Hinn, watched in 190 countries, but few of us have heard of him because he is an evangelist.

President Bush has said that he doesn't believe in evolution (he thinks the jury is still out). President Ronald Reagan felt the same way, and such views are typically American. A new Gallup poll shows that 48 percent of Americans believe in creationism, and only 28 percent in evolution (most of the rest aren't sure or lean toward creationism). According to recent Gallup Tuesday findings, Americans are more than twice as likely to believe in the devil (60 percent) as in evolution.

In its approach to evangelicals, the national news media are generally refe-
York dinner parties to link crime to deprived childhoods—conversation would stop abruptly if someone mentioned Satan.

I tend to disagree with evangelicals on almost everything, and I see no problem with aggressively pointing out the dismal consequences of this increasing religious influence. For example, evangelicals’ discomfort with condoms and sex education has led the administration to policies that are likely to lead to more people dying of AIDS at home and abroad, not to mention more pregnancies and abortions.

But liberal critiques sometimes seem not just filled with outrage at evangelical-backed policies, which is fair, but also to have a souring tone about conservative Christianity itself. Such mockery of religious faith is unacceptable. And liberals sometimes show more intellectual curiosity about the religion of Afghanistan than that of Alabama, and more interest in routing the Taliban than in reading the Book of Revelation.

I care about this issue partly because I grew up near Yambil, Ore., which has 700 people and five churches. My science teacher at Yambil Grade School taught me that evolution was false, and a high school girlfriend attended a church where people spoke in tongues (contrary to stereotypes, she was an ace student, smarter than many people fluent in more conventional tongues, like French and Spanish). In the evangelical tinge to its faith, Yambil is emblematic of a huge chunk of Middle America that we in the Northeast are out of tune with.

Moreover, it is increasingly not just Middle America, but Middle World. As Professor Philip Jenkins notes in a new book, fundamentalist Christianity is rising through the developing world. The number of African Christians has soared over the last century, to 360 million from 10 million, and the boom is not among wealthy Protestants but among charismatic Pentecostals.

One of the deepest divides in America today is the gulf of mutual suspicion that separates evangelicals from secular society, and policies battle over abortion and judicial appointments will aggravate these tensions further in coming months. Both sides need to reach out, drop the contempt and display some of the inclusive wisdom of Einstein, who wrote in his memoir: “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.” (New York Times, March 14, 2003, nytimes.com)

In this essay Nicholas Kristof tackles a delicate issue relations between evangelical Christianity and secularism. He must create a trustworthy ethos if he wants members of either group to continue reading, and he does this by littering the piece with bits of information. He cites polls and authorities and provides data on the popularity of media that appeal to evangelical Christians. He also acknowledges his own bias, giving the impression that he is honest. Had he not taken such care to establish that he is both an honest and informed writer, his audience may not stay to read his final plea for discussion between the groups.

To seem well informed is especially important when the audience is relatively well informed themselves about the issues at hand. In this case, the rhetor must quickly assure them that he knows what he is talking about. He may do so by using language that suggests he is an insider, by sharing an anecdote that illustrates his point, or by providing counterarguments.

The Superconducting Supercollider was to be the most powerful particle accelerator in the world. The 33-mile underground tunnel, lined with 11,000 superconducting magnets, would accelerate two beams of protons in opposite directions around a gigantic ring, slamming the beams together to create a spectacular fireworks display of subatomic particles. Physicists expected that by mimicking the conditions thought to exist in the primordial plasma of the early universe, the supercollider would reveal new exotic species of particles, thereby providing significant insight into the fundamental structure of matter.

(Bowes, August-September 1997, 50)

Bowers manages to make the scientific terms come to life as he describes the cultural moment in science when he decided to enter the field of physics. Because he details the supercollider’s activity with such precision, Bowes establishes himself as someone who knows a good deal about the subject under discussion, and as a result, readers are more likely to pay attention to what he has to say.

We remarked earlier that rhetors who wish to appear intelligent and well informed must demonstrate that they have done whatever research and contemplation is necessary to understand an issue, and they must avoid making irrelevant or trivial arguments as well. A rhetorical disaster may occur when a speaker fails to establish themselves as well informed about
the issues they discuss. While campaigning for the presidency in 1996, for example, then senator Bob Dole repeatedly criticized Hollywood's values. Here is an account of one such incident from USA Today:

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole Wednesday said Hollywood is "mainstreaming deviancy," and accused the entertainment industry of promoting rape, violence, and sexual abuse.

At a Los Angeles fund-raiser, Dole—front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination—said, "It will only stop when the leaders of the entertainment industry recognize and shoulder their responsibility.

Dole is going after Hollywood because advisers say it's good politics. He's hoping to appeal to mainstream voters, as well as conservatives.

Dole called his outrage more than a "gaggle of old attempts of one generation to steal the fun of another."

He's said that old movies, like Natural Born Killers and True Romance, "reveal in mindless violence and hopeless sex.

Dole singled out recording groups Cannibal Corpse, Gore Boys and 2 Live Crew, and a "culture business that makes money from music extolling the pleasures of raping, torturing and mutilating women."

And he said that the movie Wall Street, which owns Intercope Records, was on the "leading edge of coarseness and violence."

"Bob Dole finds it easier to put the blindsers on and attack Hollywood for political points," said Arthur Kropp of People for the American Way.

Dole's Hollywood denunciation is not his first. In April he was criticized for attacking the movie Priest while acknowledging he had never viewed the film, which portrays sexual misconduct by Roman Catholic priests. (New, 1, 1996, A1, 6).

When asked if he had seen the film under discussion, Dole admitted that he had not. His admitted failure to do his homework negatively affected the reception of his later speeches on violence in the media. Failed ethics in one situation can carry over into subsequent situations, shaping a rhetorical character that can hinder the reception of future messages, especially if the rhetor is under intense and constant public scrutiny. In this case, those who recalled his previous mistake might not regard Dole's views as informed evaluations.

Here is an example of failed ethics produced by another rhetor who did not do the necessary research on the issue at hand:

Many students go to college to find a husband or wife. While there are some who attend for the purpose of getting themselves an education, these are few and far between. The majority of compassion seekers are men because by the time they reach college most of them are ready to settle down after the busy life of high school. In most cases, men are tied to home security, and have problems in adjusting to being completely on their own. In the opinion of this authority, men are looking to fulfill their need of security by finding a wife in college.

There is no hint here that the author did any research on this subject, even to the extent of asking one or two college men whether or not his conclu-
CHAPTER 6: ETHICAL PROOF: ARGUMENTS FROM CHARACTER

This history of good work associates Gray with several important moments in the civil rights movement, thus indicating to readers why they should be interested in learning more about him.

Sometimes reviewers will allude to a director’s history in order to reinforce their estimations of his abilities. Here, for example, is Roger Ebert’s review of Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers. Notice how Ebert constructs his ethos by showing us that he is both an experienced reviewer of movies and that he is also familiar with literary conventions:

With “Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers,” it’s clear that director Peter Jackson has filled the balance decisively against the hobbits and in favor of the additional action heroes of the Tolkien trilogy. The star is now clearly Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen), and the hobbits spend much of the movie away from the action. The last third of the movie is dominated by an epic battle scene that would no doubt startle the gentle medievalist J.R.R. Tolkien. The task of the critic is to decide whether this shift damages the movie. It does not. “The Two Towers” is one of the most spectacular special effects ever made, and, given current audience tastes in violence, may well be more popular than the first installment, “The Fellowship of the Ring.” It is not faithful to the spirit of Tolkien and misplaces much of the charm and whimsy of the books, but it stands on its own as a visionary thriller. I complained in my review of the first film that the hobbits had been short-changed, but with this second film I must accept that as a given, and go on from there.

“The Two Towers” is a rousing adventure, a skillful marriage of special effects and computer animation, and it contains sequences of breathtaking beauty. It also gives us, in a character named Gollum, one of the most engaging and convincing CGI [computer-generated imagery] creatures I’ve seen. The Gollum was in possession of the Ring, now entwined to Frodo, and misses it (“my precious”) most painfully; but he has a split personality and (in-between) worlds when his dark side takes over serves as a guide and companion for Frodo (Elijah Wood) and Sam (Sean Astin). His body language is a choreography of ingratitude and distortion. The film introduces another computer-generated character, Treebeard, a member of the most ancient race in Middle-Earth; a tree that walks and talks and takes a very long time to make up its mind, explaining to Merry and Pippin that some morning he would have guessed that a walking, talking tree would look silly and break the spell of the movie, but no, there is certainly majesty in this mossy old creature.

The film opens with a brief reprise of the great battle between Gandalf (Ian McKellen) and Balrog, the monster made of fire and smoke, and is faithful to the lore of what comes next but showcasing a higher victory is watched.
of fighting and war. In other words he prefers complexity to spectacle, and thus reinforces his ethos as a serious critic of film.

Achieving Good Will

Cicero wrote that good will could be won “if we refer to our own acts and services without arrogance; if we weaken the effect of charges that have been preferred, or of some suspicion of less honorable dealing which has been cast upon us; if we dilate on the misfortunes which have beset us or the difficulties which still beset us; if we use prayers and entreaties with a humble and submissive spirit” (On Invention I:11:22). While ethical nitches like these were persuasive to Roman audiences, they may be a bit too flauntry for modern tastes. Modern critics can demonstrate their good will toward an audience by carefully considering what readers need to know about the issue at hand in order to follow the argument. They should supply any necessary information that audiences might not already have but should be careful not to repeat information that the audience already knows.

Movie reviewers usually operate on the ethical principle of good will: they must assume that people will listen to or read their reviews in order to decide whether to see a given film. Since people put their trust (and their money) on the line when they take reviewers’ advice, movie reviewers are obligated to have good will toward their audiences. They demonstrate this good will by telling audiences just enough about the plot or characters or direction to allow them to decide whether to see a film, but they don’t give away the ending. They also demonstrate good will by providing audiences with their frank opinion about a film, as Ebert does in the review above. Here is another review of The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, written from a very different ethos:

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers is...
Sideshow Bob with a bad case of Dermatitis. Treebeard is the oldest being in Middle-Earth, but only because Jean Rivers isn’t.

And then there’s Gimli the Dwarf who offers war-torn refugees some comic relief. Today he kills Orcs, tomorrow he kills twice nightly at Caesars Atlantic City. He’s on Brooke Shields short of a USO show.

Gimli and Treebeard sound suspiciously alike, suggesting that while Orcs may be abundant in Middle-Earth, voice talent is not.

The time of the Elves it nearly over, warns the Elf leader, soon, there will be no one to bake the Kekubars...

Elsewhere in Middle-Earth.... "There!” exclaimed Frodo. "It’s the tower of Sauron. What gave it away? The enormous rabbit ears on top! And a vast EYE in the center! So the Dark Lord gets CBS! You’d think he’d be early on DIREC TV.

Say, if the Dark Lord was really all that powerful, wouldn’t he invent a gun?"

The good wizard Gandalf returns from the dead, as we know, but then, what turned out to be the sword hole there ever was. Now resurrected, Gandalf the Gray (as Gandalf the White.) But Gandalf, plump or periwinkle, would coordinate better with your coloring, noted helpful Elf Legolas. When Gandalf mounts his trusty Steed, it’s off-camera for two hours until his triumphant return.

So our heroes speed towards their destination, the place where The Ring must meet its end before our friends die. The fires of Mount Doom...

Say what you want about sequels, but this one is worth its weight in gold.

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers is a towering, stupendous achievement.

Maybe the trilogy is like an Oreo cookie. The middle might be the best part.

(Mark Ramsey, moviefone.com December 11, 2002)

Note how very different this reviewer’s ethos is from that established by Ebert. His review is a series of over-liners. If this writer has good will toward his audience, he achieves it by making them laugh rather than by providing details about the film, as Ebert does. Ramsey does risk turning off any readers who are fans of the Tolkien books and/or the films by making jokes at the legend’s expense. The risk is mitigated somewhat near the end by what appears to be an honest assessment of The Two Towers. (This sentence also includes a nice analogy.)

The ethical criticism of good will poses interesting problems for writers of newsmagazines like Time and Newsweek. These writers are obligated to include the facts of the news in their stories, but their stories sometimes appear a week or ten days after the same events have been thoroughly covered in newspapers and television. How do such writers manage to present the necessary facts—in case some reader has been hiding in a cave—and yet do so without boring their readers? Many Americans watched the coverage of the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. How are writers after the fact to compete with the gripping images that appeared on television? Here is an excerpt from Newsweek’s lead story the following week:

Dan Webster was happy to be away from Washington, with its petty rivalries, its crime, its windswept Truman. The one-time Senator aide had come home to hearland. He had just dropped off his 3-year-old son, Joseph, at the America’s Kids day-care center when the force of the explosion hurled him across his desk in the courthouse. Stunned, wild with fear, Webster ran down the street, to the smoking, shattered shell that had, until a few minutes before, been a federal office building. There was just rubble where the day-care center had been. He found a group of children huddled with rescue workers—but his own was not among them. He ran to fetch his wife, who worked nearby. Twenty minutes later, miraculously, he found a policeman carrying his boy. Joseph’s face had been slashed by flying glass, his condyle had been ruptured by the blast and his arm was broken. But he was alive. (May 1, 1995, 25)

This piece is very like fiction, in fact. Aristotle would have called it an argument from example (see Chapter 5, on rhetorical reasoning). The writers used the third person point of view to describe the details of the blast as it affected one man and his family, before giving other details about the larger effects of the bombing. They presented Webster as a victim of a tragic irony; he and his family moved away to Oklahoma City on the presumption that they would be safer in the Midwest than in Washington, DC. Moreover, the writers characterized Webster as “stunned” and “wild with fear,” thus creating a dramatic character like those in novels. These details and effects create ethical interest where a simple rehearsal of the facts could not.

As another means of securing good will, rhetors can say why they think their presentation of an argument is important and what benefits will accrue to those who read or listen to it. We made an ethical appeal of this sort at the beginning of this book when we suggested that the study of ancient rhetorics will, in essence, turn people into better citizens. Of course, this play works only if audiences do not resist ulterior motives on a rhetor’s part. Television advertisements for life insurance often begin with scenarios depicting loved ones whose lives have been disrupted by the death of a provider who left no insurance. While the companies that sponsor these ads seem to have good will toward their audience insofar as they wish to protect people from harm, viewers know that these companies also want to sell insurance. In this case, they do it by frightening people—a tactic that is marginally ethical.

Establishing good will is especially difficult to manage when students write for teachers, since in this case the audience is usually better informed than the rhetor. The best way to demonstrate good will in this case is to follow teachers’ instructions.

**VOICE AND RHETORICAL DISTANCE**

We have been arguing that rhetors can create a character within a discourse and that such self-characterizations are persuasive. Ancient rhetoricians realized that very subtle ethical effects were available through the manipulation of stylistic features. Here is Hermes of Tarsus, for example:
Rough and vehement diction and coined words are indicative of anger, especially in sudden attacks on your opponent, where unusual words that seem to be coined on the spur of the moment are quite suitable—words such as “lambaste” or “outpush.” All such words are suitable since they seem to have been dictated by emotion. (See Types of Style p. 359)

Rhetors can still create self-characterizations by means of certain stylistic choices: modern rhetoricians give the name voice to this self-dramatization in style. Of course, voice is a metaphor in that it suggests that all rhetorical situations, even those that use written or electronic media, mimic the relation of one person speaking to another. Written or electronic discourse that creates a lively and accessible voice makes reading more interesting. Like the characters of style, the repertoire of possible voices is immense: there are cheerful voices, gloomy ones, somber ones, homely ones, sincere ones, angry ones—the list is endless.

Voices affect the rhetorical distance that can seem to exist between rhetors and their audiences. Once again, the term distance is a metaphor representing the degree of physical and social distance that exists between people speaking to one another. But even in written or electronic discourse, rhetors can narrow or widen the rhetorical distance between themselves and their audiences by means of stylistic choice. When creating a voice, rhetors should consider the situation for which they are composing: how much distance is appropriate given their relationship to an audience; how much distance is appropriate given their relationship to the issue. As a general rule, persuasion occurs more easily when audiences can identify with rhetors. Identification increases as distance decreases.

**Intimate Distance = Closer Identification, More Persuasive Potential**

**Formal Distance = Less Identification, Less Persuasive Potential**

Rhetors who know an audience well or whose audience is quite small can use an intimate distance (unless some factor in the rhetorical situation prevents this). The distance created in personal letters, for example, is ordinarily quite intimate, while that used in business correspondence is more formal since rhetors either do not know their correspondents personally or because convention dictates that such relationships be kept at arm’s length, so to speak. Compare the distance created by Roger Ebert and Mark Ramsey in their reviews earlier in this chapter. Although both pieces are written in first person, Ebert’s tone is more distant and formal than Ramsey’s. He achieves this by giving information about the film rather than by cracking jokes about it and by establishing himself as an authority on film.

However, rhetorical situations can create exceptions to the distance-intimacy equation. Formal language is ordinarily appropriate in a courtroom, for example, even though an attorney, a defendant, and a judge constitute a very small group. In addition, the attorney may know both the judge and the defendant well. Nonetheless, she probably ought to use formal language in her conversations with both, given the official and serious nature of courtroom language: performers at concerts and television evangelists, whose audiences number in the thousands or even millions, nonetheless occasionally address their audiences quite personally and intimately.

A rhetor’s attitude toward the issue also influences distance. On one hand, where rhetors remain as neutral as possible, expressing neither a supportive nor rejecting attitude, distance tends to be greater. On the other hand, rhetors’ strong expression of an attitude—approval or disapproval, for example—closes distance.

More Attitude = Intimate Distance
Less Attitude = More Formal Distance

### Grammatical Person

The prominent features of style that affect voice and distance are grammatical person, verb tense and voice, word size, qualifiers, and—in written discourse—punctuation. There are three grammatical persons available in English: first person, in which the person or persons speaking or writing refer to themselves as “I” or “we”; second person, in which the audience is addressed by means of you; and third person, in which the rhetor mentions agents or issues but does not allude directly to herself or her audience.

**First-Person Reference**

“I will veto this bill when it comes to my desk.” (The president speaks, referring to himself as “I.”)

**Second-Person Address**

“You’ll see . . . I’ll veto this bill.” (The president speaks to someone else, referring to that person in second person.)

**Third-Person Reference**

“President Smith will veto the bill sent him by Congress today.” (Another person speaks about the president.)

“Today the White House announced that it will veto the bill. (Someone speaking about the president uses metonymy to increase distance even more; she refers not to the president’s person but to the place where he lives).

Composition textbooks (and teachers) often tell their students never to use first-person (I or we) or second-person (you) pronouns in the papers they write in school. We think that this rule is too simple and inflexible to respond to the great variety of rhetorical situations that people encounter.

Generally, first- and second-person discourse creates less distance between a rhetor and an audience than does third-person discourse, because the participants in the action are referred to directly. In third-per-
to the rhetor or his audience tend to disappear. Thus third-person discourse creates the greatest possible rhetorical distance. First- and second-person discourse are used in situations where rhetors are physically proximate to audiences—in conversation and in more formal speech situations as well. In settings where spoken discourse is used, I and you actually refer to participants in the situation, even when the audience is very, very large, as it is at football games and open-air concerts. Third-person is generally used by speakers only within quite formal contexts, or if convention dictates that it be used—at a conference of scientists, for instance.

**First- and Second-Person Discourse**

First- and second-person discourse are ordinarily used in speech when small groups of people are conversing. Clarity of pronoun reference is ordinarily not a problem in conversation because the persons to whom the pronouns apply are visible and audible to all participants. To see how important it is to maintain the relatively intimate distance necessary to conversation, try speaking about someone who is present in the third person (use her name, use the pronouns she and her to refer to her). Third-person pronouns create such a distance that the person so referred to may feel that she has suddenly been excluded from the conversation.

First and second grammatical persons have interesting and complex ethical effects in writing and in electronic discourse, since the persons participating in these rhetorical acts are not physically proximate to each other. Here is a fictional example of first-person discourse, from Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield*:

> Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born. . . .

> Here is a version of the passage revised into third-person discourse:

> Whether or not David Copperfield turns out to be the hero of his own life will be shown in these pages. To begin the story of his life at its beginning, records show that he was born. . . .

The third-person version demonstrates how that choice increases the distance between reader and writer, as well as between readers and the subject of this novel, the life of David Copperfield.

But use of the first person can increase distance if a writer gives information about his or her ideology or opinions in a way that excludes some readers. Here is an example—taken from an article by Lewis H. Lapham and published in *Harpers*—of a first-person voice that may cause some readers to feel excluded.

> Were I to believe what I read in the papers, I would find it easy to think that I no longer can identify myself simply as an American. The noun apparently

a plain American I have neither voice nor authentic proof of existence. I acquire a presence only as an old American, a female American, a white American, a rich American, a black American, a gay American, a poor American, a native American, a dead American. The subordination of the noun to the adjectives makes a mockery of both the American promise and the democratic spirit, but it serves the purposes of the politicians as well as the news media, and throughout the rest of this election year I expect the political campaigns to pitch their tents and slogans on the frontiers of race and class. For every plodding, the candidates will find a migrant farm worker, to it matter how eccentric or small in number, a distant and discouraging they. (January 1992, 48)

Interestingly enough, the effectiveness of this first-person voice depends on whether or not readers share Lapham's desire that all Americans be identified as similar to one another simply because they live in the same country. Readers whose identity customarily has an adjective placed in front of it (whether they want this to happen or not) might wonder whether the author represented by this voice understands how difficult it is for some persons to be thought of "simply as an American."

Since it is modeled on conversation, first-person discourse always implies the presence of a hearer or a reader, a "you" who is listening or reading, whether that "you" is explicitly mentioned or not. Note that relies on an "I-you" relation indicates to members of an audience that a rhetor feels close enough to them to include them in a relatively intimate conversation.

Dear folks, I know you may be worried about me, so I'm writing to say that I arrived safely. Please send money. Love, your son.

The author of this note gives no details at all about his arrival—when, where, how. He obviously feels so close to his audience that he assumes they need no more information than he supplies.

In relationships that are not intimate, the "I-you" voice has complex ethical effects. Novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky's "Underground Man" provides a good instance of the ego-centeredness that may result from the use of first-person discourse, even when the rhetor is a fictional person, as he is in this case:

> I am a sick man . . . I am a stupid man. I am an unpleasant man. I think my lover is diseased. However, I don't know beans about my disease, and I am not sure what is bothering me. I don't treat it and never have, though I respect medicine and doctors. Besides, I am extremely superstitious, let's say sufficiently so to respect medicine. (I am educated enough not to be superstitious, but I am.) No, I refuse to treat it out of spite. You probably will not understand that. Well, but I understand it. Of course, I can't explain to you just whom I am annoying in this case by my spite. (1)

Here is a complaining neighbor, wrapped so deeply in his own troubles that he seems at first to be engaging in an ego-centered, aimless, and self-centered . . .
an audience ("You probably will not understand"); a move that establishes a sort of back-hence intimacy. And the final sentence in the passage suggests that the relationship will become "us" against "them" before very long. The intimate "I-you" relationship includes Dostoevsky's audience, whether they want to be this man's companion or not.

The ethical possibilities opened by grammatical person are endless. In Desert Solitaire, Edward Abbey used a combination of third and first person to separate "us" from "them."

There may be some among the readers of this book, who believe without question that any and all forms of construction and development are intrinsic goods, in the national parks as well as anywhere else, who virtually identify quantity with quality and therefore assume that the greater the quantity of traffic, the higher the value received. There are some who frankly and boldly advocate the eradication of the last remnants of wilderness and the complete subjugation of nature to the requirements of what is known as "progress." This is a courageous view, admirable in its simplicity and power, and with the weight of all modern history behind it; it is also quite insane. I cannot attempt to deal with it here.

There will be other readers, I hope, who share my basic assumption that wilderness is a necessary part of civilization and that it is the primary responsibility of the national park system to preserve intact and undiminished what little still remains. (Ibid., 37)

Abbey referred to those who don't share his opinions in the third person, perhaps because he was sure that they wouldn't be among his readers. This tactic created a "we-they" relationship that gave Abbey's readers a sense of being allied with him against those who do not share his position.

"We," the plural first person pronoun, shares in the complex rhetorical effects created by the use of "I." "We" may establish a cozy intimacy that presumes much in common between author and audience. Consider the use of first person in the following excerpt from a piece written by Victoria A. Brownworth that appeared in Curve magazine:

Pride and naming go together. At early Gay Pride marches in the 1970s, we chanted: "Say it loud and clear and proud!" In the activist 1980s, when AIDS crisis was killing gay men with such ferocity, we changed: "Say it loud and clear and proud!"

In the 1990s we had a new chant: "We're here, we're gay, get used to it!"

What we call ourselves is both an evolving process and an essential element of self-acceptance, or what we have come to call pride.

I spoke about identity and pride recently at the University of Pennsylvania. The topic was the word queer and the ongoing debate about its use. Like nigger or fat, it is a loaded word that comes with a history of violence. Reclaiming epithetical language remains highly problematic, renaming ourselves with the negative slurs of the dominant culture: an attempt to assert prideful dominance over their intent to wound is politically laudable, but it doesn't always work. I have never witnessed a Jewish friend do anything but cringe at the word fat. Many blacks find the use of nigger in rap and hip-hop lyrics offensive, have been hurt at us with violent rage. Even if we do not accept these names and wear them with pride, it is a limited construct. Blacks can call themselves nigger, whites cannot. Those who espot the word queer at us as an incontrovertible name use it as if it were accepted parlance.

The process of naming is a constantly evolving one. Embedded within the concept of pride and identity politics is what we feel about what we call ourselves. The emotion around naming carries as much weight as its political etymology. There are many names that signify, to myself and to others, who I am. Dyke, queer, feminist, writer, lesbian, working-class, Catholic, intellectual. These are identities I claim and assert. But identity is not fixed. Our identities can change and that evolution can present us with conflicts over not only the names we claim, but also over our acceptance of what those names stand for, and thus our pride in ourselves. (56)

Brownworth, as a regular columnist for the lesbian magazine Curve, is intimate with her audience, and she assumes, for the most part, that her readers share her experience when she chronicles the various chants gays and lesbians have used to assert their identity collectively. Her frequent use of first person discourse at the beginning of the essay demonstrates her own knowledge about such collective action, and what's more, that her knowledge comes from first-hand experience. She moves between the plural first person ("we") in the first paragraph to the first person singular ("I") in the second paragraph, thus effectively showing where she stands on the issue and why she has the authority to write an essay on identity's "legacy." Sentences like "I spoke about identity and pride recently at the University of Pennsylvania" and "I have never witnessed a Jewish friend or anything but cringe at the word fat" combine to produce Brownworth as close to her readers even as they establish her as an expert. And as the piece continues, readers are encouraged to see how Brownworth herself has struggled with the question of identity and language. She invokes historical moments (Gay Pride marches) and shared rallying cries so familiar to Curve readers ("We're here, we're queer!" and "Say it loud, gay and proud") to create the impression that she and her readers have a lot in common by virtue of their being lesbians in the early twenty-first century.

And so the use of we may exclude readers depending on whether they are included in the group of persons it designates and on whether or not their inclusion/exclusion matters in some way. Compare the relative inclusiveness of the following uses of we:

We the people of the United States.... We shall overcome.

"We weren't always old and conservative. We used to be young and conservative." (New York Life Insurance Company)

In the first example, we refers to the Americans who established a federal or national government; we was intended to consolidate group feeling among Americans. The use in "we shall overcome" in contrast, has a gen-
version to the distancing effect for anyone who is not African American, of "African Americans will overcome." In the third example, we refer, presumably, to the people who run an insurance company, who want to promote an ethos of wise, risk-free management. This reference to a group of people that does not include the reader is something of a departure for advertising, which generally uses a second-person voice. Whether or not readers will do as they are asked at the end of the ad ("call your New York Life agent") depends upon whether or not they wish to be included in a group of investors who are "set in our ways" and who "weather the storms" because of their conservative financial philosophy.

We use the first-person pronoun throughout this book, even though to do so is unconventional in textbooks. We do so for three reasons. First of all, this voice seems to be more honest, since much of what we have to say here has developed from our own thinking about the usefulness of ancient rhetoric. As a result, writing in first person was easier for us since we didn't have to go searching for circumlocutions like "in the opinion of the authors" to express what we think. Second, when we take a position on a matter that is debated by scholars of ancient rhetoric, the first-person voice allows us to take responsibility for that position; third-person pronouns make flat statements about disputed matters seem too authoritative and decisive in situations where opinions differ. Third, we hope that readers will identify more readily with a first-person voice. The material in this book is foreign and difficult and, by itself, puts quite a little distance between us and our readers. The use of a third-person voice would only widen that distance. Our choice of first-person does create one problem, one that some readers may have noticed by now. Its use can create an ego-centered voice that excludes an audience. Whether this happens or not depends on the care taken by the rhetor to establish a respectable ethos and on his attitude toward his subject. We worried a good deal that our use of the plural first person would be taken as authoritative; we don't mean it to be. That is, we feared it would become the so-called "royal we," so-called because kings and queens use it when making official announcements. There is yet another rhetorical problem inherent in the use of a first-person voice. First person often led us to want to write in second person as well, as in phrases like "Notice how . . ." and "You should do . . ." Since we wanted to avoid the instructional tone conveyed by the second person, we were often forced to substitute third-person circumlocutions for you—the rhetor, the writer.

Second Person Discourse

Second-person discourse is the province of advertising. "Come fly the friendly skies." "Just do it." "You're in good hands." Advertisers want their audiences to feel close to the companies they represent and the products they sell. The cozy second-person voices they establish cover over the fact that every ad gives instructions to its audience; use this, buy that. In other words, a potential rhetorical problem is inherent in second-person discourse, because listeners who adopt it are giving directions. Obviously, this just a pinch of manitou to the boiling sauce." "Join tab A to slot B." The person who gives directions assumes a position of superiority to audiences. If readers are ready to be dictated to, as users of recipes usually are, this voice works. When readers or listeners are not receptive to instruction, use of the second-person pronoun can increase distance rather than closing it. For example, political activist and presidential candidate Ross Perot goofed in his address at the annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People when he referred to the audience several times as "you people." Perot's grammatical separation created a palpable and alienating distance between himself and his audience.

Third Person Discourse

Third-person voice establishes the greatest possible distance between writer and reader. Use of this grammatical person announces that its author, for whatever reasons, cannot afford too much intimacy with an audience. Third person is appropriate when a rhetor wishes to establish himself as an authority or when she wishes to efface her voice so that the issue may seem to be presented as objectively as possible. In third-person discourse the relationship between the rhetor and audience to the issue being discussed is more important than the relationship between them.

Here is a passage from Friedrich A. Hayek's The Constitution of Liberty that is written in third person:

The great aim of the struggle for liberty has been equality before the law. This equality under the rules which the state enforces may be supplemented by a similar equality of the rights that men voluntarily enjoy in their relations with one another. This extension of the principles of equality to the rules of moral and social conduct is the chief expression of that common belief called the democratic spirit—and probably that aspect of it that does most to make intolerant the inequalities that liberty necessarily produces. (85)

Hayek did not qualify the generalizations put forward in this paragraph with an "I think" or even with an "Experience shows that . . ." He may have had several reasons for choosing to write in this distancing fashion: to seem objective, to seem authoritative and therefore forceful, or to keep his subject—equality—in front of readers, rather than his personality. Since Hayek is a very well-known political theorist, his status as an authority (his situated ethos) may be such that he doesn't have to qualify his generalizations.

Here's another example of third-person discourse from the first page of How Institutions Think, written by a well-known anthropologist, Mary Douglas.

Writing about cooperation and solidarity means writing at the same time about rejection and mistrust. Solidarity involves individuals being ready to suffer on behalf of the larger group and their expectation other individual members to do as much for them. It is difficult to talk about these questions cooly. They touch on intimate feelings of loyalty and sacredness. Anyone who has accepted trust.
Our use of alternating male and female pronouns in this book has irritated some of our readers. Some who have complained about this practice would prefer that we stick to a single gender, thus reducing the number of occasions in which gender switches call attention to the rhetoric of our argument and hence distract readers from what we are saying. Other readers insist that consistent use of male pronouns would be less distracting. Calls for consistency in gender reference suggest that readers imagine a rhetorical actor or actors with whom they identify while reading. When that actor’s gender is altered, the reader must stop in order to adjust her picture of the imagined actor (as in this sentence). Calls for sole reliance on the male gender, however, seem to us to stem from a commonplace that rhetorical actors are, or ought to be, male. That is to say, the first objection to our practice is rhetorical; the second is ideological. We adopted the practice of switching the gender of pronouns referring to rhetorical actors in order to call our readers’ attention to both the workings of rhetorical actors and the power of the commonplace. Some of our critics have said our second aim goes beyond our responsibilities as rhetoric teachers. What do you think?

Students often use third-person when they write for teachers on the correct assumptions that the normal distance lends authority to their work and that it is appropriate for a rhetorical situation that obtains in most classrooms. A curious thing sometimes happens within third-person prose, however: people write phrases like “the writer of this paper feels” or “in the opinion of this author.” If these constructions emerge during the writing process, it may be that the issue demands that the rhetor express some opinions and take responsibility for them. In this case, first person may be a better choice. Third-person statements tend to have an authoritative flavor. When rhetors find themselves trying to add qualifiers about their opinions or attitudes, it may be the case that the third-person voice is inappropriate or even dishonest. Of course, dishonesty is disastrous if a reader detects it.

**Verb Tense and Voice**

The choice of grammatical person is the most influential element in establishing voice and distance. However, other stylistic choices, such as verb tense and voice, affect an ethos as well. Present tense has more immediacy than past tense; use of the present tense gives an audience a sense of participation in events that are occurring at the moment, while past tense makes them feel like onlookers in events that have already occurred. Compare your response to the following phrasings:

**Present Tense**: Quintillian taught his students to . . .

**Past Tense**: Quintillian taught his students to . . .

The second example distances readers from Quintillian because it explicitly places his teaching in the past.

In English, verbs may assume one of two “voices”—active and pas-
Word Size

Other stylistic resources help to establish voice, as well. Word size seems to affect voice and distance. American audiences tend to assume that polysyllabic words (big words with lots of syllables, like polysyllabic) indicate that their user is well educated. Hence they are likely to award authority to a writer who uses them. Compare the effect of “It will be my endeavor in this analysis...” to that of “Here I will try to analyze...”

When used carefully, polysyllabic words are generally more precise than smaller words. Polysyllabic is more specific than large or big: deconstructing is both more impressive and precise than “taking apart”; chemoflavacontactors is more precise, but less intimate, than “the stuff that causes holes in the ozone layer.” Because of their greater accuracy, larger words tend to appear in formal discourse, in which rhetors are more concerned with accuracy than with establishing an intimate relation with readers. However, big words can have the disadvantage of making their user sound pompous; too many polysyllabic words can also discourage people from making the effort to plow through them, especially if their meanings are obscure to the intended audience. Here is a brief passage written by philosopher Jacques Derrida:

On what conditions is a grammatology possible? Its fundamental condition is certainly the usurping of logocentrism. But this condition of possibility turns into a condition of impossibility. In fact, it risks upsetting the concept of science as well. Grammatology or grammatography ought no longer to be presented as sciences; their goal should be exorbitant when compared to a grammatical knowledge. (Of Grammatology [1976] 74)

While Derrida writes simple sentences, he nonetheless litters his pages with polysyllabic terms whose meanings are unfamiliar to many readers (chiefly because Derrida coined many of them himself). One has to be very committed to read Derrida’s work because it takes a long time to learn the meanings of the terms he employs.

Familiar words are effective in informal discursive situations where the audience is on fairly close terms with the rhetor; everyone shares common understanding that lessens the rhetor’s obligation to be precise. “Cool!” is an example wherein precision of meaning is absolutely sacrificed to the establishment of intimacy. (As you can see, this phrase, which is ordinarily used in conversation, loses much of its effect in print).

Qualifiers

Qualifiers like some, most, virtually, and all affect voice and distance. A qualifier is any term (usually an adverb or an adjective) or phrase that alters the degree of force or extent contained in a statement. Compare the relative dis-
All humans are created equal.

It may be that some humans are created equal.

Actually, very few humans are created equal.

Virtually no humans are created equal.

The first statement is quite distant, because it makes a sweeping, authoritative judgement. No authors are present to identify with readers. The other statements are more intimate because they betray the presence of an author, modifying the extent or intensity of her judgement in each case.

As a general rule, the more qualifiers and the more intensity they convey, the more intimate the distance between rhetor and audience. Qualifiers have this effect because they indicate, however subtly, that someone is present making judgements about degrees of intensity. Compare this unqualified statement to the heavily qualified one that follows it:

Unqualified: Three months after announcing it had settled a lawsuit filed against it by Bread and Butter Corporation, the City Council of Ourtown made the agreement public today.

Heavily Qualified: Three long months after announcing it had tentatively settled one of the most expensive civil lawsuits in the city's history, today the City Council of Ourtown, with some trepidation, made public a proposed agreement between it and the gigantic Bread and Butter Corporation.

The first version creates more distance between author and readers because the writer expresses few judgements about the event under discussion. The author of the second version, is willing to qualify events by using adjectives and adverbs that express degree ("tentatively," "expensive," "gigantic")

Composition textbooks sometimes caution writers against the use of qualifiers, calling them "weasel words." However, cautious writers often find it necessary to use a few qualifiers in order to represent a position as accurately as possible. (The underlined words in the preceding sentence are qualifiers). Moreover, qualifiers can be effective in reducing distance between a rhetor and an audience in situations where an intimate distance is more persuasive than a more formal one. A side note about gender and language use: linguistic research indicates that women use more qualifiers than men do.

Here is a passage about Newt Gingrich, who was Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1997. It was composed by William J. Buckley and published in his magazine, the National Review. We have italicized the qualifiers that appear in it.

The leader of a reformist, populist party in a representative government must stay on the offensive to survive. He should not pack quixotic flights and need not eschew tactical compromises, but he must continue to make strategic advances across a broad front. Instead, Gingrich has narrowed the Republican agenda and balanced budget at any cost has enabled Clinton to extort concession after concession from a demoralized GOP. That is surely not Gingrich's fault alone. But he should not be surprised that troops without a mission will sometimes direct their energies against one another. (August 11, 1997, 14).

Some of the italicized qualifiers are necessary to convey the meaning of the passage ("representative," "Republican," "balanced"). However, the other italicized terms work to convey Buckley's opinion of the Republican party ("reformist," "populist"). These terms are conjectures about the party's agenda: not everyone will agree that they appropriately describe the party's goals. Other qualifiers convey Buckley's opinion of the Speaker's recent actions—"quixotic," "defensive"—and obviously, not everyone will agree with this assessment, either.

Punctuation

Punctuation is an extremely subtle means of establishing voice and distance in written discourse. The more exotic marks of punctuation work to close distance between writers and readers; they do the work that gestures, facial expressions, tone, and pitch do for speakers. Dashes convey breathlessness or hurry—or a sudden thought—or an afterthought. Parentheses (like these) decrease distance, because they have the flavor of an interruption, a remark whispered behind the hand. Exclamations point indicate strong emotions at work! Textbooks say that quotation marks are to be used only to represent materials that has been quoted from another source, but increasingly quotation marks are being used for emphasis. This example shows them doing both jobs: "We don't 'cash' checks." Underlining or bold or CAPITAL LETTERS convey emphasis or importance, and all of these graphic signals close the distance between rhetor and audience. In electronic discourse, text written in caps is taken as evidence that the user is SULTING, and the tactic is considered impolite unless used sparingly and for effect.

People who use electronic discourse developed a lexicon of punctuation marks, called "emoticons," to indicate ethos. Among these are the use of asterisks on either side of a word to indicate some action on the rhetor's part: 'blush' "wink". A wink can be indicated by this creative combination of punctuation marks: :-). Here is an example of the use of punctuation to enhance ethos:

Sharon:

Our meeting yesterday prove that two heads definitely make more stuff! To recap: I will play through my list, edit the chapters on extrinsic proof and formal logic and deliver the move to you. Then you will add the remaining items on the list, do a final edit, and we'll be done with draft one (bug exhalato) Then we can put on our party hats. *-*
These innovative marks of punctuation seem to make e-mail less distant by bringing authors’ personality into their posts.

If you doubt that small things do influence distance, note whether you are offended the next time you see them in a message e-mailed to you by someone you do not know. Contemporary decorum seems to dictate that fancy or innovative punctuation be used in intimate situations while conciseness be used for more formal rhetorical situations. These situations should feature only the standard punctuation used to mark sentences and indicate possession (see Chapter 13, on delivery).

**SITUATED ETHOS**

Because rhetoric is embedded in social relations, the relative social standing of participants in a rhetorical situation can affect a rhetor’s persuasiveness. A differential power relation inheres within any rhetorical situation simply because rhetors have the floor to speak. As long as they are being read or listened to, they have control of the situation. But audiences have power, too, particularly in the case of written rhetoric, in which readers are relatively free to quit whenever they choose. Few rhetors enjoy absolute power over either hearers or readers. We all know how easy it is to mute television commercials or to skip to the end of a murder mystery to see how it turns out.

But differential power relations exist outside of rhetorical situations, and they affect the degree to which an invented ethos can be effective. In other words, exceptions to Aristotle’s generalizations about ethos occur in rhetorical situations where a rhetor’s ethos is either bolstered or compromised by his reputation or his position in the community. Such exceptions apply most strongly to well-known people and especially to those who are well known because they hold some authoritative or prestigious position in the community. Ministers generally enjoy more cultural authority than bartenders, at least in rhetorical situations where they are considered to have expertise. A prior reputation as an A student or as a goon-off may affect a teacher’s reception of students’ work no matter how carefully students craft an invented ethos.

Rhetors and audiences may exist in unequal social relations to one another for a variety of reasons. Within classrooms, for example, teachers have more power than students, and usually teachers can influence students whenever they think it’s necessary or proper to do so. Within the culture at large, in general, older people have more authority than younger ones, and wealthy people have more power than poorer ones do, in part because they have better access to the channels of communication. According to the rhetorician Wayne Brockriede, there are three major dimensions in any rhetorical situation: interpersonal, attitudinal, and situational.

The interpersonal dimension—the relations among persons who participate in a rhetorical act—has three characteristics: liking, power, and distance. Liking has to do with how well the people who are associated in a States was attempting to broker peace between Israel and Palestine, reporters speculated whether the leaders of the countries involved actually liked each other. If they did, according to Professor Brockriede, their personal relationship should have smoothed discussions of the difficult issues they had to face.

Under the head of “liking,” then, rhetors should ask: Are the feelings of liking or disliking mutual among participants in this rhetorical situation or in arguments about this issue? How intense are these feelings? Are these feelings susceptible to rhetorical change?

Brockriede defines power as “the capacity to exert interpersonal influence.” Power may be the focus of a rhetorical act (as in “I’m a power struggle”), or it may be a by-product of the act. A person may have power in a rhetorical situation for several reasons: because he or she has charisma; because of her position within the social system; because she has control over the channels of communication or other aspects of the rhetorical situation; because she can influence sources of information and/or the participants’ ideology, or because she has access to other powerful people. President Ronald Reagan, who was frequently referred to as “the great communicator,” was thought by his supporters to have great personal charm, or charisma (which was to be expected, perhaps, given his experience as an actor). John F. Kennedy was also thought to be a charismatic person, and many television evangelists owe their success to their personal charisma.

But not everyone has this somewhat mysterious quality called charisma. And so it is also important for rhetors to think about the structure inherent in any rhetorical situation. Power is usually relatively shared among rhetors and their audiences. Few rhetors enjoy absolute power over their hearers or readers, even those like the president of the United States, who can exert enormous power in other situations.

Rhetors who control the channels of communication have great situated power, because in extreme situations they can force people to become their audience. When the president schedules a speech or a news conference on an important issue, for example, television networks are obligated to carry it even though it costs them money in lost advertising revenues to do so. People are obligated to listen and watch, unless they can take rhetorical power into their own hands and turn the television off. Rhetorical power is obviously tied to access. Access (or lack of it) can either facilitate communication or disable certain possibilities for fruitful exchange. The issue of access came to the fore in 1995 with the national budget debate, when Republican leaders claimed to have been denied opportunities to discuss budget concerns with President Bill Clinton. Here is an account of the incident from the Detroit News:

House Speaker Newt Gingrich said Wednesday that he decided to toughen the Republican position on the budget after being “stiffed” by President Clinton aboard Air Force One.

Gingrich, R-Ga., and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., were among dozens of dignitaries who flew to Israel last week with Clinton to attend the
The GOP leaders were insulited that their only contact with Clinton during the 25-hour round-trip flight was when he walked by twice to thank them for coming, Gingrich said. A chat with White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta lasted only a few minutes.

Gingrich said he and Dole assumed at least part of the journey would be spent trying to work out the imminent budget crisis.

Then the guests were told to exit the rear ramp of Air Force One when it returned to Andrews Air Force base outside Washington, while Clinton gave the main speech in full view of waiting media.

"Was it just a sign of utter incompetence and lack of consideration or was it a deliberate strategy of insult?" Gingrich said Wednesday.

He said he concluded at that point that the White House wasn't interested in compromising, and they shared no common ground. Consequently, he said, Congress would have to pass important budget-related legislation without Democratic votes.

"That's part of why you ended up with us sending down a tougher continuing resolution," he said. The continuing resolution, a short-term spending measure needed to keep the government operating until a budget is adopted, was vetoed by Clinton. As a result, large chunks of the government shut down Tuesday.

"This was not pretty," Gingrich said. "This was an effort on our part to read the White House strategy. . . . It was clear coming out of that airplane that they wanted a confrontation." (November 16, 1995, 6A).

Here issues of power and access to it came to the fore, radically influencing the rhetorical strategies that followed. Because Gingrich and Dole read their limited contact with the president as a controlled measure of avoidance, a standoff ensued, and for weeks to come, the government did not function as usual. Indeed, federal agencies all over the country closed their doors, leaving 800,000 federal employees temporarily out of work because they had no operating budgets.

Here are some questions to ask about the power structure of a rhetorical situation: How disparate are the power positions of the various participants of a rhetorical act, and does the act increase, maintain, or decrease the disparity? How rigid or flexible is the power structure, and does the rhetorical act function to increase, maintain, or decrease the stability? As we have been saying, the rhetorical principle of distance examines how far apart, socially or situationally, participants are from one another in a rhetorical situation. When choosing a voice for a discourse, a rhetor should ask, Is this the optimal distance for persuasion, or should it be closer or farther away? Answers to these questions will depend in part on the quality of power relations between rhetor and audience.

The attitudinal dimension of rhetorical situations determines what presuppositions exist among the participants in a rhetorical act that will influence their response to the situation. We can predict, roughly, that people will respond to a rhetorical proposition in one of three ways: acceptance, indifference, or rejection. Rhetors who are preparing to argue a case should ask: What would we do in such a situation? Is it likely we would have an audience?

John Chouman writes for an online journal called Yellow Times. In the essay that follows, he takes positions that many Americans might think controversial or even unpatriotic, given their ideological positions. As you read, ask yourself whether Chouman's ethos works in his favor in this tricky piece.

**DISTURBING THE PLANET AND BLAMING THE MISS ON OTHERS**

I received a letter from a reader recently asking me what it is about America that I hated so much. Since its tone was polite, I replied at length, don't have anything—"hate" is an awfully strong word—there are things I find disturbing about America, and, as it happens, these are things many others also find disturbing.

There's certainly no need for my services in the 24-hour-a-day orgy of noisy self-glorification that pours from television, radio, magazines, movies, sporting events, and even sermons in the home of the brave. This non-stop, drum-beating, national revival meeting has become the background noise of everyday American life, so much so that many are not aware that there is anything unusual about it.

There is a wonderful scene in "The Gulag Archipelago." After a speech by Stalin, the audience applauds and applauds and cannot stop applauding. Everyone waits for his or her neighbors to stop before stepping out, and the neighbors also do not stop. The applause threatens to continue forever. Why? Because NKVD men prowl the aisles, looking for anyone who stops applauding.

Without making any outlandish, inappropriate comparisons between Bush's America and Stalin's Russia, there is still a very uncomfortable parallel between that frightening historical scene and recent events in the U.S., especially the State of the Union address. Even though the President said nothing demonstrating statesmanship or imagination or even compassion, everyone applauded and endorsed and kept up the rhetoric. Some media commentaries
actually compared his feeble recitation of platitudes with the thrilling cadence and brilliant words of Franklin Roosevelt at a time of true darkness. Several well-known television news personalities felt called upon to make gibberish personal statements as though they felt the need to prove their patriotic bona
fides. What a big fat disappointment America is today. An affluent, noisy, moral netherworld. A place where fundamentalists pitch their tents in billboards and Pan-Can basketball. A place where piety and mediocrity are lavishly praised. A people bickering with demands about their rights and redress of grievances, but with no thought about their responsibilities. A people who brag of being freer than any other people without knowing anything about other people.

An insatiable consuming empire of a country whose national dream has been reduced to consuming more of everything without a care for anyone else on the planet.

A people without grace who always blame others for what goes wrong.

American, roughly 4% of the planet by numbers, gulp down more than half the world’s illegal drugs, but in all the strident speeches and in all the poorly-conceived foreign policy measures, it is always the fault of Mexico or Colombia or Vietnam or Panama or the French Connection or someone else out there. Anyone, that is, but the people who keep probing and shouting the stuff down, and all the steady American officials who are so clearly necessary to keep the merchandise widely available.

One of history’s great moments of insufferable posturing came with the creation of annual “report cards” on how well various nations were doing at controlling drugs, as though those other countries were unreliable children being assessed by their wise Auntie America, the same wise Auntie sank out on a million pounds of chemicals at any given moment.

America has a long history of vote tampering and rigged elections in many local jurisdictions. It is widely understood that vote tampering, especially in Chicago, gave John Kennedy a victory he did not win in the 1960 election. Biographer Robert Caro has revealed how Lyndon Johnson’s political career in Texas had the way smoothed by vote fraud. And now, two and a quarter centuries after the great republic’s founding, she still cannot run an election for president.

On top of fraud and unwillingness to spend enough to assure proper ballots, America clings to the most corrupt method possible to finance election campaigns, defining private money as free speech. The more of it, the better. One would almost think that the billions in bribes paid out by the CIA over the decades to corrupt other governments had influenced thinking about how things should be done at home.

Yet with a record like this, the State Department never stops passing public judgment on the inadequacies of democracy in other places. The State Department’s views on democracy, about as deserving of serious consideration as the last Congress’s idea of why you impeach an elected president, reduce to the same tacky business as the drug report cards: it’s always someone else who’s wrong. Even worse, the sentiments on democracy and rights are used as wedges for trade concessions. It just doesn’t get more hypocritical than that.

Having mentioned the CIA’s bribery over the decades, its interference in

...
His career was ruined even though not a shred of clear evidence was ever produced. The more rational conclusion that the Chinese, a clever and resourceful people, had managed the feat themselves stood little chance when someone from "there" was there to blame.

The case of the Cuban boy Elian, provided what may be the most remarkable example of this kind of false accusation and arrogant behavior. An ill-conceived policy of granting automatic refugee status to all Cubans who made it in flimsy boats to American shores, part of an incipient campaign of hatred against Castro, lured the boy’s mother to her death, as it had lured many others. The boy still had a loving father, other family and friends, but they just happened to live in the wrong country. An already-injured child was put through months of hell in Miami, a hostage to ideology as surely as American diplomats in Iran, his father, family and home repeatedly ridiculed and insulted, and it was all done on one else’s faith, Castro’s, in this case.

I close by telling my reader that I never object to letters that disagree with me, only to those that are rude or insistent or obscene. And, I have to say, America does generate an awful lot of those. (http://www.YellowTimes.org, March 1, 2003)

Does Chuckman demonstrate intelligence—that is, does he seem to know what he is talking about? Certainly the essay is littered with details, although Chuckman does not cite any sources for these. Are the specific instances he mentions (the case of Wen Ho Lee and of Elian Gonzalez for example) well-known enough that readers are willing to take Chuckman’s word for what happened? Does Chuckman make any attempts to establish himself as a man of good moral character? The opening compliment to a polite reader suggests that he is a civil person, and his distinction between “hating America” and finding the things that Americans do to be “disturbing” shows that he is at least trying to be a reasonable person. Does he demonstrate good will toward his audience? Chuckman provides plenty of examples to back up his claim that Americans tend to blame others for misfortunes of many kinds. Are you convinced?

EXERCISES

1. Find a half dozen short pieces of professional writing. These can be selections from books, newspapers, or magazines, fiction or nonfiction. Read each passage carefully. How does the author of each piece establish an ethos? Specifically, how does he or she convince you that he or she is intelligent and well-informed? What tactics does the author use to establish his or her good character? His or her good will toward readers? Make lists of these tactics for future reference. Do any of the pieces display an ethos that is not successful?

2. Now analyze the pieces in terms of the rhetorical distance created by

or do they establish a formal distance? How do they achieve this distance? Look at their use of grammatical person, verb voice and tense, word size, qualifiers, and punctuation.

3. For practice, try to alter the voice and rhetorical distance of two or three of the pieces. Change the grammatical person, the word size, the voice and tense; use more or fewer qualifiers; use more or less and different kinds of punctuation. What happens? Is the author’s ethos altered? How? Does the distance change? How? Is your revision more or less effective than the original? Why?

4. To practice creating an effective ethos, write a letter to someone who is very close to you—a spouse, parent, or friend. Now write a letter that says the same thing to someone who is less close to you—a teacher, for example. Now write the letter to a company or corporation. What happens to your voice in each case? What features of your writing are altered?

5. Write a letter in someone else’s voice; someone you know, or better yet, a famous person such as a politician, a TV anchor, a movie star. You may have to watch and listen awhile to the person whose ethos you are imitating until you can do this successfully.

6. Try imitating the voice used by some writer you admire. (For more exercises of this kind, see Chapter 14, on imitation.) How does the writer achieve ethical effects?

7. Look at several articles in a popular newspaper or news magazine such as USA Today or Newsweek. Who seems to be speaking? How do the authors of these articles establish an ethos? Do they attempt to seem intelligent and well-informed? How do they get access to the information they pass along?

NOTE


WORKS CITED

