Cicero Latinizes Hellenic Ethos

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My whole method of writing is such that I can easily infer from it that the main point is the following: That Cicero's effective way to enhance the value of his work has three systems as stated before, the second, enlightening them: the third in their passion.

"And I also recall..." when my opinions held great weight in the Senate. - Antonius in Cicero's De Oratore 2.128

Cicero to Lælius, Epistles ad Familiares 1.121
an atechnic (inaesthetic) proof. Yet much of his attention in the Rhetoric is directed toward the creation of entechnic (artistic) proof and toward the creation of ethical proof that takes place within the act of discourse and between rhetor and audience. So explicit is Aristotle’s discussion of this process that references and sections of his treatment of ethos are readily identifiable within his Rhetoric, which, in part, explains the considerable amount of scholarship.

In contrast to the scholarship on the theoretical treatment of Aristotelian ethos, studies emphasizing the practical application of ethos frequently examine Cicero’s legal and political speeches. Such work provides important observations that help to explain how ethos is culturally created between rhetor and audience within a specific social context. Although the study of ethos as either Aristotelian theory or Ciceronian practice is valuable, a third potential source of study receives little attention: Cicero’s theoretical views on ethos. Our essay seeks to complement earlier work that stresses Ciceronian ethos as practiced in oratory with a more sensitive understanding of the meaning of ethos in his rhetorical theory.

The lack of attention to Ciceronian theory on ethos may be related to the accessibility of evidence. Unlike Aristotle, Cicero did not define ethos in clearly labeled and extractable passages. Cicero’s Latinized notion of ethos—while just as important and central to his rhetorical theory as Aristotle’s—is much more difficult to identify and understand. In fact, the term ethos is rarely used by Cicero; it is documented in only one instance in all of his Rhetorica (Orator 128; Abbott et al. 438). Quintilian believed that ethos had no Latin synonym (Institutio oratoria 6.2.8–9; cf. May 4). The absence of the term ethos itself should not, however, lead to the conclusion that an understanding of ethos is not present in Cicero’s works. Passages and references that bear on his views of ethos occur throughout his writings. Reconstructing Cicero’s notion of ethos therefore requires a careful synthesis of references culled from a range of works.

A second reason for the concentration on Cicero’s application of ethos is the uniqueness and abundance of the record of his public oratory. Cicero was the first novus homo to be elected consul in thirty years (Syrie 94), and as the unprecedented success of his legal victories reveals, his career is a testimonial to how the force of character through effective rhetoric could be a source of persuasion in the Roman Republic. So extraordinary was Cicero’s success that the focus for understanding Ciceronian ethos has centered on his political and legal speeches as well as the fascinating interplay between his performance as an orator and his post-performance as a writer in the “publication” of orations (Enos, Literate Mode). Yet, Cicero’s reputation as a statesman and advocate is complemented (and in some instances outdistanced) by his contributions as a theoretician of rhetoric. Just as it is important to understand Ciceronian ethos in order to understand his political and legal career, so also is his notion of ethos central to understanding his rhetorical theory.

Ciceronian ethos is actually a confluence of notions, a synthesis of several concepts that interact in different ways. No single, corresponding Latin expression—for example, persona (De Oratore 3.54) or auctoritas, (De Senectute 17)—has a meaning equivalent to ethos, and the search for such a term misdirects our understanding of the complexity of the concept. Thus, to avoid promoting a particular Latin term that would only create an error of labeling and category, the Greek term ethos is used throughout this essay with intent. Its use is meant to convey the confluence of Ciceronian Latin concepts that, taken together, form his notion of ethos.

In addition to synthesizing Cicero’s notion of ethos, this chapter has a perspective markedly different from that found in current scholarship. As mentioned above, much of the research on Ciceronian ethos concentrates on his performance, his enactment of ethos through public oratory, with scarcely any discussion of ethos based on his theoretical works. Scholars have sought to understand Cicero’s impact by accounting for the ways in which he utilized discourse to create a forceful character in the Roman courts and political arena, often concentrating on the notion of the portrayal and creation of a vir bonus image (Enos and McClaran; Cherry). George Kennedy’s discussion of ethos with respect to Cicero is one of the best illustrations of such a perspec-
tive. Kennedy uses the term *ethos* throughout his *Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* but principally discusses *ethos* in terms of Roman oratory (e.g., 100). Kennedy’s discussion of Cicero’s theoretical treatment of *ethos* is concentrated in one paragraph (222–23) in which he advances only the briefest explanation and one limited to a few comments that Cicero made in *De Oratore*. In this section Kennedy claims that Cicero shared Aristotle’s view that *ethos* is a major constituent of rhetoric, but Kennedy recognizes that Cicero’s “actual treatment is not particularly Aristotelian” (222). Kennedy considers Cicero’s account of *ethos* “brief” but “striking” because “Cicero regards *ethos* as consisting in presentation of the gentler emotions” (222). “It conciliates and charms the audience,” Kennedy asserts, “and is essentially good natured, a lower level of dramatic intensity than the raging fire of *pathos* which is the real triumph of the speaker’s art” (222).

Kennedy’s account of Cicero’s theoretical views of *ethos* should arouse some degree of caution. First, despite the fact that Kennedy recognizes a fundamental difference between Cicero’s notion of *ethos* and Aristotle’s, he nonetheless defines Ciceroian *ethos* by Aristotelian standards. Second, Kennedy limits his interpretation of Ciceroian *ethos* to two passages in Book II of *De Oratore* (i.e., 2.182–83, 212). Yet the importance of *ethos*, discussed through various terms by Cicero, is treated not only in other sections of *De Oratore* but also throughout several other rhetorical and philosophical works. Third, Kennedy’s interpretation, based largely on passage 2.182–83 in *De Oratore*, sees *ethos* only in terms of a continuum with *pathos* (e.g., *Rhetoric* 41, 505). That is, Kennedy believes that *ethos* and *pathos* are different in kind but only in the degree of emotion, a view that he may have derived from Quintilian (6.2.8–9) and erroneously attributed to Cicero (see Grimaldi, “Auditors’ Role” 74–77). Our examination, however, illustrates that while emotion has a place in his theory, Ciceroian *ethos* is a phenomenon markedly different from the conception of “*ethos* as consisting in the presentation of gentler emotions,” as Kennedy claims (*Rhetoric* 222).

Scholarship subsequent to Kennedy’s *Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* has advanced the contributions made by Kennedy but has done so with a manner and focus different from the objectives of this chapter. One of the best, and most recent, illustrations of such a study is James M. May’s *Trials of Character: The Eloquence of Ciceroan Ethos*. May’s detailed and careful study of *ethos* concentrates on Cicero’s demonstration of character as revealed in his legal and political speeches. In fact, in his “Preface,” May explicitly characterizes his book as intending “to meet the need for a closer examination of *ethos* (‘character’) as it was used by Roman orators, particularly Cicero” (vii). May’s brief introductory discussion of the theoretical treatment of *ethos* is heavily dependent on Aristotle and a compilation of various Roman sources that draw from some observations of Cicero. May’s statement of *ethos*, however, neither intends nor provides a coherent synthesis from Cicero’s rhetorical theory but rather concentrates on his demonstration of *ethos* as an orator.

Elaine Fantham’s excellent essay, “Ciceroian Conciliare and Aristotelian Ethos,” provides a thorough theoretical comparison of Cicero’s use of the term *conciliare* (the securing of good will) with Aristotle’s treatment of *ethos*. In her meticulous explication of the similarity and differences of these two terms, Fantham notes that difficulties arise when one seeks to match comparative Greek and Roman terms on a one-to-one basis. Even as Fantham explicates the meaning of *conciliare* (e.g., *De Oratore* 2.115, 128), she recognizes its limitations. Fantham notes, for example, that Cicero used “the verb *conciliare* when he chose it to represent the Aristotelian use of *Ethos*” but did so only once “after De Oratore,” in a similar connection (273 and n. 11), and she even indicates that other possible terms could capture some of the dimensions of *ethos* as characterized by Aristotle. One of the presuppositions driving the work of Fantham and others (for example, Forrenbough, “Benevolentium conciliare”) is that the route to understanding Cicero’s theoretical views of *ethos* is through the term *conciliare*, despite the fact that significant differences between the treatments of Aristotle and Cicero are noted. William M. A. Grimaldi discusses the problems of Fantham’s characterization of Aristotelian *ethos* as being on a continuum of emotions (“Auditors’ Role” 80 n. 16), particularly since Aristotle is so clear on the
tinctions between ethos and pathos ("Auditors' Role" 69). Fortenbaugh posits the possibility that "Cicero's account of ethos in De Oratore is not so much drawing out what is implicit in Aristotle as developing a significantly different notion of the orator's use of ethos" (Review 506). Our efforts concentrate not on conciliare but rather on the features of ethos that produce the securing of approval through character made possible by rhetoric. Paul Prill indirectly reveals this point when discussing Cicero's views on securing good will in the Orator. Prill cites Orator 128, in which Cicero provides his views on the Greek notion of ethos as aspiring to be agreeable and courteous in order to secure good will (95). It should be noted that being "courteous" and "agreeable" so that one can "win goodwill" is not a trait of ethos but its result, that is, such descriptors are the audience's impressions of the rhetor's appearance, their sentiments of admiration, and are not the traits themselves (Orator 128; De Oratore 2.184). Conciliare does (of course) mean good will, but it is the consequence of creating ethos within rhetorical discourse and is not the constituent trait that Cicero discusses throughout his theoretical works. Thus, while there will be a conspicuous absence of the discussion of conciliare in this chapter, the implications of observations for earlier work dealing with conciliare should become evident.

In short, scholarship on Ciceronian ethos has been dominated by two approaches: first, an emphasis on Ciceronian ethos as manifested in his political career; and second, comparative treatments of Aristotle's concept of ethos with Cicero's use of the term conciliare. Neither approach provides a sufficient view of Cicero's theoretical notions of ethos. Further, this chapter does not discuss the vir bonus image, which has already been examined (Enos and McIlrany) and which emphasizes appearance rather than our concern here for the theoretical constituents of Ciceronian ethos. Our perspective is concerned with Cicero's theoretical meaning of ethos. Rather than focus on a single Latin term such as conciliare, however, we seek to understand Ciceronian ethos through a synthesis of critical concepts and their relationships. Cicero wrote about the source and force of character widely and frequently in his works, describing traits, features, and benefits to such an extent, with such a variety of terms, and with such complexity that the task of synthesizing his views has not been undertaken.

Few, however, would doubt the merit of attempting such an enterprise (Kennedy, Rhetoric 150–51; Clarke 50–61). Understanding Cicero's complex notion of ethos as discussed throughout his theoretical works would not only help ground his views on rhetoric but also provide a perspective for viewing his practice as a rhetor.

The Traits of Ciceronian Ethos and Their Constituent Elements

Reconstructing the notion of Ciceronian ethos requires understanding the relationships among several factors. First, the concept of Ciceronian ethos includes three essential traits of character: ingenium (also termed natura), prudentia, and diligentia. Cicero firmly believed that every great rhetor earned his reputation by manifesting ingenium, or natura, a natural capacity for eloquence (De Oratore 1.146). In fact, Cicero believed that the natural capacity for lucid discourse was not the product of rhetoric's art but was instead its essence (De Oratore 1.146). "For swiftness of spirit and talent [ingenium] ought to be engaged," wrote Cicero through Crassus, "namely acuteness in thorough consideration, copiousness in explication and adornment, and a firmness and durability in memory. . . . And it is a mistake to think that these [traits] can be acquired by art" (De Oratore 1.113–14). Antonius also emphasizes the importance of possessing such qualities for success or, lacking such gifts, possessing at least their appearance. At all costs, Antonius argues, one must give the appearance of natural ability and avoid the suspicion that one has studied techniques (De Oratore 2.152, 153). In short, Cicero had both of his primary spokespersons in De Oratore emphasize the importance of natural talent, but for different reasons. For Crassus and Caecilius, natural talent (3.82–86) was an essential character trait that was the prerequisite for eloquence. For Antonius, ingenium or natura was a trait that must be made apparent to the audience because the realization (or appearance) of natural ability was itself a force in rhetoric. One's demonstration of natural ability through
wit, for example, would be an enormous benefit in revealing natural capacity to an audience as well as ridiculing the character of others (De Oratore 2.230–32, 288–89; Brutus 322; De Amicitia 66). Similarly, while it is impossible to read Cicero’s theoretical works and not realize the importance of a copious education as a prerequisite for the full utilization of rhetoric’s art (e.g., Brutus 253; De Oratore 3.54), it is equally impossible not to recognize that such a fullness must be grounded in one’s natural ability and that such ability must be made apparent to the audience through the discourse. Cicero believed that both the attaining and the expressing of thought together constituted sapiencia, or wisdom (De Oratore 3.56), a trait normally acquired over time and through experience (De Senectute 17). In short, a continued development and demonstration of ingenium or natura would result in a public’s recognition of the rhetor’s sapiencia. This sort of long-term, cumulative effect of ethos is central to understanding and appreciating not only Cicero’s views on the social dynamism of creating ethos but also its diachronic development. Rhetoric could “create” ethos at the moment of discourse and its effect could transcend the event and remain as either a residual force or a detriment for the rhetor long after the situation.

Complementing the manifestation of natural talent is the trait of prudencia. Sagacity to adapt and modify rhetorical discourse to the context of the situation was a trait that others, such as Brutus (Epistulae ad Brutum 11) and Quintilian (6.5.9–11), praised in Cicero, who manifested it throughout his legal cases (Enos, Literate Mode). Since Cicero firmly believed that judging the validity of rhetorical discourse rested with the audience (Tusculanae Disputationes 2.3; Brutus 183–84; Orator 24; De Oratore 3.91), a rhetor’s ability to adapt his discourse to any situation (De Oratore 2.337) became a necessary trait, one that could be manifested in a variety of ways. For example, the demonstration of propriety was strongly related to the manifestation of dignitas, which was not only perceived but also determined by the audience. Cicero believed that manifesting propriety through rhetoric enhanced one’s dignity to listeners (De Officiis 1.137).

Cicero further believed that prudencia was exhibited and cre-
The manifestation of prud
tia, though most commonly associated with the force and char-
ter of judgment in elders, was nonetheless a force in pursuit
and one that Cicero recognized as important to the concept
ethos.

Cicero believed that ingenium and prudentia were essen-
tial traits for a rhetor. He also believed that a rhetor must have
traits of commitment (e.g. diligentia) and must make such fervor ap-
parent to the audience (De Oratore 2.182). As in Aristotle's Rhetor,
emotions are a critical, inescapable feature of Cicero's rhet-
oric (De Oratore 2.197–216). In this instance, Cicero's views on
emotion are akin to Aristotle's notion of energia, or "actualizing"—
that is, the creative performance or setting into motion of such char-
acter traits (Grimaldi, Commentary 5). Natural ability and wise-
unaccompanied by feeling, or affectus (see also Quintus
6.2.8–9), had little hope of capturing or even engaging an audi-
ience. Cicero believed that the exhibition of such emo-
tions revealed a spirit deeply moved by conviction (De Divin.
1.80), in short, the demonstration of an individual willing to
ethical principles for the sake of justice. In this respect, the abil-
ity of passion in the audience bonds the rhetor with the audie-
tance, since the sense of commitment, urgency, and importance is
that the rhetor seeks to share with others.

Emotive traits also provided an index of one's commitment.
how a rhetor can facilitate the creation of ethos by the demonstration of specific traits. An audience's recognition and acceptance of such traits would, in turn, prompt them to view the rhetor as manifesting dignitas. The important point, however, is that such traits are developed within the discourse and are thus ethos-as-created proof having the characteristics of entechnic proof. Cicero's rhetorical works develop this point by discussing the relationship of ethos within arrangement (Enos, "Ciceronian Dispositio"). There are, within a rhetorical composition, specific divisions in which certain points and material are to be stressed and certain qualities of the rhetor to be directly or indirectly underscored. The exordium, for example, not only is the point where a rhetor seeks to either subdue a hostile audience or, under normal conditions, win their good will (De Inventione 1.19-26; Prill 94) but also is an opportunity to marshal arguments that will deal with the disposition of the audience in a manner that manifests prudencia. In a similar respect, during the narratio, the rhetor can provide an exposition of critical events (De Inventione 1.27-30) in a manner that "creates" the image of one's ethics and honesty (prudencia) as well as one's industry and duty (diligentia). Cicero even underscores the importance of digressio (De Inventione 1.97) as an opportunity to depart from the conventional pattern of arrangement, if prudent, to amplify a tangential yet persuasive point. It was not uncommon for Cicero to actually use such a division of rhetoric to concentrate on ethos, that is, to highlight some point of character associated with his own position or that of his clients or, conversely, to denigrate the character and motives of the opponent on a point not at issue but damaging to the audience's perception of an opposing character (Enos, Literate Mode). A reading of Cicero's discussion of invention will reveal that the creation of proofs in these and the other divisions of a composition provides the opportunity not only to create good reasons or excite emotions but also to create character for the client or rhetor. It is clear that the expectations of proof are localized for Cicero, based on the expectations of the various points of arrangement (Enos, "Ciceronian Dispositio"). In that sense, invention is localized through arrangement. This phenomenon applies not only to the making of good reasons but also to the creation of the rhetor's ethos, since different divisions within the discourse, such as the two illustrations provided above, are more appropriately identified with specific traits. Thus the co-creation of ethical proof, like the co-creation of rational and emotive proof, is not only invented within the discourse but localized through and identified as appropriate by the presumptions, shared between rhetor and audience, of the specific divisions of the composition.

The successful manifestation of a rhetor's dignitas within an act of rhetoric was the result of an audience's recognition and acceptance of traits captured under and respectfully defining ingenium, prudencia, and diligentia. Yet, the impact of Ciceronian ethos had meaning beyond the immediate context of the rhetorical situation, for the successful demonstration of diligentia within an act of rhetoric had benefits beyond the event. These benefits fall into three primary areas: auctoritas, honor, and gloria. Cicero believed that a lifetime demonstration of dignitas would enable a rhetor to attain auctoritas, which he considered to be "the height of old age" (De Senectute 61). While a sustained, public reputation was a necessity for auctoritas, "neither grey hairs nor wrinkles," Cicero asserted, "are suddenly able to seize auctoritas, but the greatest auctoritas is honestly earned as the consequence of a life of superior public deeds" (De Senectute 62-63). Coexisting with auctoritas was public honor (De Senectute 61) and with that recognition, gloria (De Republica 6.20). Such recognition, Cicero believed, came as a consequence of virtus, dignitas, and nobilitas (Librorum De Re Publica Incertorum Fragmenta 5; De Officiis 1.14) and was bestowed on an individual by an appreciative society (Tusculanae Disputationes 1.112). As Crassus observed in De Oratore (1.34), honor is the benefit of service and, even though a personal recognition conferred by others, it is nonetheless their recognition of service to others. In short, an individual's auctoritas, attained over a career-long demonstration of dignitas, resulted in personal honor. This honor, in turn, became public gloria, which could be recognized both during and after one's life. Taken in synthesis, Ciceronian ethos can be illustrated by the following diagram.
Ciceronian Ethos is developed and sanctioned. The ultimate result, potestas (power) in life and continued gloria after death, reveals a source of cultural power and reputation that was attractive not only to Cicero but doubtless to other Roman rhetors as well. Cicero saw rhetoric as a source of power (Enos, "Cicero's Forensic Oratory"), a means by which he could make an impact on Roman society. From the perspective of this discussion, the benefits of Ciceronian ethos were the routes to the attainment of potestas—that is, not to imperium in the sense of the normal sanctions of power provided by an office with charged responsibilities and authority (De Legibus 3.9) but to the personal power that develops out of one's character (Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem 1.1.22).

Conclusion

As mentioned in the opening passages of this chapter, the term conciliare, or the securing of good will, is neither Cicero's equivalent nor his corresponding term for Aristotle's notion of ethos. Rather, Cicero uses no single word that is an equivalent to ethos, particularly as used by Aristotle. In fact, starting with Aristotle's notions in order to capture Cicero's views is an imprecise approach, since Cicero did not hesitate to advance his own views and, although recognizing the ideas of Aristotle, did not hesitate to provide his own interpretation of ethos appropriate to his time and culture. In other words, Cicero fashioned a uniquely Latinized ethos. Conciliare is not the result of ethos itself. Conciliare is an indirect product of ethos, the result of ethos as the response to traits shared with the audience but not the creation of ethos itself nor even a part of the process.

Cicero's remarks about auctoritas, honor, and gloria provide much information about his views on ethos. There is no doubt that ethos, as created and transmitted in the act of discourse, extends beyond the immediate rhetorical situation and develops over time; that is, ethos is being continually created between the rhetor and the public. The sustained formation of this ethos is manifested in auctoritas, and with it come the benefits of a personal honor and a public gloria of communal recognition. Clearly, whether in the
immediate context or in the long-term formation of ethos, the rhetor and the audience together play a role in its creation, roles that are inextricably bound. The constituent elements of ethos are important, moreover, not only as traits but as manifestations made evident to and by the audience. That is, Cicero’s theoretical statements on rhetoric reveal that he believed qualities subsisted under the headings of ingenium, praevidentia, and diligentia were important not only as capacities of the rhetor but also as manifestations recognized by the audience. It is through the audience’s identification of such traits that the rhetor’s ethos is created within the discourse and establishes the basis for its own sustained effect over time. As the audience comes to view the rhetor as a person of capacity and sagacity, they have, with the rhetor, co-created the meaning of these qualities and validated these attributes as proof of the rhetor’s credibility. The ultimate benefits of potestas and gloria show the immediate power of creating ethos, as well as its sustaining influence, and confirm its centrality in classical rhetoric. For Cicero, ethos was not only a “proof” created within the discourse; indirectly, ethos was manifested in the development of personal power and public glory.

Notes

1. All translations appearing in this work were done by Richard Leo Enos, and all citations follow the standardized format of classical sources. Recommended Latin editions of Cicero’s Rhetorica are published by Oxford (Clarendon Press). The Augustus S. Wilkins edition of De Oratore published by Georg Olms is also recommended. For English translations with the original Latin texts, consult the Loeb Classical Library series published by Harvard University Press.

2. Cicero mentions ethos in the opening passages of De Fato (1.1) when discussing the topic of ethical character (mores) in philosophy; see also Grimaldi, “Auditors’ Role” 75.

3. For example, when Cicero uses conciliare in De Oratore 2.128, 129, he is discussing the appropriate style for maximizing the effect of ethical proof and not ethos itself; cf. Fantham’s discussion of conciliare with lenitas (263).

4. Cicero’s De Finibus provides an explicit discussion on the nature of ingenium (5.36).

Works Cited

Cicero’s Works

De Amicitia; Brutus; De Divinatione; Epistulae ad Atticum; Epistulae ad Brutum; Epistulae ad Familiares; Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem; De Fato; De Finibus; De Inventione; De Legibus; De Officiis; Orator; De Oratore; De Republica and Librorum De Re Publica Incertorum Fragmenta; De Senectute; Tusculanae Disputationes.

Other Ancient Authors and Works

Aristotle. Rhetoric.
Quintilian. Institutio oratoria.
Rhetorica ad Herennium.

Secondary Sources


