

The following three chapters comes from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Book Two, Chapters Twelve, Thirteen and Fourteen. Aristotle wrote the *Rhetoric* himself; all his other writings, other than perhaps his *Nicomachean Ethics* were from his students' notes.

Freud was not even a sperm and psychology never existed, as Aristotle merely focused on the only two instruments nature provided him, ears and eyes; yet, Aristotle's insights are more profound and some not even recognized by the so-called psychologists in today's "advanced" world.

Given Aristotle's acute and insightful awareness of the various characteristics of the human condition, imagine how broad and deep was his self-knowledge!

Chapter Twelve

Types of Character¹

Let us now discuss the various types of human character in relation to the emotions and moral states, to the several periods of life and the varieties of fortune. By emotions are meant anger, desire and the like – which we have discussed (Book II, Chapter Eleven). By moral states are meant virtues and vices ;these too have already been treated (Book I, Chapter 9), along with the characteristic choices and characteristic acts of the men who are subject to them (Book One, Chapters 5 & 6). By periods of life are meant youth, the prime of life and old age; by varieties of fortune (states or conditions of life) are meant health, wealth, power (in its several kinds) and their opposites – in a word, good fortune and bad.

We begin with the characteristics of youth. Young men have strong desires and whatever they desire they are prone to do. Of the bodily desires the one they let govern them most is the sexual²; here they lack self-control. They are shifting and unsteady in their desires which are vehement for a time, but soon relinquished; for the longings of youth; for the longings of youth are keen rather than deep – are like sick people's fits of hunger and thirst. The young are passionate, quick to anger and apt to give way to it and their angry passions get the better of them; for, since they wish to be honored, young men cannot put up with a slight. They are resentful if they only imagine that they are unfairly treated. Fond of honor, they are even fonder of victory, for youth likes to be superior and winning evinces

¹ The Greek word is *ethos*, whose basic meaning is *character*, or literally, *the way one has oneself*, from which, of course, we have the word *ethics*.

² Just an aside; every time I read this I reflect that being human is sexually transmitted!

superiority. They love both honor and victory more than they love money. Indeed, they care next to nothing about money for they have not yet learned what the want of it means; the point is brought out in the saying of Pittacus about Amphiaraus. (The *apophthegm*³ is unstated, however, an example might be the *New Testament* Prodigal Son -Luke: 15: 12-32, wherein an elder brother squandered his inheritance and found himself in want and eating corn husks because of hunger). The young think no evil (are not cynical), but believe in human goodness, for as yet they have not seen many examples of vice. They are trustful, for as yet they have not been often deceived. They are sanguine; for young men glow with a natural heat as drinkers are heated with wine, while as yet their failures have not been many.

They live their lives for the most part in hope (anticipation) as hope is of the future and memory of the past; and for young men the future is long, the past but short – on the first day of life there is nothing to remember, everything to expect. They are easily deceived and for the same reason, since they are quick to hope. Being passionate as well as hopeful, they are relatively brave; the passion excludes fear and the hope inspires confidence – no one is afraid when he is angry and an anticipation of good makes one confident. Young people are shy for as yet they have no independent standard of good conduct, but only the conventional standards in which they were reared (Or, to phrase it in a different manner: youth only have the morals in which they are raised as the basis of their judgments; they live by the standards of their parents.)

Youth are high minded (have lofty aspirations); first, because they have not yet been humbled by life, nor come to know the force of circumstances; secondly, because high mindedness means thinking oneself fitted for great things and this again is characteristic of the hopeful. In their actions they prefer honor to expediency; for their lives are rather lives of good impulse (instinct or feeling) than of calculation (reason or logic); calculation aims at the expedient whereas virtue at the honorable. They are fond of their friends, intimates and associates – more so than are men in the other two periods of life; this comes from their love of company and from the fact that as yet they judge nothing and hence do not judge their friends by the standard of expediency.

All youths' mistakes are on the side of intensity and excess, running counter to the maxim of Chilon: 'Moderation in all things'. They carry everything too far: they love to excess and hate to excess – and so in all else.

³ A Greek word for a pithy, instructive saying, a sententious saying or maxim.

They think they know everything and are positive about everything; indeed, this is why they always carry their doings too far. When they wrong other people, the injuries are wanton (insolent) not malicious. The young are prone to pity because they think everyone good, or, at all events better than people really are. That is, they judge their fellow man by their own guilelessness and hence assume that his sufferings are undeserved. They are fond of laughter and therefore facetious, facetiousness being a subdued insolence. Such then is the character of the young.

Chapter Thirteen

Elderly Men

As for the character of elderly men, men who are past their prime, we may say that their characteristics for the post part are the opposite of those of young men. The old have lived long, have been often deceived, have made many mistakes of their own; they see that more often than not the affairs of men turn out badly. So they are positive about nothing; in all things, they err by an extreme moderation. They ‘think’, but they never ‘know’; in discussing any matter, they always subjoin ‘perhaps’ and ‘possibly’. Everything they say is put thus doubtfully; nothing is stated with firmness. They think evil (are cynical), that is, they are disposed to put the worse construction on everything

Further, elderly men are suspicious because they are distrustful and distrustful from sad experience. As a result, they have no strong likes or hates; rather, illustrating the precept of Bias, they love as men ready some day to hate and hate as ready to love. They are mean spirited (small minded) because they have been humbled by life. Thus, they aspire to nothing great or exalted, but crave the mere necessities and comforts of existence. They are not generous. Property, as they know, is one of the necessities and they have learned by experience how hard it is to acquire and how easy to lose. They are cowards, apprehensive about everything – in temperament, the opposite of the youth for they are grown cold, as youth is hot so that advancing age has paved the way to cowardice since fear in itself is a species of chill.

The elderly cling to life and all the more as the latter end of it comes nearer for, as the object of all desire is the absent, so the thing they most lack will be the thing they most desire. They are unduly selfish (their self-love exceeds the right measure) another trait of the mean-spirited.

Through selfishness they live their lives with too much regard for the expedient, too little for honor; by expediency we mean what is good for oneself, by honor what is good absolutely. They are not shy, but tend to be shameless because they have less regard for honor than for expediency; they do not care what people think of them. They are slow to hope, partly from experience, since things generally go wrong, or at all events seldom turn out well; and partly too from cowardice.

The elderly live in memory rather than anticipation for the part of life remaining to them is but small, while the part that is past is large and hope is of the future whereas memory is of the past. Here again is the reason for their garrulity; they are for ever talking of bygone events, which they thus enjoy in recollection. Their fits of passion, though quick, are feeble. As for their desires of sense, these have either wholly failed, or are weakened. Accordingly, the old are not characterized by passion and their actions are governed, not by impulse but by love of gain. Hence men in this period of life are thought to be temperate (appear to have the virtue of self-control); the truth is that their desires have slackened and they themselves are mastered by the love of gain. Their lives rather lives of calculation than of moral bias; for calculation aims at expediency, whereas the object of morality is virtue.

When they wrong others, the elderly injure others out of malice, not from insolence. Old men, too, as well as young men, tend to feel pity, but not for the same reason. Young men feel pity out of human kindness; old men feel pity out of their infirmity. Because the elderly are weak, they take all possible sufferings to be near them and this, as we saw (Book, Chapter 8) is the state of mind in which pity is felt; hence, they are querulous, not given to jesting or laughter for the querulous disposition is just the opposite of the mirthful.

Such, then are the characteristics of young men and of the elderly. Now, the listener is always receptive when a speech is adapted to his own character and reflects it. Thus, we can readily see the proper means of adapting both speech and speaker to a given audience. (In addressing young men, for example, the speaker should assimilate his character to theirs. Or, again, in pleading for a gift to the poor and ailing, one would appeal to the kindness and generosity of the young, but to the fears and doubts of the old.)

Chapter Fourteen

The Prime of Life

As for men in the prime of life, their character evidently will be intermediate between these two, exempt from the excess of either young or old. They will be neither excessively confident – which means confident to the point of rashness – not yet too timid; they will be both confident and cautious. They will neither trust everyone nor distrust everyone; rather, they will judge each case by the facts. Their rule of life will be neither honor alone, nor expediency alone; they will duly observe both standards. So with regard to parsimony and prodigality: their economy will be fit and proper. So, too, with regard to passion and desire; they will combine self-control with valor and valor with self-control. In the young and old these qualities are not combined; young men are brave, but lack self-control and old men, while temperate, are cowardly. To put it generally: all the valuable qualities which youth and age divide between them are joined in the prime of life and between the respective excesses and defects of youth and age, in every case it strikes the fitting mean. The body in its prime from thirty years of age to five-and-thirty and the soul about forty-nine.⁴

⁴ Thirty-five and forty-nine are multiples of seven, similar to the biblical three score and ten, which is twice thirty-five. However, Aristotle's numbers are based on the average age of a Greek citizen of his time – Socrates, for instance, lived to the age of seventy, of course, having been found guilty and ordered to drink hemlock before the Athenian Senate.