

Passions and Persuasion

Appealing to the passions with aims of persuading listeners was a familiar ploy in ancient Athens. Gorgias celebrated speech's power to arouse various passions and in doing so persuade (*Helen*, 8-10). Greek literature displayed and evoked the passions, often with aims of persuading. Athenian democratic practices and its courts permitted and fostered appeals to them. Even so, the nature of the passions, their means of persuasion, and the appropriateness of their persuasions were neither well understood nor agreed upon. Plato noted the power of particular passions to affect and beguile audiences and even speakers themselves, but questioned whether one was in one's right mind at such times (*Ion* 535b-e, cf. *Phaedrus* 267d). Moreover, he contested the appropriateness of passions to particular virtues (*Phaedo* 68c-69b), their role in a proper search for knowledge (*Phaedo* 66b-e), their place in the development of character (*Republic* III 386a-b, 387c, 390a, 396d), as well as their place in the fine arts generally (*Republic* X). At his trial, Socrates repudiated an appeal to pity (*Apology* 34b-35b).

Aware of such diverging views, but methodologically disposed to pursue the coherence in and sense behind beliefs and practices, Aristotle attempted to grasp the nature of the passions and their significant roles in a variety of practical disciplines, including ethics, poetics and rhetoric. It is in the latter context that one finds his seminal thoughts on the connections between passions and persuasion. Thus it is in his *Rhetoric* that one is best able to comprehend Aristotle on the matter – though what can be gleaned for rhetoric will have application elsewhere.