*Against Timarchus*...and Demosthenes: Anti-rhetorical Strategy in Aeschines 1

Aeschines’ speech against Timarchus has been criticized for its lack of structure[[1]](#footnote-1) and its focused legalism.[[2]](#footnote-2) Scholarship in turn has concentrated on Aeschines’ strategy of citing moralizing laws coupled with a studied attack on Timarchus’ lifestyle.[[3]](#footnote-3) But discussion of the strategy and structure of Aeschines’ speech must also take into consideration the topos of anti-rhetoric that pervades his oration. I argue that Aeschines’ strategy of attacking Timarchus’ immorality is inseparably bound to his assault on rhetoric and its embodiment, Demosthenes. Examination of this connection reveals an artful unity and structure in his speech.

The case against Timarchus was a case of self-defense, as Aeschines by his own admission was striving to discredit the men who were challenging him at his *euthynai* (1-3). Thus both Timarchus and Demosthenes are the targets. Aeschines from the beginning of his speech opposes himself to Timarchus (and by extension, Demosthenes) by posing as an *idiotes*, as opposed to the *rhetores*, pointing to his inexperience in court and his private reasons for prosecuting.[[4]](#footnote-4) By repeatedly opposing *idiotes* to *rhetor* in his introduction and his citation of the laws (1-36), he builds an anti-rhetorical foundation from which to attack the *rhetores* Timarchus and Demosthenes (1-3, 5, 7-8, 18-20, 24, 26-27, 31-32). Though it has been argued that Aeschines fails to mention his own political role in this speech because of his precarious political situation[[5]](#footnote-5) or out of pure shallowness[[6]](#footnote-6), his lack of political argumentation is readily understandable as a further rhetorical strategy to keep up the persona of a private citizen as he attacks the rhetoric of public speakers.

But his narration of Timarchus’ malfeasance (37-116) focuses on Timarchus the *rhetor* for only a short time (106-115) and even here does not attack his rhetoric. Aeschines must therefore continually remind the jurors of the dangers of rhetoric even during the narration, ushering in Demosthenes’ defense and Demosthenes himself as a manipulator of speech (71-73; 94). In this way, Aeschines links immorality and rhetoric and at the same time impresses on the jurors’ minds the practical danger of Timarchus’ immorality. Timarchus’ immorality was not illegal, except that he presumed to act as a public speaker. It was therefore necessary for Aeschines to connect Timarchus’ immorality with rhetoric, and he does so in the person of Demosthenes, Timarchus’ partner.

Aeschines refers to Demosthenes twice before actually naming him. He dubs him “a certain speechwriter” who has “contrived the defense” (94) and “the man who advertises that he can teach young men the art of speaking [and] tricks you with false logic and prevents a result to the city’s advantage” (117). Demosthenes’ identity is sophist; he is not named until 119. Aeschines continues his anti-rhetorical attack, contrasting his own simplicity (120) with Demosthenes’ rhetorical skill (119, 123). He then names Demosthenes a sophist (125) and connects his rhetoric with pathic immorality (131, 160-164). He identifies with the jury (esp. 141) and attacks the arrogance of the defense. Finally, just before the conclusion, which again returns to Timarchus’ immorality, Aeschines extends his attack on Demosthenes, accusing him of planning to trick the jurors with his rhetoric and of disgracing Athens with his speech, but also of squandering his inheritance and committing unseemly actions with a boy (166-176). Thus Aeschines conflates immorality with rhetoric, even accusing Demosthenes of the same actions as Timarchus. He seals their connection by declaring that neither Timarchus nor Demosthenes should be allowed to participate in public life (181).

Aeschines’ strategy was to conflate Timarchus’ immorality with Demosthenes’ rhetoric, thus simultaneously incriminating Timarchus’ immorality and guarding against the arguments of the defense. It worked.

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1. Usher (1998) 280-282 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kennedy (1963) 238-239 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dover (1989) 19-109, Hunter (1994) 104-5, Davidson (1997) 250-277, Fisher (2001) esp. 53-67 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Davidson (1997) 267, Kurihara (2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Fisher (2001) 54-55, 315, 322 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kennedy (1963) 238-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)