

# Cicero's Rhetoric vs. Baumgarten's Aesthetics: A Small Comparison of *Decorum* of Cicero With *Magnitudo* of Baumgarten\*

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This paper made a comparison of Cicero's Rhetoric with Baumgarten's Aesthetics, for answering the question of how Baumgarten built the system of *ars aesthetica* on the basis of Cicero's rhetoric. The paper demonstrated how Baumgarten's key ideas of *pulchritudo* and *magnitudo* were related with Cicero's *decorum* and *modus* concepts. Baumgarten's *magnitudo* originated in Cicero's *modus*. Baumgarten, however, differentiated the idea *pulchritudo* from the Cicero's *decorum* for approaching the issue of *pulchritudo ipsa*.

**Keywords:** Cicero, rhetoric, Baumgarten, aesthetics, decorum, magnitudo

## The concept of Cicero's *Decorum*

The summit of Cicero's rhetoric is "*orator perfectus*" (Schulte, 1935; Barwick, 1963; Classen, 1986). This ideal speaker is one who has the ability to adjust the form of speech appropriately according to the content of a given topic, no matter what the topic is. He is who can make a speech according to the principle of *decorum* (Guérin, 2009, pp. 119-139). Cicero says that the *decorum* concept he uses is borrowed from Greek *prepon*.

70. The Greeks call it *prepon*, let us call it *decorum* or "property". Much brilliant work has been done in laying down rules about this. The subject is worth mastering. From ignorance of this mistakes are made not only in life but very frequently in writing, both in poetry and in prose. Moreover the orator must have an eye to property not only in thought but in language. For the same style and the same thoughts must not be used in portraying every condition in life.

Cicero discusses the *decorum* one should keep in speech. First, he introduces four upper-level concepts: thought (*sententia*), words (*verba*) (word), subject (*res*), and person (*persona*).

71. The universal rule, in oratory as in life, is to consider propriety. This depends on the subject under discussion and one the character of the speaker and the audience.<sup>1</sup>

About the scope of coverage, Cicero distinguishes between speaker and audience. He argues that contents and forms should be appropriated according to the position of the person. Based on this, Cicero develops

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<sup>1</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *Orator*, translated by H. M. Hubbell.

detailed ideas of *decorum* (propriety). However, the concept he uses in detail is no longer that of *decorum*. Instead, Cicero replaced it with the question of *quatenus* (how far).

73. Moreover, in all cases the question must be “how far?” For although the limits of propriety differ for each subject, yet in general too much is more offensive than too little.<sup>2</sup>

The precept of “how far” means that there is a measure to be taken in every situation. Through this discussion, Cicero connects the concept of *decorum* as a goal to pursue and the concept of *modus* as a means to practice. *Decorum* is the object-concept of *modus*, and *modus* is the means-concept of *decorum*. It is clear in the following.

But orderly behaviour and consistency of demeanour and self-control and the like have their sphere in that department of things in which a certain amount of physical exertion and not mental activity merely, is required. For if we bring a certain amount of propriety and order into the transactions of daily life, we shall be conserving moral rectitude and moral dignity.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of *modus* is central to expression in rhetoric. Cicero calls the ideal speaker a “*moderator*”. A *moderator* is a person who has internalized the ability to act on *modus*. The personified expression for the concept of *modus* is *moderator*. Here are a few of the guidelines that Cicero requires speakers to follow regarding the concept of *modus*. Regarding subjects, Cicero emphasizes some points. First, the speaker should make it clear that what the issues are and who is the party interested. These two factors determine the purpose the speaker needs to pursue and the action he needs to take. For example, there are three factors to be aware of regarding people who are involved: oneself, opponent, and audience. One should pay attention to their nationality, family, friends, social status, occupation, education, gender, age, appearance, personality, fate, property, taste, hobbies, achievements, and names. Regarding issues, the distinction between time and place is important. These two factors are related to the distinction of the audience, and differentiate speeches into statutory, ritual, and political speeches. Along with the classification of speech types, one should not forget three goals of the speech: move (*movere*), delight (*delectare*), and prove (*probare*)/instruct (*docere*). These goals are realized through means of expression, which aim at the virtues of grammaticality (*sermo purus et latinus*), clarity (*perspicuitas*), *decorum*, and embellishment. These virtues must also be appropriated to the nature of the audience and the subject. Through such processes, the style of the speech is determined. If one wish to give a deep impression on the mind of the audience, one has to choose a grand style, the middle style to give the audience pleasure, and the subtle style if the argument is needed. Those are the three styles of speech: grand style, middle style, subtle style.

69. The man of eloquence whom we seek, following the suggestion of Antonius, will be one who is able to speak in court or in deliberate bodies so as to prove, to please and to sway or persuade. To prove is the first necessity, to please is charm, to sway is victory; for it is the one thing of all that avails most in winning verdicts. For these three functions of the orator there are three styles, the plain style for proof, the middle style for pleasure, the vigorous style for persuasion; and in this last is summed up the entire virtue of the orator.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *Orator*, translated by H. M. Hubbell.

<sup>3</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *On Duties*, translated by W. Miller.

<sup>4</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *Orator*, translated by H. M. Hubbell.

The goal and the style of speech are interconnected and what make this connection is the concept of *decorum*. For example, a speech aiming at *movere* is to take a grand style. Therefore, *decorum* is a principle that mediates the goal of speech and its style. We can find this clearly in subordinate concepts that describe or define individual speech styles. For example, *genus grande*, *genus medium*, and *genus tenue* are predicated belonging to the scale concept of size or volume. This is clear that Cicero expresses the style of speech in terms of these scale concepts. Such expression in quantification terms may be regarded as a figurative device. But this is not just a figure of speech. Concepts adopted in the distinction of speech styles are, in fact, expressions of the scale of the senses, which cannot avoid borrowing terms of quantification. For example, the predicates describing the *genus grande* are as follows.

altum (Or. 192), amplum (Or. 20), grave (Or. 20), vehemens (Or. 20), ardens (Or. 27), fulmine utens (Or. 21), audax (Or. 26), copiosum (Or. 20), grandiloquum (Or. 20), etc.

As seen in the above, the predicates describing the style of speech are borrowed from the terms of quantifiers. Cicero argues that either subtle style, grand style, or middle style should be offered to a different context and situation respectively. Thus, a style is not superior to another. Cicero contends that a person who insists on a certain style is lack of understanding the principle of *decorum* that functions according to “*suus cuique modus*”. In terms of voices and gestures, Cicero distinguishes voices by size, height, strength, and length, and distinguishes gestures by eye, face, body, and posture. Cicero advises to keep propriety.

20. The style is brilliant if the words employed are chosen for their dignity and used metaphorically and in exaggeration and adjectivally and in duplication and synonymously and in harmony with the actual action and the representation of the facts. For it is this department of oratory which almost sets the fact before the eyes—for it is the sense of sight that is most appealed to, although it is nevertheless possible for the rest of the senses and also most of all the mind itself to be affected. However, the things that were said about the clear style all apply to the brilliant style. For brilliance is worth considerably more than the clearness above mentioned.<sup>5</sup>

What to keep in mind is the question of balance. The key is the appropriateness (*aptum*) between the expression (*verba*) and the object of expression (*res*). For the best appropriateness, Cicero argues figuratively that the “weight” of words should be measured. To weigh means to measure the exact value of meaning required by the object of expression and to find a matching word for the value. Regarding this, Cicero uses the “*pondus verbi*”. What he calls “the weight of words” is a function of discernment that works until a word is found, selected, expressed, placed, and is uttered through breathing. Depending on the weight, the speaker must choose the word needed. In organizing a sentence, *modus* is also important. This is supported by the assertion to measure the breath of words.

18. In combining words the things that have to be observed are certain rhythms, and sequence. Rhythms are judged by the ear itself, to secure one against either failing to fill out the verbal scheme one has proposed or being over-full; while sequence guards the style against irregularity of gender, number, tense, person or case.<sup>6</sup>

Cicero emphasizes the importance of measuring breath because breathing is the most important means of decoration in rhetoric. This is manifest in the following.

<sup>5</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *De partitione oratoria*, translated by H. Rakham.

<sup>6</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *De partitione oratoria*, translated by H. Rakham.

19. However, the following five ornaments belong in common both to single words and to combination of words: lucidity, brevity, acceptability, brilliance, charm. Lucidity is secured by using the accepted words in their proper meanings, arranged either rounded periods or in short clauses and divisions. Obscurity is caused by either length or abridgment of style or ambiguity or modification of words or metonymy. Brevity is achieved by expressing each separate idea once, in simple terms, and by paying no attention to anything but clearness of expression. The acceptable kind of oratory is when it is not too decorative and polished, if the words contain authority and weight, and if the views put forward are either weighty or in conformity with the opinions and customs of mankind.<sup>7</sup>

Cicero divides the rhythm of a sentence into three types. They are *colon*, *comma*, and *periodus*. Just as the stability and beauty of a building depends on the harmony and proportion of the pillars, which are the main elements of the building, the stability and beauty of a sentence is in fact determined by the proportional relationship between the colons that make up the sentence. It can be confirmed that the principle of *decorum* is also crucial in breathing. One additional thing to note is that Cicero is explaining the reasons for emphasizing the principle of *decorum* in expression. It is because precision, simplicity, credibility, clarity, and sweetness are revealed by the principle of *decorum*. From this, the five virtues of speech stem out: *puritas*, *perspicuitas*, *aptum*, *decorum*, *brevitas*. If so, these virtues are also based on the principle of *decorum*.

144. I had listened also to the traditional precepts for the embellishment of discourse itself: that we must speak, in the first place, pure and correct Latin, second with simple lucidity, thirdly with elegance, lastly in a manner befitting the dignity of our topics and with a certain grace: and on these several points I had learned particular maxims.<sup>8</sup>

How the propriety concept works on the theoretical system of rhetoric on the basis of *decorum* principle can be summarized in the following.

Table 1

*Cicero's Rhetoric System*

Modus											
Measure		Goal			Method						
Situation		Task	Aim	Virtue	Style	Eloquence				Act	
						Word		Words		Voice	Motion
						proper sense	tropes	speech figure	thought figure		
subject	person	invention disposition elocution memory action	move delight prove	latinity clarity propriety embellishment	grande middle subtle	used unused -rare -old -new	metapher metonymy catachresis etc	epanaphora antistrophe interlacement etc	personification interrogation climax etc	tone high middle low voice curved acute deep	gestures faces
deliberative demonstrative juridical		discussion on ideal speaker. discussion on <i>kairos</i> .			analogy vs. anomaly. asianism vs. atticism. barbarism & soloecism.						

<sup>7</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *De partitione oratoria*, translated by H. Rakham.

<sup>8</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *De oratore I*, translated by E. W. H. Sutton.

### The Idea of Baumgarten's *Magnitudo*

Roughly to say, aesthetic (*ars aesthetica*) is a modern discipline. Of course, it did not mean that there was no discussion or theory about beauty in the ancient times of the West. There were thinkers like Plato and Aristotle.<sup>9</sup> However, the author will narrow down the discussion to look into Cicero's idea of beauty. What occupy the central place in Cicero's ideas of beauty are *decorum* and *modus*, as discussed earlier. These are the terminology of ethics frequently encountered in Cicero's *De officiis*. Cicero's *decorum* is the equivalent to the concept of duty in ethics, which is used as the counterpart of *honestum*. It is evident in the following passage.

93. Under this head is further included what in Latin may be called decorum; for in Greek it is called prepon. 94. Such is its essential nature, that it is inseparable from moral goodness, for what is proper is morally right and what is morally right is proper. The nature of the difference between morality and propriety can be easily felt than expressed. For whatever propriety may be, it is manifested only when there is pre-existing moral rectitude.<sup>10</sup>

Cicero's concept of *honestum* is not an external reputation, but a certain level of perfection accomplished when we fulfill our duty. Therefore, Cicero's concept of *decorum* in the *De officiis* is equivalent to that of duty. From this, it can be deduced that Cicero's emphasis on *decorum* in rhetoric is not about the phenomenon called beauty. For example, he insists that health is itself beautiful, and needs not something added to be beautiful. One can see that beauty is accomplished when *decorum* corresponds *modus*. For this reason, the characteristics of modern aesthetic, which purely concerns beauty itself, are not found in Cicero. It can be said that *decorum* is complementary concept to *honestum*, the core of ethics. This relationship, however, does not completely block the possibility for pure aesthetics from the Cicero's concept of *decorum*. This is because the concept that Cicero uses in the discussion of general conduct or general practice in his argument of ethics is not *decorum* but obligation. However, *decorum* and obligation are similar in that both of them function on the foundation of the idea of *modus*. However, there is difference between them in that the former pursues the relevance of the relationship while the latter emphasizes the universal right. While the lack of *decorum* may cause unseemliness or embarrassment, the lack of obligation can result in a serious mistake or a crime. Therefore, one can see a possibility in the concept of *decorum* from which to develop pure aesthetics. Of course, it took a long time for this to be revealed. It took about 1,800 years. A. G. Baumgarten (1714-1762) was the one who systematized the possibility in earnest (Tedesco, 2008, pp. 137-150). Baumgarten, in *Aesthetica*, published in 1750, declares that he will pursue the knowledge of pure beauty and take the natural senses as the objects of his inquiry. According to Marie Luise Linn (Linn, 1974, pp. 105-125), Baumgarten aesthetics is based on Horace's poetry and Cicero's rhetoric. That is, aesthetics is the combination of Cicero's theory of rhetoric, Horace's genius idea, and the discussion of freedom of expression. Now it is time to inquire into how Baumgarten appropriated Cicero's rhetoric to his *ars aesthetica*. To help a better understanding, let's have a quick look at Baumgarten's *aesthetica docens*.

(1) On subject and invention (*de rebus et cogitandis heurasticē*);

<sup>9</sup> Here is not the place where to discuss the history of aesthetics in general. To be sure, there are many authors who are to be mentioned in terms of the beauty issue. For example, Augustin, Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite, Aquinas and Scotus should be invited for this discussion. But I do not invite them in this essay, because they treated the issue of beauty in terms of philosophy and theology, not in terms of pure aesthetics as Baumgarten did.

<sup>10</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *On Duties*, translated by W. Miller.

(2) On clear order, methodology (*de lucido ordine, methodologia*);

(3) On signs of thought and disposition on beauty, semiotics (*de signis pulchre cogitarum et dispositorum, semiotica*).

Undoubtedly, Baumgarten's *de heuristica* corresponds to the *inventio* of rhetoric. *Methodologia* corresponds to *dispositio*, and *semiotica* corresponds to *elocutio* (Tedesco, 2008, p. 142). Here is another remark of Baumgarten.

18. The general beauty of sensitive cognition will be the accordance of thoughts, (...) 19. The general beauty of sensitive cognition is because every completion has order, it is the accordance of order, (...) 20. The beauty of sign takes place, just as saying and eloquence, when sign is expressed in speech together with action, when words are made with living voice.<sup>11</sup>

A plenty of similar evidences are found in Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*. For confirming this, let us see one more passage in details.

22. The cognition of plenty, magnitude, truth, clarity, certainty and life is made, when they are accordant in one perception and with each other, for instance, when plenty and magnitude is accordant with clarity, truth and clarity with certainty, all other with life, and when the cognition of other various things are accordant with the same things, and when they give perfect sensitive cognition, the general beauty of things and thoughts takes place. In these plenty, newness and a certain light of moving truth delight us.<sup>12</sup>

As seen in the above, Baumgarten introduces the criteria for measuring beauty in his aesthetics (Linn, 1974, pp. 109-120). These concepts are actually borrowed from system of rhetoric. For example, clarity corresponds to perspicuity of Cicero, truth corresponds to purity, and plenty corresponds to the copious (*copiose*). In this regard, it is noteworthy to see Baumgarten's remark on arguments.

26. As far as a perception is a reason, it is an argument. Therefore, there are reliable, well known, praising, illustrating, persuading, moving arguments. The aesthetic of these requires not only the efficacious power but also the elegance. The part of cognition, in which a proper elegance is exposed, is a figure (form). There are 1) figures of things and thoughts, [these are figures of] notions, and 2) figures of order, and 3) figures of expression. These are figures of words. Types of notions are so many in number as those of arguments are.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, *Theoretische Aesthetik: Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der Aesthetica (1750/8)*, uebers. & hers. H. R. Schweizer, Hamburg (Felix Meiner) 1983: 12. 18. Pulchritudo cognitionis sensitivae erit universalis (§14) consensus cogitationum, (...). 19. Pulchritudo cognitionis sensitivae universalis est (§14), quia nulla perfectio sine ordine (M. §95 619, 3) consensus ordinis, (...). 20. Pulchritudo Significationis (*sic*), qualis dictio et elocutio, quando signum est oratio seu sermo et simul actio, quando sermo viva voce habetur.

<sup>12</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, *Theoretische Aesthetik: Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der Aesthetica (1750/8)*, uebers. & hers. H. R. Schweizer, Hamburg (Felix Meiner) 1983: 13-15. §22. Ubertas, magnitudo, veritas, claritas, certitudo et vita cognitionis, quatenus consentiunt in una perceptione et inter se, e.g. ubertas et magnitudo adclaritatem, veritas et claritas ad certitudinem, omnes reliquae ad vitam, quatenus variacognitionis alia (capp. 18-20) consentiunt ad easdem, dant omnis cognitionis perfectionem (M. capp. 668, 94), phaenomena sensitivae pulchritudinem (cap. 14) universalem (cap. 17), praesertim rerum et cogitationum in quibus iuvat copia nobilitas, veri lux certa moventis. English translation is mine.

<sup>13</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, *Theoretische Aesthetik: Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der Aesthetica (1750/8)*, uebers. & hers. H. R. Schweizer, Hamburg (Felix Meiner) 1983: 15-16. §26. Perceptio quatenus est ratio, est Argumentum. Sunt ergo argumenta locupletantia, nobilitantia, probantia, illustrantia, persuadentia, moventia (cap. 22), quorum aethetica non solum poscit vim efficaciam (M. cap. 515), sed etiam elegantiam (cap. 25). Pars cognitionis, in qua peculiaris detegitur elegantia, est FIGURA(schema). Sunt ergo figurae 1) rerum et cogitationum (cap. 18), Sententiae, 2) ordinis (cap. 19), 3) significationis, quo figurae dictionis (cap. 20). Figurarum sententiae tot quot argumentorum sunt genera.

The types of arguments suggested by Baumgarten are changed or applied forms of figures of speech and thought in rhetoric. Intriguingly to see is Baumgarten's concept on *figura*. It is because while the concept of *figura* is a key concept of aesthetics, the concept of *figura* might have been borrowed Cicero's notions. The author thinks, they are not Baumgarten's own ideas. This is corroborated by Cicero's statement.

34. This assertion on my part may possibly suggest the objection that, if the ideal types of oratory, different in form but each in its own kind praiseworthy, are almost countless in number, it is impossible that things thus differing from one another should be regulated by the same rules and belong to a single system.<sup>14</sup>

This would suffice to show how Baumgarten appropriated Cicero's rhetoric in building his aesthetics. Now one should see how Baumgarten utilized then concepts of Cicero for the construction of his aesthetics theory. Linn argues that the root of Baumgarten's aesthetics system is *magnitudo* that Kant later translated in *das Grosse*. Linn reconstructs the composition of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*, in terms of the concept of magnitude.

Table 2

*Baumgarten's Aesthetics System*

Magnitude ( <i>Magnitudo</i> )						
Matters ( <i>Materiae</i> )				Person ( <i>Personae</i> )		
absolute ( <i>absoluta</i> ): 191~201	relative ( <i>relativa</i> ): 202~	subtle type of thought ( <i>genus cogitationis tenuis</i> ): 230~		absolute ( <i>absoluta</i> ): 352~	relative ( <i>relativa</i> ): 364~	subtle magnitude ( <i>magnitas tenuis</i> ): 365~386
		middle type of thought ( <i>genus cogitationis medium</i> ): 266~				middle magnitude ( <i>magnitas media</i> ): 387~393
		sublime type of thought ( <i>genus cogitationis sublime</i> ): 282~				sublime magnitude ( <i>magnitas sublimis</i> ): 394~422

What to point out is that the Baumgarten's system of *magnitudo* closely coincides with the rhetorical system of Cicero reconstructed from the concept of *decorum*. For instance, the distinction between *materiae* and *personae* reminds us of the Cicero's *res* and *persona*. The predicates *tenuis*, *media*, and *sublimis* of thought also correspond to those of Cicero. But the crucial difference lies in this. While Cicero emphasized the concept of *decorum*, Baumgarten put an emphasis on the concept of *magnitudo*. How could this difference be explained? Regarding this, Linn did not give any explanation other than Baumgarten's aesthetics system refers to Cicero's rhetoric system. It is a significant contribution by raising the so to say *Vorlage* question. This question, however, asks for an explanation about the way of how Baumgarten utilizes Cicero's rhetoric. My answer to this is like this. First of all, the concept of the *modus* of Cicero corresponds to the *magnitudo* of Baumgarten, and *decorum* to *pulchritudo* of Baumgarten. By the way, Cicero's concept of *decorum* is fundamentally influenced by ethics. This is because they are the conceptual means of *honestum*, the goal of Cicero's ethics. Due to this,

<sup>14</sup> The English translation is from Cicero: *De oratore III*, translated by E. W. H. Sutton

Baumgarten, who wanted to construct pure aesthetics, would have chosen the concept of *magnitudo*, a free and non-purposeful concept, in dealing with beauty instead of *modus*, which is a conceptual means of *decorum*. In this way, aesthetics has become independent of ethics and purely based on the theoretical framework of rhetoric. But Linn overlooked the fact that Cicero's concept of *modus* functions on the basis of *decorum*. To conclude, Cicero's concept of *modus* corresponds to Baumgarten's concept of *magnitudo*, and then Baumgarten constructed pure aesthetics based on this concept of *magnitudo*. In other words, aesthetics became an independent discipline by taking the part of beauty out of ethics, that is, not defining beauty by any specific purpose but allowing access to beauty from a purely aesthetic point of view, through shifting its perspective from *decorum* to *pulchritudo*, from *modus* to *magnitudo*. Horace's *Ars poetica* has also played an important role in the process of aesthetics becoming an independent discipline (Lecointe, 2012, pp. 1-20), because Baumgarten wanted to cultivate through *ars aesthetica* who was not an *orator* but a *felix aestheticus* who is close to a *poeta creator*. Baumgarten argues that the artistic creator should have the liberty of expression to create new things, freely employing theoretical system as well as the natural talent. However, with regard to the issues associated with novelty and creation, we should note that the ideas of freedom and new creation emphasized on *felix aestheticus* in Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* are borrowed from Horace's *Ars poetica*. This is why Baumgarten's so-called *homo aestheticus* cannot be explained by Cicero's *orator perfectus*.

### Conclusion

To conclude, it was possible for aesthetics to become an independent field of study by taking the part of beauty out of ethics, that is, not defining beauty by any specific purpose but allowing access to beauty from a purely aesthetic point of view, through shifting its perspective from *decorum* to *pulchritudo*, from *modus* to *magnitudo*.

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