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Modern rhetoric/ancient realities

James Walsh Friedenbach

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MODERN RHETORIC/ANCIENT REALITIES

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
James Walsh Friedenbach
August 1988
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ABSTRACT

Some theorists of what is called the new rhetoric contend that classical rhetoric is no longer pertinent to the modern world. In this thesis, contemporary rhetorical perspectives, particularly that of the new rhetoric, are analyzed and a five-part description of a rhetoric that reconciles the contemporary perspectives and the classical tradition is proposed—that is, that rhetoric is dialogue, that it addresses the whole person, that it is productive, that it is metaphorical, and that it is ethical. It is maintained that the purported estrangement between our rhetoric and that of our traditions is more specious than real, that the classical tradition is still relevant to a contemporary rhetoric that is humanistically conceived.
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In our modern age, it is said, we cannot communicate effectively or meaningfully because we no longer share common beliefs and world views, because for us knowledge is uncertain and always changing, and because values are situational and relative. Our world, unlike that of other peoples in other times, is vexed by confusion and our universe is essentially meaningless. Language itself, our uniquely human ability to discover and convey meaning, to shape our lives individually and socially, is no less a victim of this confusion, if not a participant in and cause of it. Little wonder, therefore, that rhetoric, the ancient and inclusive art with which we facilitate and enlighten the conduct of the individual and society, should also be comprised or rendered impotent, or, as if seizing the moment, made into something exploitive and opportunistic. Once used to negotiate the difficulties inherent to our existence, to discover and consolidate shared meanings, beliefs, and aspirations, rhetoric now too often merely reflects our confusion or acts helpless in the face of difficulties, as though it too had traded in the arts of living for the expediencies of existence.

In examining what he calls the "pathos of modern communication," Winston Weathers writes, "Man cannot
communicate, we are told, because of the very nature of the universe and reality and our own limited intellectual capacity" (7). And in the same place he observes that for many people "modern science has opened the doors that reveal a meaningless and indescribable universe." Daniel Fogerty states that a new philosophy of rhetoric is needed in a "time of disintegration like the present" (130). And in the same vein, but partially subscribing to the world view that Weathers criticizes and Fogerty seems to accede to, S. Michael Halloran writes, "Deprived of a given world, the modern author is likewise deprived of a given rhetoric. To the extent that he must articulate his own world in such a way that his readers can enter it with him, he must likewise invent the commonplaces that are the rhetorical lineaments of that world" ("On the Eng of Rhetoric" 630). The rhetorician, Halloran tells us later in the same article, is the "lonely modern anti-hero" (631).

Commonplaces are not invented, of course, not as Halloran uses the word "invented"; if they were, they wouldn't be commonplaces. But that we are able to live with such contradictions, to regard them as normal, in indicative of the problem. Commonplaces, those mutually held beliefs and assumptions of people that form the ground of classical rhetoric, are discovered, summoned forth by the rhetorician, and used to bring about the sort of social consensus necessary as premises for arriving at probable truths. That
was true for the Greeks and, as I will maintain here, it is still true. Rhetoricians, just the opposite of the solipsistic anti-hero, modern or otherwise, are necessarily persons invested in the course and well-being of society, persons who share its fundamental principles and goals, and in the best of circumstances persons who somehow personify them—who by voicing themselves voice their culture.

S. Michael Halloran acknowledges that aspect of rhetoric and, ironically, demonstrates it himself; for in the same place that he gives us the discouraging news that the rhetorician must articulate his or her own world view and invent commonplaces in order to communicate, he seeks our understanding, our agreement, that communication, and therefore rhetoric, is both possible and important. He reaches out to us with language and ideas, and not just his ideas but those of our cultural tradition. He thereby confirms, unwittingly perhaps, the observation of Wayne Booth, who wrote that "to worry about the reader would be absurd in a genuinely absurd universe" (The Rhetoric of Fiction, 394). By caring about his readers and presuming a communality of meaning with them, S. Michael Halloran is the antagonist of his own "lonely modern anti-hero."

The word "modern" and its train of assumptions notwithstanding, our world is not so much different from that of other times, not in regard to the essentials of the human condition, which constitute, after all, the subject,
venue, and rationale of rhetoric. Our world is not different because we are not different. The basic problems and opportunities of humanity—its givens—the tasks of living, individually and communally, the possibilities for good and evil, and our ability to choose between them, are no different now than they have ever been. And if our rhetoric, or what passes for it, is not up to meeting those problems, for whatever reason, then it is up to us to make or retrieve a rhetoric responsive to the needs of our age. None of us has been "given" a world. Each generation is responsible for maintaining whatever beneficial patrimony is available to it, and responsible as well for discovering or reviving meanings and values that are good for the individual and conducive to the comity of peoples.

The problem for rhetoric is not one of meanings and values. We are not bereft of either; and humanity is always inclined, courageously or haltingly, in the direction of both; this is contrary to those who would have us resigned to the confusions and contradictions of the contemporary world, those who forget that rhetoric's task is to face up to uncertainty and wrest meaning from it, to be defiant when need be and to seek the good always. Nor is the problem one of language. To most people, words still mean what they say. Besides, a language sufficient to corrupt—and we have seen more than enough of that—is a language to ennable. A viable, humanistic rhetoric depends, rather, on that basic
human sentiment, that disposition towards the good and the meaningful, that we have all been born with. What Richard Weaver calls "the life-affirming sentiment" (Ideas Have Consequences 20) is the heart of rhetoric, and it is always there with people, actually or potentially, and no preachments or world views to the contrary can extinguish it. And it is to that sentiment, which is belief, of the individual and as it is conjoined communally, that rhetoric makes its first appeal, and upon which all its endeavors, whether argumentative or persuasive, are based.

So long as that sentiment is intact, rhetoric functions as it always has. It presumes, as it much, that life makes sense, that the universe is not meaningless; and it presumes that persons have the freedom to choose, that neither the person nor history is determined. It starts not with the universe, given or otherwise, but with the individual, who is always passionate as to the outcome of his or her existence and ever needful of a meaningful world. These truths have been the leitmotif and premise of all rhetoric, including the rhetoric of our own day. And it is especially so with the rhetoric of those who would deny these truths. No one seeks meaning more earnestly or is more credulous, more given to lesser faiths, than the person who professes to find the universe meaningless.

"The soul is impulse, not simply cognition," Richard Weaver writes, "and finally one's interest in rhetoric
depends on how much poignancy one finds in existence" (Ethics 23). And Ernesto Grassi writes, "As a passionate, and not exclusively rational, being, man is in need of the emotive word" (Rhetoric as Philosophy 26). If we are having trouble finding poignancy in existence, much of the blame can be laid to a rhetoric that appeals to us partially—and therefore, in a sense, not at all—by basing its appeal on a would-be pure reason. Caught up in and infatuated with the scientific point of view, contemporary rhetoric often seems unable to find any grounds for truth beyond the inductive and empirical. As science unpeels the endless onion skins of earth and sky and deludes itself and us into thinking that it is getting somewhere, our rhetoric, and all who are suitors to it, notably the academic world, has had an almost exclusive resort to facts. We have witnessed the futile tragi-comedy of the humanities, of which rhetoric is both child and parent, being put in hock to scientism, and then, thereby emasculated, attempt to address the massive human problems of the contemporary world. In this we are not new. But never have the ethics of science and the humanities been so closely intertwined as in our own day, and never, therefore, has rhetoric been so dehumanized. Ernesto Grassi, to whom I will return later at length, scores this phenomenon in Rhetoric as Philosophy, as does Winston Weathers in The Broken Word. Susan Miller, who also holds to the humanist banner, can write as follows:
It takes little philosophical training to recognize . . . that rhetorical humanism, the view that unites language, thought, and action in the person, lost out to self-reflective rationalism, the separation of subject from object. The contextuality of rhetoric could not hold sway against objective, scientific, and ultimately positivistic thought. (50)

And Robert Connors, no less an advocate of rhetorical humanism than Grassi, Weathers, and Miller, can write: "We should not in our search for provable knowledge forget that the essential use of all knowledge is in aiding humanity in search for consensually-arrived-at truth" ("Composition Studies and Science" 19). Richard Weaver, without equivocation as usual, goes straight to the heart of the problem when he writes,

Like MacBeth, Western Man made an evil decision, which has become the efficient and final cause of other decisions. Have we forgotten our encounter with the witches on the heath? It occurred late in the fourteenth century, and what the witches said to the protagonist of this drama was that man could realize himself more fully if he would abandon his belief in the existence of transcendentals. (Ideas 2-3)

Our age's near obsession with the inductive, scientific point of view is based, it would seem, on the supposition that humanity can somehow lift itself up by its own rational bootstraps. And coincident with that, as Albert Camus once observed critically, is the implicit notion that society is its own end. So far as Weaver is correct, to the extent that we have turned our backs on transcendentals, we have turned our backs on any hierarchy of values necessary to the
formulation of a meaningful and reasonable rhetoric, one anchored somewhere. Without a hierarchy, without ultimate terms, rhetoric is unable to really evaluate, predicate, or define, and becomes instead a situational response to shifting circumstances. Even some of those who harken to the richness of our rhetorical traditions overlook the scheme of ultimates upon which rhetoric depended and imagine that its forms are transposable to a world leery of value judgements and dissociated from transcendent verities. And in this respect, those who criticize the unthinking imitation of classical rhetoric's forms are correct.

Scientism—and I borrow the word from Robert Connors to indicate an aberration of what true science stands for—with its relegation of inquiry to the observable, not only cuts us off from the sustenance of our humanistic tradition by rejecting that tradition's transcendent suppositions, but it offers us as well a truncated definition of humanity, providing as the subject of rhetoric the non-historical, materialistic, self-bound person (not the "lonely modern anti-hero, which is a fictive creation for the most part, and a romantic one at that). Given the dominance of scientism and its attendant world view, it's something of a wonder that rhetoric survives at all, except as a curiosity or a mere technique—a way of using tropes, figures, and the rest of the incidental paraphernalia of classical rhetoric.
Rhetoric survives, nonetheless, because we survive. And even a would-be self-sufficient age finds itself faced with human problems that don't yield to purely rational resolution and human aspirations that aren't fulfilled by society. Human nature can be told that there is no truth beyond what can be observed and proven, but it never really believes it. And it can be told, as Marxism has been telling it boorishly for a long time, that what it sees is what it gets, but it doesn't believe that either. It knows intuitively that there's no such thing as merely mortal, and at heart it resents being told otherwise. Take from it one hierarchy and it will construct another; deny it one "metaphysical dream" (Weaver, Ideas 20) and it will conjure another one.

A meaningful rhetoric is always possible. It does not, as Whitman and others have maintained, depend on a pre-existing great audience. Given the antagonisms and spiritual disintegrations of our age, if we wait for just the right audience, it will be a long wait. The audience is always there, just as it has always been. But to discover it, rhetoric will have to discover itself, and it will have to be conceived of in a way commensurate with its tasks. Instead of searching for the right audience, or straining to find a ground on which one can be appealed to, it will have to gather the wit and courage to overcome its own agnosticisms and risk the same choices, the same affective
commitments, that have constituted the challenges of all great rhetoric from the beginning. People like Milton, Swift, and Zola didn't wait for the right audience; they forged one, and in the process didn't quail at going into the teeth of prevailing opinion—which, as often as not, is prevailing bigotry.

The so-called new rhetoric (and there are echoes of the word "modern" here, as if by new is meant that we have reached a higher plateau of enlightenment) sets itself apart from the classical tradition and supposes that we have achieved a better way of understanding—that, as Daniel Fogerty writes, "our decision-making process has largely changed to a mutual, cooperative discussion that strives for rational compromise" (132). Fogerty's flush of optimism came in 1959; and on the basis of the theories of Kenneth Burke, I.A. Richards, and certain semanticists, principally S.I. Hayakawa, he envisioned an enlightened age of rhetoric just around the corner. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede, writing much later and keeping their feet more firmly on the ground, dismiss most of the contentions of the new rhetoric and argue for the continuing relevance of classical theory. In their essay "On Distinctions Between Classical and Modern Rhetoric" they write: "Earlier in this essay we alluded to the large body of rhetorical 'theory' which argues that modern rhetoric is characterized by understanding, mutual sharing, and two-way communication. Yet how well does such
a theory account for or describe twentieth-century rhetorical practice, which has surely reached new heights (or depths) of manipulative use of language" (48)? Lunsford and Ede observe the obvious, yet the obvious hasn't seemed to have had much impact on those who still operate according to the notion that rhetoric can function and function effectively in lieu of objective standards and commonly held beliefs. As if striving to accommodate a senseless universe, many contemporary theorists despoil the very rhetoric they would uphold by resigning it, with scrupulous avoidance of value judgements, to the manipulation of language, the shuffling of ideas, and the situational negotiation of mercurial circumstances.

My purpose here is to try to provide a description of rhetoric that will reconcile the estrangement between our rhetoric and that of our classical traditions. I will maintain that if the consensus and hierarchy of values available to traditional rhetoric have declined or been mislaid, then it is our task to build or find new ones. I will try to show that rhetoric at its best, whether classical or contemporary, has common elements, that its appeal, its persuasiveness, and its justifications come from its ability and willingness to address the full person sincerely involved with his or her individual destiny and social existence. I will propose that it does so by eliciting universal and essentially unchanging human values.
From my perspective, the issue is not our ability, or lack of it, to decipher the universe. "Life is a mystery to be lived," Thomas Merton once wrote, "not a problem to be solved." The issue, rather, is humankind's ongoing challenge to find what Richard Weaver calls "poignancy in existence," a challenge, I am convinced, shared no less by the ancients than by us. In brief, I will propose a description of rhetoric that I hope will be pertinent to the contemporary experience and compatible with the classical tradition. In doing that, I will necessarily have to circumvent many aspects of rhetoric as it is now broadly conceptualized. I will attend instead only to rhetoric of broad import, to public rhetoric, that is, to language addressed to the community of persons on the occasion of communal problems.

First I will look at some of the current and past definitions and conceptualizations of rhetoric, this to better understand the scope and difficulty of the problem. As well, this will underscore and clarify my own rationale for attempting, however imperfectly, a description of rhetoric that is comprehensive enough to embrace both traditional and contemporary rhetorical theory.
Chapter II
Some Definitions of Rhetoric

Given the proliferation of definitions, perspectives, and theories that mark the discussion of contemporary rhetoric, it is difficult to clearly grasp just what rhetoric entails. In his well-known article "The Rhetorical Stance," Wayne Booth gives us some idea of the problem:

The word "rhetoric" is one of those catch-all terms that can easily raise trouble when our backs are turned. As it regains a popularity it once seemed permanently to have lost, its meanings seem to range all the way from "the whole art of writing on any subject," as in Kenneth Burke's The Rhetoric of Religion, through the "special arts of persuasion," on down to fairly narrow notions about rhetorical figures and devices. And, of course, we still have the meaning of "empty bombast," as in the phrase "merely rhetorical." (139)

Actually, Wayne Booth understates the case. Extrapolating from the multitude of definitions available on the subject, it would be possible to conceive of rhetoric as virtually anything that has to do with language, and a few things that specifically don't. Consider a definition by W. Ross Winterowd, for example, in Contemporary Rhetoric: A Conceptual Background. "According to my definition, rhetoric is the global art that develops theories concerning, and studies the manifestation of, all human discourse, not just persuasion" (20). According to that definition, one is not so pressed to discover what rhetoric is as to what it isn't. Winterowd—wisely, one feels—goes
on to say, "I will not defend that definition, nor will I elaborate upon it." To elaborate would be to write a book about everything. And speaking about everything, consider Kenneth Burke's definition as quoted above by Wayne Booth: Rhetoric is "the whole art of writing on any subject." That covers everything from the Summa Theologica to thank-you notes to one's grandmother. A conclusion we can't avoid at least entertaining is that if rhetoric is everything then rhetoric is nothing. A definition should never be too tight or too literal, but if it doesn't have some specificity its meaning tends to dissipate.

Moving somewhat this global, Edward P. J. Corbett, in a book about rhetoric widely regarded as authoritative, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, defines rhetoric as "the art of discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or move an audience, whether that audience is made up of a single person or a group of persons" (3). That is still broad, and it is faulty, I think, for defining a rhetoric without any ethical dimensions; so according to Corbett's definition there would be nothing, aside from eloquence, to distinguish the rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln and Adolph Hitler, of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Reverend Jim Jones. But at least Corbett confines rhetoric's meaning to the "use of discourse," even though in his definition he doesn't take into account non-verbal discourse—pictures,
gestures, music, and so on. Yet his definition is graspable: it delineates, however loosely—and a good definition must be spacious—a province for rhetoric that is understandable. More than that, his definition ties in with rhetoric as classically conceived. It is an art or discipline, it concerns discourse, and it concerns particularly that discourse used to persuade, instruct, or move an audience.

The word audience is key here. It implies that rhetoric is addressed to people in their social stance on particular occasions or in response to public situations. That lifts rhetoric from the realm of the commonplace. Corbett's definition suggests, quite intentionally, the best known definition of rhetoric we have, that of Aristotle, who defined rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering the available means of persuasion in any given situation." And Corbett makes sure to point out—as many writers who quote Aristotle's definition don't, thus missing the point—that the Greek word for persuasion comes from the Greek word to "believe." Therefore, Corbett writes, "one sees that Aristotle's definition can be made to comprehend not only those modes of discourse which are 'argumentative' but also those expository modes of discourse which seek to wind acceptance of information or explanation" (2-3).
I will return to Corbett later on when I attempt to provide my own description of rhetoric; but first let's look at some definitions of rhetoric from other sources.

In his article "Modern Rhetorical Theory and Its Future Directions," C.H. Knoblauch writes: "I will assert as boldly as I dare that rhetoric is the process of using language to organize experience and communicate it to others. It is also the study of how people use language to organize and communicate experience" (29; italics his). Knoblauch makes defining rhetoric sound like a pretty risky business. And his definition is notable in that, like some other moderns, he moves rhetoric interior to the person, making of it a process of not only how we communicate with others but also how we communicate with ourselves—in other words, how we think. We see in his definition currents of contemporary epistemological theory.

In the same article, Mr. Knoblauch refers to another definition of rhetoric, that of Douglas Ehninger, when he writes, "Perhaps Douglas Ehninger has best defined rhetoric from this modern intellectual vantage point when he refers to it as 'that discipline which studies all of the ways in which men may influence each other's thinking and behavior through the strategic use of symbols' (37). This "modern intellectual vantage point" refers to the perspective--the epistemic theory--that sees the person as, in Ernst Cassirer's phrase, a symbol-using animal, as using symbols
to construct meaning and reality. More accurately, symbols in this sense are reality. "Knowledge of the world," Knoblauch writes, "is an imaginative achievement comprised of symbols" (36). Knoblauch doesn't prove this epistemic theory that is premise to his and Ehninger's definition of rhetoric; rather he summons as authorities for it such people as Cassirer, Whitehead, de Saussure, Sapir, Levi-Strauss, Langer, and Polanyi, but fails to note that they didn't prove it either. In any case, having defined the individual as the maker of knowledge, symbolically or any other way, Knoblauch's and Ehninger's rhetoric tends to devolve to the subjective formulation and manipulation of that knowledge. How one thusly isolated subject with his or her proprietary knowledge communicates with another isolated subject with his or her proprietary knowledge is a question left unanswered. Symbols without common reality seemingly communicate on the wing.

Compare the definitions of Knoblauch and Ehninger, representative as they are of a prevalent, although not exclusive, modern epistemic perspective, with that of a nineteenth-century rhetorician, Henry Day (as quoted by Nan Johnson in "Three Nineteenth-Century Rhetoricians: The Humanist Alternative to Rhetoric as Skills Management"): The art of rhetoric proposes to explain the principles by which we discourse or communicate thought and feeling to other minds, and to furnish the means of acquiring a skill and dexterity in the use of this power. (109)
That is a clear definition and one that would be understood by the average person. But notice the different epistemic premise: "The art of rhetoric proposes to explain principles by which we discourse or communicate thought and feelings to other minds . . . ." No ethereal meeting of winged symbols here, just persons talking to one another. To his credit, Mr. Day didn't take the trouble to cite contemporary authorities to prove that persons are able to talk with one another. And notice also the humanistic perspective, as opposed to those conceptions of rhetoric based on an epistemic theory that has the individual as an isolated generator of meaning, a symbol-making animal who is unable to mutually discover and experience meaning in concert with objective reality and other persons.

Moving back to the present, here's a pragmatic, functional definition of rhetoric by James Kinneavy:

I mean by rhetoric the kind of discourse that is exemplified by political speeches, legal persuasion in court, religious sermons, commercial advertising, etc. I do not include in rhetoric most scientific writing, fictitious or poetic writing, or even informative news stories. In other words, I limit 'rhetoric' to the meaning it had in the trilogy of the traditional liberal arts of grammar (literature), rhetoric, and logic. This delineation gives at least some historical realism to the definition. ("Restoring the Humanities: The Return of Rhetoric from Exile" 19)

There is some confusion with that definition in that he excludes fiction and poetry at the same time that he includes literature; and I'm not sure how commercial
advertising sneaked into the trilogy of the traditional liberal arts. But generally that is a definition we can get our teeth into, as opposed, for example, to the rhetoric-is-everything definition of Kenneth Burke ("the whole art of writing on any subject"). In addition, by limiting rhetoric to its more traditional forms, Kinneavy doesn't suppose that modern rhetoric is different in kind from what it has been historically. And he keeps rhetoric in the humanistic arena by excluding scientific or merely informative writing. Anyone familiar with the writings of Einstein, however, could argue quite persuasively that scientific writing is sometimes eminently humanistic.

Finally, here is a definition from the previously quoted Daniel Fogerty, S. J., in which he seeks to combine the theories of Kenneth Burke, I. A. Richards, and S. I. Hayakawa. Rhetoric, he writes, is "the science of recognizing the range of meanings and the functions of words, and the art of using and interpreting them in accordance with this recognition" (130). That could be stated more simply by saying that rhetoric is being able to use and understand language. Worth mentioning about Fogerty's definition is that it makes of rhetoric both a science and an art, thus reflecting the modern scientific study of language. In the same book (Roots for a New Rhetoric), Father Fogerty proposes that college curricula be revamped to reflect the work of Burke, Richards, and the
modern study of semantics, especially the work of S. I. Hayakawa. He saw those theorists as providing a rhetoric for the next decade, which in this instance was the 1960's. In the 1960's we did indeed witness a new kind of rhetoric, but it is doubtful that Burke, Richards, and Hayakawa—especially Hayakawa—approved of most of it.

There are, of course, many other definitions of rhetoric from many different perspectives, but the above sampling provides some idea of the complexity and contrariness of the problem. Some definitions see rhetoric as necessarily ethical—a subject I will discuss below—and in that respect maintain a continuity with classical theory and practice, as well as keeping rhetoric in a humanistic mode, unless one can conceive of a non-humanistic ethics. Every definition of rhetoric I have seen shows evidence of people struggling, of scholars and others trying to pin down just what rhetoric is. Some of the efforts are better than others; but none yields the kind of clarity and inclusiveness we like in our definitions. My efforts to provide a description of rhetoric that is compatible with the classical tradition and pertinent to the contemporary experience won't be any different—will be no less a struggle with no fewer loose ends. Perhaps that is unavoidable. Even when conceptually delimited, rhetoric is, as Aristotle noted, the most embracing of the arts, "the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any
subject presented to us." Remembering that persuasion means bringing about belief, that covers a lot of ground. The following descriptive qualities of rhetoric should, therefore, be inclusive enough and flexible enough to pertain to "any subject presented to us" during the working out of our social existence.
That rhetoric should be dialogic seems a simple enough assertion, perhaps even self-evident. All communication, after all, presumes the existence of an audience, someone communicated with. But true dialogue, and within that true dialectic, presumes an active participation by the audience, a sharing in the act of communication. Much of what passes for rhetoric lacks this mutuality, as communication is often monologic—the audience is not talked with but rather talked to or at. Thence would much contemporary communication and composition theory have us size up, evaluate, and demographically measure our audience pursuant to successfully putting across a message to it. This is the monologism of advertising, politics, and special-interest advocacy—rhetoric that accommodates, or rhetoric that manipulates, which is, large or small, a rhetoric of power. Monologic rhetoric demeans the audience by keeping it passive and disallowing it participation in discourse. In effect, therefore, it denies members of the audience their full humanness.

Douglas Ehninger makes the striking point that argument, which is necessarily dialogic, "compliments" our humanity by appealing to our unique rationality, that to appeal to an audience's sentiment or to solicit its
agreement without using that appeal as the basis of argumentation or dialectic is to treat people as means, as things (6-7). Richard Weaver addresses the same issue when he writes, "Whereas formerly its (rhetoric's) burden was what people believed or had experienced, the burden now tends to be what they wish to hear" (Ethics 184). Telling an audience "what they wish to hear" is rhetoric that caters to or patronizes the audience. Monologic rhetoric finds support in those theories that define rhetoric in terms of the aims and purposes of the rhetorician; and it is exemplified by those phenomenological perspectives that see the writer or speaker articulating an essentially subjective or isolated interpretation of reality, one disengaged from the reader or listener. And it is characteristic of all those forms of communication that merely impart information.

Dialogic rhetoric, on the other hand, "compliments" the audience by bringing it into and making it part of the rhetorical act. It makes the audience a dynamic participant in the seeking of probable truth, making truth consensual in the sense that it is mutually discovered and acceded to. At the same time, it takes the risk of disagreeing with the audience's preconceptions or opinions. Rhetoric doesn't always tell people what they want to hear, but rather risks confounding their expectations in order to find the truth. John Gage, in "An Adequate Epistemology for Composition: Classical and Modern Perspectives," states the issue well:
Rhetoric is dialectical, or like dialectic, insofar as it assumes an active audience which motivates the composer's inquiry into possible knowledge, rather than a passive audience to which prior knowledge is meant to be passed on. Modern composition methods, as well as ancient ones, do not neglect to advise the writers that they must "know their audience," but the difference I am suggesting is not necessarily a difference between knowing one's audience and not knowing it. It is a difference between how and at what stage that knowledge is used to inform the composing act. In contemporary composition, knowing one's audience is usually viewed as a rhetorical consideration in the sense that one must adapt one's way of making a case to the "needs, interests, personality, values" of a particular audience, but not in the sense that a particular audience contributes reasons which determine what the case must be or motivate the inquiry. (162; italics his)

The audience should not be an obstacle or receptacle, Gage argues, but rather a resource. Otherwise, one is engaged in a "pseudo-dialectic, predetermined to guarantee that the writer's reasons prevail" (163). In the same place, drawing on Aristotle, he says, "Classical invention ... was not carried out for the purpose of 'finding something to say,' but for the purpose of investigating reasons that might be applied to the solution of a given problem" (158). Seen this way, rhetoric enters us into a dialogue before we even begin to write or speak. The dialogue is on-going and informs our choices and solutions, not to win over the audience but to participate with them, to discover, in Gage's words, "mutually validated reasons in the context of the need to discover collective truths" (164). Rather than treating the audience as a "thing"
(Ehninger) or as a "receptacle" (Gage), this is a humanistic rhetoric that treats the members of the audience as co-rhetoricians.

Consider the similarity of Gage's contention to that of Chaim Perelman in a different context, where he seeks to establish valid grounds for argumentation:

To make his discourse effective, a speaker must adapt to his audience. What constitutes this adaptation, which is a specific requisite for argumentation? It amounts essentially to this: the speaker can choose as his points of departure only the theses accepted by those he addresses. (The Realm of Rhetoric 21)

Whichever the perspective, the point is the same, whether in classical or contemporary rhetoric: the search for probable truths as rhetorically transacted is a cooperative venture.

In classical rhetoric, that cooperation was contained in the concept of the enthymeme, which was not just a syllogism with the premise left off—a syllogistic short-cut—but an argument based on commonplace beliefs (Gage 157). Such commonplaces were the rhetorical capital of the classical orator, and his or her appeal to them was both a confirmation of shared beliefs with the audience and a confirmation of the fact that such shared beliefs with the audience and a confirmation of the fact that such shared beliefs were accessible—urgent enough to be persuasive when summoned forth. The distinction is important because it is in the latter respect, in regard to how urgent our beliefs are, that some contemporary rhetorical theory parts company
with the classical tradition. An inability to discover and embrace shared meanings would render the concept of the enthymeme void. The problem—that is, that the enthymeme or its equivalent is no longer possible—is suggested by S. Michael Halloran's remark quoted earlier, that we have been deprived of a given rhetoric because we have been deprived of a given world. It is endemic to that epistemically view of some moderns that would have all knowledge in a constant state of creation, negotiation, and process.\(^6\) And it forms a backdrop as well for the work of Chaim Perelman (and others), who has devoted much of his efforts to search for what he calls "warrantable" grounds for argumentation, which is to say that if we can't prove our premises, we can't validly argue.

Because the audience of classical rhetoric was able to grant a broad range of premises, the rhetorician was able to pursue arguments with more leeway. Richard Weaver can thus refer to the "spaciousness" of the old rhetoric, a spaciousness permitted by an audience that was able to bring to the rhetorical experience a body of shared principles and beliefs. That the range of those shared principles and beliefs has narrowed in our age is clear enough; but, I would argue, the rhetorical appeal is still basically the same. Its basis is still shared meanings and commonplace beliefs.\(^7\) Rhetoric either takes commonplace beliefs as a starting point and builds on them or, no less dialogic, it
musters cooperation in search of them, knowing that if in our social and political deliberations we are going to find workable solutions to our problems, we will have to start someplace. Indeed, knowing that we have to start someplace in order to get things done is a commonplace belief. One of the ironies of monologic communication is that it seeks to impose truths unilaterally, thus promulgating prescriptions at the same time that it denies shared truths. The larger irony is that by denying our ability to share meaning with any kind of reasonable constancy, it abrogates its own ability to communicate. Monologic rhetoric in this sense is not the result of the absence of shared truths or knowledge, it is the cause for their seeming disappearance. The pathos of communication that Winston Weathers refers to, mentioned in my introduction, is a misnomer: it's the pathos of noncommunication.

Looking for a way out of the apparent dilemma of seeking probable truths without premises on which to base them, Thomas Farrell purports to reformulate what he calls "Aristotle's early expansive vision," that is, that "rhetoric was the art which employed the common knowledge of a particular audience to inform and guide reasoned judgement about matters of public interest" (1). After recounting how knowledge has changed over the centuries and about how the modern person doesn't have the certainties at hand that were available to the Greeks, Farrell pursues a current
definition of shared knowledge upon which we can base our rhetorical appeals. He delineates the problem well:

Aristotle was able to posit a body of common knowledge as a natural corollary to his ideation of human nature, the potential of human reason, and the norms and procedures of public decision-making. While analytic and dialectic provided foundation and structure for the facts of science and the general truths of philosophy, rhetorical method found its warrant in occasions of particular choice, its form the enthymeme and example, and its substance in shared, contingent knowledge, consisting in signs, probabilities, and examples. (2)

Recognizing that our commonplace beliefs and collective world views are not similar to those of the Greeks, Farrell looks for a communality with which we can reach agreements. He finds this in what he calls "social knowledge," which he defines as follows: "Social knowledge comprises conceptions of symbolic relationships among problems, persons, interests, and actions, which imply (when accepted) certain notions of preferable public behavior" (4). Farrell is chary of the word "belief," and he is, I think, equivocal when he uses phrases like "symbolic relationships," "which imply," and "certain notions." Phrases like these have a way of vaporizing. Later on, as if to cover himself further, he employs Stephen Toulmin's phrase "as a rule" to refer to those norms by which social conduct can be regulated. That phrase too is rather fast on its feet. Yet Farrell recognizes that in bringing rhetoric to bear on social problems, we have to start somewhere and we have to do something. Moreover, his language implicitly recognizes
that dialogue deals with things in time and space, with reality.

In arguing for social knowledge as he defines and illustrates it, Farrell also acknowledges rhetoric as an essentially cooperative endeavor between writer or speaker and the audience. He writes:

I maintain that social knowledge rests upon a peculiar kind of consensus. That is to say, it rests upon a consensus which is attributed to an audience rather than concretely shared. This means that such knowledge does not rest upon agreement which is both fact and known to be fact. The assumption of agreement may be counterfactual. Some persons may, in fact, disagree with what is attributed. Yet it is assumed understanding of agreement--as an hypothesis rather than fact--which makes rhetorical argument possible. (5)

In the same place he writes, "But more than being simply attributed to others, social knowledge is assumed to be shared by other persons in their collective capacity as audience" (8). He then says, "A conscious and civilized audience is therefore representative in more than a statistical sense, for we must assume that its collective nerve endings are alive to the interests of others in society" (8). And he adds, "One should not forget that the rhetor speaks on behalf of others. That knowledge which is assumed to be held by other persons thus involves the rhetor with the complicity of other knowers, whose interests are now a factor for reasoned consideration" (13). The similarity between that comment and the comments of Gage and Perelman quoted above is striking.
Thomas Farrell makes of consensual discovery something a bit more mysterious than I would prefer. And like Chaim Perelman speaking about the mental construct of the "universal audience" (The Realm of Rhetoric), he is reluctant to say that universal principles exist and can be appealed to. He can write, for example, that "Social knowledge is thus the assumption of a wider consciousness" (and, he suggests, one greater than the individual consciousness), providing us with a phrase that has a certain philosophical ring to it but one that, if subscribed to, would entail a bigger leap of faith than the realist epistemology he takes pains to avoid. Still, in searching for a way out of the epistemic dead-end of our age, he reinvests the audience of rhetoric with their rightful share of participation in the social discovery of probable and workable truths. Given his epistemic uncertainties--he predicates audience in terms of "collective nerve endings," after all--Thomas Farrell does us a service.

But compare his conception of rhetoric as dialogue to that of a nineteenth-century traditionalist, Franz Theremin, someone representative of the classical point of view (and virtual unknown in contemporary rhetorical theory). The following quotation is from Nan Johnson's article "Three Nineteenth-Century Rhetoricians: The Humanist Alternative to Rhetoric as Skills Management" and refers to Theremin's book Eloquence a Virtue.
The invention of argumentative discourse is dependent upon what Theremin calls the dialogic quality of rhetoric. The rhetorician must be committed to the principle of discovering shared truths, truths that will in turn generate the most effective means of expression and fulfill his or her purpose. Theremin describes the rhetorical dialogue as "an attempt to transfer something that has been generated in the depths of the soul into another person, which can be done only in proportion as the orator himself possesses that which is to be reproduced. (108)

Note the difference in phraseology from that of Thomas Farrell: "depths of the soul," "into another person" (not "collective nerve endings). There's no equivocation with Theremin, no vapory terms or trendy abstractions like "the assumption of a wider consciousness." (Of course, there will always be those who would argue that the word "soul" is about as vapory as one can get.) Based on principles and seeking discoverable, shared truths, one person communicates with another person and, like Socrates in the Phaedrus, journeys with that sympathetic other toward the truth.

As I will maintain in the next section, that other person must be a whole person, one whose identity and integrity remain intact even as he or she is part of a mass audience. The individual can never be collectively subsumed. For rhetoric as dialogue is inseparable from its other aspects: the integrity of the members of its audience, its language, its occasion, and the ethical principles that inform and elicit it. By the same token, none of the other aspects of rhetoric can thrive if rhetoric
is not dialogic. And, I will argue, these things are true in our age no less than they were in Theremin's or Aristotle's.
Rhetoric Addresses the Whole Person

A valid rhetoric addresses the whole person in his or her fully human capacity and in contemplation of his or her responsible social membership. It is, therefore, inclusive and humanistic, addressing us in terms of our common humanity at least and in terms of our shared dignity at best. Increasingly, however, the communication of the contemporary world is aimed at the person partially considered— at his or her race, sex, ethnicity, political partisanship, occupation, or special interest. Increasingly, therefore, the communication of the modern world is exclusionary. Rhetoric compliments human nature by recognizing and addressing its wholeness; and its appeal is inclusive.

I don't propose to examine the whole range of the exploitation of language and the demeaning of the person that results from it. I have chosen instead to focus on certain instances of contemporary anti-rhetoric (I borrow the term from Robert Connors) that have often escaped critical scrutiny, or even gained respectability, instances where not the whole person but the partial person is addressed and intentionally so. My primary concern will be certain language or discourse phenomena characteristic of scientism and the academic community.
A currently fashionable concept among many academics in rhetoric and composition studies is that of the discourse community. Its roots are varied, but it stems mostly from the concept of the speech community generated by the study of linguistics. In linguistics, the concept is sound enough, concerning as it does those ways and patterns of speaking that members of particular, definable groups use to communicate. A speech community coalesces linguistically around certain presumptions, shared meanings, a unique dialect perhaps, and some common, perceptible values that somehow set that group apart from other people. The trouble starts when the speech-community concept is transposed from spoken language to written discourse.

The literature and points of view are extensive here, but representative of them is the perspective of David Bartholomae. In two articles especially—"Released into Language: Errors, Expectations, and the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy" and "Inventing the University"—Bartholomae tries to make the case that the academic discourse community, as similar to a linguistic speech community, creates and maintains a mode of discourse unique to it. To anyone familiar with academia, that is an unarguable supposition. But Bartholomae goes on from there and maintains that that is the way it ought to be, that that represents and allows for an enhanced communicative capability. He contends, for example, that new college
students—persons unversed in the academic community's unique discourse style and lexicon—should be indoctrinated into this way of communication: that they should unlearn their nonacademic style of writing and adapt to, adopt, the style of academic in general and their chosen field of study in particular. Once a student enters college, Bartholomae contends, what is important is that the student learn to be understood by—be linguistically negotiable with—his or her fellow academics, and particularly his or her fellow sociologists or biologists or what have you. The student should, in Bartholomae's disturbing phrase, acquire the "gestures of academic authority" ("Inventing the University," 161). If this perspective were simply a rehash of when-in-Rome advice to the student who wants to get along, then it would be relatively harmless, although still anti-rhetorical in its exclusivity. But it is more than that. As it is formulated by Bartholomae, it entails a much broader conceptualization. The discourse community—in the instant case the academic discourse community—constitutes, or creates, or makes possible (the language is vague) a grasp of knowledge and a generation of meaning that would not be available without its existence. Put another way, one duly initiated into the discourse of the academic community has access to ideas and knowledge not available to the average person. If that sounds a bit elitist it is because it is a bit elitist. Consider another phrase by
Bartholomae. "It should be clear by now," he writes, "that when I think of 'knowledge' I think of it situated in a particular discourse community, rather than as situated in mental 'knowledge sites'" ("Inventing the University," 145). The sounds of modern epistemic theory, as alluded to earlier, are discernible in that statement, and the inference is available that knowledge is a social construct, all the better constructed if that society is made up of experts collegially and linguistically joined by a definable and necessarily, exclusive body of data, presumptions, codes, and so on. The clear implication is that knowledge resides in or is proprietary to particular academic communities, and that if one wants access to that knowledge he must join that community, and on its terms. Knowledge here, and therefore communication, is intramural, not available generally to the person but prescriptively to the specialist. The discourse community as conceived by Bartholomae can remain intact only so long as it remains anti-rhetorical.

The notion of the academic discourse community—or of the business discourse community or the scientific discourse community—is anti-rhetorical because it addresses the person only insofar as the person partakes of the identity of the community and because it excludes those not in that community. (It's worth noting that the speech discourse community is anti-rhetorical for some of the same reasons.)
Yet the discourse community is anti-rhetorical for other reasons as well. It deals almost entirely in scientific or specialized or semantically pure language, thereby leaving much of the person unaddressed (see chapter below, "Rhetoric uses Metaphorical Language"). And, ironically, it leaves its own members unaddressed and circumscribes or rations their intellectual activity. Richard Freed and Glenn Broadhead refer to the problem in their article "Discourse Communities, Sacred Texts, and Institutional Norms," confounding themselves slightly by using jargon (of which the word "paradigm" is now the paradigm) favored by the communities they criticize:

For both overtly and tacitly, these communities establish paradigms that discoursers adhere to or, often at their risk, depart from . . . . The paradigms reign: they set an agenda and attempt to guarantee its meeting, often rewarding those who do and discouraging those who don't. They legislate conduct and behavior, establishing the eminently kosher as well as the unseemly or untoward. (156)

From this viewpoint, the discourse community, by establishing what to talk about and how to talk about it, intellectually impoverishes its members at the same time that it is erecting linguistic and ideational barriers, and sometimes valuative ones, between itself and the community at large. As various discourse communities, like medieval city-states, set themselves apart, members of those communities are denied whole communication, as thinking, language, and intellectual agenda are prescribed. And if we
take into account the current fascination of some persons in the language-arts disciplines with the speculations of Thomas Kuhn, particularly his hypothesis in regard to paradigms and "paradigm shifts," the situation is further exacerbated. For is, as Kuhn maintains about the physical sciences and as some would find applicable to other disciplines as well, such as rhetoric and composition studies, academic communities cluster research, ideation, and experimental axioms according to a priori conceptual models, then not only would ideas and language be circumscribed, they would be virtually dictated.

In any situation where one's response to problems, especially human problems, is predetermined, whether by rubrics of language or ideas, and whenever the person is addressed not as a person but as a member or a specialist or an expert, then rhetoric ceases. Phrases like "discourse community" and "paradigm shift" are merely indicators of the problem. Yet they are especially worth mentioning because they are, in the main, the issue of scholars, some of the very people who should sustain a valid rhetoric. As Richard Hughes observes in "The Contemporaneity of Classical Rhetoric," where he argues for the judgement and discretion found in the best of classical rhetoric, "Never before has judgement-making been in such jeopardy: we are hemmed in by the specialists who deal in arcane fact and speak only to one another, and the taste-makers who eschew evidence and
capitalize on our unreason. But unless we continue to make and share judgements, we are in danger of creating a vast society of silence" (p. 159).

The person and society are both deprived when communication is segregated into cubicles, where it caters to or indoctrinates its own and ignores or patronizes all others, sterilizing or hoarding knowledge in the name of knowledge and sometimes pronouncing social policy in the name of expertise. In rhetoric, which concerns the social life of the whole person and is based on "discovered judgement" (Hughes, p. 158), there's no such thing as expertise, and the concept of the discourse community is a glaring aberration. "The symbol of rhetoric," Ross Winterowd reminds us, "is the open hand, beckoning to understanding" (Rhetoric: A Synthesis, 85). The language of the scholar, the scientist, and the "expert" is becoming increasingly "closed-handed." The pedant's stance, Wayne Booth writes, "consists of ignoring or underplaying the personal relationship of speaker and audience and depending entirely on statements about a subject--that is, the notion of a job to be done for a particular audience is left out" ("The Rhetorical Stance," 184). The person is not addressed but advised, not complimented but patronized. And the person is told, as often as not, that in matters that affect his or her life, that he or she should accede to the
specialist. What's particularly distressing about this kind of anti-humanism is that it has become so respectable.

If members of specialized communities merely spoke to one another, as Richard Hughes notes, we could live with that. The rhetorical irony is, however, that the more specialized a person becomes in our age, the more likely it is he will be called on—or feel the call himself—to pronounce on matters of social importance, to propagate social judgements. Disturbingly, such persons are listened to, indeed, often sought out, as the contemporary audience seems willing to abdicate its own responsibility in the rhetorical dialogue and hand over the deliberation of important matters to society's would-be experts. Thus, for example, in recent memory can a renowned anthropologist pronounce judgement on birth-control policy, a renowned nuclear physicist tell us what to do about nuclear disarmament, a renowned heart surgeon advise us on racial policy, and a renowned pediatrician tell us how to raise our children. We are awash in the anti-rhetoric of expertise.

Rhetoric addresses the whole person, and in that act, by that full recognition, it invites the person, open-handedly, into the rhetoric itself. Since it seeks probable truths in regard to matters of social policy in which we all have a stake, it makes of the audience an expert. It can't do this if it addresses the audience in its particularities of interests, knowledge, occupation, race, sex, or
ethnicity. Accordingly, it must be couched in language considerate of, and thereby complimentary to, the whole person, recognizing that we are not just rational, although rational we ought be, but also emotional and value-seeking. Thus the classical trivium of logos, ethos, and pathos, and the recognition by Aristotle and others that rhetoric must touch the whole person because it is the whole person who will be called on to believe and act according to it. In this respect, Lunsford and Ede quote Grimaldi’s commentary on Aristotle:

In rhetorical discourse the audience must be brought not only to knowledge of the subject but knowledge as relevant and significant for they are either indifferent, opposed, or in partial agreement . . . . If the whole person acts then it is the whole person to whom discourse in rhetoric must be directed ("On Distinctions Between Classical and Modern Rhetoric,"43--from Grimaldi’s Studies, 146-47).

We see in that an observation similar to Wayne Booth's as quoted above, an observation confirmed more broadly by Chaim Perelman, whose studies of rhetoric led him to the conclusion that rhetoric has never been exclusively logical or dialectical but has always, at its best, used the full range of language to appeal to the whole person.13 An obvious corollary is that the rhetorician must employ his whole person—logos, ethos, and pathos—in making his or her rhetorical appeal. A purely rational or a purely emotional person will unavoidably create an anti-rhetorical appeal. The fault of such notions as the discourse community is that
they falsely suppose that reason or data or scholarship alone will do the trick. That supposition has, like bad genes, disabled would-be academic rhetoric all along and accounts largely for both its social impotence and its persistent tediousness.

Scholars like Perelman frame rhetoric in correctly humanistic terms and therefore realistic terms. Rhetoric doesn't seek to convince an audience, Perelman notes, but strives rather for its "adherence," a much more congenial term. And, he recognizes, rhetoric must have "presence," that it must be marshalled and scored in such a way as to rouse the sympathy of the audience. There is something here of Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatistics, that rhetoric is not just reasonable discourse but also must be plotted for audience impact. And, of course, it has been the stock-in-trade wisdom of the entertainment business from day one (a business to which the Greeks, especially Aristotle, were no strangers). Perelman's "presence" and Burke's "dramatistics" are just alternative ways of recognizing what those in the rhetoric of show business have known since the time of Homer, that whatever the message, the audience must be won over. And the only way to do that, the only way to win the audience's adherence, is to treat them as people. Define them partially and win them not at all. Belief and action, the goals of rhetoric, flow from the whole person,
as Aristotle observed, so it is the whole person who must be spoken to.
Chapter V
Rhetoric is Productive

Productive is not exactly the right word, but we have no right word for it. The word "standing" as used in jurisprudence comes close. A case must have standing for a court to consider it; there must be something at stake, a pressing issue to be resolved. Conversely, the issue can't be merely moot or speculative. Just as the law, ideally, responds to real issues, rhetoric is responsive to—not the creator of—actual, here-and-now, pressing social problems, ones that demand solution, or at least a workable resolution. The Greek term that contained the idea of productiveness was *stasis*, although it meant not quite the same thing. As did Lunsford and Ede, William Gage quotes from William Grimaldi's *Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric* and observes that rhetoric functions "as a method of communication . . . between people as they seek to determine truth or fallacy in real situations" ("An Adequate Epistemology for Composition: Classical and Modern Perspectives," 155). The issue addressed by the rhetorician is, as it were, a given. The rhetorician, and the rhetoric, responds to it. Thus, Gage points out, the modern concept of invention or discovery is often misused or misconstrued as the means to find topics to write or talk about. This would be the invention of a moot rhetoric. The
rhetorician, rather, uses invention to explore the categories and issues entailed in a pressing social question. To return briefly to my analogy above, the lawyer pleading a case does not invent precedents or points of law, he or she finds, discovers, precedents and points of law that are applicable to the case at hand.

In this same sense, the classical concept of the enthymeme, as I discussed above in regard to rhetoric being dialogic, is often misconstrued in contemporary rhetorical theory, defined simplistically on the one had as a syllogism with its primary premise missing and on the other hand as a device of the rhetorician for unilaterally formulating a problem or argument that he wants to convince the audience of. As Gage points out, again indebted to Grimaldi, the enthymeme was a way of getting into a subject that demanded resolution (158). By analyzing the issue, the rhetorician could discover premises endemic to it, premises shared by the audience, and base his or her appeal on them—taking them for granted, in effect, but using them both as assumptions on which to base subsequent deliberation and as a way to explicate the problem under consideration. Thus could Perelman say, as I quoted earlier, that "the speaker can choose as his points of departure only the thesis accepted by those he addresses."

The subject, or thesis, of rhetoric, therefore, is not presented to the audience but asked for by them. Yet this
element of rhetoric—its productive aspect, that it be in response to real situations—is frequently overlooked in contemporary writings. Even the estimable Edward P. J. Corbett, in his definition of rhetoric quoted earlier, leaves it out. It's worth repeating that definition:

Rhetoric is the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or move an audience, whether that audience is made up of a single person or a group of persons. (Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, 3).

That rhetoric should be productive in response to pressing issues is not even implied, in that definition or in most of the other definitions I quoted in that part of this paper titled "Some Definitions of Rhetoric." It seems to have dropped by the wayside; and one contemporary theorist, Richard Vatz, can even maintain that rhetoric is as the rhetorician says it is, that the rhetoric itself virtually, or literally, creates the rhetorical situation ("The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation"). But let's look again at Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, this time with my underlines:

Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject matter . . . But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us.

In line with Aristotle's conception of rhetoric as being responsive to real issues, consider the following comments by Wayne Booth in his essay "The Rhetorical Stance":

46
What makes the rhetoric of Milton and Burke and Churchill great is that each presents us with the spectacle of a man passionately involved in thinking an important question through in the company of an audience. (188)

And in the same place he says in regard to Edmund Burke:

In short, because he was a man engaged with men in the effort to solve a human problem, one could never call what he wrote dull, however difficult or abstruse.

The emphases in Booth's quotation are mine; and the words emphasized underscore the issue here: "passionately involved," "thinking an important question through in the company of an audience," "engaged with men in the effort to solve human problems." That is rhetoric of dialogue, of mutuality, and of moment—not abstract, moot, or speculative—and it is consequently rhetoric that engages us. What Booth discovers in the rhetoric of Milton, Burke, and Churchill could be discovered as well in all rhetoric we generally regard as great. It is rhetoric of the person stepping into the midst of an urgent social dialogue and eloquently "thinking an important question through in the company of an audience," remembering that eloquence, like form, follows function.

For another contemporary perspective consistent with the classical, humanistic perspective, consider Ernesto Grassi's comment in Rhetoric as Philosophy: "An abstract subject will never lead to political action, but only that subject which is 'found' in the concrete historical c" (51).
I will draw on Mr. Grassi more extensively in my discussion below of rhetoric and metaphorical language, but I will quote him once more here. This is also from *Rhetoric as Philosophy*:

The pressing nature and meaning of every question and answer, its concrete character, which is the root of the human world, is excluded from every formalistic approach to language. But it is only in this concrete context that truth and error, inquiry and knowledge, receive their meaning. (86)

How different the perspectives of Gage, Booth, and Grassi—all of them consistent with the perspective of Aristotle—are from those contemporary perspectives that would invent subjects, analyze audiences demographically for the sake of better convincing them of something, or pick subjects out of an ideological hat for the sake of monologically propagating them. Minus real problems that demand resolution, misconstruing the function of the enthymeme, aberrating the concept of invention, and rendering the audience as passive recipients for the rhetorician's ideas, much contemporary rhetoric and rhetorical theory would demean the audience by imposing solutions on it, or would use it as a sounding board for speculative, formalistic, or specialized discourse. And to the extent that one subscribed to the subjective, phenomenological epistemology I referred to earlier, one would not think "important questions through in the company
of an audience," but would think them through in the company
of oneself, and, I suspect, rather dispassionately at that.

The rhetorician, allowing for the redundancy, is
rhetorically representative of his society. If he is no
longer an embodiment of his culture, possessing the quality
the Greeks called arete, he nonetheless deals, in Grassi's
words, "in the context of tasks that arise 'here and now'"
(92). It is when the rhetorician retreats from or is aloof
from the concrete and urgent that such modern concerns as
pluralism, factionalism, and a lack of consensus come most
strongly into play. Social urgency, whatever the varieties
of world views and beliefs extant in society, is always
ground for a realizable, practicable consensus where none
was thought to exist. It was not that long ago when
Franklin Roosevelt rhetorically welded a consensus out of
disparate constituencies, and not once but twice: first in
the face of economic urgency and then in response to
military emergency. More recently, Martin Luther King, Jr.
discovered a broad-based consensus of values where none
was thought to exist. Consensus there will always be. The
mistake comes from supposing that the rhetorician has to set
out with them in hand instead of by his passionate
involvement in real situations uncovering them in concert
with the audience as he goes.

There is a huge difference, however, in rhetorical
appeals responsive to pressing social problems and that form
of anti-rhetoric that exploits circumstances. We should keep in mind that the demagogue too steps into urgent social situations. But he does so with the desired outcome already decided by him ahead of time; and instead of welding or discovering consensus, he manipulates baser passions. The appeal, then, is not to belief in order to work out consensual resolutions; it is to prejudice for the purpose of reaching his or her solution. The difference, in this instance as elsewhere, is ultimately ethical—the motivation of the rhetorician. Contemporary rhetoric, or the obverse of rhetoric, is rife with examples of urgent social questions being exploited opportunistically. And often the only apparent difference between true rhetoric and false is the difference between and ethical and an unethical rhetorician, something no different now, as Plato reminds us in the *Phaedrus*, than in classical Greece. But besides the ethical character of the rhetorician, which is sometimes difficult to discern, a visible sign of exploitive or demagogic rhetoric is that it seeks somehow to make its audience exclusive. And false rhetoric is most often characterized not by what it is for but by what it is against. Its sought—and frequently achieved—purpose is therefore perverse. Rather than seeking "liaison," in Chaim Perelman's fine choice of words, it seeks social conspiracy. False rhetoric is, however subtly, usually framed in terms
of us versus them. The audience is not consulted, it is
taken in.

Erring on the other side, formalistic or academic or
strictly speculative rhetoric, by proffering solutions where
none have been called for—and characterized therefore by
its importunance—and doing so in language that stirs no
one, can and usually does discover that it has no consensus
to work with. Sometimes the line between the exclusivity of
the demagogue and the elitism of the academic or
intellectual is thin indeed; but mostly formalistic rhetoric
is known—almost famous for—its inherent futility. Whether
in show business or rhetoric, there is nothing worse than
playing to an empty house.

Rhetoric has standing. And it has standing because society, not the rhetorican says so. Yet sometimes that
standing, the "moment" of an issue, is given life by the
rhetorician. Just as rhetoric can discover and coalesce
consensus, it also can, as it has often done, shape and
focus an issue that was theretofore inchoate or latent in
the minds of the audience. In this capacity, the
rhetorician breathes life into an issue. But here also
the opportunity for evil is close by the opportunity for
good. The paranoia, megalomania, and hate aroused in the
German society of the 1930's was in large part rhetorically
created, even though that rhetoric was demonstrably false
and archetypal of anti-rhetoric. Nonetheless, the lesson is
there, as, incidentally, is the reminder that education, as is popularly supposed, is not of itself a defense against rhetorical abuse. The Germany of the 1930's was the most educated society in the world at that time. Although I anticipate myself, since I deal with the ethics of rhetoric below, the experiences of recent history should remind us forcefully that any conceptualization of rhetoric that leaves out its ethical component is fatally flawed. So when I maintain that rhetoric is productive, it must be underscored that that necessarily means that it be productive for the good of the person and society, that in the midst of social urgency it seek a virtuous solution. In that broad area between fact and opinion in which rhetoric functions, the choice between good and evil is always in the balance. Urgency, therefore, is not enough; the good rhetorician must be able to predicate and define, and be able to presume of his or her audience that same ability.
Chapter VI
Rhetoric is Metaphorical

"As a passionate, and not exclusively rational being," Ernesto Grassi writes in *Rhetoric as Philosophy*, "man is in need of the emotive word" (26). Rhetoric uses the emotive word. Its language is metaphorical as opposed to logical, figurative as opposed to literal. Rhetoric is borne by living language, where form and content are inseparable, language that communicates in concrete, historical circumstances in regard to truths that are not logically or inductively demonstrable. It both precedes and is subsequent to the rational language of dialectic, metaphorically vitalizing premises that are prior to what can be rationally established and, once a position has been secured dialectically, leading us analogically to the whys and wherefores of our actions. Rhetorical language convinces us not only what we should do in a given social circumstance but conveys as well the reasons for doing it. It taps our basic convictions and prompts us to make them pertinent to the problems of living.

The fundamental recognition here is that we as human beings have a grasp of life and our place in the world that is precedent to logical demonstration, a grasp that yields the unstated premises of any dialectic. We seek a just solution to this or that social problem, for example,
because we have a prior idea of justice; and we seek a just solution for the good of the individual and society because we have a precedent, primal grasp of the good. And that grasp is itself, according to Grassi, the product of metaphor, of our internal rhetoric. Rhetoric, therefore, both enables and addresses our idea of justice and of the good. Neither can be proven or described in purely rational terms. They precede induction, being first causes of it, and supersede logical conclusions, which are necessarily evaluative.

In regard to both values and beliefs, the motivating stuff of individual and social action, we make them real, actualize them, in relation to here-and-now concrete circumstances by the use of figurative language, language that draws meaning from and gives meaning to the actual content and context of our lives. Rhetorical language is able to transpose vital human values and beliefs to real-life problems by metaphorically investing us in those problems. In *Rhetoric as Philosophy*, Grassi states the case provocatively:

The techne of rhetoric, as the art of persuasion, of forming belief, structures the emotive framework which creates the tension within which words, questions that are dealt with, and actions that are discussed, acquire their passionate significance. It creates a tension through which the audience is literally "sucked into" the framework designed by the author. (26)
To Grassi, rhetoric is not just an adjunct or conveyance of philosophy, it is rather philosophy itself, since metaphorically it discovers and vitalizes those premises of value and belief upon which philosophy is based, the premises from which it proceeds, which Grassi calls archai, or archaic ideas. These are those basal human conceptualizations that represent humanity's sense of self and the world and which stir its upward longing. (These ideas cannot even be discussed without the use of metaphor.) Rhetoric, Grassi, observes, "is the origin and criterion of the movement of the rational process of clarification" (20). It is, in other words, the language of wisdom; and by harkening us to first things—by showing them, not proving them—it is prophetic and evangelic; and it is, therefore, in the deepest sense of the word, humanistic.

Rhetoric to Grassi "bridges" from archaic ideas, human wisdom, to the world, and, just as important, allows us to go in the other direction also, metaphorically using the actual to shape and crystalize belief. In this, he recalls and seeks to revitalize the Greek and Judeo-Christian humanist tradition by making the world metaphor to the life of the person and the course of society simile to the destiny of the individual. And in the process he seeks to rescue rhetoric, and language generally, from contemporary rationalism and its separation of fact and belief, res and verba, form and content. Rational language to Grassi is
unrhetorical because it is divorced from actual circumstances, from the present and pressing nature of life and action. It is denotive, monologic, and information-bound. In this respect, as Grassi notes, its code is fixed and unable to adapt to the real circumstances of life; whereas metaphorical language can invent its own code according to circumstances. Grassi writes:

> The pressing nature and meaning of every question and answer, its concrete character, which is the root of the human world, is excluded from every formalistic approach to language. But it is only in the concrete context that truth and error, inquiry and knowledge, receive their meaning. (86)

He repeatedly uses the words "pressing" and "urgent" to emphasize his contention that rhetoric is the language that cohabits with life, that allows for the adaptation of wisdom and ingenuity to the vagaries and presence of contemporaneous living, and does so in fully human terms, conjoining logos and pathos, the person and society in the same utterance.

Another contemporary, Richard Weaver, also sees rhetoric as metaphorical. Where Grassi can write that "man is in need of the emotive word," Weaver can write, "The soul is impulse, not simply cognition; and finally one's interest in rhetoric depends on how much poignancy one senses in existence" (The Ethics of Rhetoric, 23). Only Weaver's perspective is from a different direction. Whereas Grassi sees rhetoric at the root of our deliberations and
preparatory for dialectic, establishing or discovering those premises without which dialectic could not begin, Weaver sees rhetoric as grounded in dialectic, taking up where dialectic leaves off. He puts it this way:

What a successful dialectic secures for any position therefore is not actuality but possibility; and what rhetoric thereafter accomplishes is to take any dialectically secured position and show its relationship to the world of prudential conduct. This is tantamount to saying that what the specifically rhetorical plea asks of us is belief, which is preliminary to action. (The Ethics of Rhetoric, 28)

So just as Grassi sees dialectic as incapable of getting at and conveying—actualizing—what he calls archaic values and beliefs, Weaver sees it as incapable of moving us toward belief and action, even once that dialectic has been socially adjudicated. Dialectic from both perspectives is humanistically impotent, incapable of securing belief or engaging the passions and therefore incapable of moving us to action. In this regard, Weaver quotes from Mortimer Adler, who notes that dialectic

is a kind of thinking which satisfies these two values: in the essential inconclusiveness of its process, it avoids ever resting in belief, or in the assertion of a truth; through its utter restriction to the universe of discourse and its disregard for whatever reference discourse may have toward actuality, it is barren of any practical issue. It can make no difference in the way of conduct. (The Ethics of Rhetoric, 28; from Dialectic by Mortimer Adler, 243-44)

Grassi and Weaver—and Adler as well—see the problem sympathetically but from different directions. From both
points of view, however, the metaphorical, figurative nature of rhetorical language is affirmed, seen as necessary to grasp and enliven those truths that will move the person beyond logical conviction to the here-and-now realm of belief and action. Moreover, both men hold that knowledge is based on belief, as did Aristotle, that there is no true knowledge without it, but rather merely idle speculation. To Grassi, knowledge is derived philosophically by adhering to and proceeding from prerational principles or archaic ideas, and in this he claims authority in Aristotle (see Rhetoric as Philosophy 26-7). To Weaver, knowledge is secured as it relates to our pursuit of the good, and in this he claims authority in Plato (see The Ethics of Rhetoric, Chapter I, "The Phaedrus and the Ethics of Rhetoric"). Grassi the Aristotelian who finds his intellectual sustenance in the world view of 16th-century Italian Humanism and Weaver the Platonist who philosophically positions himself with the world view of the Age of Faith obviously part company on many issues. But as regards rhetoric being metaphorical, they see eye-to-eye, if from different perches. And in this respect they are consistent with and provide a contemporary endorsement of the classical tradition.

If that tradition has lost out along the way—and in some respects it certainly has—it is attributable as much as anything to the scientistic point of view discussed
previously, the view that would have knowledge, and therefore language, stripped of its emotive content and made purely logical. This is the knowledge and the would be rhetoric of Cartesian rationalism (granted, an overworked phrase), wherein language is stripped of it analogic, figurative, metaphorical content and made instead literal, denotive, and demonstrative. It is the language of information and facts. Susan Miller provides a brief description of how humanistic rhetoric lost out to this rationalistic, scientific perspective.

It takes little philosophical training to recognize, however, that rhetorical humanism, the view that unites language, thought, and action in the person, lost out to self-reflective rationalism, the separation of subject from object. The contextuality of rhetoric could not hold sway against objective, scientific, and ultimately positivistic thought. ("Classical Practice and Contemporary Basics," 50)

"The contextuality of rhetoric" is a well-chosen phrase and, not incidentally, a good metaphor. It brings us up to Miller's meaning. More to the point is her description of the situation we find ourselves in. In an age awed by the scientific and everything that claims, often bogusly, affiliation with it, metaphorical language finds itself somewhat cornered or, because it's been so often abused, disparaged. Yet it is one of those elements of rhetoric that is both consistent with the classical tradition, the humanistic tradition, and pertinent to the contemporary experience, because it does not depend on the prevalence of
this or that world view but on the essentially unchanging makeup of human nature. As well, it is the only language that can adapt to changing circumstances, finding its meaning in the application of principles to reality. It is the only language that can express and enlighten the person existentially, concretely, and, in a phrase Grassi might have used, in the fully human realm.

It has often been pointed out that the very persons Grassi and Weaver lay claim to were themselves leery of emotive language; and, in a way, they were. But they were critical of exclusively emotive language, language dissociated from reason, and they were critical, as we all should be, of emotive language being used exploitively. At the same time, both Aristotle and Plato recognized rhetoric as leading to right judgement in regard to the good, and that right judgement was a function of the whole person. Aristotle repeatedly points out that for persons to be persuaded—for them to choose the right course of action and to subscribe to the belief necessary for that—they must be affectively disposed to both recognize the probable truth of an argument and to act upon that conviction. And Plato, for all his criticism of the emotional side of our nature, composes all his philosophical writings metaphorically, from the Republic to the Phaedrus. Without metaphor, which includes allegory, he would have been practically speechless. The problem is not emotive language but rather
the separation of emotive language from its dialectical counterpart. As Richard Weaver points out, "The kind of rhetoric which is justly condemned is utterance in support of a position before that position has been adjudicated with reference to the whole universe of discourse—and such the world always produces more than enough" (*The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 25).

Rhetoric without dialectic produces the kind of exploitive or platitudinous discourse that has given rhetoric a bad name. It too separates logos from pathos, but it errs in the other direction from purely denotive discourse by using emotional appeals to manipulate the audience. Political rhetoric is often used as an example of this. Yet political rhetoric at its best, from Burke to Lincoln to Churchill, is metaphorical. And without metaphor we would be hard put to conceptualize our political circumstances, and we would be unable to grasp those sustaining mythologies that make political life possible. 20 The significance of metaphor is contingent on an accompanying dialectic. We can rhetorically enliven only what we can rationally adjudicate. The metaphorical eloquence of Lincoln, for example, which is what mostly survives in our recall, was built on an axiomatic foundation, a dialectical spine. Strictly emotive rhetoric is invertebrate; the metaphors dissipate into thin air. Additionally, much modern rhetoric, abetted by not a small
amount of misled rhetorical theory, would have metaphor as a mere embellishment of otherwise purely denotive language, leaving one nebulous and the other sterile. This is rhetoric as garnish or decoration—eloquence in the worst sense of the word. The ghost-written speeches of contemporary political figures readily come to mind as instances of preconceived polemic polished up with negotiable metaphors—cliches really—not to convey or vivify the discourse but to popularize the speaker.

Metaphor is conjoined with rhetoric which is conjoined with dialectic. And one could extend the figure, adding res and verba, matter and form, the person and the world, the immanent and the transcendent, and so on. The organic conceptualization of language, of the person, and of the world has always been at the heart of humanism, whatever its various manifestations or emphasis. That humanism subsumes the accidental distinctions between ancient and modern, and it supervenes the rationalism of our age by reminding us—metaphorically more often than not—that as creatures of our history we share common lot with creature of all history.
Chapter VII

Rhetoric is Ethical

Language, any language, is fraught with value. This is true even of that language that purports to be value-free. All the more is it true of rhetoric, that language that seeks to persuade and move people toward belief and action. And this is so because rhetoric necessarily entails an opposition of principles. And, as Richard Weaver reminds us, rhetoric, unlike dialectic or purely rational discourse, "always espouses one of the contraries" (The Ethics of Rhetoric, 21). It brings analysis to bear on prudential conduct. It solicits choices, and in doing that it unavoidably assumes a hierarchy of values. It says that this choice is better than that one, this course of action or this belief better than that one. Even though it deals in the probable and contingent--indeed, because it deals in the probable and contingent--it seeks to move us toward what is good and true. It is, therefore, ethical. This was a virtually unquestioned assumption of classical rhetoric, and that assumption has only been seriously questioned very late in our history, in the trail of various forms of nihilism that would have all values up for grabs or that would confine them, incommunicado, to the precinct of individual consciousness.
I assume here that the act of rhetoric, the fact that one engages in it at all, presumes the ability to communicate with others and presumes accordingly the ability to influence others, one way or another, sooner or later, toward good or evil. I assume these things because to assume otherwise would be to lapse into absurdity. And I maintain, in conjunction with our rhetorical traditions, that if language does not move us, or seek to move us, toward the good and true, then it is not rhetoric at all.

One of the best articulations of this position I have seen is by a relatively obscure 19th-century rhetorician, Franz Theremin. And for this I am indebted exclusively to Nan Johnson's fine article, "Three Nineteenth-Century Rhetoricians: The Humanist Alternative to Rhetoric as Skills Management." Unfortunately, as Nan Johnson points out, Franz Theremin's writings are practically unobtainable, coming to us in an 1844 translation of his *Eloquence a Virtue*, copies of which, according to Johnson, can now be found only in a few East Coast libraries.

Explaining Theremin's perspective, Johnson writes as follows:

Three concepts underlie Theremin's theory of rhetorical discourse: 1) that persuasion is a communicative act essential to harmonious living, 2) that audience identification and assent to commonly shared values is the most effective moral basis for persuasion, and 3) that a consideration of values on the part of the speaker will generate both thought and appealing subject matter. (107)
In the same place she writes:

Theremin contends that all motivation and truth, and hence all persuasion, stem from the pursuit of ethical ideas of duty, virtue and happiness. He defines rhetoric as "that action, that force, that develops this universal ethical impulse. (107)

With minor adjustments, perhaps no adjustments at all, those comments could have been Aristotle's over 2000 years earlier, who saw rhetoric and ethics as integrated endeavors leading the person toward right conduct. And compare them with Richard Weaver's contention, coming over a century later than Theremin, when he writes, as quoted earlier, that rhetoric "is impulse, not simply cognition, and finally one's interest in rhetoric depends on how much poignancy one senses in existence."

"Theremin," Johnson writes, "describes the rhetorical dialogue as an 'attempt to transfer something that has been generated in the depths of the soul into another person, which can only be done in proportion as the orator himself possesses that which is to be produced' (Johnson 108; Theremin 152). This is strikingly similar to the over-arching theme of Plato's Phaedrus, where Socrates sees one good soul sympathetically leading another good soul to the love of the truth. In that comment as well are clear reflections of Quintillian's admonition that the rhetorician must be a good person, "Blameless in point of character" (Johnson, "Ethos and the Aims of Rhetoric," p. 103), for only then can he expect to lead the other person to good
action. In it also are reflections of Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* and of Hugh Blair in the century before Theremin. "Let him (the rhetorician) so order his life that he not only prepares a reward for himself," Augustine writes, "but also so he offers an example to others, and his way of living may be, as it were, an eloquent speech" (quoted by Johnson in "Ethos and the Aims of Rhetoric," 107). "It is of utmost consequence," Hugh Blair writes, "that the speaker firmly believe both the truth and importance of those principles which he inculcates in others, and not only that he believe them speculatively but have a lively and serious feeling for them" (Johnson 109).

Theremin's conception of an ethical rhetoric is like a summation of the whole classical tradition; and since he situates rhetoric in the life and destiny of the person, he summarizes the whole humanistic tradition as well. "Ethical ideas are destined to be embodied in life," he writes, "they lie in the reason, and must be presupposed to be in every man considered as being endowed with reason, and are, moreover, actually indwelling in everyone" (Johnson, "Three Nineteenth-Century Rhetoricians," 115). And in our time, Richard Weaver, situated in the same traditions, can write, "Thus, in the reality of his existence, man is impelled from behind by the life-affirming sentiment and drawn forward by some conception of what he should be" (Ideas Have Consequences, 20).
This is rhetoric in pursuit of ethical goals and propagated by ethical persons. Both aspects are contained in the classical idea of ethos. And that ethos is based on the nature of the person, defining the person as one with an innate idea of and disposition toward the good. This concept is at the core of Judeo-Christian teaching. To Theremin, as to practically everyone in the classical tradition, rhetoric facilitates our best realization of ourselves, both individually and socially. In the sense that language, the Word, is inseparable from ideation and the making of our lives, rhetoric is the best realization of ourselves. Rhetoric is, therefore, the most humanistic of the arts—not a social skill or a way of verbally managing the difficulties inherent in our social existence. In the classical tradition, rhetoric has a distinctly teleological, if not theological, dimension. Its ethical character derives from a conceptualization of ultimates. But, as Richard Weaver writes in Ideas Have Consequences, "An ethics of rhetoric requires that ultimate terms be ultimate in some rational sense" (23). It is the modern world's disability or disinclination to define ultimate terms in some rational sense on which hinges much of the difference, real or supposed, between classical and modern rhetoric, particularly in regard to rhetoric's ethical dimension.

The reasons for what I will call our ethical disenfranchisement are many and vast. They are represented
from one perspective by the previously quoted observation of S. Michael Halloran that, "Deprived of a given world, the modern author is likewise deprived of a given rhetoric."

This represents the prevalent supposition—prevalent at least in academic and intellectual quarters—that the world of classical rhetoric had benefit of an intelligible universe that provided firm grounds for ethical discovery, and that we don't. From a different perspective, it is the result of that world view that is grouped rather loosely and imprecisely under the umbrella term of modern rationalism. That term is a sort of philosophical thumbnail sketch of the modern penchant for accepting as true only that which can be proven rationally, which means empirically, inductively, and—and the word should perhaps go in quotations—scientifically. This perception is often implicit in the academic use of the word "scholarship." Thusly reduced, cognition, and hence ethical subscription, are rendered hostage to the sensate and the material, to provable phenomena. Provable phenomena being necessarily particular and not universal—which is the unavoidable reductionism posed by nominalism—ethics becomes necessarily situational, an ad hoc response to circumstances, not the issue of principles. At the risk of further over-simplifying a complex subject, a third major perspective that has confounded the postclassical formulation of an ethical rhetoric, and related to the other two, is that of epistemic
subjectivism. This perspective presents itself in many guises, many -isms, some mentioned previously here, but it is basically just one form or another of phenomenology, the epistemic theory that would have all reality the end-product of personal perception. Reality is in the eye of the beholder—or in the ear, or in the cognition, and so forth. As a philosophical theory, it's as old as rhetoric itself, many Sophists having subscribed to it, for example, but it has enjoyed a resurrected status in recent years, at least among some academics. It has notably ingratiated itself into rhetoric via cognitive psychology, reader-response criticism, and the various fashionable speculations of European, mostly French, intellectuals that are referred to rather niftily by Marilyn Cooper as "nouvelle French notions."

The upshot of all this for rhetoric, among countless other ramifications, is that many moderns find themselves ethically (and morally) invalid, unable to formulate a rhetoric of ethics because they are unable to formulate ultimates, to build a hierarchy of values upon which to base an ethics. Ethics is predication, after all, and predication becomes free-floating, not derived situationally, as is often wrongly supposed, but dictated situationally. Thus is relativism always its own prescriptiveness. As a result, our attempts to formulate a
postclassical rhetorical ethics have been in the main piecemeal, fatuous, or illusory.

One attempt to circumvent the ethical problems posed by the above-mentioned modern perspectives is so-called Rogerian ethics, a borrowing from the theories of the psychotherapist Carl Rogers whose social influence was considerable in the 1960's and early 1970's. In their text *Rhetoric, Discovery and Change*, Young, Becker, and Pike subscribe rather enthusiastically to Rogerian ethics (274). And so does Maxine Hairston ("Carl Roger's Alternative to Traditional Rhetoric," 373-377). Yet however admirable its altruism, Rogerian ethics is merely a formula for getting along, a sort of rhetorical bedside manner that would have the rhetorician be respectful and considerate of the point of view of those he is trying to convince of something.23 There is nothing wrong with that, and as a rhetorical procedure it is similar to Aristotle's idea that we should base our arguments on the beliefs of our audience and be respectful of "reputable opinions" (Barnes 16; and Lunsford, "Aristotelian vs. Rogerian Argument: A Reassessment," 149). But two objections at least come to mind. If, as Rogers and his advocates say, we should be considerate of those we are trying to convince, the next insistent question is, why? Why should we be fair to those we are trying to convince if not being fair would work just as well, or better? Ethics always entails a hierarchical series of "whys?" And

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Rogerian ethics are applicable to any form of rhetoric for any reason. Winning over an audience by accommodating it, which is what Rogerian ethics easily becomes, is, as a tactic, standard stuff for demagogues. It was stock-in-trade for some (not all) of the Sophists, it was routine for Machiavelli, and it has long been elementary to political diplomacy, of good nations and bad.

Rogerian ethics exemplify the modern ethical dilemma. People still have the urge, the impulse for goodness, but are confounded by various debilities of relativism when it comes to determining just how that goodness is to be judged or why it ought be adhered to.24

There have been many attempts to formulate an ethics for post-classical or "new" rhetoric. To S. Michael Halloran in "On Making Choices, Sartorial and Rhetorical," it is a matter of propriety and appropriateness. Alan Chaffee, in "The Ghostly Paradigm in Composition," appeals to what he calls the "toto principle," by which he means that we should be completely fair with those we address by presenting all the information at our disposal, favorable to us or otherwise. He doesn't elaborate as to why we should. In effect, he says that we should be rhetorically fair because it's the fair thing to do. Even the admirable Chaim Perelman finds himself confounded by the same problem: how to posit an objective ethics on a subjective, relativistic foundation. He tries to solve the problem by establishing
an objective foundation in human universals, in the manner of Kant's "categorical imperative" and Rousseau's "general will." The objective benchmark for Perelman would be the "universal audience," a mental concept of the rhetorician comprising all reasonable, intellectually competent people (Ray 364). If the argument persuades—wins the "adherence" of—the universal audience, then that result secures a kind of operational objectivity, thus solving for Perelman, if imperfectly, the dilemma between relativism on the one side and absolutism or transcendent objectivity on the other. The universal audience becomes his non-empirical grounding for ethical judgements.

A danger in assessing the ethical and valulative confusions of contemporary rhetoric lies in supposing that academic and intellectual deliberations of that problems are normative, that they are somehow representative of the majority thinking of our age. Although it would be impossible to prove one way or the other, I suggest that such deliberations are not representative, that they are, rather, simply more visible, or audible, as the case may be. There are reasons to suppose—talking with people being one of them—that despite the much heralded pluralism and confusions of our age that most people still subscribe to some form of transcendent reality, that to most people the real, in Richard Weaver's words, "is not exhausted by the apparent."
In an event, ethics are finally a function of each person's conceptualization or grasp of his or her human circumstances, of how he or she visualizes and chooses to understand life, society, and human destiny. In this respect, rhetoric, and particularly the ethics attendant to it, is not as much subject to the prevalence of this or that theory or -ism as is sometimes supposed. Since, at its best, it draws both suasion and sustenance from those it addresses—and the sometimes arbitrary bifurcation between classical and contemporary rhetoric hasn't changed that—its appeal and powers to persuade depend not on a given world but on a given humanity. One of the faults of postclassical theorizes of rhetorical ethics is that they seemingly feel compelled to establish a universal ground for ethics before addressing an audience ethically, forgetting that their uncertainties—or need for certainties—are not necessarily shared by the majority of humankind. They tend to forget that rhetoric, when incorporated with an audience can discover principles that detached cerebration never can. Rogerian ethics tells us what we already know and have known; and Perelman, however admirably, seeks a non-empirical grounding for value judgements that the majority of us have always possessed, not through a mental concept of a universal audience but by means of the reality of a universal conscience. Even unsophisticated human nature is ethically adept, no less or more so now than it has ever
been. We continue to ask a hierarchical series of "whys?" because, as Franz Theremin observed, and as most of the great persons of history have received as an obvious truth, "Ethical ideas are destined to be embodied in life, they lie in the reason, and must be presupposed to be in every man considered as being endowed with reason, and are, moreover, actually indwelling in everyone." To those who would ask why, on what basis, things are right and wrong, one can answer finally and in the fullness of wisdom, "Because."
Chapter VIII
Conclusion

In 1961, two years after the publication of *Roots for a New Rhetoric*, in which Daniel Fogerty advocates a new rhetoric for our age, one based on the theories of, among others, I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, and S. I. Hayakawa, John Kennedy gave his Inaugural Address. It was acclaimed worldwide. One might suppose that John Kennedy had found a new rhetoric for our age. Only it was as much old rhetoric as new, informed by traditional guidelines and brought to bear on current problems. Commenting on President Kennedy's address, the editors of *The New Yorker* praised him for his return to and revival of the classical style of Aristotle and the "grand" style of Cicero. *The New Yorker* concluded its comments by saying, "And so we leave the speech to the students of rhetoric, having invoked for Mr. Kennedy the blessings of Aristotle and Cicero, and for ourself the hope that he has re-established the tradition of political eloquence."25

At the same time that *The New Yorker* was expressing the hope that Kennedy's Inaugural Address signaled the re-establishment of the tradition of classical rhetoric, advocates of the new rhetoric were telling us that the classical tradition was no longer pertinent to the modern experience, that its modes, perspectives, and underlying
world view were outdated and irrelevant. That position was taken by Fogerty in 1959. Somewhat later, in 1970, shortly after Martin Luther King Jr. had borrowed from the classical tradition even more than John Kennedy, and with the help of that tradition discovered a moral consensus where none was thought to exist, Young, Becker, and Pike, in *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, wrote, "With few exceptions, the classical tradition survives today only in the training of formal debaters" (5). The modern position is spelled out most clearly, and the classical tradition dismissed almost out-of-hand, by Knoblauch and Brannon in 1984 in *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*, where the classical tradition is referred to pejoratively as "That Old-Time Religion" (22).

Yet while these and other advocates of the new rhetoric are saying that modern rhetoric will bring about better communication, and that now, as opposed to before, "enlightened cooperation is the preeminent goal of communication" (Young et al. 9), Winston Weathers is describing the pathos of modern communication (*The Broken World*), Wayne Booth is observing the amorality of much modern literature (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 377-398), Richard Weaver is decrying the decline of rhetoric (*The Ethics of Rhetoric*), and some of the most prominent rhetoric scholars of our time are making a strong case for the relevance of
the classical tradition (*Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*).

Obviously, contemporary rhetoric is a vexed subject, and as its various and sundry definitions would indicate, a confused one. A principal reason for this, besides the scientism discussed above and what James Kinneavy calls "the alienation of rhetoric from the humanities" (20), is the epistemic perspective or theory that would have language the maker and determiner of reality and knowledge. It is partly premise to the work of Young et al. and extensively so to that of Knoblauch and Brannon, whose work I take to be representative of the perspective. The theory I speak of has it that the individual, with language, symbolically composes the world. From this point of view, knowledge is not something existing objective to the person or something fixed; it is, rather, ever-shifting, renewing, and being formed individually, and verified socially. The phrase "making knowledge," for example, has worked its way into the literature of contemporary rhetorical theory and its related field, composition studies; and now that phrase is often taken for granted, even though by making knowledge a product of subjective determination it represents a veritable revolution in the history of Western thought, which for the most part was based on a realist epistemology. A common expression among new rhetoric theorists, and something of a favorite concept with post-structuralist literary theorists,
is that language is subversive: since it is able to compose reality, it can subvert whatever has been accepted as real or true. But, of course, if that theory were true (which would mean that it itself would be subject to subversion and therefore only tentatively true), then everything else may or may not be true, including accepted principles of conduct, institutions and their informing principles, and those very reasoning processes by which we arrive at probable truths (or real ones) that are premise to individual and social decisions.

Again taking Knoblauch and Brannon as representative of this perspective (not especially pages 51-76), it is not surprising that they aren't just advocating a particular rhetoric, or scoring another kind of rhetoric with which they don't agree; they are attempting to articulate an entire philosophy and ask the teachers of contemporary writing and rhetoric to subscribe to that philosophy preliminary to formulating pedagogical theory and practice (98-117). As well, they set themselves up as authorities on classical thought, and on the basis of that, on what John Gage finds to be a superficial, often wrong understanding of classical thought ("The 2000-Year Old Straw Man"), they try to make the case that the Greeks and Romans and everyone sympathetic to or imitative of the classical perspective since then were, in the main, unenlightened. In one place they write, "We speak of the superiority of modern rhetoric
only with reference to its improved rhetorical integration of evidence and insight regarding the processes of the mind, the operation of discourse, and the nature of knowledge" (77). That "only" doesn't leave much else. And again the question arises as to the superiority of modern rhetoric. If this modern epistemic perspective does in fact represent some kind of new enlightenment, where are the rhetorical fruits of it?

Generally, the modern perspective referred to here has served only to create a dichotomy between contemporary rhetoric and the classical tradition. More accurately, it has served to create a dichotomy between contemporary theory and classical rhetoric, since there is no evidence that some new kind of rhetoric is upon us or that the classical tradition is obsolete. And, as a rule, the advocates of the modern perspective are less philosophical about their contentions than are Knoblauch and Brannon (and in this respect, I would credit Knoblauch and Brannon for spelling out what they mean and why, instead of simply making statements whose philosophical implications are left unexamined). The position is more often simply asserted. The current jargon in composition studies, for example. That would have writing as a "process" and not a "product" is fraught with philosophical implications that are almost always taken for granted, never spelled out. One of the few places where I have seen these implications spelled out,
although not to my agreement, is in Knoblauch and Brannon's *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* (Chapter 5, "Discourse as Knowledge/Knowledge as Discourse," 51-75). Instead of using "process" and "product" as mere jargon, they put their philosophical cards on the table. Mostly, however, the contentions of the new rhetoric, epistemic and other, are simply asserted. So what one is used to seeing is something like S. Michael Halloran, in "On the End of Rhetoric, Classical and Modern," saying, "The assumptions about knowledge and the world that informed classical rhetoric are no longer tenable" (624) or "In the absence of a world given by a stable and coherent cultural tradition, man is compelled to construct his own" (625). This is the manner in which the problem, the dichotomy between classical and modern rhetoric, is usually stated, as an assertion that the world of classical rhetoric was predictable, composed of fixed, objective values, and culturally stable, whereas, in Halloran's words, "Our values seem arbitrary, contradictory, and ultimately groundless" (624).

It's beyond my purposes here, and I daresay beyond my ability, to go into a full-scale analysis of the philosophical presumptions and ramifications of this modernist perspective. The narrower point is that this perspective—which is both philosophical and just plain modern, i.e., since we live now we know more than those who lived then—has driven a wedge between classical and
contemporary rhetoric, made them two schools of thought as opposed to one tradition, and, in my judgement, to the discoverable benefit of no one. My argument is that the rhetorical tradition is still intact and that the supposed differences between ancient and modern rhetoric are more specious than real, more concocted than demonstrable, if not in theory at least in practice; and I adhere to the position that rhetoric is a practical, living art, not a theoretical one.

I'll use an analogy here, which will have the weakness of all analogies, and the strengths. The history of art has seen more changes in perspective than one could count, including some radical shifts in epistemic perspective. Such shifts characterize and enliven the history of art, and one only has to think of the more obvious examples: the change from the Romanesque to the Gothic perspective in the middle ages, the advent of Impressionism in the middle of the nineteenth century, the marked disjuncture from tradition that distinguished modern art in the first part of the twentieth century. All these shifts in artistic perspective entailed corresponding shifts in philosophical perspective. There was a different philosophical premise to the architecture of Alberti in the late fifteenth century and Frank Lloyd Wright in the twentieth. Rembrandt and Picasso could not have had much more different world views. The examples could go on. Yet no informed and judicious
student of art history would argue that a Byzantine mosaic of the tenth century and a Mexican mural of the twentieth weren't sharing in the same art, that they weren't part of the same unbroken tradition, or that one was artistically superior to the other. All art has the same basal vocabulary, some of it emphasized one time in one way, some of it another time in another way.

So too with rhetoric. Despite its different perspectives over the centuries—and, as George Kennedy reminds us in *Classical Rhetoric*, there have been many of them—the basal vocabulary is the same, as is the subject and the task. The five descriptive qualities of rhetoric I have put forth here (and there could have been others, and they could have been framed differently) are qualities I conceive of as prescinding from shifts in philosophical perspective, emphases of style, or changes in theory. I visualize them as qualities characteristic of the rhetoric of every age. Different philosophical worlds notwithstanding, rhetoric deals in the real world, and its appeal and form in the face of human realities has been essentially the same, across time and across cultures, from Plato to Augustine, Lincoln to Hammarskjold, Jefferson to Kenyatta, and all in between. Just as artists find affinity with other artists and other art, whatever the gulfs that separate them, so do rhetoricians imitate and join with other rhetoric. They speak or write from the same
tradition, visualize the same audience, and seek the same goals. Lincoln, at his best, spoke for the ages because he spoke from the ages. All good rhetoric does this. Indeed, the language it employs derives meaning and resonance it would not have were it not for the tradition. Rhetoric recognizes society's historical dimension; and while it addresses the person in time, it recognizes him or her as persons like unto and fulfilling the story of all others. But it is only the whole person who shares in this historical affinity. Like art, rhetoric achieves validity in accordance with the universality of its appeal, but it achieves that universality by addressing the person in time, place, and particularity. In doing this, it presumes, as it has always presumed, that dialogue is possible, that shared ideas and shared values are possible. Even those I have criticized in this paper understand that, and their scholarship confirms it. Publishing is in itself an act of extraordinary faith in our ability to understand ourselves and the other person.

I have for practical purposes used throughout a narrow conceptualization of rhetoric, having focused on public utterances, written or spoken, that are in response to pressing social and human issues. It is a somewhat arbitrary conceptualization, adopted for the expedient purpose of managing an unmanageable subject. Rhetoric is much broader than that, of course, and in a real way it can
include virtually any kind of communication, albeit, not just for any reason. Yet even in its public, social manifestations it can take on many forms and still achieve and be characterized by the qualities I have elaborated on. Rhetoric doesn't have to be an Inaugural Address, although without Lincoln's use of that unique form, both rhetoric and we would be the poorer.

We, the audience, take our rhetoric where we find it. It can emanate from Tin Pan Alley or from a Birmingham jail. In World War II it was a scene from Shakespeare, when the British government commissioned the movie production of Henry V, and Henry's speech before the Battle of Agincourt became a rallying cry for the Battle of Britain. It can be, and often is, just one word, "Freedom!" Or it can be wordless, and thereby say everything, as when in September, 1939, Radio Warsaw played Chopin's "Polonaise" over and over again until Poland finally fell. It can become and remain part of a sustaining national mythology—chiseled perhaps, like the words of Emma Lazzaurus, telling us more than they say, or sung, like the lyrics of "America," splendid even without the music. There is little difference ultimately as to the form it takes. And it can always be understood, whether it be an eighteenth-century painting by Francisco Goya figuratively denouncing the cruelties of tyranny or a twentieth-century crayon drawing by a child from Treblinka exposing the face of evil with the timeless voice of
innocence. It can be all these things, and more, because finally rhetoric is not what is said, or how, but what is heard. And in this respect its voice is neither ancient nor modern. It is, rather, magnificently or tragically, merely—yet never merely—human.
Notes

1 Weathers quotes James Conant’s observation that as a result of modern science “the very concept of existence becomes meaningless.”

2 For two different perspectives on the confused state of affairs in classical Greece, see Lunsford and Ede, "On distinctions Between Classical and Modern Rhetoric," p. 43, for a brief commentary, and E. R. Dodds, The Ancient Concept of Progress, passim, for an extended commentary.

3 "Men desire by nature," wrote Aristotle, "to discover the truth. Nature would not have given men such a desire and left it impossible of satisfaction." Quoted by Barnes, p. 16, without the original citation in Aristotle.

4 For the point of view that great rhetoric requires a great audience, see Weaver’s The Ethics of Rhetoric, Chapter VI: "Milton’s Heroic Prose."


6 For as concise an articulation as I have found of the modern epistemic perspective referred to here, see Chapter 3, "Discourse as Knowledge/Knowledge as Discourse," in Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing, by C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, pp. 51-76.

7 For a good example of contemporary rhetoric that depends for its appeal on the solicitation of shared beliefs, and for an explication of that rhetoric, see Keith Miller’s article on the rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr., "Martin Luther King, Jr. Borrows a Revolution: Argument, Audience, and Implications of a Secondhand Universe."

8 It is instructive how in times of social or political crisis—war being the ultimate example—our equivocations about shared meanings and principles fall largely by the wayside. By no accident has much good rhetoric been the product of political emergency, not just because of the magnitude of the events or the perceived threat to our interests, but because the commonplace beliefs of the people are readily accessible to the rhetorician. Churchill in World War II comes to mind; and it is interesting to note that once the war had ended and those commonplace beliefs were less accessible, Churchill’s rhetoric was not so well received.

See Maxine Hairston's "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing," *College Composition and Communication* (February 1982), pp. 76-87, for an example of how Kuhn's theory has been enthusiastically adopted by one member of the Composition studies community.

For an excellent retort to those who would apply Kuhn's theories to the language arts, see Robert J. Connors's "Composition Studies and Science," *College English* 45 (January 1983), pp. 1-20. And for a thorough retort to Kuhn's theories as they are meant to apply to just the physical sciences, see *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, passim.

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Perelman, like Aristotle, bases his theories on a comprehensive survey of that rhetoric has been in actuality, not on mere speculation. And he is led to conclude that rhetoric has never been purely logical.

In this respect, Richard Vatz, in responding to Lloyd Bitzer's theory of the "rhetorical situation," is correct in maintaining that the rhetorician can shape events. He errs, I believe, in going too far and maintaining that the rhetorician creates the situation, just as Bitzer errs, I think, in maintaining that the situation creates the rhetoric. Scott Consigny strikes a happy medium between the two, giving the rhetorician, the audience, and the situation their due.


17 I borrow the term "scientistic," which is admittedly slightly pejorative, from Robert Connors in "Composition Studies and Science."

18 As Barnes points out, one of Aristotle's main claims in the Gryllus was that rhetoric should not excite the passions (20); and in the Republic, the Gorgias, and -- although by way of a mixed message--in the Phaedrus, Plato raises the same caution.


21 See note 19.

22 For a discussion of classical rhetoric's theological character, see Weiss, "The Humanist Rediscovery of Rhetoric as Philosophy," p. 32.

23 Andrea Lunsford provides a Rogerian-like criticism of Rogerian ethics from the classical perspective in "Aristotelian vs. Rogerian Argument: A Reassessment," College Composition and Communication 30 (May 1979), pp. 146-151.

24 For an example of how Rogerian ethics can devolve into ersatz homiletics, see Jim Corder's "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love," Rhetoric Review 4 (September 1985), pp. 16-32.

25 For the Inaugural Address of John Kennedy and the editorial from The New Yorker, I am indebted to Edward P. J. Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, pp. 551-55. Mr. Corbett provides a detailed analysis of the speech on pp. 555-65, wherein he notes its classical elements and style, its similarity to the diction of the Bible, the speeches of Lincoln, and so forth.
For an analysis of the modern epistemic perspective underlying the work of Young, Becker, and Pike, of Knoblauch and Brannon, and also of Ann Berthoff, see James Berlin's "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," *College English* 44 (December) 1982, pp. 765-77.
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