

concerns in the study of communication (rather than borrowed from other fields). Its approach is also increasingly concerned with applied communication research. The study of human communication today is undertaken in a vibrant and forward looking environment, building on firm traditions but diversifying to confront new realities.

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## 16

### The Rhetorician's Quest

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Earlier chapters in this book provide a good grasp of theory and its uses. Theory consists of constructs that purport to explain or account for phenomena—in our case, for the experience of human communication. Theory guides inquiry, in such activities as observation, description, and prediction. Through this work, theory leads to knowledge or understanding, and, on occasion, to new or modified theory. In addition, theory can be used to evaluate not only procedures and standards of inquiry, but also the conduct of human communication itself.

How does the rhetorical theorist theorize or philosophize? Answering this question is this chapter's primary aim. Through a series of examples, we will detail various modes of thinking by which the rhetorician pursues knowledge or understanding of human communication processes and practices. Before getting to these ways of thinking, several general matters require attention, including clarifying the distinctions between theorizing and philosophizing, and between knowledge and understanding. Also considered are some relationships between rhetorical and social scientific theorizing, and the factors involved in the genesis and shaping of theory.

### KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, THEORIZING, AND PHILOSOPHIZING

As for the distinctions between knowledge and understanding, while knowledge is commonly considered ideas that are generalizable and predictive, understanding is often considered ideas that explain phenomena and provide meaningful, useful comprehension of acts, deeds, and events. Theory is a particular aspect of both—knowledge and understanding. Philosophy is a larger set of constructs which would account for both—knowledge and understanding. "Cognitive dissonance" is a theory, which, when applied in research, may produce knowledge. Carl Hempel's "theory" of covering law (1965), however, is larger; it is a *metatheory*, reflecting a philosophy of what constitutes knowledge, how it should be pursued, and how it is applicable to any "scientific" theory. Although these distinctions are not absolute, as will be indicated, it is important to recognize them, because they are widely held and can be useful.

### RELATIONSHIPS AMONG COMMUNICATION THEORISTS

One way the distinctions do not serve well is in trying to draw absolute differences between the theorizing of rhetoricians and other communication theorists. A popular notion is that rhetoricians are "rationalists" and other communication theorists are empiricists; rhetoricians think in "armchairs" or live in libraries, while other communication theorists think in "laboratories." Evidence abounds that this characterization is grossly distorted, including the range and extent of current qualitative research and the gamut of philosophical positions arrayed in Richard Chervitz's book, *Rhetoric and Philosophy* (1990). In this collection of essays, rhetoricians explored the relationships between rhetorical theory and realism, relativism, critical rationalism, idealism, materialism, existentialism, and pragmatism; there is also an essay on "rhetoric after deconstruction." Of these essays, the ones most pertinent to the dubious distinctions drawn between rhetorical theorists and other communication theorists are those on materialism and realism. Indeed, the strongest defense of "objectivity" in recent communication literature appears in a series of studies conducted by Chervitz and Atkins, much of which is summarized in their book, *Communication and Knowledge: An Investigation in Rhetorical Epistemology* (1986).

This is not to say that there are no differences among rhetorical theorists and other communication theorists. Where most rhetoricians and some communication theorists differ from their colleagues is over whether or not one believes in and tries to pursue what Paul Ricoeur referred to as the "science of praxis" (1991, p. 199). Those who have this dream insist on theories that provide explanations entailing linear causation, reasoning from the existence of antecedents to a conclusion of consequences following from them. Rhetorical theorists, by and large, along with many others in the social sciences and humanities, are more than willing to accept explanations that assume biological causation, reasoning from a comprehensive construct to an interpretation of particular acts, deeds, or events. Such explanations (or interpretations) dispel what is "confused, fragmentary . . . cloudy . . . [or] strange, mystifying, puzzling, [and] contradictory . . .," according to Charles Taylor (1977, p. 103). Take, for instance, the

concept of *culture* as it is applied in organizational communication research. The concept accounts for much, but does not predict anything. Like other theoretical constructs, it is a useful generalization insofar as it aids understanding and is fruitful in guiding inquiry. No generalization, however derived, is beyond contradiction or further qualification. This is one reason why new theories are always emerging: the search for better explanations is constant.

Another way to get at the similarities and differences among communication scholars is to consider their typical lines of inquiry, the questions they pursue, and the research they conduct to answer them. Table 16.1 facilitates this consideration (note the quotation marks around the headings). Several features are to be observed in this representation. First, each item in each column indicates a way of producing or constituting knowledge or understanding. Second, human communication cannot be appreciated fully without each of these avenues being pursued. Third, *the two categories are not discrete*. One cannot do empirical research, that is, deal directly with data, without concepts to work with, however elementary they may be. And one cannot develop useful concepts without due regard for data. Whatever else rhetorical theory—philosophy and communication theory may be, they are practical and pragmatic. They concern the world of lived experience. Their value is commensurate with their contribution to understanding and performing well here, now, and for the future. What ultimately separates some rhetorical and communication theorists from some others is, as noted earlier, whether or not they subscribe to "scientism," and the clearest evidence of this subscription is what they predicate as data in their theory and research, and what they demand as an adequate explanation.

### THE GENESIS AND SHAPING OF THEORY

The question at this point is: How do theories/philosophies arise, and what ideas or conditions shape them? The answer to the first part of this question goes as follows: theories and philosophies arise whenever a well-informed mind becomes dissatisfied

TABLE 16.1

#### Ways of Producing Knowledge and Understanding

<u>"Empirical"</u>	<u>"Conceptual"</u>
Laboratory experiment	Definitions (analytic synthetic operational)
Field experiment	Models theories philosophy
Survey	Determinations of "data" (arguments appeals ideas images interacts behaviors etc.)
Content Analysis	Evaluative standards (logical ethical aesthetic)
Ethnographic studies	
History	

with conventional wisdom. They are born out of wonder and curiosity, out of a passion to understand, to improve understanding and conduct. They are nurtured by knowledge, intelligence, imagination, and insight—a commodity that does not occur in a vacuum. Theories and philosophies, although they begin with critique, cannot rest content with showing the faults and flaws of conventional wisdom; they must go on to articulate a better way of thinking that produces a better way of acting. The answer to this first part would not be complete if we were to ignore two other motivations in producing theory: ego and the desire to publish rather than perish. Needless to say, neither is sufficient to account for good theory. Indeed, one colleague maintains that there is only one requirement to formulate good theory—smart parents.

Earlier we noted differences between theory and philosophy, but maintained that the differences were not absolute. In fact, theories presuppose philosophical ideas: ontological assumptions about reality; epistemological concepts of knowledge, logic, and reason; axiological stances regarding ethical ideas of the good, the desirable, and the obligatory (and their opposites); and psychological beliefs about the nature of the human use/abuse of whatever means of communication by which one or more people can be related, including but not restricted to language, signs, and symbols. Theories are also affected by political considerations, including existing governmental realities and ideal conceptualizations. Theories, or the philosophy on which they are based, are constrained or accelerated by technology, ranging from oral means and opportunities for communication, to written systems of expression, to the various forms of electronic media that dominate current communication practices. All of these influences can be accounted for through one line of inquiry or another, the one element that evades clear understanding is genius, and this, too, is a factor in the formulation of theory. We will refer to each of these factors in theory building, except genius, as we detail the various nodes of thinking that shape the process.

### CREATING THEORIES/PHILOSOPHIES OF RHETORIC

What is rhetoric? What is its role in communication? In education? How does it interpret the communication act? One more clarification is needed before we proceed—the meanings of *rhetoric*.

#### Meanings of *Rhetoric*

The most familiar use of the word "rhetoric" is its common application as a pejorative label, signifying discourse that is untruthful, perhaps unethical, and certainly self-serving. In this signification, "rhetoric" is synonymous with deceit, distortion, or language used to create a biased impression or image of someone or some act, deed, or event. Its most condemnatory usage, it denotes unreality, as in "All they do is give us rhetoric; what we need now is talk about reality." The irony (or ignorance) in this usage is that it is itself rhetorical, a use of language to convey persuasive ideas. One may condemn rhetoric, use it in a condemnatory way, but one cannot escape it. To accuse one of being "rhetorical" is, in effect, accusing one of dishonesty. The important point to note is that *rhetoric pertains to all pragmatic, persuasive discourse, honest and*

*dishonest*. Because pragmatic, persuasive discourse has the power to move people to concerted action, it is both feared and prized. It reveals human beings in the full range of their capacities for ignoble and noble words and deeds. Thus, whereas most people are accustomed to think of rhetoric as talk that they oppose to action, the rhetorician is trained to think of "talk"—or any form of communication—as a *kind of "action"* that needs to be studied on its own terms.

Because rhetorical competence (when it accords with one's own conception of truth and justice) is highly prized, it has played a prominent role in the education of citizens throughout the history of Western culture. Indeed, along with grammar and logic, it formed the original liberal arts. Each of these arts provided precepts and principles for fashioning ideas and information from all avenues of learning. Grammar taught clear and correct expression; logic instructed in the ways of sound thinking; and rhetoric offered procedures of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery of subject matter. Rhetoric's offerings in this vein are evident today, especially in courses in speech and written composition. In this capacity, *rhetoric serves as a significant pedagogical art*.

In earlier times, especially in Europe, rhetorical pedagogy often focused on teaching the manifold features of style: the figures of speech, usually divided into schemes (unusual or extraordinary patterns of language and sentence structure, such as alliteration) and tropes (uses of words to signify something other than their lexical meaning, such as metaphor or hyperbole). Rhetoricians in the Renaissance devoted much energy to compiling and cataloguing these stylistic devices; the rhetorical handbooks from this era often list hundreds of terms with obscure Greek and Latin names for seemingly simple concepts, such as anaphora (repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses) or oxymoron (yoking together two opposite concepts in the same phrase, as in "painful pleasure" or "cruel kindness"), which students were expected to memorize. Because of this historically important aspect of rhetorical pedagogy, many people to this day tend to reduce rhetoric to the study of these flowery figures. This reduction is a mistake that distorts the rich history of rhetorical theory and teaching. Yet it is also worth noting that the rhetorical figures catalogued by generations of scholars should not be seen only as devices for embellishment or adornment of a preexistent message; figures of speech such as metaphor are also constitutive of thought, since we cannot form or communicate our ideas without them.

"Rhetoric" refers not only to discursive practices and pedagogy, it also specifies a category—a genre—of communication, a way of interpreting communication, and a theory or philosophy of communication. As a *genre, rhetoric names that form of communication which is argumentative or persuasive*—in contrast with such forms as exposition, narrative, drama, and so forth. Kenneth Burke's philosophy of rhetoric, which holds that rhetoric is the symbolic function of inducement—where there is persuasion, there is rhetoric—radically re-alter these distinctions, making it possible to think seriously about the rhetoric of architecture, film, fiction, ritual, and any other symbolic expression that relates human beings. It is from this stance that *rhetoric becomes a significant mode of interpretation*.

Long before Burke, rhetorical theory and composition informed the practices of dramatists, poets, musicians, and artists in Greece, Rome, the Renaissance, and today, thinking across the disciplines. A particularly impressive program that reflects the

impact of using rhetoric as a mode of interpretation is the Iowa "Rhetoric of Inquiry project." In the publication inaugurating its beginning conference, *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (1987), there are essays on the rhetoric of mathematics, science, anthropology, psychology, economics, history, literature, law, political science, feminism, and theology. The common thread that runs through these essays is their attention to the way knowledge within and across fields and disciplines is formed through communication practices. For example, Donald McCloskey, one of the leading figures of the Iowa project, showed in his *The Rhetoric of Economics* (1985) that progress in theory-building, even in an avowedly empirical and quantitative discipline, depends on the ability to formulate persuasive arguments that employ the full range of human linguistic resources—not just scientific data presented in graphs and tables, but also through style, arrangement, metaphor, and analogy.

A more recent contribution to rhetoric as a mode of interpretation is that of Richard Lanham, who has employed rhetorical thought to examine the computer as an intrinsically rhetorical device. In *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology and the Arts* (1993), he claims that computers encourage a mode of consciousness he calls "toggling"—the ability to switch back and forth between viewing a text or communicate it as an artificial construction, on the one hand, and seeing through the text to the reality that it represents, on the other. Through the ages, rhetorical training has sensitized audiences to be attuned not only to the communicator's intended meaning, but also to the linguistic and symbolic devices used to convey meaning. According to Lanham, the dynamic, interactive qualities of digital text place rhetorical modes of interpretation once again into the center of our culture, forcing us to recognize the artificiality of all self-consciously crafted communicative acts. Whereas some might find this insight unsettling, he celebrates it as a revival of rhetoric, with the potential to restore vitality to education, the arts, and democratic practice, claiming that "electronic expression has come not to destroy Western arts and letters, but to fulfill them" (1993, p. xiii).

Finally, there is *rhetoric as theory or philosophy*, which attempts to account for all of the above: rhetoric as discursive practice, pedagogy, form of communication, and mode of interpretation. The difference between rhetorical theory and rhetorical philosophy, as suggested earlier, is that theory advances explanations of particular features of rhetorical processes or practices, such as ideology, culture, or episteme (as will be shown later); philosophy proposes conceptions that explain the creation, composition, adaptation, presentation, and reception of rhetorical events and experiences—from an encompassing set of ideas concerning the nature of human beings, political systems, relevant technology, and the relationships among the various arts and disciplines. Such philosophical enterprises can be found in several of the works we discuss later, including Plato, Aristotle, George Campbell, and Kenneth Burke.

The abiding question that has animated the rhetorician's quest since its origins in ancient Greece is this, "How and in what ways do humans constitute themselves, others, and the world through the use and abuse of communicative instruments (words, signs, symbols, gestures, rituals, etc.)?" Answers to this question have been various, some particular, others comprehensive, some theoretical, others philosophical. There are most as many theoretical and philosophical conceptions of rhetoric as there are significant theoretical and philosophical works. These varying conceptions reflect

shifting philosophical presuppositions, political conditions, and technology, but the question persists.

## BUILDING RHETORICAL THEORY OR PHILOSOPHY

The next task is to detail the principal ways in which different theorists and philosophers have pursued the quest-seeking knowledge and understanding of things rhetorical.

### The Beginnings

The most appropriate way to begin is at the beginning, over 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece. (Theorizing about communication did not begin in the 1940s and 1950s with the Hovland, Janis, and Kelly, 1953, studies.) Rhetorical theory began, as the traditional story goes, when courts were established to settle disputes over property rights, a situation in which relevant documents had been destroyed. Thus, it was necessary for the disputants to "invent" persuasive arguments based on probabilities. For instance, a rich man has no need to claim property which is not his own. I am a rich man; the property is rightfully mine. A poor man cannot be expected to win a case against a rich man unless his cause is just. I am a poor man; my cause is just; the property is rightfully mine. The effort to classify, to note the various structures of the argument presented before the courts, was the beginning of rhetoric as a serious intellectual line of inquiry. The initial move was to lay the grounds for theory (i.e., grounded theory) by establishing a grammar or terminology that would identify key elements in a communicative process. The first step was description: cataloging and categorizing the strategic moves. The second step was to explain or account for them. A third step was to consider their consequences (social, political, and pedagogical). Another step is to consider the enterprise in regard to related arts and disciplines.

### Building from "Grounds"

Three features of grounded theory are noteworthy here. First, it is descriptive but explanatory only in a limited way, and, of course, it is not predictive of human conduct. It is, in effect, but a first step. Second, naming or renaming the elements in a communication process is critical to theory building, it affects explanation and may signal the advent of a "new" theory or philosophy. For instance, it is one thing to use the terminology of Aristotle—ethos, pathos, and logos—and quite another to use the language of Burke—signs of constabulation, modes of identification. These different terms denote, among other things, different psychological presuppositions: Aristotle, a "rationalistic" definition of humans, and Burke, a Freudian conception of humans. Third, grounded theory is alive and well in the late 20th century.

Although Roderick P. Hart's *Verbal Style and the Presidency: A Computer-Based Analysis* (1984) is presented as "rhetorical history," it can be considered a superb example of the process of establishing grounds for theory. More than 400 speeches from Truman to Reagan were analyzed by computer using a program called "Diction." Actually, 800 messages were scanned, for indications of activity, optimism, certainty, and realism, also embellishment, self-reference, variety, familiarity, human interest, complexity, and symbolism. The result was an impressive, persuasive characterization of each of the presidents studied, and a second book, *The Sound of Leadership* (1987),

which continued the empirical approach of *Verbal Style*. Hart did not offer his works in a theoretical fashion, but the data are there, and his generalizations provide useful explanations of presidential speechmaking.

### Building from Observations of Practice

Because rhetoric, as discursive practice, became so vital to the life of ancient Greece through education as well as legal, political, and public address, it drew the attention of Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates (rhetoric's "greatest teacher" of the age). Each took a different approach to rhetoric. Isocrates' approach may be called practical phenomenological (as contrasted with philosophical [Husserlian] phenomenological). In an implied complaint against the kind of philosophy practiced in Plato's academy, he designated his work "practical philosophy." The keystone of Isocrates' approach was the observations made in this passage (which became central to the rise and influence of humane studies):

We ought, therefore, to think of the art of discourse just as we think of all the other arts, and not to form opposite judgments about similar things, nor show ourselves intolerant toward that power which, of all the faculties which belong to the nature of man, is the source of most of our blessings. For in the other powers which we possess . . . we are in no respect superior to other living creatures; . . . but because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish. For this it is which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust, and things honorable and base; and if it were not for these ordinances we should not be able to live with one another. It is by this also that we confute the bad and extol the good. Through this we educate the ignorant and appraise the wise; for the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul. With this faculty we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute and seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown. . . . [W]e shall find that none of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom. (1928, pp. 327-329)

The question is, "How did Isocrates know these things to be true?" The answer is that he observed everyday life. He did not try to look above, into, or below it. His approach was not eclectic, as is the wont of many contemporary textbook writers. He did not borrow precepts from humanists and empiricists (such as they were in his time). He devised his techniques of teaching rhetoric to accord with his foundational perception of human speech performance and what he saw as pragmatic, effective experience to achieve excellence in advancing the highest ideals of Athenian society.

Although his celebrated essay "The Rhetorical Situation" (1968) reflects Aristotelian realism, Lloyd F. Bitzer's approach to building rhetorical theory is like that of

Isocrates. By analyzing the nature of the occasions that give rise to rhetorical discourse, he is able to specify their constituents: exigence, audience, and constraints. How does he know that these are the constituents? Because they are there, not only for he to see them, but for anyone else who will look carefully. Later, we cite a work that uses Bitzer's observations, using metaphor as the beginning point.

### Building by "Borrowing"

Because we have made reference to "borrowing" in a way that may seem pejorative, we need to say that "borrowing" is a legitimate way to build theory. Earlier use of the word only implies that there is something dubious about texts that employ distinctions based on 18th-century faculty psychology—to inform, to convince, to persuade—without awareness that they philosophically imply that humans are really two kinds of beings, rational and irrational (moved by desire, suggestion, impressions, and so forth). There is also the complication of introducing models of communication implying that humans are some sort of machine. Our complaint is not that these views have nothing to offer to communication studies; it is when they are indiscriminately put together that we demur.

The sort of borrowing that makes sense is that which adopts conceptions from related disciplines across the academy that further our ability to explain communicative practices in a philosophical and consistent manner. The practices are quite familiar to communication theorists as they borrow extensively from social psychological models and constructs such as cognitive dissonance, compliance, gaming theories, and attitudes, beliefs, and values. Prime examples in rhetorical theory are ideology, culture, and episteme. To worry about borrowing such ideas, to fear co-optation by other disciplines, is to hold to the misconception that knowledge/understanding is compartmentalized along departmental lines. Recent examples of theory-building through "borrowing" include Michael McGee's "The Ideograph: A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology" (1980), Thomas B. Farrell's *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (1993), and Raymie E. McKerrow's "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Practice" (1984). Each of these works is a significant contribution to rhetorical theory; none, however, represent a philosophy of rhetoric. On the other hand, each of them, respectively, is founded on a philosophical position: materialism, Aristotelianism, and postmodern (Foucaultian) thought.

### Building from Observations of Ideal Reality

Plato's approach to rhetoric is philosophical through and through. This does not mean it is irrelevant to the "real world", only that it is based on philosophical presuppositions, most importantly Plato's metaphysical notions of ultimate reality. Whereas almost all other thinkers who write about rhetoric ground their works on ideas directly related to the phenomenological world, Plato thought in terms of the *noumenal* world, a world where truth, good, justice, and such existed eternally, fixed, and universal. Insofar as his philosophy derived its conceptions from this way of thinking, it can be called an ontological approach.

From this way of viewing the phenomenological world, rhetoric, which is always a matter of acting in the phenomenological, contingent, and quotidian world, had to be seen as not only deficient ethically, intellectually, and as a pedagogical art, but also as dangerous. The only salvation for rhetoric was for it to be informed by dialectical knowledge, that is, by philosopher kings. At the end of his dialogue *Phaedrus* (trans. 1961), Plato outlines what was called a "true" rhetoric. He demanded that the rhetorician know what he or she was talking about, the nature of the soul of the body politic, and the various uses of language which would implant a sense of sobriety and justice in the audience. Such a conception follows his idea of what a true art is. It must be like medicine: It should have a conception of the good (health), know the nature of the physical body, and apply the appropriate remedies by which the body could be restored and maintained in good health. There is a sense in which Plato outlined the first "science" of rhetoric and communication. It should also be noted how this conception was consonant with his ideal conception of the political state as imagined in the *Republic*.

Plato's modern day counterpart in rhetorical theory is Richard Weaver, who was, until his death, an intellectual leader of conservative thought in America. He began his most known work in rhetoric, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (1953), with an essay titled "The *haedrus* and the Nature of Rhetoric." There, he writes: "There is . . . no true rhetoric without dialectic, for the dialectic provides that basis of 'high speculation about nature' without which rhetoric in the narrower sense has nothing to work upon" (1953, p. 17). He also wrote that "rhetoric at its truest seeks to perfect humans by showing them better versions of themselves, links in that chain extending up toward the ideal, which only intellect can apprehend and only the soul have affection for" (1953, p. 25). Weaver as perhaps most closely identified with the view that "language is sermon" (1963/1970), always moving closer toward or farther away from truth and justice.

#### Building from Observations of Contingent Reality

Where Plato and Weaver were convinced of an ultimate reality, Aristotle and Burke were convinced, at least in regard to the nature and functions of rhetoric, that the phenomenal world is "real," however differently they perceived it. On the presupposition that rationality distinguished humans from all other animals, Aristotle conceived rhetoric as the capacity (shared to some extent by all humans) for observing the available means of persuasion in a given case; the means of persuasion as proofs, demonstrations that were logical, ethical, and emotional; and the aim or end of rhetorical discourse as influencing human judgment. His "method" for observing the nature and functions of rhetoric (as with his study of the other subjects which came within the purview of his philosophy) was an intellectual, intuitive, inductive process. For example, in determining the kinds of rhetorical discourse, he looked to where discursive practices occurred, saw that the key places of civic judgment were the assembly, the courtroom, and the agora where speeches of praise and blame were presented. He examined the addresses in each of these forums entelechially—that is, see what they were when they became what they were, not individually, but as a class. From this examination, he concluded that deliberative speeches concerned the nature and employed the topics of expediency and in expediency regarding war and peace, exports and imports, ways and means, and national defense; forensic speeches

concerned the past and employed the topics of accusation and defense, justice and injustice; and epideictic (ceremonial) speeches concerned the present, employing the topics of praise and censure, honor and dishonor. These determinations, it should be noted, were philosophical (analytical), not purely descriptive.

Contrary to Plato, Aristotle held that rhetoric was a useful art, because persons could be informed about the materials that composed their speeches, and precepts and principles could be systematically organized to teach students so that they could improve their capacity for observing appropriate persuasive proof for different situations. He also held that rhetoric had its own "logic," an epistemology attuned to reasoned probabilities which represented the only possible foundation for making civic decisions where absolute or scientific knowledge was unavailable. He also disagreed with Plato's view of the relationship of rhetoric and ethics, maintaining that while rhetoric did teach an ability to argue opposite conclusions, it was "absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with the limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason, when the use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs." Aristotle has often been held to the idea that rhetoric is amoral. In fact, he wrote: "What makes a man a 'sophist' is not his faculty, but his moral purpose." Most important here, however, is his admonition: "We must not make people believe what is wrong" (Aristotle, 1954, 23–24). The significance of these views, at this point, is that they show critical differences between Aristotle's and Plato's positions on rhetoric; they also show how different philosophical presuppositions lead to these differences. Where Plato's philosophy is consonant with his conception of an ideal republic, Aristotle's philosophy is consonant with Athenian democracy, and, in many ways, with our own.

So far we have presented theorists and philosophers in such a way as to give the impression that their thinking follows some linear and systematic movement from presuppositions to precepts and principles, from sudden insights to elaborated constructs. Theory-building rarely, if ever, happens according to these happy, snappy procedures. We also may have suggested that it is always revolutionary rather than evolutionary, when the reverse is most often the case. We bring up these matters at this time because we are about to characterize the thinking of one of the most creative writers ever to grace the panoply of rhetorical philosophers: Kenneth Burke. We will juxtapose his position to Aristotle's, because he acknowledged his indebtedness to the Stagira's philosophy (even though his own philosophy is based on different political and psychological presuppositions), because it facilitates clarification without too much distortion, and because comparison of their thinking on rhetoric vividly demonstrates how different origins leads to different offerings. This last point may be better put this way: we can see what a difference real differences can make in knowledge and understanding, what justifies claiming that something "new" has been generated—like a rhetorical theory.

Earlier we noted that the introduction of a "new" grammar is a sign that a new theory or philosophy is present. This is certainly the case in regard to Burke's opus, which features a major book entitled *A Grammar of Motives* (1945). Only after this work appeared was his next major book, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1955), written and published. Burke agreed with Aristotle that human relations, including rhetorical transactions, were of the contingent, quotidian world. But where Aristotle held that what distin-

ished humans from other animals was their rationality, Burke's "Definition of Man" (1968) claimed that the propensity to the use and abuse of symbols was the essential distinguishing characteristic of human nature. Burke also claimed that rhetorical experience found its end or aim not in judgment (as Aristotle had it) but in identification; that proofs were not the instruments of rhetoric, but signs of consubstantiation; and that the function of rhetoric was not persuasion, but inducement. Where Aristotle's rhetoric grew out of epistemological presuppositions, Burke's emanated from ontological presuppositions. Aristotle's rhetoric served the Athenian democracy; Burke's rhetoric was intended to serve a socialistic community (understanding that socialism is used here with a small *s*). Aristotle got his ideas about rhetoric from an entelechial analysis of rhetorical practices; Burke got his, once he made it explicit in the *Grammar*, from what he called the "pentad," which was, interestingly, an analog of Aristotle's ten categories for determining the nature of things. Burke's questions of what kind of actor was performing, what kind of scene provided the context for the act, what kind of purpose animated the performance, what kind of action named the performance, and what kind of agency was employed in the performance was designed to reveal the motive inherent in any human relations. In other words, Burke was interested in how humans use and abuse symbols in attempts to move them to share conceptions of the identity of others in community, and the world itself. Like Aristotle, Burke advanced a normative philosophy of rhetoric. Aristotle formulated conceptions which would elevate knowledge, reason, and rational judgment; Burke's aim is revealed in his motto, "Ad bellum purificandum" ("Toward the purification of war"). The "purification" idea is basic to Burke's philosophy and criticism; it can be succinctly summarized as "if we must have conflict, let it be verbal conflict." Both were realists of a sort—Aristotle being a "logical realist," and Burke a "linguistic realist," somewhat in the same vein as Hans-Georg Gadamer. Contrasting the views of Aristotle and Burke in this way stresses differences; however, it is more the case that Burke simply expands and subsumes Aristotle's thought.

### Building Theory by Analogy

One of the obvious conclusions to be drawn from this analysis of Aristotle and Burke is that different definitions of humanity inevitably lead to different philosophies of rhetoric. However, it is also true that one can build and use theories without such a radical, evolutionary move. This can be seen in theories generated through analogy. Analogy plays a significant role in all sorts of thinking (indicating similarities and differences which lead to significant new constructs), but what we are pointing to here is not just any sort of analogy or piecemeal borrowing. Our interest is in the large-scale relating of two phenomena. Particularly useful examples can be found in the works of Stephen Toulmin (1958) and Chaïm Perelman with L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). These authors reconstruct argumentation theory to accord with a jurisprudential model. There are important differences in their thinking, but on this point, they are as one: their work is informed throughout by an extended analogy between jurisprudence and ordinary practical communication.

Toulmin's theory began with a critique of formal logic, in regard especially to ethical argument. His interest has been in reasoning *per se*. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's philosophy, which held that rhetoric should be the study of discursive means by which people are brought to adherence, is also concerned with reasoning, but in terms of the relationship between arguer and audience. Where Toulmin offers a schematic for laying

out the anatomy of a line of argument, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca delineate the structures of practical reasoning and propose a way to determine better argument by its ability to persuade the most demanding audience that one might imagine. Toulmin's measure of an argument is its ability to withstand appropriate criticism. Again, it is important to note that these speculations about reason are not just "armchair" productions, they are serious attempts to better understand how arguments naturally appear and can be assessed in the real world.

### Building Theory Through Metaphor

Closely related to the use of analogy in building theory is the use of metaphor. Beginning with a biological metaphor: that communicative processes and practices affect the life of ideas in the minds of people, Fisher (1970) proposed a reconstruction of rhetorical genre. Instead of a category system based on judgments rendered in different sites of civic address, or a system based on 18th-century faculty psychology, a scheme was advanced that noted categories in which discourse functions to give life or acceptance to certain ideas (affirmation); to revitalize the life or acceptance of ideas (reaffirmation); to restore the health of ideas (purification); to undermine ideas (subversion). Later, another type of discourse was identified, which attempts not only to undermine ideas but to put into question any idea that insists things can be better (evisceration).

This example of theorizing not only shows how metaphor can be generative, it also demonstrates how theories can build on one another. Earlier, we outlined Bitzer's (1968) work on the constituents of rhetorical situation, which are constant from one situation to another. Fisher's motive view of communication agrees that there are situations that are rhetorical, but insists there are different kinds of rhetorical situations which may be better understood by employing Burke's concept of motives as names for situations. For example, reaffirmation not only names the overall motive of Lincoln at Gettysburg, to revitalize the cause of the war, it also reveals that the scene, agency, purpose, and act were consonant with this motive; that is, the scene (the state of mind of the audience: Why are we fighting?), the form and content of the address (which formed an archetypal pattern of rebirth), the purpose (to revivify the principle on which the war was fought), and the act itself were all elements of a reaffirmation. That the motive view of communication has not altered the approach of composition textbook writers since its appearance in 1970 is testimony, perhaps, to the truism that old habits of thinking die hard, that new ideas are painful to contemplate and hard work to implement—inertia is a powerful restraint on change.

### Building from Naturalistic Observations of Reality

One final approach to building a philosophy of rhetoric should be recognized. George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Bitzer, 1963) is, he maintains in his introduction, founded on a tolerable sketch of the human mind and the radical principles on which it operates (1963, p. xliii). His understanding of these principles came from several sources: Humean and Lockean thought, "common sense philosophy," and, importantly,

faculty psychology and David Hartley's associationism. Eighteenth-century philosophers attempted to understand the workings of the human mind by viewing mental operations as a function of the various capacities or "faculties." Reflecting this view, Campbell categorized the types and purposes of discourse with reference to the faculties that they sought to engage in the minds of audiences: to inform (the understanding), to convince (the intellect), to persuade (the will), to please (the imagination). There is much more to his philosophy of rhetoric than this, but Campbell's use of faculty psychology is sufficient to show how rigorously applied presuppositions may lead to necessary conclusions about communication.

There is no contemporary counterpart to Campbell's *Philosophy*, although several scholars have seen a relationship between his work and Burke's. Another whose work has been related to Campbell's is that of I. A. Richards, titled, like Campbell's, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Bitzer, 1936/1963). Their works are actually quite different. Although each wanted to accommodate the best scientific thinking of his age, Campbell was concerned with the nature and functions of all sorts of discourse; Richards, strongly influenced by positivist thought, was concerned with "the study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (1936, p. 5). Campbell's and Richards' works each demonstrate how rhetorical theory is always being reformulated in response to major advances in other fields and disciplines. It is not difficult to imagine that if research in artificial intelligence, particularly schema theory, advances beyond its present state, someone will come forward to reconceptualize rhetoric on this new foundation.

### From Theory to Philosophy

There is one more mode of theory or philosophy building that must be recounted before this survey is completed. It shows how theory construction begins with critique, leads to refinement, and, after reflection, results in a philosophical position. In 1963, Karl Wallace argued that the substance of rhetoric is "good reasons" (1963, pp. 239-249). In the process he proposed a conception of good reasons. Wayne Booth, in 1974, wrote a book entitled *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, in which he advanced his own notion of good reasons. In 1978, Fisher critiqued the conceptions of Wallace and Booth, and formulated another definition of good reasons, one that subsumed those of Wallace and Booth. It should be noted that "subsumption" is often the mode of the progression of ideas in the social sciences and humanities, rather than by "accretion," as in the natural sciences.

Six years after Fisher wrote "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons" (1978), during which time he elaborated the idea in several articles, tested it in classes, read much more, and reflected, he came up with the proposal of the narrative paradigm (1984, pp. 1-22). The idea progressed through several more publications and eventuated in his book *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (1987). At this point, theory evolved into philosophy. The move that enabled this development was specifically questioning what one must assume in order to accept the construct of good reasons that had been advanced. The answer was: one had to see human beings as *homo narrans*, storytellers. Here again, "subsumption" was at work. The "new" idea did not deny Aristotle's notion of the rational capacity of human beings, or Burke's concept of humans as symbol using/abusing animals; it incorporated both. What may be worth remarking here is, that in order to build theory, one does not need to destroy what has gone before. The

fact of the matter is that new theory or philosophy does not arise without context and predecessors who "built" the foundation for a continual rebuilding.

### CONCLUSION

We have covered much ground in this chapter, making distinctions between knowledge and understanding, theorizing and philosophizing; relating the work of various communication theorists; identifying the major ways used in generating theories and philosophies: phenomenological, grounded research, borrowing, assuming ultimate reality, assuming contingent reality (epistemologically and ontologically), analogy, metaphor, naturalistic presuppositions, and evolutionary processes. A crucial conclusion that may be drawn from this is that the first—and last—test of a theory or philosophy is how well it accounts for the lived experience that it purports to explain. In the presence of an explanation that "fails" this test, the invitation or the demand of the theorist/philosopher is to formulate a better explanation.

Twenty years ago, this invitation was recognized and productively accepted by a number of feminist scholars, who argued that traditional histories and theories of rhetoric have failed to adequately represent and explain the communicative experience of women (see chapter 31, this volume). The essay that appeared to mark this acceptance and energized the work of others was Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron" (1973). The initial move among feminist scholars was to remedy the neglect of women in historical-critical studies. Much progress has been made in discovering and providing significant texts for public address studies (Campbell, 1989; Cooper, 1992/1988; Martin, 1987). Most recently, feminists have more directly concerned themselves with rhetorical theory. Karen E. Altman, for instance, argues that the traditional conception of rhetorical knowledge is gender biased, that "the 'body of knowledge' is a myopic metaphor. A more farsighted one is 'bodies of knowledge'" (Altman, 1992, p. 487). And Carol Blair critiques the traditional modes of organizing rhetorical theories according to influence or systems. She proposes, alternatively, a "critical history" approach, one that focuses on "text, particularity, change, and criticism," and which is always open to new ideas (1992, p. 418.) As yet, no explicit, elaborated feminist rhetorical theory has appeared—but the invitation remains open.

At this point, we are charged by the editors to speculate on future trends. We are tempted to say that what we have covered indicates that the fascination with how and in what ways humans create and recreate one another, their communities, and the world, continues unabated, indeed it has accelerated in recent years. One of the causes of the resurgence of interest in rhetoric has to do with the ongoing struggle between modern and postmodern thought. A key question in this struggle is whether or not there can be any sort of knowledge that can assure belief or human action. Rhetoric's reply, historically, is yes. In his essay "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric," Hans Blumenberg (1987) wrote of the role of rhetoric in guiding human choice in situations where evidence is incomplete, arguing that "The axiom of all rhetoric is the principle of insufficient reason." Yet, as Blumenberg noted, it is important to remember that acting out of necessity on insufficient evidence does not imply a rejection of rationality:

[T]he principle of insufficient reason is not to be confused with a demand that we forgo reasons. . . . One has to be cautious about making accusations of irrationality in situations where endless, infinitely extensive procedures have to be excluded; in the realm of reasoning about practical activities in life, it can be more rational to accept something on insufficient grounds than to insist on a procedure modeled on that of science, and it is more rational to do this than to disguise decisions that have already been made in arguments that are scientific in form. . . . In the realm in which the principle of insufficient reason holds, there are rational decision rules that do not resemble science. (1987, pp. 447–448)

The rhetorician's task is to identify, and occasionally help to reformulate, the rational decision rules that guide communication and judgment in the groups, cultures, and societies that we study. In a world without foundations—God, logic, science, language, history, and so forth—rhetorical theory and philosophy provides guidance for reconstructing reason, reinserting ethics and practical wisdom into the fabric of private and public life, and restoring a meaningful, useful conception of the public and its culture. A major prospect for future inquiry would be to pursue modes of communication that can ameliorate the conflicts arising out of religious, tribal, ethnic, gender, and economic class differences which appear to have replaced the foundations that served to ground authority for belief and action in centuries past. These differences act as anchors for self-identity and worldviews that must be transcended if conflicts are to be resolved peacefully. What rhetorical strategies and tactics can do this? That is a question eminently worth working on for the foreseeable future.

By connecting past and present writers throughout this chapter, we strove to reveal the heritage of rhetorical thinking, to indicate where it is and where it appears to be going. But then, one cannot predict the future, one can only anticipate and fashion adaptations influenced by new practices, theory, and technology. There is, of course, still the matter of genius.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Bizzell, P., & Herzberg, B. (Eds.). (1990). *The rhetorical tradition: Readings from classical times to the present*. Boston: St. Martin's Press. An anthology of works from the traditional rhetorical canon that ranges from the Sophists to contemporary literary criticism, with excellent connecting chapters that provide historical biographies, discussions of the significance of the anthologized texts, and comprehensive references. Very useful for both beginning and advanced students.
- Blackman, M. (Ed.). (1987). *Rhetoric: Essays on invention and discovery*. Woodbridge, CT: Ox Bow Press. Of special import is McKeon's essay among others in this volume.
- Bryant, D. C. (1953). Rhetoric: Its function and scope. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39, 401–424. A seminal discussion of the nature of rhetoric by an influential early scholar in the field of speech communication. Bryant assigns a four-fold status to rhetoric: as an instrumental discipline concerned with pragmatic communication management, as a literary study concerned with style and semantics, as a philosophical study concerned with methods of investigation and inquiry, and as a social and political study of the influences of language in society. His definition of the function of rhetoric as that of "adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas" (p. 413) has become a commonplace.
- Conley, T. (1990). *Rhetoric in the European tradition*. New York: Longman. A thoughtful overview of the history of rhetorical theory that devotes attention to aspects of the tradition (such as Byzantine rhetoric) neglected in most other survey works. Conley distinguishes four basic types or models of rhetoric:

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dialectical, problematical, controversial, and operational. Though it gives too little space to contemporary rhetorics, Conley's expert discussion of classical and medieval theory makes this work well worth reading.

Corbett, E. P. J. (1990). *Classical rhetoric for the modern student* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford. An excellent adaptation of classical rhetorical theory. Although intended as a textbook in English and composition, its perspective is broad enough to be useful to communication scholars; the book includes lengthy applications of rhetorical concepts to a wide variety of literary and political texts. Corbett's discussion of figures of speech is comprehensive and useful, especially given the usual dryness of most treatments of this topic.

Howell, W. S. (1956). *Logic and rhetoric in England, 1500–1700*. The authoritative study of rhetoric in the English Renaissance.

Ijseeling, S. (1976). *Rhetoric and philosophy in conflict: An historical survey*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. This work is a thematic history of the conflict between rhetoric and philosophy that extends from the ancient Greeks and Romans, through the church fathers of late antiquity and the medieval period, to the Italian humanists, to early modern philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche, and finally to Freud and Heidegger. Ijseeling takes the perspective that "whoever embarks upon reflection on language necessarily confronts the problems of rhetoric" (p. 4).

Kennedy, G. (1963). *The art of persuasion in Greece*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. The three books by Kennedy (one of the great classical scholars of the rhetorical tradition) listed here provide exhaustive and fascinating accounts of the development of rhetorical thought. Required reading for students of the history of rhetoric and philosophy.

Kennedy, G. (1972). *The art of persuasion in the Roman world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kennedy, G. (1980). *Classical rhetoric and its Christian and secular tradition from ancient to modern times*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Murphy, J. J. (1974). *Rhetoric in the middle ages: A history of rhetorical theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press. A comprehensive survey of medieval rhetoric that links its development to social, cultural, and religious trends.

Ong, W. J. (1988). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. London: Routledge. A thought-provoking study of the relationship of technology and rhetorical theory that ought to be of immense utility to all communication scholars. This book provides the best introduction to Ong's theory of the evolution of communicative cultures as constituted by oral, written, printed, and electronic media.

Vickers, B. (1988). *In defence of rhetoric*. Oxford: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press. A polemical history that serves as a useful corrective to the abuses of rhetoric from Plato to modern literary theory. Vickers details the impact of rhetorical theory on a number of other arts, including music, painting, and literature.

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## 17

## Persuasion

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Implicitly or explicitly, persuasion underlies much of mass and human communication theory and research. Persuasion is a special case of the larger study of social influence. Social influence may be defined as creating, changing, or reinforcing the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors of another person. Persuasion involves an intentional communicative act that excludes force (i.e., coercion). At a minimum a successful persuasive attempt generates some type of cognitive, affective, or behavioral modification in the target. In the following discussion we begin by defining several important terms and types of persuasion research, examine different research paradigms, explore the variables that influence persuasive strategies, and offer a sample study.

## DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

The concepts of *attitude*, *belief*, and *behavior* are inextricably linked to persuasion. *Attitudes* are evaluative tendencies regarding some feature of the environment and can typically be phrased in terms of like and dislike or favor and disfavor (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). *Beliefs* are assessments that something is or is not the case. Thus,