DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 072 485 CS 500 133

AUTHOR McGaffey, Ruth; And Others
TITLE Philosophy and Rhetoric.
INSTITUTION Georgia Speech Communication Association.
PUB DATE 72
NOTE 35p.
JOURNAL CIT Georgia Speech Communications Journal; v4 n1 p5-71 Fall 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Analytical Criticism; Aristotelian Criticism; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Ethical Values; *Ethics; Logic; *Persuasive Discourse; *Philosophy; *Rhetoric

ABSTRACT

This publication contains three articles centered on the theme of philosophy and rhetoric. In the first article, "Rhetorical Probability and the Search For Truth," Ruth McGaffey submits that in a free society, decision-making is more often than not based on probability, the subject matter of rhetoric, rather than certainty. Robert F. Holton in the second article, "The Issue of Morality for the Rhetorician and Philosopher," discusses the relationship between rhetoric, philosophy, and morality in terms of the purpose of rhetorical training, the allowable methods of persuasion, and the nature of arguments used. In the third article, "'Fitness of Response' in Bitzer's Concept of Rhetorical Discourse," Ralph S. Pomeroy first reviews Lloyd Bitzer's concept of rhetorical discourse, and explains what he considers are ambiguities in the theory, and finally reprints a dialogue between himself and Bitzer on the subject. (Author/RN)

VOLUME IV FALL, 1972 NUMBER 1

GEORGIA SPEECH COMMUNICATION JOURNAL

CONTENTS

We invite you to submit articles for publication in the Georgia Speech Communication Journal. Articles should be sent to the editor. Inquiries about subscriptions should be addressed to Clarence McCord, Landrum Box 8091, Georgia Southern College, Statesboro, Georgia 30458.

RHETORICAL PROBABILITY

AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Ruth McGaffey

Twenty-five hundred years ago Plato denied that rhetoric was an art, and defined it as a species of flattery, a sham counterpart of justice. It had, he said, no subject matter of its own, no truth to present, and was concerned solely with belief and illusion. To Plato, rhetoric was a word which implied trickery, immorality, deceit, and superficiality. It was a perversion of discourse because the rhetorician was willing to settle for probability.

Others, both scientists and philosophers, have charged rhetoricians, teachers of rhetoric, debate coaches and practical persuaders with a lack of concern for truth. Rhetorical critics have been criticized for their analysis of technique rather than evaluation of ideas.

Many have risen to the defense of rhetoric. Most of these defenses have been an attempt to answer Plato. One modern writer has pointed out that, even in the best of these, the synthesis of philosophy and rhetoric is apt to be uneasy;[1] and George Kennedy has stated in his discussion of the conflict between philosophers and rhetoricians that "modern readers tend to sympathize with philosophy in its dispute with rhetoric. In the former discipline they see devotion to truth, intellectual honesty, depth of perception, consistency and sincerity; in the latter, verbal dexterity, empty pomposity, triviality, moral ambivalence, and a desire to achieve arbitrary ends by any means."[2]

This essay will deal specifically with the concept of probability as attacked by the philosophers and scientists, and as defended by the rheto-

ricians. It will be submitted that in a free society, decision-making based on probability makes up the greater part of practical discourse. It will further be suggested that, since rhetoric by its nature is concerned with practical discourse, it is inevitably based on probability rather than certainty. If this is true, rhetoricians should be concerned with developing and teaching a logic which is uniquely applicable to that concept. Finally it will be argued that, while the subject matter of rhetoric is probability, the study of the use of that concept in choice-making behavior is an investigation into the nature of man and thus is a search for truth.

In our society we have rejected decision-making by edict or violence. Nor are we willing to have our decisions made by a group of "philosopher kings" who claim to have possession of the truth. Thus we have adopted democratic decision-making and the adversary system as a way of life. Such a process relies now, as it did in classical Greece, on making decisions without complete knowledge. As Oliver Wendell Holmes put it when he articulated his famous "market-place theory" of free speech, "Every year if not every day we have to wager our salvation upon prophecy based upon imperfect knowledge."[3] That this is true is obvious. Sometimes the facts which might be used as a basis for decisions are not known or cannot be discovered. Does the use of marijuana have harmful physical and psychological effects? Will the Supersonic Transport harm the environment? Does exposure to pornography result in anti-social behavior? Do oral contraceptives present a danger to health? Perhaps research will eventually answer these questions. In the meantime, however, it may be necessary to formulate policy based on probable effect. By means of discourse the evidence is weighed and the answer which seems most probable is temporarily accepted.

Even, however, if these factual questions were answered, the policy decision might be unclear. In

many cases there will also be a conflict in values. Is it more important to be able to move people very quickly from place to place or to slightly reduce future air and water pollution? Is it more important to control population or to eliminate a small amount of individual risk? Is freedom to read or view pornography for the majority more or less important than the effect of such reading and viewing on a minority? Is law and order more important than liberty and dissent? Is full utilization of our resources more important than protecting the environment? While some may argue that there is an absolute hierarchy of values which should determine these policy decisions, it seems quite clear that such a hierarchy of truth is not universally accepted or self-evident. Thus we make these policy decisions on the basis of which value is chosen by the greatest number.

Likewise we must employ probable truth in our system of justice until the time arrives when all criminals confess their guilt, some magic test has been found which conclusively establishes it, or we have developed a perfect society in which crime does not exist.

Much practical discourse, then, by the nature of its content must be based on what is or will be "probably true." It is this discourse that is the inherent province of the rhetorician. Douglas Ehninger wrote, "Abstractly considered, a system geared to the Platonic ideal of communicating truth in order to make men better is to be ranked above one devoted to the ornamenting of language or the tricks of persuasion, and without doubt every 'good' rhetoric has as its ultimate purpose the communication of 'truth.' But, at the same time, a rhetoric which conceives of truth as a transcendent entity and requires a perfect knowledge of the soul as a condition for its successful transmittal, automatically rules itself out as an instrument for doing the practical work of the world, and for this reason is less preferable than a system geared to the

communication of contingent truths as established by probable rather than apodeictic proofs."[4]

That rhetoric is indeed concerned with practical discourse is evident from a cursory glance at some of the definitions of the subject which have been presented by rhetoricians. Aristotle, of course, defined rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in a given case the available means of persuasion."[5] Donald Bryant wrote that "rhetoric is the rationale of informative and suasory discourse."[6] R. C. Jebb defined rhetoric as "the art of using language in such a way as to produce a desire impression on the hearer or reader."[7] Robert C. Oliver in his introduction to Natanson and Johnstone's Rhetoric, Philosophy and Argumentation said that "the rhetorical procedure is to determine what the speakers wish to accomplish in influencing the behavior of particular listeners concerning a specific subject."[8] Even for those writers associated with the "new rhetoric" whose emphasis is on language and symbol systems, the end is often persuasive and practical. Virginia Holland states that "for Burke the immediate and characteristic purpose of rhetoric is to effect persuasion, or to help the critic identify himself with others; its matter is characteristically the language symbol, and its method of handling this material is characteristically a strategy."[9] Ehninger defines a "rhetoric" as "any organized, consistent, coherent way of talking about practical discourse in any of its forms or modes."[10]

Perhaps one of the most interesting statements about the nature of rhetoric is that of Lloyd Bitzer. He states:

> A work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but

> by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive.[11]

If practical discourse must be based on probability, and if rhetoric is the study of such practical discourse, it seems obvious that such a study must be concerned also with probability. What, then, is the basis of the long dispute between philosophers and rhetoricians? George Kennedy points out that the disagreement between Plato and the rhetoricians, particularly those labeled as sophists was not "simply an historical contingency, but reflects a fundamental cleavage between two irreconciliable ways of viewing the world."[12] The early sophists were activists or teachers of activists whose aims were practical. Some like Protagoras were philosophical relativists. Protagoras believed that absolute truth was unknowable and perhaps nonexistent. He thought that truth must be approximated "in each individual time and place somewhat in the manner that the just is determined in a court of law."[13] If this is true rhetoric is justifiable and in fact necessary, for only when two sides are persuasively presented can the choice between them be intelligently made--thus the adversary system. Kennedy points out that this view was at times a greater liberalizing force than that of the philosophers. It is perhaps responsible for the principle of law that anyone, however "clear the proof against him, has a right to present his case in the best light possible."[14] It has long been noted that the theory and practice of rhetoric flourished most in periods of democracy and least under tyranny.

Rhetoricians, then, have historically dealt with things of the world and have thought that, not

only was the truth perhaps nonexistent in the Platonic sense, but values might vary and reality could be changed. Philosophers, on the other hand, beginning at least with Socrates, taught that truth was absolute and knowable. Thus it was clear that rhetoric was either unimportant or potentially dangerous since it could present possible untruths in an attractive manner. To them there was a clear distinction between dialectic, the question and answer method of finding the one right answer, and rhetoric. The latter seemed unconcerned with universal truth and only interested in a persuasive answer for a given moment. Kennedy concludes his discussion of these two diametrically different ways of looking at reality by saying:

> There have always been those, especially among philosophers and religious thinkers, who have emphasized goals and absolute standards and have talked much about truth, where there have been as many others to whom these concepts seem shadowy or imaginary and who find the only certain reality in the process of life and the present moment. In general, rhetoricians and orators, with certain distinguished exceptions, have held the latter view, which is the logical, if unconscious, basis of their common view of art as a response to a rhetorical challenge unconstrained by external principles. The difference is not only that between Plato and Gorgias, but between Demosthenes and Isocrates, Virgil and Ovid, Dante and Petrarch, and perhaps Milton and Shakesphere.[15]

Chaim Perelman points out that this conflict between rhetoric and philosophy derived not only from a difference in ways of looking at the world, but also "represented the opposition between two ideal forms of life: the active life and the contem-

plative life."[16] The ideal of the contemplative life was to search for truth about any given subject, the order and nature of things, and about divinity. Once this truth was discovered, the philosopher was supposed to be able to work out the practical rules of action. These rules were to flow directly from knowledge. That of course assumed that this knowledge was available if one could only discover it. The rhetorician, on the other hand, tried to teach his students how to be effective in the active life of the city.

Granting each discipline its basic assumptions, a good case can be made for each. If one assumes that there is somewhere an entity called absolute truth, then logically the proper study of mankind is to find it. Trevor Melia writes:

> The belief that there exists in the realm of human affairs Truth (capital T), and that Truth is, with the expenditure of systematic effort, obtainable, and that once obtained it is certifiable, and that once certified it is communicable, is a noble belief. It is the Magna Carta for a science of society and, it seems to me, it is the death sentence of a humanistic rhetoric. To the extent that the Truth about human affairs is discoverable, it becomes incumbent on the man of good will to accept nothing less. And for the man bent on the search for Truth, the contingent must surely be the <u>merely</u> contingent. Rhetoric, the art which deals <u>par excellance</u> with contingencies, would earn the title <u>mere</u> rhetoric.[17]

If, however, one believes that Truth about human affairs is not obtainable, practical decisions must be based on probability, contingencies and opinions, and the study of the use and improvement of discourse based on these contingencies becomes important. Further, if the assumption is made that

no one person or group of people knows or has found this Truth, one is left solving problems by exploring alternatives and applying the solution which is the most persuasive to the most people. Thus Homes' marketplace theory becomes relevant and justifiable. It then can be argued that the best way of assuring practical "truth" is to present both sides of a proposition as persuasively as possible, or as John Stuart Mill wrote in On Liberty, "Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right.... The beliefs which we have most warrant for have no safeguards to rest on but a standing invitation to the world to prove them unfounded."[18]

Periodically, society has been dominated by groups or individuals thought by themselves and their audiences to have possession of the truth. Since, during these periods, the church or the effective ruler of the state made the important decisions, rhetoric as a study of practical decision-making activity was irrelevant and thus became a study of style and ornamentation. This happened much of the time from the decline of the Roman Republic until the Renaissance. Then a different style of philosophical investigation was introduced which was to profoundly effect not only philosophy, but science as well. Descartes argued in The Discourse on the Method that everything which was only plausible should be taken for false. This philosopher made the "self-evident" the mark of reason and considered valid only demonstrations which starting from much self-evident ideas, extended by means of proofs, the self-evidence of the premises to the derived conclusions. Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca explain that this geometric type of reasoning "was the model proposed to philosophers desirous of constructing a system of thought which might attain to the dignity of a science."[19] It

was thought that a rational science could not be based on probable opinion. Instead, it had to formulate a system of "necessary propositions" which every rational human being would accept. Agreement would be inevitable. Disagreement would thus indicate error. Descartes said, "Whenever two men come to opposite decisions about the same matter, one of them at least must certainly be in the wrong, and apparently there is not even one of them who knows; for if the reasoning of one was sound and clear he would be able to lay it before the other as finally to succeed in convincing his understanding also."[20]

Descartes' ideas have resulted in works of logic devoted to methods of proof which are basically deductive and divorced from the proofs used in human sciences. It will be argued subsequently that this removal of philosophy and science from methods relevant to human problems in areas of probability requires the formulation of a science of argumentation which specifically deals with a logic of probability. In explaining the approach of the logician, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write:

> The logician is indeed inspired by the Cartesian ideal and feels at ease only in studying those proofs which Aristotle styled analytic, since all other methods do not manifest the same characteristic of necessity. This tendency has been strongly reinforced during the last century, a period in which, under the influence of mathematical logicians, logic has been limited to formal logic, that is to the study of methods of proof used in the mathematical sciences. The result is that reasonings extraneous to the domain of the purely formal elude logic altogether, and, as a consequence, they also elude reason. This reason, which Descartes hoped would, at least in principle, solve all problems set to man the solution of

> which is already possessed by the divine mind, has become more and more limited in its jurisdiction, to the point that whatever eludes reduction to the formal presents it with unsurmountable difficulties.[21]

As philosophy became more and more mathematical, science became more and more empirical. Scientists, too, had a quarrel with rhetoricians. They claimed to be interested only in propositions which conformed to the facts. This concept of "truth" did not rely on self-evident premises, but on controlled observation. While the results of such observation could certainly prove valuable to the rhetorician in somewhat limiting his reliance on probability, the careful control possible in a laboratory was not comparable to most practical situations, and thus the methods used by scientists were not always appropriate to the rhetorician. Philosophers were quick to point out that, although it appeared that science was one realm of thought in which strictness of inference was prevalent and subjectivity was avoided, such inferences were themselves based on premises which may not be probable. Raphael Demos wrote in 1932:

> . . . it would be a mistake to suppose that in science, inference is a self-dependent process, in which a general background is irrelevant; scientific inference is valid only within the framework of certain general ideas, like that of the objective reality of matter, of the existence of some measure of order in nature, and of the validity of quantitative methods. Thus. . .scientific evidence is without force to the mystic who rejects sense perception. Science seems to be certain of its results, because it accepts without question the general presuppositions upon which those results are based. Like all special disciplines, science has a way of disposing of whatever is essentially

> doubtful in its realm, by simply refusing to envisage it as a problem at all, and accepting it as certain from the start.[22]

Other philosophers argued that while the methods of science and mathematics could be applied to certain situations, their existence did not justify if all actual human problems could be solved by these methods. Chaim Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca use this argument in The New Rhetoric in their call for a practical logic--argumentation. They write, "But if essential problems involving questions of a moral, social, political, philosophical, or religious order by their very nature elude the methods of the mathematical and natural sciences, it does not seem reasonable to reject all the techniques of reasoning characteristic of deliberation and discussion--in a word, of argumentation."[23]

This defense of a rhetorical approach by philosophers is indicative of a change in the long dispute between the two disciplines. There has been a tendency in recent years for philosophers and rhetoricians to cooperate. This appears due largely to a change in modern philosophy. Perelman writing in the Journal of Philosophy and Rhetoric points out that rationalism, empiricism and romanticism could not consider rhetoric important or valid. However, "with philosophies of life, action, and value and leading up to pragmatism" philosophy had reacted against absolutism. Robert Oliver further states that in recent years "students of meaning" have come to general agreement on several conceptions which bring philosophy and rhetoric into a closer partnership. These conceptions discussed by Oliver include such things as the idea that the mind comes into meaningful relationships with the environment through a process of symbolic transformations, the idea that what we notice in the environment and how we react to it are both predetermined to a degree by how we are prepared to notice that type of object, and very importantly, the idea that meaning does not come from

a given symbolic pattern, but from the response of the observer. All of these conceptions tend to make for less consideration of truth as a Platonic idea and more consideration of various interpretations of reality and various world views.[24]

A clear statement of this attitude was that of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in The New Rhetoric. The statement begins, "We combat uncompromising and irreducible philosophical oppositions presented by all kinds of absolutis. . ." After several paragraphs of elaboration the statement concludes, "Instead of basing our philosophy on definitive, unquestionable truths, our starting point is that men and groups of men adhere to opinions of all sorts with a variable intensity, which we can only know by putting it to the test. These beliefs are not always self-evident, and they rarely deal with clear and distinct ideas. The most generally accepted beliefs remain implicit and unformulated for a long time, for more often than not it is only on the occasion of a disagreement as to the consequences resulting from them that the problem of their formulations or more precise definition arises."[25]

These two European philosophers call for an analysis of forms of reasoning which can be used in situations where decisions cannot be based on objective truth. They suggest that the alternative to developing this kind of practical, audience-oriented dialectic is either adherence to some universally valid truth or recourse to suggestion and violence.[26]

That position is consistent with the one taken in this essay. It has been submitted here that practical discourse is the province of the rhetorician, and that by its nature such discourse takes place in a context of probability. Thus it would seem desirable to insure that speakers and listeners are trained in the use and criticism of forms of reasoning practical for such discourse. Dovre and Anderson in the introduction to Readings in Argumentation put the case this way:

> The continuing strength of a democratic society depends on a public forum of competing arguments by informed, responsible and skilled citizen advocates. This is especially true today in an era when our world and nation are challenged by a greater number, complexity, and scope of social issues; when we are bombarded from all sides by a smoke screen of mass persuasion; and when the amount of knowledge and information accessible to us burgeons daily. The study of argumentation is based on the premises that thoughtful deliberation, intensive research, rational analysis, and the testing of ideas through reasoned discourse provides a vital means of conflict resolution and decision making; and that the student who firmly grasps principles of argumentation theory is best equipped to become a responsible and competent practitioner of argumentative discourse.[27]

If it is desirable to train advocates and citizen audiences in applied logic based on a realistic and reasonable probability, it is logical that this kind of teaching should be based on tests of reasoning and evidence that are applicable to situations of probability. Gidon Gottlieb in The Logic of Choice points out that deductive, inductive, and scientific models of reasoning have led us to apply inappropriate criteria for validating the inference-making procedure. He also contends that judging the rationality of any argument requires an understanding of the rules particular to the specific situation.[28] For years teachers of argumentation have struggled to apply the formal tests of syllogistic reasoning to real-life arguments with very unenthusiastic responses from students. Perhaps the reason for the difficulty may best be explained by a philosopher. Demos wrote:

> I have tried to show that the validating form "p is true, p. implies q. is true" is simply irrelevant (at least for a large portion of thought) because the conditions which it prescribes do not obtain, because definite atomic truths and rigidly necessary implications are not to be had in the universe of concrete discourse. Thus the issue is not between the psychological process on the one hand, and logical norms on the other, but between norms of inference which are fantastic and those which have an application. The logic of strict reasoning is, one might say, non-Euclidean.[29]

Although this problem of creating a practical argumentation with rules uniquely applicable to rhetorical situations where probability is the order of the day seems vital to making rhetoric relevant, Brockreide and Rhninger have stated that since 1932 rhetoricians and students of public address have not shown much interest in exploring the nature of argument as it is characteristically employed in rhetorical situations.[30] Philosophers, while perhaps ignoring much of the early work done by rhetoricians during this century, have attacked this problem with vigor. Stephen Toulmin presented a new way of analyzing argument in The Uses of Argument in 1958.[31] Other books dealing specifically with argumentation in the rhetorical sense have been The Rhetoric of Argumentation by William J. Brandt, Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation by Natanson and Johnstone, and The New Rhetoric by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. In each case argumentation is based on the concept of probability. Brandt, for example, argues that, "The writer or argument does not have, of course, the same problem as the philosopher or logician. His objective is probability, not truth, and he knows that the readers' experience, and not ultimate reality, is the test of probability."[32] He then states that the

logical criteria of validity are not those of the rhetorician, nor do the classifications of "logical sins" have such relevance to what actually goes on in argumentation. If this is indeed true, it is high time that rhetoricians and philosophers and scientists forget the continuation of twenty-five hundred years of debate regarding probability versus truth and concentrate on working out the best system of rhetoric based on rules which specifically apply to the rhetorical process.

A final comment should be made, however, in regard to truth and probability. Gerard Hauser has written about "Rhetoric as a Way of Knowing,"[33] and has said that "to study rhetoric is to investigate a uniquely human phenomenon." He suggests that rhetoric can afford a unique view of the world, that it gives special insight into man and that it therefore has its own "truth." In a very basic sense, this study of one of man's activities, his choice-making behavior, is indeed an attempt to find "truth." One of the meanings of philosophy is simply love of wisdom. As Oliver suggests, philosophical thought is aimed at determining the real nature and form of the subject under consideration.[34] If the object under consideration is man and in particular how he acts in a "rhetorical situation," the rhetorician too is aiming at truth--and at discovering that "truth" which he is uniquely qualified to find. It has been said that philosophers talk about the world or about the language they use to talk about the world and there is nothing else to talk about. Rhetoricans thus talk about the world too, and one of the realities of that world is that decisions in real life are based on probable truths.

Mrs. McGaffey (Ph.D., Northwestern University) is Assistant Proffesor of Speech, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

FOOTNOTES

[1]William F. Brandt, The Rhetoric of Argumentation (New York, 1970), p. 7.

[2]George Kennedy, The Art of Persuasion in Greece (Princeton, 1963), p. 23.

[3]Abrams v. United States, 250 U. S. 616 (1919).

[4]Douglas Ehninger, "On Systems of Rhetoric," Journal of Philosophy and Rhetoric, I (1968), 140.

[5]Aristotle, "The Rhetoric," in Readings in Classical Rhetoric, ed. by Thomas W. Benson and Michael Prosser (Boston, 1969), p. 56.

[6]Donald Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIX (December, 1953). 404.

[7]Richard C. Jebb, "Rhetoric," in Encyclopedia Britannica, XIX, 246.

[8]Robert C. Oliver, "Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation: Congenial or Conjunctive," in Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation ed. by Maurice Natanson and Henry W. Johnstone, p. ix.

[9]L. Virginia Holland, Counterpoint: Kenneth Burke and Aristotle's Theories of Rhetoric (New York, 1959), p. 24.

[10]Ehninger, p. 131.

[11]Lloyd Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation," Journal of Philosophy and Rhetoric, I (1968), 3.

[12]Kennedy, p. 15.

[13]Kennedy, p. 13.

[14]Kennedy, p. 23.

[15]Kennedy, p. 15.

[16]Chaim Perelman, "Rhetoric and Philosophy," Journal of Philosophy and Rhetoric, I (1968), 15.

[17]Trevor Melia, "In Defense of the Subtle Dancer," Today's Speech, XIX, 31.

[18]John Stuart Mill, On Liberty ( ), p. 24.

[19]Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation (Notre Dame, 1969), p. 2.

[20]Descartes, Rules for the Direction of the Mind, GBWW, Vol. 31, p. 2.

[21]Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 2.

[22]Raphael Demos, "On Persuasion," The Journal of Philosophy, XXIX (1932), 227.

[23]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 512.

[24]Oliver, p. xi.

[25]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 510.

[26]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 3.

[27]Jerry M. Anderson and Paul J. Dovre, ed., Readings in Argumentation, p. xiii.

[28]Gidon Gottlieb, The Logic of Choice (New York, 1968).

[29]Demos, p. 227.

[30]Wayne Brockriede and Douglas Ehninger, "Toulmin on Argument: An Interpretation and Application," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLVI, 44.

[31]Stephen Toulmin, The Uses of Argument (Cambridge, 1958).

[32]Brandt, p. 212.

[33]Gerard A. Hauser, "Rhetoric as a Way of Knowing," Today's Speech, XIX, pp. 43-48.

[34]Oliver, p. x.

THE ISSUE OF MORALITY

FOR THE RHETORICIAN AND PHILOSOPHER

Robert F. Holton

Of continuing interest to the field of rhetoric from the earliest times to the present day is the relationship between rhetoric, philosophy, and morality. This relationship has appeared in both rhetorical theory and its resulting use in criticism. Therefore, this essay explores this relationship as it developed in classical theory, and in turn, how classical positions have affected modern thought.

Much of Western Culture owes its heritage to the philosophers and educators of the Greco-Roman era. This is, perhaps, more true of rhetoric than other disciplines. In that period, morality (ethics), rhetoric, and philosophy were closely associated with each other, particularly in Greek education. Thus, it is no surprise that one can find controversies as to the goals and even the legitimacy of rhetoric. The Greek's proclivity for disagreement with each other is well-known, and if one remembers that the term, philosopher, referred to a "seeker of wisdom," it is easy to understand why the relationship produced controversy.

Before examining this controversy, an explanation of the terms, ethics and morality, will shed some light on the development of the controversy. The derivation of the term, ethics, as suggested by Sattler, noted that it came from the Greek word, ethos, meaning customs, folkways, or social norms.[1] These were considered essential behavioral standards to be followed unless one wished to incur the disapproval of the group or society. Next, an examination of a Latin dictionary, provides approximately the same derivation for the term, morality.[2] Thus, the issue of morality dealt with society's view of what is acceptable behavior which definitely included rhetorical practices.

Indeed, Aristotle claimed that ethics must define behaviors which would contribute to the welfare of the group.[3] Add to the above situation, the fact that Greece had an oral tradition expressed in its epic poetry and literature and it is natural that rhetoric would become involved with morality and philosophy.[4] Another factor which encouraged the relationship was the need for practical advice on how to prepare legal arguments and present them to a jury. This led to the development in ancient Sicily of a doctrine which has created debate throughout the history of rhetoric. This doctrine, e.g., the theory of probability of "what appears to be true," rapidly developed into a moral and philosophic question.[5] One aspect of this question was given by Freeman in her discussion of rhetorical practices in the Athenian courts:

> It (rhetoric) quickly developed into an instrument for using fallacious arguments without being detected, and helped make Rhetoric the art not only of Persuasion but Deception. This tendency caused Rhetoric to become the bete noire of the philosophers as well as the enemy of truth, logic and morality. . . .[6]

Kennedy noted that this desire of the Greeks to settle their internal disputes in courts composed of citizens also cemented an interest in the relationship among the disciplines of rhetoric, ethics, politics, etc.[7]

Notwithstanding the above influences, an educational movement of the Sophists did much to create the controversial philosophic and moral views toward rhetoric. An excellent example of this movement is Protagoras. In his instruction of "practical wisdom" to Greek youth, rhetoric played an important role. The use of probability and arguments on opposite sides of an issue was a major tool in preparing the young for civic duty. The results of the application of this individualistic moral and philosophic position, often referred to as "man is the measure of all things," was

the setting of the rights of the individual citizen in opposition to the claims of customs and law.[8] Indeed, this school of thought has been described as concerned with the human sciences, particularly persuasion. From the Sophists one got an all round philosophic training in which questions of logic, ethics, and criticism were emphasized. In contrast, other philosophic schools based their instruction primarily on the physical sciences. Rejecting the Sophists' view that "truth" was relative, they based their moral and philosophic position on universal principles which they claimed illuminated what was "true."[9] Although more related to the Sophists than the philosophers of the "physical" school, Socrates also opposed the Sophists' vehement rejection of the idea that one could identify universal principles. As Boyd observed:

> This doctrine (the Sophistic) involving as it ultimately does, a complete scepticism about moral principles was resolutely rejected by Socrates, who labored to show that there are presupposed in every particular action general principles or ideas which are the same for everybody and for all time. Temperance, justice, wisdom are not merely what the individual chooses to consider them, but are the essential ideas that underlie certain lines of conduct for which the ordinary person can find the warrant in his own experience when that experience is properly examined.[10]

Thus, several schools of philosophy in Greek education very early came into conflict over each others' view of morality and philosophy.

Socrates' pupil, Plato, added further to this dispute by his direct attack on both rhetoric and the Sophistic philosophy. He noted in the Gorgias that rhetorical training was of insignificant value because it was comparable to a knack such as cooking. This was the case because rhetoric was not based on the search for knowledge or more specifically, the discovering of

universal principles. Rhetoric's goal was only the "appearance of truth" and as such had no substance. Since knowledge led to truth and since one should have this knowledge before he spoke, rhetoric's goal was suspect. In addition, it could not even be claimed to be useful in that rhetoric did not allow the powerful to control the weak because rhetoric catered to the publics' beliefs and not truth.[11] Nevertheless, in the Phaedrus, Plato established guidelines that a philosopher would use if he were to construct a rhetoric. This included discovering the truth of what he was going to say, classifying his subjects with a definition as to their possibility of debate, introducing a principle of order in presenting topics, seeking unity and plurality in nature so that he can classify his particulars under a general head or break universals into particulars, knowing the nature of men's soul (emotions), and being able to demonstrate the connection between emotion and the argument used.[12] Thus, Plato formalized his opposition to rhetoric which has been used by others since as a reason for rejecting the study. Following the recommendation of Socrates, his mentor, Plato suggested that dialectic was the best method for testing men's beliefs. By doing so, he argued that the philosophy would have a reliable guide for judging the truth, which rhetoric could not provide because of its concern for probabilities.

During the same period, the noted logographer and educator, Isocrates, developed another position. While he might be considered in the Sophistic tradition, he strongly rejected their skeptical philosophy and its application to rhetoric. He argued that the young should have a prolonged and extensive education including the practice and criticism of speaking, literature, and historical discourse as well as instruction in a "practical" philosophy of life.[13] Clark further explained this position by citing Isocrate's belief that rhetoric taught along with logic, ethics, politics, and literature would allow the student to make a practical application of these subjects in his life.

Based on the philosophic position that exact knowledge of the future was impossible but that the problems of life forced one to plan for the future, Isocrates observed that rhetorical training was necessary; for it was the only discipline in which one could learn to weigh probabilities and deal with the uncertain contingencies of the future and thus, be able to form reasonable judgments.[14]

Another major school of philosophy concerned with rhetoric was the Peripatetic. Its most famous and influential philosopher was Aristotle. The school followed his lead by making the art of persuasion (rhetoric) one of their major concerns.[15] Aristotle's position on the moral aspect of the dispute them taking place was that rhetoric per se was an art (method) and as such, amoral. Describing it as being related to ethics and politics, he proclaimed in the first book of the Rhetoric:

> And if it be objected that one who uses such power of speech unjustly might do great harm, that is a charge which may be made in common against all good things except virtue, and above all against the things that are most useful, as strength, health, wealth, generalship. A man can confer the greatest of benefits by a right use of these, and inflict the greatest injuries by using them wrongly.[16]

Since rhetoric was an art, it could and should be systematically studied and developed. Indeed, Aristotle suggested in dealing with the moral philosophic aspect of the problem that rhetoric was the counterpart of dialectic. Nevertheless, in discussing one of the key elements in being persuasive, the enthymeme, he made no clear distinction among dialectics and rhetoric. The importance of this argument is that confusion about the meaning and nature of dialectic, rhetoric, and scientific demonstration is still with us. Some believe that

Aristotle took a middle course since he posited a definite use for all three reasoning techniques. In his work, Analytics, he defined apodeictic (syllogistic) reasoning as being scientific demonstration (dealing in universal principles.) Then, in his Topics, he discussed dialectics in relation to probabilities.[17] However, Bitzer noted an important factor one must consider when discussing these methods of reasoning in relation to rhetoric. At times, scientific demonstration uses premises that are probable or for "the most part true."[18] Likewise, besides probabilities and signs one could also use the syllogism (scientific demonstration) in constructing enthymemes.[19] Apparently, there is no clear line dividing rhetoric, dialectic, and scientific demonstration. As Aristotle concluded his discussion at one point in book one, of the Rhetoric,

> It has, then, been stated above what is the nature of Probability, a Sign, and complete proof, and what are the difference between them. In the Analytics a more explicit description has been given of these points; it is there shown why some of these reasonings can be put into syllogisms and some cannot.[20]

Thus, Aristotle in dealing with universals and probabilities adopted the stance that under some circumstances rhetoric, dialectics, and scientific demonstration could be used interchangeably. Yet, because of historical events and arguments over the exact interpretation of his view this confusion has not as yet been resolved.

The Stoics were another philosophic school that concerned itself with rhetoric. In their minds, the purpose of studying and developing all disciplines was to make man better or more moral. Thus, in dealing with rhetoric they focused on the areas of invention and arrangement. Excluding the motivational aspects of emotional and ethical appeals, they felt that the

aim of rhetoric should be to teach the audience.[21] As Boyd pointed out, the Epicureans held the same general view as Socrates that the best of life was based on knowledge or insight. While the Epicureans put emphasis on how to live for the enjoyment of life and were hostile to rhetoric, the Stoics were concerned with problems of personal conduct.[22] They argued that rhetoric was good and useful only as long as it was controlled by a responsible, moral orator.[23] This process of moral behavior, of course, necessitated finding methods to validate truth. Rhetoric was only one of these methods. In summary to this point, rhetoric was seen by some philosophers as an activity to be opposed because of its emphasis on arguments that were only probable while others felt that it was a useful activity to be used in concert with other disciplines to aid the individual's or society's aims.

At this point, two factors should be mentioned. First, the decline of Greek political power and the loss of intellectual resources such as Aristotle's library, for example, inclined the Greek schools of philosophy to emphasize academic techniques such as commonplaces and ignore questions of ethics and politics.[24] This, in turn, evoked further scorn by other philosophers. Clarke emphasized this point by observing the rhetoricians of the Hellenistic age were men of small calibre restricting themselves to minor matters rather than the broad concerns of earlier rhetoricians. Secondly, Stoicism became the dominant philosophy of the Hellenistic era. Thus, their general view of rhetoric predominated.[25]

Cicero became the Latin purveyor of the view of rhetorical thought advocated by Isocrates. He accepted the position that the goal of rhetorical education should prepare one for civic life. Although philosophy was not to be thought of as hostile to rhetoric, it was seen as a co-ordinate study to be used to improve the orator's ability. Under Cicero, the concept of the orator-statesman was to have its most influential advocate.[26] Yet, the educational system itself was to play a more important role in emphasizing

rhetoric's value to society:

> When Roman education took a more systematic form, and literature and rhetoric became the predominate studies, the encyclopedic interest in the various subjects of instruction ceased and attention was concentrated on oratory as the supreme study.[27]

This general view adapted from various Greek philosophic schools created the seven liberal arts which so fascinated the Middle Ages. However, the study of logic, grammar, and rhetoric received the major attention of the student in Rome. It can also be observed that the trend in rhetorical theory which emphasized forensic pleading began in Sicily and matured in Rome. Again, Cicero was an excellent example of this trend.[28] In regard to the issue of morality and the issue of how to validate knowledge, it meant in the case of the former that the practical view of the issue taken by Isocrates would predominate and in the latter, Cicero's triumph over the theory of probability.

Nevertheless, the Stoics' belief in the use of rhetoric in assisting man in being more moral was still influential in some quarters. This can best be illustrated by the broad statement of rhetorical education set forth by Quintilian:

> I on the other hand hold that the art of oratory includes all that is essential for the training of an orator, and that it is impossible to reach the summit in any one subject unless we have passed through all elementary stages. . .My aim, then, is the education for such a one is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellences of character as well. For I will not admit that the principles of up-

> right and honorable living should, as some have held, be regarded as the peculiar concern of philosophy.[29]

This influence came also from Quintilian's own Roman forefathers. The best example of these would be Cato the Censor whose definition of rhetoric as the science of speaking well was used by Quintilian to support the connection between morality and speaking.[30] This should be considered an additional requirement placed on rhetoric rather than in basic conflict with Cicero's position. Yet, Quintilian may be considered among the "prophets without honor" in his own time.

Rhetoric during this era was rapidly degenerating into an academic exercise used either as a prelude to a career in Imperial administration or to display one's virtuosity in order to attract both students and fame. While rhetoric was held in high esteem by society in the Second Sophistic, it was not concerned with the moral and philosophic disputes of the classical times.[31] The areas of invention and arrangement had become primarily the province of logic. Indeed, one must wait until the modern period before a sustained attempt to return rhetoric to its former concern with the issues bearing on the topics of morality and philosophy appeared. Even then, it has been of little interest to the philosophers of the time.

While not wishing to leave the impression that the Middle Ages and Renaissance had no impact on rhetorical thought, the rest of this essay focuses on the controversies in modern thought that can be traced to classical postures in philosophy and morality. First, one major change in the emphasis in establishing the probability of one's argument occurred. The Greeks and later the Romans put more reliance on establishing probability through the use of "artistic" proof than is presently the case.[32] There seem to be several factors which account for this difference. One is the influence of English legal theory as applied to the theory of rhetoric. This can be attributed partly to Whately's restatement of classi-

cal theory as it appears in his Elements of Rhetoric. Three points suggest this difference: (1) Rhetoric is defined as the art of finding and arranging arguments, (2) these arguments either of the necessary or probable type, were to support propositions, and (3) a distinction was made in the form and material to be used to construct arguments. Interestingly enough, Whately objected to Aristotle's division of proof into "artistic" and "inartistic". He felt that all arguments were derived from the data one uses and that the division made little sense.[33] In addition, his discussion of propositions, presumption, and burden of proof had a notable affect on American rhetorical theory. Clarence W. Edney in his "English Sources of Rhetorical Theory in Nineteenth-Century America," observed that Whately is largely responsible for initiating the trend of theory which moved rapidly in the direction of a rhetoric of argumentation and debate.[34] Its present effect can still be seen. Ehninger and Brockriede stated that Whately laid the ground work for most of the subsequent treatment of the subject of argumentation.[35]

Important also was the weight given to the use of evidence or "inartistic" proof, for it instituted the trend to put more emphasis on it in rhetorical criticism and training.[36] Another reason for this change appeared to be the change from a major interest in forensic rhetoric to that of deliberative or political rhetoric.[37] Perhaps also, the wish of Twentieth Century rhetoricians to escape the odium that rhetoric acquired of being primarily connected with style and delivery as created by the Ramistic influence on modern as well as later influence by the Elocutionary movement of the Nineteenth Century.[38] The results of these influences was suggested by Howell:

> The renunciation by logic of her alliance with the theory of communication has been a serious blow to modern rhetoric. As I mentioned a moment ago, it has led to an obvious and fatal superficiality whenever

> rhetoricians have affixed to their own work an abbreviated version of traditional logical theory. It has also led to a counterrenunciation of logic by rhetoric, as in the elocutionary movement of the nineteenth century.[39]

Thus, the issues created in classical time about the use of syllogistic (universal) and probable reasoning reoccurred. If one reviews the texts and journals in the area of rhetoric and argumentation of this century, he will find numerous monographic positions concerning the basis of logical reasoning, the definition of the enthymeme and its utility in criticizing arguments in conflict. As Howell noted, in most cases, texts give formal logic an abbreviated treatment. Examples vary, but one can observe this in the writing of Thonssen and Baird,[40] of Freely and Mills in argumentation,[41] and Capp in a basic rhetorical text.[42] This appears to be in part the same disagreement that arose in classical rhetoric on how one should validate knowledge. The battle, it seems, continues. McBurney, writing in Speech Monographs, argued that the enthymeme was a deductive type of argument based on probability, while others writing later echoed or modified this position.[43] Indeed, a reaction to the formal and mathematical logic of this and the last century in validating knowledge occurred. For example, Stephen Toulmin, an English logician, developed a pattern for examination of the truth and validity of arguments which was not dependent on the earlier trends in logic.[44] This change was matched by the Belgian philosopher, Perelman, who in his "introduction" to The New Rhetoric pointed out that the logical developments in recent times, dependent as they were on a formal and mathematical base, could not deal with arguments in the realm of such contingent disciplines as ethics, politics, law, etc, He returned to rhetoric for his base because of its insistence, he stated, on the idea that one's discourse should gain the adherence of the

minds of the addressees.[45] The disagreement as to the place of probability in rhetoric and argumentation remains unsettled.

Different positions as to the goals of rhetorical training and criticism, as developed in classical times, are mirrored in the philosophic and moral positions of present day rhetoricians. For example, the Sophistic influence can be seen in an article published early in this century. Wichelns suggested that the purpose of rhetorical criticism was to assess the effects of a speech.[46] This, in turn, influenced heavily the rhetorical criticism done following the article. Although not listing effect as the only function of criticism, Thonssen and Baird in their landmark treatment of criticism emphasized this as a major function.[47]

Current influences of the Isocratic-Ciceronian school of thought, that of Aristotle, and of Quintilian are readily available. For example, McBurney and Wrage, after discussing the various classical positions, adopted the Aristotelian view that a "good speech" depended on the methods employed. They agreed also that social responsibility should be encouraged.[48] Some adopted Quintilian's position that the speaker should be a "good man". Monroe did so by pointing out its importance to the "ethical" mode of persuasion.[49] Occasionally, one can uncover an article arguing for this famous rhetorical position.[50] The more prevalent view seemed to be adapted from the Isocratic-Ciceronian tradition of the orator-statesman. The goal to be achieved was the strengthening of democracy by the teaching of sound rhetorical theory. A leading exponent of this view was Brigance.[51] Again, an examination of the journals and texts illustrate this point.[52] Yet, some focus on methods which they consider philosophically and morally unsound. Minnick and Haiman are excellent examples of this trend.[53] Nevertheless, it is difficult to classify them as being influenced by one or another of the classical schools of thought. The above treatment is by no means exhaustive of the material written that illustrate how classical moral

and philosophical positions have affected modern rhetorical theory. It was given to suggest that the moral and philosophic controversies have reappeared. The author will not suggest what position that one should adopt. What he will suggest is that the modern rhetorician study these controversial positions carefully so that he may decide what approach he should take to speech training and criticism.

In summary, then, the relationship among rhetoric, philosophy, and morality centered around issues developed by the philosophers and rhetoricians in classical times. They include: (1) What is the purpose of rhetorical training and criticism? Is it to achieve results, search for knowledge, to make man more moral, or to prepare one to fulfill his civic duty in a democracy? Should there by a combination of the above aims? (2) What are allowable methods of persuasion? This involved not only evaluation of specific techniques, but more importantly, depends on what answer one gives to the above question one. (3) Finally, a question in episimology needed answering. Should one rely on arguments to persuade which are probable or should they be universal or necessary?

Mr. Holton (Ph.D., Bowling Green University, 1970) is Assistant Professor of Speech, Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois.

FOOTNOTES

[1]William M. Sattler, "Conceptions of Ethos in Ancient Rhetoric," Speech Monographs, XIV (1947), pp. 55-56.

[2]Harper's Latin Dictionary--A New Latin Dictionary, ed. E. A. Andrews (New York, 1879), p. 1167. The Latin term, mos, moris (pl., mores), meant: "A measuring or guiding rule of life; hence, manner, custom, way, usage, practice, wont, as determined not by laws, but men's will and pleasure, humor, self-will, or caprice. . ."

[3]Aristotle, "Ethica Micomachia," The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), p. 935.

[4]George Kennedy, The Art of Persuasion in Greece, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1963), pp. 3-5.

[5]Ibid., pp. 58-60.

[6]Kathleen Freeman, The Murder of Herodes and Other Trials from the Athenian Law Courts (New York, 1963), p. 31.

[7]Kennedy, p. 27.

[8]William Boyd, The History of Western Education, revised and enlarged by Edward J. King, 7th ed. (New York, 1965), p. 27.

[9]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[10]Ibid., pp. 27-28.

[11]Everett Lee Hunt, "Plato and Aristotle on Rhetoric and Rhetoricians," Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking (New York, 1925) pp. 33-40/

[12]Ibid., pp. 41-53.

[13]Boyd, pp. 25-26 and Kennedy, pp. 174-183.

[14]Donald Lemen Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (New York, 1957), pp. 55-56.

[15]Kennedy, p. 272.

[16]Aristotle, "Rhetoric," The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle, trans. by W. Rhys Roberts (New York, 1954), p. 23; hereafter cited as Aristotle, "Rhetoric".

[17]Kennedy, p. 96.

[18]Lloyd F. Bitzer, "Aristotle Enthymeme Revisited," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLV (December, 1959), p. 403.

[19]Ibid., pp. 402-404.

[20]Aristotle, "Rhetoric," p. 29.

[21]Kennedy, pp. 292-294.

[22]Boyd, pp. 306-308.

[23]Kennedy, p. 293.

[24]Ibid., pp. 322-324.

[25]M. L. Clarke, Rhetoric at Rome--A Historical Survey, 4th Impression (New York, 1968), pp. 8-10.

[26]Boyd, pp. 67-68.

[27]Ibid., pp. 68-70.

[28]Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Rome Education, p. 64.

[29]Quintilian, The Institutio Oratoria of Quin-

tilian, trans. by H. E. Butler (Cambridge, Mass., 1918), pp. 5 and 9-10.

[30]Clarke, Rhetoric at Rome, pp. 116-117.

[31]Ibid., pp. 100-107.

[32]For example, see Aristotle, "Rhetoric," Bk. 1, Chap. 15, pp. 83-90, which constitutes all the attention he devotes to "inartistic" proof.

[33]The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately, ed. by James L. Golden and Edward P. J. Corbett (New York, 1968), pp. 299-340 and see the footnote on p. 299.

[34]A History of Speech Education in America, ed. by Karl Wallace (New York, 1954), p. 84.

[35]Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, Decision by Debate, (New York, 1963), p. 97.

[36]For example, see Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York, 1948), pp. 341-344, for a discussion of evidence or "inartistic proof" as a main concern of the area of "logical" appeals and in a basic text, Ray E. Nadeau, A Basic Rhetoric of Speech Communication (Reading, Mass., 1969), pp. 36-38.

[37]An examination of many of the studies reported in History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. William Norwood Brigance and Marie Hockmuth Nichols. 3 vols. (New York, 1965) provide a good illustration of this point.

[38]The basis for the separation of invention and arrangement from rhetoric was pointed out by William P. Sanford, English Theories of Public Address, 1530-1828 (Columbus, Ohio, 1938), pp. 46-48 and its influence in Americanby Warren Guthrie, "Rhetorical

Theory in Colonial America," A History of Speech Education in America, pp. 48-53; the influence of the elocutionary movement is discussed by Guthrie, pp. 55-56, its later triumph as the main rhetorical concern is discussed by Frederick Haberman, "English Sources of Elocution in America," pp. 105-123, Marie Hockmuth, "Rhetorical Elocutionary Training in Nineteenth Century Colleges," pp. 153-173, Mary M. Robb, "The Elocutionary Movement and Its Chief Figures," pp. 178-200, and Claude L. Shaver, "Steele MacKaye and the Delsartian Tradition," pp. 202-216, all in the History of Speech Education in America.

[39]Wilbur Samuel Howell, "Renaissance Rhetoric and Modern Rhetoric: A Study in Change," The Rhetorical Idiom (New York, 1958), p. 57.

[40]Thonssen and Baird, Speech Criticism, pp. 346-347.

[41]Austin J. Freely, Argumentation and Debate (Belmont, Calif., 1961), devoted chapter nine to the different methods of reasoning. In it, he included the syllogism and the enthymeme, defined as a syllogism with a premise or the conclusion omitted. In later editions (the wnd in 1966 and the 3rd in 1971), he modified his view to including the comment that the enthymeme was based on probability; Glen E. Mills, Reason in Controversy, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1968), in chapter eight discussed the traditional approach to logic, some later theories, and his own system of classification. He also noted the difference in positions taken by a number of texts on public speaking, debate, discussion, and criticism (pp. 185-186).

[42]Glenn R. Capp, How to Communicate Orally, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966), discussed the enthymeme as a syllogism with either a premise or conclusion assumed, pp. 333-338.

[43]James McBurney, "The Place of the Enthymeme in Rhetorical Theory," Speech Monographs, III (1937), pp. 49-74; Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited"; Earl M. Wiley, "The Enthymeme: Idiom of Persuasion," Quarterly Journal of Speech XLII (February, 1956), pp. 19-24; or Charles S. Mudd, "The Enthymeme and Logical Validity," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLV (December, 1959), pp. 410-414.

[44]Ehninger and Brockriede, "The Unit of Proof and Its Structure," Decision by Debate, Chapter Eight. Also, they noted on page 109 that Toulmin believed that formal logic lacked practical utility in the area of argumentation.

[45]Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric--A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. by Jon Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1969), pp. 1-11 and 5.

[46]Herbert A. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking, p. 205.

[47]Thonssen and Baird, "The Measure of Effectiveness," Speech Criticism, pp. 448-461.

[48]James McBurney and Ernest J. Wrage, Guide to Good Speech, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965), pp. 1-8.

[49]Alan H. Monroe, Principles and Types of Speech, 4th ed. (Chicago, 1955), pp. 5-7; one might also examine Lew Sarret and William Foster, Basic Principles of Speech, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1946), pp. 14-16.

[50]Carroll Brooks Ellis, "A Good Man Speaking Well," Southern Speech Journal, XI (March, 1952), pp. 85-89.

[51]William Norwood Brigance, Speech--Its Techniques and Discipline in a Free Society (New York, 1952),

[52]For examples, see Thonssen and Baird, pp. 466-472; Claude E. Kantner, "Speech and Education in a Democracy," Southern Speech Journal XVII (September, 1952), pp. 14-22; Thomas R. Nilsen, "Free Speech, Persuasion, and Democracy," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIV (October, 1958), pp. 236-243 or The Ethics of Speech Communication (Indianapolis, 1966), pp. 83-90; and Edward Rogge, "Evaluating the Ethics of a Speaker in a Democracy," Quarterly Journal of Speech XLV (December, 1959), pp. 419-426.

[53]Wayne Minnick, The Art of Persuasion (Boxton, 1955), pp. 284-286, and Franklin S. Haiman, "A Re-Examination of the Ethics of Persuasion," Central States Speech Journal, III (March, 1953), pp. 4-9; and "Democratic Ethics and the Hidden Persuaders," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIV (December, 1958), pp. 385-395.

"FITNESS OF RESPONSE" IN BITZER'S CONCEPT OF RHETORICAL DISCOURSE

Ralph S. Pomeroy

Few recent contributions to "the search for a new rhetoric" have aroused the lively, widespread interest that Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" has.[1] It is easy to see why. In the first place, Bitzer in his original article took on a rare and difficult task--the formulation of a new general theory of rhetoric, applicable to all oral and written discourse, in contrast to the many special theories now proposed for a Rhetoric of Agitation and Control, of Civil Rights, of Black Power, of Warmongering, and even of Desecration.[2]

Furthermore, Bitzer grounds this formulation on non-Aristotelian premises. In drawing attention to this aspect of Bitzer's theory, I do not wish to suggest that it is anti-Aristotelian in scope or intent. But the fact that Bitzer's theory appears, or can be made to appear, quite consistent with Aristotelian percepts is not its primary distinction. On the contrary, Bitzer's theory is distinguished primarily by the fact that it takes a different starting-point from Aristotle's. It discusses rhetorical activity by means of assumptions and concepts not especially indebted to Aristotle's.[3] It reaches conclusions about the meaning and value of rhetoric not limited by Aristotle's. No major theorist, claims Bitzer, not even Aristotle, "has treated rhetorical situation thoroughly as a distinct subject in rhetorical theory; many ignore it."[4] Now the need which this claim implies is the basis for Bitzer's theory. This is distinction enough for any theory, especially when we consider the history of rhetoric as a traditional art--and, to a great extent, as an art of tradition. But when we consider along with it the

current concern about an alleged "Neo-Aristotelianism" dominating our rhetorical criticism,[5] it is obvious why this aspect of Bitzer's theory cannot help but provoke various reaction.

Finally, though Bitzer never states it explicitly, another purpose of his theory seems clear. It attempts to give us a new rationale for criticism--a new set of viable concepts which we can use not only in interpreting but in evaluating any instance of rhetorical discourse. Bitzer does not, indeed, promise but only suggests that his theory will do this.[6] Nevertheless, if, as Herbert W. Simons claims, "There can be no criticism without standards, no fruitful analysis or understanding of human interaction without acceptable conceptual underpinnings,"[7] then this is clearly an important task for any new rhetorical theory to undertake.

Surely these are ambitious purposes. Yet it remains an open question whether Bitzer's theory does not raise as many problems as it tries to solve. One such problem, which this paper will investigate, underlies Bitzer's concept of rhetorical discourse. Now, as I interpret Bitzer's theory, it stands or falls with the acceptance or rejection of this concept. Therefore I will begin with a brief restatement of the theory, then go on to identify the problem, show why it is important, and suggest a possible solution. I am encouraged to take this last step (call it, if you will, an exercise in postcritical speculation) by Bitzer's assurance, early in the article, that he does not regard his theory as completely developed. He intends, he says, "in what follows to set forth <u>part</u> of a theory of situation":

> This <u>essay</u>, therefore, should be understood as an attempt to revive the notion of rhetorical situation, to provide <u>at least the outline</u> of an adequate conception of it, and to establish it as a controlling and fundamental concern of rhetorical theory.[8]

I

Bitzer's theory may be summarized as follows. Before any rhetorical discourse is created and presented, a rhetorical situation must exist. This situation is not a critical scheme or theoretical construct. It does not have to be imposed like a cookie cutter onto our experiences of completed rhetorical acts. We can infer it directly, while those acts are in process, as a complex interplay of exigence, audience, and constraints. These three constituents, say Bitzer, "comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation," although "When the orator, invited by situation, enters it and creates and presents discourse, then both he and his speech are additional constitutents."[9] Exigence stands for any imperfection (need or want) marked by urgency and modifiable by discourse. Audience stands for the intended receivers of the discourse, capable of being influenced by it to modify the imperfection. Constraints stands for the set of physical and psychological conditions which define or "constrain" the field of decision and action.

According to Bitzer, then, we do not have rhetorical discourse until we have a rhetorical situation. We should not "assume that a rhetorical address gives existence to the situation; on the contrary, it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence."[10] We may, however, have nonrhetorical discourse--that is, verbal constructs not called into existence by a rhetorical situation. These, contends Bitzer, may even "exhibit formal features which we consider rhetorical--such as ethical and emotional appeals, and stylistic patterns. . .yet all remain unrhetorical unless, through the oddest of circumstances, one of them by chance should fit a situation."[11]

Bitzer does not further explain or illustrate these odd circumstances, nor how they allow nonrhetorical discourse to "fit a situation." Instead, he maintains that the reason why "The presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of

a rhetorical situation"[12] is that such a situation "invites a fitting response, a response that fits the situation. . .(and) meets the requirements established by the situation."[13] Therefore, just as "the existence of a rhetorical address is a reliable sign of the existence of situation,"[14] so the quality "fitness of response" is a reliable sign that the address or discourse is truly rhetorical.

This line of reasoning a traditional rhetorician would call an argument from sign. Already we can see how it involves the theory in serious conceptual difficulties. These we shall shortly discuss. For now let us note that this line of reasoning allows Bitzer to define discourse as rhetorical "insofar as it functions (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a situation which needs and invites it."[15]

II

But how do we know when a situation is truly rhetorical? According to Bitzer, we do not have a rhetorical situation without a rhetorical exigence. But just as there are nonrhetorical discourses and nonrhetorical situations, so there are nonrhetorical exigences--imperfections which cannot be modified at all (Bitzer cites death, winter, and some natural disasters) or which "can be modified only by means other than discourse."[16] Bitzer admits that rhetorical practitioners often "encounter exigences which defy easy classification because of the absence of information enabling precise analysis and certain judgment--they may or may not be rhetorical."[17] He cites the example of an attorney who elects to appeal the verdict on a client "because the exigence might be rhetorical." But he also insists that "In any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected."[18]

When Bitzer admits, however, that even this "controlling" exigence may be perceived clearly or un-

clearly, may be strong or weak, real or unreal, important or trivial, completely or barely modifiable by discourse, and familiar or totally new, then the conceptual difficulties in his theory become apparent. A theory which requires its users to discriminate carefully and continually between rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourses, situations, and exigences runs the risk of being not only misunderstood and misapplied; it may never be applied at all.

Some of these difficulties, however, are also methodological. They vitiate the usefulness of Bitzer's theory as a rationale for rhetorical criticism. Two of these need special comment at this point so that we may refer to them later.

Note, first, that within the context of Bitzer's theory it is always possible to argue that any rhetorical exigence which did not produce rhetorical discourse was not truly rhetorical in the first place.

As an instance of this, consider the following: A community welfare group in a small town decides to prepare and distribute a "fact-sheet" on the dental effects of fluoridated water. No pro or con arguments on fluoridation are presented. No appeals for funds, voter support, or legislative change are made. In short, there is no "Action Step"; the "fact-sheet" is just that--pure, unsolicited information. Furthermore, there is no discernible public response to the "fact-sheet." No letters to the editor or articles on fluoridation appear in the newspaper. No discussion of fluoridation take place in meetings of the City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, or the various service clubs. No comments on the "fact-sheet" are made publicly by dentists. Moreover, the community welfare group decides not to do a follow-up survey. Thus, as regards any kind of public discourse the existence of the "fact-sheet" is completely unacknowledged.

Question: Can we establish in this instance, through the scope of interpretation allowed by Bitzer's theory, that the original exigence (i.e., the need presumably felt by the community welfare

group in producing the "fact-sheet") was truly rhetorical?

Answer: No--at least not on the basis of the situation as described. We are forced to conclude, on the strict interpretation of Bitzer's theory, that the original exigence was nonrhetorical. Bitzer's theory, however, allows that the situation may become rhetorical or be re-interpreted as rhetorical if, later, a "rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to (it), in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem."[19] But the instance just adduced points up a major methodological difficulty in Bitzer's theory as it now stands.

Similarly, within the context of Bitzer's theory it is impossible to argue conclusively that any exigence ("controlling" or otherwise) which did produce some kind of discourse ("fitting" or otherwise) was really nonrhetorical.

As an instance of this, consider the following: In the same small town already described, the newspaper staff experiences a "slow" day. The editor assigns a reporter to "dig up a story" by walking around the town. Several hours later the reporter returns with the information that he has counted no less than sixteen barber poles in town. This information is duly included as "filler" in the next issue of the paper. It has three discernible results. First, it prompts a number of letters to the editor, expressing astonishment and civic pride that a town so small can support sixteen barbers. Secondly, a student protest group forms and demonstrates before the barber shops, claiming that they constitute a monopoly working against "independent business enterprise"--i.e., the "student barbers" in the campus dormitories. Finally, after much discussion in the City Hall the mayor appoints a committee to investigate the charges of monopoly, unfair trade practices, and unjustifiable boycott. In short, the situation produces several instances of discourse, attributed by some townspeople to the editor's "slow day" assign-

ment.

Question: Can we establish conclusively in this instance, through the scope of interpretation allowed by Bitzer's theory, that the original exigence (i.e., the editor's need for a story) was really nonrhetorical.

Answer: No--because, whether intended or not, it did produce instances of discourse. These can all be referred to a "complex of persons, objects, events and relations" which, says Bitzer, "are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience, (and) therefore available for scrutiny by an observer or critic who attends to them."[20] Thus the situation is what Bitzer calls "real or genuine... grounded in history,"[21] and can be interpreted as a rhetorical situation likely to produce rhetorical discourse. We are forced to conclude, then, on a strict interpretation of Bitzer's theory, that the original exigence, however seemingly trivial or accidental or ridiculous, was really rhetorical. At least we have no way, on such an interpretation, of preventing the discourse from being judged "fitting" and therefore rhetorical. So this instance, too, points up a major methodological difficulty in Bitzer's theory.

Both of my instances, of course, are facetious. The difficulties they illustrate, however, are significant. These difficulties point to another, more fundamental difficulty in Bitzer's theory. They derive from a single postulate, an assumption which Bitzer makes--indeed, must make in order to complete his account of exigences--and which he asks us to accept without proof. Bitzer nowhere formulates this postulate explicitly, though he implies it throughout. Thus the statement of the postulate, which follows, is mine--not his.

Stated concisely, the postulate is: nonproductive rhetorical exigences exist. By nonproductive I mean, in Bitzer's words, exigences which did not produce "Rhetorical discourse. . .called into existence by situation."[22] Bitzer's postulate requires us to assume that some nonproductive exigences are truly

rhetorical despite the fact that they did not "give birth to rhetorical utterances."[23] If we accept this postulate in order to apply the theory, we run head-on into the difficulty of determining which nonproductive exigences are rhetorical. Bitzer attempts to forestall this difficulty by appealing, once again, to the quality "fitness of response." He makes this appeal by stating an explanatory hypothesis--the hypothesis of the "propitious moment":

> Every rhetorical situation in principle evolves to a propitious moment for the fitting rhetorical response. After this moment, most situations decay; we all have the experience of creating a rhetorical response when it is too late to make it public.[24]

Now this hypothesis, put forth as explanatory, itself requires explanation. For Bitzer's statement of it raises a number of serious objections, semantic and substantive. I will limit discussion of these to four that seem to me the most important.

To begin with, what does the modifier "in principle" mean in this context? I suggest it means only that, according to Bitzer, we ought to assume such "evolution" and "decay" of rhetorical situations is always going on, whether we perceive it or not. Given the ambiguous character of exigences as Bitzer has shown it, this assumption is plausible. But is it any more plausible than the assumption, say, that "every golf tournament evolves to a propitious moment for the fitting drive or putt"?

Secondly, we must ask in this context: "propitious moment" for whom? For the rhetor--the producer of "the fitting response"? Or for the audience--the intended receivers of the response? Or for both? And if for both, is it not reasonable to expect Bitzer to develop his concept of rhetorical discourse explicitly in terms of two standpoints--that of the rhetor and that of the audience? I do not mean these ques-

tions to be carping, since I agree with Bitzer that the audience is an essential, relevant "constituent" of the rhetorical situation in ways that "the orator" (or, more generally, the rhetor) and his discourse are not.[25] But I would like to see Bitzer develop the relation of the audience standpoint to the other "constituents" of exigence and constraints with at least as much richness of detail as he has developed the relation of the rhetor's standpoint. As his theory is now formulated, it suffers from an overemphasis on what David Berlo, Herbert W. Simons, Lawrence Rosenfield and others have called a "source of orientation."[26] This is nowhere more clearly seen than in Bitzer's treatment of the quality "fitness of response." He deals with it almost exclusively in terms of the rhetor's perception of what is "fitting."

But, to use Bitzer's example, recall the assassination of President Kennedy. Is it not likely that many of our responses at the time, like those later for Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy, were not "rhetorical" or "creative" at all? Were they not, in all probability, vents for a variety of emotions we were feeling? They may have run a gamut from astonishment through outrage and anxiety to compassion and religious resignation. They may have been completely nonverbal. Or they may have been inadequately verbal, even inarticulate. But surely they were essentially private reactions, not intended for a specific audience. Bitzer concedes as much when he says that "there came into existence countless eulogies to John F. Kennedy that never reached a public; They were filed, entered in diaries, or created in thought."[27] But Bitzer misses the point here. These "eulogies," whether expressed or unexpressed, hardly qualify as experiences "of creating a rhetorical response." On the contrary, if such reactions qualified us for anything, it was probably to receive, not to create, fitting rhetorical responses; for in sharing them, we composed a receptive audience with "expectations. . .keyed to a tragic historic fact."[28]

Finally, what about the problems faced by a

rhetorical critic in determining the "propitious moment" for nonproductive rhetorical exigence? How can he fix the propitious or fitting moment for responses but which somehow did not? Without discourse, as we have seen, there is no guide, no reliable sign, within the context of Bitzer's theory for determining if either a situation or the exigence which defines it is truly rhetorical. Without discourse, there is no way to distinguish a rhetorical audience (persons "capable of serving as mediator(s) of the change which the discourse functions to produce") from a scientific audience ("persons capable of receiving knowledge") or a poetic audience ("persons capable of participating in aesthetic experiences induced by the poetry").[29]

Thus Bitzer's postulate that nonproductive rhetorical exigences exist is another anomaly of his theory. Such a conceptual byproduct of his generally useful, insightful analysis of "rhetorical situation" has and can have only a vague, shadowy, fugitive existence. It not only performs no critical function; it is an obstacle to practical criticism.[30] A critic's notion of how an exigence which failed to produce responses can nevertheless be considered rhetorical must be, alas, remarkably like Bishop Berkeley's notion of how the table continues to exist in a room when no one is perceiving it.

III

Why these anomalies? They may be explained, if not resolved when we notice that in Bitzer's theory the conceptual dependency runs one way and the methodological dependency another. Suppose, in other words, we interpret the theory according to the way that Bitzer develops and supports his concepts. Then we will take the existence of rhetorical discourse as depending on the presence of a rhetorical situation--or, more accurately, on the presence of a "controlling" rhetorical exigence which prescribes the audience and constraints within the situation. We will, in short,

interpret a discourse as rhetorical (rather than poetic, scientific, or some other type) insofar as it depends on and, in most cases, derives from that specific interplay of exigence, audience, and constraints identifiable as a rhetorical situation.

This seems, for the moment, a plausible interpretation. Then we remember that the only reliable sign of the existence of a rhetorical situation is the presence of a rhetorical discourse--or, more accurately, on the presence within that discourse of a quality, "fitness of response," which marks it as rhetorical and indicates the nature of the exigence it is responding to as rhetorical. To apply Bitzer's theory as a rationale for criticism, then, we must begin with what is basic to it methodologically rather than conceptually: a discourse presumed to be rhetorical, implying (though not conclusively establishing) a rhetorical exigence.

Why is all this important? What difference does it make in our understanding and possible application of Bitzer's concept of rhetorical discourse? I suggest that it is important, and does make a difference, because it discloses a major contradiction in Bitzer's theory. At some points in Bitzer's theory as it now stands, his discussion of the quality "fitness of response" sounds descriptive, suggesting that it functions as a defining quality of any rhetorical discourse. At other points, however, his discussion sounds normative, suggesting that "fitness of response" functions as a standard or norm for effective rhetorical discourse.

We can now see why this happens. Suppose you start with an exigence as the primary datum or "given." Then you face the problem of determining whether it is rhetorical--whether it interacts or can interact as part of a rhetorical situation. If discourse follows the exigence, and refers to it, you can treat the discourse as produced by it and therefore as a "fitting response" to it. In this way you can stipulate both the discourse and the exigence as rhetorical. But this seems, at best, a questionable procedure. If

on the other hand, no discourse follows the exigence, you still face the original problem--is the exigence truly rhetorical?--plus two others: (1) why did this exigence fail to produce discourse? and (2) what kind of discourse would constitute a "fitting response" to this exigence? Because of these problems, and others which I have shown to be related to them, I recommend that any critic planning to apply Bitzer's theory start with discourse, not an exigence, as the primary datum.

Even with this pragmatic reversal of starting-points, however, Bitzer's theory raises other problems of interpretation and application. Within the limits of this paper I can do no more than suggest a few of these. They concern further ambiguities involved in Bitzer's notion of the discourse as a fitting response. Bitzer is well aware of these ambiguities. He attempts to reduce them by offering us, as we have seen, the double-analogy that "rhetorical discourse comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem."[31] But the sense is not the same--or at least not similar enough to make the quality "fitness of response" immediately intelligible.

To see the inadequacy of the question-answer analogy, let us consider two examples. Suppose you ask me "When did Caesar cross the Rubicon?" and I answer "Between Washington and California." Now, in one sense (the informational) my response is obviously inappropriate. Yet in another (the grammatical) my response is "fitting" since it is an answer to a question. Of course, it is the wrong answer to your question, but the right answer to a question you did not ask--probably "Where is the state of Oregon located?" Again, suppose you ask me "When did Caesar cross the Rubicon?" and this time I answer "94 B.C." This, too, is a "fitting" response, though it is the wrong answer to your question since (as you inform me) the generally accepted date for Caesar's crossing is 49 B.C. Yet you and I can even conceive of circumstances where we would consider my second answer not

only "fitting" but "right"--say, a test-situation in an elementary history class where approximate dates or "dating by century" are counted as corrected. Thus we see how the analogy of question-answer to Bitzer's situation-discourse breaks down.

The problem-solution analogy does not fare much better. Granted that "problem" is roughly equivalent to Bitzer's term "exigence," as his usual synonyms for it ("need," "want," "lack," "imperfection") readily show. But the very choice of terms suggests that Bitzer has a precise concept in mind. Recall, too, how Bitzer encourages us to distinguish rhetorical from nonrhetorical exigences in the analysis of a situation. Obviously, given the demands of the theory, a rough semantic equivalent will not do. But, as we have seen, within the context of Bitzer's theory the concept exigence--even when qualified as "controlling"--is riddled through and through with ambiguities. These ambiguities, moreover, affect the viability of Bitzer's rhetorical discourse, which is conceptually dependent upon it. As an explanatory concept, then, Bitzer's exigence is no more precise than, say, the "Need Step" in Alan Monroe's Motivated Sequence.[32] And as a critical concept which can be applied in the evaluation of rhetorical discourse, it is probably less useful.

A more promising analogy is the one that Bitzer offers early in the article but fails to develop:

> A rhetorical work is analogous to a moral action rather than to a tree. An act is moral because it is an act performed in a situation of a certain kind; similarly a work is rhetorical because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind.[33]

How and to what extent is a rhetorical work analogous to a moral action? The question, as Bitzer raises it, is intriguing. Perhaps the attempt to answer it will lead to a theoretical reconstruction of Bitzer's treatment of the relationship of rhetorical discourse to rhetorical situation. If so, and if the reconstruc-

tion can be supported by sufficient empirical data, it may rectify at least some of the problems in Bitzer's original formulation. What follows is not this hoped-for reconstruction (since I look forward to Bitzer himself eventually providing it), but rather an exercise in pure post-critical speculation.

I will begin by agreeing with Wayne Brockriede's statement, in an article previously cited, that "contemporary practice (of rhetoric) is essentially interactive."[34] Indeed, I do not know how I can very well disagree with it in light of the abundant evidence of two-way attempts at communication surrounding all of us. When I think of these attempts in terms of Bitzer's account of rhetorical situation, I conclude that (1) in most situations, the standpoints of the rhetor and the intended audience seldom coincide at the outset; (2) rhetorical activity, considered as "transaction," "process," "dialogue," "exchange," or whatever, consists to a great extent in bringing the rhetor's and audience's standpoints into some sort of fruitful overlap; and (3) this bringing-into process involves mediating between the rhetor's and audience's several senses of exigence and constraints as they operate in this particular never-quite-repeated situation.[35]

In some way, then, the rhetor seeks from his audience a mandate not only to speak to them (he may have that already, through constraints operating in the particular situation) but to become a spokesman for them. He seeks to identify himself not only with the audience's intersts but with the pursuit and perservation of its interests. He seeks, in short, a delegated authority from his audience to act and to be taken as acting in its behalf. Furthermore, he seeks that authority from his audience because, in any genuine rhetorical situation, it resides there; it is a power which his audience can grant, withhold, or rescind; and his audience can do these things with it under the stress of great emotion, or in an attitude of calm deliberation, or with a sense of reluctance, anxiety, exhilaration, or despair.

In some way, too, the audience in any genuine rhetorical situation knows it has this power. It may be unable or unwilling to act directly in its own behalf, because of its own operating constraints, but it has the power--in however inchoate and dispersive a form--to delegate authority for action to the rhetor. This power, when generated in a rhetorical situation, for rhetorical purposes, is what I call a rhetorical sanction. It exists in the audience; it manifests itself within the rhetorical situation, through the audience's sense of the compelling exigence as adjusted to the prevailing constraints; and it is sought by the rhetor through his discourse.

Sanctions are, of course, of various kinds--primarily, legal, ethical, political, and religious. These need to be studied for analogues to the rhetorical sanction. Furthermore, the notion of sanctions in general and of rhetorical sanctions in particular suggests some ways in which a rhetorical discourse is, in Bitzer's words, "analogous to a moral action." Like a moral action, a rhetorical discourse involves elements of motivation, obligation to others, and successful or "satisfactory" performance. These elements are taken into account in a formal definition of Sanction contributed by the philosopher William Frankena to the Dictionary of Philosophy:

> A sanction is anything which serves to move (and, in this sense, to oblige) a man to observe or to refrain from a given mode of conduct, and hence, on a hedonistic theory, any source of pleasure or pain.[36]

Inspection of this definition suggests further ways in which the notion of rhetorical sanction could clarify Bitzer's account of the relationship of discourse to situation. Rhetorical discourses should be viewed from two standpoints--the rhetor's and the audience's. From the standpoint of the rhetor, the entire discourse is a strategy of accomodation which may or may not "fit" its sense of the exigence.

The notion of rhetorical sanction can also clarify what we have seen as the descriptive-normative ambiguity of the quality "fitness of response" in Bitzer's concept of rhetorical discourse. We can say that a response is fitting ("adequate," "appropriate," "satisfactory") if it reaches its intended audience, through adjustment to the prevailing constraints, and causes the audience to identify with the rhetor's sense of exigence. But if we can show that through such "identification" the audience acknowledge the rhetor's sanction in working to remedy the existence, then we can say that the response was also effective.

In conclusion, I would suggest developing this notion of rhetorical sanction as one way in which Bitzer could revise his concept of rhetorical discourse, allowing for important differences in perspective from the standpoints of the rhetor and the audience. Such revision could reduce--or better, eliminate entirely--the ambiguities surrounding his concept of exigence. It might allow also for distinguishing rhetorical responses which are fitting from those which, more than fitting, are effective.

IV

How would Bitzer respond to these criticisms? Fortunately we need not guess, since he has already responded publicly to some of them on a symposium, "The Rhetorical Situation: Comment and Reply," sponsored by the Western Speech Association during its Portland Convention in November, 1970. On that occasion, after hearing a shorter version of this critique, Bitzer commented on what he took to be its main points. Then I replied to objections he had raised.

Since that time the substance of our remarks has been extended into the dialogue of argument and counterargument which follows. It amounts to a reassessment, on both sides, of some issues involved in the acceptance or rejection of Bitzer's theory. It does not try to account for all the issues involved. Nonetheless, it is presented here for the sake of

philosophic candor--and as part of an ongoing process of reflective inquiry about rhetoric to which both Bitzer and I are committed.

Bitzer: Suppose I begin with comments on your summary of my paper, since it contains some statements or interpretations which do not quite express my meaning.

Pomeroy: Fair enough.

Bitzer: At the beginning of your summary you say: "Bitzer's theory may be summarized as follows. Before any rhetorical discourse is created and presented, a rhetorical situation must exist." Now I contend that my paper does not say this. My position is that a discourse is rhetorical in relation to--as a response to--a situation But this does not mean that in every instance the situation must exist before the message can be created and presented. Discourse if often created in anticipation of a situation--when a speaker needs to be prepared for a situation he thinks will occur.

Pomeroy: Can you give examples of that?

Bitzer: Of course. Consider a candidate for political office preparing his acceptance statement days before the election. Consider, again, a newspaper writer preparing the obituary of a famous person years before his death. So, I do not believe the creation and presentation of rhetorical discourse must await the full development of a situation. Still, I agree, it is probably true that most messages we regard as rhetorical are created in response to situations that exist, or are approaching full development, at the time the speech is uttered.

Pomeroy: That agreement is an important concession, I think. But let me reply to your earlier statement. It is true that the beginning summary-sentence is not quoted verbatim from your paper. Nonetheless, it

expresses accurately, I believe, your main line of argument. You do assert that most discourses we regard as rhetorical <u>are</u> created in response to situations that exist, fully or in part, at the time the speech is uttered. In fact, you just reasserted it. You also assert that other discourses which we may not regard as rhetorical can only <u>become</u> rhetorical in relation to--as responses to--a <u>rhetorical</u> situation. Now, if these assertions refer to the fact that in your theory the situation makes the discourse rhetorical, and not the other way around, then you and I agree on your theoretical position here.

<u>Bitzer</u>: Good! But now I'd like to comment on a reference in your summary to the "odd circumstances" by which a nonrhetorical work might <u>become</u> rhetorical You say: "We may, however, have <u>non</u>rhetorical discourse--that is, verbal constructs not called into existence by a rhetorical situation. These, contends Bitzer, may even 'exhibit formal features which we consider rhetorical--such as ethical and emotional appeals, and stylistic patterns. . .yet all remain unrhetorical unless, through the oddest circumstances, one of them by chance should fit a situation.' Bitzer does not further explain or illustrate these odd circumstances, nor how they allow nonrhetorical discourse to 'fit a situation'."

<u>Pomeroy</u>: How would you clarify the reference?

<u>Bitzer</u>: I would point to the example used in my paper: the person who spends his time writing eulogies of persons who never existed. <u>His</u> speeches are nonrhetorical. Though they have all the marks of a real eulogy, they are fictive--they are not in relation to a situation. One of his fictive eulogies would become rhetorical if, by chance, it were later seen to fit a real person--that is, if, by chance, it came into fitting relation with a real situation. Similarly, consider the speech of a character in a novel, or an entry in Lincoln's diary, or conversation overheard

in the hallway. Any of these might become rhetorical for someone if he is in a situation for which it counts as a fitting response.

Pomeroy: Well, my reply here is covered partly by the first reply. In other words, I agree that your theory allows for discourse becoming rhetorical when it relates to a genuine rhetorical situation. My puzzlement, and thus the point in dispute, arises over the nature of that relation. It seemed, and still seems, to me that your example--the eulogist of fictive person--explains nothing. But my concern here is with something more significant than any of your examples explain.

Bitzer: What is that?

Pomeroy: It arises over your phrase "by chance," used once in your original statement and twice in your comments. I am concerned with the importation of Chance into your account of "rhetorical situation," which up to that point stressed not only exigence, audience, and constraints as "relevant constituents," but further specified that a "controlling exigence" almost defines any given rhetorical situation. How, then, can Chance play a part in your theory? Apparently under certain conditions it can even become a determining factor. But if we allow Chance in the theory because we seem to find it in our experience, doesn't this weaken your account of the quality "fitness of response"? We have seen that account to be crucial to the acceptance of your concept of rhetorical discourse. But once Chance is admitted as a determining factor, "fitness" deteriorates into mere "appropriateness." This forces your theory into maintaining that nonrhetorical discourse becomes rhetorical insofar as it is somehow regarded as "appropriate" to a rhetorical situation. Pardon the pun, but "appropriate," in this context, does not somehow seem "fitting."

Bitzer: Apology accepted--reluctantly. Well, perhaps we cannot resolve that point here. But let's move on. You level a major criticism, I admit, when you raise the question, How do we know when a situation is truly rhetorical? You point out what I have already conceded--that some situations are real, others unreal or sophistic, some exigences clear, others unclear, some strong, others weak, some important, others trivial, some completely modifiable by discourse, others barely modifiable, and so on. Then you comment: "A theory which requires its users to discriminate carefully and continually between rhetorical and nonrhetorical discourses, situations, and exigences runs the risk of being not only misunderstood and misapplied; it may never be applied at all." Now I do not take this to be a devastating criticism if by a "user" you mean a rhetorician or a critic.

Pomeroy: Why not?

Bitzer: Well, it seems obvious to me that the theorist and the critic must examine rhetorical situations with great care. If so, their examinations will require concepts and distinctions of the sort mentioned. For example, if a rhetorical critic examines Senator Muskie's election night campaign speech, he must understand it in relation to the situation which called it forth. I maintain that we cannot understand the speech's arguments and import unless we see it as a response to the earlier Nixon speeches and other elements in the situation. Further, it seems likely that the critic would want to determine whether or not the situation Muskie perceived could have been modified by his message, whether the exigences Muskie perceived were real or sophistic, and so on.

Pomeroy: That's an impressive example.

Bitzer: Here's another. I have heard some critics of Nixon's campaign oratory say that the exigences he sought to dramatize to the public were sophistic--unreal,

contrived. So, I believe that the concepts and distinctions which you presumably find burdensome are needed--and are really emplcyed by us in our serious criticism. On the other hand, if by "users" you mean practitioners--orators of all sorts--then no doubt these concepts and distinctions would not be systematically applied. I do not think this a hazard, however, since I believe that very few speakers base their practice on theory.

Pomeroy: I will reply in a moment to the semantic point. But first let me say that I don't agree that very few speakers base their practice on theory. On the contrary, I think that many do--only it is usually on what you and I would probably call "bad" theory: some inadequately examined or superficial notion, picked up somewhere, on what is intrinsically "persuasive," "inspiring," "informative," or "entertaining," without regard to the constraints of the situation or the expectations of the audience. Isn't it, in fact, the inept and amateur speakers that seem the most theory-ridden--the most dominated by preconceptions of "what to say" and "how to say it"? Professionals are much less beguiled by theory, and much more critical of the theories they do accept, since they can rely on the resources of their experience--including the experience of criticism. But that's by the way. Suppose I return to the semantic point.

Bitzer: By all means.

Pomeroy: By a "user" I do mean primarily a rhetorician (whether theorist or critic) but also a historian of rhetoric, a political scientist, a practitioner--in fact, anyone who could conceivably find a rhetorical theory useful. But the real point is not Who could use it? but How useful would it be? That is why I do not find your concepts and distinctions "burdensome," as you suggest.

Bitzer: I'm glad to hear it.

Pomeroy: Instead, I find them in some ways ambiguous, contradictory, and inconsistent. I have no doubt that parts of your theory as it now stands are certainly useful, if other parts are neglected or substituted for. But, after all, it is the theory as a whole--what Aristotle would call a synolon--which solicits out acceptance and application. And for the practical critic of rhetoric, two values of an acceptable theory are coherence and intelligibility. Thus I find myself reluctant to reject your theory entirely, because of its keen and often novel insights into the nature of a rhetorical situation. Yet I cannot accept the theory entirely as it now stands, because it glosses over difficulties that it raises and, I think, is obliged to deal with.

Bitzer: Perhaps some of these will clear up as we continue. You level a second major criticism in calling attention to methodological problems. You say: "Within the context of Bitzer's theory it is always possible to argue that any rhetorical exigence which did not produce rhetorical discourse was not truly rhetorical in the first place . But is impossible to argue conclusively that any exigence. . .which did produce some kind of discourse. . .was really non-rhetorical." You also assert that in my theory the conceptual dependency runs one way and the methodological dependency another. You then comment: "We remember that the only reliable sign of the existence of a rhetorical situation is the presence of a rhetorical discourse."

Pomeroy: Yes, with the emphasis on "reliable."

Bitzer: Well, this last statement, I think, is the source of confusion giving rise to the alleged difficulties. I wish, therefore, to say clearly that I do not believe and did not say in the paper that the only reliable sign of the existence of a rhetorical situation is the presence of a rhetorical discourse. I did point out that frequently situations come into

existence, then atrophy, without discourse having been created in response to them. All of us have experienced this. We have failed to speak when we thought we should; later, perhaps, we created in private thought the speech we should have uttered in the situation. With this point understood, I think the force of your objection is lost. Clearly, there are some situations which did not generate rhetorical discourse. Would you like examples?

Pomeroy: Of course!

Bitzer: In countless towns and cities, early in this century, people and industries were polluting the streams and air. There were exigences, audiences, and constraints. But in many of these places no one responded rhetorically. It is clear also that some nonrhetorical exigences and situations have generated discourse which people erroneously thought was rhetorical. They thought they were in rhetorical situations but they were not. Recall, for example, that men for thousands of years asked the sun, wind, moon, or some other object to provide rain, fertility, and other favors. They thought the situation genuine but it was spurious. In contemporary life, too, there are speakers responding to situations which are unreal.

Pomeroy: The critical issue here is indeed "major," if by "major" you mean a significant ground for accepting or rejecting the theory as a rationale for criticism. Furthermore, I think you see the issue and concede its force, but cannot resolve it without extensive revision of the theory. Again, your examples are impressive. They indicate the intended scope of your theory. They also clarify, to some extent, the differences you find between rhetorical and nonrhetorical discourse.

Bitzer: Thank you.

Pomeroy: But while it is true that your paper does not say, in so many words, that the only reliable sign of

a rhetorical situation is the presence of a rhetorical discourse, that proposition is entailed by your main line of argument. This is especially apparent in your account of the relation of exigence to discourse. It may well be an unintended implication of your argument. But the effect of this proposition, whether stated or implied, can be felt by a critically perceptive reader and could be a stumbling-block to the practical critic. That was why I brought out the hypothetical examples of the fluoridated water "fact-sheet" and the barber pole newspaper story. That was also why I analyzed your hypothesis concerning "the propitious moment."

Bitzer: Can you explain further why you consider this proposition "a significant ground for accepting or rejecting the theory as a rationale for criticism?

Pomeroy: Yes. You claim that there must be some rhetorical situations which did not generate rhetorical discourse. Possibly so. But without discourse we cannot now know reliably that the situations were really rhetorical at that time. We can, of course, conjecture that they were or argue that they should have been rhetorical, with "controlling exigences" which should have evoked "fitting responses." But someone else is equally free to conjecture or to argue otherwise. Then are we not left with only the well-known "insight of hindsight" to justify us?

Bitzer: Obviously I have not convinced you. Let me conclude, then, by responding to another point. You suggest that I employ the notion of "effective response" in addition to, or instead of, "fitting response". There were several reasons, when I wrote the paper, why I chose not to use the terms "effect" and "effective". But the main reason was that I myself find the meaning of "fitting response", or "fitness of the response to the situation", or the ways in which situation "prescribes" fitting response, exceedingly unclear. And your criticism of this I

readily acknowledge. Of course, a fitting response is one that is effective--that is, given limitations imposed by the situation, it does modify the exigence. But the more precise meaning of "fitting response" can only be determined in the individual case by examining the particular situation.

Pomeroy: My suggestion was to use "effective response" in addition to, not instead of, "fitting response"--and for the reasons given. The most compelling reason, for me at least, is what I have analyzed as the descriptive-normative ambiguity of "fitting response". To eliminate this, as well as to develop a double-standpoint for viewing rhetorical discourse in light of your "moral action" analogy, I offered a speculative sketch (it is no more than that) which I hope you will expand into a finished portrait. For clearly, as my opening discussion indicated, your theory is, as it now stands, incomplete. Clearly, too, it should be completed, not abandoned. For I agree with another critic of your theory, K. E. Wilkerson, that it is "one of the few nontrivial alternatives to traditional theory to appear in recent rhetorical literature."[37]

Mr. Pomeroy (Ph.D., 1960, Stanford University) is Associate Professor, Department of Rhetoric, University of California, Davis, California.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, I, 1 (Winter, 1968), pp. 1-14.

For extended critical discussion, see: K. E. Wilkerson, "On Evaluating Theories of Rhetoric," Philosophy and Rhetoric, III, 2 (Spring, 1970), pp. 82-96; and Richard L. Larson, "Lloyd Bitzer's 'Rhetorical Situation' and the Classification of Discourse: Problems and Implications," Philosophy and Rhetoric, III, 3 (Summer, 1970), pp. 165-168.

For brief comments and acknowledgments of indebtedness, see: Carroll C. Arnold, "Oral Rhetoric, Rhetoric, and Literature," Philosophy and Rhetoric, I, 4 (Fall 1968), pp. 193, 206-207-, 208, 210; Richard L. Lanigan, "Rhetorical Criticism: An Interpretation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty," Philosophy and Rhetoric, II, 2 (Spring, 1969), pp. 61, 63-64, 70-71; Walter R. Fisher, "A Motive View of Communication," Quarterly Journal of Speech, LVI, 2 (April, 1970), pp. 131-132; Craig R. Smith, "Actuality and Potentiality: The Essence of Criticism," Philosophy and Rhetoric, III, 3 (Summer, 1970), pp. 138, 140; Karl R. Wallace, Understanding Discourse: The Speech Act and Rhetorical Action (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), pp. 72n, 97-98n; and Richard J. Goodman and William I. Gorden, "The Rhetoric of Desecration," Quarterly Journal of Speech, LVII, 1 (February, 1971), p. 24.

[2]Cf. J. Jeffrey Auer, ed. The Rhetoric of Our Times (New York: Applieton-Century-Crofts, 1969); John Waite Bowers and Donovan J. Ochs, The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1971); Haig A. and Hamida Bosmajian, eds. The Rhetoric of the Civil-Rights Movement (New York: Random House, 1969); and Robert L. Scott and

Wayne E. Brockriede, eds. The Rhetoric of Black Power (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); George MacBeth, "The Sick Rhetoric of War," The Critical Quarterly, VI, 2 (Summer, 1964); and Goodman and Gorden, op. cit., pp. 23-31.

[3]Bitzer's only explicit indebtedness to Aristotle's Rhetoric is in his treatment of constraints as equivalent to Aristotle's classification of "artistic" and "inartistic" proofs. See Bitzer, op. cit., p. 8.

[4]Ibid., p. 2.

[5]Cf. Edwin Black, Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method (New York: Macmillan, 1965), passim; Wayne E. Brockriede, "Toward a Contemporary Aristotelian Tehroy of Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech, LII, 1 (February, 1966), pp. 33-40; numerous brief references in Anthony Hillbruner, Critical Dimensions: The Art of Public Address Criticism (New York: Random House, 1966); and J. Robert Olian, "The Intended Uses of Aristotle's Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXV, 2 (June, 1968), pp. 137-148.

[6]Bitzer, op. cit., p. 6: "Not the rhetor and not persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity--and, I should add, of rhetorical criticism."

[7]Herbert W. Simons, "Toward a New Rhetoric," The Pennsylvania Speech Annual, XXIV (September, 1967), p.7.

[8]Bitzer, op. cit., p. 3 (my italics).

[9]Ibid., p. 8.

[10]Ibid., p. 2.

[11]Ibid., p. 9.

[12]Ibid., p. 2.

[13]Ibid., p. 10.

[14]Ibid., p. 2.

[15]Ibid., p. 6.

[16]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[17]Ibid., p. 7.

[18]Ibid. Here, Bitzer's assertion seems to echo George Campbell's statement, at the very beginning of the Philosophy of Rhetoric (1776), that while "All the ends of speaking are reducible to four. . .," nevertheless "Any one discourse admits only one of these ends as the principal.". But this similarity--and there are others--is hardly surprising, given Bitzer's many invaluable studies of Campbell. See especially his "Editor's Introduction," The Philosophy of Rhetoric by George Campbell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963); "A Re-Evaluation of Campbell's Doctrine of Evidence," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLVI, 2 (April, 1960), pp. 135-140; and "Hume's Philosophy in George Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric, Philosophy and Rhetoric, II, 3 (Summer, 1969), pp. 139-166.

[19]Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," p. 5.

[20]Ibid., p. 11.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid., p. 9.

[23]Ibid., p. 6.

[24]Ibid., p. 13.

[25]Ibid., p. 8.

[26]Cf. David K. Berlo, The Process of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 115-116; Herbert W. Simons, op. cit., pp. 11-14; Lawrence W. Rosenfield, "Rhetorical Criticism and an Aristotelian Notion of Process," Speech Monographs, XXXIII, 1 (March, 1966), pp. 1-16; and Dean Barnlund, "Toward a Meaning-Centered Philosophy of Communication," Journal of Communication, XII, 4 (December, 1962), pp. 201-202.

[27]Bitzer, op. cit., p. 9.

[28]Ibid. For two able discussions of such "receptivity to responses" (both tending to confirm my point here), see: Charles J. Stewart and Bruce Kendall, eds. A Man Named John F. Kennedy: Sermons on His Assassination (Glen Rock, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1964), passim; and Charles J. Stewart, "The Dallas Pulpit and the Kennedy Assassination," Central States Speech Journal, XVI, 4 (November, 1965), pp. 255-261.

[29]Bitzer, op. cit., p. 8.

[30]By "practical criticism" I mean normative and judgmental discourse devoted to rhetoric, not as ideally or fictively conceived but as actually practiced. I therefore agree with Lawrence Rosenfield that the practical critic of rhetoric "occupies himself with some combination of variables which focus on the message": Source-Message-Environment, Message-Critic, Source-Message-Environment, Source-Message-Critic, or Message-Environment-Critic. See: Lawrence W. Rosenfield, "The Anatomy of Critical Discourse," Speech Monographs, XXXV, 1 (March, 1968), p. 58. Under "rhetoric actually practiced," however, I would include any theories of rhetoric actually advanced and applied.

[31]Bitzer, op. cit., p. 5.

[32]Cf. Alan H. Monroe and Douglas Ehninger, Princi-

ples and Types of Speeches, 6th ed. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1967), pp. 278-279.

[33]Bitzer, op. cit., p. 5.

[34]Brockriede, op. cit., p. 36.

[35]Cf. Bitzer, op. cit., p. 8: ". . .the rhetorical audience must be capable of serving as mediator of the change which the discourse functions to produce."

[36]W(illiam) K. F(rankena), art. "Sanction," Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. by Dagobert D. Runes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 276.

[37]Wilkerson, op. cit., p. 93.