

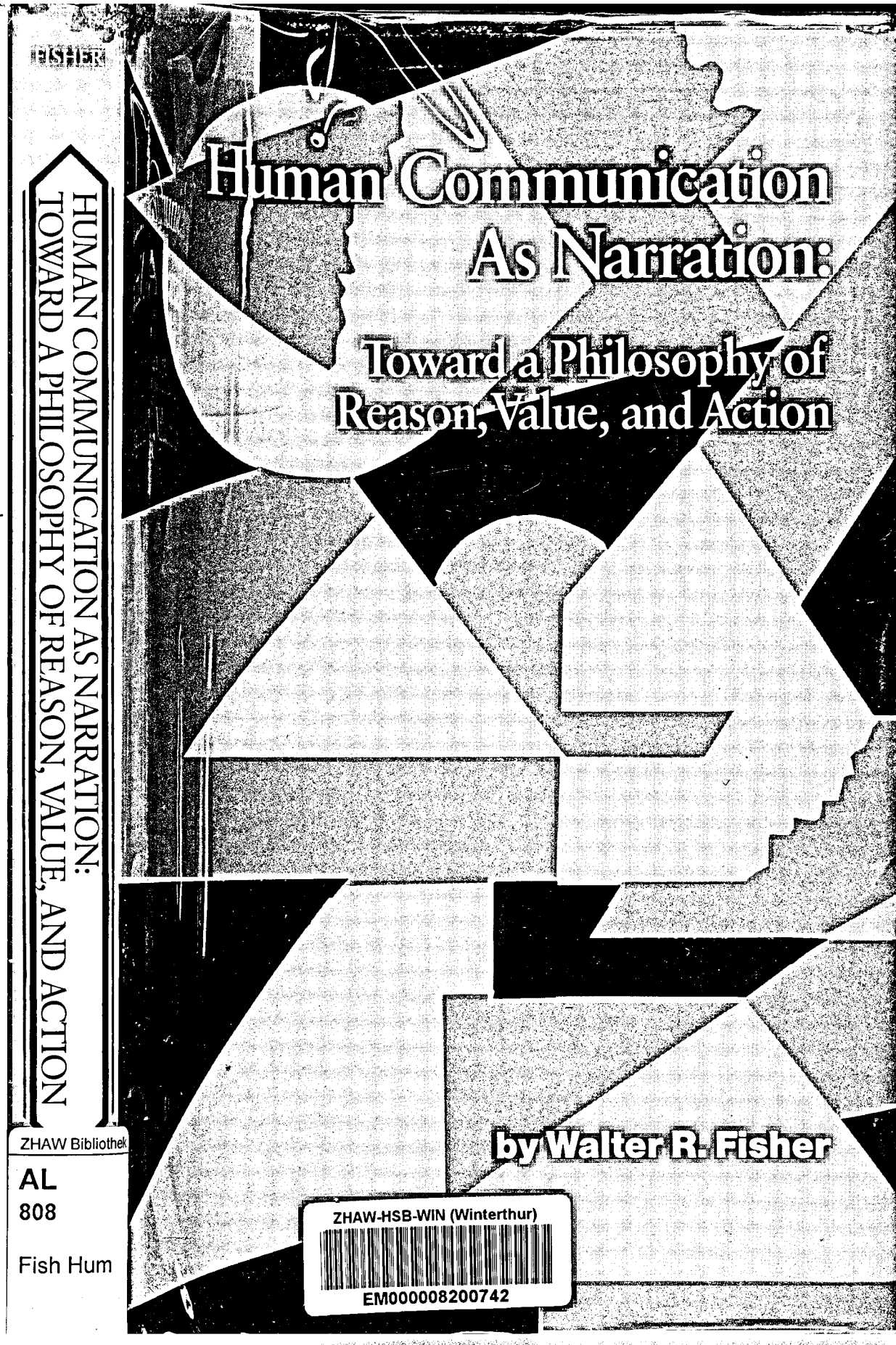
Human Communication As Narration: *Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*

by Walter R. Fisher

This book addresses questions that have concerned rhetoricians, literary theorists, and philosophers since the time of the pre-Socratics and the Sophists: How do people come to believe and to act on the basis of communicative experiences? What is the nature of reason and rationality in these experiences? What is the role of values in human decision making and action? How can reason and values be assessed? In answering these questions, Professor Fisher proposes a reconceptualization of humankind as *homo narrans*; that all forms of human communication need to be seen as stories – symbolic interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character; that individuated forms of discourse should be considered “good reasons” – values or value-laden warrants for believing or acting in certain ways; and that a *narrative logic* that all humans have natural capacities to employ ought to be conceived of as the logic by which human communication is assessed.

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PART I
THE HISTORICAL EXIGENCE

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning was the word or, more accurately, the logos. And in the beginning, “logos” meant story, reason, rationale, conception, discourse, thought. Thus all forms of human expression and communication—from epic to architecture, from biblical narrative to statuary—came within its purview. At least this was the case until the time of the pre-Socratic philosophers and Plato and Aristotle. As a result of their thinking, logos and mythos, which had been conjoined, were dissociated; logos was transformed from a generic term into a specific one, applying only to philosophical (later technical) discourse. Poetical and rhetorical discourse were relegated to a secondary or negative status respecting their connections with truth, knowledge, and reality. Poetic was given province over mythos; rhetoric was delegated the realm where logos and mythos reign in dubious ambiguity. A historical hegemonic struggle ensued among proponents of each of the three forms of discourse and it lasts to this day.

The story of these events, which I shall sketch in this chapter, is germane to an understanding of the narrative paradigm that shall propose in chapter 3. The essential postulates of the paradigm are:

(1) Humans are . . . storytellers. (2) The paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is “good reasons,” which vary in form among situations, genres, and media of communication. (3) The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character along with the kinds of forces identified in the Frenzt and Farrell language-action paradigm. (4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives (5) The world as we know it is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation.¹

The story told here will provide one-half of the historical context behind the narrative paradigm; the other half concerns an evolving relationship between logic and the three forms of discourse; I shall detail that half in the next chapter. The entire argument will demonstrate that the ancient conception of logos, when informed by the narrative paradigm, has validity and value for today and tomorrow.

The story of logos and mythos parallels the story of orality and literacy, as told by Walter Ong.² There is however, a fundamental difference between them. The issues in the orality-and-literacy story are how the mind is constituted and what the consequences are for human consciousness. At issue in the story of the interrelations of logos and mythos is which form of discourse—philosophy (technical discourse), rhetoric, or poetic—ensures the discovery and validation of truth, knowledge, and reality, and thereby deserves to be the legislator of human decision making and action. The two stories inform one another and both are necessary to a full realization of the relationship between communication and what humans are and can become.

Another parallel story is told by Samuel Ijsseling in *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict*.³ Its issue is “What is actually happening whenever something is said or written?” I propose the narrative paradigm as a response to this question and as a factor that might be part of Ijsseling’s history—if it were extended. The theme of the story on which I shall focus is the transformation of the concept of logos.

Historically, the most pertinent struggle is the one among proponents of the major forms of discourse over who “owns” logos. I offer the narrative paradigm as a move beyond that struggle. Acceptance of the narrative paradigm shifts the controversy from a focus on who “owns” logos to a focus on what specific instances of discourse, regardless of form, provide the most trustworthy, reliable, and desirable guides to belief and to behavior, and under what conditions.

Prior to the pre-Socratics and to Plato and Aristotle, “mythos and logos, imagination and thought,” were “not yet distinct.” Truth was not then the province of privileged discourse, whether called argument or dialectic. “Living myth” was still considered “truth . . . the very instrument of truth, in the original sense of the Greek word *aletheia*. For in its saying myth lays open to sight what without it would be utterly concealed; it reveals, lifts out of primordial hiddenness and brings to light a whole world; it brings all things forth and gives them form: a visible palpable presence.”⁴ The evolution from story to statement began with

the pre-Socratics. “What they proceeded to do was to take the language of the *mythos* and manipulate it, forcing its terms into fresh syntactical relationships which had the constant effect of stretching and extending their application, giving them a cosmic rather than particular reference.”⁵ Then came Plato.

Plato was not so much interested in the cosmos as were the pre-Socratics. Like the Sophists and rhetoricians, his interest was human existence. Unlike the Sophists and rhetoricians, however, he did not believe that argument based on probabilities was all the world had to offer or that such argument should be accepted as constituting logos. He certainly believed that probabilities were not a proper foundation or guide to personal or public life. His project, according to Eric Havelock, was to formulate “an abstract language of descriptive science to replace a concrete language of oral memory.”⁶ The epitome of this language was dialectic, the only form of discourse that could ensure apprehension of true ideas. His “contribution” to the transformation of logos was to technologize logos, to make it a term appropriate only to philosophical discourse. The effects of his thought were to create “experts” in truth, knowledge, and reality; to establish the rational superiority of philosophical (technical) discourse; to relegate mythos to myth (meaning fictional); and to downgrade rhetoric and poetic. Dispensations were made for rhetoric and poetic; they had a place in the life of the community, but they were not to be considered serious intellectual arts. They were to be controlled or informed by philosopher-kings.

Aristotle, Plato’s pupil, reinforced the idea that some forms of discourse are superior to others by drawing clear distinctions among them in regard to their relationship to true knowledge.⁷ Only scientific discourse was productive of true knowledge, because it was the only form of discourse in which reasoning could be apodictic, that is, necessarily valid. Dialectic discourse could lead to knowledge but only to probable knowledge, based on expert opinion. Rhetoric, founded on contingent reason, was appropriate for “untrained thinkers.” And to Aristotle poetic discourse did not function as much by reasoning as by “imitation” and cathartic participation. Thus, while Aristotle recognized the value of different forms of human communication in different domains of learning and life, he established a configuration that enabled later, and often lesser, thinkers to insist that their mode of discourse was superior to others and to call on him for support.

FROM PHILOSOPHY TO TECHNICAL DISCOURSE

After the pre-Socratics and Plato and Aristotle, the next most influential statement of the view that philosophical discourse reigns supreme over other forms of discourse is that of Francis Bacon. Actually, the effect of Bacon's thought was to elevate scientific (technical expository) discourse over all forms of discourse, including philosophy. Philosophy retained a high status, but only as it focused on science. The "demotion" of philosophy was a concomitant of the new theory of knowledge—that knowledge concerns the physical world and is strictly empirical. This was a reversal in logic from an emphasis on deduction to emphasis on induction. The new authority on knowing was not Aristotle or the church but *method*, the procedures for proper empirical investigation. One of the major results of Bacon's ideas was a reconception of rhetorical invention. The ancient theory had it that rhetoricians *discover probabilities* by considering, topically, what is known or can be believed about a given subject. Bacon's conception of rhetorical invention was that it is simply processing or finding communicative *adaptations* of knowledge originally discovered by nonrhetorical processes. The effect of his thought was to reduce rhetoric to a "managerial art"; that is, its function was to facilitate transmission of knowledge acquired through investigations regulated by other disciplines. The earliest full exposition of rhetoric so conceived was George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*.⁸ The rhetorical writings of Hugh Blair⁹ and Richard Whately¹⁰ helped to popularize this view. In still narrower form the managerial conception of rhetoric was popularized in Great Britain by Alexander Bain, whose manual, *English Composition and Rhetoric*,¹¹ was very widely used, and in the United States by Adams Sherman Hill of Harvard, whose *Principles of Rhetoric*¹² became a standard textbook in America. Both men insisted that rhetoric was the study of the *forms* of prose composition and had nothing at all to do with content.

Bacon cleared the field for the new science, but Descartes determined how it was to be plowed. Descartes's contribution was to perfect the method of empirical investigation by grounding it on mathematical demonstration. He esteemed "eloquence highly, and loved poetry," yet he felt that "they were gifts of nature rather than fruits of study."¹³ Other studies were rejected because they were based on traditional philosophy, which allowed a diversity of opinions, where "no more than one of them can ever be right."¹⁴ The eventual result of Descartes's views was the doctrine of the logical positivists, who held that no statement could claim expression of knowledge unless it was empirically verifiable—at least in principle or it

involved a logical entailment. The doctrine also entailed the notion that values were "non-sense." The discourse of technical experts was thereby designated as the only serious form of human communication; rhetoric and poetic were considered irrational, if sometimes amusing, forms of human transaction.

Aiding and abetting the general influence of Bacon and Descartes was John Locke, whose aim was to establish that knowledge is "real only so far as there is a *conformity* between ideas and the reality of things."¹⁵ Like his predecessors, Locke attacked the value of the syllogism, the topics (guides to rhetorical invention), and all forms of ornamental speech. In *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, he wrote: ". . . if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else, but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat."¹⁶ Thus the only form of discourse for learned study and communication was exposition.

There is, perhaps, no more instructive statement of the ideal form of scientific communication than that of Thomas Sprat. After dismissing rhetoric and poetic, he declared that the "new" form of communication would return "to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many *things*, almost in an equal number of words." The style was to be a "close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear sense; a native easiness: bringing all things as near Mathematical plainness, as they can."¹⁷ It is not difficult to see in this statement an impetus to twentieth-century general semantics.

Today there is much ferment about the consequences of these views: the concept of knowledge that denies a role for values, the separation of logic from everyday discourse, and the privileging of "experts" and their discourse. The narrative paradigm, as an affirmative proposal against these moves, is a case in point. These postivistic views have also been attacked by a host of philosophers, including Richard Bernstein,¹⁸ George-Hans Gadamer,¹⁹ Jürgen Habermas,²⁰ Richard Rorty,²¹ and Calvin Schrag.²² Indeed, it is not humanists alone who have been and are questioning these ideas. Following the challenges by Kurt Gödel and Werner Heisenberg to scientific certainty, scientists and philosophers of science have joined the discussion. The direction of this rethinking is illustrated by Stephen Toulmin's *Return to Cosmology*²³ and Fritjof Capra's *Turning Point*.²⁴ One cannot predict the outcome of the arguments, but one can hope for a concept of logos that approximates that of the ancients. Theirs was a

concept that regarded all humans and their communication as not irrational and as deserving respect.

VOICES ON BEHALF OF POETIC

It is not to be supposed that proponents of poetic and rhetoric were silent in the audience of those who extolled philosophy and technical discourse. Nor is it to be assumed that those ancients who most eloquently asserted the significance of poetic argued only from poetic's permanence and beauty, its powers of providing aesthetic pleasure. During the times of the pre-Socratics, Plato, and the Sophists, Aristophanes was insisting that the standard of excellence in poetry was not only "skill in the art," but also "wise counsel for the state." In *The Clouds* he caricatured Socrates as a Sophist, a teacher of false, irresponsible logic. That Socrates was not a Sophist is beside the point that Aristophanes was making: the teachings of drama were germane to life here, now, and for eternity.

Like those who spoke for rhetoric, to be considered below, those who spoke for poetic were divided between those who claimed the primacy of their art over other forms of discourse and those who claimed supremacy only in a particular domain of life. Proponents of poetic tended to claim as their special domain personal knowledge or consciousness; rhetoricians tended to claim as their domain public knowledge oriented toward decision making and civic action.

One of the most eloquent voices on behalf of eloquence was Longinus. Significantly, his *On the Sublime* did not extol one form of discourse over another; it celebrated qualities of communication that can appear in any genre of discourse. I refer to Longinus specifically because the attributes of eloquence he identified are not strictly rhetorical. There is no mention of argument, for instance. The qualities on which he focused are also qualities that are in sharp contrast to those prescribed by Thomas Sprat for expository discourse. "The effect of elevated language," Longinus wrote, "is not persuasion but transport. At every time and in every way imposing speech, with the spell it throws over us, prevails over that which aims at persuasion and gratification."²⁵ To prove his point, he cited passages from drama, poetry, epic, history, philosophy, and oratory. The sources of sublimity, he said, were five: the "power of forming great conceptions"; "vehement and inspired passion"; "formation of figures"; "noble diction"; and "dignified and elevated composition."²⁶ Any form of discourse might display these qualities, but "mere rhetoric" and technical

discourse would not. True eloquence would find its natural home in great literature.

Much clearer in asserting the primacy of poetic was Boccaccio. Writing in the fourteenth century, when the dominant mode of discourse was theological, he aligned poetry with the church's doctrine that truth could be allegorical: poetry "veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction."²⁷ He acknowledged that poetry was informed by rhetoric (and grammar), but he declared that "among the disguises of fiction rhetoric has no part, for whatever is composed as under a veil, and thus exquisitely wrought, is poetry and poetry alone."²⁸ At the same time, however, Boccaccio insisted that poetry could serve rhetorically. If necessary, he wrote, poetry "can arm kings, marshal them for war, launch whole fleets from their docks, nay, counterfeit sky, land, sea, adorn young maidens with flowery garlands, portray human character in its various phases, awake the idle, stimulate the dull, retain the rash, subdue the criminal, and distinguish excellent men with their proper meed of praise."²⁹ Not only did Boccaccio claim truth for his art, he also held that it "is a practical art, springing from God's bosom," and is therefore moral as well.³⁰

Sir Philip Sidney, writing in the sixteenth century during the rise of science, claimed that poetry is the supreme form of discourse, that its function is to foster virtue, and that its appeal is universal. Poetry, said Sidney, offers tales "which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner."³¹ He attacked learned (historical and philosophical) discourse but did not directly discuss scientific discourse. He wrote that "no learning is so good as that which teacheth and mooveth to vertue; and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as Poetry."³²

By the end of the eighteenth century, the challenge of science was sorely felt by those who spoke for aesthetic communication. Friedrich von Schiller summarized the situation in this way:

Once the increase of empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable, and once the increasingly complex machinery of the state necessitated a more rigorous separation of ranks and occupations, then the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance. The intuitive and the speculative understanding now withdrew in hostility. . . . While in the one a riotous imagination ravages the hard-won fruits of the intellect, in

another the spirit of abstraction stifles the fire at which the heart should have warmed itself and the imagination been kindled.³³

The effects of this severance were to fragment society and the conceptions of the individual, to create a struggle between sense and intellect, between the "sensuous drive," which "proceeds from the physical existence of man," and the "formal drive," which "proceeds from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature."³⁴ To restore balance, full humanity, Schiller held that society and individuals should celebrate "play," the ludic impulse, which is the subject of John Huizinga's classic *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*.³⁵ (It is also a major theme in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*.) Schiller wrote: "Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays." Aesthetic expression, he maintained, is "the most fruitful of all in respect of knowledge and morality."³⁶

By the end of the nineteenth century, proponents of poetic could not, or did not, challenge science's claim on the domain of the physical sphere of life. Instead, they reconceptualized knowledge, declaring that knowledge was of more than one kind. Benedetto Croce, for instance, held that "knowledge was two forms: it is either intuitive knowledge or logical knowledge; knowledge obtained through the imagination or knowledge obtained through the intellect; knowledge of the individual or knowledge of the universal; of individual things or of the relations between them: it is, in fact, productive either of images or of concepts."³⁷ It is clear that the distinction is between art as expression and science as literal impression.

In 1926 I. A. Richards took exception to the idea of "regarding Poetic Truth as figurative, symbolic; or as more immediate as truth of Intuition, not of reason, or as a higher form of the truth as reason yields."³⁸ In his "Science and Poetry," he held that "it is *not* the poet's business to make true statements."³⁹ Poetry is composed of "pseudo-statements" whose function it is to give order to attitudes and experience. Scientific discourse is composed of referential statements that produce "genuine knowledge," which, however, are limited to increasing "our practical control over Nature."⁴⁰ Rhetorical discourse, said Richards, is composed of "mixed statements" that appear in pragmatic communication. While each of the major arts of discourse was given its place in this scheme of things, Richards insisted that "Poetry is the completest mode of utterance."⁴¹

Allen Tate rejected not only Matthew Arnold's attempt to put science and poetry on an equal footing, Charles Morris's semiotic interpretation of

poetry, but also the early Richards of "Science and Poetry," which he considered too much influenced by positivism. However, Allen Tate endorsed Richards's view that poetry is the most complete utterance among those that could be made by any of the arts of discourse. He claimed in "Literature as Knowledge" that the result of poetic statements is "complete knowledge." But he insisted: "The order of completeness that it achieves in the great works of the imagination is not the order of experimental completeness aimed at by the positivist sciences, whose responsibilities are directed towards the verification of limited techniques. . . . No one can have an experience of science, or of a single science."⁴² The completeness of Hamlet, Tate averred, "is not of the experimental order, but of the experienced order." His final claim was that the "'interest' value" of poetry is a "cognitive one."⁴³

There is ferment today regarding how to conceptualize and to relate science, knowledge, and praxis; there is also controversy about how to conceptualize and to relate science, knowledge, and aesthetic experience. The sharpest divisions are among representatives of poststructuralism and deconstructionism, and representatives of the literary tradition, like Gerald Graff in *Literature against Itself*,⁴⁴ and hermeneuticians, like Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, who think that poetry has cognitive significance, not, of course, the kind of cognitive significance insisted upon by logical positivists or cognitive scientists. The cognitive significance of aesthetic communication lies in its capacity to *manifest* knowledge, truth or reality, to enrich understanding of self, other, or the world.

VOICES ON BEHALF OF RHETORIC

Of the proponents of rhetoric as the central form of discourse, the most articulate in the ancient world was Isocrates, who was opposed but admired by Plato. It has been conjectured that Aristotle chose to lecture on rhetoric, not only to complete his treatment of all subjects, but also to contrast his philosophical view of rhetoric with the views of the rhetoricians, as represented by the teaching of Isocrates. According to G. Norlin, for Isocrates "logos" was consubstantial with discourse, because discourse reflected "both the outward and the inward thought; it is not merely the form of expression, but reason, feeling, and imagination as well."⁴⁵ Isocrates' defense of his art in the *Antidosis* includes a statement that declares his "philosophy," and at the same time reflects the major thrust of the West's rhetorical tradition at least to the sixteenth century:

We are in no respect superior to other living creatures; nay, we are inferior to many in swiftness and in strength and in other resources; but, because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish. For this it is which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust, and things honourable and base; and if it were not for these ordinances we should not be able to live with one another. It is by this also that we confute the bad and extol the good. Through this we educate the ignorant and appraise the wise; for the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul. With this faculty we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute and seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown; for the same arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts; and, while we call eloquent those who are able to speak before a crowd, we regard as sage those who most skillfully debate their problems in their own minds. . . . none of the things which are done with intelligence takes place without the help of speech, . . . in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom.⁵⁶

This statement is not only central to the rhetorical tradition, it is also an inspiration for the humanistic tradition “fathered” by Cicero. The Ciceronian and humanistic traditions were, in fact, virtually synonymous through the Renaissance and at the rise of scientifically oriented thinking.

Echoing Isocrates’ thought, Cicero wrote in *De oratore*, “For the one point in which we have our very greatest advantage over the brute creation is that we hold converse one with another, and can reproduce our thought in word.”⁴⁷ He conceded jurisdiction over “the mysteries of nature” and the “subtleties of dialectic” to the philosopher, but Cicero insisted that rhetoric was supreme in the sphere of “human life and conduct.”⁴⁸ Even so, the only reason he conceded the two domains to the philosopher was the “indolence” of rhetoricians in regard to them. Perhaps the clearest statement of his view of the scope of rhetoric was this: “But in an orator we must demand the subtlety of the logician, the thought of the philosopher, a diction almost poetic, a lawyer’s memory, a tragedian’s voice, and the bearing almost of the consummate actor. Accordingly, no rarer

thing than a finished orator can be discovered among the sons of men.”⁴⁹ Thus, to Cicero, the orator was foremost a statesman, a person of near universal knowledge and extraordinary gifts whose mission was to elevate civic life through action. Cicero’s orator was, in a sense, the obverse of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s scholar—Man thinking. Said Emerson: “Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth.”⁵⁰ The practicing rhetorician is the person acting on knowledge to further truth.

After Bacon, Descartes, and scientific thinking began to dominate the intellectual arts, Giambattista Vico rose to defend the rhetorical-humanistic tradition that I have just sketched. Writing in 1709, he held that “young men should be taught the totality of science and arts, and their intellectual powers should be developed to the full.” This meant that they should not only know the procedures of science, but also “the art of argument.”⁵¹ This position put him in opposition to the prevailing monistic concept of knowledge and the Cartesian method. It put him firmly in the camp of Cicero. Vico believed that one needed *common* as well as *technical sense*. He characterized scientific education as generating speculative criticism, about which he wrote:

Now, such speculative criticism, the main purpose of which is to cleanse its fundamental truths not only of all falsity, but also of the mere suspicion of error, places upon the same plane of falsity not only false thinking, but also secondary verities and ideas which are based on probability alone, and commands us to clear our minds of them. Such an approach is distinctly harmful, since training in common sense is essential to the education of adolescents, so that that faculty should be developed as early as possible; else they break into odd or arrogant behavior when adulthood is reached.

Common sense, Vico held, is the “criterion of practical judgment” and is the “guiding standard of eloquence.”⁵²

Vico’s twentieth-century counterpart, Ernesto Grassi, carries the argument of rhetoric’s supremacy further and deeper. A philosopher, Grassi delves into history and the nature of human thought and asserts “the primacy of ‘topical’ philosophy (‘topics’ as the theory of the finding of arguments) over ‘rational’ philosophy and . . . the primacy of rhetoric—imagistic speech and thereby dialogue—over rational speech and thereby monologue.”⁵³ He assigns to rhetoric *ingenium*, “the sphere of wit and acuteness,” the main task of which “is to ‘decipher’ the world without which reality would remain unknown and mute; *ingenium* is hence an

activity that lets the divine shine."⁵⁴ Like Vico, Grassi ultimately retains a distinction between philosophy—technical discourse, which he calls “rational speech” or “that which is strictly, ‘mathematically’ explains or infers what is implied in premises”—and rhetorical speech, which is “dialogue” rather than monologue and is imbued most importantly with metaphor.⁵⁵ The realm of rhetoric, for Grassi, is, then *logos*, a combination of religious experience, *pathos*, and ontological perception of human existence.

This view differs from the one I shall propose. I do not agree that what Grassi calls rational speech is purely monologue. Philosophical-technical discourse is a form of communication. It is not expressed to stand by itself; it is addressed to others and has its own modes of strategic appeal. Part of that appeal arises from metaphor and other forms of *mythos*. Furthermore, *ingenium* as insight is not peculiar to any particular subject matter; it is a necessary act of mind for any creative thought, whether in science, philosophy, art, religion, rhetoric, or any other. At the same time, I think Grassi’s consideration of rhetoric as philosophy is a significant statement. It overcomes the notion that real *logos* occurs only in the privileged discourse of scientists and certain philosophers.

Paralleling the attempt by proponents of poetic to advance their art by aligning it with knowledge has been a move by rhetoricians in recent years to treat rhetoric as epistemic. Since Robert L. Scott’s “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic” in 1967,⁵⁶ there has been a stream of books and articles exploring the nature of rhetoric and its relationship to knowledge.⁵⁷ Theorists have argued that rhetoric is uniquely associated with the discovery and development of public or social knowledge. Bitzer has posited an idea of “public knowledge.” This knowledge is “a fund of truths, principles, and values which could only characterize a public.” By rhetoric he means “a method of inquiry and communication which seeks to establish correct judgments primarily in the areas of practical and humane affairs, for the speaker or writer and for the audience addressed.” He holds that “rhetoric generates truth and values,” “gives voice to interests and principles,” and serves as an instrument with which to test public truths.⁵⁸ Bitzer explicitly distinguishes personal and public knowledge, and implicitly distinguishes technical and public knowledge.

Farrell concentrates on a concept of “social knowledge”: “*conceptions of symbolic relationships among problems, persons, interests, and actions, which imply (when accepted) certain notions of preferable public behavior.*” Social knowledge is to be clearly distinguished from “technical or specialized knowledge.” The kinds of knowledge differ in that social

knowledge concerns human decisions and actions by audiences, while technical knowledge is “actualized through its perceived correspondence to the external world.”⁵⁹ Thus, in both Bitzer’s and Farrell’s conceptions, rhetoric retains its traditional jurisdiction—civic conduct.

Each of the above conceptions has its critics. Michael Calvin McGee and Martha Ann Martin contrast Bitzer’s “idealistic” view with a “materialist’s” perspective. Walter M. Carlton attacks Farrell’s distinction between social and technical knowledge, arguing that all knowledge is rhetorically generated and sustained. It is not my purpose to adjudicate these and similar disputes, but I want to point out that all the scholars I have mentioned—and others—reaffirm the historic, integral relations of rhetoric to *creation* of *logos*. I do not believe, however, that the arguments so far made concerning the epistemic dimensions of rhetoric go far enough.

I join Karlyn Campbell in believing that rhetorical experience is more usefully viewed ontologically than epistemologically.⁶⁰ Put another way: rhetorical experience is most fundamentally a symbolic transaction in and about social reality. In this experience “knowledge” may or may not loom large. For instance, one of the decisive dimensions of rhetorical experience when persons interact symbolically is their perceptions of the others’ perceptions of them. These perceptions they read from what and how the other persons communicate. Unless a respondent perceives an accurate and appropriate perception of herself or himself in the message, there will be little or no communication. In its extreme, negative form, this condition is alienation. Its opposite, positive form, is charisma, which exists when there is a communicative transaction in which one person perceives the other as loving and honoring the best in them.⁶¹ I do not mean to say that knowledge is unimportant in communication. I do mean, on the other hand, that it is ultimately configured narratively, as a component in a larger story implying the being of a certain kind of person, a person with a particular worldview, with a specific self-concept, and with characteristic ways of relating to others.

To date, the fullest, most systematically developed statement about the relationship of rhetoric to knowledge is that of the late Chaïm Perelman. He advanced the thesis that rhetoric should be “the study of the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or to increase the mind’s adherence to the thesis presented for its assent.”⁶² In Perelman’s theory, rhetoric, as a study, has jurisdiction over all practical reasoning, that is, all informal logic and argumentation. Perelman acknowledged that “in a great many areas of knowledge the ideal of truth must prevail over other considera-

tions," but, as a student of law, he insisted that in the domain of justice—where issues of right and wrong are decided—rhetoric as argumentative reason occurs but demonstrative reason seldom if ever does.⁶³ Like other rhetoricians I have just cited, Perelman denied that any special privilege can be assigned to assertions about absolute standards for truth, knowledge, and reality because those matters have to be *argued* before and assented to by audiences, else they have no public significance. Another feature of Perelman's work was his implication that values are ineradicable constituents of knowledge, of practical wisdom. Accordingly, he held that the worth of arguments must be measured by the quality of the audience(s) that would adhere to them.

The most revolutionary move in the twentieth century regarding rhetoric is that of Kenneth Burke. Viewing rhetoric as the symbolic function of inducement, rather than as a form of discourse, Burke sees rhetoric as an attribute of *all* symbolic expression and action.⁶⁴ "Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric and wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion."⁶⁵ He admits that one can make distinctions among forms of discourse, but they cannot be absolute distinctions, for there is no genre without appeal. The "arousing and fulfillment of desires," the anticipation and gratification created by "the sequential unfolding of the discourse" occur in all forms of discourse.⁶⁶ Experiencing rhetoric, for Burke, is not purely epistemological; it is more fundamentally an ontological experience. Rhetorical experience works by identification rather than by demonstration. As he recognizes reason as well as aesthetic qualities in all forms of human communication, Burke's theory recaptures and reinforces the original sense of logos.

The narrative paradigm, as I shall present it, is fully in accord with these views, but it differs from Burke's dramatism in two ways. The first difference is subtle but important. It concerns the precise part played by people in the interpretation and assessment of meanings in the world and in their choices of behaviors in given situations. Burke's dramatism *implies* that people function according to prescribed roles; they are actors performing roles constrained or determined by scripts provided by existing institutions. The narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers, as authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature. A narrative perspective focuses on existing institutions as providing "plots" that are always in the process of re-creation rather than existing as settled scripts. Viewing human communication narratively stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors).

The second difference derives from the first. The notion that people are actors leads to the supposition that human behavior is to be assessed by a presentational standard. The question becomes how well one performs one's various roles. This is not, of course, Burke's personal view. He seems to hold that good communication not only surmounts division, but also engenders humane, reasonable action. The norm of humane, reasonable action, however, is not intrinsic to dramatism; it is Burke's own commitment and appears to be the motivating force behind this theory. Not all successful identification results in humane, reasonable action. No theory can ensure such an end, but the narrative paradigm is designed to further it by incorporating the concept of identification to account for how people come to adopt stories and, by adding the concept of narrative rationality, a "logic" intrinsic to the very idea of narrativity. That people's symbolic actions take the form of stories and that they assess them by the principles of coherence and fidelity are the essential points of difference between dramatism and the narrative paradigm.

CONCLUSION

The historical sketch I have given here reveals that, since the time of the pre-Socratics and Plato and Aristotle, there has been a great contest that might be epitomized in "Logos, logos, who's got the logos?" One cannot blame all the ills of the intellectual world on this historic struggle for professional hegemony, but the conflicts have contributed to contemporary confusion by repressing realization of a holistic sense of self, by subverting formulation of a humane concept of rationality and sane praxis, by rendering personal and public decision making and action subservient to "experts" on knowledge, truth, and reality, and by elevating some classes of persons and discourse over others. The moral I would draw is this: some discourse is more veracious, reliable, and trustworthy in respect to knowledge, truth, and reality than some other discourse, but no *form* or *genre* has final claim to these virtues. Some persons know more than others, are wiser, and are more to be heeded than others. But no one knows all there is to know even about his or her own area of specialization. I contend further that human communication in all of its forms is imbued with mythos—ideas that cannot be verified or proved in any absolute way. Such ideas arise in metaphor, values, gestures, and so on. On occasion, they also arise through clear-cut inferential or implicative structures. I take it as fact, also, that mythos has cognitive as well as aesthetic significance.

In the beginning was the logos as a concept that incorporated all of the facts above and more. The concept should be similarly inclusive today, and it can be if the narrative paradigm or some similar construct commands the adherence of those who study and practice the arts of human communication.

I have been exploring the exigence that gives rise to the basic construct of the narrative paradigm. In the next chapter, I shall consider the exigence that calls for its logic—narrative rationality. My central contention is that *narrative* is a concept that can enhance understanding of human communication and action wherever those phenomena occur. To view discourse and action as occurring within “the human story” will allow us to account for human behavior in ways that are not possible using the theories and methods of the social sciences, especially those social sciences that attempt to approximate the paradigm of the natural sciences. The historical exigence that makes a fresh viewpoint necessary has been, as I have just shown, the tendencies of modern Western philosophies to treat truth, knowledge, and reality as the business of “experts” only, and to deny the intellectual, the cognitive content of rhetorical and poetic discourse. The difficulty has been that these tendencies place that which is not *formally* logical or which is not characterized by *expertise* within a somehow subhuman framework of behavior. I contend that we are not *irrational* in all of our nonformal, lay functions, and I turn now to the topic of what I shall call “narrative rationality.” This notion implies that all instances of human communication are imbued with logos and mythos, are constitutive of truth and knowledge, and are rational.

NOTES

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