

survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage.

Today I see the Valley still struggling to survive. Whether it does or not, it will never be as I remember it. The borderlands depression that was set off by the 1982 peso devaluation in Mexico resulted in the closure of hundreds of Valley businesses. Many people lost their homes, cars, land. Prior to 1982, U.S. store owners thrived on retail sales to Mexicans who came across the border for groceries and clothes and appliances. While goods on the U.S. side have become 10, 100, 1000 times more expensive for Mexican buyers, goods on the Mexican side have become 10, 100, 1000 times cheaper for Americans. Because the Valley is heavily dependent on agriculture and Mexican retail trade, it has the highest unemployment rates along the entire border region; it is the Valley that has been hardest hit.³²

"It's been a bad year for corn," my brother, Nune, says. As he talks, I remember my father scanning the sky for a rain that would end the drought, looking up into the sky, day after day, while the corn withered on its stalk. My father has been dead for 29 years, having worked himself to death. The life span of a Mexican farm laborer is 56—he lived to be 38. It shocks me that I am older than he. I, too, search the sky for rain. Like the ancients, I worship the rain god and the maize goddess, but unlike my father I have recovered their names. Now for rain (irrigation) one offers not a sacrifice of blood, but of money.

³²Out of the twenty-two border counties in the four border states, Hidalgo County (named for Father Hidalgo who was shot in 1810 after instigating Mexico's revolt against Spanish rule under the banner of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*) is the most poverty-stricken county in the nation as well as the largest home base (along with Imperial in California) for migrant farmworkers. It was here that I was born and raised. I am amazed that both it and I have survived. [Au.]

"Farming is in a bad way," my brother says. "Two to three thousand small and big farmers went bankrupt in this country last year. Six years ago the price of corn was \$8.00 per hundred pounds," he goes on. "This year it is \$3.90 per hundred pounds." And, I think to myself, after taking inflation into account, not planting anything puts you ahead.

I walk out to the back yard, stare at *los rosales de mamá*. She wants me to help her prune the rose bushes, dig out the carpet grass that is choking them. *Mamagrande Ramona también tenía rosales*. Here every Mexican grows flowers. If they don't have a piece of dirt, they use car tires, jars, cans, shoe boxes. Roses are the Mexican's favorite flower. I think, how symbolic—thorns and all.

Yes, the Chicano and Chicana have always taken care of growing things and the land. Again I see the four of us kids getting off the school bus, changing into our work clothes, walking into the field with Papí and Mamí, all six of us bending to the ground. Below our feet, under the earth lie the watermelon seeds. We cover them with paper plates, putting *terremotes* on top of the plates to keep them from being blown away by the wind. The paper plates keep the freeze away. Next day or the next, we remove the plates, bare the tiny green shoots to the elements. They survive and grow, give fruit hundreds of times the size of the seed. We water them and hoe them. We harvest them. The vines dry, rot, are plowed under. Growth, death, decay, birth. The soil prepared again and again, impregnated, worked on. A constant changing of forms, *renacimientos de la tierra madre*.

This land was Mexican once
was Indian always
and is.

And will be again.

Stanley Fish

b. 1938

Stanley Eugene Fish was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and grew up in Philadelphia. He was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and earned his Ph.D. in 1962 at Yale. He taught at the University of California at Berkeley and subsequently at Johns Hopkins University and at Duke University, where he was professor of both English and law, chair of the English Department, and director of the university press. He left Duke in 1998 to become dean of arts and sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Fish's earliest scholarly work focused on the Renaissance (with a book based on his dissertation on John Skelton's poetry in 1965) and on the work of Milton and George Herbert. His first major work, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (1967), applies an early version of reader-response theory, arguing that Milton uses literary strategies to lead his readers to a sense of the sinfulness of pride, only to then "surprise" them by showing how they themselves have been prideful in their very reading of the poem. This approach shifts the critical focus from the idea that meaning is in the text itself to the idea that meaning occurs as a result of the operation of the text upon the reader. Fish's scholarly writing from this time forward is distinguished by his careful attention to literary theories, particularly those based on language theories, such as reader-response, speech acts, and, later, deconstruction.

In *Surprised by Sin*, Fish maintains that the "surprise" works in *Paradise Lost* because of Milton's goal of bringing the reader to self-consciousness about sin. But soon, in several articles later collected in *Is there a Text in this Class?*, *The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980) and in a book, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (1972), Fish generalizes his theory and shows that it applies to other works, indeed to all works of literature. The "artifact" of the literary work does not, he argues, contain its own meaning. The meaning emerges as a result of the act of reading, which therefore ought to be the focus of the critic's attention.

Fish is himself one of the severest critics of the theory he put forward at this time. In the introduction to *Is there a Text in this Class?*, he points out the flaw of his method and of much reader-response criticism, namely, that of presuming to know how reading works in some universal sense (at least for all educated readers) and to be able to describe it. Moreover, he notes, in a book like *Surprised by Sin*, the critic assumes that the effects achieved are the effects intended by the author, which simply returns the meaning or the responsibility for the meaning to the text itself. In the essays collected in *Is there a Text in this Class?*, Fish argues that the reader "creates" the text by deciding which of its features are relevant or significant. But how does the reader decide? Fish was not content (as were other reader-response critics) to allow mere individual preference to rule. Instead, he puts forward the enormously influential idea of the *interpretive community* (later to appear as "discourse community" in rhetoric scholarship) that maintains the values and conventions that "always

already" constrain its members as they come to the text. In answering the question of whether there is a text in the class, Fish answers "no," if by "text" one means an object with a fixed and determinate meaning. Rather, the text is a creation of the community, for what is there is what a particular community agrees or is constrained to see there. This means that any interpretation that makes sense or is persuasive is so only because it arises within and is directed to a community that sees or is willing to see the text through the same lens of assumptions about what counts as literature, or even about what words and phrases may mean. This analysis implies, in its turn, that the proper business of criticism is to address and argue about the way the lens is or ought to be shaped—that is, the interpretive assumptions that one does or ought to apply. It also implies that the very definition of "literature" is communally bound, and therefore that there is no such thing as a quintessentially literary text. All texts, indeed, are "always already" under interpretation.

Fish's work during the succeeding decade elaborates these insights, examining the sources and criticizing the implications of "foundationalist" theory—namely, "theory that promises to put our calculations and determinations on a firmer footing than can be provided by mere belief or unjustified practice."¹ He sees the foundationalist assumption operating widely, almost universally, as a belief that interpretation must seek some underlying truth that is "really" there or at least some objective basis for assessing our beliefs. Fish also takes up the question of what an antifoundational view of language and interpretation might be. The essays in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (1989) address these issues. Here is what Fish says this title means:

I intend it to refer to the unreflective actions that follow from being embedded in a context of practice. This kind of action—and in my argument there is no other—is anything but natural in the sense of proceeding independently of historical and social formations; but once those formations are in place (and they always are), what you think to do will not be calculated in relation to a higher law or an overarching theory but will issue from you as naturally as breathing.²

Meaning, then, follows from the set of presuppositions that constitute or characterize the social formation (or the particular moment and its context) rather than from anything inherent in the words or sentences or other symbols that are used for communication. Most importantly for Fish, there is no place to stand that is outside some context and set of presuppositions. It is not possible, that is, to assess a given interpretation in an absolute way. Nor is it possible to articulate a theory that accounts for all of the features of context and thereby become completely self-conscious about the way one's interpretive acts are bound. This last point leads Fish to assert that theory (as in literary theory or philosophical method) has no consequences.

A further consequence of the antifoundationalist position is to recognize that although the set of interpretive principles in force at any time (Fish is thinking of

¹Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 321.

²Fish, p. ix.

principles of law especially) may be arbitrary in some sense—that is, they cannot be based on ultimate reality or transcendent truth—they are nonetheless *in force* and not *absent*. Fish insists that he is *not* arguing that there aren't constraints, that we should adopt rampant relativism, or that all interpretations are personal. That position is just as untenable, he argues, as the foundationalist position.

Interpretive systems obviously change, and Fish wants to know how that change occurs. They do not change because of theory, he argues, if by theory we mean "a set of rules or principles or procedures that is attached to . . . no particular activity, but is of sufficient generality to be thought of as a constraint on (and an explanation of) all fields of activity."³ They change, rather, because of an argument that, although it may not be "right" in an absolute sense, is able to change the prevailing way of thinking about the world to another way—another way that is just as bound by circumstances and contexts but that comes to seem superior. Fish is following Thomas Kuhn to a considerable extent in this analysis. Both recognize that a new idea or way of seeing—a new "paradigm"—does not come into being without being argued for. This is the operation, Fish says, of rhetoric.

In his subsequent work, the essays collected in *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change* (1994) and *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too* (1995), and in a remarkable range of essays in print and electronic journals, speeches, and interviews, Fish explores the consequences of his basic argument in literature, cultural studies, education, law, and various areas of public policy. In *Professional Correctness*, he argues that because literary criticism is a highly specialized interpretive community, it lacks the power to effect political change. Therefore, critics are mistaken when they claim that change will occur because of the kind of texts they study or the forms of interpretation they use. This, Fish says, is the underlying error in the great multiculturalism debates.

Fish has won a wide audience in the law and philosophy of law communities, judging by the responses to both *Doing What Comes Naturally* and *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*. "Virtually all students of law, the social sciences, and social philosophy should read" the latter book, says one review.⁴ The chapters in it (many of them transcripts of Fish's debates with conservative ideologue Dinesh D'Souza) concern public policy issues, basic precepts of liberalism, and, once again, multiculturalism. The title essay repeats Fish's now basic thesis in the form of the argument that all speech is situated and purposeful. Except in the artificial environment of a college seminar, all speech is rhetorical or instrumental, intended to accomplish something. Fish shows that all free speech advocates will say that there are "of course" some limits to what speech can be allowed in public. That "of course" is determined by the social situation, and since all speech is socially situated, there will always be some "of course" limits. The only condition in which speech could really be "free" would be one in which speech meant nothing and was offered for no reason.

³Fish, p. 14.

⁴Lief Carter, "There's No Such Thing as Free Speech," *The Law and Politics Book Review* 4.3 (March 1994): p. 33.
<www.unt.edu/lpbr/subpages/reviews/fish.htm>

The essay "Rhetoric" that is reprinted here comes from *Doing What Comes Naturally*. Fish reviews the history of rhetoric as a contest between foundational and antifoundational views. He holds rhetoric in high regard for its underlying Sophistic belief in an antifoundational worldview. Protagoras was correct, says Fish, in recognizing that only the situated and contingent reality is meaningful. Therefore, rhetoric is necessary for civilized life. Moreover, the revival of rhetoric in the twentieth century is a good thing: It both reflects and enhances the "interpretive turn" (what others have called the linguistic turn) in many disciplines. Fish's roll call of the heroes of the interpretive turn is a helpful summary of the central theme of twentieth-century rhetorical theory.

Selected Bibliography

"Rhetoric" appeared originally as Chapter 20 in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham and London, 1989). It is reprinted in *The Stanley Fish Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veese (New York, 1999), with a headnote by Steven Mailloux. This collection contains eleven well-chosen essays by Fish, each with a brief headnote. "Rhetoric" is also reprinted in *Rhetoric in an Antifoundational World: Language, Culture, and Pedagogy*, ed. Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard R. Glezjer (New Haven, 1998).

Fish's major works are *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967; 2nd ed. 1998); *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972); *Is there a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980); *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change* (Oxford and New York, 1994); and *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too* (Oxford and New York, 1995). Another collection of essays on law, religion, and politics is *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

A wide-ranging interview with Gary Olson is "Fish Tales: A Conversation with 'The Contemporary Sophist'" in *Journal of Advanced Composition* 12.2 (fall 1992): 253-77, reprinted, with responses by Patricia Bizzell and John Trimbur, in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, Literary Criticism: (Inter)views*, ed. Gary Olson (Carbondale, Ill., 1994). A good overview of Fish's theories and development is Paul H. Fry's essay on Fish in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 67: Modern American Critics Since 1955*, ed. Gregory Jay (Milwaukee, 1988), pp. 97-105. John Schilb analyzes Fish's work on rhetoric in *Between the Lines: Rethinking Composition Theory and Literary Theory* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1996). The "Introduction" to *Rhetoric in an Antifoundational World*, noted above, relates Fish's ideas (clearly crucial to this collection) to the theories of Derrida, Rorty (a contributor), and others. The essays in the collection—most notably Frank Farmer's "Foundational Thuggery"—frequently address Fish's work.

Rhetoric

. . . up rose
 Belial, in act more graceful and humane;
 A fairer person lost not Heav'n; he seem'd
 For dignity compos'd and high exploit:
 But all was false and hollow; though his Tongue
 Dropt Manna, and could make the worse appear
 The better reason, to perplex and dash
 Maturest counsels: for his thoughts were low; . . .
 . . . yet he pleas'd the ear
 And with persuasive accent thus began.
 Paradise Lost, II, 108-15, 117-18

I

For Milton's seventeenth-century readers this passage, introducing one of the more prominent of the fallen angels, would have been immediately recognizable as a brief but trenchant essay on the art and character of the rhetorician. Indeed, in these few lines Milton has managed to gather and restate with great rhetorical force (a paradox of which more later) all of the traditional arguments against rhetoric. Even Belial's gesture of rising is to the (negative) point: he catches the eye even before he begins to speak, just as Satan will in book IX when he too raises himself and moves so that "each part, / Motion, each act won audience ere the tongue" (673-74). That is, he draws attention to his appearance, to his surface, and the suggestion of superficiality (a word to be understood in its literal meaning) extends to the word "act"; that is, that which can be seen. That act is said to be "graceful," the first in a succession of double meanings (one of the stigmatized attributes of rhetorical speech) we find in the passage. Belial is precisely *not* full of grace; that is simply his outward aspect, and the same is true for "humane" and "fairer." The verse's judgment on all of his apparent virtues is delivered in the last two words of line 110—"he seem'd"—and the shadow of "seeming" falls across the next line which in isolation might "seem" to be high praise. But under the pressure of what precedes it, the assertion of praise undoes itself with every Janus-faced word (the verse now begins to imitate the object of its criticism by displaying a per-

vasive disjunction between its outer and inner meanings; indicting seeming, it itself repeatedly seems): "compos'd" now carries its pejorative meaning of affected or made-up; "high" at once refers to the favored style of bombastic orators and awaits its ironic and demeaning contrast with the lowness of his thoughts; "dignity" is an etymological joke, for Belial is anything but worthy; in fact, he is just what the next line says he is, "false and hollow," an accusation that repeats one of the perennial antirhetorical topoi, that rhetoric, the art of fine speaking, is all show, grounded in nothing but its own empty pretensions, unsupported by any relation to truth. "There is no need," declares Socrates in Plato's *Gorgias*, "for rhetoric to know the facts at all, for it has hit upon a means of persuasion that enables it to appear in the eyes of the ignorant to know more than those who really know" (459),¹ and in the *Phaedrus* the title figure admits that the "man who plans to be an orator" need not "learn what is really just and true, but only what seems so to the crowd" (260).²

This reference to the vulgar popular ear indicates that rhetoric's deficiencies are not only epistemological (sundered from truth and fact) and moral (sundered from true knowledge and sincerity) but social: it panders to the worst in people and moves them to base actions, exactly as Belial is said to do in the next famous run-on statement, "and could make the worse appear / The better reason." This is an explicit reference to a nest of classical sources: the most familiar is Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 1402, 23, condemning the skill of being able to make arguments on either side of a question: "This . . . illustrates what is meant by making the worse argument appear the better. Hence people were right in objecting to the training Protagoras undertook to give them."³

¹*Gorgias*, ed. and trans. W. C. Helmbold (Indianapolis, 1952), p. 18. [Au.]

²Plato, *Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Rabinowitz (Indianapolis, 1956), p. 46. [Au.]

³*The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 11, ed. and trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Oxford, 1946). [Au.]

Socrates makes the same point in the *Phaedrus*: "an orator who knows nothing about good or evil undertakes to persuade a city in the same state of ignorance . . . by recommending evil as though it were good" (260). Behind Belial (or descending from him; the direction of genealogy in *Paradise Lost* is always problematic) is the line of sophists—Protagoras, Hippias, Gorgias, shadowy figures known to us mostly through the writings of Plato where they appear always as relativist foils for the idealistic Socrates. The judgment made on them by a philosophic tradition dominated by Plato is the judgment here made on Belial; their thoughts were low, centered on the suspect skills they taught for hire; the danger they represented is the danger Belial represents: despite the lowness of their thoughts, perhaps because of the lowness of their thoughts, they pleased the ear, at least the ear of the promiscuous crowd (there is always just beneath the surface of the antirhetorical stance a powerful and corrosive elitism), and the explanation of their unfortunate success is the power Belial now begins to exercise, the power of "persuasive accent." Encoded in this phrase is a continuing debate about the essence of rhetoric, a debate whose two poles are represented by Gorgias's praise in the *Encomium of Helen* of rhetoric as an irresistible force and the stoic Cato's characterization of the rhetorician as a good man skilled at speaking ("vir bonus, dicendi peritus"). The difference is that for Gorgias the skill is detached from any necessary moral center and represents a self-sustaining power ("persuasion allied to words can mould men's minds"), while for Cato the skill is a by-product of a focus on goodness and truth (thus the other of his famous aphorisms, "seize the thing, the words will follow"—"*rem tene, verba sequentur*"—which later flowers in the Renaissance distinction between *res et verba*).⁴ In one position eloquence is the hard-won creation of a special and technical facility, a facility one acquires by mastering a set of complicated—and morally neutral—rules; in the other eloquence is what naturally issues when a

man is in close touch with the Truth and allows it to inspire him. Born, it would seem, in a posture of defensiveness, rhetoric has often gravitated toward this latter view in an effort to defuse the charge that it is amoral. Quintilian's formulation (itself gathered from the writings of Cicero) is one that will later be echoed in countless treatises: "no man can speak well who is not good himself" ("*bene dicere non possit nisi bonus*," *Institutes*, II, xv, 34). As a defense, however, this declaration has the disadvantage of implying the superfluousness of rhetoric, an implication fully realized in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* where eloquence is so much subordinated to wisdom that it disappears as a distinct and separable property. Belial, in contrast, is wholly defined by that property, by his ability to produce "persuasive accents." "Accent" here is a powerfully resonant word, one of whose relevant meanings is "mode of utterance peculiar to an individual, locality or nation" (OED). He who speaks "in accent" speaks from a particular angled perspective into which he tries to draw his auditors; he also speaks in the rhythms of song (etymologically, accent means "song added to speech") which as Milton will soon observe "*charms the sense*" (II, 556). "Persuasive accent," then, is almost a redundancy: the two words mean the same thing and what they tell the reader is that he is about to be exposed to a force whose exercise is unconstrained by any sense of responsibility either to the Truth or to the Good. Indeed, so dangerous does Milton consider this force that he feels it necessary to provide a corrective gloss as soon as Belial stops speaking: "Thus *Belial* with words cloth'd in reason's garb / Counsell'd ignoble ease and peaceful sloth" (II, 226–27). Just in case you hadn't noticed.

I have lingered so long over this passage because we can extrapolate from it almost all of the binary oppositions in relation to which rhetoric has received its (largely negative) definition: inner/outer, deep/surface, essential/peripheral, unmediated/mediated, clear/colored, necessary/contingent, straightforward/angled, abiding/fleeting, reason/passion, things/words, realities/illusions, fact/opinion, neutral/partisan. Underlying this list, which is by no means exhaustive, are three basic oppositions: first, between a truth

that exists independently of all perspectives and points of view and the many truths that emerge and seem perspicuous when a particular perspective or point of view has been established and is in force; second, an opposition between true knowledge, which is knowledge as it exists apart from any and all systems of belief, and the knowledge, which because it flows from some or other system of belief, is incomplete and partial (in the sense of biased); and third, an opposition between a self or consciousness that is turned outward in an effort to apprehend and attach itself to truth and true knowledge and a self or consciousness that is turned inward in the direction of its own prejudices, which, far from being transcended, continue to inform its every word and action. Each of these oppositions is attached in turn to an opposition between two kinds of language: on the one hand, language that faithfully reflects or reports on matters of fact uncolored by any personal or partisan agenda or desire; and on the other hand, language that is infected by partisan agendas and desires, and therefore colors and distorts the facts which it purports to reflect. It is use of the second kind of language that makes one a rhetorician, while adherence to the first kind makes one a seeker after truth and an objective observer of the way things are. It is this distinction that, as Thomas Kuhn notes, underwrites the claims of science to be a privileged form of discourse because it has recourse to a "neutral observation language,"⁵ a language uninflected by any mediating presuppositions or preconceptions; and it is the same distinction that informs Aristotle's observation (*Rhetoric*, III, 1404. 13) that "Nobody uses fine language when teaching geometry." The language of geometry—of formal rules with no substantive content—is contrasted by Aristotle to all those languages that are intended only to "charm the hearer," the languages of manipulation, deception, and self-consciously deployed strategy.

It is this understanding of linguistic possibilities and dangers that generates a succession of efforts to construct a language from which all per-

spectival bias (a redundant phrase) has been eliminated, efforts that have sometimes taken as a model the notations of mathematics, at other times the operations of logic, and more recently the purely formal calculations of a digital computer. Whether it issues in the elaborate linguistic machines of seventeenth-century "projectors" like Bishop Wilkins (*An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, 1668), or in the building (à la Chomsky) of a "competence" model of language abstracted from any particular performance, or in the project of Esperanto or some other artificial language claiming universality,⁶ or in the fashioning of a Habermasian "ideal speech situation" in which all assertions express "a 'rational will' in relation to a common interest ascertained without deception,"⁷ the impulse behind the effort is always the same: to establish a form of communication that escapes partiality and aids us in first determining and then affirming what is absolutely and objectively true, a form of communication that in its structure and operations is the very antithesis of rhetoric, of passionate partisan discourse.

That desideratum and the fears behind it have received countless articulations, but never have they been articulated with more precision than in these sentences from Bishop Sprat's *History of the Royal Society of London*, 1667:

When I consider the means of *happy living*, and the causes of their *corruption*, I can hardly forbear . . . concluding that *eloquence* ought to be banish'd out of all *civil societies*, as a thing fatal to Peace and good Manners. . . . They [the ornaments of speaking] are in open defiance against *Reason*; professing not to hold much correspondence with that; but with its slaves, the *Passions*: they give the mind a motion too changeable, and bewitching, to consist with *right practice*. Who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties, these specious *Tropes* and *Figures* have brought on our Knowledge? How many rewards, which are due to more profitable, and difficult arts, have been snatch'd away by the easie vanity of *fine speaking*? (pp. 111–13)

⁴See Andrew Lange, *The Artificial Language Movement* (Oxford, New York, and London, 1985). [Au.]

⁷Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, 1975), p. 108. [Au.]

⁴See A. C. Howell, "Res et Verba: Words and Things," in *Seventeenth Century Prose: Modern Essays and Criticism*, ed. S. Fish (Oxford, 1971). [Au.]

⁵Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962), p. 125. [Au.]

The terms of banishment are exactly those invoked by Plato against the poets in book X of his *Republic*: Homer, Socrates says, may be "the most poetic of poets and the first of tragedians, but we must know the truth [and] we can admit no poetry into our city save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men; for if you grant admission to the honeyed Muse . . . pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and that which shall . . . have approved itself to the general reason as the best" (607a). The "honeyed muse" is precisely what Belial becomes when his tongue drops Manna (113), a quintessentially idolatrous act in which he substitutes his own word for the word sent down to us by God and therefore deprives us of the direction that God's word might have given us. Although the transition from classical to Christian thought is marked by many changes, one thing that does not change is the status of rhetoric in relation to a foundational vision of truth and meaning. Whether the center of that vision is a personalized deity or an abstract geometric reason, rhetoric is the force that pulls us away from that center and into its own world of ever-shifting shapes and shimmering surfaces.

Of course, the allure of surfaces and shapes, of "specious Tropes and Figures," would not be felt if there were not something already in us that inclined to it. Rhetoric may be a danger that assaults us from without, but its possible success is a function of an inner weakness. The entire art, as Aristotle explains regretfully, is predicated on "the defects of our hearers" (*Rhetoric*, III, 1404, 8), on the assumption that members of the audience will be naturally susceptible to the rhetorician's appeal. The anti-rhetorical stance can only be coherent if it posits an incoherence at the heart (literally) of the self that is both rhetoric's victim and its source. That self is always presented as divided, as the site of contesting forces; in Christian terms the forces are named the carnal and the spiritual; in secular psychologies the names are passion and reason or the willful and the rational; but whatever the names, the result is a relationship of homology between the inner and outer landscapes, both of which contain a core element of truth and

penumbra of irrationality.⁸ If tropes and figures "give the mind a motion too changeable," it is because the principle of change, in the form of the passions, already lives in the mind, and it follows then that banishing eloquence and the poets from your republic will only do half the job. As Milton puts it in the *Areopagitica*, "they are not skillful considerers of human things who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin";⁹ policing the outer landscape will be of little effect if the inner landscape remains host to the enemy, to sin, to error, to show.

It is the view of the anti-rhetoricians that this double task of inner and outer regulation can be accomplished by linguistic reform, by the institution of conditions of communication that at once protect discourse from the irrelevancies and contingencies that would compromise its universality and insulate the discoursing mind from those contingencies and irrelevancies it itself harbors. Wilkins proposes to fashion a language that will admit neither *Superfluities*—plural signifiers of a single signified, more than one word for a particular thing—nor *Equivocals*—signifiers doing multiple duty, single words that refer to several things—nor *Metaphor*—a form of speech that interposes itself between the observer and the referent and therefore contributes "to the disguising of it with false appearances" (pp. 17–18). The idea is that such a language, purged of ambiguity, redundancy, and indirection, will be an appropriate instrument for the registering of an independent reality, and that if men will only submit themselves to that language and remain within the structure of its stipulated definitions and exclusions, they will be incapable of formulating and expressing wayward, subjective thoughts and will cease to be a danger either to themselves or to those who hearken to them. In this way, says Wilkins, they will be returned to that original state in which the language spoken was the language God gave Adam, a language in which every word perfectly expressed its referent (on the model of Adam's simultaneously understand-

⁸This is the language of H. L. A. Hart's *The Concept of Law* (Oxford, 1961). [Au.]

⁹John Milton, "Areopagitica," in *Milton's Prose*, ed. J. May Patrick et al. (New York, 1968), p. 297. [Au.]

ing the nature of the animals and conferring upon them their names), a language that in the course of time and "emergencies" has unfortunately "admitted various and casual alterations" (p. 19).

In the twentieth century Wilkins's program is echoed point for point (absent the theological scaffolding) by Rudolf Carnap: Carnap would admit into the lexicon only words that can be tied firmly to "protocol" or "observation" sentences, sentences that satisfy certain truth conditions and are therefore verifiable by reference to the facts of the world. The stipulation of this criterion, Carnap asserts, "takes away one's freedom to decide what one wishes to 'mean' by [a] word."¹⁰ The freedom of individual speakers and hearers would be further taken away if the words of a verifiable lexicon were embedded in a grammar that "corresponded exactly to logical syntax," for if that were the case "pseudo-statements could not arise" (p. 68). That is, no one could be misled either by the words of another or by that part of his consciousness inclined to wander from the path of truth; the tendency of language to perform in excess of its proper duty—to report or reflect matters of fact—would be curbed in advance, and the mind's susceptibility to the power of a language unconstrained by its empirical moorings would be neutralized. In short, the danger posed by rhetoric, both to the field of discourse and the discoursing consciousness, would have been eliminated. Of course, there are important differences to be noted between the idealism of Plato, the antienthusiasm of a Restoration bishop, and the logical positivism of a member of the Vienna Circle, but together (and in the company of countless others) they stand on the same side of a quarrel that Plato was already calling "old" in the fifth century before Christ. That quarrel, the quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric, survives every sea change in the history of Western thought, continually presenting us with the (skewed) choice between the plain unvarnished truth straightforwardly presented and the powerful but insidious appeal of "fine lan-

¹⁰Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics," in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (Glencoe, Ill., 1959), p. 63. [Au.]

guage," language that has transgressed the limits of representation and substituted its own forms for the forms of reality.¹¹

II

To this point my presentation has been as skewed as this choice, because it has suggested that rhetoric has received only negative characterizations. In fact, there have always been friends of rhetoric, from the sophists to the anti-foundationalists of the present day, and in response to the realist critique they have devised (and repeated) a number of standard defenses. Two of these defenses are offered by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*. First, he defines rhetoric as a faculty or art whose practice will help us to observe "in any given base the available means of persuasion" (I, 1355, 27) and points out that as a faculty it is not in and of itself inclined away from truth. Of course, bad men may abuse it, but that after all "is a charge which may be made in common against all good things." "What makes a man a 'sophist,'" he declares, "is not his faculty, but his moral purpose" (I, 1355, 17). To the anticipated objection that rhetoric's potential for misuse is a reason for eschewing it, Aristotle replies that it is sometimes a necessary adjunct to the cause of truth, first, because if we leave the art to be cultivated by deceivers, they will lead truth-seekers astray, and, second, because, regrettable though it may be, "before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction" and on those occasions "we must use, as our modes of persuasion and argument, notions possessed by everybody" (I, 1355, 27). That is, because of the defects of our hearers the truth itself must often be rhetorically dressed so that it will gain acceptance.¹²

Aristotle's second defense is more aggressively positive and responds directly to one of the most damaging characterizations of rhetoric:

¹¹See on this point George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, NJ, 1963), p. 23. [Au.]

¹²See John Milton, "Reason of Church Government," in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D. M. Wolfe et al., vol. 1 (New Haven, Conn., 1953), pp. 817–18. [Au.]

"We must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are" (I, 1355, 28–33). In short, properly used, rhetoric is a heuristic, helping us not to distort the facts, but to discover them; moreover, adds Aristotle, the setting forth of contrary views of a matter will have the beneficial effect of showing us which of those views most accords with the truth because "the underlying facts do not lend themselves equally well to the contrary views." By this argument, as Peter Dixon has pointed out, Aristotle "removes rhetoric from the realm of the haphazard and the fanciful"¹³ and rejoins it to that very realm of which it was said to be the great subverter.

But if this is the strength of Aristotle's defense, it is also its weakness, for in making it he reinforces the very assumptions in relation to which rhetoric will always be suspect, assumptions of an independent reality whose outlines can be perceived by a sufficiently clear-eyed observer who can then represent them in a transparent verbal medium. The stronger defense, because it hits at the heart of the opposing tradition, is one that embraces the accusations of that tradition and makes of them a claim. The chief accusation, as we have seen, is that rhetoricians hold "the probable (or likely-seeming, plausible) in more honour than the true" (*Phaedrus*, 267a). The sophist response is to assert that the realm of the probable—of what is likely to be so given particular conditions within some local perspective—is the only relevant realm of consideration for human beings. The argument is contained in two statements attributed famously to Protagoras. The first declares the unavailability (not the unreality) of the gods: "About gods I cannot say either that they are or that they are not."¹⁴ And the second follows necessarily from the absence of godly guidance: "Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are that they are, and of

the things that are not that they are not" (quoted in Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a). What this means, as W. K. C. Guthrie has pointed out, is "that the Sophists recognized only accidental as opposed to essential being, . . . the conditional and relative as opposed to the self-existent."¹⁵ This is not to say that the categories of the true and good are abandoned, but that in different contexts they will be filled differently and that there exists no master context (for that could only be occupied by the unavailable gods) from the vantage point of which the differences could be assessed and judged.

The result is to move rhetoric from the disreputable periphery to the necessary center: for if the highest truth for any man is what he believes it to be (*Theaetetus*, 152a), the skill which produces belief and therefore establishes what, in a particular time and particular place, is true, is the skill essential to the building and maintaining of a civilized society. In the absence of a revealed truth, rhetoric is that skill, and in teaching it the sophists were teaching "the one thing that mattered, how to take care of one's own affairs and the business of the state."¹⁶ The rhetorician is like a physician; it is his job "to diagnose the particular institution and prescribe the best course of action for a man or a state under given conditions"¹⁷ (see Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167b–d, *Protagoras*, 318e–19a); and when Socrates asks Protagoras if he is "promising to make men good citizens," the reply is firm: "That . . . is exactly what I profess to do" (*Protagoras*, 319a). Of course, in this context words like "good" and "best" do not have the meanings a Plato or Socrates would want them to have—good and best in any and all circumstances; rather, they refer to what would appear to be the better of the courses that seem available in what are generally understood to be the circumstantial constraints of a particular situation; but since, according to the sophist view, particular situations are the only kind there are, circumstantial determinations of what is good are as good as you're going to get.

¹³William K. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 193. [Au.]

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 186. [Au.]

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 187. [Au.]

That is, as I have already said, the strongest of the defenses rhetoric has received because it challenges the basic premise of the anti-rhetorical stance, the premise that any discourse must be measured against a stable and independent reality. To the accusation that rhetoric deals only with the realms of the probable and contingent and forsakes truth, the sophists and their successors respond that truth itself is a contingent affair and assumes a different shape in the light of differing local urgencies and the convictions associated with them. "Truth was individual and temporary, not universal and lasting, for the truth for any man was . . . what he could be persuaded of."¹⁸ Not only does this make rhetoric—the art of analyzing and presenting local exigencies—a form of discourse no one can afford to ignore, it renders the opposing discourse—formal philosophy—beside the point. This is precisely Isocrates' thesis in his *Antidosis*. Abstract studies like geometry and astronomy, he says, do not have any "useful application either to private or public affairs; . . . after they are learned . . . they do not attend us through life nor do they lend aid in what we do, but are wholly divorced from our necessities."¹⁹ Indeed, he goes so far as to deny to such disciplines the label "philosophy," for "I hold that man to be wise who is able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course, and I hold that man to be a philosopher who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight" (p. 271). Men who want to do some good in the world, he concludes, "must banish utterly from their interests all vain speculations and all activities which have no bearing on our lives."

What Isocrates does (at least rhetorically) is shift the balance of power between philosophy and rhetoric by putting philosophy on the defensive. This same strategy is pursued after him by Cicero and Quintilian, the most influential of the Roman rhetoricians. In the opening pages of his *De Inventione* Cicero elaborates the myth that will subsequently be invoked in every defense of

humanism and belles lettres. There was a time, he says, when "men wandered at large in the field like animals," and there was "as yet no ordered system of religious worship nor of social duties."²⁰ It was then that a "great and wise" man "assembled and gathered" his uncivilized brothers and "introduced them to every useful and honorable occupation, though they cried out against it at first because of its novelty." Nevertheless, he gained their attention through "reason and eloquence" ("*propter rationem atque orationem*") and by these means he "transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk." Nor would it have been possible, Cicero adds, to have "turned men . . . from their habits" if wisdom had been "mute and voiceless"; only "a speech at the same time powerful and entrancing could have induced one who had great physical strength to submit to justice without violence." From that time on, "many cities have been founded, . . . the flames of a multitude of wars have been extinguished, and . . . the strongest alliances and most sacred friendships have been formed not only by the use of reason, but also more easily by the use of eloquence" (I, 1). Whereas in the foundationalist story an original purity (of vision, purpose, procedure) is corrupted when rhetoric's siren song proves too sweet, in Cicero's story (later to be echoed by countless others)²¹ all the human virtues, and indeed humanity itself, are wrested by the arts of eloquence from a primitive and violent state of nature. Significantly (and this is a point to which we shall return), both stories are stories of power, rhetoric's power; it is just that in one story that power must be resisted lest civilization fall, while in the other that power brings order and a genuine political process where before there was only the rule of "physical strength."

The contrast between the two stories can hardly be exaggerated because what is at stake is not simply a matter of emphasis or priority (as it

²⁰Cicero, "De Inventione," in *Cicero*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), I, 2. [Au.]

²¹See, for example, John Lawson, *Lectures Concerning Oratory*, ed. E. N. Claussen and K. R. Wallace (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 27. [Au.]

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 51. [Au.]

¹⁹Isocrates, "Antidosis," in *Isocrates*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. George Norlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 275, 277. [Au.]

¹³*Rhetoric* (London, 1971), p. 14. [Au.]

¹⁴*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels and

seems to be in Aristotle's effort to demonstrate an *alliance* between rhetoric and truth) but a difference in worldviews. The quarrel between rhetorical and foundational thought is itself foundational; its content is a disagreement about the basic constituents of human activity and about the nature of human nature itself. In Richard Lanham's helpful terms, it is a disagreement as to whether we are members of the species *homo seriusus* or *homo rhetoricus*. *Homo seriusus* or Serious Man

possesses a central self, an irreducible identity. These selves combine into a single, homogeneously real society which constitutes a referent reality for the men living in it. This referent society is in turn contained in a physical nature itself referential, standing "out there" independent of man. Man has invented language to communicate with his fellow man. He communicates facts and concepts about both nature and society. He can also communicate a third category of response, emotions. When he is communicating facts or concepts, success is measured by something we call *clarity*. When he is communicating feelings, success is measured by something we call *sincerity, faithfulness to the self* who is doing the feeling.²²

Homo rhetoricus or rhetorical man, on the other hand,

is an actor; his reality public, dramatic. His sense of identity, depends on the reassurance of daily histrionic reenactment. He is thus centered in time and concrete local event. The lowest common denominator of his life is a social situation. . . . He assumes a natural agility in changing orientations. . . . From birth, almost, he has dwelt not in a single value-structure but in several. He is thus committed to no single construction of the world; much rather, to prevailing in the game at hand. . . . He accepts the present paradigm and explores its resources. Rhetorical man is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it. Reality is what is accepted as reality, what is useful. (p. 4)

As rhetorical man manipulates reality, establishing through his words the imperatives and urgencies to which he and his fellows must respond, he

manipulates or fabricates himself, simultaneously conceiving of and occupying the roles that become first possible and then mandatory given the social structure his rhetoric has put in place. By exploring the available means of persuasion in a particular situation, he tries them on, and as they begin to suit him, he becomes them.²³ "I hold," says Isocrates, "that people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well," for in the setting forth of his position the orator "will select from all the actions of men . . . those examples which are the most illustrious and the most edifying; and habituating himself to contemplate and appraise such examples, he will feel their influence not only in the preparation of a given discourse but in all the actions of his life" (pp. 275, 277). What serious man fears—the invasion of the fortress of essence by the contingent, the protean, and the unpredictable—is what rhetorical man celebrates and incarnates. In the philosopher's vision of the world rhetoric (and representation in general) is merely the (disposable) form by which a prior and substantial content is conveyed; but in the world of *homo rhetoricus* rhetoric is both form and content, the manner of presentation and what is presented; the "improvising power of the rhetor" is at once all-creating and the guarantee of the impermanence of its creations: "to make a thing beautiful or unbeautiful, just or unjust, good or bad is both a human power and a sign of the insubstantiality of these attributes."²⁴ Having been made they can be made again.

Which of these views of human nature is the correct one? The question can only be answered from within one or the other, and the evidence of one party will be regarded by the other either as illusory or as grist for its own mill. When presented with the ever-changing panorama of history, serious man will see variation on a few basic themes; and when confronted with the per-

²³See Thomas Sloane, *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1985), p. 87: "Rhetoric succeeded in humanism's great desideratum, the artistic creation of adept personhood." See also Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago, 1980). [Au.]

²⁴Nancy Streuver, *The Language of History in the Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ, 1970), pp. 15, 12. [Au.]

sistence of essentialist questions and answers, rhetorical man will reply as Lanham does by asserting that serious man is himself a supremely fictional achievement; seriousness is just another style, not the state of having escaped style:

In a fallen cosmetic world, [plain Jane] is asking *not* to be considered, wants to be overlooked—or perhaps to claim attention by contrast. She is as rhetorical as her made up sister, proclaims as loudly an attitude. Thus the whole range of ornament from zero to 100 is equally rhetorical, equally deep or equally superficial. (p. 30)

That is to say, for rhetorical man the distinctions (between form and content, periphery and core, ephemeral and abiding) invoked by serious man are nothing more than the scaffolding of the theater of seriousness, are themselves instances of what they oppose. And on the other side, if serious man were to hear *that* argument, he would regard it as one more example of rhetorical manipulation and sleight of hand, an outrageous assertion that flies in the face of common sense, the equivalent in debate of "so's your old man." And so it would go, with no prospect of ever reaching accord, an endless round of accusation and counteraccusation in which truth, honesty, and linguistic responsibility are claimed by everyone: "from serious premises, all rhetorical language is suspect; from a rhetorical point of view, transparent language seems dishonest; false to the world."²⁵

And so it *has* gone; the history of Western thought could be written as the history of this quarrel. And, indeed, such histories have been written and with predictably different emphases. In one version written many times, the mists of religion, magic, and verbal incantation (all equivalently suspect forms of fantasy) are dispelled by the Enlightenment rediscovery of reason and science; enthusiasm and metaphor alike are curbed by the refinement of method, and the effects of difference (point of view) are bracketed and held in check by a procedural rigor. In another version (told by a line stretching from Vico to Foucault) a carnivalesque world of exuberance and possibility is drastically impoverished by the ascen-

²⁵Lanham, *Motives*, p. 28. [Au.]

dency of a soulless reason, a brutally narrow perspective that claims to be objective and proceeds in a repressive manner to enforce its claim. It is not my intention here to endorse either history or to offer a third or to argue as some have for a nonhistory of discontinuous *episteme* innocent of either a progressive or lapsarian curve; rather, I only wish to point out that the debate continues to this very day and that its terms are exactly those one finds in the dialogues of Plato and the orations of the sophists.

III

As I write, the fortunes of rhetorical man are on the upswing, as in discipline after discipline there is evidence of what has been called the interpretive turn, the realization (at least for those it seizes) that the givens of any field of activity—including the facts it commands, the procedures it trusts in, and the values it expresses and extends—are socially and politically constructed, are fashioned by man rather than delivered by God or Nature. The most recent (and unlikely) field to experience this revolution, or at least to hear of its possibility, is economics. The key text is Donald McCloskey's *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Wisconsin, 1985), a title that is itself polemical since, as McCloskey points out, mainstream economists don't like to think of themselves as employing a rhetoric; rather, they regard themselves as scientists whose methodology insulates them from the appeal of special interests or points of view. They think, in other words, that the procedures of their discipline will produce "knowledge free from doubt, free from metaphysics, morals and personal conviction" (p. 16). To this, McCloskey responds by declaring (in good sophistic terms) that no such knowledge is available, and that while economic method promises to deliver it, "what it is able to deliver [and] renames as scientific methodology [are] the scientist's and especially the economic scientist's metaphysics, moral, and personal convictions" (p. 16). Impersonal method, then, is both an illusion and a danger (as a kind of rhetoric it masks its rhetorical nature), and as an antidote to it McCloskey offers rhetoric, which he says, deals not with abstract truth, but with the truth

that emerges in the context of distinctly human conversations (pp. 28–29). Within those conversations there are always

particular arguments good or bad. After making them there is no point in asking a last, summarizing question: "Well, is it True?" It's whatever it is—persuasive, interesting, useful, and so forth. . . . There is no reason to search for a general quality called Truth, which answers only the unanswerable question, "What is it in the mind of God?" (p. 47)

The answerable questions are always asked within the assumptions of particular situations, and both question and answer "will always depend on one's audience and the human purposes involved" (p. 150). The real truth, concludes McCloskey, is that "assertions are made for purposes of persuading some audience" and that, given the unavailability of a God's-eye view, "this is not a shameful fact," but the bottom line fact in a rhetorical world.

At the first conference called to consider McCloskey's arguments, the familiar anti-rhetorical objections were heard again in the land, and the land might have been fifth-century Athens as well as Wellesley, Massachusetts, in 1986. One participant spoke of "the primrose path to extreme relativism" which proceeds from "Kuhn's conception of the incommensurability of paradigms" to the "contention that there are no objective and unambiguous procedures for applying . . . rules since the meanings of particular actions and terms are entirely . . . context-dependent." Other voices proclaimed that nothing in McCloskey's position was new (an observation certainly true), that everyone already knew it, and that at any rate it didn't touch the core of the economists's practice. Still others invoked a set of related (and familiar) distinctions between empirical and interpretive activities, between demonstration and persuasion, between verifiable procedures and anarchic irrationalism. Of course, each of these objections had already been formulated (or reformulated) in those disciplines that had heard rhetoric's siren song long before it reached the belated ears of economists. The name that everyone always refers to (in praise or blame) is Thomas Kuhn. His *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is arguably the most fre-

quently cited work in the humanities and social sciences in the past twenty-five years, and it is rhetorical through and through. Kuhn begins by rehearsing and challenging the orthodox model of scientific inquiry in which independent facts are first collected by objective methods and then built up into a picture of nature, a picture that he himself either confirms or rejects in the context of controlled experiments. In this model, science is a "cumulative process" (p. 3) in which each new discovery adds "one more item to the population of the scientist's world" (p. 7). The shape of that world—of the scientist's professional activities—is determined by the shapes (of fact and structure) already existing in the larger world of nature, shapes that constrain and guide the scientist's work.

Kuhn challenges this story by introducing the notion of a paradigm, a set of tacit assumptions and beliefs within which research goes on, assumptions which rather than deriving from the observation of facts are determinative of the facts that could possibly be observed. It follows, then, that when observations made within different paradigms conflict, there is no principled (i.e., nonrhetorical) way to adjudicate the dispute. One cannot put the competing accounts to the test of fact, because the specification of fact is precisely what is at issue between them; a fact cited by one party would be seen as a mistake by the other. What this means is that science does not proceed by offering its descriptions to the independent judgment of nature; rather, it proceeds when the proponents of one paradigm are able to present their case in a way that the adherents of other paradigms find compelling. In short, the "motor" by which science moves is not verification or falsification, but persuasion. Indeed, says Kuhn, in the end the force of scientific argument "is only that of persuasion" (p. 94). In the case of disagreement, "each party must try, by persuasion, to convert the other" (p. 198); and when one party succeeds there is no higher court to which the outcome might be referred: "there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community" (p. 94). "What better criterion," asks Kuhn, "could there be?" (p. 170).

The answer given by those who were horrified by Kuhn's rhetoricization of scientific procedure

was predictable: a better criterion would be one that was not captive to a particular paradigm but provided a neutral space in which competing paradigms could be disinterestedly assessed. By denying such a criterion, Kuhn leaves us in a world of epistemological and moral anarchy. The words are Israel Scheffler's:

Independent and public controls are no more, communication has failed, the common universe of things is a delusion, reality itself is made . . . rather than discovered. . . . In place of a community of rational men following objective procedures in the pursuit of truth, we have a set of isolated monads, within each of which belief forms without systematic constraints.²⁶

Kuhn and those he has persuaded have, of course, responded to these accusations, but, needless to say, the debate continues in terms readers of this essay could easily imagine; and the debate has been particularly acrimonious because the area of contest—science and its procedures—is so heavily invested in as the one place where the apostles of rhetorical interpretivism would presumably fear to tread.

At one point in his argument Kuhn remarks that in the tradition he is critiquing scientific research is "reputed to proceed" from "raw data" or "brute experience"; but, he points out, if that were truly the mode of proceeding, it would require a "neutral observation language" (p. 125), a language that registers facts without any mediation by paradigm-specific assumptions. The problem is that "philosophical investigation has not yet provided even a hint of what a language able to do that would be like" (p. 127). Even a specially devised language "embodies a host of expectations about nature," expectations that limit in advance what can be described. Just as one cannot (in Kuhn's view) have recourse to neutral facts in order to settle a dispute, so one cannot have recourse to a neutral language in which to report those facts or even to report on the configuration of the dispute. The difference that divides men "is prior to the application of the languages in which it is nevertheless reflected"

²⁶*Science and Subjectivity* (Indianapolis, 1967), p. 19. [Au.]

(p. 201). Whatever reports a particular language (natural or artificial) offers us will be the report on the world as it is seen from within some particular situation; there is no other aperspectival way to see and no language other than a situation-dependent language—an interested, rhetorical language—in which to report.

This same point was being made with all the force of philosophical authority by J. L. Austin in a book published, significantly, in the same year (1962) that saw the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Austin begins *How to Do Things with Words* by observing that traditionally the center of the philosophy of language has been just the kind of utterance Kuhn declares unavailable, the context-independent statement that offers objective reports on an equally independent world in sentences of the form "He is running" and "Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma" (pp. 47, 142). Such utterances, which Austin calls "constative," are answerable to a requirement of truth and verisimilitude ("the truth of the constative . . . 'he is running' depends on his being running"); the words must match the world, and if they do not they can be criticized as false and inaccurate. There are, however, innumerable utterances that are not assessable in this way. If, for example, I say to you, "I promise to pay you five dollars" or "Leave the room," it would be odd were you to respond by saying "true" or "false"; rather, you would say to the first "good" or "that's not enough" or "I won't hold my breath" and to the second "yes, sir" or "but I'm expecting a phone call" or "who do you think you are?" These and many other imaginable responses would not be judgments on the truth or accuracy of my utterance but on its appropriateness given our respective positions in some social structure of understanding (domestic, military, economic, etc.). It is only if the circumstances are of a certain kind—that is, if five dollars is a reasonable rather than an insulting amount, if the room I order you to leave is mine not yours—that the utterances will "take" and achieve the meaning of being a promise or a command. Thus the very identity, and therefore the meaning, of this type of utterance—Austin names it "performative"—depends on the context in which it is produced and received. There

is no regular—in the sense of reliable and predictable—relationship between the form of the linguistic marks (the words and their order) and their significance. Nothing guarantees that “I promise to pay you five dollars” will be either intended or heard as a promise; in different circumstances it could be received as a threat or a joke (as when I utter it from debtors’ prison), and in many circumstances it will be intended as one act and understood as another (as when your opinion of my trustworthiness is much lower than my own). When the criterion of verisimilitude has been replaced by the criterion of appropriateness, meaning becomes radically contextual, potentially as variable as the situated (and shifting) understandings of countless speakers and hearers.

It is, of course, precisely this property of performatives—their force is contingent and cannot be formally constrained—that is responsible for their being consigned by philosophers of language to the category of the “derived” or “parasitic,” where, safely tucked away, they are prevented from contaminating the core category of the constative. But it is this act of segregation and quarantining that Austin undoes in the second half of his book when he extends the analysis of performatives to constatives and finds that they too mean differently in the light of differing contextual circumstances. Consider the exemplary constative, “Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma.” Is it true, accurate, a faithful report? It depends, says Austin, on the context in which it is uttered and received (pp. 142–43). In a high school textbook it might be accepted as true because of the in-place assumptions as to what, exactly, a battle is, what constitutes winning, what the function of a general is, etc., while in a work of “serious” historical research all of these assumptions may have been replaced by others, with the result that the very notions “battle” and “won” would have a different shape. The properties that supposedly distinguish constatives from performatives—fidelity to preexisting facts, accountability to a criterion of truth—turn out to be as dependent on particular conditions of production and reception as performatives. “True” and “false,” Austin concludes, are not names for the possible relationships between freestanding

ing state of affairs; rather, they are situation-specific judgments on the relationship between contextually produced utterances and states of affairs that are themselves no less contextually produced. At the end of the book constatives are “discovered” to be a subset of performatives, and with this discovery the formal core of language disappears entirely and is replaced by a world of utterances vulnerable to the sea change of every circumstance, the world, in short, of rhetorical (situated) man.

This is a conclusion Austin himself resists when he attempts to isolate (and thereby contain) the rhetorical by invoking another distinction between serious and nonserious utterance. Serious utterances are utterances for which the speaker takes responsibility; he means what he says, and therefore you can infer his meaning by considering his words in context. A nonserious utterance is an utterance produced in circumstances that “abrogate” (p. 21) the speaker’s responsibility, and therefore one cannot with any confidence—that is, without the hazard of ungrounded conjecture—determine what he means:

a performative utterance will, for example, be . . . hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy. . . . Language in such circumstances is in special ways . . . used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use. . . . All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances . . . are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (p. 22)

The distinction, then, is between utterances that are, as Austin puts it later, “tethered to their origin” (p. 61), anchored by a palpable intention, and utterances whose origin is hidden by the screen of a theatrical or literary stage setting. This distinction and the passage in which it appears were taken up in 1967 by Jacques Derrida in a famous (and admiring) critique of Austin. Derrida finds Austin working against his own best insights and forgetting what he has just acknowledged, that “infelicity [communication going astray, in an unintended direction] is an ill to which *all* [speech] acts are heir.”²⁷ Despite

²⁷Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Glyph* 1 (1977): 100 [Au.]

this acknowledgment, Austin continues to think of infelicity—of those cases in which the tethering origin of utterances is obscure and must be constructed by interpretive conjecture—as special, whereas, in Derrida’s view, infelicity is itself the originary state in that any determination of meaning must always proceed within an interpretive construction of a speaker’s intention. The origin that supposedly tethers the interpretation of an utterance will always be the product of that interpretation; the special circumstances in which meaning must be inferred through a screen rather than directly are the circumstances of every linguistic transaction. In short, there are no ordinary circumstances, merely those myriad and varied circumstances in which actors embedded in stage settings hazard interpretations of utterances produced by actors embedded in other stage situations. All the world, as Shakespeare says, is a stage, and on that stage “the quality of risk admitted by Austin” is not something one can avoid by sticking close to ordinary language in ordinary circumstances, but is rather “the internal and positive condition” of any act of communication.”²⁸

In the same publication in which the English translation of Derrida’s essay appeared, John Searle, a student of Austin’s, replied in terms that make clear the affiliation of this particular debate to the ancient debate whose configurations we have been tracing. Searle’s strategy is basically to repeat Austin’s points and declare that Derrida has missed them: “Austin’s idea is simply this: if we want to know what it is to make a promise we had better not *start* our investigations with promises made by actors on stage . . . because in some fairly obvious way such utterances are not standard cases of promises” (p. 204). But in Derrida’s argument, the category of the “obvious” is precisely what is being challenged or “deconstructed.” Although it is true that we consider promises uttered in everyday contexts more direct—less etiolated—than promises made on a stage, this (Derrida would say) is only because the stage settings within which everyday life proceeds are so powerfully—that is, rhetorically—in place that they are in effect invisible, and

²⁸Ibid. [Au.]

therefore the meanings they make possible are experienced as if they were direct and unmediated by any screens. The “obvious” cannot be opposed to the “staged,” as Searle assumes, because it is simply the achievement of a staging that has been particularly successful. One does not escape the rhetorical by fleeing to the protected area of basic communication and common sense because common sense in whatever form it happens to take is always a rhetorical—partial, partisan, interested—construction. This does not mean, Derrida hastens to add, that all rhetorical constructions are equal, just that they are equally rhetorical, equally the effects and extensions of some limited and challengeable point of view. The “citationality”—the condition of being in quotes, of being *indirect*—of an utterance in a play is not the same as the citationality of a philosophical reference or a deposition before a court; it is just that no one of these performatives is more serious—more direct, less mediated, less rhetorical—than any other. Whatever opposition there is takes place within a “general” citationality which “constitutes a violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every *speech act*” (p. 192).

Searle points out (p. 205) that in order to achieve a “general theory of speech acts,” one must perform acts of exclusion or idealization like Austin’s; but it is the possibility of a general theory—of an account that is itself more than an extension of some *particular* context or perspective—that Derrida denies. His is the familiar world of Rhetorical Man, teeming with roles, situations, strategies, interventions, but containing no master role, no situation of situations, no strategy for outflanking all strategies, no intervention in the arena of dispute that does not expand the arena of dispute, no neutral point of rationality from the vantage point of which the “merely rhetorical” can be identified and held in check. That is why deconstructive or post-structuralist thought is supremely rhetorical: it systematically asserts and demonstrates the mediated, constructed, partial, socially constituted nature of all realities, whether they be phenomenal, linguistic, or psychological. To deconstruct a text, says Derrida, is to “work through the structured genealogy of its concepts in the most scrupulous

and immanent fashion, but at the same time to determine from a certain external perspective that it cannot name or describe what this history may have concealed or excluded, constituting itself as history through this repression in which it has a stake."²⁹ The "external perspective" is the perspective from which the analyst knows in advance (by virtue of his commitment to the rhetorical or anti-foundational worldview) that the coherences presented by a text (and an institution or an economy can in this sense be a text) rests on a contradiction it cannot acknowledge, rests on the suppression of the challengeable rhetoricity of its own standpoint, a standpoint that offers itself as if it came from nowhere in particular and simply delivered things as they really (i.e., nonperspectivally) are. A deconstructive reading will surface those contradictions and expose those suppressions and thus "trouble" a unity that is achieved only by covering over all the excluded emphases and interests that might threaten it. These exclusions are part of the text in that the success of its totalizing effort depends on them. Once they are made manifest, the hitherto manifest meaning of the text is undermined—indeed, is shown to have always and already been undermined—as "the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise," are deprived of the claim to be *unrhetorical*, serious, disinterested.³⁰

Nor is this act performed in the service of something beyond rhetoric. Derridean deconstruction does not uncover the operations of rhetoric in order to reach the Truth; rather, it continually uncovers the truth of rhetorical operations, the truth that all operations, including the operation of deconstruction itself, are rhetorical. If, as Paul de Man asserts, "a deconstruction always has for its target to reveal the existence of hidden articulations and fragmentations within assumedly monadic totalities," care must be taken that a new monadic totality is not left as the

legacy of the deconstructive gesture. Since the course of a deconstruction is to uncover a "fragmented stage that can be called natural with regard to the system that is being undone," there is always the danger that the "natural" pattern will "substitute *its* relational system for the one it helped to dissolve."³¹ The only way to escape this danger is to perform the deconstructive act again and again, submitting each new emerging constellation to the same suspicious scrutiny that brought it to light, and resisting the temptation to put in place of the truths it rhetoricizes the truth that everything is rhetorical. One cannot rest even in the insight that there is no place to rest. "Rhetoric," says de Man, "suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration" (p. 10). But the rhetorical vision is foreclosed on and made into a new absolute if those "vertiginous possibilities" are celebrated as the basis of a new wisdom. The rhetorical beat must by definition go on, endlessly repeating the sequence by which "the lure of solid ground" is succeeded by "the ensuing demystification."³² When de Man approvingly quotes Nietzsche's identification of truth with "a moving army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms," a rhetorical construction whose origin has been (and must be) forgotten, he does not exempt Nietzsche's text from its own corrosive effects. If Nietzsche declares (well in advance of Kuhn and Austin, but well after Gorgias and Protagoras) that "there is no such thing as an unrhetorical, 'natural' language," for "tropes are not something that can be added or subtracted from language at will," the insight must be extended to that very declaration: "A text like *On Truth and Lie*, although it presents itself legitimately as a demystification of literary rhetoric, remains entirely literary, and deceptive itself" (p. 113). The "rhetorical mode," the mode of deconstruction, is a mode of "endless reflection," since it is "unable ever to escape from the rhetorical deceit it announces" (p. 115).

²⁹*Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, Conn., 1979), p. 249. [Au.]

³⁰William Ray, *Literary Meaning* (Oxford, 1984), p. 195. [Au.]

IV

That, however, is just what is wrong with deconstructive practice from the viewpoint of the intellectual left, many of whose members subscribe to Nietzsche's account of truth and reality as rhetorical but find that much of post-structuralist discourse uses that account as a way of escaping into new versions of idealism and formalism. Frank Lentricchia, for example, sees in some of de Man's texts an intention to place "discourse in a realm where it can have no responsibility to historical life" and fears that we are being invited into "the realm of the thoroughly predictable linguistic transcendental," the "rarified region of the undecidable," where every text "speaks synchronically and endlessly the same tale . . . of its own duplicitous self-consciousness."³³ Terry Eagleton's judgment is even harsher. Noting that in the wake of Nietzschean thought, rhetoric, "mocked and berated for centuries by an abrasive rationalism," takes its "terrible belated revenge" by finding itself in every rationalist project, Eagleton complains that many rhetoricians seem content to stop there, satisfied with the "Fool's function of unmasking all power as self-rationalization, all knowledge as a mere fumbling with metaphor."³⁴ Operating as a "vigorous demystifier of all ideology," rhetoric functions only as a form of thought and ends up by providing "the final ideological rationale for political inertia." In retreat "from market place to study, politics to philology, social practice to semiotics," deconstructive rhetoric turns the emancipatory promise of Nietzschean thought into "a gross failure of ideological nerve," allowing the liberal academic the elitist pleasure of repeatedly exposing "vulgar commercial and political hectorings" (pp. 108-9). In both his study of Benjamin and his influential *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Eagleton urges a return to the Ciceronian-Isocratic tradition in which the rhetorical arts are inseparable from the practice of a politics, "techniques of persuasion indissociable from the substantive issues and

³³*After the New Criticism* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 310, 317. [Au.]

³⁴*Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, 1981), p. 108. [Au.]

audiences involved," techniques whose employment is "closely determined by the pragmatic situation at hand."³⁵ In short, he calls for a rhetoric that will do real work and cites as an example the slogan "black is beautiful," which he says is "paradigmatically rhetorical since it employs a figure of equivalence to produce particular discursive and extra-discursive effects without direct regard for truth."³⁶ That is, someone who says "black is beautiful" is not so much interested in the accuracy of the assertion (it is not constatively intended) as he is in the responses it may provoke—surprise, outrage, urgency, solidarity—responses that may in turn set in motion "practices that are deemed, in the light of a particular set of falsifiable hypotheses, to be desirable."³⁷

For Eagleton, the desirable practices are Marxist-socialist and the rhetoric that will help establish them has three tasks:

First, to participate in the production of works and events which . . . so fictionalize the "real" as to intend those effects conducive to the victory of socialism. Second, as "critic" to expose the rhetorical structures by which non-socialist works produce politically undesirable effects. . . . Third, to interpret such words where possible "against the grain," so as to appropriate from them whatever may be valuable for socialism.³⁸

It is, of course, the second of these tasks that presents conceptual and cognitive problems. If all cultural work is, as Eagleton says in the sentence just before this passage, rhetorical, then how does one's own rhetoric escape the inauthenticity it discovers in the rhetoric of others? Eagleton's answer is contained in his assumption of the superiority of the socialist program; any rhetorical work in the service of that program will be justified in advance, while conversely any rhetorical work done in opposition to socialist urgencies will flow from "false consciousness" and will deserve to be exposed. This confidence in his objectives makes Eagleton impatient with those for

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 104. [Au.]

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 112. [Au.]

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 113. [Au.]

³⁸*Ibid.* [Au.]

²⁹Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 6. [Au.]

³⁰Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), p. 86. [Au.]

whom the rhetoricity of all discourse is something to be savored for itself, something to be lovingly and obsessively demonstrated again and again. It is not, he says, "a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems; it is a matter of starting from what we want to *do*, and then seeing which methods and theories will best help us to achieve these ends."³⁹ Theories, in short, are themselves rhetorics whose usefulness is a function of contingent circumstances. It is ends—specific goals in local contexts—that rule the invocation of theories, not theories that determine goals and the means by which they can be reached.

There are those on the left, however, for whom the direction is the other way around, from the theoretical realization of rhetoric's pervasiveness to a vision and a program for implementing it. In their view the discovery (or rediscovery) that all discourse and therefore all knowledge is rhetorical leads or should lead to the adoption of a *method* by which the dangers of rhetoric can be at least mitigated and perhaps extirpated. This method has two stages: the first is a stage of debunking, and it issues from the general suspicion in which all orthodoxies and arrangements of power are held once it is realized that their basis is not reason or nature but the success of some rhetorical / political agenda. Armed with this realization, one proceeds to expose the contingent and therefore challengeable basis of whatever presents itself as natural and inevitable. So far this is precisely the procedure of deconstruction; but whereas deconstructive practice (at least of the Yale variety) seems to produce nothing but the occasion for its endless repetition, some cultural revolutionaries discern in it a more positive residue, the loosening or weakening of the structures of domination and oppression that now hold us captive. The reasoning is that by repeatedly uncovering the historical and ideological basis of established structures (both political and cognitive), one becomes sensitized to the effects of ideology and begins to clear a space in which those effects can be combated; and as that sensitivity grows more acute, the area of combat will become larger until it encompasses the under-

lying structure of assumptions that confers a spurious legitimacy on the powers that currently be. The claim, in short, is that the radically rhetorical insight of Nietzschean/Derridean thought can do radical political work; becoming aware that everything is rhetorical is the first step in countering the power of rhetoric and liberating us from its force. Only if deeply entrenched ways of thinking and acting are made the objects of suspicion will we be able "even to *imagine* that life could be different and better."

This last sentence is taken from an essay by Robert Gordon entitled "New Developments in Legal Theory."⁴⁰ Gordon is writing as a member of the Critical Legal Studies Movement, a group of legal academics who have discovered the rhetorical nature of legal reasoning and are busily exposing as interested the supposedly disinterested operations of legal procedures. Gordon's pages are replete with the vocabulary of enclosure or prison; we are "locked into" a system of belief we did not make; we are "demobilized" (that is, rendered less mobile); we must "break out" (p. 291), we must "unfreeze the world as it appears to common sense" (p. 289). What will help us to break out, to unfreeze, is the discovery "that the belief-structures that rule our lives are not found in nature but are historically contingent," for that discovery, says Gordon, "is extraordinarily liberating" (p. 289). What it will liberate are the mental energies that were before prevented by the "paralysis-inducing" effects of received systems of thought from even imagining that "life could be different and better." In the words of Roberto Unger (another prominent member of the movement), if you start with an awareness of the insight "that no one scheme of human association has conclusive authority" and come to an understanding of the "flawed" nature of the schemes now in place, you can then "imagine the actualizations [i.e., present-day arrangements of things] transformed" and in time "transform them in fact."⁴¹ The result will be a "cultural-revolutionary practice" that will bring about the "progressive emancipation from a

³⁹The Politics of Law (New York, 1983), p. 287. [Au.]

⁴⁰"The Critical Legal Studies Movement," *Harvard Law Review* 96 (1983): 580. [Au.]

background plan of social division and hierarchy" (p. 587). To the question, what is the *content* of that emancipation, given a world that is rhetorical through and through, those who work Gordon's and Unger's side of the street usually reply that emancipation will take the form of a strengthening and enlarging of a capacity of mind that stands to the side of, and is therefore able to resist, the appeal of the agenda that would enslave us. That capacity of mind has received many names, but the one most often proposed is "critical self-consciousness." Critical self-consciousness is the ability (stifled in some, developed in others) to discern in any "scheme of association," including those one finds attractive and compelling, the partisan aims it hides from view; and the claim is that as it performs this negative task, critical self-consciousness participates in the positive task of formulating schemes of associations (structures of thought and government) that are in the service not of a particular party but of all mankind.

It need hardly be said that this claim veers back in the direction of the rationalism and universalism that the critical/deconstructive project sets out to demystify. That project begins by rejecting the rationalities of present life as rationalizations and revealing the structure of reality to be rhetorical, that is, partial; but then it turns around and attempts to use the insight of partiality to build something that is less partial, less hostage to the urgencies of a particular vision and more responsive to the needs of men and women in general. Insofar as this "turn" is taken to its logical conclusion, it ends up reinventing at the conclusion of a rhetorically informed critique the entire array of anti-rhetorical gestures and exclusions. One sees this clearly in the work of Jürgen Habermas, a thinker whose widespread influence is testimony to the durability of the tradition that began (at least) with Plato. Habermas's goal is to bring about something he calls the "ideal speech situation," a situation in which all assertions proceed not from the perspective of individual desires and strategies, but from the perspective of a general rationality upon which all parties are agreed. In such a situation nothing would count except the claims to universal validity of all assertions. "No force except that of the better argu-

ment is exercised; and, . . . as a result, all motives except that of the cooperative search for truth are excluded."⁴² Of course, in the world we now inhabit there is no such purity of motive; nevertheless, says Habermas, even in the most distorted of communicative situations there remains something of the basic impulse behind all utterance, "the intention of communicating a true [*wahr*] proposition . . . so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker."⁴³ If we could only eliminate from our discourse performances those intentions that reflect baser goals—the intentions to deceive, to manipulate, to persuade—the ideal speech situation could be approximated.

What stands in our way is the fact that many of our speech acts issue from the perspective of local and historically contingent contexts, and these by definition cannot contribute to the building up of a general rationality. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to choose and proffer utterances that satisfy (or at least claim and desire to satisfy) *universal* conditions of validity. This is the project Habermas names "Universal Pragmatics" and the name tells its own story. Habermas recognizes, as all modern and postmodern contextualists do, that language is a social and not a purely formal phenomenon, but he thinks that the social/pragmatic aspect of language use is itself "accessible to formal analysis" (p. 6) and that therefore it is possible to construct a universal "communicative competence" (p. 29) parallel to Chomsky's linguistic competence. Sentences produced according to the rules and norms of this communicative competence would be tied not to "particular epistemic presuppositions and changing contexts" (p. 29), but to the unchanging context (the context of contexts) in which one finds the presuppositions underlying the general possibility of successful speech. "A general theory of speech acts would . . . describe . . . that fundamental system of rules that adult subjects master to the extent that they can fulfill the conditions of happy employment of sentences in utterances no matter to which particular language the sentences may belong and in which accidental contexts the

⁴²*Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, 1975), pp. 107–8. [Au.]

⁴³*Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston, 1979), p. 2. [Au.]

utterances may be embedded" (p. 26). If we can operate on the level of that fundamental system, the distorting potential of "accidental contexts" will be neutralized because we will always have one eye on what is essential, the establishing by rational cooperation of an interpersonal (non-accidental) truth. Once speakers are oriented to this goal and away from others, oriented toward *general* understanding, they will be incapable of deception and manipulation: "Truthfulness guarantees the transparency of a subjectivity representing itself in language" (p. 57). A company of transparent subjectivities will join together in the fashioning of a transparent truth and of a world in which the will to power has been eliminated.

In his book *Textual Power* (New Haven, 1985), Robert Scholes examines the rationalist epistemology in which a "complete self confronts a solid world, perceiving it directly and accurately, . . . capturing it perfectly in a transparent language" and declares it to be so thoroughly discredited that it now "is lying in ruins around us" (pp. 132-33). Perhaps so, in some circles, but the fact of Habermas's work and of the audience he commands suggests that even now those ruins are collecting themselves and rising again into the familiar anti-rhetorical structure. It would seem that any announcement of the death of either position will always be premature, slightly behind the institutional news that in some corner of the world supposedly abandoned questions are receiving what at least appear to be new answers. Only recently the *public* fortunes of rationalist-foundationalist thought have taken a favorable turn with the publication of books like Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, both of which (Bloom's more directly) challenge the "new Orthodoxy" of "extreme cultural relativism" and reassert, albeit in different ways, the existence of normative standards. In many quarters these books have been welcomed as a return to the common sense that is necessary if civilization is to avoid the dark night of anarchy. One can expect administrators and legislators to propose reforms (and perhaps even purges) based on Bloom's arguments (the rhetorical force of anti-rhetoricism is always being revived), and one

can expect too a host of voices raised in opposition to what will surely be called the "new positivism." Those voices will include some that have been mentioned here and some others that certainly merit recording but can only be noted in a list that is itself incomplete. The full story of rhetoric's twentieth-century resurgence would boast among its cast of characters: Kenneth Burke, whose "dramatism" anticipates so much of what is considered avant-garde today; Wayne Booth, whose *The Rhetoric of Fiction* was so important in legitimizing the rhetorical analysis of the novel; Mikhail Bakhtin, whose contrast of monologic to dialogic and heteroglossic discourse sums up so many strands in the rhetorical tradition; Roland Barthes, who in the concept of "jouissance" makes a (non) constitutive principle of the tendency of rhetoric to resist closure and extend play; the ethnomethodologists (Harold Garfinkel and company) who discover in every supposedly rule-bound context the operation of a principle (exactly the wrong word) of "ad-hoc-ing"; Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca whose *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* provides a sophisticated modern source book for would-be rhetoricians weary of always citing Aristotle; Barbara Herrnstein Smith who, in the course of espousing an unashamed relativism, directly confronts and argues down the objections of those who fear for their souls (and more) in a world without objective standards; Fredric Jameson and Hayden White who teach us (among other things) that "history . . . is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization";⁴⁴ reader-oriented critics like Norman Holland, David Bleich, Wolfgang Iser, and H. R. Jauss who, by shifting the emphasis from the text to its reception, open up the act of interpretation to the infinite variability of contextual circumstance; innumerable feminists who relentlessly unmark male hegemonic structures and expose as rhetorical the rational posturings of the legal and political systems; equally innumerable theorists of composition who, under the slogan "process, not product," insist on the rhetorical nature of com-

⁴⁴*The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, 1981), p. 35. [Au.]

munication and argue for far-reaching changes in the way writing is taught. The list is already formidable, but it could go on and on, providing support for Scholes's contention that the rival epistemology has been vanquished and for Clifford Geertz's announcement (and he too is a contributor to the shift he reports) that "Something is happening to the way we think about the way we think."⁴⁵

But it would seem, from the evidence marshaled in this essay, that something is always happening to the way we think, and that it is always the same something, a tug-of-war between two views of human life and its possibilities, no one of which can ever gain complete and lasting ascendancy because in the very moment of its triumphant articulation each turns back in the direction of the other. Thus Wayne Booth feels obliged in both *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *A Rhetoric of Irony* to confine the force of rhetoric by sharply distinguishing its legitimate uses from two extreme-limit cases (the "unreliable narrator" and "unstable irony"); some reader-response critics deconstruct the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the text, but in the process end up privileging the autonomous and self-sufficient subject; some feminists challenge the essentialist claims of "male reason" in the name of a female rationality or nonrationality apparently no less essential; Jameson opens up the narrativity of history in order to proclaim one narrative the true and unifying one. Here one might speak of the return of the repressed (and thereby invoke Freud whose writings and influence would be still an-

⁴⁵"Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," *The American Scholar* 49 (spring 1980). [Au.]

other chapter in the story I have not even begun to tell) were it not that the repressed—whether it be the fact of difference or the desire for its elimination—is always so close to the surface that it hardly need be unearthed. What we seem to have is a tale full of sound and fury, and signifying itself, signifying a durability rooted in inconclusiveness, in the impossibility of there being a last word.

In an essay, however, someone must have the last word and I give it to Richard Rorty. Rorty is himself a champion of the antiessentialism that underlies rhetorical thinking; his neo-pragmatism makes common cause with Kuhn and others who would turn us away from the search for transcendental absolutes and commend to us (although it would seem superfluous to do so) the imperatives and goals already informing our practices. It is, however, not the polemicist Rorty whom I call upon to sum up, but the Rorty who is the brisk chronicler of our epistemological condition:

There . . . are two ways of thinking about various things. . . . The first . . . thinks of truth as a vertical relationship between representations and what is represented. The second . . . thinks of truth horizontally—as the culminating reinterpretation of our predecessor's reinterpretation of their predecessors' reinterpretation. . . . It is the difference between regarding truth, goodness, and beauty as eternal objects which we try to locate and reveal, and regarding them as artifacts whose fundamental design we often have to alter.⁴⁶

It is the difference between serious and rhetorical man. It is the difference that remains.

⁴⁶*Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, 1982), p. 92. [Au.]