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Reverence and Rhetorology: How Harmonizing Paul Woodruff's *Reverence* and Wayne Booth's
Rhetorology Can Foster Civility within Communities

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Reverence and Rhetorology: How Harmonizing Paul Woodruff's *Reverence* and Wayne Booth's

Rhetorology Can Foster Civility within Communities

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Masters of Arts

Wayne Booth's neologism *rhetorology*, introduced in 1981, hasn't caught on in rhetorical scholarship. Nevertheless, in this essay I hope to revive *rhetorology* by harmonizing it with Paul Woodruff's work on *reverence*. I show how harmonizing these terms makes each more comprehensible. In order to illustrate how reverence and rhetorology might be made more practical I also analyze two arguments in the health care debate leading up to the passing of the Affordable Health Care for America Act in early 2010. Ultimately I hope to show that rhetorology is a reverent rhetorical practice, one that can help us restore a needed sense of communal reverence in contemporary democracy.

Keywords: reverence, rhetorology, Wayne Booth, Paul Woodruff, civility

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Introduction

Wayne Booth first introduced his neologism *rhetorology* in his 1981 article “To Those Who Do Not Teach English, But Who Believe That Something Called ‘English’ Should be Taught: Mere Rhetoric, Rhetorology, and the Search for a Common Learning” (*Vocation* 125). He also reemphasized his interest in the word repeatedly in the years just before his death in 2005, noting some of its weaknesses in a 2000 RSA speech (“Ending”), jesting with the editors of *Critical Inquiry* in 2003 for not picking it up (“Future of Criticism”), and promoting it as a central solution to our current political misunderstandings in his 2004 manifesto on rhetoric, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*. The word, however, hasn’t caught on in public or scholarly circles: the OED and other online dictionaries do not list it; a search on Google Scholar yields only 41 hits, JSTOR yields nine, and comppile.org yields only two. All the links I’ve followed in scholarly databases and journals are either links to Booth’s own writings or links to reviews of Booth’s work, where the word is mentioned only in passing. In my searches I’ve found no writings that argue for the value of keeping *rhetorology* as a working term. It’s clear, in sum, that Booth’s neologism is dead.

Nevertheless, my intent here is to show the usefulness of rhetorology by framing the concept in a new light. To do this I will harmonize rhetorology with the recent work of philosopher Paul Woodruff about the democratic civic virtue he calls reverence. Specifically, I posit that Booth’s rhetorology is made more comprehensible when understood in the context of Woodruff’s views on reverence. Conversely, I find that Woodruff’s view of reverence is made useful through an understanding of the sort of communicative interaction that is implied by Booth’s concept of rhetorology. Taken together, reverence and rhetorology emphasize the need for civility and respect in civic discourse.

Since the ancient view of civic virtue as something people practice has largely faded from contemporary American public consciousness, I argue that framing reverence as an attitude rather than as a virtue can help us better understand what reverence is. While attitudes are individual characteristics, they can aggregate to have social and communal consequences. These consequences occur because, as Kenneth Burke claimed, attitudes are “incipient action” (*Grammar* 430), and as such individual attitudes can collectively result in changed societal behavior. At its core, then, my argument is that rhetorology can lead individuals to change their attitude before and during arguments. This change in attitude would be centered in reverence and would in turn result in a greater sense of civility in community discourse.

Defining Reverence

Though Woodruff defines reverence many times throughout his book *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*, his clearest definition comes on the first page:

Reverence begins in a deep understanding of human limitations; from this grows the capacity to be in awe of whatever we believe lies outside our control—God, truth, justice, nature, even death. The capacity for awe, as it grows, brings with it the capacity for respecting fellow human beings, flaws and all. (*Reverence* 3)

In other words, reverence has much in common with many other ancient civic virtues—such as humility, respect, and kindness—but it is uniquely tied to awe. Awe is the essence of reverence. And awe, unlike mere humility, respect, and kindness, is always coupled with a sense of fear and gratitude for something incomprehensible (i.e. “God, truth, justice, nature, even death”). In short, as I understand Woodruff’s definition, reverence is awe-inspired civility.

Woodruff clarifies his definition of reverence by contrasting reverence with faith. “Reverence is not faith,” Woodruff says, “because the faithful may hold their faith with

arrogance and self-satisfaction, and because the reverent may not know what to believe” (46-47). While reverence requires belief in something beyond the self, it bucks against an indomitable faith, a faith that claims to know God’s will in all things. Such a faith has lost its sense of awe, fear, and gratitude. When Woodruff claims that “if a religious group thinks it speaks and acts as God commands in all things, this is a failure of reverence,” he’s saying that such a religious group has assumed the mind of God and has therefore lost awe for Him (13). This indomitable faith is contrary to reverence because such practitioners lose sight of and deny their own inadequacies.

Woodruff is careful, however, to clarify that just because reverence is opposed to indomitable faith doesn’t mean it is a synonym for complete relativism. Complete relativism (by which I mean the strain of relativism that posits that all “truth” is solely a creation of human beings) has no sense of awe for anything outside of humanity and therefore cannot be reverent. It believes, as Protagoras famously and enigmatically believed, that “man is the measure of all things” (qtd. in Woodruff 148). Complete relativism, as Woodruff points out, leads people to opt out of debate, since the belief that all viewpoints are equally true (and therefore equally false) renders debate meaningless. To illustrate this, Woodruff posits that this relativist attitude surfaces even in some professors who “publish frequently and are often heard at learned conferences”: “for them the whole business is a game. They don’t think it matters what they believe, or what *you* believe for that matter” (154). Woodruff then tells a story of someone he calls “Professor Charles,” a philosophy professor—possibly a conglomerate of personalities Woodruff has known over the years:

Take Professor Charles. He may begin an argument, “I happen to like realism on this point,” and then draw rigorous inferences from this principle of which the

best he can say is that he “happens to like it.” His endings are as arbitrary as his beginnings, and the best that I can say of him is that he has learned to play the game he calls philosophy with skill. But ask him whether he thinks realism is true and he will brush you aside gracefully. That question is not for him. Charles says he is content with any theory, so long as the game is well played around it. (154)

Woodruff claims that “the immunity Charles gives himself from argument separates himself from other scholars; he is trying to be a community of one” (154). Such immunity from debate is the real danger of complete relativism. Woodruff claims—and this is central to tying his argument to Booth’s—that earnest debate and discussion are essential for reverence. In sum, earnest debate cannot occur if someone takes an attitude of indomitable faith or an attitude of complete relativism.

Therefore, reverence embraces—even necessitates—a belief that lies between these two opposites. It requires us to accept both that we can never know all things and that we are not the measure of all things. This one belief is the root of reverence. A reverent person believes that through communication and cooperation with each other, human beings might come slightly closer to truth, that through this process we might learn which ideas and beliefs are truer than others. In other words, Woodruff’s version of reverence (and mine as well) isn’t a straight synonym for humility, respect, kindness, faith, or relativism—though it comes close to all five of these words. “Simply put,” Woodruff says, “reverence is the virtue that keeps human beings from trying to act like gods” (4). And the central problem with acting like gods, in the work of Woodruff and Booth, is that those who do so are prone to stop listening to their fellow human beings.

Defining Rhetorology

Rhetorology, above all, is concerned with the act of listening to other human beings. In perhaps his clearest description of the word, Booth defines rhetorology as

not rhetorical persuasion but rather a systematic, ecumenical probing of the essentials shared by rival rhetorics in any dispute. . . . Rhetorologists do not just try to discover the rival basic commitments and then "bargain." Nor do they just tolerate, in a spirit of benign relativism. Instead, they search together for true grounds, then labor to decide how those grounds dictate a change of mind about more superficial [i.e. external, outward] beliefs. Any genuine rhetorologist entering any fray is committed to the possibility of conversion to the "enemy" camp. ("Confessions")

In other words, rhetorology, unlike rhetoric, has no concern for winning an argument.

Rhetorology doesn't ask, "how can I persuade an opponent to my way of thinking?," but "how can I find common ground with my opponent so that we can move forward together?" Booth did not view rhetorology as a replacement for rhetoric, but as a complementary rhetorical practice. By creating a rhetorical practice that includes a willingness to admit one's own errors and a willingness to genuinely listen to the opposing viewpoint, Booth's rhetorology is grounded in an understanding of human limitations. I assert, therefore, that rhetorology is reverence in practice. Reverence is the attitude; rhetorology, the act.

Rhetorology is made clearer by looking at major landmarks in Booth's career. When an interviewer spoke to Booth in October 2001 about an article Gregory Clark had written about Booth's scholarship, Booth said,

I do like that article . . . because he's captured the fact that not just my teaching but my scholarship has always had a kind of implicit—the negative way of putting it would be “moralizing” or “didactic”—center, preaching at the world to be better, particularly to be better in the act of communication . . . really listening to one another, trying to find out what that person really is saying, rather than attacking a target that's not there. *And that's been sort of my lifetime profession, both in the publication and in the teaching*—get them to learn how to listen to the other and respond to that other in a persuasive way that makes the dialogue really go. (“Wanderer”, italics mine)

This general concept was a major part of Booth's 1974 book, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, wherein Booth focused on the ideas of “mutual inquiry” and “the rhetoric of assent.” Booth's central purpose in that book was to show that through the process of mutual inquiry we might find ways to assent when we communicate rather than to adhere to what he calls the modern dogma that “the job of thought is to doubt whatever can be doubted” (back cover). In other words, Booth questioned the benefits of unrelenting doubt, and in so doing showed that we should sometimes find good reasons to assent, through the process of mutual inquiry. Ultimately “the rhetoric of assent” and “mutual inquiry” are close synonyms for rhetorology and serve to further clarify that rhetorology is essentially about getting rivals to genuinely listen to each other. This project had been central to Booth's work for decades, and it is telling that in his final years the term he chose to use as a synonym for these ideas was *rhetorology*.

The word is not without a glaring weakness, though: it's a mouthful to say. Booth himself called it an “ugly neologism” (*Professing Rhetoric* 225), and its ugliness may be a central reason

why the word hasn't caught on in any substantive way. I can sympathize with Booth's response to detractors of his self-coined phrase:

Maybe you can think of a better word, but I can't: "dialogue" is too narrow, "dialogology" even uglier, "discourse analysis" totally uninformative and unchallenging: "rhetoristics," a failed effort. "Dialectics" or "dialecticalism" are perhaps the best rivals, but they seem to leave rhetoric behind. And so on to through hermeneutics, or what Steven Mailloux has called cultural hermeneutics: still misleading. So why not rhetorology. [sic] (*Professing Rhetoric* 232)

In a later footnote he addressed detractors further: "If the term bothers you," he said, "just think a bit about the history of other "logies": theo-logy, sociology, anthropo-logy, ideo-logy, bio-logy. Don't we need a term other than rhetoric for the deepest study of rhetorical matters?" (398 *College English* 2005). I agree with Booth's implicit argument that we need a term for this concept, and I can sympathize with his struggle to locate the most proper word. Still, the etymology of Booth's neologism makes sense: literally, from the Greek, "the study of the speaker." That is, those who practice rhetorology are willing to scrutinize their own ideas as deeply and honestly as they would they would their opponents'. Rhetorologists strive to objectively study their own rhetorical stance. This is why Booth defined rhetorology as "the probing of the deepest convictions underlying *both sides* in any conflict" (*Professing Rhetoric* 224). Rhetorology ultimately means that both sides objectively analyze their own positions, and that they both openly admit the weak points of their own positions to their rivals. This openness allows rivals to improve their attitude toward each other, which in turn leads them to more genuinely listen to each other.

In sum, though I can see why Booth called *rhetorology* an “ugly neologism,” the etymology of the word and its direct connection to the ancient art of rhetoric lend credence to his term and show why it deserves to be revisited and more widely used. In the rest of this article I hope to further define *rhetorology* and show its usefulness by demonstrating how practicing *rhetorology* can engender reverence. To do this I will first show how reverence and *rhetorology* harmonize, and then review an example Booth gives in his book *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*. I will also analyze two examples that surfaced during the 14-month debate leading up to the passing of the Patient Affordable Care Act on March 21, 2010. These examples will illustrate how the practice of *rhetorology* promotes the attitude of reverence.

Reverence and Rhetorology

Since Woodruff and Booth are both about the work of developing healthier communities, they harmonize effortlessly. For instance, Woodruff argues that progress in human communication, specifically in public debate, depends on “the good judgment of the audience—that they be willing to listen carefully to both sides” (*Democracy* 187). According to Woodruff, feelings of reverence always lead us to listen respectfully to opposing viewpoints, especially when those viewpoints come from voices commonly viewed as inferior to our own. Indeed, Woodruff claims that “an irreverent soul is unable to feel respect for people it sees as lower than itself—ordinary people, prisoners, children” (4). It is the deep understanding that no human being is all-powerful or all-knowing—despite even the greatest of human achievements—that leads us to take the first step towards reverence. Woodruff, for instance, claims that “reverence runs across religions and even outside them through the fabric of any community, however secular. We may be divided from one another by our beliefs, but never by reverence” (15). Woodruff continues, in a vein I think Booth would agree with: “If you desire peace in the world,

do not pray that everyone share your beliefs. Pray instead that all may be reverent” (15). This ecumenical approach has obvious ties to Booth’s rhetoric.

Booth’s ties to reverence are nowhere clearer than in his manifesto *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, published the year before he died. In the book’s final chapter he illustrates how rhetoric could be used as a way to bridge the impasse between science and religion. To do this, Booth outlines seven warrants, seven foundations that scientists and religionists share. Though he cautions that he isn’t “making the assertion that rhetoric can totally unite any one particular religious denomination with the scientific endeavor” (156), Booth pinpoints a few commonalities between these rival discourses with the hope that they might see that they are not completely at odds with each other and thereafter begin to listen more fully to each other.

Booth’s seven warrants reveal the commonality between rhetoric and reverence, and they clarify how rhetoric could become a working term in scholarly and public discourses. I list the seven warrants here and afterward demonstrate how they collectively harmonize with Woodruff’s views on reverence. I hope to show that Booth, like Woodruff, is illustrating that reverence can lead rivals (in this case scientists and religionists) to common ground. Here are the warrants:

Warrant One: The world as we experience it is somehow flawed.

Warrant Two: The flaws are seen in the light of the Unflawed, some truth, some notion of justice, or “goodness”

Warrant Three: There is some supreme order or cosmos or reality, something about the whole of things that provides the standards according to which I make the judgments of Warrants One and Two.

Warrant Four, emerging from the first three: All who are genuinely religious (not just complaining) will somehow see themselves as in some inescapable sense a part of the brokenness.

Warrant Five, following inescapably from the first four: The cosmos I believe in, the cosmos I may or may not feel gratitude toward for its gift of my very existence, the cosmos that is in its manifestations in my world in some degree broken—my cosmos calls upon me to do something about the brokenness.

Warrant Six, an inevitable moral corollary of the other five: Whenever my notion of what my cosmos requires of me conflicts with my immediate wishes or impulses, *I ought to surrender to that higher value.*

Warrant Seven . . . The psychological or emotional feelings connected with all of this. (161-67, italics added)

There are two central things that relate to reverence here: 1) Booth was motivated by reverence to find these warrants and 2) what these rivals have in common are many of the same ideas Woodruff illustrates in *Reverence*.

The act of compiling an impartial list of common beliefs between two rivals requires reverence. Booth's claim that science and religion both share a belief in what he calls "the Unflawed," something that is above human control, is directly tied to Woodruff's claim that reverence "is a sense that there is a something larger than a human being" (63). Indeed, Woodruff posits that reverence requires "that I recognize that X is not entirely under my control" (66). Acknowledging our limitations and the existence of an Unflawed, which is what Booth did with these warrants, requires reverence. When Woodruff claims that "reverence begins in a deep understanding of human limitations" and that "from this grows the capacity to be in awe of

whatever we believe lies outside our control—God, truth, justice, nature, even death,” (3) he’s promoting a definition that fits cleanly with Booth’s talk of “the flawed” and “the Unflawed.” Compare Booth’s idea of the Unflawed in these warrants to another definition Woodruff gives of reverence:

Reverence must stand in awe of something—something I will call the object of reverence. What could it be? Something that reminds us of human limitations . . . Therefore you must believe that there is one Something that satisfies at least one of the following conditions: it cannot be changed or controlled by human means, is not fully understood by human experts, was not created by human beings, and is transcendent. Such beliefs are the least you must have in order to be reverent.

(117)

Neither Booth nor Woodruff delve into specifics about what they mean by “the Unflawed” or the “one Something.” This generalized view is essential for maintaining reverence between rivals, since reverence is lost as soon as one side fixates too strongly on their specific idea of the Unflawed and holds the belief that they alone comprehend that Unflawed perfectly.

Even though he didn’t explicitly say as much, what Booth discovered in his warrants was that the central commonality between scientists and religionists is reverence. This mirrors Woodruff’s claim that “reverence runs across religions and even outside them through the fabric of any community, however secular” (15). Booth is hoping that scientists and religionists, two groups that have seemingly been at odds with each other for centuries, might see that they have more in common than their surface differences indicate. He is hoping that by acknowledging their commonalities these rivals will feel reverence and listen to each other. This is nowhere more evident than in the seventh warrant where Booth writes about the importance of the

“emotional feelings connected with all of this” (167), since Woodruff claims that “reverence is a matter of feeling” (117). Woodruff argues that in order to be reverent one must *feel* reverent. This is because, as Woodruff says, “a virtue, if you have it, is not under your conscious control” (33). In other words, we cannot intellectualize our way toward an attitude of reverence. It is not enough merely to make a list of commonalities between rivals. In order to be reverent and, in turn, in order to properly practice rhetorology, two groups must develop the proper attitude toward each other. To do this requires listing commonalities, but it also requires, as I will show in the following section, that each side acknowledge the tradeoffs to their own position.

Examples: The Health Care Summit and Gregory Mankiw on Health Care

The 14-month debate that led to the passing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in March 2010 was, by most accounts, irreverent. Many of the town hall meetings were vitriolic and combative, and much of what was said about politicians was polarizing. Republicans were labeled “the party of ‘no’” and Democrats were viewed by opponents as ignoring the wishes of the American people. For the purposes of this paper I will focus my analysis on a few paragraphs from the congressional health care summit meeting on February 22, 2010, and then I will contrast these paragraphs from the health care summit with an essay about tradeoffs in the health care debate, written by Gregory Mankiw, professor of economics at Harvard.

The health care summit consisted of 38 representatives of Congress—21 Democrats and 17 Republicans. During the discussion both sides had substantive time to speak: President Obama spoke for 125 minutes, Democrats for 132, and Republicans for 111 (Riley and Simon). It was an opportunity as well for each side to listen to their opponents, and find out where they agreed. Obama said in his opening speech that he hoped this would happen: “What I’m hoping to

accomplish today is for everybody to focus not just on where we differ, but focus on where we agree, because there actually is some significant agreement on a host of issues” (Weiner). In response, several Congress members focused on areas of agreement. For instance, when Senator Tom Coburn (R - OK) spoke about cutting fraudulent spending in government programs already in existence, Obama said, “that’s an example of where we agree. We want to eliminate fraud and abuse within the government systems” (Weiner). In addition, Rep. Paul Ryan (R - WI) said, “We agree the status quo is unsustainable. It’s got to get fixed. It’s bankrupting families. It’s bankrupting our government. It’s hurting families with pre-existing conditions. We all want to fix this” (Weiner). Statements like these showcase rhetorology in practice.

There were other evidences of rhetorology as well. Most importantly perhaps is that conservatives and liberals met face-to-face to discuss this issue on C-SPAN. This setup allowed Congress members and viewers alike to listen to viewpoints directly from government representatives. This openness allowed for a greater degree of rhetorology than a series of one-sided speeches to a silent audience would have, especially since speakers were allowed to proceed through their arguments without interruption for 8-12 minutes at a time. This setup granted time for everyone to listen in a substantive way to the views of their opponents. In addition, Obama fostered rhetorology by saying upfront that he hoped that both sides would focus on areas of agreement before focusing on areas of disagreement, and other representatives fostered rhetorology by following that advice. If Woodruff’s claim is true that the "isolation of leaders from followers is a first step away from reverent leadership" (170) then the setup of an open, unedited discussion on national TV was a move toward reverence.

Unfortunately, while the setup and initial tenor of the meeting were positive, the outcomes of the meeting weren’t promising. Many of the representatives touched on areas of

agreement and then immediately focused on areas of disagreement, as though they didn't see the use of dwelling on agreements. Senator Jon Kyl (R - AR) said, "it's not a matter of just saying we all agree on the goal of reducing waste, fraud and abuse. We all do, of course. It's how you do it" (Weiner). Rep. Steny Hoyer (D - MD) said, "we need to get to the objective of covering all Americans and having them have access to affordable health care. We agree with that. I think probably everyone around this table agrees to it. So what we're going to talk about is the how" (Weiner). Even though Obama asked for each side to focus on how they agreed, both sides struggled to end up agreeing in a substantive way, creating headlines later in the day such as "Health Care Summit Ends without Apparent Movement Forward" (Bash), "More Talk, No Deal At Health Summit" (Meckler), and cynical summary sentences, like this one from *The New York Times*: "the main lesson to draw from Thursday's health care forum is that differences between Democrats and Republicans are too profound to be bridged" ("After the Summit"). These divisions weren't solely the fault of how the representatives approached their discussion; the philosophical differences admittedly may have been too great to lead to a unified solution, even if both sides perfectly practiced rhetoric. However, by more directly practicing rhetoric, these representatives would have increased the likelihood that an attitude of reverence would have better pervaded the health care summit.

Gregory Mankiw, professor of economics at Harvard, illustrated how someone might more directly practice rhetoric when debating about health care reform. Throughout the health care debate, Mankiw published several articles on health care and fiscal issues in *The New York Times*. Like the members of Congress in the health care summit, Mankiw didn't share the mean-spiritedness of many of the arguments in town hall meetings and on the web. He mainly

focused on the financial pros and cons of health reform. After the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 was voted in by the House, Mankiw wrote,

One thing I have been struck by in watching this debate is how strident it has been, among both proponents and opponents of the legislation. As a weak-willed eclectic, I can see arguments on both sides. Life is full of tradeoffs, and so most issues strike me as involving shades of grey rather than being black and white. As a result, I find it hard to envision the people I disagree with as demons. . . .

I like to think of the big tradeoff as being between community and liberty. From this perspective, the health reform bill offers more community (all Americans get health insurance, regulated by a centralized authority) and less liberty (insurance mandates, higher taxes). Once again, regardless of whether you are more communitarian or libertarian, a reasonable person should be able to understand the opposite vantage point. (Mankiw)

Here is an example of someone practicing rhetorology. Mankiw isn't apathetic about the issue—he has a strong opinion about health care reform, an opinion he expounds on later in his piece. But, importantly, Mankiw claims that he can see the tradeoffs to his position, and he claims that his ability to see these tradeoffs allows him to better empathize with his opponents. His ability to acknowledge tradeoffs causes him to treat his opponents with respect. I see this idea of tradeoffs as a key component to rhetorology, one that can help refine Booth's term. Essentially, practicing rhetorology requires more than merely locating points of agreement. This is especially true when political speeches about bipartisanship are appealing to the public and may be motivated by pandering to voters, a motive that is antithetical to reverence as Woodruff defines it when he declares that reverent leadership occurs only when “public devotion to a lofty goal eclipses the

leader's personal interests" (165). Speeches about bipartisanship can potentially be used to further a personal agenda rather than to serve the larger cause—a motive that is antithetical to engendering the shared devotion to higher ideals that reverence requires.

In order to fully practice rhetoric and develop an attitude of reverence, rivals must view their own stance as neutrally as they can and admit the tradeoffs of their own stance. In addition to finding areas of agreement with a rival, a rhetorologist might say, "From my point of view I think the tradeoffs to my position are _____, _____, and _____." Statements like this indicate that a speaker has attempted to look objectively at their own position, as rhetoric (again, "the study of the speaker") demands. And yet, even if someone mentions tradeoffs, they might still employ a straw man argument and only bring up the weakest tradeoffs to their own position. To more fully practice rhetoric, then, the speaker would follow their statement about tradeoffs by asking their opponent, "Do you see any additional tradeoffs to my position?" and then genuinely listen to their opponent's critique of their position. If a speaker started an argument this way (by listing the tradeoffs and then by sincerely asking an opponent to fill in any logical holes), this would indicate an attitude of reverence better than listing points of commonality alone would.

Getting back to the discussion in the health care summit, I posit that if President Obama were to have openly discussed tradeoffs in addition to asking for participants to discuss areas of agreement, the participants would have moved closer to finding common ground and better engendered an attitude of reverence. That is, if Obama had started the summit by briefly outlining what he saw as the tradeoffs to his position and then asked Republicans if they could think of any additional tradeoffs to his position (and if Republicans did likewise) it would have been even clearer that both sides had a vested interest in collaborating to find the best solution to

the health care problem. They'd also have shown—by asking the vulnerable question, “Do you see any additional tradeoffs to my position?”—that they favored the communal above self-promotion.

It would have also been clearer that participants in the summit really did share the reverent devotion Woodruff speaks of: "Reverence is a shared devotion to high ideals. Respect—the respect that flows from reverence—requires that we recognize each other's devotion to those ideals" (180). Woodruff likewise claims that “leadership (as opposed to tyranny) happens only where there is virtue, and reverence is the virtue on which leadership most depends. Public devotion to a lofty goal eclipses the leader's personal interests, if it is a goal that leaders and followers may pursue with equal fervor” (165). By openly acknowledging tradeoffs to one's own position and by seeking additional scrutiny, leaders can improve the likelihood of fostering a reverent discussion. Reverence demands that both sides harbor a willingness to be vulnerable, to readily accept flaws in personal viewpoints so that they can better work together. This idea fits nicely with Booth's definition of rhetorology as “the systematic effort to improve our capacity to learn together” (“Reply to Mr. Kimball”). Reverence and rhetorology lead people to be aware of and open about the weaknesses of their own position in the hope that their rivals will do the same.

I cannot argue that if rhetorology had been practiced as I have just outlined it that the participants in the health care summit would have come to a perfect solution to the health care problems. Health care reform is endlessly complex—too complex, at least, to be solved without countless discussions and debates. In all likelihood there simply was no possibility that conservatives and liberals would have seen eye to eye in the course of a single health care summit like this. My central point here is that if both sides had practiced rhetorology by openly

admitting the tradeoffs to their own positions (and thereafter sincerely listened to their rivals expound on additional tradeoffs), an attitude of reverence would have been more clearly present.

Conclusion: Rhetorology as an Umbrella Term

The implications of using *rhetorology* as a rhetorical term are far reaching. Rhetorology emphasizes reverence in a way that rhetoric, at least in its classical sense, doesn't always emphasize. For instance, if we take Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Kennedy 35), then the motive behind rhetoric is to persuade someone else to believe as I believe. Rhetorology, on the other hand, is motivated by reverence. That is, whereas the study of classical rhetoric emphasizes how persuasion works and how people might persuade rivals, the study of rhetorology emphasizes how rivals might enter a discussion with a reverent attitude, and how rivals might maintain an attitude of reverence throughout a discussion. Rhetorology prepares us to enter an argument with the hope to transcend and commune with an opponent, rather than to conquer an opponent. Rhetorology, in other words, never enters the ring swinging.

Rhetorology can also serve as an umbrella term for all rhetorical practices that work to alleviate misunderstanding. Since the etymology and scope of the word are broad in their implications, *rhetorology* is a word might include such theories and practices as Carl Roger's principles of communication¹, Peter Elbow's believing game², and Burke's dialectical transcendence.³ One might question why we need a separate category for these ideas, since they aren't exactly antithetical to anything in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. It's true that principles that aim to alleviate misunderstanding (or at least principles nearly synonymous) are generally taught whenever rhetoric is taught, but creating a separate category for these principles emphasizes that such concepts are essential addendums to traditional rhetorical studies. That is, as we study

theories of rhetorology directly we better engender an attitude of reverence. Maxine Hairston, professor emerita of English at University of Texas at Austin, experienced this change in attitude when she studied Rogerian argument:

In the several years since I first became interested in Rogerian argument it has had a growing influence on me. Not only do I teach it to help my students become better rhetoricians, but I have found that increasingly I am using Rogerian strategies myself when I really care about communicating with people. I have learned how to phrase questions neutrally in order to elicit genuine answers, and I have trained myself to become a better listener by adopting Rogers' advice to withhold my response until people have had a chance to express their views (Hairston, "Using Rogers' Communication Theories" 51).

While Hairston was primarily a writing teacher rather than a rhetorical theorist, her argument here is relevant: studying Rogerian argument improved her capacity for reverence. The principle holds for rhetorology as well, since at their core rhetorology and Rogerian argument are both about systematically practicing the art of genuine listening. Hairston described the importance of carving out a place for studying the art of listening, a place separate from the study of rhetoric. By pointing out how her study of Rogerian argument improved her attitude, Hairston reveals the importance of having separate terminology to describe and analyze the process of genuine listening. Peter Rabinowitz backed this idea: "Once we have a vocabulary for explaining what we do when we listen, it is easier to convince others to listen the way we do—and to change the way we listen ourselves" (qtd. in Ratcliffe 17). The vocabulary for discussing methods of listening and communication can foster attitudes of reverence, and this is the great strength of making rhetorology a working term: rhetorology engenders reverence by emphasizing the

communal aspects of rhetorical theory. Since rhetorology demands that rivals study their own positions while openly admitting tradeoffs, it can improve the likelihood that rivals will genuinely listen to each other. By making rhetorology a complementary discipline to rhetoric—a complementary discipline that would include all practices that seek to alleviate misunderstandings between rivals—scholars can improve the likelihood that individuals will engender an attitude of reverence and that in turn communities will practice a greater sense of civility in civic discourse.

Notes

¹ “Carl Rogers suggests that we can do two things which he, as a therapist, has found helpful in opening up communication and resolving conflicts. First, we can scrupulously avoid using evaluative language; second, we can listen to each other with understanding and acceptance” (Hairston 373).

² Elbow explains that the believing game requires practitioners to “adopt the disciplined practice of believing *all views*—even unwelcome of “obviously wrong” ones—in order to find virtue or validity that our habitual thinking hides from us” (391).

³ James Zappen argues that dialectical-rhetorical transcendence is a term for “a variety of devices or strategies” that “bring together individuals and groups with conflicting points of view” (295).

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