

Haskell, R.E. and Hauser, G. (1978). Rhetorical structure: Truth and method in Weaver's epistemology. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 64, 233-245. National Communication Association (NCA).

RHETORICAL STRUCTURE: TRUTH AND METHOD IN WEAVER'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Robert E. Haskell and Gerard A. Hauser ⁺

During the past decade rhetoricians have paid increased attention to the writings of Richard Weaver. ¹ Whether their analyses have explicated his rhetorical doctrines,² extrapolated from them further insights for contemporary rhetorical theory,³ or critiqued the merits of his views⁴ there is consensus on the centrality of a cultural order based on Truth as the unifying theme to his body of thought. For Weaver the cohesions and fragmentations of our age-indeed, or any age-are traceable to some ultimate Truth which forms a core of attraction. If recognized, it will bind its adherents with a unity of purpose; if obscured, culture will disintegrate through the disruptions of fragmented ends. These are not the views of an atomic reductionist but, rather, of a rational idealist⁵ who,

⁺ Mr. Haskell holds a doctorate in Psychology and Social Relations from the Pennsylvania State University. Mr Hauser is Associate Professor of Speech Communication at the Pennsylvania State University. They express their appreciation to Donald P. Cushman and Richard B. Gregg, whose suggestions were helpful in the preparation of this paper.

¹ Cf. James B. Benjamin, "An Examination of Richard M. Weaver's Theory of Rhetoric," Thesis Pennsylvania State 1972; Dennis R. Bohrmann, "The Uncontested Term Contested: An Analysis of Weaver on Burke." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 57 (1971), 298-305; Thomas D. Clark, "The Philosophical Basis of Richard Weaver's View of Theoretic," Thesis Indiana 1969; Donald P. Cushman and Gerard A. Hauser, "Weaver's View of Rhetorical Theory: Axiology and the Adjustment of Belief, Invention, and Judgement," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59 (1973), 319-29; Clark T. Irwin, Jr., "Rhetoric Remembers: Richard Weaver on Memory and Culture," *Today's Speech*, 21, No. 2 (1973), 21-26; Richard I. Johannesen, "Richard Weaver's View of Rhetoric and Criticism," *Southern Speech Journal*, 32 (1966), 133-45; Richard L. Johannesen. Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks, "Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric: An Interpretation," in *Language is Sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric*, ed. Johannesen, Strickland, and Eubanks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 7-30 for a cross-section of comment on Weaver's theory of rhetoric.

² Johannesen.

³ Cushman and Hauser.

⁴ Bormann.

⁵ Our emphasis in this essay is on the idealist mode of thought in Weaver's writings rather than on any particular ideology which he may have espoused. Weaver's Platonism goes without question, and we shall refer to this influence in places. But he also was taken by the *form* of Marxism because of its ideological rigor, while abstaining from its premises. It was attractive as a logically tight system and, from that vantage point, Weaver noted its particular

reminiscent of Plato, is a proponent of metaphysical wholes discovered by imagination and reflected in language. For Weaver we are rational and moral only insofar as we capture the Truth holistically.

Importantly, for Weaver, the Truth is grasped holistically in terms of *form*. As he says in *Visions of Order*,

The truth most important for us to recognize in our present crisis is the principle of integration and exclusiveness. There is for all things, as Aristotle pointed out, an entelechy, a binding, type-determining factor, which gives to a thing its specific form and property of coherence. The fact that a culture is a spiritual and imaginative creation does not mean that it is any less bound by this pervading law ... Form is intellectual and negative; it sets boundaries which affirm in the very process of denying. The form of a culture is its style ... It imparts tone to the whole of society by keeping before its members a standard of the right and the not right. But this form depends upon the centripetal image of an idea of perfection and goodness and upon confidence in ruling out what is unlike or fortuitous.⁶

Curiously, however, Weaver's writings provoke objections not so much in terms of form as in the matter in which he treats matters of "fact." From an empirical perspective there is the temptation to dismiss his analysis as patently inaccurate, to claim that if the "facts" and examples were denied his arguments would tumble like a jarred house of cards. Our suspicion is that Weaver would not take this as a telling indictment; he would brush aside such objections as blind to the ideal which informs his arguments, to the dependency of "facts" on form, and to the holism of his rhetoric.

The tension between form and fact in Weaver's thinking raises questions not only about his theory of truth but also about the rhetorical problem of concretizing the ideal. Understanding Weaver's theory of truth is undoubtedly a necessary condition to a valid interpretation of his writings. Further, his insistent avowal of an absolute truth, which is humanly knowable and toward which all humans strive, places *form* at the center of Weaver's conceptions of reality, thought, action, and culture.⁷ And if we take Weaver at his word, that our vision of truth will be manifested in our public style (a form), which announces implicitly the awes of the preferable, then it would seem to follow that a *formal* analysis of his own discourse may be productive for explicating Weaver's image of truth. Finally, such an approach may bet us beyond Weaver. He may serve as an object lesson in resolving the rhetorical problem alluded to above. His strategies in concretizing the ideal may help us better to understand rhetorical form.

rhetorical force. Throughout, then, the rational force of ideological form in Weaver's thinking will remain a focal concern

⁶ Richard M. Weaver, *Visions of Order* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 12-13.

⁷ The importance of *form* in Weaver's thought is pervasive. It is the *form* of truth which gives meaning to the "facts" of existence, not vice versa. It is the *form* of imaginative discovery which provides the possibility for transcending sheer animal existence. It is the *form* of language which shapes our perception of reality. It is the *form* of rhetoric which leads us up or down the hierarchic ladder implicit in cultural ideals. See Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 18-34; his *Visions of Order*, pp. 3-21; and Richard M. Weaver, "Language is Sermonic," in *Dimensions of Rhetorical Scholarship*, ed. Robert E. Bebergall (Normal: Department of Speech, Univ. of Oklahoma, 1963), pp. 49-63.

Our analysis will concentrate on Weaver's use of a rhetorical form to develop a theory of Truth. We shall attempt to demonstrate that his theory of truth can be divided into (a) a metaphysical or absolute theory of Truth and (b) an existential theory of truth, with the latter flowing from the former. Our analysis will indicate that Weaver's argument is essentially analogical and that it exploits the possibilities of analogic form in ways that are rhetorically interesting. In this regard, we shall argue that *the form of Weaver's analysis combines the analogic elegance of mathematics with the dogmatic finality of Christian-like theism to develop a metaphysical theory of Truth*. Elaborating of his theory of Truth, we shall maintain that it is generated by Weaver's metaphysical dream,⁹ which functions as a tyrannizing image¹⁰ for him. After we have explicated his theory, we shall demonstrate how it is systematically manifested in his writings. We shall then relate Weaver's theory of Truth to rhetorical structure. Finally, we shall conclude that Weaver's mode of analysis is fundamentally analogical and, further, is indicative of a basic way of thinking significant for rhetorical theory.

TRUTH: METAPHYSICAL

Weaver discusses truth on two levels: the metaphysical and the existential. Metaphysically he depicts Truth as absolute, a priori, and eternal; existentially he depicts it as axiological and historical. The former, outside space and time, is synchronic; the latter, within time and history, is diachronic.

According to Weaver, there is a *"truth higher than, and independent of, man."*¹¹

⁸ We are attempting to develop an implicative reading of Weaver's texts that goes beyond a "literal" interpretation. The hermeneutic doctrine of the autonomy of the text is, therefore, not our guiding interpretive principle. Rather we are generally following the hermeneutic guidelines set down by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967). Consequently, we must keep in mind that Weaver is (a) steeped in the classics, especially in the writings of Plato, (b) a political conservative, (c) a Christian-like apologist (meant strictly as a neutral description), and (d) quite concerned with the function of analogic reasoning. These characteristics provide an initial basis upon which to apprehend the genre of his thought and, therefore, a starting point for an interpretive analysis. The implications of this interpretive base will become clear as we progress.

⁹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 18, defines a "metaphysical dream" as "an intuitive feeling about the immanent nature of reality, and this is the sanction to which both ideas and beliefs are ultimately referred for verification. Without the metaphysical dream it is impossible to think of men living together harmoniously over an extent of time. The dream carries with it an evaluation, which is the bond of spiritual community."

¹⁰ Weaver, *Visions of Order*, p. 11, defines a "tyrannizing image" as that which is at the center of a culture and "which draws everything toward itself. This image is the ideal of its excellence."

¹¹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 157. Italics added

TRUTH¹² is reflected in universals, which are not generated by the senses. TRUTH is its "*Primordial conception is somehow in us.*"¹³ Hence the enumeration of particulars with not lead to Truth. In fact, it is the universal that enables us to recognize particulars. "[T]he thing is not true," says Weaver, "*and the act is not just unless these conform to a conceptual ideal.*"¹⁴ Nominalist and empiricist doctrines merely substitute "things" for Truth.¹⁵ Persons of this persuasion are not filled with Truth, they are "*puffed up with vanity over their ability to describe precisely some minute portion of the world.*"¹⁶ TRUTH, given in the universal rather than in the particular, is made known to us deductively. It is metaphysical in nature.

Unlike Aristotle, who proposes a logical essentialism, and Locke, who proposes an empirical essentialism, Weaver

236

is Platonic insofar as he adheres to a doctrine of essence that is made manifest through language (rather than through laws of inference or observation) and is axiological in its implications.¹⁷ Discourse leads us to that act of discovery, the noetic experience, from which we may reason to secure conclusions about the rest of reality. And yet language never fully expresses Truth, for that would reduce the transcendent essence to its representative form.

Neither dialectic nor rhetoric captures Truth. While the former reveals it and the latter amplifies it,¹⁸ both are verbal arts. In quoting Hobbes, Weaver says that words are never counters but simply markers.¹⁹ Indeed, if Truth were realized there would be no need for rhetoric.²⁰ Although language must be used in our search for Truth, it is not *directly* connected to Truth.

As an idealist in the Platonic/Hegelian strain, Weaver depicts Truth as residing in the totality, *in the ideal*. TRUTH does not reside in individual facts nor is it given visibility by them. Instead we apprehend the Truth through a complex dialectical process. Hence, like Hegel, Weaver considers the particular facts of history to be mere vulgarized reality; they are irrational.

¹² The idea of absolute Truth, in a Weaverian sense, is a tautology, and yet, because omitting the modifier could cause confusion when the word "Truth" begins a sentence, we will capitalize the entire word in such places.

¹³ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 157.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130. Italics added.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62. Italics added.

¹⁷ Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), 3-26.

¹⁸ Cushman and Hauser, p. 328.

¹⁹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 150.

²⁰ Cushman and Hauser, p. 329. Cf. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950; rpt. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), pp. 271-74.

Just as the old Greek philosopher would not condescend to counting the teeth in a horse's mouth as an empirical means of determining the precise number that horses in fact possess, since the particular horse is only a pale similitude to the ideal horse, so is Weaver not overly concerned with empirical facts. As Einstein once remarked, "If the facts do not fit the theory, so much the worse for the facts."

We submit then that beneath Weaver's more obvious rhetoric, which appears to appeal to "facts," is a "hidden" epistemological agenda: the ideal which he attempts to make manifest by the *use* of facts. Thus, Weaver's epistemology is to his rhetoric as ground is to figure.

TRUTH: EXISTENTIAL

Weaver finds existential truth in the domain of history. We encounter it specifically in the set of cultural beliefs and sentiments that each of us holds. Somehow and in some way universal Truth is made manifest in belief and sentiment,²¹ although clearly no individual's beliefs or sentiments could themselves fully encompass universal Truth. That is, since absolute Truth is universal, no particular mortal entity can fully and singularly possess it.

Conversely Weaver argues *as if* he possessed the Truth, when, in fact, he is only participating in it. Consequently in Weaver's writings existential truth, which is the only one he can know experientially, becomes in effect an undogmatic dogmatism. That is to say, existential truth as manifest in belief and sentiment functions on the everyday level *as if* truth operates dialectally, not metaphysically. It leads to a higher level truth, climbing to absolute Truth; for Weaver says that "dualism... [provides] purchase for the pull upward."²² Hence existential truth, which is partly a product of belief in the universal, is responsible for the

237

revelation of eternal Truth. In brief, existential truth participates in eternal Truth. *And it does so rhetorically.*

Absolute Truth is reflected in and must be translated into concrete terms, otherwise existential truth would have no markers leading to and showing its connection with universal Truth. *Data, logical argument, and examples—all imperfect vehicles—are used as mere rhetorical devices in the aspiring to and demonstration of Truth; they are merely vulgar necessities imperfectly pointing, as does language itself, to the Word.*

According, in a world devoid of belief in universal Truth, says Weaver, "Good will alone fails in the same way as does sentiment" to demonstrate or convince others of Truth.²³ "This means that the beginning must not be less hard-headed and sophisticated than dozens of competing doctrines which would lure people" to their truth.²⁴ Thus the deliberate (i.e., rhetorical) use of hard data and other persuasive devices are merely means to an end; they do not prove the end (Truth) but simply demonstrate (i.e., show) it, for Truth, by definition, is universal

²¹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, pp. 18-34.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 130.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

and outside of history and the world of facts.

Hence, even if the facts that Weaver uses are wrong (whatever that may mean, since "facts" are conditioned by a given belief system), at worst it is only incidentally irritating; it has no necessary bearing on the Truth. At the very least *"incorrect" examples could be cited as though they were hypothetical examples* illustrating the Truth. And since universal Truth does not depend on the natural world, "wrong" or "invalid" data only reflect upon the rhetor's imperfect skill in finding those concrete instances of it.²⁵

WEAVER'S DIALECTIC

Weaver is aware that he is of a culture and within history, and therefore that his truth is existential. He understands that he, too, is subject to his own theory so that underlying his own system of belief and sentiment is an ideal. Finally, he recognizes that his ideal is not necessarily the one, True ideal. Instead it is a representation of it. Consequently he has no delusions about universal Truth coming from his mortal mouth. At best he is a rhetorical "dummy" voicing the collective sounds of the ideal and of history.

Indeed, Truth is suprapersonal. We gain insight into it from the dialogue of the whole humanity. Weaver quotes Karl Vossler as observing, "Everything that is spoken on this globe in the course of ages must be thought of as a vast soliloquy spoken by the human mind, which unfolds itself in millions of persons and characters, and comes to itself again in their reunion."²⁶ Consequently Truth is not the product of a single speaker; it is somehow the enduring portion of our continuing collective dialogue. Yet it transcends the dialogue itself, being reflected in discourse. Discourse viewed holistically provides insight into its nature. But if lies

238

elsewhere than in the spoken or written word-if it transcends a mere successive juxtaposition of syllables-then one must not read Weaver too literally as pronouncing the Truth. We must instead look to interaction among the countless voices of history to gain insight into the transcendent Truth.

When we examine the ongoing discourse we find that absolute Truth is dialectically connected to and revealed by the interaction of "good rhetors" i.e., those who possess strong belief (or a belief which possesses them), which would be closer to the "truth" in the Greek sense. But belief is at best an image of Truth; it is not in the domain of the metaphysical but of

²⁵ For example, to say that many of Weaver's "historical facts" are in error is to reflect our own bias rather than his. Since Weaver holds that Truth is absolute, facts have no substantial status or bearing on the case in point. Upon being "shown" to be "factually" or "historically" incorrect, examples merely revert to their "real" status, that of hypothetical examples. One may claim that such examples are true, but not in the fashion of categorical statements of fact. Such examples must be correct not in relation to any concrete "reality," but rather only to themselves and their relation to the Truth or ideal proposition which called them forth in the first place. (After all, in Weaver's rational idealism "reality" is a distortion, a vulgar "copy," at best, of the truth.) See, for example, Weaver's "Concealed Rhetoric in Scientist Sociology," in Johannesen, Strickland, and Eubanks, pp. 157-58.

²⁶ Cited in Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 150. Italics added.

the existential. Thus, though Weaver may be a "good rhetor," only existential truth is extant in his text (which is, itself, part of a larger dialectal process).

TRUTH is more that what is; it is also what should be.²⁷ Consequently "good rhetors" must go beyond announcing the "facts" dialectally secured. They must intersect these with the order of feeling and motion.²⁸ Thus to reveal Truth, "good rhetors" must act as if they possessed Truth, otherwise their beliefs will be insufficiently strong to give insight into the absolute. Thus, while Weaver recognizes that he does not clearly apprehend ultimate Truth, he operates as if he did. The noumenal Truths are implicit, even if not explicitly announced, in his adherence to existential truths- to beliefs and sentiments which he holds as if Truths and which guide his feelings and actions respective to his thoughts.

Here we have a dual perspective. According to Weaver's theory, only metaphysical truth is absolute and non-contingent. Yet Truth is approached in the realm of the contingent nature of our respective systems. From inside any system, the existential Truth of that system appears to be absolute, for it is the only truth adherents to that system possess.²⁹ From outside the system, the existential truth is espoused appears as less than absolute because an external perspective reveals it as but one of several alternative formulations. From outside, a system's truth is seen as existentially conditioned. Those inside a system may come to recognize this fact, but such recognition carries a price. The extent to which we are conscious of the mutability of our system's view is the extent to which belief is weakened; we are alienated from the universal our system implies. Knowing this, Weaver would never directly qualify his "vision;" such as admission would not only signify his relative *fall* from belief and fragment his universal truth by one degree (at the least) but also would undermine the necessary process of participation in absolute Truth.³⁰

239

Absolute Truth, then, is in dialectical relation to existential truth. But this is obvious

²⁷ Weaver, *Visions of Order*, p. 64.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-72; Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, pp. 27-54.

³⁰ Weaver explicitly addresses this dualism in his account of a "doctor of culture" who "though in it, he is not wholly of it." Doctors of culture are persons who have the advantage of seeing their culture from an external perspective while feeling its pull from an internal perspective. The result is an apparent oxymoron of crippling objectivity that enhances a liberating honesty of appraisal while simultaneously stigmatizing the critic in a manner that "impedes free cultural participation." Despite Weaver's profession that this is not an anomaly, he is nonetheless aware of its fundamental epistemic tension, which he resolves in an interesting way. After a period of estrangement, Weaver tells us, there is a reunion of critic and culture more intensified and more reflective because now the culture is seen as a whole. Cultural doctors are able to cure not because they deny the system but because they understand it so well. Weaver's own observations about political leaders (not to mention his own argumentation) suggest that such "medical" rhetoric actually employs the *as-if* posture toward epistemic truth which we have been describing. And it further suggests that on epistemic matters Weaver was unable to become the kind of "cultural doctor" he prescribed insofar as he functioned as a "good rhetor." Weaver, *Visions of Order*, pp. 7-9.

only from outside the experience of belief and of one's metaphysical dream. Inside the experience, existential truth personally functions *as if* it were absolute Truth. Weaver's absolute Truth, then, belongs to his epistemology and his existential truth to his rhetoric, just as dialectic belongs to epistemology and rhetoric to persuasion. While Weaver believes that Truth exists, he recognizes that mortals (including himself) can never know it totally. On the other hand, Truth is gleaned through the dialogue among good (believing) persons who propound their beliefs. When persons propound their beliefs, the act *as if* they possessed the Truth. Since Weaver is such a person, he must act *as if* he possessed the Truth in order for it to emerge from the dialogue. From this it follows that to get at his epistemology one must leave the literal text, for the text-like all other rhetorical appeals-presents an imperfect representation of reality.

WEAVER'S METAPHYSICAL DREAM AND TYRANNIZING IMAGE

Weaver suggests that an individual's logic of belief is manifest in those premises the individual employs most often at the crucial junctures in argumentation.³¹ These premises reflect the individual's metaphysical dream. Presumably, then, Weaver's personal vision of the ideal may be discovered by following his own directions. His own theory, naturally enough, dialectically folds in upon and envelopes Weaver himself, creating a higher level statement regarding the "reading" of his texts.³²

If this hypothesis is accepted, then what is Weaver's metaphysical dream and tyrannizing image and how do they affect the interpretation of his text and its meaning? We suggest that Weaver's metaphysical dream and tyrannizing image are analogous to the notion of the Kingdom of God as expressed in Christian doctrine; that the *form* of this Christian notion is his root metaphor, which generates not only his tory of truth but also his theory of rhetoric, axiology, and culture.³³ We further suggest that the following analysis will factually demonstrate the thesis herein presented. We interpret the following claim by Weaver to be self-referential:

Naturally, when the speaker replies to this question he is going to express his philosophy, or more precisely, his metaphysics. My personal reply would be that he is making the highest order of appeal when he is basing his case on definition or the *nature of the thing*. I confess that this goes back to a very primitive metaphysics, which holds that the highest reality is *being*, not becoming. It is a quasi-religious metaphysics, if you will, because it ascribes to the highest reality qualities of stasis, immutability, eternal perdurance-qualities that in Western civilization are usually expressed in the language of theism.

³¹ Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, p. 55. Cf. Cushman and Hauser, p. 323, for a discussion of this point.

³² The dialectic being discussed here is not that of opposition, though phenomenally it appears to be, but that of the negative contained in the positive. Thus the model of the dialectical relationship of absolute Truth and existential truth is that of the surface of a mobius band.

³³ Looked at from a Burkean perspective, we are arguing that this *form* represents the principle of identification from which Weaver derives coherence and order for his rhetoric, axiology, and cultural vision.

*That which is perfect does not change; that which has to change is less perfect.*³⁴

Throughout, this passage is inspired by religious form. There are higher and lower orders. The higher is marked by

240

perfection; the lower by imperfection. There is a core of Truth toward which all must strive. So to strive is to be rightly ordered—to be in harmony with an essence of immutable Truth, with being rather than becoming, with permanence over change. This formally ordered metaphysics is the basis for Weaver's theory of truth and part of his theory of rhetoric, axiology, and view of culture.

The pervasive influence of this form is clearly evident when one examines the broad strokes of Weaver's argument in *Ideas Have Consequences*. There the religious form of an eternal One which orders the finite many is recurrent, ostensibly just superimposed upon his logic. However, that appearance is deceiving. In fact the very design of Weaver's argument there depends upon religious form. Weaver's own metaphysical dream is expressed in a religious analogue which creates the very structure of logic. As Weaver himself says, "It must be apparent that logic depends upon the dream, and not the dream upon it."³⁵

We can better appreciate how Weaver's logic is conditioned by religious form if we condense his book into its fundamental analogies. In our introductory paragraphs we made passing notice that Weaver's principal mode of thinking was analogical. Indeed, in numerous places Weaver explains that, aside from its stylistic significance, he finds analogy of signal importance in reasoning. It is precisely because analogy is related to essences and eternal Truth that Weaver accords it such elevated status. As he says in "Language is Sermonic," "The user of analogy is hinting at an essence which cannot at the moment be produced."³⁶ Because it may serve as a key to the reading of a text, analogy has particular promise for interpreting Weaver's thinking, for unlocking the structure of (Weaver's) Truth as manifested in Weaver's system. He hints at this structure in the following statement which we take to be paradigmatic:

I mentioned a moment earlier that this type of argument seems to be preferred by those of a poetic or non-literal sort of mind. That fact suggests yet another possibility, which I offer still more diffidently, asking your indulgence if it seems to border on the whimsical. The explanation would be that the *cosmos is one vast system of analogy*, so that our profoundest intuitions of it are made in the form of comparisons. To affirm that something is like something else is to begin to talk about the unitariness of creation. Everything is like everything else somehow, so that we have a ladder of similitude mounting up to the final one-ness—to something like a unity in godhead.³⁷

Keeping Weaver's emphasis on analogy in mind, we turn to *Ideas Have Consequences*. In that book written as a commentary on Western culture, Weaver proceeds to comment on

³⁴ Weaver, "Language is Sermonic," p. 55. Italics added.

³⁵ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 21.

³⁶ Weaver, "Language is Sermonic," p. 56.

³⁷ Ibid. Italics added.

mindless decay and decline resulting from a general ignorance and/or neglect of anything greater than the individual. There we find the analogy of religious form structuring the reasoning throughout. In terms of a "Kingdom of God" model, Weaver depicts us as fallen from grace and in need of reconciliation with a transcendent unity if we are to avoid the damning chaos implicit in our present state of fragmentation. Within this structure, his arguments may be condensed as follows:³⁸

241

Just as God is reflected in the individual, so is the universal reflected in the particular, the whole in the part, the One in the many. Just as one must obey and submit to God's will and law, so too must the individual obey and submit to the will and law of the community. As above, so below.

Just as not to participate fully in God is to fall from Grace, so, too, not to be involved fully in one's work is to fall from harmony, to be alienated. Just as one sees God in the particular, so does one see the ideal in each task. Just as God is to be seen in each society, so is society reflected in each member; hence as one works for society one is working for God. Just as "individualism" is a fall from society, so is egoism and self-absorption a fall from God, and therefore into sin. Thus, all deviation is a fall from perfection.

Just as God is perfect form and harmony, so, too (to Weaver), is classical music. Thus is jazz a falling from good form and harmony. In Education the fall is reflected in a lack of discipline, a quality required in the service of God. The same is reflected in impressionistic painting; it reflects not only lack of discipline but also lack of individuation, as does democracy and other doctrines of equality. Such views deny authority and hierarchy.

However, while God is reflected in each person, all the mortals in the world do not add up to God: The Whole is more than the sum of its parts. Just as the divine mind cannot be understood by humanity but must be accepted on faith, so, too, Truth must be based on belief. Progress, by definition, is a fall, since Truth and God are eternal. Just as one does not prove the existence of God but only points to those things that reflect Him, so, too, one does not prove universals, but only points to those things that reflect them, i.e., data, "facts." examples.

All these arguments reflect Weaver's analogic continuum—a one-ness, a similitude-mounting up the ladder to a unity in the godhead. In analogic terms, or what Aristotle called the continuous analogy, the rhetorical structure of Weaver's thought can be represented in a continuous analogic series, the first being a master print of the others:

MAJOR PREMISE ABOVE:BELOW :: GOD:MANKIND:: UNIVERSAL: PARTICULAR ::
IDEAL:EACH TASK :: PERFECTION:CHANGE

MINOR PREMISE OBEDIENT HUMANITY: GOD :: INDIVIDUAL: COMMUNITY ::
WORKER : JOB :: PERFECT FORM AND HARMONY : GOD ::
CLASSICAL MUSIC : MUSIC :: DISCIPLINE:EDUCATION ::

³⁸ The following paragraphs are a summary in analogic form of Weaver's arguments in *Ideas Have Consequences*, e.g., pp. 35-91. They are developed *seriatim* from the text. Whether and how much this hierarchical structure is consciously constructed is a question which need not concern us here. We are interested instead in an essential structure of the rhetorical argument present in the text.

REPRESENTATIONAL PAINTINGS : IMPRESSIONIST PAINTING

THEREFORE

CONCLUSION NOT TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN GOD : FALL FROM GRACE ::
INDIVIDUALISM : FALL FROM SOCIETY :: NOT TO BE FULLY
INVOLVED IN ONE'S WORK : ALIENATION :: JAZZ : FALL FROM GOOD
HARMONY :: PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION : CLASSICAL EDUCATION ::
VULGARIZED DEMOCRACY : AUTHORITY

In effect, the reasoning evident in *Ideas Have Consequences* forms a gigantic syllogism composed of analogic relations: a deductive series of *ratios* and *proportions* in the old Greek sense of *analogia*; wherein the structure is akin to mathematical reasoning.

From an external, empirical perspective Weaver's texts seem not to be Truth-seeking, since he argues *as if* he already has the Truth; nor are they Truth-providing, since they do not consider Truth to be provable by external evidence. Rather his texts appear as more akin to the genre of apologetics. But such a classification, if left to stand alone,

242

misses the rational basis of Weaver's system considered in an of itself *qua* system. In terms of its internal form, the "thinking" present in his texts is closer to logico-mathematic reasoning in that it comprises (a) a vast system of analogies (or propositions), (b) making no reference to anything outside of itself, (c) being a postulated system, (d) with truth being demonstrated by internal consistency and coherence. In such thinking truth values are not determined by external reference but by the intrinsic qualities of relationships ideas bear to the postulates and definitions internal to the system of thought. Concomitantly, knowing here does not consist in *truthful* reference to entities external to the thinking process of thought itself.³⁹ Moreover, while Weaver's theistic-like "model" proposes an analytic system that claims to explicate an ultimate whole, it is equally dogmatic since ultimate wholes transcend the possibility of opposition. Hence his thinking combines the analogic elegance of mathematics with dogmatic finality of Christian-like theism in a metaphysical vision of Truth.

If we are attracted by such an analysis, its pull stems as much from the form of the rhetor's argument as from its content. By constructing an inclusive, systemic, analogically extended form, Weaver has displayed his reasoning through a most persuasive rhetorical device. "Rhetoric," says Weaver, "moves the soul with a movement which cannot *finally* be justified logically. It can only be valued analogically with reference to some supreme image."⁴⁰ Thus, as we have seen, Weaver's supreme image is that of a hierarchical Christian-like equation, which he *analogically and systematically extends to vulgar empirical phenomena*.

That Weaver is directly aware of the analogical extension of form as a rhetorical "device" we surmise from his passages that seem to correspond to our thesis. Indeed he is explicit in indicating how form, analogically extended, actually moves an audience: "[W]hen the

³⁹ Cf. Mortimer Adler, *Dialectic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1927), p. 19. Adler's account of dialectic was familiar to Weaver and he refers to it with praise in *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. Adler's account of dialectical reasoning is not unlike the reasoning pattern we maintain is present in Weaver's works.

⁴⁰ Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, p. 23. Italics added.

rhetorician encounters some soul 'sinking beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice' he seeks to re-animate it by holding up to its sight the order of presumptive goods. This order is necessarily a hierarchy leading up to the ultimate good. All of the terms in a rhetorical vocabulary are like links in a chain stretching up to some master link which transmits its influence down through the linkages."⁴¹ Hence, to Weaver, Truth is transmitted by its similar (analogic) *form*⁴² to a master image.⁴³

243

CONCLUSION

We have maintained that Weaver is an idealist in the classical philosophical sense of the term. As a consequence, he believes that Truth is beyond the individual's grasp, yet it somehow works through the individual. Thus Truth asymptotically emerges in debate by each rhetor out of strong conviction and belief arguing the case, using whatever means (i.e., examples, facts, and other rhetorical devices) are available to point to Truth. No person *qua* person exists in the realm of absolute Truth, but each functions instead in the realm of existential truth (though to admit this is to weaken one's role in the *process of obtaining Truth*.) Thus the rhetor acts *as if* in possession of Truth. Since to an idealist change is irrational, the form of Truth will remain constant. Further, the form of Truth—the universal—is *reflected* in each particular. It is thus the task of the rhetor to *demonstrate* this form. In so doing, the particulars correspond exactly to the absolute which they reflect. Nevertheless, the structure of Truth is reflected in them. Hence, expressed as a ratio, Weaver's structural hierarchy is to the form of Truth as the axiological content he inserts is to the facts he assembles to signify his cultural message; absolute Truth is to the structural hierarchy as existential truth is to the culture-bound normative values.

Finally, having erected a form, Weaver then can subtly combine the various areas he pronounces upon into a systematic, corresponding, and coherent rhetorical argument. His idealist rhetorical strategy is to render all change as history and all irrational empirical facts as in conference with an identical to an absolute—just as the mathematician renders all apples identical in conformance with the number "1." Weaver's rhetorical structure, then, is like a set of mathematical premises out of which a series of numbers is generated constituting an equation, and into which empirical phenomena *can* be seen to correspond.

If our analysis of Weaver's epistemology and rhetoric is correct, then its implications go

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² In our terms these are analogical linkages. See the analogical syllogism set forth above.

⁴³ Kenneth Burke suggests a similar explanation: "Here, in this conclusion of dialectic, one should look for the ultimate rhetorical motive of *homo dialecticus*. Human effort would thus be grounded ... in a *form, in the persuasiveness of the hierarchic order itself*" (p. 276). *How does this happen? Burke says that, "Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation regardless of the subject matter. Formally, you find yourself swinging along with the succession"* (p. 58). *From this perspective rhetoric-as-form enables one to brachiate through an otherwise difficult and overgrown epistemological jungle, creating higher-order sensible pathways. Thus we submit that repetitive form becomes in the written tradition a rhetorical equivalent to the function of rhythm in the oral tradition.*

beyond him as a *particular* rhetorician. Rather he becomes a paradigm case generating new or, at least, only partially explored areas in rhetorical theory. In a sense we have used Weaver as a vehicle, *an example*, upon which to transport some ideas we consider significant aspects of any rhetorical theory.

The three basic ideas we see evolving from this analysis are about (1) analogic form, (2) the role of the example, and (3) analogic reasoning.

(1) In terms of *analogic form*, we would suggest that Weaver's Christian-like "model" is but one variant of a class of such analogic structures, along with their roles in persuasive discourse, yet to be uncovered. Analogic form appears to provide a controlled framework within which Weaver (or any rhetor, for that matter) may move skillfully from idea to idea. Analogy establishes linkages or relationships among ideas. Once the structure of analogizing is apprehended, the relationships among ideas and the conclusions toward which they march become apparent. Within an analogic form we may critically evaluate whether the links obtain and, then, whether the conclusions advanced follow. On the other hand, if we are skeptical of an analogy, it may be not so much the specific case that is troublesome as the analogic structure itself. Analogy is used when we are in search of clear definition. Apart from its content, the form of analogy (just as the form of definition) contains implicit criteria for judging the truth or value of things, thoughts,

244

and actions. Just as we may reject not the specific definition of any X but instead the definitional act which orders all elements within a domain of interest with respect to the definiendum, so too with analogy. It may not be the specific cases viewed that are objectionable as the mode of thinking that forces one to see them in ratios.

In practice, analogy so unites matter and form that one may go from the structure ("elements are best understood in ratios") to the linkages in a specific analogy ("this specific a:b::c:d"), or from the reasoning ("this specific a:b::c:d") to analogic structure ("elements are best understood in ratios"). Analytically the critic and commentator may proceed in either direction (from the superstructure of thought to specific claims, or from specific claims to intellectual superstructure). But to capture the full impact of analogy on the rhetoric of its author we must understand the interaction between form and matter whereby a total structure gives coherence to a series of analogic conn whereby a series of analogic connections generates movement of thought and provides linkages to a structure. This interactive relationship of form and matter is important not only to discourse and its analysis but also to the act of composition.

(2) In terms of *example*, Weaver's method or argument suggests a dual relationship between rhetor and ideas and between rhetor and audience. Epistemologically Weaver reverses the prevailing empirical position on the role of facts: Rather than have facts as the basis of theory, he makes them examples of theory; they stand as models. His rhetoric, however, appears to subscribe to an empirical epistemology wherein facts are evidentiary: Examined rhetorically, his claims appear to emerge *out of* "factual examples."

Weaver's rhetorical adaptation raises the tantalizing question of whether this dual epistemological-rhetorical status of example is not shared by ideological discourse in general, accounting for the strongly partisan reactions it provokes. Ideological rhetoric employs

examples that support a bias; they are typically "loaded" in a direction.⁴⁴ If we feel their weight, the criteria of judgement and action they imply gain moment for us. But if they miss the mark, we are more likely to dismiss their implicit criteria of rationality and behavior as well.

To illustrate, Weaver depicts contemporary mass media as a "great stereopticon."⁴⁵ The sensationalism of modern press, radio, television, and film are depicted as preying on our base emotions, propagandizing false impressions of the individual and the individual's place in culture, and leading to social fragmentation. As an example, the mass media represent a paradigm of cultural distress. To agree with Weaver's example is to agree with the structure of reality it exemplifies. Rhetorically, that structure appears to develop from the specific cases, to grow out of the "factual" examples he presents as evidence. Conversely, should one dismiss his specific examples as in some way a misrepresentation, then the force of Weaver's whole argument concerning cultural order and disorder is likely to be seriously diminished. When the examples miss their mark, the larger, controlling analogical structure of the whole thought is thrown off course.

On this view, examples provide the

245

link between the rhetor and the experiences of the audience. Auditors build (or fail to build) a bridge from their world to that envisioned by the rhetor. Examples, then, would again be important for discourse, analysis, and composition with special emphasis on the opportunities and constraints they afford for persuasive interaction.⁴⁶

(3) Finally, our discussion of Weaver suggests that *analogic reasoning* in its usual sense (not as form or repetitive structure but as explicit imagery) and in its role in persuasive discourse poses important problems for further research. Analogy's persuasiveness appears to hinge on the relationship it communicates between the content inherent in an explicit image and the proportioned nature of that content when presented in ratios. In rhetoric these are presented as a whole or unity, not as analytically discrete parts. We need to know more about the psychological appeal of these interacting dimensions as they affect audiences in their reconstructions of messages.⁴⁷ In analogic reasoning, as in analogic structure and example, we

⁴⁴ For an illustration of this, although he was writing to make a different point, see Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 56 (1970), 102-19.

⁴⁵ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, pp. 92-112.

⁴⁶ For further theoretical analyses of the role of example in rhetoric, see Gerard A. Hauser, "The Example in Aristotle's Rhetoric: Bifurcation or Contradiction?" *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 1 (1968), 78-90; and Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* [1958], trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969), pp. 350-71.

⁴⁷ Cf. James S. Measell, "Classical Bases of the Concept of Analogy," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 10 (Summer 1973), 1-10; James S. Measell, "Development of the Concept of Analogy in Rhetorical Theory," in *Rhetoric and Communication*, ed. Jane Blankenship and Hermann G. Stelzner (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 34-35; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, pp. 371-98; and Karl R. Wallace, "On Analogy: Re-definition and Some Implications," in *Studies in Speech and Drama in Honor of Alexander M. Drummond*, ed. Herbert Wichelns, et al. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1944), pp. 412-26.

discover a basic way of thinking.⁴⁸

In sum, then, we have used Weaver's *method of argument* as an *example*, a concrete instance, that exemplifies three important considerations for rhetorical theory. But as with all examples, this one necessarily falls short of the universal it signifies. Thus we must go beyond Weaver, for a holistic understanding and appreciation of rhetorical form cannot rest upon a single, albeit most interesting, rhetorical design.

⁴⁸ For an account of analogic reasoning and perceptual processes related to the present thesis regarding the persuasiveness of analogically extend *form*, see Robert E. Haskell, "Anatomy of Analogy: A New Look," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 8 (1968), 161-69; R.E. Haskell, "The Analogic and Psychoanalytic Theory," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 55 (Winter 1968-69), 662-80; Robert E. Haskell, "An Analogical Model of Small Group Behavior," *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 28 (1978), 27-54; and Robert E. Haskell, "Lacanian Psycholinguistics: The Way In," *Interfaces* (in press).