HUGH BLAIR, TECHNÉ, AND THE LEGACY OF BOTH IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

by

WESLEY CLAY VENUS

(Under the Direction of Michelle Ballif)

ABSTRACT

We often assume writing to be a techné, but we do so to a detriment. Thinking of any intellectual activity in this way trains our minds to the false belief that theory and practice can be made to correspond to one another in ways that are consistent with a subject, which is in this case language. Present-day writing pedagogy exists at the end of a long tradition of language-technai, and, as is the case with any human activity ever regarded as a craft, an often unaddressed and unacknowledged element of virtue attends it. This subjective and value-based component will always necessarily provide the foundation for the theoretical framework (its praxes), and in so doing create the illusion of objectivity. Such is the case for most of the theory-driven pedagogies we see today in composition studies, a tradition began to a significant extent in the eighteenth-century by Scottish rhetorician Hugh Blair. In these regards his legacy contributes significantly to the new tradition involving the systematic application of avant-garde academic theory to composition classroom practices. We see evidence of this in current-traditionalism, cognitivism, expressivism, and social-epistemicism which is consistent with the ancient model of techné and which is consistent even with certain elements of “the post-process movement,” a movement among composition scholars which at least abstractly positions itself apart from praxis-driven approaches to writing scholarship.

INDEX WORDS: Hugh Blair, Techné, Composition pedagogy, Composition theory, James, Berlin, Current-traditionalism, Cognitivism, Expressivism, Social-epistemicism, Post-process
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DEDICATION

To my wife, Tina. Without her understanding and support, this dissertation would never even have gotten off the ground. She has been much more patient with me than I have been diligent about my work, which in most cases is really saying something. About her, and not me, of course.
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INTRODUCTION

Since its earliest days, even before “composition” became “Composition,” the field has manifested a compulsion to apply every cutting-edge theory to the practical concern of the teaching of writing, a function of, in Lynn Worsham’s words, the “pedagogical imperative” of the field (96). Related to this imperative is the discipline’s assumption that writing is a technê—that is, that writing is a human activity that is rational and a reproducible process, and, hence, is teachable. This assumption has a long history, since it was decided by some in ancient Greece, after much debate, that rhetoric could be usefully elevated to the level of technê. As I will show, subsequent scholars, practitioners, and instructors have assumed, likewise, that rhetoric and its attendant activities like writing are all technai. This dissertation aims to investigate this disciplinary assumption by revisiting significant historical moments with the intent to demonstrate that to elevate any human activity to the level of technê, specifically rhetoric/writing, also means imposing limitations on that activity. A technê, as we shall see, requires one to limit access to the ambiguity of human action and thought and desire in order to gain progress and improvement and understanding, and that is not—I will further argue—the price that one ought to pay. Certainly it is not the price one pays willingly.

Specifically, in order to make any activity into a technê, one must do two things: generally speaking, one must reduce its operations to rational laws, which do not perfectly suit it, and one must also enable an ultimately arbitrary standard of “goodness” or “truth” to be applied to it. This first requirement (rationality) we generally see developing into a kind of foundationalism, and the second requirement (the standard) we find is fairly consistent with the...
ancient notion of virtue. In tandem, these two requirements form an essentially baseless sense of human activity—writing, in this case—because one supplies the rationale for the other. That is, we have a way of differentiating “good” or “effective” writing from “bad” or “ineffective” writing because we have standards of goodness and effectiveness we can rely on; and conversely, we have standards of excellence because what we think we know about writing—what we have observed of it—provides them for us.

For the field of composition studies, this means that we must reconsider how we teach and that we must decide for ourselves what we consider to be foundational virtues. Open as many have become to the notion that foundationalism limits our better understanding, we do not support that insight by thinking of writing as a craft or as a technê. So long as writing has been taught, there have been those who thought they understood writing and language and teaching for what they really are and for what is good about them. Technê easily proceeds or precedes this notion. Some perhaps sensing this, have chosen to focus their efforts on teaching methods rather than course content, but in either case, we have individuals or groups of individuals taking for a constant (rational rule or standard of excellence) what in the baseless dynamic of technê and virtue seems more variable. Instead, in any case so far, we make a foundation of anti-foundationalism and find ourselves right where we left off.

The intent of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the present mission and philosophical groundwork of composition studies and of first-year composition as an institution is consistent with the positivism and foundationalism of technê. We should also understand that a technê invariably anticipates a monolithic (but not as often clearly articulated or significantly protracted) standard of excellence or truth (virtue), and that the application and consequently the reapplication of theory to writing instruction amounts to technê in the end. In the present state of
composition studies, the application of theory to writing pedagogy does little for the integrity of either, warping the intellectual openness of the former to unnecessarily overburden and misappropriate the latter. James Berlin is correct in observing in *Rhetoric and Reality* that institutional English composition instruction in the modern era has followed a varied but foundational course from its eighteenth-century positivistic roots, but—as I will further argue—social-epistemicism and post-process writing theory have no more broken free from this legacy than any other ideological instantiations of writing *technai*.

Two Primary Figures: Blair and Berlin

Two figures from different periods emerge who are central to the development of my argument. The first, James Berlin, fairly recently identified the field in a way that broke along ideological lines and did so in such a way that strongly reinforces the notion that writing is a *technê*. The second, Hugh Blair, was a rhetorician and educator from eighteenth-century Scotland, and in many ways he made it possible for Berlin to even conceive of his argument in the first place. Berlin opposes almost everything Blair stands for, but Blair is the key figure here because he helped articulate, at a crucial point in the history of composition, the key methods for teaching and learning writing. Berlin and Blair both have positions which are problematic, and in surprisingly similar ways, all of which can be summed up in a faith in truth, though the composition of that truth differs in each case.

In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” Berlin offers up a taxonomy of four general ideological spheres within which he sees all contemporary writing instruction existing. Berlin published this essay almost twenty years ago, and the legacy of his taxonomy has been immense, but perhaps to such far-reaching proportions in many ways fundamental to
composition studies that Berlin would disapprove. “Rhetoric and Ideology” has appeared in numerous teaching sourcebooks since its publication and often finds itself applied as a generative model for how one should go about conducting his or her career in the field of composition studies instead of offering up a general description of the field from an ideological lens. Ultimately, however, Berlin’s article has been a convenient one on which to fall back when talking about writing instruction, but because of its overuse and misuse one might take it to be no longer descriptive of the field and in some ways counterproductive. At this moment in the history of the field, it seems that we are moving away from this emphasis on ideology, and this dissertation proposes in part to take to task some of the fundamental flaws inherent to making ideology the primary consideration in composition pedagogy; but regardless of this, the movement that resulted in some ways from Berlin’s share of the conversation provides us with the historical trajectory of English composition from which we are all working, for good and for bad. Berlin’s work, especially this seminal article, offers us little objective distance in a field of study already complicated by many centuries’ worth of contributions from scholars and practitioners from widely differing points of view. Perhaps Berlin understands this, but he found rallying points more suitable, the first of which many argue originates in Blair’s period.

The first of the spheres of ideological influence Berlin describes in “Rhetoric and Ideology” is “current-traditional rhetoric,” which he marks by an interest in external and absolute standards of quality writing, in recognition of such writing, and of emulation of it. This brand of rhetoric Berlin finds to be animated by the bourgeois drive of upward mobility. In truth, as he argues in his book *Rhetoric and Reality*, the roots of current-traditional rhetoric can be found in the Common Sense philosophies of rhetoric from eighteenth-century Scottish intellectuals. Brought over from the Continent by a few of these was an interest in belles lettres, a method or
kind of literary appreciation derived in large part from Longinus’s *On the Sublime*. The chief interest for this discussion lies in the bellettristic interest in the recognition and apprehension of literary genius. Combined with the varying degrees of pragmatism of the period and with the upward mobility of all lowland Scots after the 1707 Acts of Union, bellettrism blossomed in the teaching of composition long after the bellettristic movement for literary appreciation fell away. The legacy remains, however, in the evolution and reapplication of bellettrism in the humanities in general and composition in particular, evidenced most recently by the Erica Lindemann/Gary Tate debate of the late twentieth century regarding the roles of literature and composition in the domains of one another. More of that is to follow.

One such proponent in the introduction and application of belles lettres to the study of rhetoric in eighteenth-century Scotland was Hugh Blair, who would eventually come to be Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh. Most scholars recognize Blair’s contributions to the study of rhetoric to be minimal but his influence on nineteenth-century writing instruction to be profound; and where the present-day English department and composition studies took their roots in this period we are said to find Blair’s legacy still there, losing resolution with age, but a solid core nonetheless. So, where Berlin finds prescriptive grammars and the enforcement of quality standards of mechanics, style, and organization, there is current-traditional rhetoric as well. Blair’s legacy for Berlin ultimately would be the commodification of academic discourse and the systematization of it to the extent that one could go on producing it by preconceived and therefore seemingly arbitrary standards.

Berlin also explores the ideologies of “cognitive,” “expressivist,” and “social-epistemicist” rhetorics in his famous article, identifying in each case what ideological turns on corporate capitalism from which they are derived and in turn they reinforce. Ultimately he favors
the last, social-epistemicism, acknowledging its usefulness in exposing and manipulating the ideologies that influence our thoughts and motivations, citing by contrast (to the current-traditional, cognitive, and expressivist schools) its “self-consciously” aware ideological stand (478). The rationale Berlin gives for favoring an interrogative mode such as social-epistemicism is fundamentally a Marxist one. Those arbitrary standards Berlin sees as the mark of current-traditional rhetoric are evidence of bourgeois-mindedness, and cognitivism and expressivism are all the same for Berlin in that regard. In the case of cognitivism there is the claim to “the transcendent neutrality of science” (478), and Berlin characterizes it as the late nineteenth-century, new university

    heir apparent of current-traditional rhetoric [. . .], [the new university’s] role

[being] to provide a center for experts engaging in ‘scientific’ research designed
to establish a body of knowledge that would rationalize all features of production,
making it more efficient, more manageable, and, of course, more profitable. (480)

In the case of expressivism Berlin roots it historically in “the elitist rhetoric of liberal culture” in the early twentieth century (484), morally optimistic (484), but also inherently individualistic and therefore often blind to the social dimensions of a given pedagogical-rhetorical situation (486), and ultimately exploitative, elitist, and authoritarian, favoring as it does private vision over collective need (487). In all cases, however, Berlin sees these rhetorics functioning as reinforcement of an educational philosophy that favors preparation for the world of corporate capitalism (482) over an intellectually healthier and more progressive mode of critical intellectual engagement.

However, there may be far more of Blair’s thinking in the other parts of Berlin’s taxonomy than Berlin himself may have supposed, even regarding social-epistemicism. Their
similarity rests not in their emphasis on the significance and consideration of ideology so much as it does in their humanistic perspective. Certainly Berlin differs from Blair in a fundamental and epistemological way, and the most brilliant part of Berlin’s analysis is the part that is most often overlooked: “Rhetoric and Ideology” describes these ideological turns of rhetoric historiographically. We have not inherited them all of a piece, after all. Berlin’s contention is that the history of writing and writing pedagogy is informed by the mission of the modern university, whose educational philosophy reinforces the bourgeois motivations of its early modern forbearers. There have been subtle changes over this span of time, and to this Berlin attributes the development successively of cognitivism and expressivism. However, there is one lexical pattern to Berlin’s essay that signifies an enormous philosophical oversight: the analysis of “Rhetoric and Ideology” is peppered with accusations of “positivism,” a humanistic sin of which social-epistemism, as Berlin himself characterizes it, is not at all innocent, if for no other reason than the simple fact that the creation or description of any mode of communication or understanding is as positivistic in method and philosophy as the unselfconscious espousal of the very capitalistic ideologies that current-traditionalism, cognitivism, and expressivism reinforce. In both cases one supposes an absolute set of circumstances to be existent, even if the circumstances are unknown or even in some cases unknowable. To the extent Berlin and Blair are positivists, their cultural-political ideologies differ along with their apparent self-conscious espousal of them.

To be fair, to some extent Blair and Berlin are talking about two different things: the first about early modern rhetoric and the second about its application in the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing classroom. This is a distinction as important as the difference between theory and praxis. While one draws out a theoretical framework for the reconfiguration and
reapplication of rhetoric, the other casts it in an ideological light, mapping its progress alongside the progress of modern capitalism and instantiating it in the modern writing classroom, the site where so many influential members of society spend their intellectually formative years. For these reasons, this dissertation proposes to overlay the field of composition with a discussion also of technê, a concept originally theorized in partial conjunction with rhetoric and well over two thousand years before modern capitalism ever was; it is useful to do so because inevitably technê occupies the intellectual space where theory and pedagogy meet. As we shall see, once one regards any human activity as a technê, it soon becomes taken for granted that what theoretical and philosophical underpinnings motivate that supposition correspond directly to how that craft is performed, how it is understood, and how it is taught.

Technê and Virtue: Mutual Inseparability

It would be difficult to treat the topic of technê fully in a condensed space such as that which a dissertation provides, however, but the account which will be given is the substance of what is told here: a technê is a logical system connected to any art or craft which provides both a philosophical and a pragmatic understanding of it and is apprehensive of some (often external) end which pertains to that art or craft, the goal being the predictable and systematic reapplication of that understanding. Specifically, Martha Nussbaum identifies a technê as “a deliberate application of human intelligence to some part of the world, [. . . and] is concerned with the management of need and with prediction and control concerning future contingencies” (95). Distinguished from epistemê, we understand technê theoretically to be a craft-like knowledge of any creative activity that bears even the smallest amount of intellectual scrutiny. The ancient philosophers apply the term technê variously and limit it not only to rhetoric; in fact, not all of
them would agree that rhetoric is a technê, much less on what a technê is even in a philosophical sense. The definition above is therefore not intended to be a definitive one, but I offer it here as the grounds on which to begin a discussion of it regarding composition studies.

There is historical precedence for this discussion, as the ancients debated the legitimacy of considering rhetoric as a technê, and in so doing gave us a unique insight into the minds of individuals who live in a world where that notion is not taken for granted. Plato argued that it was not; Aristotle and the sophists contended that it was, their reasons differing as often and as dramatically as their opinions did. However, at the historical point of significance which is the subject here, it seems a far foregone conclusion that rhetoric and writing are both technai. As stated above, at the very least this is social-epistemicism’s common ground with the other parts of Berlin’s taxonomy. The only difference is of focus and scope, but the result is the same. Current-traditionalism is a technê because it systematizes writing, coupling that with pretentions of moral ambivalence. Cognitivism is a technê because it systematizes writing while describing the psychological processes of the brain that produces or reiterates it. Expressivism is a technê because it systematizes writing on the adaptability of shared language to meet personal ends. In a similar fashion to the others social-epistemicism is a technê because it effectively anticipates what the other parts of this taxonomy do: systematized writing. In this case it regards writing as a means not to full or honest expression so much as complete political and critical understanding and engagement. Social-epistemicism anticipates a fully empowered and enlightened individual and presumes a reality governed by rational law.

In light of Berlin’s positivism, this dissertation proposes that while Berlin would like to step back and analyze writing in the twentieth-century classroom by not taking its ideological underpinnings for granted and by not accepting the time-tested pedagogies of nineteenth- and
twentieth-century at face value, a more comprehensive approach would be first to explain how writing pedagogy has been shaped by a deeply-rooted supposition that writing is a *technē* and second how writing without this supposition would look. Blair and Berlin appear here because they loosely bracket a period of time where writing instruction and rhetoric and the modern period coincide. The focus of this dissertation is limited to this period because the focus here is on the consideration of writing in the modern university as a *technē* rather than rhetoric as a *technē* or even writing as a *technē*, topics which are far too general for full and fair representation in any single work.

In any discussion where *technē* appears, one must also clarify the ends that a *technē* in question meets. The examples we get from Socrates have often to do with medicine or flute-playing, where a craftsman must have some knowledge of health or beauty to know what it takes to achieve it as an end. Presumably the same would go for writing: one would need a standard of taste or eloquence to recognize and then to emulate; a *technē* could provide the apparatus for achieving both of these ends. A logical instability exists in the case of writing, however, because those standards of good writing must ultimately be arbitrary ones. Berlin criticizes this approach further on the grounds that corporate ideology underpins this arbitrary standard because every value system appears to us as the outward expression of some other, more insidious, motivation of self-interestedness. Hugh Blair recognizes the rational fallibility of a monolithic standard of taste and chooses to defend belles lettres on the grounds that taste cannot be rationally resolved in the first place but that the baseline for tastefulness is something which is consistent with “the general taste of mankind” (46), therefore acknowledging the standards of taste to be somewhat subjective though demonstrably consistent. However, sensing that the belles lettres need some
particular standard on which to base itself, Blair does link the refinements of taste to virtuous living by way of Quintilian, arguing that the refinements of taste is moral and purifying (36).

The mission of a *technē* in all cases is to provide a person with a way to achieve an end or a group of specifiable ends with an eye to some standard of perfection or quintessence. Its purpose is not, however, to justify or interrogate that standard. Berlin argues that very thing: that what current-traditionalism, cognitivism, and expressivism do is rely upon positivistic suppositions without questioning the ethos of scientism. Asked to respond to Blair’s position that the refinements of taste lead to virtue, he might first ask what virtue is for Blair and then argue that Blair’s virtues are bourgeois ones and subject to all the psychic baggage that attends them.

The weakness of Berlin’s argument, however, is very much the same thing. Social-epistemicism would put into play a *technē* for the building and identification of structures—modes of consumption, modes of production, distribution, etc.—as rational as any others. If the aim of the course is to instill the principles of critical thinking about societal interplay, then the result is very much like a *technē* of the eighteenth-century tradition.

Such a thing would be a particularly subtle form of foundationalism since its structures operate by laws of rationalism. A spin-off of social-epistemicism is post-process theory and the interest in introducing anti-foundational methods to the writing classroom. Post-process theorists ran with the social-epistemicist notion that beyond the cognitive processes involved in the act of writing a writer’s consciousness is subject to the social variables surrounding a rhetorical situation, but beyond that, post-process theory sought to undermine foundationalism by de-emphasizing the teaching of content. The trick in doing so, however, is in identifying and applying a method for teaching without foundationalizing it in the first place. The idea would be to create a classroom where the emphasis on course content and on the writing process as a
rational system of its own would be replaced by a less prescriptive method to teaching writing. Talking about pedagogy and anti-foundationalism simultaneously can be tricky business, however. In many ways English composition is wed to a foundational approach to pedagogy. The relatively brief history of modern English composition attests to that. It can be hard to imagine the role of writing teacher without it. This dissertation proposes, in fact, that much of what has until this point been called post-process theory is a continuation of foundationalism and is only a continuation of the social-epistemicist/anti-foundationalist myth. Instead of applying theory to practice, as we have almost always done, it might be best for us to consider what rhetoric and composition might be like were it not treated as a technê; after all, it is the application of theory to pedagogy that leads to foundationalism in the first place when the assumption that rhetoric is a technê is so ingrained in our thoughts.

Finally, the topic of virtue also plays a role in this discussion, and it is one similar to the role of ideology in the social-epistemicist argument in the sense that both virtue and ideology are latent, often uninterrogated, value-based motives. As noted above, Berlin believes Blair’s sense of writerly or even scholarly virtue to be, at best, unknowingly ignorant of the perpetuation of capitalistic ideology, but the contention here is that Berlin is only half correct: virtue and ideology are not comparable to one another, at least in the senses that Berlin and Blair are using them. Most critics will agree that neither virtue nor ideology can be fully comprehensible at any single historical point in time, but that both originate in a set of suppositions which are in no way apparent to those who are not looking straight at them. As we shall see in Chapter Four, of course, one problem with social-epistemicism is that there is no way of looking straight at the functions of virtue and ideology in the first place. Nevertheless, the critical difference between ideology and virtue is their relevance to the topic of craft. Like ideology today, virtue’s academic
relevance begins with the connection between what a person does and who a person is.

Eventually, virtue became specialized in the way that Blair seems to suggest about taste and its connection to a person’s writing and self-expression. We can discuss virtue here and not fall over the same stumbling blocks that we do with ideology, however, because of the nature of its relationship with technē: unlike ideology, virtue does not presume to explain the causes of human events and motivations; rather, it exists as a complement to craft, no more legitimizing it that it legitimizes virtue. Virtue operates in many ways similar to ideology, but it does not ground human activity in any rationalizable sense; and we are able to make this break from the ancient sense of virtue because we no longer use the term virtue in the sense that the ancients did.

The proposal here, however, is not that the relevance of virtue to craft is a more suitable method for the study of composition. In fact, it is the opposite. The argument instead is that virtue too often goes unaddressed and that, it being attendant if unrecognized when a human activity is regarded as a craft, virtue is far too enigmatic to make technē of any ultimately good use. Historically we find that virtue can never be fully comprehended, at least in any way that is useful in the sense that we hope that a technē will be, for instance. In the classical era we find a sense of virtue far less specialized than Blair imagined it. Then it was sense of virtue which addressed the whole of a person’s character. Even then we find squabbles over the relation of virtue to human action. In particular we are interested here in the relation of virtue to rhetoric. Words and language generally being rhetoric’s stock in trade, virtue was no more comprehensible then than it is now.

But as a point this dissertation returns to in example as well as argument, there are other voices from composition studies’ past which necessarily have as many kinds of virtue as they do
senses of technê. Berlin’s taxonomy provides for us a convenient framing device to discuss four different persuasions, but there are others as well.

Other Previous Voices

A number of key works on the topics of classical rhetoric, the history of rhetoric, and the history of composition studies are cited here. The purpose in doing so, however, is not to provide a review of all “great works” on the subject of rhetoric, generally, any more than it is to provide a history of rhetoric. In fact, long periods of time—the Roman era and the Middle Ages, particularly—are left out altogether. The purpose of the historical scope, and in including a chapter on Greek rhetoric and eighteenth-century rhetoric in a dissertation on the present state of composition studies, is for one thing to provide an historical framework of suppositions regarding virtue and technê from which to draw. For another the purpose of the inclusion of these two periods is to frame the topic from an early classical perspective—the originary one—and from an early modern perspective. Additionally, the key selected works on the history of English composition and modern thought are by no means exhaustive, but included by virtue of the fact that they are the most cited by the more influential current-traditional, cognitivist, expressivist, social-epistemicist, and post-process scholars of our time.

For another thing, the purpose of this large historical scope is also to illustrate the point that the supposition that rhetoric is a technê is a flawed one and also that in the modern field of composition studies, to one extent or another, the various movements we find where one theory or another is brought to bear on the teaching of English composition all fail in similar ways and for similar reasons. In each instance we find a group or an individual motivated with the conviction that a particular theoretical apparatus, school of thought, or social movement will
provide the necessary tools for dealing with language and communication in the ways that they function in and on the human mind. In this respect, as we shall see, contemporary composition pedagogues and theorists seem different from Socrates and Plato only in the particulars of their fundamental belief systems.

However, after Plato died nearly twenty-five hundred years ago, there have been few to say that rhetoric is not a *technê* and do so with a straight face. This is because up until today the notion that rhetoric, as a phenomenon of language, is a *technê* has served as a foregone conclusion. All who have seriously put thought into it have acknowledged that language is ultimately irrational, but none seem to have really tried to embrace that part of language that Plato feared the most: its ambiguity. To do so would require us to abandon the possibility of applying theory to practice. Specifically, as we shall see here and elsewhere, it would require Aristotle to dismiss the notion that the study of rhetoric can reduce the ill effects of contingency, it would require Hugh Blair to face the impossibility of reconciling ancient virtue with early Modern specialization, and most specific to the purpose here, it would require us to abandon hopes that newer and stylish methods and philosophies can encompass all linguistic contingencies of speaking, writing, reading, and learning. In accepting that rhetoric is a *technê*, however tacitly, none have considered its corollary: virtue.

Again, Plato, Gorgias, and Aristotle had their individual positions on the questions of virtuous living and virtuous action and on the exact nature of rhetoric in relation to knowledge and action. Plato quite rightly perceives, as Socrates did, that language exists in a state of ambiguity and is therefore irreducible by all rational standards which *technê* has ever required. The problem with Plato, however, is the rigid notion of virtue he implies in the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias*. *Technê* and virtue always exist by mutual implication, but Plato’s sense of virtue is far
too one-sided to be considered reasonable: for him, that which does not suppose the absolute and abstract standard of virtue could not by definition be a technē. Aristotle in the Rhetoric and the Sophists like Gorgias differ on this relation of virtue to craftsmanship, but are very comfortable regarding rhetoric as a technē: Aristotle seems far more comfortable dealing with ambiguity and contingency by supposing a craft of speaking that takes the ignorance of the masses into account, while acknowledging the absolute transcendence of virtue; and Gorgias enacts in his Encomium of Helen the sophistic faith in the relevance of contingency to the appearance of virtue, but in doing so a false sense of rational reducibility too often gets implied.

After the Sophists, on rare occasions does someone think of rhetoric as being connected with truly open contingency, and more often than not we find someone like Hugh Blair, the critical figure for the application of technē to composition, who in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres makes an effort to refit those old notions of rhetoric and virtue in a way that suits more contemporary theories of the nature and functions of language and more contemporary interests (the teaching of composition). In the process, however, Blair discovers and sets a precedent for a new way of making the same old mistake: he supposes a way of teaching or a way of thinking about writing consistent with a static sense of virtue. He is the most prominent figure here because of this precedent.

Blair has many critics, and most often he gets taken to task for originating, or at least offering the first cogent description of, what has become known as current-traditional rhetoric. Many others, like Wilbur Samuel Howell, also take him to task for originating a tepid and watered-down synthesis of classical rhetoric and modern bourgeois-mindedness. Unfortunately for Blair, he fares best when scholars credit George Campbell as the most original and innovative thinker of the two, and in that case both seem to share the blame for having foisted upon us the
current-traditional rhetoric that we are supposed to have been digging ourselves out from under
since their time. Robert J. Connors and others, however, note that “current-traditional rhetoric” is
far too problematic a notion to be usefully applied, and his *Composition-Rhetoric* illustrates that
point. Finally, in terms of Blair’s precedent-setting role in the field of composition studies, his
critics may be more right than they know. Our interest here lies not so much in the legacy of
current-traditionalism (which Connors is correct to undermine) as it does in the pervasive
influence of *technê* in college composition. It is true that Blair originates not much of anything,
particularly the notions of *technê*, virtue, and even their applicability to writing, but what he does
set the very important precedent of systematic application of theory to the teaching of college
writing, and no one has taken him to task for having done that.

Histories of composition studies written since Blair’s time take as their purpose a more
clarified vision of how the discipline developed along ideological or historically contextual lines,
and in each case a descriptive pattern is sought. In no case, however, do these historians take to
task the connection between the supposition that writing is a *technê* and the weakness of any
position that favors one methodology to another. To the extent that providing a narrative for the
development of an idea is a tacit endorsement for the method used to do so, the connection
between *technê* (*how* a thing is done) and historical development (*how* a thing is or has come to
be) seems clear. Likewise, other scholars prefer to speak from a period in history contemporary
to them, and the applicability of virtue in those cases usually becomes more apparent. For these
scholars the question of whether or not rhetoric and writing are *technai* matters less than the
question of true virtue. In each case we find a rejection of those fundamental principles
underlying most previous methods of teaching, and in place of it we find a method which
supposes itself objective and valueless, thereby ascending to the distinction of *technê* of all
technē; but ultimately in each case we also find faith in a principle which is not finally consistent with language and rhetoric.

The theorists and pedagogues who loosely fit into Berlin’s taxonomy of ideological spheres in English composition pedagogy embody this notion, that ostensibly value-less systems of thought, when applied to composition pedagogy, bring to the table what values are inherent to them which are often unapparent at first blush. As we shall see in the final four chapters, the differences between these groups cannot be so easily simplified as being different parts of capitalistic ideology: in each instance we find a pedagogy developing out of older traditions of thought. More importantly, however, regarding technē and virtue, these value systems differ from ideologies in the very important sense that their respective codes of virtue all proceed from the complementary notion that rhetoric can be reduced to a way of writing, thinking, or teaching.

It seemed to Blair and his contemporaries that the effects of modernity on the human psyche rendered classical rhetoric less effectual, and to one extent or another left it in need of refurbishment, at least; likewise, since Blair’s time, many have made a similar mistake. Until very recently, theorists and pedagogues have turned to behavioral science, romanticism, and historical materialism to make rhetoric the technê that everyone supposed that it was in the first place. Their core beliefs differed in many different ways, as we shall see, but the most important similarity in each case has been that all thought that they had discovered something about the truth of writing no one had discovered before, and the most important difference is that they all got it wrong in different ways and for different reasons.

It can almost seem in this respect that composition theory has gotten progressively closer to the conclusion at which we arrive here: there is no correct way of writing or of teaching writing. The social-epistemicists acknowledge at least the endless complexities of subject
formation, which is a significant break from Blair’s rhetoric, but insofar as social-epistemicism uses rationalism for a tool, even for critical manipulation, it still regards writing as an improveable skill. Eventually we get to the present-day post-process movement in composition studies, but even in that case, the body of theory normally connected to it is not as self-consistent as the post-process scholars would like. Few of the theorists except Stanley Fish even begin to apply their work to composition studies, and when they do, it is only to illustrate the point that writing cannot be taught in any way like we have grown accustomed to teaching it. To one degree or another, most post-process composition scholars like Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch give way to the praxis imperative, which technê always implies, but also of which “post-process theory” will not admit. They argue that a productive way can be found to bring this kind of theory to bear on the teaching of English composition, but in the end their arguments hardly sound any different from the social-epistemicists.

Two critics—Sharon Crowley and Victor J. Vitanza—come closer to addressing the rift created by the praxis imperative that rhetoric-technê implies, and to different extents they do. Both understand the necessary implications outlined above of making writing a technê, but though they both problematize the recent emphasis on ideology and critical comprehension, in neither case do Crowley or Vitanza detail the importance of virtue. Crowley published Composition in the University a decade ago now, but her argument there that English composition is historically and irretrievably connected to the foundationalism the post-process theorists counter is an important one still, and she differs from the post-process and social-epistemicist rationale in the very important sense that the universal requirement, she argues, is an elitist and humanistic device, and pretenses of liberation or critical enlightenment in any form of writing pedagogy thus far are false so long as they exist. For that reason, among others, she calls
for the abolishment of the universal requirement of the first-year course. Like Berlin she links up the demise of rhetoric with the nineteenth-century refitting of it to suit modern tastes and the university’s new institutional vision. However, Crowley also outlines in great detail a decades-old tension in the American university between humanism and “naturalist skepticism,” a holdover pragmatic legacy perhaps from the Enlightenment and the refitting of the rhetorical, humanistic subject into the modern, bourgeois one.

Vitanza more specifically offers a useful response to Berlin’s argument from “Rhetoric and Ideology” in his “Three Countertheses: Or, A Critical In(ter)vention into Composition Theories and Pedagogies” from Contending With Words, an article to which we return here in the conclusion. There he argues against “‘rational’ thinking and acting, especially about language” (142) and, while preferring it to the alternatives, calls Berlin’s social-epistemicism specifically to task on this very subject on the grounds that its proponents “have not been suspicious enough of their rationalistic motives” (143). Vitanza prefers instead to think of writing pedagogies as being either foundational or anti-foundational and in the end finds all four of Berlin’s rhetorics resting comfortably within the confines of the former. In the end Vitanza prefers to resist structures of knowledge which are rational and which are predicated upon the need for the building of consensus and grand narratives, since after all, shared knowledge structures imply a faith in an arbitrary authority. He points to instances where theorists have sought to systematize language by describing its operations, or worse yet by enforcing rules upon it, and argues that in each case language delegitimizes it. The self is constituted by prevailing modes and ideologies which are beyond the power of the self to control but not to problematize (156). Consequently, Vitanza argues for a temporary moratorium in the field of composition on turning theory into “praxis/pedagogy” (160). Likewise, Crowley’s argument against the universal requirement of
composition studies reinforces Vitanza’s argument when we bring the corollary concepts of *technê* and virtue to the table.

Up until this point the literature seldom puts the anti-foundationalism of the postmodernism period into context with the ancient suppositions which serve as the bases for all of our disciplinary institutions. Histories of rhetoric and histories of composition have provided for us ideological maps of how our discipline has been formed, and the best of them raise more questions than provide answers. The connection between virtue and the teaching of writing in the postmodern era asks a new question and problematizes the usefulness of praxis yet an extra step. Further, it raises the stakes of teaching composition to begin with because, when set in an ancient and then an Enlightenment-period context, the consequences of thinking about rhetoric and writing become more apparent.

Chapter Reviews

To elaborate and describe these consequences and to set them in their varying contexts, this dissertation will proceed as follows.

Chapter One, “The Role of *Technê* in Ancient Rhetoric: Matters of Medicine and Health, and Matters of Pastry Baking,” will focus on three major figures of classical rhetoric from the Greek period, when the earliest surviving manuscripts can be found that address the topics of *technê*, virtue, and rhetoric. During that period we find a debate over the question of whether or not rhetoric, or oratory, is a *technê* and by extension over the usefulness and wisdom of bringing intellectual tools to bear on it. Plato, Gorgias, and Aristotle weigh in on this subject from variably differing and at times agreeing viewpoints, but at the center of their debate lies the topic of virtue, especially regarding its role in craftsmanship. Virtue, being a key issue in this entire
project, seems never more obviously crucial to directed human action than it does during this period, and for that reason because the roots of composition studies extend down to ancient Greece, we find there the connection between virtue and craft more clearly present in the minds of the people involved.

For Berlin’s sake, and for the sake of the far-reaching influence and structural accessibility of his article, the second through fourth chapters here are devoted to putting each of his spheres of ideological influence into the context of the ongoing discussion of technê. As we see in the first chapter, virtue is a key factor in the academic development of any craft, and by the eighteenth century we find that the early modern notion of virtue differs a good deal from the classical notion. The effect of this difference manifests itself for one thing in the sense of compartmentalization we find in the modern psyche, which enables individuals in this period to separate in their minds their intellectual activities from what they might consider to be their essential selves. In that respect the enlightenment and the growth of writing as an independently studied means of communication both result in different ways of thinking about craft and by extension about virtue.

Continuing the historical trajectory from Chapter One, Chapter Two, “The Role of Hugh Blair and of Technê in the Development of Current-Traditionalism,” addresses the rhetoric of Hugh Blair and explains how Berlin’s sense of current-traditional rhetoric can be derived from the eighteenth-century aestheticism which was a fundamental part of his lectures. Blair’s emphasis on taste as a kind of writerly virtue laid the groundwork for a stance toward rhetoric and writing which took the notion of rhetoric as a technê to be a foregone conclusion and in that respect established a code of virtue directed to writing specifically. Because that code is an aesthetic one, in what many call current-traditionalism we find perhaps the high point in the
separation of the act of writing from the living-world context from which the classical
rhetoricians like Gorgias and Aristotle theorized.

Regarding current-traditionalism, Chapter Two also outlines the already well-trodden
territory of the debate over the origins of writing in the modern academy. Robert Connors has a
sense of this period that differs from Berlin’s, particularly in the sense that he believes current-
traditionalism to be a misnomer and Berlin’s notion thereby to be faulty. This chapter likewise
acknowledges that there are a number of academic historians who view the development of
English composition from differing perspectives and for that reason yet another new one is not
offered here. The emphasis lies instead on acknowledging that a multiplicity of perspectives
exists and to underline the argument that rhetoric cannot exist as a technê and avoid such
conflicts of understanding.

Chapter Three, “The Role of Technê in the Development of Cognitivism and
Expressivism,” continues along Berlin’s taxonomical trajectory to address cognitivism and
expressivism and, like Chapter Two, characterizes their positions in the discussion of rhetoric
and craftsmanship. Framing this discussion is the treatment we find in M.H. Abrams’s landmark
book The Mirror and the Lamp regarding the Romantic era and the transition from the
neoclassical period preceding it. Berlin argues that cognitivism and expressivism were
popularized in composition studies long after the neoclassical period and the Romantic era and
acknowledges that there is some vestigial influence of those periods on what happened in the
twentieth century, but he focuses his efforts on describing their ideological functions as they
apply to writing instruction and power play. The third chapter proposes instead that a kind of
virtue that best inheres to Abrams’s general description of these two powerful influences also
inheres to these two branches of composition studies, and in that respect the role of ideology
gives us only a small part of the picture.

Nevertheless, the influence of neoclassicism and romanticism on composition studies is
born of a period where rhetoric and writing are understood as *technai*, and what methods and
suppositions about the production and teaching of writing take that as a given. Here we see the
problems of connecting theory with practice begin to make themselves apparent in ways that
were not necessarily the case with current-traditionalism, an approach to writing more or less
developed into a closed system. Instead, with cognitivism and expressivism their attendant
philosophies—neoclassicism and romanticism—seem in many ways to be mutually exclusive
and for that matter must be accepted as truth before their corresponding composition trends can.

Chapter Four, “The Pertinence of *Technê* to the Further Discussion of Social-
Epistemicism,” is devoted entirely to Berlin’s final and favored quarter of his taxonomy,
social-epistemicism. Like the other three, the theoretical foundations of it are reviewed, but more
importantly, we begin to see where the strength of Berlin’s argument for critical pedagogy
begins to falter regarding questions of virtue and craftsmanship. The emphasis on ideology
falters not so much in its failure to portray an accurate sense of truth so much as in its faith in a
rational descriptive model of human behavior. That faith, as it turns out, is the same faith Blair
put into the faculty of taste, that Campbell put into the scientific method, and that Elbow puts
into individual expressive power. Social-epistemicism likewise always assumes that human
action is reducible to rational processes.

Chapter Five, “The Post-Process Movement and Anti-Foundationalism: A Continuation
of the Myth of *Technê*,” the final chapter, addresses a trend in the field of composition studies,
commonly called the post-process movement, which we see there is in some ways a continuation
of many of the same faulty approaches to teaching writing that we have seen before, particularly regarding the topic of praxis. The theory that informs the post-process movement is largely postmodern and in that respect, under careful scrutiny, deligitimizes any notion one may have of making a pedagogy of high theory.

To that end we can go back, once again, to the originary point of *technē* and rhetoric, the subject of the first chapter. In ancient Greece the distance between the essential self and the human activities of the self seem far less distant from one another than does the distance between Marxist materialism and critical thinking or between the Romantic era and expressivistic writing. As it turns out, however, Plato, Gorgias, and Aristotle, among others were mired in deep metaphysical and philosophical loggerheads which in many ways contribute to the difficulties which we face to this day.
CHAPTER ONE:

THE ROLE OF TECHNÊ IN ANCIENT RHETORIC: MATTERS OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH, AND MATTERS OF PASTRY BAKING

Just below the surface of any discussion of English composition pedagogy very often lies the fundamental supposition that the teaching and production of a writing text is a repeatable process. To reference the act of writing as a process implies that to write in a predictable and systemized fashion would be efficient, natural, and would therefore yield more positive results. The challenge is first in clarifying in theoretical terms what constitutes good writing and second in identifying and formulating a method by which those results are most effectively achieved. However, the terms of both challenges are very often more dependent upon the prevailing philosophies and psychology of the time than we usually expect. James Berlin recognizes this in part when he argues that current-traditional, cognitivist, and expressivist writing pedagogies are informed and shaped by corporate-capitalistic ideology, but he falls short of noting that social-epistemicism and what has become post-process pedagogy also apprehend a set of circumstances where writing is an intellectual process for the exposition and discovery of a specific set of circumstances. Whether these circumstances regard subversive ideological influence or the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship is immaterial to the fact that in either case a positive set of circumstances is supposed.

In Chapter Two we will see that part of rhetorical study most pertinent to the foundations of English composition: the point in history where aesthetic theory comes to bear on writing in such a way as to clarify for us the origins of English composition and English literature as
academic institutions, derived at least in part from the long history of the study of rhetoric. However, in that tradition of rhetorical study, we find in the very beginning two concepts theorized in classical Greece which pertain to this discussion in some very important ways: virtue and technē. The Greeks originate neither concept, and today we hardly ever talk about virtue and technē in connection with rhetoric, except in the case of the latter to draw a connection between what went on then and what goes on now.

Regarding virtue, however, it might seem easy and even necessary to divorce that concept from talk about rhetoric. We understand quite clearly that during that period individual action and endeavor were difficult to distinguish from individual character, and character and action were likewise more difficult to compartmentalize than they are today. Writing seemed inseparable from speaking as a subject of study for one reason because writing seemed only an extension of speech, a decontextualized spoken thought for the purpose of reading it in a later context. Another reason writing seemed this way, however, was that virtue was considered the seat of all action, communicative or otherwise. Character and virtue, in this respect, went hand in hand with what one did by necessity.

Virtue, it seems, is that from which any activity draws its strength, or more precisely, its persuasive power. As we shall see of Plato, for instance, he rejects oratory as a meaning-making activity for philosophy because, as he puts it, philosophy has truth as its object, whereas oratory makes its object persuasion. Plato does not get the only say on matters of virtue, however. Many of the other classical scholars think of virtue as something decidedly less enigmatic, as a quality less bound by metaphysics and more to human perception, and in that disagreement over the nature and principles of virtue as it pertains to craft we find a key component of the field of composition studies today. It can seem unnecessary in our world to talk of virtue and technē
because the former is a term after the Enlightenment we no longer use in some of the ways that it was meant, and because the latter is a concept we just take for granted. However, we make a critical error in doing so because each concept has a few latent features which affect the ways that we act (and in our case write) that are worth mentioning. The debate over the nature of virtue in craft, even as far back as Plato and the sophists, must be addressed because what they have to say about it speaks directly to our understanding of the source of good writing—what is the relation between good writing and a good author—and to the question of whether or not good writing can be learned.

This chapter proposes that the ancient topic of technê be revisited to cast an encompassing light on the subject of composition in the modern era. To reiterate from the introduction, a technê is a logical system connected to any art or craft which provides both a philosophical and a pragmatic understanding of it and is apprehensive of some (often external) end which pertains to that art or craft, the goal being the predictable and systematic reapplication of that understanding. It can often be the case that within a technê there can exist smaller crafts which are in many cases internal to the original end. Perhaps the most useful and accessible way to proceed with this is to allow Plato, Gorgias, and Aristotle to weigh in on this topic, with selected readings given below, all of which address the subjects of rhetoric, technê, and virtue most directly. In doing so we find that, for the ancients at least, the model we settled on ultimately obliges us to accept oratory (and eventually writing) as a technê and by implication to accept an ethical code connected to it.
Technē in Antiquity

Martha C. Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness* identifies technē as “a deliberate application of human intelligence to some part of the world […]” and is “concerned with the management of need and with prediction and control concerning future contingencies” (95). In addition, in all cases where Nussbaum finds a technē from Aristotle’s work we see four features stressed: universality, teachability, precision, and concern with explanation (95). Nussbaum derives these criteria for determining technē from the fifth-century philosophers Hippocrates, regarding his treatises on medicine, and Aristotle, regarding *Metaphysics*. In either case the examples from antiquity given in the most pragmatic terms have to do mostly with medicine. We should not accept Aristotle as the only authority from antiquity on the subject of technē; certainly we can find others with differing viewpoints from that same era. The legitimacy in using Aristotle as a model here, however, stems first from the fact that he is the only author from that period (before Cicero) to compose such a foundational piece on rhetoric wherein it is treated so fully as a technē, and second from considering what he does with rhetoric in light of the philosophy-rhetoric debate raging during that period.

This argument does not contend that modern English composition has purposefully and systematically crafted itself into a technē. It does not understand itself to be a technē; nor did it at any point in its development until this point regard itself as such or consciously develop as a technē. Rather, howsoever composition is a technē has to do with an unselfconscious identification: we make reference to “the writing process” unselfconsciously and unironically. More of that will be addressed in the second chapter, where the birth of modern English composition in the eighteenth century is examined, though it is beyond the scope of this study to give it a full treatment. The cultural and psychic root of this unselfconscious identification lies
much deeper in the Western psyche, however. We find it taking its current form, where it gets applied to modern institutions of learning, only a few centuries ago, but much of that is derived from discourse over philosophy and rhetoric that took place 2,500 years ago and more but by figures so dominating the philosophical landscape that the terms of discussion still inform and shape our thoughts to this day.

The unselfconscious identification that attends a *technê* in the minds of its users also contains a component of virtue that often goes overlooked. Much of what we take for granted about artistry and craftsmanship is intertwined with this latent concept. Plato and Aristotle have very definite beliefs about one’s position in the moral universe in relation to what he or she does, up to and including the quality of craftsmanship and knowledge. It is easy enough to say that we assume about *technê* what we will, that we have certain attitudes about these things that we would not have were it not for ancient Greek philosophy, but the entire concept of *technê* is very carefully derived from a notion of virtue that is markedly different from our own. We must first understand how it is different, but also we can see that everything handed down to us about *technê* exists in our minds in anticipation of a code of virtue that is no longer relevant to our culture.

Regarding the universality of a given field of knowledge—Nussbaum’s first criterion of Aristotelian *technê*—to define a thing as a *technê* in the general and classical sense, it must be determined that there are general parameters observed in the behavior and operation of it. In other words, there must be certain things observed about it or of the performance of it that are universally applicable. One must be able to produce through the use of *technê* an account of experience which can be imitated. For instance, we are interested for this reason in understanding the nature of human intelligence, on the assumption that the operations of the human mind, if in
some way quantifiable in general terms, can give us a better sense of the operations of language and rhetoric in it and on it. Aristotle does this in the Rhetoric, reasoning for instance that one must craft his argument to suit an older audience differently than to suit a younger one because younger individuals have so much more of a fiery temperament than older groups of people do. One must be able reasonably to predict the results of an action before it is performed. In that regard the action is considered to be teachable.

How universality can be achieved depends very much upon one’s critical persuasion. As we shall see in Chapter Two, how sense gets made of a given field or human activity or would-be techne differs very much in the classical period from the Enlightenment. In Cicero’s first canon of rhetoric, invention, for example, a wide range of knowledge is considered necessary to speak on any subject, the rationale being that eloquence proceeds from intellectual virtue. Quintilian’s belief is that eloquence proceeds from virtue in a general sense, and much earlier, for Aristotle an argument began from the topoi and the idea that the lines of argument could be delineated syllogistically. Enlightenment thinking adds a layer of abstraction and begins thinking about invention inductively, which is really not so far from Aristotle’s thinking when we consider his willingness to accept observational knowledge. Universality is achieved instead through operational knowledge of language or human cognition. In addition to understanding a wide range of subjects, one would also understand how it is that he or she came to understand them in the first place. The difference between one and the next is the difference between general and specific, between generalized knowledge and operational, systematic understanding.

Secondly, for a techne to achieve the criterion of teachability in the classical sense it must be converted into a predictable and ordered experience, since it had in the classical period been decided that “[u]nordered experience can only be had, as chance brings it about” (Nussbaum 96).
How one converts writing experience into a predictable, ordered, taught process depends of course entirely upon one’s pedagogy, and pedagogy takes on as many forms as there are teachers. It can be informed by theory, pragmatics, a combination of the two, or as North has noted of English composition as a humanistic field, by methodology. Any one teacher’s pedagogy will be a calculus of institutional, philosophical, social, personal, and practical experience. This is, of course, the other side of composition technê. Ultimately, however, insofar as we can generally regard writing as a universal experience with clearly identifiable parameters, we can establish the criterion of teachability.

General parameters can only go so far when one is being practical, however. Eventually one has to develop a group of techniques whereby he or she can definitely say “this is at least part of the way in which the writing process is done. These are the expectations we can reasonably share about writing.” The reasonability of what expectations are being considered falls to the criterion of precision, Nussbaum’s third. The equivalent Greek term to the English precision is akribeia and is associated “lawlike regularity or invariance and with fidelity to data” and “frequently linked with the notion of having a measure or a standard” (Nussbaum 96). Such a concern is linked to the previous to criteria for determining technê in the sense that there is an interest in remaining faithful to what knowledge has already been told about the characteristics of the given action and to precedent. At its heart, any technê is conservative in this very important regard and self-regulatory in a way that is inconsistent with much of what many presume their teaching pedagogy to be. In fact, one might argue that all pedagogy is consistent with this third criterion, precision.

The last criterion for the creation and validation of a technê, the concern with explanation, goes a step further and explains the reasons for its operations. In Nussbaum’s
example to illustrate this point, where there is an individual complaining of stomach aches, it is not enough to say that it is because he or she ate a lot of cheese, but for his or her knowledge to fall into the range of *technē* the medical author doing the study instead “must be able to isolate the element *in* the food […] and to explain how (through what sort of causal interaction with the body) the effect takes place” (96). Likewise, if we are regarding writing as a *technē*, we must have at least a rudimentary understanding of rhetoric or of how the process of writing operates upon the minds of the writer and of his or her readers. If rhetoric does not play a conspicuous role in a teacher or writing program’s policies on “the writing process,” some other rationale exists for the justification and explanation of how writing works in its place, whether that rationale is actually articulated or not. In the end the reasons for this rigid requirement are linked back to the original emphases on prediction and control.

The last criterion is the most thought-provoking for the purposes of this discussion because it does indicate that there is some concern in the formation of a *technē* with critical response to its subject. It would not be enough for a surgeon, for instance, from Aristotle’s point of view to explain a stomach-ache away syllogistically—“cheese is a bad food, because it gives a stomach-ache to the person who eats a lot of it” (qtd. in Nussbaum 96). A more complex knowledge of the workings of the human digestive system and of the chemistry of cheese would be required. A *technē* would be required to explain *why* this is the case. Rhetoric has been very useful to the development of modern English composition in this regard. Early on what worked for the speech arts was reappropriated for the written word. As we shall see in the next chapter, with the eighteenth-century introduction of aesthetic theory some separation from rhetoric was achieved, and written composition eventually became its own subject-area.
One can imagine what such a requirement as explanation would have to do with writing as a technê. A technê does not ask itself the purpose or value in its existence; it assumes it. Except on the fringes a technê exists as a closed system, of itself and for itself. It does not resist those who question its validity. A technê’s staying power is ensured by a number of things; among these are its practicality—however so far one is willing to put a premium on practicality—and by extension its time-tested use. Indeed, it has become difficult to imagine what writing would be like if it were not regarded as a technê.

To imagine such a thing one would have to review classical philosophy, for it is at this point in intellectual history that so much of what we take for granted about intellectual activities was first postulated. Specifically, a review of the debate over sophistry and over rhetoric and philosophy might prove the most useful. Again, strictly speaking this dissertation is about composition as a technê, but so much of what we have to say about composition today and technê throughout takes theoretical shape during the classical period, at least a careful review bears mentioning. A great deal of it hinges initially upon how Plato and Socrates define technê and how they differentiate rhetoric from other human activities in that regard, and in that respect there are a number of philosophical and personal straits to navigate. Regarding the sophists of this period we also have the issue of transcendent truth and political expedience to consider. By the time we get to Aristotle, who fully regards rhetoric to be a technê, but for different purposes than the sophists do, we have a systematized look at a subject (rhetoric) that seems to settle the issue, but not to the exclusion of all other possibilities.

It is important that we consult the classics because in many respects this is the period of intellectual history where it first occurs to anyone to intellectualize human craftsmanship. Because it was during this period that so much of the groundwork for Western thought was laid,
so much of how we relate to ourselves and what we do gets taken for granted. We have been thinking in certain ways for more than twenty-five hundred years. Aristotle and Cicero were consulted on and off exclusively over the centuries regarding rhetoric all the way until the nineteenth century until English composition was introduced to the North American academy; and a very important part of ancient rhetorical attended the transition. That handover will be examined in further detail in Chapter Two. Ultimately, however, ancient suppositions on craft and technê are very much present in our thoughts.

Plato: Method and Transcendence

Regarding rhetoric, Plato differentiates in the Gorgias and the Phaedrus “knack” from “craft” or “skill.” Common thought during this period, as it was for a very long time, was that skill derived from natural talent, and from Plato’s point of view to possess a special rhetorical skill meant only that one had a particular talent for misleading people. Instead, Plato preferred as Socrates did the dialectical method of structured intellectual inquiry. Certain universal truths existed independent of human thought and endeavor, and rhetoric and sophistry and poetry and democracy served only distract the mind from the light of these truths. As humans we are all naturally subject to confusion and flattery, and insofar as rhetoric appealed to emotion and vanity instead of logic and reason, it only made matters worse. Further, truth proceeded from virtue for Plato, and that which would not be consistent with truth and virtue could not for that very reason be a craft or a technê.

Any example of Plato’s metaphysics illustrate his thoughts on the nature of human knowledge quite clearly, and his metaphysics underline the primacy of logic and rationality for him. Near the middle of the Phaedrus his Socrates describes a very elaborate system for the
hierarchy of humanity. This is the myth of the charioteer, which would become a very powerful one in Western civilization thereafter. In it he envisions a mass of charioteers racing around in a massive three-dimensional circle tapering to the top, and at the top of this figure is the light of truth. In each incarnation of a person’s soul the soul gets closer or further from the light of truth, depending on how wisely and virtuously that person conducts his or her affairs. When one gets closest as a mortal can get to the light, he (invariably) will live the life of a philosopher. There is a hierarchy below that of life-priorities, descending in order of types of people that increasingly garner Plato’s contempt.

Plato so despises democracy—an influence for which he blames the death of his mentor, Socrates—that the intellectual conflation he makes between it and rhetoric is plain to see. Brian Vickers describes Socrates’s closing position in the *Gorgias* as being “since all modes of address to the public are tainted by flattery and corruption, it is better to lose your life than to pollute your soul by speaking in your own defence” (88). This personal prejudice he has against democracy, folded into his metaphysical model of human knowledge provide him with a deep aversion to all that rhetoric means and does, from Aristotle’s point of view and certainly from the sophists’ to be sure. However, Vickers points out very succinctly that such a prejudice is academically unsound. To the degree one comprehends the light of truth one can presume a degree of moral superiority, and it is the duty of a leader to convert his followers down the path of virtue. The failure of any governmental system, then, implies a systemic defect:

Plato has an absolute concept of successful education being a once-and-for-all conversion of its recipients to virtue, and so the fact that the Athenian citizens disagreed with its leaders proves to him that they had not been educated properly, and hence that the leaders were at fault. (Vickers 89)
For Plato there could be no further explanation and no influence outside of the moral shortcomings intrinsic to democracy. Rhetoric, being a function of democratic principles and flourishing where democracy exists, serves only to obscure virtue and truth. There can be no technē regarding rhetoric from his point of view because its original motives are so base.

A politician is given not much choice in a set of circumstances such as this. In true dialectical fashion, it is an either/or proposition. When speaking to the public, he can “either educate them to virtue and justice or join in their corruption by gratifying their desires” (Vickers 90). The issue of virtue becomes apparent early on in this rather lengthy dialogue and very important to the discussion of rhetoric and technē. Plato so believes in the dialectical method that he is certain of the outcome of any use of its method. For him there should be little room and little patience for one who acts by rule of political expediency. Charges of opportunism are leveled against many during this period, where much emphasis is placed upon a person’s ethos and where the luxury of having a precedent is not so easy to fall back on in the historical sense. Much was at stake in Plato’s point of view, and dialecticism would do a great deal to counter the dangers he perceived coming from sophistry and circumstance. Plato had an ethos in mind, that of a “man who […] enters circumstances ready to address them from a certain distance with confidence and conviction, and the result is that he usually makes the best out of them” (Poulakos 98).

In the Gorgias, Plato’s Socrates opens by engaging Gorgias in this kind of dialectical discourse on the nature of oratory as a craft. True to the dialectician’s methodology, he would like to ask questions under the premise of reaching an understanding, for the intellectual benefit of all involved, of the exact nature of the art of oratory, especially in contrast with similar arts. It can seem off-putting today when one thinks of Plato’s discourse approach to his argument. There
are a number of reasons for this, all important to the discussion of *technē* because the answers to them establish an historical and a critical context to the discussion of rhetoric. Almost all of Plato’s works appear to us in discourse form, as a dialogue, with sophisticated literary qualities of characterization and dramatic arc. For one thing, it would probably not have occurred to writers of this period to write out their thoughts from one point of view. In this period writing was relatively new, and discourse was the mode of communication to which they were profoundly wed. As we grew culturally and psychically accustomed to writing it has become easier for us to imagine discourse going on with fewer limitations of time and space. One has the luxury with writing of carefully thinking an argument through without having to anticipate an immediate response and without having to counter an opponent with each assertion. Writing is a much more solitary enterprise than speech, which during this period is much more agonistic. The differing qualities of speech in each of the characters of Plato’s dialogues reflects this.

But there is an even more important reason for that, which is linked in many ways to these inherent qualities of writing, versus those of speech. In many ways we see Plato’s Socrates providing for us a model on how dialectics would work when done properly. Plato pits him against the minds and actions of various characters of the period in much the same was as he imagines that they would engage outside of the written dialogue. It is interesting that dialectics would arise during this slow transition period from oral to written discourse in that dialectics for Plato anticipate a state of mind for a given individual that is fairly consistent more with that of a writer than a speaker. The emphasis, after all, if discourse were done in proper dialectical fashion would be upon *logos*, upon a transcendent truth that existed outside of the boundaries of undirected discourse. John Poulakos notes this and that dialogical discourse, so given,
announced that, far from an agonistic enterprise, discourse was a cooperative endeavor, an endeavor depending upon the give-and-take of disciplined discussion. [...] It declared that the main aim of discourse is inward reflection, not outward exhibition—its purpose should be to problematize its listeners and cleanse them of their ignorance, not to dazzle its spectators and feed their appetite for show. (101)

For that matter, as Poulakos goes on to say, a regulated dialogue such as the ones that we see in Plato, provided a model of active engagement by its participants instead of one where an incoherent group of people with varying degrees of intellect and influence would be passively taking in the thoughts of a speaker, without having the ability to request clarification or to arrive at a conclusion other than the speaker’s own. One might object that, because Plato penned and crafted these discourses without the input of the real individuals who supposedly participated in them, these last two luxuries are ostensible at best. Certainly this is true, but one must also consider the benefits that the old agonistic model afforded Plato when he wrote them down. His Socrates would have been able to express the thoughts that Plato had the time to artfully craft with the kind of wit that certainly could not be diminished through the passage of time, both of which are fully afforded with the use of writing, and all the while afford himself the strong ethos of the speaker in the spoken-world, agonistic context.

The opening of the Gorgias is interesting because in addition to enacting Plato’s notion of proper dialectics it addresses the issue of technē at the outset, each character aside from Socrates presuming oratory to be a craft. Being knowledgeable of a craft, the company opens the discussion by wondering aloud what it is that Gorgias would call himself as a craftsman. Polus contends that it is “the most admirable of the crafts,” and “[o]f these various crafts various men
partake in various ways, the best men partaking of the best of them” (448c). Socrates complains, however, that no one has asked Polus “what Gorgias’ craft is like, but [instead] what craft it is, and what one ought to call Gorgias” (448e). Gorgias settles the first matter himself, by Socrates’ specific request: “It’s oratory, Socrates,” he says succinctly (449a). Corollary to this the company reaches the conclusion that as a craftsman and an orator, Gorgias is, as Socrates puts it, “capable of making others orators too” (449b). Gorgias confirms this. For a number of reasons—including the primitive historical stage of writing and critique that he is working out of—Plato chooses to dramatize this treatise as an exchange between more or less intelligent individuals. This is fitting, in the end, oratory being the subject as well as the context. Plato has been praised justifiably as a dramatist as well as a philosopher for all. We can certainly appreciate the irony in such a rhetorically manipulative piece.

As a craft the dialogue turns immediately afterward to the differentiation between oratory and other crafts regarding its object and theirs. A good craftsman would have the capability of making “speeches” about whatever activities his or her craft might involve, about the operations of it, which correlates with Nussbaum’s last two criteria for technē: teachability and explanation. It gives us insight into the formal style of Greek discourse that to speak from a knowledgeable and professional point of view on a given topic would be best translated as making a speech. This is very much the tone of the Gorgias. In response to Socrates’ proposition that all crafts seem like oratory since they all have to do with making speeches, Gorgias replies that “in the case of the other crafts the knowledge consists almost completely in working with your hands and activities of that sort. In the case of oratory, [however, …] [i]ts activity and influence depend entirely on speeches” (450b-c). Depending on the nature of the craft in question, and depending
on whether or not one is teaching the craft to another, or if the proper execution of it requires one to speak, all crafts involve speech-making in one way or another.

At any rate, the craft of oratory by degree will in all cases “carry out and exercise [its] influence entirely by speech” (451d). The question turns then to what oratorical speeches would actually be about. Socrates makes a great deal here of understanding the usefulness of studying oratory if almost all crafts in one degree or another require one to speak, the supposition being that speaking effectively on any topic might come from one’s ability as a craftsperson and therefore ancillary to working knowledge of the craft in question. This again speaks to the heart of Plato’s belief in effective speech being more knack than skill. Socrates poses the question to Gorgias what subject does oratory concern itself with. Gorgias responds vaguely that oratory concerns itself with “[t]he greatest of human concerns, […] and the best” (451d). Pressed further Gorgias responds still vaguely that oratory’s subject “is the source of freedom for humankind itself and at the same time it is for each person the source of rule over others in one’s own city” (452d). Ultimately just after Gorgias defines oratory by the context in which he knows it best: “I’m referring to the ability to persuade by speeches judges in a law court, councillors in a council meeting, and assemblymen in an assembly or in any other political gathering that might take place” (452e). Further, Plato paints Gorgias as tyrant, as in support of his claim that oratory’s concern is “the greatest of human concerns,” when he argues just after that oratory is the greatest of all crafts in that a skillful user of it might mobilize the resources of other craftspeople to meet his or her own personal (and potentially selfish and malevolent) ends. It does not involve speaking on one subject so much as persuading crowds, Gorgias explains, an important point which is returned to later.
But before this, Socrates lands on a definition of oratory, in terms understandable to any user of *technē* of any kind. He characterizes Gorgias’s position on oratory as being “a producer of persuasion” (453a). But this does not satisfy Socrates completely, especially insofar as good craftwork might persuade one to a certain point of view just as surely as oratory does. Gorgias’s response is two-parted. One is again that the persuasion of oratory “is the kind that takes place in law courts and in those other large gatherings” he mentions before; furthermore, “it’s concerned with those matters that are just and unjust” (454b). A much more rapidly-paced debate follows thereafter on the difference between persuasion produced by conviction and persuasion produced from learning and true understanding. In both cases, as Socrates posits and Gorgias agrees, “both those who have learned and those who are convinced have come to be persuaded,” and of both types of persuasion there is necessarily “one providing conviction without knowledge [and] the other providing knowledge” (454e). Here he lands on a very important point about *technē*: “evidently oratory produces the persuasion that comes from being convinced, and not the persuasion that comes from teaching, concerning what is just and unjust” (454e-455a).

Ultimately, Socrates decides, “an orator is not a teacher of law courts and other gatherings about things that are just and unjust, either, but merely a persuader” (455a). This is one of Plato’s most important points on rhetoric and on the art of oratory. He places the term “merely” very carefully in the previous quote to emphasize the usefulness of rhetoric as a subject of study in the realm of philosophy (and necessarily from his point of view the dangers of it to society). The best Socrates can say for oratory at this point in the discussion is similar to that of Aristotle later, that if one were to speak to a crowd (the “masses”), an understanding of the craft of oratory might be an expedient: concerning matters of justice and concerning masses of unwashed and unlearned
people, he says “I don’t suppose that [the orator] could teach such a large gathering about matters so important in a short time” (455a).

Socrates then poses a very interesting question to Gorgias that speaks importantly to the cultural climate of the time and hints at the complexities of the debate over sophistry that we go into depth about later. Socrates reframes his argument in pragmatic terms, that he is the spokesperson for a concerned and interested populace: “What will we get if we associate with you, Gorgias?” (455d). This is couched in a question about the teacher-pupil relationship, but not so vaguely is Socrates asking Gorgias about what a city could expect by buying into a political and educational system that bases its fundamental beliefs in sophistry as opposed to philosophy.

Once again, it is important that we revisit Plato’s position that rhetoric or oratory is a “knack” rather than a “craft” or “skill” because he sees fit to bring it up at this point. Not only that, but it also speaks to the issue at hand, that a necessary link can be found between virtue and craft. The question is posed to him by Polus what Socrates thinks that oratory is. He responds by clarifying the position that it might be considered a craft, and after Polus’s affirmation, Socrates replies that “I don’t think it’s a craft at all” (462b). Rather, he says to Polus that rhetoric is “the thing that you say has produced craft” (462c). Most translations use the term knack to express Plato’s meaning best, but it is translated from the Greek empeiria, which earlier in this text and many others is given as “experience,” two ideas with interesting associations here. This is spoken by Polus, no less, who argues there that a craftsman might be evaluated by acquired skill at his craft.

Socrates’s sudden frankness leads him to his second conclusion in this vein: that not only is oratory a knack rather than a skill or craft, but also it is a knack “for producing a certain gratification and pleasure” (462c). From this point he and Polus embark on a discussion of the
nature of flattery in persuasion, whereby Socrates argues his points syllogistically. By now the conversation has evolved momentarily into a one-sided discussion, with Socrates explicitly guiding Polus to the questions, asking him to ask certain questions and then answering them. Socrates employs a cooking metaphor, specifically that of the pastry baker. Like a pastry baker an orator has a knack “[f]or producing gratification and pleasure,” and although oratory is not the same exactly as pastry baking, “it is a part of the same practice,” he says (462e). More specifically, of oratory and other likewise gratifying and pleasure-giving occupations, Socrates explains that “I think there’s a practice that’s not craftlike, but one that a mind given to making hunches takes to […]. I call it flattery, basically” (463a-b).

Plato has a very complicated arrangement to attend this observation. He describes it as a four-part piece, ordered spatially and syllogistically. In it are included pastry baking, oratory, cosmetics and sophistry, all of which correspond to four parts of flattery. He describes it vaguely, and after asking Polus to ask him what part of flattery Socrates thinks oratory is, Socrates responds bewilderingly that “oratory is an image of a part of politics” (463d). He purposefully tries to confuse the company here, opening this part of his discourse with a hypothesis, making the eventual landing point that much more dramatic for it. This statement goes to the heart of the matter of his position on knack and purposeful skill. They first very quickly differentiate in the life of a human the body from the soul and that “there’s a state of fitness for each of these” (464a). Further, it is possible, all concede, for one to seem fit, in body or in soul, without actually being so and that sorts of things exist whereby one can make him or herself seem fit in either case when it is not the case. Socrates further complicates his analogy with the observation that attendant to the body and soul are two corresponding crafts, “[t]he one for the soul I call politics,” he says; “the one for the body, though it is one, I can’t give you a name for offhand, but
while the care of the body is a single craft, I’m saying it has two parts: gymnastics and medicine” (464b). The corresponding term to gymnastics is legislation, and the corresponding term to medicine is justice. This makes up another part of his four-part table of bodily and spiritual health—gymnastics, medicine, legislation, and justice: “they always provide care […] with a view to what’s best” (464c).

The role of flattery in this syllogism Plato describes as a corruptive one. It “divides itself into four, masks itself with each of the parts and then pretends to be the characters of the masks” (464c-d). He means by this that flattery—as pastry baking and oratory are—pretends to know what is best for the part of the body or soul with which it corresponds. In the case of medicine there is pastry baking (for instance), and in the case of oratory there is the correct sense of justice. Socrates calls anything flattery that “guesses at what’s pleasant with no consideration for what’s best” (465a), which is why he is calling it a knack—because guesswork is involved, albeit refined in many instances by experience, natural aptitude, and luck. “[I]t isn’t a craft,” he continues, “but a knack, because it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them” (465a). It cannot provide the account of activity or experience that Nussbaum refers to as the concern with explanation, the last criteria of a technê proper.

Socrates arrives at a syllogistic conclusion at this point, Plato being satisfied that his point is well made. “[W]hat cosmetics is to gymnastics, sophistry is to legislation,” he says, “and what pastry baking is to medicine, oratory is to justice” (465c). This is a very important passage when considering Plato’s thoughts on the nature of human craft. He reiterates his position on the difference between body and soul. “[I]f the soul didn’t govern the body but the body governed itself,” he explains, the body would do only what was gratifying to it and operate not with proper judgment and not with any sense of care for itself. A world governed in such a way is very much
a nightmare to Plato: he fears a situation where “all things would be mixed together in the same
place, and there would be no distinction between matters of medicine and health, and matters of
pastry baking” (465d). This might seem a continuum fallacy, to be sure, and not a mild one; but
in a continuum nevertheless, he would place sophistry and oratory nearer injustice and
irrationality than their opposites. Hence, as he explains to Polus after his speech, oratory is a part
of flattery, in the sense that it is a part of the general human tendency to weakness of judgment,
even in matters of personal concern. The work of the orator and sophist serves only to reinforce
and exaggerate this part of human nature. There is no justice in matters of flattery, and
necessarily nothing of technē in it, we would presume, because both justice and technē are after
matters that exist outside of themselves.

To expand on this point, Plato embarks on a very important but dizzyingly complicated
discussion with Polus on the nature of power, influence, and personal success regarding orators,
and with tyrants by way of illustration. Socrates’s position is that orators, like tyrants, have the
least power in any city “[f]or they do just about nothing they want to, though they certainly do
whatever they see most fit to do” (466e). It is true that a skillful orator during this time, through
his influence, could not directly put a person to death (for instance, as a tyrant could), but he
could bring such a thing about in a judicial context. Socrates disagrees with Polus that such a
thing is a “great” power, but he also sees a logical impossibility in simultaneously maintaining
the positions that “[p]ower is a bad thing” and “doing what one sees fit without intelligence is
bad” (467a). Socrates maintains exasperatedly that a tyrant and an orator do what they see fit but
never what they want. This is because what he sees fit is not often what is best, or just, or good,
because the measure of these things is not apparent to these kinds of people—and to a certain
degree not to anyone. This means that a person can see fit to behave in a certain way but not
achieve the result that he wants because we all naturally want what is best, whether we know what that is or not.

From there he asserts the position that tyrants and orators are miserable and deserving of our pity (rather than, presumably, our respect). He also asserts that, up to and including putting a person to death unjustly, performing an unjust act is more pitiable than suffering the same injustice. This is to say “that the admirable and good person, man or woman, is happy, but that the one who’s unjust and wicked is miserable” (470e). Such a position is a difficult one for us to accept today, and it covers a multitude of sins regarding civil society and the social contract. We must remember the Greek position on virtue and the importance placed upon it. Such a position as Plato takes here is philosophically consistent with its political and cultural historical context. Civil-ethical codes had not evolved to the point that they have now. Plato’s position is the point of view, for instance, that made Stoicism possible a couple of centuries later. Socrates presses the matter, to the amazement of Polus, going so far as to maintain that, while one who suffers a just punishment is miserable, no more so is he than the tyrant who gains his power unjustly. Even so, he says, the perpetrator who avoids getting caught is all the more so miserable.

Here Socrates also does something very interesting: in parrying Polus’s contentions that he has refuted the philosopher’s claims on the grounds that he is “saying things the likes of which no human being would maintain” (473e), Socrates takes the opportunity to assert his practical beliefs on the dangerousness and the uselessness of democracy in the resolution of any important issue. A general consensus, in a group of any size beyond two individuals speaking, offers no justifiable or even useful conclusion. “I do know how to produce one witness to whatever I’m saying, and that’s the man I’m having a discussion with,” he maintains, and “[t]he majority I disregard” (474a).
The question remains, however, over what is more miserable personal state of affairs—to suffer injustice nobly or to live an unjust life unpunished. Socrates has no problem securing from Polus the conclusion that there is such a thing as spiritual health that operates along similar principles as bodily health. After deciding that the treatment of bodily illness can sometimes be painful but worthy of being stood for its benefits, the unjust tyrants of the world are miserable all the same by avoiding punishment because

[they focus on its painfulness, but are blind to its benefit and are ignorant of how much more miserable it is to live with an unhealthy soul than with an unhealthy body, a soul that’s rotten with injustice and impiety. This is also the reason they go to any length to avoid paying what is due and getting rid of the worst thing there is. They find themselves funds and friends, and ways to speak as persuasively as possible. (479b-c)]

So goes Plato’s critique of oratory and orators, removed partially from its context, but the judgment no less harsh for it. This position feeds quite easily into the earlier position he takes on rhetoric and flattery. One wants what is gratifying, be it wealth, power, or pastries. Presumably one can be spiritually ill without what knowing what is best. The connection to virtue is again that action belies inner truth.

His discussion with Polus begins to round out here, where conclusions are made and his position on oratory is somewhat softened. In life, “what a man should guard himself against most of all is doing what is unjust,” he says (480a), which is hardly a debatable point, but regarding oratory, which most often is used to defend injustice, from his point of view, “it is of no use at all, unless what takes it to be useful for the opposite purpose: that he should accuse himself first and foremost, and then too his family and anyone else dear to him who happens to behave
unjustly at any time” (480c). The pain is not worth bothering over when one is assured that justice is being served.

The rest of the dialogue is dedicated to the dispute between Socrates and Callicles over just and unjust acts indicating true happiness as a point of departure. Callicles very much favors the method that Plato sees the sophists taking—that is, that it is natural for one to behave in a self-serving and self-aggrandizing way, and that when does so, regardless of the scale of activity, he or she is behaving naturally and is therefore justified. Plato certainly disagrees.

The Gorgias offers more insight into Plato’s thinking about rhetoric and craft and virtue than we find here, but these certain parts of it speak to the issues of virtue and technē in the sense that they provide for us Plato’s rationale for virtuous living and for virtuous action. Regarding writing and rhetoric specifically we know that Plato means to draw a line between them and intellectual skill. The origins of virtue can be very difficult to clarify there, but it seems clear that Plato’s view of virtue is of a reality transcending human desire. It can be anticipated but never changed.

In the Phaedrus what parts pertain to technē have to do with form, and how important it is that the parts of a speech structurally resemble the parts of the idea that it communicates. There Plato’s Socrates debates a young admirer of oratory over matters of love and matters of philosophical truth. It might be said that the first half of the Phaedrus is less about oratory than it is about love and desire and the moral and metaphysical constructs that attend it. It is in the first half that his complicated myth of the charioteer appears. Much of what they do have to say about writing and about oratory we find in the second half, and practically all of it is in response to a speech given by Lysias that the young Phaedrus is taken with. The dialogue opens with Phaedrus praising a speech by Lysias, and Socrates and Phaedrus disagree on its merits, Socrates
contending that its conclusion (“discovery”) is not that insightful. Love and desire, for Socrates, are distractions from truth and justice and often what is good. While love is not inherently bad (since it comes from the gods), desire must always be matched with reason for love to exist.

When the conversation does turn to oratory specifically, Socrates makes the pronouncement regarding Lysias that “[w]riting speeches is not in itself a shameful thing,” but that “[i]t’s not speaking or writing well that’s shameful; what’s really shameful is to engage in either of them shamefully or badly” (258d). This much could have been expected from what we have seen already in the *Gorgias*, particularly regarding virtuous action. The question is raised, therefore, of how one can determine “[w]hen is a speech well written and delivered, and when is it not?” (259e). This is of course an interesting way of posing such a question because it implies of rhetoric that there is an appropriate method of delivery and a correct content for every contingency. For our purposes here it also gives us a better sense of Plato’s understanding of virtuous motive. From there the discussion moves from rightness of delivery to whether or not “someone who is to speak well and nobly [would] have to have in mind the truth about the subject he is going to discuss” (259e) because again it is a given in the dialogues that this would be the case.

The *Phaedrus* is interesting in this regard because in dealing with justice in more practical terms than does the *Gorgias*, and Phaedrus raises an interesting point regarding knowledge and expression. “What I have actually heard about this […],” he says regarding the subject of knowledge, “is that it is not necessary for the intending orator to learn what is really just, but only what will seem just to the crowd who will act as judges. Nor again what is really good or noble, but only what will seem so” (259e-260a). Once again, here we find Plato’s characterization of, and subsequent response to, the sophists. Socrates chooses not to moralize
directly from Phaedrus’s observation here, to appeal directly to an ethical code that would have been shared by many in his audience, Phaedrus among them; he instead makes it a matter of terminology. Of making speeches and speaking not of what is “really good or noble, but only what will seem so,” Phaedrus says “[f]or that is what persuasion proceeds from, not truth” (260e). This is an observation that the character Socrates chooses to take very seriously.

Socrates momentarily sidesteps the question of the nature and origins of persuasion and poses a more pointed question about wisdom. “[W]hen a rhetorician who does not know good from bad addresses a city which knows no better and attempts to sway it […],” praising “bad as if it were good, and, having studied what the people believe, persuades them to do something bad instead of good—with that as its seed, what sort of crop do you think rhetoric can harvest?” (260c-d). For this reason Plato considers virtue to be of paramount importance. An idea is virtuous insofar as it is consistent with the way things actually are, in nature and in justice. Without the kind of breadth and depth of knowledge he thinks that philosophy provides, rhetoric can only provide us with a very close and corrupt vision of truth and justice.

The pair now embark on a very important discussion about the ability of oratory to communicate truth. Speaking as the voice of “the art of speaking,” Socrates says that though one might speak authoritatively on any matter without an actual knowledge of the truth, though mastery of truth is advisable, “even someone who knows the truth couldn’t produce conviction on the basis of a systematic art without me” (260d). This point of rhetoric Socrates says he is willing to accept, provided that we are willing to accept that rhetoric is an art, but he hears “certain arguments” (Gorgias 462b-c) that rhetoric is instead “an artless practice,” and, “[a]s the Spartan said, there is no genuine art of speaking without a grasp of truth, and there never will be” (260e).
Phaedrus wonders at this and does not dismiss it out of hand and would like Socrates to explain. Socrates begins by trying to establish rhetoric’s usual context for the period. He asks, regardless of the scope of its subject and seriousness, “isn’t the rhetorical art, taken as a whole, a way of directing the soul by means of speech, not only in the lawcourts and on other public occasions but also in private?” (261a-b). His purpose in establishing the context is to begin making the point that an orator, for the purposes of self interest, might find himself speaking for or against—“speaking on opposite sides”—any given issue in any given contingency, and at that on matters of justice and injustice. What Socrates proposes that he sees in a person like this is one who will “artfully make the same thing appear to the same people sometimes just, and sometimes, when he prefers, unjust” (261d). Phaedrus readily agrees with all of Socrates’s propositions, soon landing on the conclusion that an “artful” speaker’s “listeners will perceive the same things to be both similar and dissimilar, both one and many, both at rest and also in motion” (261d). To a believer in universal form such as Plato is, such a thing is abominable.

Socrates observes such behavior in the courtrooms, but he goes further to say that these qualities of lawcourt speech are inherent to human speech as a whole. Here he asserts his belief that oratory cannot be considered an art. This he accomplishes syllogistically by trying to explain how one could convince a group, through a series of painstaking steps of logical progression, that a certain fact of matter is opposite of what is actually the case. His first premise he begins by getting Phaedrus to concede to the point that it is easier to deceive someone if the things that one is comparing (for instance) are more similar than less so—in other words, things that are very similar and not things that are exact opposites, to state the most extreme case. Secondly, Phaedrus accepts the premise that one may only truly deceive someone if he or she (the deceiver), to avoid self-deception, knows “precisely the respects in which things are similar and
dissimilar to one another” (262a). Socrates concludes that oratory is not an art because someone “who doesn’t know what each thing is [could never] have the art to lead others little by little through similarities away from what is the case on each occasion or to its opposite” (262b)—not without deceiving him or herself in the process.

He goes on to prove his point by having Phaedrus read back Lysias’s speeches and explaining how he observes this going on. Excerpts are interspersed through their ongoing discussion, but for the most part what we find is dialogue, re-establishing Socrates’s point. The first point made is that there are words which we can be relatively sure mean the same general thing to all language users—“iron” and “silver” are his examples—and words which we cannot, such as “just,” “good,” and “love.” Because the speech in question is about love, everything in it will be relative, he says, to Lysias’s own understanding of that concept. After hearing more of Lysias’s speech he criticizes it for being poorly structured, having no obvious organizing principle except a movement in tone from censure to praise. Much is said of structure here, with Socrates working a plug in for dialectics, maintaining that there is a natural sense to things that can be discerned with the proper method. They then have great fun throwing out terms for the different parts of a speech that have been taught.

Phaedrus wonders to Socrates where one could acquire great rhetorical skill if it were not to be considered a learnable craft. Echoing his appraisal from the Gorgias of oratorical persuasion as a knack, Socrates dismissively replies that “[i]f you have a natural ability for rhetoric, you will become a famous rhetorician, provided you supplement your ability with knowledge and practice” (270d). The difference in “a great art” is that, like Pericles, Socrates says, one must reinforce natural ability with “endless talk and ethereal speculation about nature” (270a). Plato does not outline his criteria for technê, so we can speculate from statements such as
these what that would be. Believer as he is in transcendent truth, we would have to assume that it is somewhat similar to what we will see of Aristotle’s in that regard, but with the certain requirement that its method and object would be similar to his own.

His thinking in throwing out all of these terms that rhetoricians were teaching is that understanding the proper parts of an activity—arranging them in an appropriate order—is not demonstrative of true knowledge of the subject. In a certain sense he is speaking of an overly specialized social-cultural construct where there are individuals performing their duties without any real sense of how their activities contribute to good or civil welfare, or in the case of oratory, how their speeches are contributing to knowledge. In the end he believes that we should be sorry for rhetoricians, that we should pity them (as he believes Adrastus or Pericles would), in the way that he says we should pity tyrants above, since rhetoricians “cannot define rhetoric” and are “ignorant of dialectic”: “[i]t is their ignorance that makes them think they have discovered what rhetoric is when they have mastered only what is necessary to learn as preliminaries” (269b-c).³

From these points he posits that in all cases of craftsmanship one must first make a determination on “the nature of something” and takes medicine and rhetoric as useful points of comparison—make a determination of the nature “of the body in medicine, of the soul in rhetoric” (270b). For Plato this is the case because “empiricism,” as it is termed here, provides us only with details, and because, if we truly want to treat the body or the soul correctly, our knowledge of them should be as expansive as possible. We must understand its parts, how it operates in its own context, what its limitations are. This is the appropriate method of inquiry into anything, he believes, and the way whereby we come to a proper understanding not only of what we see, but also of what we do. A working knowledge of the human body would precede proper treatment of it, by this reasoning, but without a working knowledge of why a particular
treatment works—what it is that this treatment really is doing—no progress is made except in the alleviation of certain undesired symptoms.

The application Plato finds in medicine is clear if we apply these principles to the study of the human body and to medicine. As it applies to rhetoric, to the soul, where conviction is produced, “someone who teaches another to make speeches as an art will demonstrate precisely the essential nature of that to which speeches are to be applied” (270e). One can only understand rhetoric if he or she has an understanding of the soul, which is the house of virtue, and can “explain how, in virtue of its nature, it acts and is acted upon by certain things” (271a), in the way that a doctor understands the body. From there one can classify the parts of the soul and how they function altogether. Socrates knows that orators do not have this knowledge of the soul because their actions and speeches do not demonstrate an accurate understanding of it. Anyone could know this because, the soul being as natural and universal a form as anything else, exists outside of human activity, unchanging.

From there Socrates actually begins to explain, at Phaedrus’s request, “how one should write in order to be as artful as possible,” an explanation which explains more clearly Plato’s method for understanding nature and for achieving proper knowledge. One must first understand that there are many different kinds of soul, and each one of a certain sort. For that matter, there are also in turn a comparative number of kinds of speech and sorts, each appealing most to people of certain persuasions of soul. The orator must then apply this knowledge to life, take what he or she has a conceptual knowledge of and make use of it. This person will then understand instinctively when a certain speech-act is appropriate and called for.

The difference between those who believe as Socrates says he does and those in the lawcourts is in priority. As the political and justice system existed at that period, Socrates
believes that “one who intends to be an able rhetorician has no need to know the truth about the things that are just or good or yet about the people who are such either by nature or upbringing” (272d). In the lawcourts of the day, such knowledge is unneeded. Care is directed to producing conviction instead of truth. And worse yet, in logical-philosophical terms it is perfectly acceptable to accept probability—what is “likely”—as an indicator of truth over unequivocal proof (272d-e), a determination that he believes the dialectical method can deliver, but that that day’s oratory never could. George Kennedy notes that in the trial courts of this period there existed no professional lawyers on either side of the aisle, and no judge to direct and maintain the kind of order we see today. Instead, he explains, “[t]he jury was the judge and judged both law and fact; there was no appeal from their decision, though cases could be reopened if there was new evidence” (15). From what we have seen of Plato, and from what we know of his resentment over the trial and death of Socrates, his thoughts here could not even be viewed with the kind of mild cynicism that many view law and politics even today.

Plato would instead prefer to stick with this notion of transcendent truth, as it can exist with or without human interference and misinterpretation. One at least has the possibility of comprehending it even a small bit. So, the advantage of knowing the truth, he explains, is an ability to know how best to explain it, as he says before when he explains that one cannot convince others when he has not convinced him or herself: “in every case the person who knows the truth knows best how to determine similarities” (273d). One gets the idea that something is likely, and therefore worthy of making a decision regarding it, by its similarity to the truth. This he explains—or imagines explaining—to Tisias, supposed co-founder with Corax of the formal study of rhetoric. In this explanation through Socrates Plato offers his final judgment of rhetoric. The conditions under which one could properly learn the art of speaking are indeed definite, but
also broad: “[n]o one will ever possess the art of speaking, to the extent that any human being can, unless he acquires the ability to enumerate the sorts of characters to be found in any audience, to divide everything according to its kinds, and to grasp each single thing firmly by means of one form” (273d-e). Additionally, the burden of effort to do so would be greater than any “sensible man” would be willing to bear, an effort, as he describes it, that would require one “to speak and act among human beings, but so as to be able to seal and act in a way that pleases the gods as much as possible” (273e). The master-slave analogy, he judges, is the best way to understand this.

They decide to move to writing as a craft, to what makes it good and what makes it “inept”—certainly a useful discussion regarding the main topic of this dissertation and ancillary to the subject of rhetoric. This is particularly interesting since writing exists during this period in a state of relative infancy. Socrates maintains that writing contributes to the atrophy of memory, the material of its users being “external and depend[ing] [upon] signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own” (275a). With writing “you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality” (275a). All of this he takes from another imaginary conversation between Thamus and Thoth on the subject of writing.4 Words for Plato are thoughts taken out of proper context and can at best serve as reminders for those who heard them in the first place, an argument that is in keeping with most of the media studies scholarship of the present day. We cannot expect from writing, he argues, much that is “clear or certain” because of this, and furthermore, we cannot get anything more out of writing because the author cannot be interrogated: “it continues to signify just that very same thing forever” (275d-e). The best use for writing, he contends, is writing such as Plato does in composing the Phaedrus, the kind of writing that is useful for one to look back on as a reminder
of good and just thoughts that he once had (perhaps when he was less forgetful) and as a 
stimulant to further philosophical discussion. This kind of discourse he likens to a seed, one that 
grows and pays dividends of usefulness and intellectual pleasure. From there he ends rather 
stodgily, arguing against the undue attention paid to the composition of speeches for amusement 
only and giving a rather optimistic assessment of the career for a then-young Isocrates.

From these two major works Plato’s position on rhetoric, technē, and virtue seem clear 
and fairly self-consistent. Knowledge for him, and craft as an active extension of it, draws its 
strength from virtue and from truth. Rhetoric cannot be a technē from his point of view for this 
very reason. Rhetoric and oratory as a study serve to obscure truth and to meet the ends of the 
individual speaking. Virtue in this sense is fixed and thereby unrefinable.

Gorgias, Sophistry

It might be difficult to imagine a period in history where two groups are so fundamentally 
opposed—politically, professionally, theoretically—as the sophists were with Plato and Socrates. 
The sophists during his period were real pragmatists, Gorgias and Protagoras being possibly the 
best known today as then, with the possible addition—depending on your point of view—of 
Isocrates. From Plato’s point of view the function of the sophist in society is to mislead and to 
take advantage of certain institutions and certain human weaknesses for personal gain. He 
complains about this in great detail in the Gorgias. John Poulakos has a more generous view, 
however, that historically “they spring up not simply as a result of a conducive climate but in 
order to address particular circumstances and to fulfill certain societal needs” (12). The sophists 
flourished during this period not only because of a political switchover from aristocracy to 
democracy, but also, in a culture that for all of its massive cultural change still placed a premium
on skill and generosity, there was a real need to represent oneself favorably and skillfully in public discourse.

Sophistry during this period speaks to the subjects of virtue and technê in the sense that they provide the counterpoint to Plato’s position and in so doing open the middle ground for Aristotle to occupy. The sophists all seem to locate virtue in a less cosmic realm, which could be as owing to human limitation as it is to their metaphysics. Nevertheless, we find with the sophists and their sense of virtue a certain moral and ethical malleability that we do not find with Plato. This necessarily means that there need be no moral scruples regarding the question of whether rhetoric is a technê or not, especially when virtue is largely context-specific. In terms of rhetoric, as with any other subject of intellectual study, the way one goes about being persuasive is as open as anything else.

Fundamentally the sophists also continue the Skeptical tradition begun by Protagoras. They agree with Plato that, as Patricia Bizzell puts it, “human knowledge relies solely on sense perception and is therefore necessarily flawed” (22), but along with that is the sense that “[c]ertainty or absolute truth is not available to humans […]”, but probable knowledge can be refined by pitting opposing positions against one another and examining the arguments thus brought forward” (Bizzell 22). This means that philosophically their sense of “taking advantage” presented them with no ethical difficulties, especially since being relatively cosmopolitan, their circumstances called for a diversity of rhetorical situations: “they believed and taught that notions of ‘truth’ had to be adjusted to fit the ways of a particular audience in a certain time and with a certain set of beliefs and laws” (Jarratt xv).

This policy of “taking advantage” has its roots in the ancient Greek notion of kairos. Poulakos describes it as coming out of the dual concepts of to prepon and to aprepes (the
appropriate or proper and the inappropriate or improper, respectively), the first of which “relies on normative standards of speech, and speaks in terms of familiar topoi […], which address a situation in its typicality, its resemblance to prior and similar situations,” the second of which is the direct opposite (60-61). Both are formulated through use and precedent and result in the establishment of standard oratorical practices and contexts. To that end, as Poulakos further explains, in both instances we have a situation where “the uniqueness of a given situation” gets sacrificed in favor of a higher regard for taking personal advantage (61). Kairos itself he describes in far less cynical terms than Plato or Socrates would in part as an allusion “to the realization that speech exists in time and is uttered both as a spontaneous formulation of and a barely constituted response to a new situation unfolding in the immediate present” (61).

Fundamentally we find kairos to be a functional term, describing a rhetorical approach that is cognizant of and in turn responds to oratorical norms. A rhetor who speaks with this kind of awareness recognizes the uniqueness of a given situation and has a certain advantage of persuasion.

One can imagine what effect a speech by a sophist of this period would have, particularly in light of this concept. We find a willingness in kairos to treat variably that which philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle take as a given. For Plato the issue is plain to see. Everything that he does is predicated upon the assumption of absolute and transcendent truth and upon the dialectical method of inquiry into it. We derive all that we know from what has already been established and accepted as certain. Kairos goes for what is new and unexplored every time. As we shall see of Aristotle, the response would be similar. As Poulakos notes, kairos being wholly underivative and conceptually improvisational, there exists in such a speech “no ready-made audience” (61). Aristotle attaches great importance to making use of all variables of a given
situation, including audience composition, but by way of standard rhetorical practice. Along with knowing one’s audience, Aristotle relies in the *Rhetoric* upon oratorical norms—from genre to style and delivery, and especially to invention techniques—and more importantly, he expects that his audiences will do the same. Small wonder that philosophers would respond so strongly to the sophists’ methods, especially regarding *kairos*, when so much is at stake.

The sophists of this period were no mere mercenaries, however; rather, “[c]aught in the midst of this pervasive change, [they] responded neither as passive observers nor as active resisters but as energetic catalysts, accelerating its rate and enlarging its scope” (Poulakos 13). Small wonder also that Plato would resist this change as the sophists did not, critical as he is of democracy, blaming it for the death of Socrates. The doctrine of *kairos* arises from them in this regard, “the idea that the elements of a situation, its cultural and political contexts, rather than transcendent unchanging laws, will produce both the best solutions to problems and the best verbal means of presenting them persuasively” (Bizzell 24). In a political situation where most of them were far more cosmopolitan than many of their students and often detractors, the sophists contended that, “rather than agonizing over what is proper or improper according to unchanging social rules, people should consider their immediate circumstances and what would be expedient at the moment” (Bizzell 24).

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to describe in detail but the stakes for Plato’s issues with the sophists are political as well as theoretical, and much of it is played out in the hearts and minds of the Greek citizenry, much of which we can trace back to *kairos*. From his point of view,

[b]ecause it is driven by the ignorant masses it caters to, sophistical rhetoric is conceptually deficient; because it emerges in response to the flitting events of the
day, it is inconsistent, unreliable, and of no permanent value; and because it is fueled by the ignoble ambitions of its makers, sophistical rhetoric is suspect.

(Poulakos 80)

He rejects them on these bases and on the grounds that they accepted money for teaching and often professed to teach virtue along with rhetoric, his beliefs in virtue being so wholly different from their own.

Before we explore the application of *kairos* to the workings of *technê*, there is also the important issue of *dissoi logoi* to contend with and apply. *Dissoi logoi* is fundamental to the beliefs of the sophists because it supposes so much about truth and the language we use to characterize and understand it that the philosophers of the period would disagree with. By consensus we connect *dissoi logoi* most clearly with Protagoras, whom many very carefully regard as “the oldest sophist” and who described that concept as signifying that “there [are] two contradictory arguments about everything” (Jarratt 49). Grammatically, we can say *dissoi logoi are*, just as well as we can say that it *is*, which is to say that in addition to being a term which expresses the notion that there is no single or best way of describing or understanding a thing, it also encompasses the two or more courses of action that we might apply to a given situation.

Another way of describing Protagoras’s take on *dissoi logoi* is to consider what is implied when we talk about truth—whether we capitalize the “t” or express it in lower-case form: Susan Jarratt notes that in Protagoras’s lost work, *Truth*, we know that the subtitle would be *Refutations*, “suggesting that [he] understood *dissoi logoi* to be a means of discovering a truth rather than the expression of a distance from a separate, single Truth within phenomena” (49). His thoughts are very different from Plato’s and Socrates’s in this regard in that he “denies any significance to the existence of phenomena outside the individual human experience” (Jarratt 50). From *dissoi logoi*
one’s outlook would certainly be a subjective one, and it supposes of an orator, for instance, that he or she would know best about what course of action to take, considering such a limited vantage point.

An outlook wherein dissoi logoi plays a fundamental part does not necessarily imply a limited scope, but it does not admit of dogmatism so easily as Plato’s does. Accepting the notion that there are at least two ways of looking at everything supports the “man is the measure of all things” dictum and suggests that “[e]verything that gets said can only be understood in terms of something other, something different, and, more specifically, something opposite” (Poulakos 58). Poulakos goes on further to describe the world of dissoi logoi as “polyvocal,” especially in opposition to the univocal world of transcendental truth. We can acknowledge one or more of the “truths” that dissoi logoi addresses, but the persuasive power of rhetoric allows us to make a choice, whether we are aware of these truths or not:5 “because the imperative to action generally permits only one of the two [options or perspectives] to prevail in a given instance, rhetoric affords people a means through which they can persuade on another to favor, at a given moment, one logos over all others” (Poulakos 58). This is to say the oppositions exist, in opposition to one another, and that we recognize them, or we do not.

Regarding technê the notions of kairos and dissoi logoi do not readily apply for very similar reasons. The concept of kairos is obviously irreconcilable with it. In the way that Nussbaum has described technê, and in what Plato has implied of it, too much is predicated upon habit and precedence for us to ever be fully embracing both concepts simultaneously. Regarding dissoi logoi, technê seems mutually exclusive with it as well. As was explained in the opening of this chapter technê is built always around a supposition that there is a way of doing things the same in every contingency, that for the sake of expediency (perhaps) the answer to a particular
problem is always the same. In this respect there would necessarily be features of rhetoric and
language—rich features of diversity and imagination—*technē* would be unable to accommodate,
for the sake of expediency, but also for the sake of universality.

Notably, the work of the sophists of this period resists categorical and universal
description; they did not operate as a “school,” and they were not the products of an academy.
This is fitting, however, for “[i]nasmuch as the sophists’ purpose was to demonstrate that the
world could always be recreated linguistically, restated in other words, and thus understood
otherwise, the search for their essential doctrines is in vain” (Poulakos 25). When we consider
that writing is very different during this period than it is today, we can understand that much was
written down that did not survive, and what was considered fit to write down then differs from
what we see fit to commit to paper today. The sophists had no real overall doctrine of rhetoric.
Whether this is attributable to the approach to writing then or to their beliefs in rhetoric could not
easily be said. However, the effect is clear. In looking at what has survived we find that “reading
all the pieces as a totality may yield a sensible gestalt, but it will be a gestalt marked by gaps,
breaks, inconsistencies, and contradictions” (Poulakos 54). In a sense sophistic rhetoric resists
systematization historically as well as academically in the way that a *technē* would prefer.

Regarding Gorgias the sophist specifically, we find his thinking not best characterized in
the eponymous dialogue by Plato to say the least. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg
describe a fundamental belief “that provisional knowledge is the only knowledge that we can
attain,” and that “[h]e denied the existence of transcendent essences” (42). In the terms used
above, this means that Gorgias did not believe in the perfect triangle, ship, state of health, or fruit
pastry. Or the perfect speech act, for that matter. More important to the point, however, Gorgias
believed that “if we are to believe anything, we must be distracted from the limitations of
provisional knowledge” (Bizzell 42). For thinkers like Plato, contending with Gorgias’s point of view can be frustrating, and for that matter Gorgias is given no serious consideration as a philosopher. The point that language is deceitful is not a debatable one during this period. Plato and Gorgias would both agree upon that readily. The question at hand is of essence, a metaphysical concept that Gorgias would not accept.

We cannot ignore the theoretical point of view that we find in Gorgias. He forwards a well-known set of paradoxes in “On Nature,” that “[n]othing exists; or if it does exist, we cannot know it; or if we can know it, we cannot communicate our knowledge to another person” (Bizzell 43). This is to say that we cannot come to know anything that transcends our own experience, not with the certainty that we think that we do. We certainly cannot explain them in the way that we understand them. So, necessarily, “human encounters with the world and the exchange of knowledge about it are necessarily limited, provisional, and shared experiences that rely upon a shared deception effected by language” (Bizzell 43).

In the *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias dramatizes the kind of power language wields over its users in his defense of Helen for succumbing to Paris. Bizzell and Herzberg describe this piece as epitomizing the sophistic belief that “[l]anguage creates and changes the opinions that are our only available knowledge” (43). He opens by acknowledging that transgressive behavior is deserving of punishment, but that testimony against her behavior has become “univocal and unanimous.” His purpose he describes as being “to free the accused of blame and, having reproved her detractors as prevaricators and proved the truth, to free her from their ignorance” (2). Most noteworthy from that statement is his use of the term *truth*, a supposition presumably that there is a single or at least *most accurate* interpretation. It is difficult to tell if this is a
rhetorical move, to show strength at such an early stage of his defense, or if it is Gorgias being ironic.

Gorgias’s method is not so very different from Plato’s in the sense that he employs the syllogism and the appeal to nature to make his case, drawing certain conclusions from what seemed then to be the natural order of things. It was predetermined that her fate would be as it was, for “God is a stronger force than man in might and in wit and in other ways” (6). In a sense this was her deceiver, for she had no choice in matters of predetermination. In the process she was “raped and robbed of her country” and had no choice in such a matter either. He even invokes the Platonic notion of unexpected pity, that we should have it for one who has been so unjustly served.

If predeterminism had a hand in Helen’s seduction, it was by way of language that her destiny was brought about. Here Gorgias explains his thinking on language and the powerful effects of it on the human psyche, and where he differs so drastically from Plato in outlook. “Speech is a powerful lord,” he explains, “which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity” (8). He begins by speaking of poetry and of the aesthetic-sympathetic response we have towards its subjects. Through sympathetic response to poetry, he explains, our souls will respond in kind: “[s]acred incantations sung with words are bearers of pleasure and banishers of pain, for, merging with opinion in the soul, the power of the incantation is wont to beguile it and persuade it and alter it by witchcraft” (10). He explains that to persuade necessarily is to offer up a “false argument,” that it is unavoidable since “most men take opinion as counselor to their soul”; and “since opinion is slippery and insecure it casts those employing it into slippery and insecure successes” (11). We cannot fault Helen on such a matter of figurative constraint.
Gorgias finds it apparent that speech impresses upon the soul opinion, but does little for truth and by its operations there makes belief far more subjective than we would hope or realize. He even likens the effects of speech on the soul to pharmacology:

[The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion. (14)]

Similarly Gorgias finds that the soul is impressionable to the extent that any spectacle, good or bad—such as Paris’s beauty, in this instance—is to some degree blameworthy, that in such a case a person’s inappropriate or inadvisable response “should not be blamed as a sin, but regarded as an affliction” (19). Almost certainly the sophists found as much sport in clarifying and supporting unconventional positions such as Gorgias does in the *Encomium of Helen*. It was a big draw for their craft.

Aristotle

Aristotle disagreed with Plato and sided with the sophistic way of thinking in the very important sense that he considered rhetoric a *technē*, reasoning that rhetoric is a counterpart (*antistrophos*) to dialectic, for the very important reason that “both are concerned with such things as are, to a certain extent, within the knowledge of all people and belong to no separately defined science” (28-29). Perhaps part of this reason is that Aristotle realizes that the ends of philosophy cannot be served as Plato would have them served (one browbeating at a time), and
that on occasion it becomes necessary and even helpful to know how to speak to a large audience. But Aristotle also seems more pedantic than Plato, and he realizes in that respect more could be accomplished and a greater depth of knowledge could be attained if one were to operate in a more methodical manner and with less expended energy. He does not deny the legitimacy or usefulness of dialecticism, but he means to say only that what is natural in human behavior is worthy of study and systematization. The formal study of rhetoric for Aristotle, who believes strongly in dialectics and the syllogism, is a way of dealing with probability. He agrees with Plato in the concept of absolute truth and that its persuasive strength is self-evident if given in a way that is appropriate to context: “rhetoric is useful [first] because the true and the just are by nature stronger than their opposites, so that if judgments are not made in the right way [the true and the just] are necessarily defeated [by their opposites]” (34). If anything, he and Plato and other likeminded individuals are never comfortable with probability in the way that the sophists were. He acknowledges that rhetoric belongs to no genus of subject—that it is limited to no particular subject of discourse—and distinguishes between the persuasive motivation of dialectics and rhetoric in that rhetoric’s “function is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case” (35).

Regarding probability in the study of human discourse rhetoric always has the potential to mislead and misinterpret. In Chapter 2 of the Rhetoric, Aristotle carefully defines rhetoric as “an ability […] to see the available means of persuasion” (36). Further he distinguishes it from other arts in the very important sense that they are instructive about their own subjects. Instead, rhetoric can observe “the persuasive about ‘the given’” (37). As Plato was, Aristotle is also not so optimistic as to believe that truth would always or ultimately prevail in human affairs. He
does, however, believe that truth is always persuasive provided that its presentation is honest and appropriate.

Nevertheless, there are useful means of persuasion that involve rhetoric, and most importantly that involve handling rhetoric as an art or as a technē. To be sure, one can be persuasive in an inartistic manner—his examples are making use of witnesses, contracts, and inducing testimony from slaves with the use of torture—but to be sure there are artistic, reliable methods of ensuring a relatively reliable argument. One can make use of his or her ethos, logic (logos), or could even exploit a sympathetic dimension to the issue (pathos), so long as truth is served. For, as Aristotle describes rhetoric here, an artistic, persuasive piece is in truth a dressed-up syllogism, given unabstractive. From these artistic methods, he says, we can observe that “rhetoric is a certain kind of offshoot of dialectic and of ethical studies (which it is just to call politics)” (39). Rhetoric is an art which both produces (like poetics) and is practical. He acknowledges that, when handled unsophisticatedly, rhetoric can be perverted into kinds of perversities limited only by the kind of perversity that the human soul will allow, but also “[r]hetoric is partly dialectic, and resembles [dialectics] […]; for neither of them is identifiable with knowledge of any specific subject, but they are distinct abilities of supplying words” (39-40). The difference, then, is in the context in which those words are supplied, for in either case the imperative is persuasion.

And it is the notion of imperative that also seems to be inherent in technē. Any craftlike activity necessarily carries along with it a sense of urgency that animates it artificially. One might say that this urgency stands in the place of self-justification. In the world of English composition studies today we might call that need for justification “the pedagogical imperative,” among other things, for there is a multiplicity of imperatives in almost all human activity. When
considering rhetoric as something other than a technê, we disencumber ourselves of that need to some extent, and we disencumber ourselves of all sorts of needs that we have simply learned to live with over centuries of rhetoric-technê. A complex dynamic of means and end develops around an activity when it becomes a technê. As we see here we find from its earliest stages the notion of technê circling around this sort of “will to virtue” inherent to it. This notion exists, once again, latent in any craft; it is not inherent only to rhetoric or to writing. It also predates Aristotle. However, Aristotle brings virtue to the table here in a fashion and with a deliberateness that cannot be found elsewhere.

From there Aristotle fleshes out his notion of the rhetorical act as a dressed-up syllogism in his explanation of how, in artistic speech, there are parts which correspond to principles of logic—the example (paradeigma) corresponding to induction and the enthymeme to syllogism being his examples—the presence of each part in speech again depending upon the judgment of the speaker on what would best suit his or her audience and his or her character. Later we see a genus-species breakdown of all parts of rhetoric, most notably his discussion of the topics, which he is uncomfortable with but sees as a necessary

Another useful place to consult Aristotle on this topic is the Nicomachean Ethics, particularly regarding his discussion of “Intellectual Virtue” in Volume VI. He restates from before in his discussion of moral virtue that “there are two parts of the soul—that which grasps a rule or rational principle, and the irrational” (138). Categorical definition is a favorite technique of Aristotle’s, and one that applies to the rhetoricians of the eighteenth century as well. Of this rational principle, he explains that there are two parts of that: the first he calls calculative, or “one by which we contemplate the kind of things whose originative causes are invariable”; and the second he calls scientific, or “one by which we contemplate variable things” (138). If the
nature of a thing is invariable or irrational, then one cannot deliberate on it; she or he can only understand it or not understand it. Of virtue here regarding any principle or object, its goodness or badness is “relative to its proper work.” That is, insofar as the intellect goes, virtue is relative to its rational apprehension of truth.

He goes on directly after to list the “Chief Intellectual Virtues”—art, scientific knowledge, practical wisdom, philosophic wisdom, and intuitive reason—and to situate them briefly in relation to what he has been saying of virtue. Though he lists art first, he opens by discussing scientific knowledge, and what he has to say about that informs the rest of this section, especially regarding the object of intellectual virtue. He opens by acknowledging that, unless we take seriously the mission of rational, scientific inquiry, what we know of the sensory world is all that we would expect to know, and we are limited in knowledge to what we observe being and happening first-hand. There are certain universals, however, that are not relative to experience, and through rational processes of induction and deduction, these truths may be ascertained, and once ascertained worked from to produce new knowledge. “Scientific knowledge,” he determines, “is, then, a state of capacity to demonstrate” (141).

Aristotle’s definition of scientific knowledge can be useful when we consider technē, especially regarding Nussbaum’s last two criteria: precision and concern with explanation. His discussion of the next intellectual virtue, art, proves even more enlightening. There he opens by differentiating between “things made” and “things done” (141). One can easily imagine here under which categories the crafts Plato discusses oratory and medicine falling. These two categories are different in nature, he explains, “so that the reasoned state of capacity to act is different from the reasoned state of capacity to make” (141). Art, he explains, is a reasoned state of capacity to make. Art is a logical step following the apprehension of some idea; it is the act of
bringing that idea into being, “with contriving and considering how something may come into being which is capable of either being nor not being, and whose origin is in the maker and not in the thing made” (141). This means that the product of art would be something which originates from the mind of the artist and not something which comes in to being on its own, or naturally. In those cases the motive of the object’s origin is inherent in it. Regarding virtue, and in being concerned with making, art involves “a true course of reasoning, and lack of art on the contrary is a state concerned with making, involving a false course of reasoning” (142).

For again, all things natural aim at good. This is the given with which Aristotle opens the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Though for Aristotle we live in a reality governed by sensorial misperception—in Plato’s cave—we do have rational processes with which we may apprehend what is good and what is natural. It cannot be stressed strongly enough that all naturally-occurring things are good is a foundational supposition of human endeavor, and of *technē* particularly. This comes even before rationality. These are founding principles of our treatment of writing. There are ethical considerations concerning millennia-old metaphysics that we might take issue with at work in our thinking about writing, especially when we take it for granted that it is a *technē*. To accept even (especially, really) tacitly the notion that rhetoric is a *technē* requires us also to accept the supposition that all that occurs in human activity has a positive and transcendent corollary.

It means also that, regarding composition, we would have to suppose that when our students come to us in conference the day before the essay is due with nothing in hand and say to us, tapping their skulls, that “I don’t have it written, but it’s all up here,” we must accept that as a valid explanation. That a composition could exist in one’s head and needs only to be written supposes of composition that it is the act of bringing that about, of transcribing one’s thoughts,
that the entirety of the piece actually exists, *all of a piece*, in the composer’s mind. We would have to accept, also, that what we call the writing process is a bit of a farce.

That is what we must confront of composition as a discipline when regarding writing as an Aristotelian *teknē*. But what are the implications regarding language? All seem to agree, from Socrates onward, that the operations of language in the human mind are anything but rational. The most rationally idealistic through the years have dreamed of developing a language, inducted from the operations of the human mind and of natural truth, which could communicate perfectly.

Again, Aristotle is much less like Plato than we might usually suppose. He opens the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the observation that “[e]very art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim” (1). He goes on from there under the first heading to begin describing, with a vision of great hierarchical detail, what might not be so apparent in that day: that is, while all activities aim at some good, there are a multiplicity of specific ends. This is to say that, while a shipbuilder’s work is good—and in his actions he aims at doing good in the performance of his work—his actions are also aimed at producing a ship. Further, there are many ends which overlap with other human pursuits—bridle-making, for instance, being concerned not only with the art of riding, but also with military action and strategy—and many more which subordinate themselves to other arts. Some ends can be ranked in importance, also, the end of good for a man being superseded by the good of the state, for instance.

*Technē* for Aristotle is simultaneously simple and complicated in this way. At bottom there is a natural state of good in all things. His definition of rhetoric, that it is the art of finding the best available means of persuasion: the most interesting part of this statement in this context
is that he supposes that there always will be a \textit{best} way. He does not disagree with Plato in principle that a state of perfection exists for all things in theory and that we cannot apprehend this truth with the sole use of our native instincts and intellects. His characterization of the natural order differs in a very important way, however. One might begin by analyzing the metaphors they employ and describe them geometrically. Where Plato has the inverted gyre from the \textit{Phaedrus}, the myth of the charioteer, Aristotle’s model is much less grand, but much more complicated for all of it. Plato’s focus is upon the light of truth. Aristotle takes this as a given, but is more interested in developing a method for understanding it. He sees things in hierarchies. The nature of a thing can be determined by him in a grander scheme, by understanding its \textit{function} in an observable set of circumstances. One might be involved in the process of building a ship, for instance, a process at the end of which one might find a ship practically identical to the ship before and just after (but not necessarily so), but not through any skilled efforts might this person actually produce a ship. This person might be a sailmaker, a hullmaker, or any other variety of craftspersons who contribute eventually to the making of a ship. The practical end of their combined work ultimately is a ship, however. What has come to be termed current-traditionalism, for instance, accepts this notion readily, that one could compartmentalize his or her efforts in composition, focusing on style here, mechanics there. Likewise, what has come to be termed cognitivism envisions an apparatus of recursive cognitive mechanisms, all working together to produce a thought expressible from the simplest of expressions to the most complex.

Aristotle does not leave off there, however. One’s work might lead to the production of a ship, again practically speaking, but this person is also a function in this case of the larger Greek war machine, and if the ship has a multi-purpose function it might be the Greek economy; and through his work this person contributes his or her part the Greek society at large and plays a role
in the nature of its *ethos*. The craftsman’s impact on society is greater on a personal scale than on a societal one, to be sure, but not less essential for all of it. In Aristotle’s view, a single act and a single person can function differently, depending on the larger reality of which it is a functionary.

In the end, this is what a *technē* will always do, whether we accept the Platonic model or the Aristotelian. It takes what is considered natural, rationalizes it, and then turns its interest into production and improvement. As Vickers points out, rhetoric, which he calls “the art of persuasive communication, has long been recognized as the systematization of natural eloquence” (1). It depends from there only in which direction we choose to direct our efforts in the study of it. Do we choose to understand why a particular oratorical act worked or did not work? Or do we choose from there to turn those conclusions toward the production of new and unforeseeable rhetorical acts? In this respect we have the rhetoric of the Aristotelian and Ciceronean traditions competing with that of the sophists.

At the heart of the debate over philosophy and rhetoric lie the complexities of subject formation, a topic which will be revisited repeatedly throughout. As John Poulakos notes succinctly of the sophists of classical Greece, “their focus was on the affairs of the polis, not the affairs of the mind” (27), that instead of approaching knowledge as a means to achieving something internal, they “emphasized the primacy of logos as the medium circulating between human beings and constituting both human beings and the world” (15). Philosophy supposes truths that transcend human affairs, whereas rhetoric, in the sense that the sophists understood it, supposes a reality that is utterly inconstant. Such an approach supposes an interaction with language that changes us, and in turn gets changed *by* us as users of it.
In terms of *technē* the significance of this observation is plain to see. To make a *technē* of rhetoric is to suppose of language that there is something constant about it. Plato and Aristotle are both very interested in dialecticism because of its rationality. Though the questions themselves are linguistic in dialectics, they are worded in such a way that the answers to them could only be one of two things, and they suppose a truth and a justice from which to contrast the subject of inquiry. From Nussbaum’s criteria of *technē*, this supposes of language that it can be made to signify truth, but only by the shortest of increments. Plato and Aristotle were not satisfied that all individuals would have been able to grasp the dialectical method in a way that would make it universally effective, but they were also living in a time very different from our own. Logicians as well as rhetoricians have been trying to perfect such a linguistic system ever since, and as we see in the next chapter, the Enlightenment period brought new solutions to the table, and with no less mixed results.
CHAPTER TWO:

THE ROLE OF HUGH BLAIR AND OF TECHNÉ IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRENT-TRADITIONALISM

With regard to techné, the classical tradition continues doctrinally unaltered to the dawn of the eighteenth century, though there are some fundamental alterations that begin to take place two or three centuries before with the dawn of the Modern Age. During the period before, in Roman times, Cicero systematizes rhetoric by dividing it into five principle parts, and Quintilian outlines the ideal education of a person, from virtual infancy to late adulthood, with rhetoric as his centerpiece. In the sixteenth century, Petrus Ramus responds to tradition by divorcing thought from expression, effectively arguing that invention and most of structure—the first two arts of Cicero’s five—are separable from the others on the grounds that, a speech being effectively a dressed-up syllogism, logic and rhetoric are two irreconcilable academic areas. It began to occur to scholars by this point once again that knowledge and expression were separable, and the study of rhetoric seemed increasingly to limit itself in scope.

The most important offshoot of this kind of thinking is that we would have to reconsider what Plato has said about philosophy and dialectics and what Aristotle calls “intellectual virtue” in the Nicomachean Ethics. Ramus champions dialecticism as an appropriate methodology for a number of scholarly disciplines. Of virtue this means that, the arts being methodologized, a new type of virtuosity is introduced. Whereas before, where the measure of virtue was determined by one’s scope of knowledge, now this did not have to be the case. Any system contained its own logic, but did not necessarily have to be understood in context of political and metaphysical
concerns. Virtue and wisdom were no longer rolled into one. Regarding intellectual virtue, this old sense of virtue was displaced in one field after another with a different kind of virtue, and such was the case for rhetoric. It being long considered a \textit{technē}, the principles of virtue were ingrained in its premises: all of its principle texts were infused with the anticipation of virtue and truth. Their principles were variably refitted to an altered virtuosity, and in the case of rhetoric, scholars turned to aestheticism first on the Continent and then in Great Britain.

Eighteenth-century Scottish rhetorician Hugh Blair would recast rhetoric by emphasizing the application of aesthetic theory to composition and in the process make a new kind of rhetoric \textit{technē}. We know that as a Common Sense philosopher and educator of the Enlightenment Blair was instrumental in bringing belles lettres from the Continent. In the process the groundwork was laid for a formulation of education and writing sensitive to the tasteful operations of effective written prose. Nowhere has his rhetoric made a more lasting impact than in the publication of his \textit{Lectures on Rhetoric} (1783), upon his retirement from teaching.

The topic of this dissertation more properly speaking is written composition as a \textit{technē} and how that supposition is so philosophically fundamental to English composition. Although the formation of English composition is one far too complex to describe in any one project, this project begins supposing Hugh Blair to be a foundational figure in the formation of modern English composition. His contributions to the field of rhetoric have not been so widely praised, though they are distinctive.

Blair’s rhetoric did not emerge independently, however. Many scholars regard him as more of a master synthesizer than an original thinker. A few words must be given to two major influences on it, to give a sense of his thinking: Adam Smith and George Campbell. In the case of Smith we have an individual who was instrumental in pushing belles lettres to the forefront of
the new course curriculum and providing the rationale for its conclusion, and in the case of Campbell we have an individual who was first willing to apply the mechanics of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to the study of rhetoric and of the rationalism and methodology of science in general.

There have been more original and innovative thinkers and lecturers during this period than Blair, but this dissertation proposes that he is the most useful for this discussion because of his popularity in and subsequent practical influence on the development of English composition during the nineteenth century, especially in the North American academy, but also because his detailed explanation for what has been called “the refinements of taste” offer us a blueprint for the changeover from ancient virtue to modern taste. Blair might have been more of a synthesizer than an innovator, and his arguments might have fundamental flaws and inconsistencies, but they give us the best available glimpse now into the early modern mind on this topic and its wranglings with classical texts in a very specific and concrete fashion.

If we consult the scholarship we will find no shortage of arguments connecting the belletrism of Blair and his likeminded colleagues from this period to the development of the modern English department and to the rhetorical stance of dispassionate insight into literature. We also find plenty which has been said on the relationship of taste to literary study, that it provides us with a framework for appreciating art with an objective distance and a sense of its importance in a less personal, more systemic way. What the scholarship is missing, however, seems to be the linkages among taste, virtue as the classics understand it, and craft as it pertains to writing. As with last chapter we will visit the primary texts from this period that speak to these issues specifically, and in doing so we will consult what Blair has to say about taste, what Campbell has to say about psychology and about the significance of his cognitive methods, and
by contrasting their more modern views on these topics to those of the ancients on the subjects of virtue and craft, we can discover something new: that these changes are not only adjustments to suit a different era, but also they are a continuance of the limitations imposed upon rhetoric when it was first posited as a craft.

Belles Lettres and the Legacy of Classical Virtue

At its origin point we find “belles lettres” to be a French literary term, the eighteenth-century English equivalent phrase for it being “‘polite learning,’ ‘fine letters,’ and ‘fine learning,’ and later it became a naturalized English term in its own right” (Howell 520). The French scholar René Rapin was instrumental in the development of this aesthetic system, and Howell credits Adam Smith for bringing rhetoric and belles lettres together. It was even thought by Ernest Campbell Mossner later when Smith’s lectures were discovered that they were against rhetoric, “taking rhetoric as the ancient logic of multiplicity of divisions and subdivisions” (qtd. in Howell 546), but Howell contends “that Smith not only identified himself with [rhetoric] but also through his efforts sought to bring it into partnership with the needs of his own day,” and that Smith’s so-called “‘anti-rhetoric’ is therefore not in truth the opposite of rhetoric, but the very essence of rhetoric as he conceived of it in its modern form” (546).

Smith’s instantiation of belles lettres differs from that of his Continental predecessors, according to Howell, in two senses which are very important to the issue of technē in composition:

First, he made rhetoric the general theory of all branches of literature—the historical, the poetical, the didactic or scientific, and the oratorical. And secondly, he constructed that general theory, not by adopting in a reverential spirit the entire
rhetorical doctrine of Aristotle, or Quintilian, or Ramus, but by selecting from previous rhetorics what he considered valid for his own generation, and by adding fresh insights of his own whenever he saw the need to do so. (547)

Instead of linking rhetoric and belles lettres to the centuries-long rhetorical tradition, Smith gathered what suited him from the French aestheticists and applied it in a fashion that much more recent English-speaking predecessors had: Addison and Steele, a few of whose works in the *Spectator* Blair uses as his primary focus for four of his lectures in the second volume of his course on rhetoric and belles lettres. Smith envisioned belles lettres as a closed system, applicable in the new modern world.

Instead, Smith and his successors chose to see rhetoric “not only as the theoretical instrument for the communication of ideas in the world […], but also as the study of the structure and the function of all the discourses which ideas produce as they seek passage from person to person and from age to age” (Howell 548). It is this second sense that we find the comparison to *technê* the most apparent, especially regarding the part of *technê* which for the sake of its usefulness remains blithely unconcerned about its origin. Smith and his fellow rhetoricians’ structural interest in rhetoric simply reflects a supposition about rhetoric that extended back thousands of years. Both classical rhetoric and Enlightenment rhetoric suppose rhetoric to be a *technê*; they differ only in method in this regard.

Whereas in the past the interest in rhetoric had its roots in an interest in the preservation and reinforcement of the classics, with belles lettres the interest in the past laid in the understanding of proven and effective work with an eye towards generating new work. From the middle ages onward it had been apparent that there were forms of discourse which were unaddressed in the ancient work done on rhetoric and that those forms of discourse had certain
rules that were inconsistent with those of speech-acts. Always those forms had been treated as Aristotle had treated rhetoric, however: as generalized topics. The belles lettres would engender a much more rationalistic, inductive form of rhetoric, where new topics could be applied where necessary and where what was known and observable about the operations of language and the human mind could be rationalized and used progressively.

Nevertheless, what this turnover from deductive to inductive logical predominance and from analytic, open-contextual to belletristic, generative rhetoric signifies for this topic (technē) is that it provides for us a solid sense of rhetoric as being a craft, and not only that, but one in the Ciceronian sense of thinking of one completely comfortable with the notion of specialization. It is as critical that we examine the rhetoric of eighteenth-century Britain as we have of classical Greece for that very reason that, while the ancients lay the groundwork for our understanding of virtue, craft, and knowledge as general rules of living, the eighteenth-century belletrists inhabit these well-worn notions and reinvigorate and reappropriate them with a spirit of modernism and specialization. Further, in doing so they lay the foundations for the twenty-first century English department and the field of composition studies. Most importantly, however, in doing so these Enlightenment-era thinkers inherit those parts of rhetoric-technē that were theoretically problematic for the ancients and no more resolved them than Plato or Aristotle could: the irresolvability of virtue to craft and the resistance of language to systematization.

James L. Golden and Edward P.J. Corbett open their introduction to their excellent collection of *The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately* by styling them as “the triumvirate of British rhetoricians who came at the end of a long tradition of rhetoric which had its beginning in fifth-century Greece” (1). Almost certainly these three rhetoricians were there when new ideas about classical rhetoric were no longer being had.
To some extent it is likewise critical that it be noted that Blair and Campbell particularly were Scottish and were delivering their lectures in a newly energized Scottish academy which was very different from the English academy, and furthermore, much closer in institutional administration and academic perspective to what would become of the American academy that it was to the English academy then as well as now. Those students Blair and Campbell taught in Scotland were motivated from a largely provincial frame of mind, and the faculty there turned to more avant-garde, Continental theory as a model rather than to the English academic tradition.⁶ One might say, to this extent, that the roots of compositional virtue—however, whenever, and wherever that may be described—lie at least partially in a certain sense of provincialism. To that extent it might be said that the perspective of the eighteenth-century Scottish academy was complicated by the fact that it originates from, and was fed to, the minds of individuals whose perspectives were a blend of reaction to British dominion, and simultaneously were an interest in the perpetuation and growth of British political and cultural expansion. Regarding virtue and technē, this surely means a disciplinary ethos which fosters an affinity for the avant garde and a skeptical perspective on tradition.

Part of the reason for this adaptation of rhetoric to belles lettres was political and cultural, but another part had to do with a change in the linguistic media; for perhaps nothing necessitated the rise of belletrism more than the increases in literacy which attended, among other things, a rising middle class and increased access to relatively inexpensive reading material. Golden and Corbett see belles lettres as one of three eighteenth-century responses to the now seemingly defunct classical tradition, the others first being a stubborn adherence to the classics and the second becoming an elocutionist: it was thought that rhetoric could be brought to bear on the liberal arts in general, as those “disciplines share a common interest in taste, style, criticism, and
sublimity […]” and “seek to instruct the student to become an effective practitioner and judge in written and oral communication” (8).

The belles lettres seemed like a reasonable middle ground for these humanists. To one degree or another the classics could be refitted to apply to the modern world, and not discarded at all. Among other things Blair found his point of departure on very practical terms which flowered into more theoretical ones when studied more closely. For one Blair did not think the “vehement” tone and agonistic stance of classical judicial oratory becoming to a speaker of any stripe in the eighteenth century (Howell 660). He considered these features outmoded. It must be remembered that Blair was a moderate and considered popular as a minister, as Golden and Corbett have noted, partly because his sermons “did not unsettle the congregation with constant reminders of such Calvinistic doctrines as those on original sin, total corruption, a priori election, and damnation” (24). Blair’s ethos functions prominently in his public life as it does for his intellectual consistency.

However, he makes one adaptation that is certainly more superficial when he moves to undermine the ancient three-part taxonomy of style—plain, middle, and grand—opting instead to problematize the lines of distinction and the necessity of speaking in the grand style altogether. There are subtle differences in the speaker’s attitude and beliefs and in the audience’s aforementioned expectations that render such a rigid system of stylistic modes unnecessary and ultimately unwelcome, a liability to the ethos of the speaker. This point he inherited from Smith (Howell 653). The ethos being formulated by the Scottish belletrists of the period ultimately plays an important role in shaping the way scholarly ethos developed in the academy, and many regard it as the original rationalization for, and the intellectual point of departure from, the
objective and relatively dispassionate scholarly ethos which dominated the better part of
twentieth-century letters.

It must be said that Blair skirts a number of sticky issues in his lectures, particularly those
that deal in metaphysical matters. For this reason he is always criticized for superficiality.
Howell calls it an “insufficiency” of his work that Blair chooses not to connect eloquence with
the truth or falsehood of a rhetorical act, the moral grounds on which a given argument is made,
taking it—its “goodness” or “badness”—as a given (655). This is very much akin to his
complicated and slightly convoluted explanation of the nature and function of taste in his early
lectures and to his notions of virtue; Blair leans very heavily on the authority of the classics in
this regard in what amounts to a circular logic: the argument (or sentiment) is true because of the
virtue of its speaker, and the virtue of its speaker is sound because of the trueness of its reasoning
(and the sincerity of its sentiment).

As for reasoning and knowledge itself he finds the syllogism useful, reassigning it and its
function in argument (deduction) the term “synthesis” while reassigning the inductive function
“analysis,” depending on the practicality of its inclusion in a rhetorical act. This is very
Aristotelian in a sense, always angling for the best means of persuasion. Blair finds himself here,
as elsewhere, adapting a rhetorical scenario to meet the needs of the masses. A speaker may find
himself or herself speaking to an audience with little patience for or interest in empirical facts,
who are apparently unable (or unwilling at least) to make the logical leap to a necessary
conclusion (Howell 662).

In the end for Howell, Blair seems not to have contributed anything at all to rhetorical
theory except for in his application of it to writing, where his lectures on taste function as an
apparatus on how to appreciate compositions designed to please and move (670-671). Ultimately
Howell acknowledges Blair to be “a humanistic scholar,” concentrating on all aspects of developing an orator, rather than a “narrow technician” (667), the etymology of which word is not lost here, in light especially of the issue of technê. Blair bases his rhetoric upon the classical tradition, and all the implications regarding virtue surrounding it. In this respect we must consider that the mission of the academy in this period was still interested in personal growth and development, and the trend of professionalization was much weaker. Regardless, when one examines Blair’s lectures, an element of professional compartmentalization can be easily found, a trend which as we have noted earlier allows us to direct our sense of virtue to other parts of human endeavor, just as easily as we can divide technê into smaller, more particular, less holistic parts. In this respect, though Blair does not call it that—in fact, as we shall see, he resists it—we can easily imagine an ethical code for any technê. Many who adapted Blair’s rhetoric later accepted perspicuity, for instance, as a writerly virtue, not seeing fit it seems to further reconcile it with the classical tradition and the modern adaptations that ultimately brought it about. More than anything else, as we shall see, this adaptation of virtue is owing to the reappropriation and re-visioning of rhetoric to suit more modern and scholastic interests and sensibilities.

A few more words must be said about belles lettres in order to establish its relationship with virtue and technê. A fundamental supposition of belles lettres is that there are qualities of good writing which can be apprehended through refinements of a certain faculty of the intellect called taste. Taste is a faculty common to all humans that allows us to recognize in any aesthetic object—painted, sculpted, written, or otherwise—qualities about it which are excellent by standards which are much more difficult to determine. Hugh Blair goes to great lengths to articulate the formation of standards of taste in his lectures. Taste plays a very prominent role in Blair’s rhetoric. After the Introduction in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, in fact, he
makes it the first chapter in the course of study. “Taste,” he says, “may be defined ‘The power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art’” (1: 20). Immediately afterward he recognizes the difficulty in determining whether it is “an internal sense” or “an exertion of reason,” where it exists relative to individual human understanding. Blair defines reason as “that power of the mind which in speculative matters discovers truth, and in practical matters judges of the fitness of means to an end”; and insofar as this is the case, “nothing can be more clear, than that Taste is not resolvable into any such operation of Reason” (1: 20). Taste is a sense common in all humans to one degree or another, is irrational, and is “ultimately founded on a certain natural and instinctive sensibility to beauty [contra “reason”], yet Reason […] assists Taste in many of its operations, and serves to enlarge its power” (1: 21). In this way, Blair is able to theorize belles lettres and apply them to rhetoric in a similar fashion as Aristotle was able to with rhetoric. There is an innate sense that we have about being persuasive and about appreciating a well-crafted argument. Taste is a part of that.

The refinements of taste did not emerge into the culture of the academic community new and fully formed, however. They could not have come to fruition were it not for work done On the Sublime, recontextualized in the Enlightenment era. This is a prevailing notion during this period, one with a classical legacy that we can witness from the Spectator and from Alexander Pope’s Essay on Criticism and to some extent even further back from his Essay on Man. The prevailing sentiments of the period about transcendent prose rested with On the Sublime. Certainly the notion of transcendence, as we see here in Chapter One, did not originate with Longinus, but the attribution of literary transcendence to nature does originate with his work and is a way of establishing a standard above the common perspective, beyond mere persuasive power and into ecstasy.
Though much of the classical sense of things persists in Blair’s rhetoric, there are a number of different ways that we see him differing from the classical tradition, and the first and most obvious initial sense is that taste differs from virtue for the very reason that he gives, that it is not resolvable through reason. He understands reason to be “that power of the mind which in speculative matters discovers truth, and in practical matters judges of the fitness of means to an end” (1: 20). In either case we do have a strong sense of Platonism, but without the metaphysical absolutism that attends it. If we are going to accept taste as a replacement for virtue in the rhetorical tradition during this period, an examination of Blair’s statement on taste’s irrational operations would explain it quite clearly, for function and mechanism in everything from this period from physics to cognition says as much about those scholars’ motivations as it does about their understanding of the principle matters of the universe.

We might locate his understanding of taste somewhere between Plato’s sense of rhetoric and his sense of truth. Blair begins to explain: “[i]t is not merely through a discovery of the understanding, or a deduction of argument, that the mind receives pleasure from a beautiful prospect or a fine poem. Such objects often strike us intuitively, and make a strong impression, when we are unable to assign the reasons of our being pleased” (1: 20). Aesthetic response is certainly subjective for a bellettrist like Blair. This is not to say that universal truth and meaning cannot be derived through the study of respondents across a wide swath of people in different places and times, however. One might argue that Blair is a bit more like Aristotle in these regards. He argues that anyone has the capability of feeling and responding strongly to a beautiful experience, “[h]ence the faculty by which we relish such beauties, seems more nearly allied to a feeling of sense, than to a process of the understanding” (1: 20). This sense, as he calls it purposefully, operates as any of the five senses do, to a certain extent, though attending it are
rules of accuracy and propriety that are a bit more complicated and the very reasons for delivering these lectures to begin with. Presumably belletrism would refine a person’s sense of aesthetic taste in the same way that wine connoisseur (for instance) would refine his or her sense of taste in the physical and intellectual sense, understanding wine both intuitively and abstractly. This is Blair’s meaning when he explains, as above, that reason “assists Taste” and “serves to enlarge its power.”

It seems that some have the Platonic “knack” for appreciating something tasteful than others, but we all possess the gift of taste in one degree or another. In this sense Blair is resorting to the prevailing cognitive theory of the period, faculty psychology. “It is no less essential to man to have some discernment of beauty,” he explains, “that in is to possess the attributes of reason and of speech” (1: 22). The foundational model of faculty psychology is Aristotelian in some respects; it is of a hierarchy of the mind, though their understanding of the biological operations of it seems inexact, wherein sense and stimulus enters the figurative mind mechanism, the operations of which are predictable, universal, and more or less rational. At any rate, the strength of each faculty—taste, in this instance—differs from person to person, he explains. The fundamental belief that Blair inherits from Locke is that all undefective minds operate from the same mechanical principles but differ in output from each other depending on what experiences are had.

He begins to set the stage for an argument that supports a chauvinistic, or at least classist, position, implying like Plato that there are some humans inherently wiser or more perceptive to truth or beauty than others. To some extent, also, the gift of taste, and other gifts likewise of the “ornamental part of life,” varies in degree; and “[i]n the distribution of those talents which are necessary for man’s well-being, Nature hath made less distinctions among her children” (1: 23-
24). This notion he raises and moves along from in the space of only one whole page; he finds
the notion of an inherent deficiency regarding aesthetic apprehensiveness wholly credible. This
is not unusual for the period, certainly, but it bears mentioning because it underlines a way of
understanding human nature that is very consistent with classical thinking. This notion also
seems noteworthy in light of the present debate over Blair’s legacy in rhetoric today, particularly
regarding individual student potential.

Nevertheless, taste being a faculty, it is improvable with work and study, and after all, he
acknowledges here, the refinements of taste are a main reason for his students attending these
lectures. Here he calls specific attention to the cultural differences between “barbarous” and
“civilized” nations and bases his position on the refinement of cultures relative to the number of
those educated among them, “on the superiority which they give in the same nation to those who
have studied the liberal arts, above the rude and untaught vulgar” (1: 24). He has no misgivings
about this position, he is clear to say. The cultural and nationalistic chauvinism expressed here
indicates not only a rather specific and rigid standard of cultural contrast and assessment, but
also it gives Blair and his students a standard by which to judge themselves, especially since the
early eighteenth century is a period of dramatic cultural assimilation in provincial Scotland.

Like any other mental faculty, he believes taste to be improved through exercise. Those
of which faculties we possess that we use out of habit or vocation—sight, for instance, in those
whose jobs require them to “deal in microscopical observations”—become improved at a more
dramatic rate. A refined sense of taste comes from exposure to objects which are beautiful, and
though in the initial stages of education he or she might not recognize the kind of sophisticated
and subtle beauties of a given piece, the apprehension is eventually acquired. The speed and
appropriateness of this acquisition depends largely upon the quality of one’s training and
presumably upon the native instincts for beauty one has. To this end, if we accept taste as a kind of intellectual virtue, Blair’s idea that it can be refined is certainly more Quintilian than Platonic.

Unlike the other sensual gifts, however, with relation to reason taste occupies a difficult space between sensuality and rationality. In that respect Blair finds taste to be enhanced by both: “a thorough good Taste may well be considered as a power compounded of natural sensibility to beauty, and of improved understanding” (1: 27). He explains by resorting to the classical sense of beauty as that which is most likened to nature, but in the process he gives it a modern turn:

the greater part of the productions of genius are no other than imitations of nature; representatives of the characters, actions, or manners of men. The pleasure we receive from such imitations or representations is founded on mere Taste: but to judge whether they be properly executed, belongs to the understanding, which compares the copy with the original. (1: 27)

This is the very cornerstone of literary criticism, and one might argue the effect of professionalizing criticism, or at the very least specializing it. The difference between what Blair is proposing and what Plato and Aristotle did is a very important one. Sensitivity to beauty has always been an indicator of quality or virtue, however virtue was construed at the time. We know, for instance, from George Kennedy that various citizens of the classical period would criticize one another’s speakers on grounds of “flableness” or some other likewise physiological descriptor. The critical tradition had reached a certain stage in history by now, however, which allowed its conventions to solidify, especially since many literary conventions by now spanned the scope of three or more historical eras.

He exemplifies his point about critical perception through our response to the Aeneid, and in so doing provides us with the model on which he believes the mind to be operating. Regarding
literary art, the difference between sense and reason in our response to the *Aeneid*, a part of “the canon” of Western literature, is explained: “[w]e are pleased, through our natural sense of beauty. Reason shews us why, and upon what grounds, we are pleased” (1: 28). “Understanding” is the faculty of our minds which he places at the top of the hierarchy of operations in it which operate rationally. The understanding is a complicated mixture of reason and knowledge, both of which can co-exist in an idea because it is thought here that experience of the natural world—of a reality whose rules exist with or without our sense or acknowledgement of them—is rationally describable. Regarding taste, “[w]herever in works of Taste, any resemblance to nature is aimed at; wherever there is any reference of parts to a whole, or of means to an end […] , there the understanding must always have a great part to act” (1: 28). The point of interaction between reason and taste is where taste is purposefully and systematically enlarged and enhanced. This he sees as the “second source of the improvement of taste.” Nature and beauty are interconnected, and though that which is unnatural might please momentarily—“false beauties,” he calls them—that which is naturally beautiful can withstand the pressures of rational scrutiny.

Blair specifically credits the improvement of taste to practice and reason. “In its perfect state, it is undoubtedly the result both of nature and of art,” he explains. “It supposes our natural sense of beauty to be refined by frequent attention to the most beautiful objects, and at the same time to be guided and improved by the light of the understanding” (1: 29). This interplay he describes between nature and art appears repeatedly in his lectures and is fairly consistent throughout. For that matter it is also fairly consistent with what we see of *technē* in the classical era, a craft or art derived from what is perceived to be true about nature, or at the very least a craft or art developed for a more efficient process of understanding.
As a side note he adds of taste, in an observation that rings of virtue in the sense that Plato uses it in the *Gorgias*, that one must balance “a sound head” with a “good heart,” that in other words a true appreciation for beauty originates in an “admiration of what is truly noble or praiseworthy” and in “the proper sympathetic sense of what is soft and tender” (1: 30). Repeatedly, as here, we find Blair softening his rational stance, relying not too heavily on reason to explain everything, and in the process he reconciles taste with the far less pedantic, far more transcendent classical virtue. As Blair explains up front, taste is not reducible only to the operations of reason.

Indeed, the relation of art to nature is so derivative that from certain vantage points the two can seem conceptually indifferent. From his tempered views on rationalism he explains his own hierarchy for the operations of taste, reducing it into to “characters,” delicacy and correctness, each roughly corresponding to the “heart” and “head” parts of good taste, respectively. Of delicacy he describes this part as “principally the perfection of that natural sensibility on which taste is founded” (1: 30). Of correctness he describes it as “the improvement which that faculty receives through its connexion with the understanding” (1: 31). Delicacy in practical matters develops through the exercise of a good sensibility, through the growing sophistication of one whose sense of taste expands to a point where he or she can appreciate finer points of art that normally go by unnoticed. It becomes a matter of practiced precision, in the act of speaking one might even go far as to call it pithiness: “a person of delicate Taste both feels strongly, and feels accurately” (1: 30). Regarding correctness, a person possessing this attribute would, in Blair’s mind, go about carrying around a “standard of good sense which he employs in judging every thing” (1: 31). It seems that this standard would be a composite, an amalgamation of every beauty he or she has ever seen, and in life this vision of perfection would grow and
generalize, but with ever greater clarity; as this person goes along, with the aid of reason, he or she would be able to contrast each new thing with the refined ideal and make a judgment based upon the observation. A person’s sense of correctness would thus be ever defined and assured. Both parts of taste, rational and irrational, play off of one another, he acknowledges, and bear a very close resemblance when examined carefully; but still, for him, they correspond to matters of “nature” and “feeling” in the case of delicacy and matters of “culture and art,” “reason and judgment” in the case of correctness, a distinction which he seems intent on maintaining.

At any rate, Blair’s dichotomy of delicacy and correctness in taste gives us a more complex humanism than Plato perhaps, but in some sense it is quite simplistic. This is true especially regarding the strict hierarchy he foists upon it and the rather rigid dynamics of it. He acknowledges that there in some ways delicacy and correctness appear very similar to one another, and in others they may be virtually indistinguishable; but in the practical, useful sense, we can rely upon the irrational-rational comparison: “Delicacy leans more to feeling; Correctness more to reason and judgment. The former is more the gift of nature; the latter, more the product of culture and art” (1: 32). Such a statement acknowledges a complicated and important interplay, but favors an explicit division of operations in spite of it presumably out of deference to Aristotelian hierarchical order and possibly to convenience or intellectual disinterestedness.

He proposes from there to define taste by contrast, by moving from a view of taste “in its most improved and perfect state” to considering “its deviations from that state, the fluctuations and changes to which it is liable; and to enquire whether, in the midst of these, there be any means of distinguishing a true from a corrupted taste” (1: 32). This is an interesting move for Blair to make because of its symmetry regarding matters of such transcendence. For Plato there is truth and there is the regular state of human affairs. He seldom bothers to explain in great
detail what is not true, unless he is making someone look ridiculous or laying out a syllogistic trap. To suppose that there is a state of affairs where one’s sense of taste could be so corrupted that an entirely independent and new code and standard of beauty could be realized implies not that there is more than one correct way, but instead that rationality and morality have a far more complicated relationship than Plato supposed.

His purpose for this part of his lecture is to best characterize his detractors, and in so doing counter them. Those who disagree with him, he explains, do so on the grounds of taste “being merely arbitrary; grounded on no foundation, ascertainable by no standard, but wholly dependent on changing fancy; the consequence of which would be, that all studies or regular enquiries concerning the objects of taste were vain” (1: 32-33), then citing numerous examples of styles of literature and architecture which were once considered supreme but displaced by successive movements. In the face of this he poses a series of questions which address the difficulties which arise in the face of this fact, all adding up to an acknowledgment that a theoretical, single standard of taste is difficult to support. He begins his detraction of this position by pitting his opening position on relative standards of taste, that, accepting that each person’s opinion is equally valid on any subject, taken to its logical conclusion would be unacceptable and “absurd.” More or less he falls back upon national and intellectual prejudice, holding “Hottentots” and “Laplanders” against Longinus and Addison and “a common news-writer” against Tacitus. Such comparisons he calls “downright extravagance” in his lectures, presumably to the tune of knowing laughter. This is his first volley against arguments of critical relativism, and to a large degree, spelled out figuratively, it seems rather syllogistic.

So his position is one of degree, of maintaining that such statements cannot bear responsible academic scrutiny, though he is unwilling to interrogate certain suppositions instead
of others, especially regarding his baldly nationalistic and arrogant cultural positioning. He continues on a different tack, however, by conceding first that one individual may have a certain preference for and a natural predisposition toward, for instance, one literary genre over others, or style, or tone. This much is true of people and personal taste, that there is no object, “where there is but one conclusion that can be true, and that all the rest are erroneous” (1: 36). Here he makes a very important comparison, and in the process draws another dichotomy: “Truth, which is the object of reason, is one; Beauty, which is the object of Taste, is manifold. Taste therefore admits of latitude and diversity of objects, in sufficient consistency with goodness or justness of Taste” (1: 36). Such a statement is very neatly expressed, and one might argue cynically that his position is a very convenient one: it positions criticism—as the operation and formalization of tasteful response, compared with dialectics or some other form of logical expression as the formal language of philosophy—alongside philosophy as two intellectual endeavors of equal or similar reliability and prestige, but it also admits of nothing definitive.

He does anticipate the pragmatic response and counters with the strong position that there are certain positions on beauty that are irreconcilable, for instance two completely opposing viewpoints on the same object, that it can simultaneously be truly “ugly” and “highly beautiful.” It must be one or the other, he argues. In such a case the matter at hand “is no longer diversity, but direct opposition of Taste” (1: 36). For that matter, regarding diversity of taste, he explains, he is only speaking of genres, periods, and the like in general, but “this admissible diversity of Tastes can only have place where the objects of taste are different” (1: 36). Regarding two opposing viewpoints on the same object, however, “then it is no longer diversity, but direct opposition of Taste that takes place; and therefore one must be in the right, and another in the wrong, unless that absurd paradox were allowed to hold, and that all Tastes are equally good and
true” (1: 36). One can admire Virgil more than Homer, he explains, so long as he or she is
talking about personal preference within the larger scope of the classical epic, but he or she
cannot deny that either is beautiful because the consensus seems to take the opposite position.

In the end, it seems for Blair that there is an ultimate and definitive standard, but he
cannot define it for himself except in the most general terms possible. He can say only what a
standard is—“[a] standard properly signifies, that which is of such undoubted authority as to be
the test of other things of the same kind” (1: 37)—and define taste by virtue of it. Presumably,
since there is no bible or court to hold art against, there is the canon. But again, Blair returns to
nature here to provide his standard: “[t]here is no doubt, that in all cases where an imitation is
intended of some object that exists in nature […], conformity to nature affords a full and distinct
criterion of what is truly beautiful” (1: 37-38). Reason, again, also aids us in exerting the
authority of nature and a means by which we can make the proper comparison of copy to
original. This argument is not without its faults, however, and Blair notices them. “[C]onformity
to nature, is an expression frequently used, without any distinct or determinate meaning” (1:38).
Nature will do fine, in other words, in the abstract, but it seems that now something more “clear
and precise” is called for.

George Campbell and the New Method

George Campbell provides us with what Blair is looking for here in the treatment of
rhetoric radically different in methodology than anything ever done before, for to a large extent
in that regard Blair’s lectures were a continuation of a longstanding academic tradition. There are
some very important differences between what Blair believes about truth, beauty, and virtue than
what Plato believes (for instance). As Kennedy has noted, in fact, all the way back to Aristotle
and Theophrastus the notion of stylistic virtue has been theorized (85). Their methods were fairly similar to Blair’s, also. Campbell, however, took the inductive methodology and applied it to rhetoric wholesale.

To begin with, we will recall, taste—“an internal sense of beauty”—is a naturally-occurring phenomenon, and present to one degree or another in all men and for that matter expanded by reason. Campbell seems not to treat taste fully in his rhetoric, but he does outline what Blair only implies about human cognition. Campbell himself picks up where Locke leaves off and applies those cognitive mechanics to the workings of the human mind to the rhetorical functions of it specifically. He delineates those parts of the human understanding that correspond to it. While taste plays no major role there, in rhetorical purpose or in rhetorical form, much of what he does have to say about the faculty of the imagination addresses beauty, specifically regarding the rhetorical and literary purpose of pleasing. In that respect Campbell offers a larger framework through which Blair characterizes his lectures on the refinements of taste. He does not go into any great detail about Campbell’s work, but again, Blair is a humanist and interested in the faculty of taste as a largely irrational human phenomenon.

As noted above of Campbell, his two 1776 books comprising the whole of The Philosophy of Rhetoric, inform this psychological basis of Blair’s Lectures. Campbell in turn draws from Locke and from the faculty psychology of the period, but he is original in his application of eighteenth-century cognitive science to rhetoric and the operations of it in and upon the human mind. To this end Bizzell and Herzberg note that Campbell’s Philosophy of Rhetoric “has been justly praised as the turning point in the development of rhetoric in the eighteenth century, as the first modern rhetoric, and even as the first real advance in rhetorical theory since Aristotle” (901). His approach to the understanding of the human mind originates in
the seventeenth century with Descartes and the emphasis of the mind and subjectivism, however, and regarding methodology, the privileging of analysis and skepticism over experience and, in the application of rhetoric, *topoi*. Regarding Plato this means that what exists outside of what can be observed with certainty cannot be taken as truth; and regarding Aristotelian methodology, it meant that instead of building upon observation to uncertain truth, all the while with full confidence in what it will lead to, one begins with a hypothesis and analyzes it to determine what is true instead of making assumptions about it, for instance about a causal link. This means that what really is true is not what happens or is felt but what is perceived to be happening; therefore, mind is privileged in all things, and Descartes finds in this a suitable place to begin. Instead, mind and matter do not have to co-depend in the Cartesian system, and all observable phenomena can then operate by strictly mechanical and deterministic natural law, a supposition which has lead to many faulty and misguided scientific detours, one of which was faculty psychology.

The premise of faculty psychology begins with Locke and is that the mind is an open-ended mechanism and that we can understand its operations scientifically as a psychological phenomenon. Like Descartes, Locke differs from classical thinking in that his thinking contradicts “the traditional doctrines of received truth, innate ideas, and the presumption that direct knowledge is available through revelation or perception” (Bizzell 814). Likewise, we see him seconding Descartes and Francis Bacon in maintaining that “[w]e have direct knowledge only of our own ideas […]” and that “[w]e have direct sensations, […] but we know only the *ideas* of these sensations; all other ideas are formed by reflection upon the primary ideas caused by sensory perception” (Bizzell 814). Most importantly, to the extent that cognitive reflection
comprises the entirety of our real knowledge, what notions we have exist as verbal entities and mutual societal obligations.

Though his method might be different from Aristotle’s, however, Locke’s estimation of rhetoric and rhetoricians is no better than Plato’s. That part of language which is the domain of rhetoric is intellectually distasteful to a pragmatist like Locke and an unfortunate side effect to being human. It seems to him that “the use of words were made plain and direct; and […] language, which was given us for the improvement of knowledge and bond of society, should not be employed to darken truth and unsettle people’s rights” (131). Locke differs in that respect from Plato in his enlightenment liberality, however; he takes language to be in its natural state the way Plato only wishes that it could be: a perfect medium of interpersonal communication. In the natural and pristine state, all are rational, minds and language alike. In fact, for Locke rhetorical power seems not altogether necessary: “We should cast off all the artifice and fallacy of words, which makes so great a part of the business and skill of the disputers of this world,” he says; “pretending to the knowledge of things, [we] hinder as much as we can the discovery of truth, by perplexing one another all we can by a perverse use of those signs which me make use of to convey truth to one another” (2: 131-32n). For him rhetoric serves to obscure true knowledge by taking unfair advantage of principles of the human mind and by making use of language for purposes other than the simple communication of information. As an Empiricist of that period Locke is interested in building from what scholars observe to be true, rather than reasoning syllogistically.

In many ways playing Aristotle to Locke’s Plato, Campbell takes Locke’s psychology of the human mind and applies it to rhetoric, not to refute him necessarily but at least to understand the application of rhetoric to what was believed about cognition. Rhetoric as Campbell
understands it in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* “must address all the mind’s faculties—the understanding, the imagination, the passions, and the will—to achieve persuasion” (Bizzell 898). These faculties he finds all at work in the human mind, acting as a mechanism, with a complicated system of checks and balances one upon another, governing the thoughts and actions of the individual. In turn the proper study of rhetoric would be to first understand these operations and by an analysis arrive at some conclusion about how those operations might be manipulated to achieve optimal persuasive power. “In other words,” Bizzell continues of the four faculties, “rhetoric must be able to inform and argue, to provide aesthetic delight, to affect the feelings, and to urge to action” (898). There are certain appeals—scientific and moral, for instance—which affect each faculty differently and more or less strongly, depending, but in all cases each faculty responds to each argument according to its principles.

Regarding *technê* Campbell opens his introduction to his major work with an implicit description of it, arguing for the interdependence of “art” and “science” in human knowledge and endeavor. “All art is founded in science,” he says, “and the science is of little value which does not serve as a foundation to some beneficial art” (lxix). Even the most abstract—the most “sublime”—of sciences contribute in some way to what he there calls “the art of living,” all of which is to say art gives practical purpose to science, which in turn gives structure and “knowledge” back to art. He notes that art and science are often treated separately but sees no need to disconnect the two. For Campbell art and science enlarge the scope of human affairs through this interdependence, simultaneously doing so through study and through use. The fine arts, those of which he makes a subdivision for among the arts general, are those which appeal directly to taste and in the context of Blair are those which are most applicable.
Campbell seems very Aristotelian in his method and apprehension of the truth of natural phenomena. All truth is accessible to us through a progression of empirical observations and inferences, and though our understanding might not correspond directly to the natural state, or to God’s understanding, the method is sound and indicative of as close to a divine understanding as we may get. He imagines this in the form of a hierarchy: “when we rise from the individual to the species, from the species to the genus, and thence to the most extensive orders and classes, we arrive, though in a different way, at the knowledge of general truths, which, in a certain sense, are also scientific, and answer a similar purpose” (lxx). Not only this, but this method might be generative of future and uncertain outcomes: “[o]ur acquaintance with nature and its laws is so much extended, that we shall be enabled, in numberless cases, not only to apply to the most profitable purposes the knowledge we have thus acquired, but to determine beforehand, with sufficient certainty, the success of every new application” (lxx). Effectively, Campbell is a natural-state rationalist, conceiving of truth as a transcendent and of technê as the human part of perfection.

What this means for virtue, or his eighteenth-century equivalent thereof, is not so easily determined, though we understand clearly by now that some state of virtue is always implied in every assertion of art or technê. In the end the early modern equivalent to classical virtue grows complicated beyond useful and academically responsible definition because of the complexity of the social structure and the effects of modernism on the human psyche. It no longer suffices for a person to be a citizen or a good man speaking well. Professionalism makes it easier to imagine a speech act in terms of mode, and new technologies enable us to imagine old speech acts in differing contexts.
Though Campbell titles this work officially *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, he opens the first book of it “The Nature and the Foundations of Eloquence,” roughly conflating rhetoric with eloquence, though giving the former a more abstract, intellectual treatment and retaining the latter for more practical considerations, defining it as “[t]hat art or talent by which the discourse is adapted to its end” (1, emphasis added). He immediately proceeds to divide eloquence into parts, or “heads,” for the purposes of understanding it more analytically, asserting that “every speech [is] intended to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will” (1). Campbell’s understanding is governed by the strongly analytical, beginning always with the outcome—the ends—of a given rhetorical act, going so far especially as to assert that “[a]ny one discourse admits only one of these ends as the principal” (1). Campbell appears to treat subjects with patient and scholarly complexity, to the extent often of Aristotelian pedantry, but is on this point unusually definitive, but for the purpose of clarifying means and ends. As he notes, any one discourse act is principally marked by its end, but each end has a means by which it achieves it, and insofar as every faculty has a corresponding purpose to which the discourse appeals, every purpose has a means by which it is achieved. That said, one will necessarily have a single (but general) end or purpose, but might in the process appeal to other faculties by making use of other corresponding means. Persuasive power in the end is determined by the outcome once the discourse is completed, factors of which are of course appropriateness and skill in all facets.

Modern Taste and Classical Virtue

During this period the principles of belles lettres are not wholly different from those of *technê*. The meaning and connotations of the word *taste* were not much different then than they
are today, and certainly much closer than our sense of a physician today is than Aristotle’s
physician, to follow with a previous example, or even a physician of the eighteenth century, for
that matter. As with any other technē with belles lettres and with the faculty of taste in particular
we see a meditation on the qualities and methods for the apprehension of taste as we do on the
object of inquiry itself.

Blair seems attentive to this apprehensive aspect of rhetoric-technē mentioned in the
previous chapter. Like John Lawson of the same period at Trinity and John Quincy Adams some
time later in America (to name a couple), Blair lives in the shadow of the ancient rhetoricians.
All who taught rhetoric during this period found themselves needing to find the way that certain
doctrines of classical rhetoric apply to the modern world. Lawson and Adams choose not to take
the kind of progressive approach that the Scots did. Nevertheless, the classical texts are effusive
regarding what we call virtue connected to the art of speaking. As has been noted here, by
definition as a technē, rhetoric has built into it an imperative, and in the case of the ancient
Greeks, we call that virtue. The Scottish belletrists of this period have to find something to take
the place of virtue in order for their rhetoric to be complete and reconcilable with classical
rhetoric.

They find this replacement in taste, albeit an imperfect one for reasons that Blair does
understand quite clearly. “When we say that nature is the standard of Taste,” he explains, “we
lay down a principle very true and just, as far as it can be applied” (1: 37). Blair finds here that
complete faith in nature for the derivation of truth, justice, and beauty is no longer desirable, or
completely reliable at least. Certainly we can follow and trust nature to represent beauty in any
situation where the object is a natural one, “as in representing human characters or actions” (1:
37), but regardless, there exists “something that can be rendered more clear and precise” (1: 38)
than nature to make our determination. To begin with there exists no person who has the facul- ties for the perfect apprehension of beauty, no person who possesses “in full perfection all the powers of human nature, whose internal senses [are] in every instance exquisite and just, and whose reason [is] unerring and sure” (1: 38). Such a theoretical person would be more like Plato’s philosopher than Protagoras’s subjective human.

We cannot rely upon or even find such a perfect human, perfectly sensitized to the natural and the beautiful, so the best that we can do, as humans, is accept “[t]hat which men concur the most in admiring,” and accept that “[h]is Taste must be esteemed just and true, which coincides with the general sentiments of men” (1: 39). This is not to say, however, that the standards of taste ought to be democratically constructed entirely. The acceptability of one’s standard of taste, he argues, is proportionate to the sophistication of one’s explanation of it: “there are principles of reason and sound judgment which can be applied to matters of Taste” (1: 39). One must have a sound reason for objecting to a work of beauty for his or her sense of it to be accepted. There pervades his lectures a scholarly ethic that does not exist in the classical works.

Alongside Plato’s sense of virtue, Blair’s explanation of taste is a very complicated one, and certainly their ideas are two sides of the same coin. Virtue for Plato is for one much more abstract. He acknowledges that virtue and truth cannot be known to us from the sensory world, as does Blair of taste. They both acknowledge nature to be the standard of truth and beauty, but Plato’s version of things is infinitely more unequivocal and dogmatic than Blair’s, which appears in the middle of the eighteenth century, when modernism is in full swing. Science has at this point replaced religion to some extent as the final arbiter. Religion has lost battle after battle to science since Copernicus. At this point in history one must accept, or at least address, the subjective response. In the end, for Blair, the universal transcendence of the classical world must
give way to the complexities of scientific determinism: “Taste is a sort of compound power, in which the light of the understanding always mingles, more or less, with the feelings of sentiment” (1: 40).

Blair differs completely from Plato, and to a lesser degree from Aristotle, in the very important sense that sense perception is admissible in aesthetic appreciation. He explains: “though reason can carry us a certain length in judging concerning works of Taste, it is not to be forgotten that the ultimate conclusions to which our reasonings lead, refer at last to sense and perception” (1:40). Regarding Locke and the new principles of human cognition, this is a fairly typical statement, and where Blair and others of this period differ from the classical period most dramatically. This part of his thinking provides a counterbalance to his argument about universals. He concedes that the use of universals and the establishment of generic formulae provide us with guidelines for the appreciation of an artistic tradition and a convenient touchstone for the creation of it, but in terms of real effect, the tastes of the individual must be attended to. “It is from consulting our own imagination and heart, and from attending to the feelings of others,” he says, “that any principles are formed which acquire authority in matters of Taste” (1:40-41).

For that matter, the foundations of aesthetic norms originate from those sorts of practical, individual experiences, an aesthetic model almost completely owing to early modern mechanics. The system corrects itself, he explains, in the sense that criticism and artistic appreciation perpetuate themselves through the interplay of reason and sentiment: “[j]ust reasonings on [a] subject will correct the caprice of unenlightened Taste, and establish principles for judging of what deserves praise” (1:40). We naturally prefer certain characteristics of style and structure, and our art conforms itself to those norms, the epic and the tragedy, for instance, developing out
of a sort of natural conformity. There is not as much of Plato’s sense of universal form about such a model as this for artistic expression and appreciation; transcendent form exists, but not with the kind of absoluteness to which many had become accustomed. We do find a reality very strongly influenced by a sense of the universal, however. The vestiges of it we find in the incredible strength of the overall standards of structure and style.

The base of his argument—the standard from which he speaks—is somewhat elusive. There are things like nature and personal response that we can count on to be ultimately trustworthy, but he admits that these are largely subjective. Repeatedly he undermines pointed commentary in his attempts to provide a unified sense of taste. For instance, “[w]hen we refer to the concurring sentiments of men as the ultimate test of what is to be accounted beautiful in the arts, this is to be always understood of men placed in such situations as are favourable to the proper exertions of Taste” (1: 41). He supports this position from the arrogant viewpoint that those cultures which provide themselves with the ample opportunity for appreciation and meditation on beauty are more receptive to its true power and potential. “[W]hen arts are cultivated and manners refined,” he says, and “when works of genius are subjected to free discussion, and Taste is improved by Science and Philosophy” (1: 42), there you have a reliable standard. And in all cases this is still not a faultless observation, he explains, but these cultural systems are more stable and self-correcting. With time, however, taste prevails, and a culture that favors and nourishes rationality will always provide for it the environment necessary for it to flourish. Notably, unlike Plato, transcendence for Blair regarding beauty rests in the hands of humankind instead of the cosmos or a creator. In the background there exists a sense of faith in humanity, that, artistic beauty existing solely to uplift the human spirit, tastes do change, but at a glacial pace. Blair finds this dynamism easy enough to deal with. It seems fairly consistent also
with the spirit of the time, of a relatively optimistic and open period of scholarship, when many new discoveries and new techniques were fresh and newly realized.

Even so, however, there exists in human affairs no unassailable standard of taste to consult in times where such a standard would be most useful. “Where, indeed,” Blair asks, “is such a standard to be found for deciding any of those great controversies in reason and philosophy, which perpetually divide mankind?” (1: 43). In general terms, we do have reason and philosophy as our aid to matters of general public and spiritual welfare. “In order to judge of what is morally good or evil,” he explains, “of what man ought, or ought not in duty to do, it was fit that the means of clear and precise determination should be afforded us” (1: 43). Regarding art, however, he seems to be of the mind that we can get along fine without such definitiveness:

[to ascertain in every case with the utmost exactness what is beautiful or elegant, was not at all necessary to the happiness of man. And therefore some diversity in feeling was here allowed to take place; and room was left for discussion and debate, concerning the degree of approbation to which any work of genius is entitled. (1: 43-44)

His resistance to a unified and monolithic standard of taste notwithstanding, Blair seems satisfied to land on his conclusion at this point, “that Taste is far from being an arbitrary principle, which is subject to the fancy of every individual, and which admits of no criterion for determining whether it be false or true” (1: 44). Whatever standards of beauty there might be exist in the same form in all human minds, their “being built upon sentiments and perceptions which belong to our nature; and which, in general, operate with the same uniformity as our other intellectual principles” (1: 44). For that matter, these sentiments are capable of being “perverted
by ignorance and prejudice,” but by the same token “are capable of being rectified by reason” (1: 44).

Persistently—and especially on occasion of the conclusion of this lecture on taste—Blair’s understanding of the composition of its parts is somehow simultaneously Platonic and democratic; one might most easily say that it is humanistic. He announces, somewhat extravagantly here, that “[l]et men declaim as much as they please, concerning the caprice and the uncertainty of Taste, it is found, by experience, that there are beauties, which, if they be displayed in a proper light, have power to command lasting and general admiration” (1: 44, emphasis added). The subtext of such a statement about experience is of course the presumption that one can learn to scrutinize by way of a certain method and still maintain moral and intellectual neutrality. The next subtext, that there be a “proper” light in which to behold beauty, implies by negation a wrong way, and by his earlier observations, a way of perversity from what is natural. Blair couches his understanding of taste in Platonic metaphysics, speaking of it in the language of transcendence and immutability, but reduces its scope to the world of human affairs, the formulation of it existing only in a general consensus. To accentuate this point, somewhat vaguely but all the more decisively for it, he says “[t]here is a certain string, to which, when properly struck, the human heart is so made as to answer” (1: 44). This statement has a twinge of the mystical about it, though that seems not to be Blair’s intention, though it suits his purpose at this point to be that way. Rather, it seems that his landed on a rational point, that as human beings we are functions of the human sensibility and will naturally prefer what is considered beautiful, by consensus or by precedence, that last condition being the most significant; for time from Blair’s viewpoint allows that which is truly tasteful and applicable through the ages (timeless) to emerge and to distinguish itself from one era to the next. It allows what is subjective
to emerge to unassailability: “[t]ime overthrows the illusions of opinion, but establishes the
decisions of nature” (1: 45).

Thus Blair ends his first non-introductory lecture on rhetoric and belles lettres, but it is
the introduction to this course of study that we might find most applicable to composition, for
that is the major subject of his course of study for which his lectures were given. Those parts
regarding taste are the most beneficial to us in that regard because they speak most specifically to
his adaptation of virtue for modern scholarly needs. He seems near the middle of his introductory
lecture to be responding somewhat to an ethos of professionalism and takes some pains to
counter it with an interest in critical appreciation of artistic beauty. He sells this to some extent
by selling his students on the notion of a well-rounded individual. “The cultivation of taste,” he
explains, “is [...] recommended by the happy effects which it naturally tends to produce in
human life” (1: 14). One cannot be expected to base his or her entire living on the acquisition of
wealth and power and live happily without indulging himself or herself to some degree. The only
question from that standpoint is whether this individual will choose to distract himself or herself
with objects of true tastefulness or waste time with some other more profane distraction.

Once again, however, fundamental to all that Blair accomplishes in his lecture on taste—
what he does that Campbell only begins to do—is his reconciliation of the classical tradition,
from which he adapts classical rhetoric and Longinius’s sublimity to empiricism and the social
contract. The social contract, after all, speaks most clearly to the composition and formation of
the standard of taste which Blair contends is not divine or otherwise metaphysically
transcendent, but is consistent with the general consensus of humankind. The operations of taste
in the abstract might be consistent with those envisioned by Longinus, and to a great extent those
of rhetoric by Aristotle, but its transcendence rests in the state of human affairs. To that end,
regarding Blair’s position that the operations of taste are not rationally reducible, they could not be any more so than could be the collective mind. Regarding rhetoric-technē this means that analyzing that which is proven to be rhetorically effective will lead one closer to that elusive human standard. The notion of transcendence remains intact in either case, and its reapplication to social contract formation can be easily done.

In his tremendously influential treatise *On the Sublime* we find sublimity to exist beyond the influence of mere persuasive power. Sublimity, he explains, “is a kind of height and conspicuous excellence in speeches and writings, and […] from no other source than this have the greatest poets and prose-writers excelled and thrown around their glorious reputations the mantle of the ages” (1.3). The notion of sublimity is one which belletrists finds useful because it fits conveniently, but not quite perfectly, into the Lockean sense of a civil society, with regard to rhetoric and aesthetic theory especially. Longinus continues:

> [w]hat is beyond nature drives the audience not to persuasion, but to ecstasy. What is wonderful, with its stunning power, prevails everywhere over that which aims merely at persuasion and at gracefulness. The ability to be persuaded lies in us, but what is wonderful has a capability and force which, unable to be fought, take a position high over every member of the audience. (1.4)

Sublimity, for Blair as well as for Longinus, lies not in the influence of one individual over another so much as something that transcends an individual rhetorical act, and its persuasive power is not so much rational as it is compulsory for human beings.

It cannot be enough for Blair, however, that sublimity should be applied only where Longinus does. Blair finds better use of the sublime by theorizing it to a greater degree of abstraction than his antique predecessor intended, owing partially to philosophical difference
regarding virtue, for one, but also owing to the enlightenment tendency to systematize. He explains in his fourth lecture that “[t]he true sense of Sublime Writing, undoubtedly, is such a description of objects, or exhibition of sentiments, which are in themselves of a sublime nature, as shall give us strong impressions of them” (1: 73). He rejects, on the grounds of “indefinite”-ness a sense of the sublime based upon “remarkable and distinguishing excellenc[ies] of composition” (1: 73). He rejects in this way elements of effective writing which do not speak directly to the sublimity of a given piece. Of Sappho’s ode specifically he admits to sublimity “in particular” the elements “boldness,” “grandeur,” and pathos but consigns “tropes” and “beautiful expressions” to “the beauties of Writing in general” (1: 74). Though the legacy of Blair is known ironically more for those elements of composition which he calls “the beauties of writing” here, playing a more prominent role as they do in writing textbooks and textbook-based pedagogies, the notion of the transcendent and more importantly the historically or culturally significant remains intact.

To a great extent the indulgence of one’s spirit in the critical appreciation of the truly sublime releases one from the purely sensible world and elevates one’s mind to a higher plane of sensibility. One must balance work with pleasure in due proportions, of course, and achieving the proper proportions in one’s daily activities is the only way of getting the most out of life. He then imagines, even for the busiest person, the composition of one’s life still having significant tracts of leisure time, unmarked for anything strictly practical, and upon which the fullness of one’s life sways in the balance: he calls these tracts “vacant spaces,” or “those unemployed intervals, which, more or less, occur in the life of everyone” (1: 14). This observation appears early on in his introduction, so it is at this point that he makes his sell for the refinements of taste. Certainly, in a modern context, beauty in the classical sense does not play a part of one’s life as
regularly as it would have two thousand years before. Inversely, however leisure time did have a major impact on the lives of early modern Britons, perhaps in more or less direct proportion. The Greeks, the works of which academic-rhetoricians were recapitulating still, created not necessarily in a better or purer form, but had an interest and a notion of beauty that was in some ways abstract in the intellectual sense and grand in scope. For the modern mind, a mind of the same organism, but growing increasingly accustomed to the discrete, and where it retained a sense of the natural and the transcendent, it gained from those things a sense of the potential for disconnection between not only body and soul, but a host of other things, up to and including one’s focus and the operations of one’s mind. Potentially one could then be many things simultaneously, and one could be one thing while performing one act, and then be another when doing something else.

That one would find the pursuit of pleasures of taste the most useful and wisest occupation of one’s leisure time is very much in line with the stoical parts of Smith’s moral philosophy. The exercises for the pursuit of taste are very much in line with the non-sensual parts of human nature, though he locates them somewhere between the sensual world and that of ideas. His is a strange sort of dispassion and blandness. Classical ontology gets refitted to suit more modern, protestant theology: “Providence seems plainly to have pointed out this useful purpose to which the pleasures of taste may be applied, by interposing them in a middle station between the pleasures of sense, and those of pure intellect” (1: 15). He explains instead that the pleasures of taste operate in the middle ground between the purely sensual and the purely abstract, functioning therapeutically as a means to exercising and developing human potential. “The pleasures of taste refresh the mind after the toils of the intellect, and the labours of abstract study,” he explains; “and they gradually raise it above the attachments of sense, and prepare it
for the enjoyments of virtue” (1: 15). In this respect Blair still envisions taste’s influence occupying the same space as sense and intellect but favors intellect as a goal, while acknowledging the importance of what is inherently human to the appreciation of beauty. One who understands and appreciates this can be said to be of a “liberal disposition,” and not quite of the professional ethos of today.

The ideal human sensibility, after all, for Blair seems fairly consonant with eighteenth-century high-mindedness and retains many of the vestiges of non-individualism and philosophical idealism. “The elevated sentiments and high examples which poetry, eloquence and history are often bringing under our view,” he explains, “naturally tend to nourish in our minds public spirit, the love of glory, contempt of external fortune, and the admiration of what is truly illustrious and great” (1: 16). It seems that many of these ideas are primary parts of virtue and are still important notions to which one can aspire. Curiously, what parts of Blair’s rhetoric we apply to what has come to be called current-traditionalism seems not to have much to do with this celebration of the civic spirit. To some extent one can say that this is owing to the pre-professionalized state of the college curriculum in this era. Once the classics were dropped, these objects fell a bit by the wayside, but in North America at least, this was not the case for more than a century. To that extent one might say that, as Blair adapted virtue to suit modern sensibilities, his own rhetoric gets refitted in the nineteenth century to suit a new vision of the university.

However, he explains also that in his mind the ancient notion of virtue and the more modern notion of taste do not occupy the same place in human affairs, though he does not deny—and by negation affirms—that their domains coincide. “I will not go so far as to say that the improvement of taste and of virtue is the same,” he says, “or that they may always be
expected to co-exist in an equal degree” (1: 16). The operations seem similar for both, and the comparison an interesting one, but he is talking about a more particular field of human endeavor, one which can only lay claim to a certain part of the state of the human spirit: “[m]ore powerful correctives than taste can apply, are necessary for reforming the corrupt propensities which to frequently prevail among mankind” (1: 16-17). Blair’s thinking here exemplifies a mode of thinking typical to this period that ancient thinkers seem not to have considered seriously or possibly even not at all: the capacity for compartmentalizing human behavior. While everything about individuals during that period—everything spoken or done—seemed to contribute to who they were and their state of virtue, for Blair and the like one can think of himself or herself in terms of being a professional, a moral entity, a spiritual entity, and so on without simultaneously considering the parts to be of a whole. This is not to say that people did not ever do this, but that they had the capability of not doing so whenever they did consider themselves.

Unlike virtue for Plato, who believes that the moral condition of the soul is all that matters and that one cannot truly be persuasive or knowledgeable while in a state of moral depravity, for Blair truly tasteful sentiment and moral corruption can co-exist in the heart and mind of a single individual. He acknowledges that “[e]legant speculations are sometimes found to float on the surface of the mind, while bad passions possess the interior regions of the heart” (1: 17). He returns to his thesis, however, that there is a natural power in beauty that counters the influence of “bad passion”: “this cannot but be admitted, that the exercise of taste is, in its native tendency, moral and purifying” (1: 17). The effect of beauty, as he describes it there, is “disposing the heart to virtue.” Again, what is beautiful to the hearts of humankind is thereby natural to them, and nature is from what everything pure and moral derives. The contemplation of beauty for Blair seems to be an exercise in moral and virtuous realization.
He promises then to return to this point in his lectures—that he “shall hereafter have occasion to illustrate it more fully” (1: 17)—and seems also to take advantage of the classical linkage between virtuous life and virtuous action. Lest his students forget, that linkage does exist. One cannot separate virtue from craft. Necessarily, it is the case that “without possessing the virtuous affections in a strong degree, no man can attain eminence in the sublime parts of eloquence” (1: 17), a statement very much in line with classical scholastic policy. He reiterates: “[h]e must feel what a good man feels if he expects greatly to move, or to interest mankind” (1: 17). In addition to providing a unified and expansive sense of belletrism and the place of rhetoric in the academic realm of moral philosophy, part of the purpose of this conclusion to his introduction is to reconcile for them his students’ more worldly motivations with a much older tradition, and ultimately to justify them by it. In a modern world, the linkage between one’s ability to create and to speak, and the subjects about which he or she creates and speaks, is no longer so readily apparent. That is to say, so much more of what the ancients did and said had everything to do with who they were as individuals, or at least how they were perceived to be. It did not take a rationalization process like the creation of a technē for them to arrive at that conclusion. So much of what Blair and his students are doing here is very different, however. The linkage of taste to virtue—or the linkage of any new virtuous gift to the natural moral standard—speaks to the necessity of justification of the new virtue, and for that matter the continued justification for the concept of virtue. There is a kind of virtue in taste, in its mechanics and in its objects. Taste regards beauty in art and composition, and virtue regards superiority in a grander, moral sense; the latter is merely a subset of the former and a gateway to the realization of it.
In turn, virtuous sentiment arouses the creative and apprehensive potential of the human mind and soul. To say that one feels “what a good man feels” is to say that he or she must feel “the ardent sentiments of honour, virtue, magnanimity, and public spirit, that only can kindle that fire of genius, and call up into the mind those high ideas, which attract the admiration of the ages” (1: 17). These all in their fullest form exemplify the virtuous soul, the celebration of human potential, and in part reiterate the civic-mindedness of the classical era. Blair envisions here an interplay between the creation of beauty and the apprehension of it. “[I]f this spirit be necessary to produce the most distinguished efforts of eloquence,” he explains, “it must be necessary also to our relishing them with proper taste and feeling” (1: 17).

In all cases where a techné is found we find a system expertly identifying ends without interrogating method or its merit, which is the most significant point here. Presumably a given techné was created to efficiently override those issues, so that a flute-player, for instance, would not have to ask him or herself why a fingering pattern produced a certain sound each time it was done, or if there might be a different way to achieve the same result. Under close scrutiny, a techné will seem ultimately arbitrary in such a case. One might be tempted to speculate that the emphasis of techné upon simplification and productivity over self-awareness—the present and future, perhaps, over the past—emanates from scientism and the progressive philosophies that attend it, but the history of writing instruction is not quite so simple. Certainly the context of the scientific revolution did nothing to detract from these aspects of composition theory; indeed, they could only have added to them. However, techné also requires us in many ways to rely upon the ethos and the wisdom of an earlier age and upon the validity of sometimes centuries of ritualistic use. Rhetoric and writing were treated as technai long before the Age of Enlightenment.
To believe in the writing process is to believe that rhetoric is a *technê*. It is to believe as Blair and Smith and Campbell did, that there is some positive and transcendent standard of excellence or quintessence in human communication. The belles lettres held that there was a measurable, if not quantifiable, standard of excellence that if described and understood could provide a blueprint for the teaching and production of effective written communication, however “excellence,” “teaching,” “production,” and “effective” could be imagined. Likewise, to hold as we have since this period, that there is an optimum process for the maximization of effective prose and efficient productivity, is very much to think of rhetoric as a *technê* of a similar flavor. To one degree or another it has always been believed that rhetoric could be a *technê*, but it has not always been the healthiest way to represent it.

A better example would be the ancient example of medicine as *technê* because of what happened during the Enlightenment to change the way we had been thinking about rhetoric. A medical practitioner beforehand could be said to be a good doctor insofar as he could restore a patient to reasonable health. There we find a baseline standard of excellence. What made the physician skilled was his ability to recognize health, and not disease. What work was done was corrective. During the Enlightenment there came a clash with the scientific method, however. Scientific methodology began to interrogate old methods that had not been interrogated before. Our understanding of the human mind began to undermine our understanding of the operations of rhetoric on it. Attempts were then made to apply this new scientism to rhetoric. It was assumed that the mind operated a certain way and that experience provided its output.

Eventually what rose to the surface was a clearer distinction between classical rhetoric and the new rhetoric of this period. For Blair particularly, who was raised reading Cicero and “defined himself in relation to classical rhetoric” (Ferreira-Buckley 31), there are a few very
important distinctions. Whereas classical rhetoric was applied rather specifically to oral discourse, “the prevailing notions” of which “maintained that persuasion was the primary end of rhetoric,” “under Blair […] rhetoric became the study of communication broadly conceived” (Ferreira-Buckley 31). This meant the inclusion of the belles lettres because for Blair the term rhetoric applied to all language use (Ferreira-Buckley 31).

Taste, Systematized and Applied

All above is not to say that Blair was in any sense the founder of modern English composition. At best one could say that Blair was instrumental in applying belles lettres to the English-speaking academy. And insofar as he did that it would not have been the case had more influential members of the Scottish intellectual community such as Frances Hutcheson and Adam Smith not created the Regius professorship at Edinburgh in the first place. In fact, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that Smith’s own lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres were discovered, and there were quite a few marked differences between the two. In fulfillment of the express desires of Adam Smith, upon his death nearly all of his written intellectual property was burned to ashes, and his lectures on belles lettres were thought to be lost to the ages. Ultimately what came to us as those lectures were compilations of notes students took in the class.

The most important difference here, however, between Blair’s rhetoric and Smith’s is in legacy. Blair freely shared lecture notes on oratory, and there were qualities about them rhetorically and their ideas that became popular to teachers of rhetoric thereafter until well into the nineteenth century. Wilbur Samuel Howell calls Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres “the most popular and most influential, but not the most meritorious, of all the new rhetorics of its age” (648). One reason for this is that “[l]ike Adam Smith, George Campbell, and
Joseph Priestley, Blair considered that modern rhetoric is rightfully the theory not only of the three kinds of spoken oratory, but also of the kinds of writing as well” (Howell 670). Likewise, unlike Smith, though Blair’s *Lectures* resemble Smith’s, his “are much expanded so as to outline a general philosophy of language” (Ferreira-Buckley 24).

The next step in any process regarding a *technē* as Nussbaum argues is going to be the reapplication of whatever principles are at work in the initial apprehension. There must be a way of going about things that can be reapplied and yield reliably excellent results. In the world of English composition this might mean studying the masters of prose and their master works and emulating the qualities about them which are excellent. In terms of the criteria Nussbaum describes for us of Aristotelian *technē*, all features—universality, teachability, precision, and concern with explanation—seem apparent with current-traditionalism, as they must, but particularly regarding universality does Blair’s notion of taste seem applicable. If, for him, taste can best be defined as that which coincides with “the general sentiments of men,” then the feature of universality is plain to see.

And it is no wonder that such a rational system as Blair’s would arise into a *technē*, so rational a system is the operations of language for him. In large, this is creditable to the influence of George Campbell and to John Locke, both of whose thoughts on rational cognition were a major influence of the period. Blair’s conception of rhetoric is in fact “one that links the study of language with the study of reason itself” (Ferreira-Buckley 24). Blair puts it in his first lecture that “when we are employed, after a proper manner, in the study of composition, we are cultivating reason itself. True rhetoric and sound logic are very nearly allied. The study of arranging and expressing our thoughts with propriety, teaches us to think, as well as to speak, accurately” (1: 8).
This kind of rationalism rests very easily upon Blair’s supposition, borrowed from Longinus, that sublimity exists above individual human affairs. Having established that beauty and sublimity exist outside of the influence of all but the very most influential of individual critical voices, one can easily apply that impression to the composition of art and prose as well. The body of work in art and composition having grown so large, it scarcely mattered that the bases for its rules were not metaphysical but humanistic, and with regards to composition today, it is an issue that does not come up, even among the most conservative of scholars and teachers. The issue remains, however, regardless of whether it gets addressed or does not. Once again, this speaks to the very heart of techné and what bad or counter-progressive features attend it. It can be very easy for one to dismiss the notion of virtue in classical rhetoric as a relic of an earlier time, or to scoff at the chauvinism of the belletrists for replacing it with taste. These things exist in new instantiations, however. They most often go unnoticed because rhetoric is specialized and mediated in a different way in each era. In the classical era the issues were of personal influence, of virtue and citizenship. Likewise, whereas in the eighteenth century taste addresses the development of a certain part of the intellect and spirit, the present-day concern is with the development of one’s writing, as an academic virtue. All are aimed at some good, and a measurement of goodness very often implies a rational means whose values go uninterrogated.

One such value, for example, we derive from Blair, who systematizes it from the Spectator and insinuates it from Smith, who develops and modernizes it from stoicism. In one form we see it from Smith’s “impartial spectator” in his Theory of Moral Sentiments, the self-interested member of society, acting morally but understanding on some level that what is good in certain respects for society is in that respect good for him or her. This is to say that one is most productive when self-interest and self-promotion are the primary motivations, but a component
of that is the understanding that in certain respects what is good for the society that the individual depends on will influence one’s willingness to act on that motivation. The individual artist himself or herself likewise develops what is aesthetically—“naturally”—beautiful or sublime without being wholly derivative. When conflated with Addison and Steele’s spectator and Blair’s humanistic standard of taste, the similarities are illuminating. In both cases we have the cultural constitution dependent upon a complex interplay of societal good and individual desire and creativity. We also have in both instances the notion of the “impartial spectator,” an unachievable ideal in Smith’s society, but a transcendent and ultimately authoritative ethos nonetheless. This would be characterized by a voice devoid of all self-interest and motivated only by a desire to understand and express correctly. This is a hallmark of current-traditional rhetoric, but such a cornerstone in American letters that while it gets treated ironically, that it exists it seems for lack of another alternative. Smith borrows this from the stoic virtues: wisdom, self-control, and rationality. He theorizes the modern consumer in this regard, as Blair would theorize the modern artist and critic-author: an individual interested only in understanding what is natural and trusting in reason to illuminate it, responding to pleasure and pain as distractions from that end and reasons for which he or she should practice patience and diligence. Like the classical stoic, Smith’s stoicism believed abidingly in harmony, the essential goodness of all that is natural, and the essential value of all people.

To return to Berlin’s taxonomy, current-traditionalism is probably the school that is most obviously a technē. How current-traditionalism emerged from the eighteenth-century belles lettres and from the Enlightenment is very difficult to explain. In fact, many argue that current-traditionalism never existed in the form by which we know it most. It has been argued that “current-traditionalism” is in fact a misnomer, the concepts which it addresses being neither
“current” in the sense that no one abides by them principally, nor “traditional” in the sense that its tradition does not extend back far enough to warrant serious consideration. Robert J. Connors explains in his book *Composition-Rhetoric* that the term “current-traditionalism” originated from a 1959 essay by Daniel Fogarty and then put into theoretical terms by Richard Young in 1979 (4). Connors, like so many others, has a distaste for the term and finds that generally speaking it “indicate[s] both the outmoded nature and continuing power of older textbook-based writing pedagogies” (4).

The term “current-traditionalism” has effectively since been delegitimized, but it is still used for the sake of convenience. In the end, however, the problems with it are manifold. Regarding its currency, “To the degree that [it] has been defined and commented upon by those in composition studies, it has been universally condemned as no longer current enough” (6), and “Neither is it ‘traditional’ in the sense of adhering to or developing organically from the older, orally based rhetorical tradition” (6). Perhaps “Harvard formalism” is the best term instead, though no term seems to best describe the body of work and the scholarly movement such a term would fully address. In part this is because the period in which current-traditionalism is supposed to have flourished is so lengthy and is not nearly as self-consistent as the other groups in Berlin’s taxonomy, and also it is because during that period no definitive voice can be found. At the very least, “Harvard Formalism” speaks to a much more systematic application of these principles, in a formal academic setting, than current-traditionalism does. It can be useful as placing us in the time period where, as John C. Brereton has noted in *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925*, the modern textbook evolved from a series of treatises on rhetoric (usually from Blair and Campbell) to something more like an apparatus and a reader (314). We know from Brereton also that Adams Sherman Hill and his student and colleague at Harvard,
Barrett Wendell, formalized English composition there and in so doing were instrumental in systematizing it in many of the ways that we know it today; and to the extent that much of their source material originated from Blair and Campbell’s legacies in the American academy, many of the aesthetic principles, and more importantly the aesthetically-derived sense of virtue and excellence, are of that lineage.

Ultimately, however, the choice between “Harvard formalism” as a suitable term and “current-traditionalism” for our purposes here at least because of the collective relative ignorance of such a thing as Harvard formalism in composition studies culture today. To the extent that “Rhetoric and Ideology” has been made such a cornerstone in composition studies and a part of what one might consider to be a major player in the disciplinary mythology, “current-traditionalism,” though popularized but not coined by Berlin, stands as a straw man, practically timeless and a token not so much of a sordid past and nineteenth-century legacy as of a wretched figure in the outlying areas of present-day composition pedagogy where it is unassisted by composition theory.⁹ It is a very complicated topic—one which advances well beyond the boundaries of this project at the moment—but it has a great deal to do with the discipline’s sense of self perception. Relative to the other parts of Berlin’s taxonomy, current-traditionalism is historically bound in a way that the others are not, and to that extent, virtue being a dimension of technē which so resists definition, “current-traditionalism” is perhaps the best term for our purposes here, as virtue in late nineteenth-century Harvard, while it is probably the most descriptive term historically, surely differs from virtue today in a much different disciplinary culture.

The connection between Blair and current-traditionalism is also very problematic, and by no means one of simple delineation. While nineteenth-century rhetoric grew from eighteenth-
century epistemology, it may be that “the composition-and-textbook ‘tradition’ usually associated with current-traditional rhetoric owes less to [...] Blair than it does to pedagogical lore, sheer invention, and sui generis theoretical pronouncements made between twenty and two hundred years ago” (Connors 6). The history and development of composition in America cannot be delineated from any one source. Many things happened since Blair, and there has been lots of interplay and significant events outside of his influence. Rather, “composition-rhetoric” “exists, as it always has, as an ever shifting balance between the old and comforting and the new and exciting, the ways of lore and the ways of theory, the push of societal pressure and the inertia of academic traditions” (Connors 17). No doubt this is the case, but we must return to Blair here because of the pivotal role he plays in the early stages of the field, being the most popular rhetoric text in American colleges up until the middle of the nineteenth century. As far as the application of theory to pedagogy goes, especially considering the relation of textbook-theory to current-traditionalism, the role of Blair is significant indeed.

Connors argues that the material conditions of early American lecturers of rhetoric had more to do with the popularity of Blair’s lectures than anything else. The exhaustiveness of Blair’s lecture material and of American lecturers’ work schedules made it an obvious convenience (75). Small wonder, then, that adherents to current-traditionalism are regarded as intellectually lazy or practical to a fault. Eventually classroom conditions were such that Blair’s lectures were abridged to accommodate regurgitative “question-answer,” recitative classroom formats (Connors 75).

While Connors describes current-traditionalism by its past and its heritage, as a blend of Blair’s rhetorical theory with the working and living context of the nineteenth-century American rhetoric and then English departments, it can be just as interesting and telling to consider its
present: it seems that today, when the term “current-traditionalism” appears in the conversation, as much can be understood about the speaker as the subject. In research circles it seldom gets mentioned without at least a hint of irony or contempt. To that extent it often appears where one is being arrogant or snobbish, from the standpoint of a research department versus that of a teaching school or two-year college, the implication being that the department in question seems so backwards as not to be even of the twentieth century in its teaching philosophy. To many, however, especially since Connors’s book, the term has merely outlived its usefulness or applicability.

However, there is no reason why Connors’s and Berlin’s theses must be mutually exclusive; to the extent that one can accept the explanation that current-traditionalism arose from eighteenth-century British aestheticism blended with the material conditions of the nineteenth-century North American academy, one can also accept that cognitive and expressive rhetorics arose from textbook pedagogy infused with the twentieth-century re-vision of the American academy. There is no question that we are very far removed from Blair’s thinking in everything that we do in composition studies, from our theory, our psychology, and from our methodology, only to name a few. But as for the specter of Blair—not the most original thinker so much as a synthesizer—his lasting influence is lasting. But for Campbell, Locke, and many thinkers many years before him, we would have no belles lettres, no Blair, but if not for Blair, English composition would look very different than it does today. And so far as the role of foundationalism in it, one can only imagine the difference.

Likewise, Linda Ferreira-Buckley notes in her description of Hugh Blair’s rhetoric that in the nineteenth century the topics of literature and belles lettres underwent a narrowing of definition. The sense of the terms each rhetoric, literature, and belles lettres was somewhat
reconstituted from Blair’s original vision. Notably, whereas David Masson has noted that during this period “belletristic rhetoric […] conceived more broadly of rhetoric as ‘the science of Literature, or Literary Theory or Literary Criticism universally,’ which ‘treat[ed] the principles of Historical Writing, Poetry, and Expository Writing, as well as of Oratory’” (Ferreira-Buckley 23), the terms literature and rhetoric were also treated during Blair’s period by some belletrists as species of the genus belles lettres (23).

But not by Blair himself was this the case. The study of rhetoric in the case of belles lettres gets refocused, expanded to suit new contexts and theoretical apparati. For Blair “the term rhetoric referred to the overarching art of discourse governing both belles lettres and eloquence” (Ferreira-Buckley 29). To some extent we find Blair here reformulating and recontextualizing rhetoric, eloquence, criticism, and composition as they related to one another. His blending of taste into the mix, thereby blending production and creation, played a central role in the development of the academic critical context:

Blair’s incorporation of such a critical component [as taste] into rhetorical theory made theory responsible for articulating fundamental principles that govern the impact of all genres and for promoting the pedagogical standard that a complete education in rhetorical theory and practice involves the acquisition of a critical sensibility. (Johnson 34)

As noted above of this “critical sensibility” a key component of Blair’s lectures is the political context in which they were delivered and consequently that part of the academic culture that was engendered in part by the belles lettres, a better part of which was influenced by essayist Joseph Addison of the Spectator. Thomas Miller notes in The Formation of College English that the cultural conditions of mid-eighteenth-century Scotland were such that after the 1707 Acts of
Union Scottish non-Anglicans were given opportunities for upward social mobility that had not been afforded them before, particularly in this case regarding higher education. Progressive schools flourished in the major population centers of Scotland, an environment which was conducive to progressive thinkers such as Smith, Blair, and Henry Homes, Lord Kames. The basis of that pedagogy was founded in part upon the critical evaluation of contemporary non-fiction as well as the recognized classics of antiquity, since there is a demographical interest in the Scottish academy of this period in ascending from college to the bar or especially to the pulpit. There would naturally be an interest in more contemporary cultural and professional contexts and rhetorical situations. Miller contends that this interest fostered and is evidence of a growing professional ethic in the Scottish student body, a group whose interest in knowledge springs from the motive of upward mobility. “Essays of taste and manners,” which one can find in The Spectator, encouraged readers to take possession of this newfound mobility in all of Britain and “to look inward and refine their responses and attitudes according to the manners deemed appropriate to polite society” (51). This meant that there was a more pragmatic reason for the study and appreciation of literature and that revitalized the notion of transcendence, and in the process it engendered along with it a new motivation to study literature, raising the stakes even higher than they would have been otherwise. The classics were no longer interesting and useful only to persons of wealth and leisure.

Ultimately, this aspect of belles lettres brings the conversation to an issue founded during this period that is a large part of the landscape of composition studies even to this day: the continuing role of literary study as it relates to the study of rhetoric in the composition sequence. A fuller treatment of the subject as it relates to technē and foundationalism in general follows in the conclusion, but it relates directly to Blair in this instance because he and other belletrists of
the period move so easily between critical appreciation and critical production. A cornerstone of belletrism is the supposition that there exist certain superior and edifying texts, and that, especially in handbooks, texts of proven worth and persuasive power can be disassembled and appropriated into a critical context, one for which it was not originally intended. The critical tradition in English studies begins with the supposition that this is a worthwhile and useful activity. Berlin would contend that if not done with the proper critical perspective such activities only properly train one to passive consumer culture. The question hinges around how composition is to be taught after Blair to a student body actively involved in their education.

Berlin notes that current-traditionalism has no regard for the ideological suppositions that underpin it and is correct in part. We arrive at current-traditionalism by taking a few things of belletrism for granted. It emerges in history from the presumption that effective prose has elements about it that can be repeated when taken out of the original context. Context is certainly regarded, but smaller, more local stylistic and mechanical particulars are given greater emphasis. Ideologically, for Berlin this means that with current-traditionalism all is closed off and self-referential, and the flaws and superficialities of such a system become underlined more boldly the further we get from Enlightenment thinking. The only critical consciousness that is involved addresses the elements of the prose itself and not so much of the ideas that it expresses.11

Current-traditionalism is a technê in the very important respect that it exists not only irrespective of the ideologies that it supports but also because it is so rationalistic. Certainly there is an ideology there, but it says a great deal about something anything if it sees a rational system unproblematically. Again, Nussbaum’s criteria for the designation of technê addresses virtue rather than ideology—two concepts which can easily be confused. The role theory plays in it is less clear because the theory is so old. Berlin seems to find it unnecessary to go into any great
detail about current-traditionalism in his essay, not in the way that he does with cognitivism and expressivism. For him it seems that current-traditionalism stands as pedagogical stance that no longer has any position in the forefront of English composition theory. It seems a relic of an earlier era and no longer plays a part in research. Perhaps what realm we do see it operating in is that of what Stephen North calls English composition lore.

Still, for Berlin current-traditionalism stands as a point of departure for English composition pedagogy, an unadulterated form of unselfconscious foundationalism. In that respect it seems that Berlin is correct; though as we shall see in Chapter Four, it seems that in the end, social-epistemicism, like the other foundational pedagogies he mentions, only fails to ask itself different questions. But before composition studies arrived at social-epistemicism, two new iterations of current-traditionalism—cognitive and expressive rhetoric—were formed and applied to suit the interests of new political and social contexts. Both are critical, but serve merely to reinforce the foundational suppositions that Blair was working from two hundred years before.
CHAPTER THREE:
THE ROLE OF TECHNÉ IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COGNITIVISM AND EXPRESSIVISM

Reductive as James Berlin may seem by distilling ideological influence in the writing classroom to four main fields, he does so out of a perceived necessity or convenience; certainly his doing so is not owing to an unwillingness to deal with the many spheres of theoretical and ideological influence in the field. Rather, “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” has for its rhetorical purpose a small group of touchstones from which to derive the ideological influences he identifies operating in contemporary American academia. In his monograph-length study of the development of English composition pedagogy, *Rhetoric and Reality*, however, he treats the subject much more expansively to suit a different purpose. For one thing, he sorts these spheres using different criteria, and current-traditionalism, cognitivism, expressivism, and social-epistemicism are not envisioned as four monoliths, as they are in his article for *College English*. Instead, Berlin aims there to describe the field of English composition studies historiographically, providing his readers with a much more complex view of the spheres of influence and defining them in relation to their development alongside outside social trends and political events.

To that extent, it seems necessary to treat the topics of cognitivism and expressivism with more complexity than Berlin does in his article. Further, we should also allow other theorists and pedagogues to address these two major spheres of influence in composition studies. To fully characterize the histories and the complexity of theory would be beyond the scope of this
dissertation. However, this chapter does give voice to some of the prominent names in the two fields, with regards to their developmental history and to their contemporary forms with especial regard placed upon their relation to the subject of technē. Generally speaking, it might be fair to say that Berlin is partially correct in placing them in the long-standing institution of current-traditionalism insofar as virtue in both is far more specialized, and to a greater or lesser extent that virtue seems more academic, than virtue for rhetoric of the classical period.

The foundations of cognitivism and expressivism give us the opportunity to explore certain other parts of the question of virtue in composition. Once again, when one overlooks the role of virtue in composition as he or she thinks of it as a craft, the part that gets missed is the ethical code which functions both as its intellectual resource and its reason for being. Berlin argues that cognitivism and expressivism share roots in capitalistic ideology—as Sharon Crowley might say, each a different ethos of the bourgeois subject. This chapter proposes in turn that Berlin and Crowley’s explanations insufficiently address the problem. As we will see in the next chapter, the question of ideology really only exchanges one code of ethics for another, but for our purposes here, by taking cognitivism and expressivism as extensions of the same narrative—the myth of technai, that writing and rhetoric are best thought of as a craft—we get a better sense of how innovations and revolutions in humanism have not provided for us the kinds of representation which rhetoric and language need or deserve.

To begin with, part of what the eighteenth-century belles lettres and modernization of the academy allowed us to do is bring to bear any number of new structural and critical apparati to literary critique and composition theory. Though in no case could they be as universally applicable and as encompassing as were those qualities of classical virtue, it is argued here for that reason that two new codes of writerly virtue were developed after belletrism. Framing this
argument is M.H. Abrams’s distinction between the “mirror” and the “lamp,” which provides for us a useful model with which to examine these phenomena. Afterwards, we examine here what some of those authors Berlin does or might identify as “cognitivist” and “expressivist” have to say in their own defense, not merely for the sake of characterizing Berlin’s argument against them, but also for the sake of complicating his argument even further.

That said, the ethos of cognitivism could scarcely be more different from the ethos of expressivism than any other two pedagogical approaches mentioned here. Addressing another subject almost entirely, Abrams addresses the academic and cultural relevance of the two in *The Mirror and the Lamp* by contrasting romanticism with the kind of eighteenth-century neoclassicism that characterized the intellectual culture out of which current-traditionalism develops. Certainly, Abrams does not consider in the 1950s the application of these two factors in modern academic thought to the study of English composition pedagogy, but nevertheless, they must be considered where we find their influence, and for that reason the value in discussing cognitivism and expressivism in composition studies becomes readily apparent.

Abrams’s two titular metaphors—“one [the mirror] comparing the mind to a reflector of external objects, to other [the lamp] to a radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives” (x)—apply on many levels to the perspectives of cognitivist and expressivist pedagogues discussed below. While it is true that certain forms of cognitivism range in method and belief outside of the realm of the humanistic, a fundamental belief persists within it in an extra-sensory order and truth. In explaining the four coordinates of art criticism—the *work*, with the *artist*, the *audience*, and the *universe* radiating around it—Abrams notes that “[a]lthough any reasonably adequate theory takes some account of all four elements, almost all theories [of art criticism] [...] exhibit a discernible orientation toward one only” (6). One can argue that such a
thing is the case with composition theory as well, especially when we consider cognitivism and expressivism.

Though Abrams describes in detail the relation of the work to each of these coordinates and to itself, the relation of work to universe and work to artist—“mimetic theories” and “expressive theories” respectively—seem most applicable here, though as we shall see, the relation of work to audience (or pragmatic theory, as Abrams describes it) becomes increasingly important as we approach the influence of reader-response theory in Chapter Five and the emphasis on abstract textual coherence (or objective theory) finds many applications.

While Abrams characterizes the mimetic attitude toward art as a view originating so far into antiquity as to have an indeterminable date of origin, it is those aspects of it that apply to modernism that are of the most concern here, and we find that expressive theory develops directly afterwards in such a rapid succession that many argue that romanticism arises as a reaction to it. Either way it seems that in composition studies that the application of expressive theory to composition pedagogy does not occur until early in the twentieth century, and that the modern sense of mimetic theory does not manifest itself fully in composition pedagogy either until late in the nineteenth century as well. In Chapter Two we saw that Robert Connors and Nan Johnson argue that classical rhetoric does not get displaced in its true form until this period for a variety of reasons.

It can be difficult to distill Abrams’s argument of mimetic and expressive theory into practical pieces, but the main of his argument seems to be that mimetic theory holds that art is the imitation of the eternal, the natural, or the perceived (8), while the understanding of expressive theory is that “[a] work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product
of the poet’s perceptions, thoughts, and feelings” (22). Though a derivative of the term perceive appears in both descriptions, the important point to note is that both viewpoints locate the origin point of all creative energy in different places. For a expressive theorist excellent artistry is evidence of an artist’s ability to discover his or her thoughts and perceptions and feelings accurately and to put them into effect with expressive clarity, while for a mimetic theorist artistic merit can be determined by the artist’s ability to perceive correctly.

From what we have seen thus far of composition theory, we can safely regard that part of composition theory that Berlin calls current-traditionalism as being consistent both with mimetic and objective theory. Certainly this underlines the point that composition theory does not conform itself to specific critical and aesthetic viewpoints, but it has a certain applicability to this chapter, a chapter on pedagogical viewpoints which are more neatly in line with Abrams’s two controlling metaphors, the mirror and the lamp. Yet again, however, as rhetoric all versions of it take into account more than just the relationship of the text to one of his other three coordinates. For that matter, both camps are not mutually exclusive altogether and are not wholly contiguous on their own. Expressivism, for instance as we shall see, in certain moderate forms takes careful consideration of audience response, and cognitivism in some instances, especially for the sake of objectivity, somewhat ironically, likewise takes careful consideration of other elements, even of the experiences and circumstances of individual writers.

Likewise, we find both cognitivism and expressivism locating the originary point of written expression in different places in human consciousness. For cognitivism the academic method can seem far less humanistic than any of the others that we see here, but all the more rational for it, placing science and rationalistic model-building in the seat of virtue, and for expressivism we locate virtue and truth in the individual human soul.
Certainly insofar as there ever was a pristine state for either of these movements, there are very important cultural and historical differences between cognitivism and the enlightenment and between expressivism and the romantic movement, many of which will be addressed here, but suffice it to say, cognitivism and expressivism as we find them in the field of composition studies are fed a steady diet of these, and both work very strongly out of their respective movements.

Cognitivism and expressivism are also two topics which are interesting to consider at once because, since they are so different—some even characterize them as complete opposites—it allows us to explore certain polarities that have come to inform the shape and culture of modern academics. To some extent we might say that we find in cognitivism and expressivism two extremes, and depending on who you are reading the terms always differ. James Berlin imagines the difference to be between extreme objectivity and extreme subjectivity, while Janet Emig explores the contrast between positivism and phenomenology, though not to these two schools of rhetoric but in a way that can be usefully applied. Ultimately they each characterize a middle ground, both calling it transactionalism, but neither meaning exactly the same thing; it is this middle ground that perhaps can give us the best insight into the characteristics of cognitivism and of expressivism as equal parts to a whole.

For the topic of technē, cognitivism and expressivism provide themselves with a standard of virtue different from current-traditionalism, and for that matter, their operating parts form two different kinds of technai. Whereas technē in current-traditionalism supposed of writing that there are certain standards of excellence, cognitivism promotes certain standards of methodological excellence and expressivism measures excellence by fidelity to individual and authentic expression. Of virtue in either case this means as always that the methods belie the
value—scientific rationalism in the case of cognitivism, and romanticism in the case of expressivism.

Cognitivism

Perhaps the legacy of Campbell and Locke to the rhetorical tradition can be most clearly found in cognitivism. Though all elements in Berlin’s taxonomy share an abiding positivism in their approaches to rhetoric and pedagogy, the ethos of cognitivism seems the most scientific and methodologically rational. How these scholars reconcile their original humanistic mission with the scientism of cognitive psychology varies widely, depending largely on which psychological theorist they choose as their primary influence. Cognitive rhetorics in this regard might appear phenomenological in one instance and then empirical in the next. To that extent it cannot be useful for us to assume that research into cognitive rhetoric will be scientific in method at all. As we shall see of scholars like Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, a scientific and sheer behavioristic exploration into the mind of the writer can be very different from the work done by observationalists like Frank D’Angelo and Janet Emig, who differ one from another in very important ways themselves.

Berlin styles cognitive rhetoric in “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” as “the heir apparent of current-traditional rhetoric” and locates it historically at the end of the nineteenth century (480). He cites Richard Ohmann in observing that out of response to a relatively rapid and protracted boom and bust cycle during this period the rational and controlling part of science gained a popular appeal in all human endeavors. The university’s role then would be “to provide a center for experts engaging in ‘scientific’ research designed to establish a body of knowledge that would rationalize all features of production, making it more
efficient, more manageable, and, of course, more profitable” (480). He then briefly describes the differences between the old university and the new, the pertinent difference here being the mission of blending the academic world with the world of industry and commerce. In fact, Berlin’s description of the new American university does not appear to be wholly unlike that of the progressive Enlightenment-era Scottish institutions from Chapter Two. To the extent that the student bodies of both are comprised of a new class of the upwardly mobile, the social and economic contexts bear an important resemblance.

Berlin explains that current-traditionalism already bore scientific pretensions, but that advances in cognitive science breathed new life into rhetoric informed heavily by cognitive theory. As noted above, new advances in cognitive theory have been attended by their applications to the study of rhetoric and composition, each differing in the usual way that all scientific advances differ from the predecessors, dismissing older findings as incomplete or misinformed. The one constant, however, Berlin contends has been the supposition that “the structures of the mind correspond in perfect harmony with the structures of the material world, the minds of the audience, and the units of language” (480).

This belief in the reflective cognitive structures of the individual mind to the material world is owing in part to two other legacies of the Enlightenment: the emphasis of individual mind philosophy on perception and the abiding belief in an abiding natural order. To a large extent, the work of Locke contributes to both factors. Those who would have read the work of George Berkeley and David Hume would also have been familiar with the treatment of any percept outside of the mind as a cognitive or verbal phenomenon. Post-Cartesian doubt supports this comfortably.
Also in his essay Berlin notes of cognitive rhetoric just afterwards that its adherents promote most strongly of all the process rather than the product of composition. As scientific observers, and especially as scholars interested in the operations of the human mind, aesthetics and content signal merely the outcome of the complicated and fascinating process. The object is to understand and describe the linkage of the individual mind to the individual writing process, basing the entire enterprise upon the scientific supposition that “the invariable structures of the mind […] operate in a rational, although not totally predictable, way” (Berlin 481), again assuming that the structures of the individual mind relate to the structures of the world in an informative and measurable fashion. As Berlin describes it, cognitive theory posits that the mind operates in a hierarchy of goal-oriented processes, providing inner motivation for the writer throughout, it seems.

Goal-directed motivation does not appear to be wholly distinct from Kenneth Burke’s creative and appreciative motivations from Counter-Statement. Indeed Burke’s work in aesthetic response differs in very important ways from that of the scholars that Berlin draws from here, but Burke being a very important rhetorician and literary scholar through the better part of the twentieth century, his work on literary form plays an important role in cognitive rhetoric in all iterations. Certainly there is more of Sigmund Freud and Jean Piaget in Burke’s rhetoric and much less of the scientific cognitivism that we find in Flower and Hayes, as we shall see, but such is the methodological range of cognitivism.

Perhaps one of the most well-known publications addressing the rational reducibility of the communicative act is Linda Flower and John R. Hayes’s 1981 study, “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing.” Berlin cites from it extensively in his article, and it has in its own right become a very important touchstone in writing pedagogy. In it they call on the “venerable
tradition in rhetoric and composition which sees the composing process as a series of decisions and choices” (365), often directed, it seems, to developing a communicative act by way of its rhetorical context. Certainly this pertains in some ways to Aristotle’s main treatise on the subject—rhetoric being there the discovery of the best means of persuasion—and to some extent to Blair’s work, practically speaking, in the sense there that classical rhetoric is adjusted to suit new contexts and philosophical outlooks. This follows a bit from Burke as well. There are many determining factors in “situation-driven” rhetoric, among them being the education and the experience and comfort the writer has with language. Flower and Hayes end their introduction with the novel proposition that they will treat with perhaps a similar method and outlook as their forebears, but that the level of scientific rationality will be unparalleled. “This paper will introduce a theory of the cognitive processes involved in composing,” they explain, “in an effort to lay groundwork for more detailed study of thinking processes in writing” (366). Their terms are very scientific, such as “protocol analysis” and “a working hypothesis.”

They propose four major points about their cognitive process theory, all of which describe a mind working as a rational mechanism of discrete and cooperative parts not incredibly different from Locke and Campbell’s symbol-processing minds. The first point they propose is that “[t]he process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (366). They begin their discussion of this by observing that “stage process models” differ from this perspective in the sense that they define their model of cooperative thinking processes synchronically, while the process model is more linear. The problem with the stage models, they explain, “is that they model the growth of the written product, not the inner process of the person producing it” (367). They note that stage models have been useful and that undeniably they speak to the development of an idea
in motion, but “they offer an inadequate account of the more intimate, moment-by-moment intellectual process of writing” (367). To some extent this is the expressivists that Flower and Hayes are talking about here.

Once again, Flower and Hayes prefer to consider the writing process as a personal and hierarchically complex cognitive activity, that it has a multi-dimensionality heretofore unacknowledged. Their method is scientific. Through various means they measure the various activities whereby a student writer performs a given writing task, all of which is narrated aloud by the student as he or she composes, the result of which is the development of a composing process cognitive model. The resultant model does not appear to be strictly hierarchical, but routine and abstract. They go on to describe a complicatedly interrelated set of operations which flow from one another through various stages.

Flower and Hayes conclude from their first observation that the composition process might not be best modeled as a progressively linear pattern so much as a group of interconnected “optional actions” (375). Their second key point, then, is that “[t]hese processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded with any other” (366). Insofar as the progress in the composition of a student text occurs in real time it can appear that the idea develops in a more or less linear fashion, one could mark the development of the piece that way, but it seems that Flower and Hayes contend here that idea itself gets manufactured in the mind in a different way. It comes to the student through cognitive structures which reapply themselves, in relation to one another, continuously and consistently. This observation directs us to their third key point, that “[t]he act of composing is a goal-directed thinking process, guided by the writer’s own growing network of goals” (366), a proposition they refer to as “the keystone of the cognitive process theory [they] are proposing” (377).
They note of their third proposition that it can appear to some extent paradoxical, that the writing process can seem at once “serendipitous” and logically coherent. “People start out writing without knowing exactly where they will end up,” they explain; “yet they agree that writing is a purposeful act” (377). This speaks to the very heart of what cognitivist’s own goals are and as we shall see of expressivism, favors object over subjectivity. After all, a goal-centered approach such as cognitivism is seems by definition completely object-oriented, and from their description of it, it seems that a student-composer might have any number of cognitive goals of which he or she might or might not be consciously aware. Flower and Hayes posit a set of goals which exist in the writer’s mind that range from those of process—dealing with “carrying out the process of writing”—to those of content—“things the writer wants to say or do to an audience”—to anywhere in between, and within any composition act, those goals “grow into an increasingly elaborate network of goals and sub-goals as the write composes” (377).

The interesting part of this model, and what makes it so different from the cognitive mapping that Campbell uses, is that it does not accept faculty psychology in its premises. To that extent Flower and Hayes propose only a notion of the mind which allows for the creation of cognitive structures—which may or may not, depending, adjust to new composition goals—to aid in the composition process. Still, the orientation of their model is multi-dimensional and hierarchical. There are goals that exist on higher levels of consciousness and overall importance, each of which guides the writer in the process of solidifying the composed piece. Therein lies, in this kind of cognitive rhetoric, the link between it and *technê*, for insinuated at the end of all these suppositions about goal-oriented composing is that one could positively identify those goal-seeking patterns which are designated as “high-level,” “low-level,” and “mid-level” and direct students to address them accordingly. Flower and Hayes note, accordingly, that “one might
predict that an important difference between good and poor writers will be in both the quantity and quality of the middle range of the goals they create” (379). To that extent it might be said that poorer writers, who for whatever reason do not perform as well as better writers, are judged to be so because they have not the same abilities as the better writers to return in their minds to the higher-level goals such as idea development and rhetorical strength, preferring instead to focus on completing individual phrases and sentences correctly. Therein lies, one could presume, Plato’s knack, which is fairly consistent with cognitive rhetoricians of all stripes and wholly inconsistent, as we shall see, with the expressivists. For this kind of rhetoric the belief is that an individual, at one time or another, could possess compositional skills—and in this case command of cognitive features most suited to written composition—different from any other, and by virtue of this fact, could likewise be suitable or unsuitable to one degree or another.

Their fourth key point is that writers in turn develop this goal-directed thinking process in ever-changing and increasingly complex ways to suit their expertise and “sense of purpose,” often redirecting their goals on certain processing levels to meet new ends. For the student who is the poorer, lower-level composer, whose attention is directed toward correcting mechanical errors, the scale of goals is much more limited. To this point they add the complicated notion of knowledge, existing in various forms and in various levels of consciousness. They explain that in the act of writing “[t]he structure of knowledge for some topic becomes more conscious and assertive as we keep tapping memory for related ideas” (381). As time goes along and experience is gained that structure might change, especially in response to what intellectual goals the writer sets for him or herself in the writing process as well as out of it. These are the “goals” and “sub-goals” the writer generates in response to an assignment. Ultimately, a positive structure exists,
however dynamically, in a serviceable fashion. Flower and Hayes argue this point to establish the usefulness of cognitive modeling in composition pedagogy.

Flower and Hayes conclude their argument in the way that many cognitive rhetoricians do, from Campbell onward, and to some extent in the way that Aristotle frames his topics, with the promise of more specifically conclusive work that can be done from their model. Frank D’Angelo makes a similar argument in his *A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric*, which is far less scientific in its ethos, much more deductive in its method, but carries with it some of the same core beliefs of the abovementioned. To that extent D’Angelo’s work provides us with an important insight into the cognitive part of the rhetorical tradition. For Flower and Hayes the usefulness of their study is for the clarification of goals in the process of the writer and the writing teacher, for tapping into the cognitive resources of the mind and directing more consciously and more efficiently toward improvement. They explain: “[b]y placing emphasis on the inventive power of the writer, who is able to explore ideas, to develop, act on, test, and regenerate his or her own goals, we are putting an important part of creativity where it belongs—in the hands of the working, thinking writer” (386). From their language here it seems clear how Berlin could criticize this brand of cognitive rhetoric for the harmful perpetuation of the harmful dimensions of the entrepreneurial ethos, rewarding as it is to innovation and the apprehension of higher, but ultimately arbitrary, structures of power and revenue.

The significance of Frank D’Angelo’s 1975 volume *A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric* is that it applies the forms of discourse from Quintilian to the cognitive development theories of Piaget and to the structural aesthetic theory of Kenneth Burke, among others. His purpose, as he describes it succinctly in his General Introduction “is to outline a new approach to rhetoric, a conceptual theory of rhetoric which deals with the relationship between thought and discourse”
Drawing on what he calls the linguistic principles of rhetoric and on Alexander Bain and on the modes of discourse, D’Angelo proposes here that some definitive standard or positive set of truths about those modes of discourse that we can derive from recognizably effective discourse. He also perceives a need, he explains, in rhetoric “of a new organizing principle, a new conceptual framework which will not only relate the old and new in writing, but which will also produce a fairly coherent body of ideas about the nature of written language” (1). The idea is that there exists in human consciousness certain cognitive constants.

D’Angelo uses Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as a jumping-off point, borrowing from the positivity of the notion of a “best” available means of persuasion and then wonders aloud “what if rhetoric were a science as well as an art” (2). This idea he borrows from Martin Steinmann, who argues that the distinction between art and science is expressible as the difference between “knowing how and knowing that,” respectively. For D’Angelo a legitimate angle at the study of rhetoric is the discovery of those “general principles of oral or written discourse” which make it effective. He acknowledges the usefulness of the study of classical and older rhetorics—the works he names range from Aristotle to the eighteenth century, so “classical rhetoric would not be an accurate application except insofar as Blair and Whately borrow from the classics—but contends that for a fuller understanding of rhetoric we must turn to science as well.

The most fundamental part of this approach to rhetoric, as we have seen, is structure, but at least as much as anyone in the modern era of composition studies D’Angelo focuses upon structure abstractly. “Order, arrangement, structure—these concepts seem to be a necessary precondition in order for the mind to be able to understand anything,” he argues (10). Since D’Angelo determines order to be a precondition, we can be sure that his belief is that rational
form exists anterior to human perception of it. In other words, opposite of what we have seen of Heisenberg, order is not imposed by ourselves in making meaning of unordered elements. Like Plato, D’Angelo believes that order exists independent of our ability to perceive it.

D’Angelo is not so metaphysically deterministic as Plato, however. He notes of the “gestalt scientists” that “the human organism will not tolerate chaos; if forms are incomplete, then the organism will tend to complete them” (14). This, he explains is the mechanism of consciousness, to unify experience. He argues that we can infer from what structural patterns we perceive in discourse structural patterns of thought and vice versa (16). Through such a mutually informative process we can develop the comprehensive theory of rhetoric that he calls for earlier. This is the makeup of intelligence, however, and not actuality, which is to say, D’Angelo argues here that positive structures do exist, and not for a reality governed by chaos. He bases his beliefs in the way that Bain and others from that period did, in the certainty that those communicative acts which are proven to be rhetorically effective—those, one would presume, which best suit George Kennedy’s definition of rhetoric from “A Hoot in the Dark,” a communicative act that is followed by the desired action on the part of the hearer—might be examined for their principle parts and yield some useful knowledge about rhetorical effectiveness.

In short, D’Angelo’s stance is that there exists a structural correspondence between logic and discourse. He asserts that there do exist conceptual patterns of discourse, by which he means, he says, “verbal patterns related to thinking activity” (18), and though conceptual structure does not correspond directly to verbal structure, there are verbal equivalencies. For this position he turns to Kenneth Burke for support, whose comments in A Rhetoric of Motives and Counter-Statement particularly, he explains, “indicate that not only can formal patterns be found in experience, but also that these patterns are exemplified in oral or written discourse” (20). In the
field of composition studies and of rhetoric especially, he argues, “[t]hey can thus be abstracted and made the basis of new formal categories and conceptual principles” (20) for generative purposes as well as those of conceptual and expressive reinforcement. Later D’Angelo argues that such a correspondence can be useful to rhetoricians in posterior analysis as well. Such an argument is similar (though not completely similar) to Ramus’s, who might be interesting to turn to for his thoughts on the syllogism. His unswerving faith in the representative power of the syllogism similarly indicates a correspondent trust in the human power of formal apprehension.

For Berlin the Flower and Hayes approach to understanding composition appears, among other things, reductive, citing their focus upon the problem-solving aspect of the human mind (481). Ultimately, cognitive rhetoric seems too uncritical to Berlin in that very important regard. Utilitarian as it appears to be, cognitive rhetoric can be seen “as being eminently suited to appropriation by the proponents of a particular ideological stance, a stance consistent with the modern college’s commitment to preparing students for the world of corporate capitalism” (482). Instead it seems that Berlin envisions a simplified, bait-and-switch world view, where what seems consistent with economic modes of production, distribution, and consumption and managerial modes might be consistent with the human mind’s modes of understanding. The human mind might conveniently be conditioned to it. At the very least the university has a vested interest in this being true.

When one considers the goal-oriented motivation of the cognitivists’ model of the human mind, this makes a kind of sense. For cognitivism, “[t]he mind is regarded as a set of structures that performs in a rational manner, adjusting and reordering functions in the service of the goals of the individual” (482). In a corporate capitalistic reality, insofar as one is a “cog” (pun intended) in a corporate-capitalistic mode, his or her actions on behalf of him or her self are
animated by a motivation to do what is best for the corporation, and at the very least they are conditioned to set personal goals which coincide with the company’s. Goals are rarely evaluated with much depth of critical scrutiny. Instead, “[t]he goals themselves are considered unexceptionally apparent in the very nature of things, immediately identifiable as worthy of pursuit” (482).

Unfortunately, Berlin mistakes in cases like this one convenience and comparison for causation. Later, he declares that “the rationalization of the writing process is specifically designated an extension of the rationalization of economic activity,” and further, that “[t]he pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned goals in the composing process parallels the pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned profit-making goals in the corporate marketplace” (483). In either case—were we to accept the cognitivist rationale or the Marxian pedagogy-capitalism analogy—an added later of rational abstraction must be considered. Certainly, cognitive models of composing processes do not correlate perfectly with the corporate marketplace; there are certain differences that composition scholars like Berlin are always happy to entertain. The strength of the argument becomes problematic in the fact that the comparison is a convenient one, and the difficulty arises out of the fact that one must be able to accept a relatively long tradition of Marxian premises to begin to accept their application to composition pedagogy. More on this topic is to follow in Chapter Four, where the issues of social-epistemicism as it relates to technē and virtue, but regarding cognitive rhetoric.

Cognitive rhetoric also supposes a set of circumstances which are natural and optimal, and is positivistic in this regard. In the language of Flower and Hayes, Berlin explains, “[o]bstacles to achieving goals are labeled ‘problems,’ disruptions in the natural order, impediments that must be removed” (482). So vested is the interest of scientific pursuit in the
rational interaction between the individual mind and the natural world that the significance of any phenomenon is expressed to suit academic interests.

Berlin also notes that cognitivists have a particular problem with the unconscious, inherent operations of the human mind, particularly regarding those techniques of the human mind which deal with problems irrationally. Flower and Hayes, he notes, regard these as “heuristics” and that “[t]hey normally appear as unconscious, intuitive processes that problem-solvers use without realizing it, but” he notes, “even when formulated for conscious application they are never foolproof” (482). Presumably, a greater goal of making these measurements of human cognition is to maximize communication potential. While heuristics are not measurable by any standard of scientific rigor, Berlin notes of the cognitivists that their outcome always conforms to their underlying principle philosophy of mind, nature, and language: “there is […] a beneficent correspondence between the structures of the mind, the structures of the world, the structures of the mind of the audience, and the structures of language” (483). In the end, rhetoric suffers from over-rationalization, and at the bottom the motivation for any project of this kind is to use finding to suit a corporate agenda.

To that end Berlin defines the corporate-capitalistic in terms similar to those Flower and Hayes use. His sense of that world, as we shall see in the discussion of expressivist rhetoric in the second half of this chapter, appears multi-faceted, suitable for seemingly contradictory individual motivations. In the case of cognitive rhetoric and all academic pursuits of its kind, its entire apparatus “is designed to turn goal-seeking and problem-solving behavior into profits” (483).

Berlin sees a danger in thinking of writing in this way because it commodifies texts and because it has a way of reinforcing the capitalistic moral system. He explains that, for cognitive
rhetorics, “[t]he purpose of writing is to create a commodified text […] that belongs to the individual and has exchange value […] just as the end of corporate activity is to create a privately owned profit” (483). Further, an aspect of heuristics not often explored is that certain individuals have access to those parts of the brain most useful in writing and, if we are to accept Berlin’s analogy, most useful in the corporate world: “[t]he class system is thus validated since it is clear that the rationality of the universe is more readily detected by a certain group of individuals” (483). He then posits that the implications of this are scarcely explored because the scientific community is only interested in reinforcing and perpetuating the learning experiences of the established middle and upper classes rather than “the perfecting of inherent mental structures” common to writers of all economic backgrounds. Instead of entertaining the possibility, in other words, that human environmental factors influence the cognitive development of learners, thereby transmitting behavioral and philosophical patterns—“productive” or otherwise—from one generation to the next, cognitive rhetoricians focus their efforts on the falsely democratic premise that their work will produce positive results for everyone.

Not so, Berlin persists, because cognitive rhetoric, being a part of science in method as well as endeavor, refuses to complicate matters with the “ideological question.” To a great extent this is a problem of willful ignorance on the part of science in the interest of perpetuating the belief that reality, in Blair’s terms, is rationally reducible in all of its forms and functions. “Certain structures of the material world, the mind, and language,” he explains, “and their correspondence with certain goals, problem-solving heuristics, and solutions in the economic, social, and political are regarded as inherent features of the universe, existing apart from human social intervention” (484). A side effect of this, one would presume, is a deficiently
uncomplicated view of humanity which is compatible with an equally deficient, uncomplicated, and rational view of economics.

Once again, Berlin’s critique of cognitive rhetorics in *Rhetoric and Reality* focuses less on the “ideology question” than on characterizing it as a branch of “transactional rhetoric” and identifying it with the latest wave of new pedagogical rhetorics developed in the 1960s and early 1970s to suit more contemporary academic, cultural, and political contexts. Transactional rhetoric he describes as arguing “that reality is the product of both the observer and the observed—the private and the public—and is located in the interaction of the two” (139). This he describes in relation to two other types of that period: objective and subjective rhetorics, the epistemologies of each concentrating upon observed phenomena and individual expression respectively. He identifies two other types of transactional rhetoric—classical and epistemic—but regarding the aforementioned objective and subjective components, “[t]he differences between the various types of transactional rhetoric lie in the way each of these elements is defined and, more important, in the nature of their relationship” (155). At bottom of his description of transactionalism Berlin draws a line of comparison between cognitivism and epistemicism in the important sense that they both regard these two components simultaneously—albeit with varied ideological bases—a noteworthy comparison to which we will return in Chapter Four.

That part of transactional rhetoric that Berlin defines in *Rhetoric and Ideology* as cognitive rhetoric, however, takes its ideological foundation from the principles of scientific inquiry and logical determinism. The part of rhetorical composition studies we call cognitive rhetoric, he says, “is distinguished by its assertion that the mind is composed of a set of structures that develop in chronological sequence,” particularly regarding the structural
relationship between language and thought (159). For this reason, and for the important reason
that cognitive theorists emphasize the notion of stages of cognitive development, Berlin explains,
interest in the idea of writing as a process is very important. So much so, perhaps, that the vested
interest becomes an ideological influence on their scholarly output.

Regarding this emphasis on process, and by extension its application into English
composition pedagogy, the acquisition of writing skills depends largely upon the development of
those parts of the brain having to do with that particular skill set, directly and marginally. With
or without instruction the mind will develop on its own, and “[w]hile the mind is made up of
structures that develop naturally, it is necessary for the individual to have the right experiences at
the right moment in order for this development to take place” (Berlin, Reality 159). Further, the
development of the human mind depending as much on environment as biochemistry, what
rhetorical influences the individual faces cognitive rhetoricians find an interest in as well. The
model, as Berlin describes it, is that of the transaction, that “[t]he structures of the mind are such
that they correspond to the structures of reality, the structures of the minds of the audience, and
the structures of language” (159). These structures being charted and understood, possibilities for
teaching writing might be further enhanced.

The concept of transactionalism ultimately figures into the debate over writing and
rhetoric pedagogy because pedagogues of all persuasions find it necessary at some point to
address it at least tacitly. For that matter, also, there seems to be no consensus on a definition for
it. Ultimately each definition involves the interaction of the individual with some kind of rule of
externality. In Rhetoric and Reality Berlin defines transactional rhetoric as the “discovery” of
“reality in the interaction of the features of the rhetorical process itself—in the interaction of
material reality, writer, audience, and language” (155). Subheads of transactional rhetoric for
him here are rhetorics based upon “classical rhetoric,” cognitive psychology, and principles of epistemics. In “Inquiry Paradigms and Writing” from The Web of Meaning Janet Emig mentions transactionalism coupled with the term constructivism in the context of two other “research paradigms,” positivism and phenomenology. Her definition as well as Berlin’s supposes a reality governed by nearly infinite variability.

Despite this variability Emig’s sense of what she calls the “governing gaze” speaks to a rational reducibility. She outlines a set of critical responses or stances which she calls “inquiry paradigms,” which in turn, she says, first inform the governing gaze, or as she defines it, “a steady way of perceiving actuality” (Web 160).12 She explains further, that “[w]e see what we elect to see,” and that “[w]e have, as this metaphor puts it, a gaze that is governed by our expectations, which are in turn governed by our experiences and what we have decided cognitively to make of them” (160). She imagines her three research paradigms to exist on what seems a bit like a continuum in the same way that Berlin’s terms for subjective and objective do. The difference is that from Emig’s perspective a person does not have to be a pedagogue to have a prevailing governing gaze.

Her argument for transactionalism differs from Berlin’s, despite the similarities. For Emig positivism and phenomenology both sacrifice “field” and “focus” respectively to suit their academic needs—they both have a different attitude toward “context.” She explains: “[t]he positivist believes that a one-to-one correspondence exists or can be established between a phenomenon and an interpretation of that phenomenon; the phenomenologist, as the quotation [from Elliot Mishler’s “Meaning in Context”] notes, believes that ‘many equally valid descriptions are possible”’ (162). Emig illustrates her point, for instance, by pointing out the types of writing assignments a phenomenologist might create as opposed to those of a positivist:
“[a] positivistic assignment is one that does not emanate from the student writer nor from the students’ prior writing such as free writing, journal entries, or response-to-text papers” (163). This is to say that what writing a student does perform originates and is in response to an idea about rhetoric or about literature that exists prior to the assignment being given.

The problem from Berlin’s point of view, once again, is not so much that regarding reality, audience, and language there exists what he describes there as a “correspondent harmony” among them so much as it is the suppositions about the power dynamic between the individual and the society in it; the problem with Berlin’s thesis, however, is the supposition that there are rational structures of reality, audience, and language to begin with—none which provide us with the degree of utility that the transactionalists suppose that they do, anyway.

The transactional metaphor is an interesting one because it implies an exchange and is weakened because of it. It implies, as all metaphors do, a scale of useful equivalency, and that in terms of rhetoric, there might be some way of relating what goes on in one realm with what goes on in another. For that matter it also implies an imposed rationality onto a communicative act. This notion of reality once again, regardless of how it is posited, assumes a state of affairs where one could at least theoretically really know some kind of existential truth. Some would exchange truth in form for truth in function. Either way a positive set of circumstances presents itself. As we have seen in this chapter, and as we shall see once again below with expressive rhetoric, the problem is that such a truth always will be theoretical and subject to the eccentricities of the viewer’s “governing gaze.”
Expressivism

Berlin makes mention of a kind of pedagogical approach called “expressivism” twice in *Rhetoric and Reality*, once in connection with the progressive educational reforms of the 1920s through the 1940s and once again in connection with the emphasis on the subject in the 1960s and 1970s. Each instance is informed by different intellectual stances which were in vogue at the time of iteration, but both situated its critical gaze almost exclusively upon the writing subject.

Berlin’s critique of expressivism in “Rhetoric and Ideology” is characteristically less historically complicated than in *Rhetoric and Reality*, as we have already seen, and is styled as “expressionism,” though it encompasses more or less the same idea. Originating in the “elitist rhetoric of liberal culture” of post-World War I America, where the belief was that with the proper self-application, with the proper natural gifts of intellect one could achieve seeming unlimited potential, writing was democratized, and all were believed to have this gift (484).

Whereas cognitive rhetoric might be most historically aligned with the psychology of the Age of Reason, Berlin sees a kinship in expressionism in the Romantic era. Fundamental beliefs in both are not so different however, particularly regarding the perpetuated beliefs in individual human potential. In fact, it suffers from the same fatal flaw as cognitivism in the sense that it refuses the ideology question. The persistent and common belief of all people of this persuasion is that “[l]eft to our own devices [...] each of us would grow and mature in harmony,” though from Berlin’s point of view, in a reality governed by ideological influence, “[u]nfortunately, hardly anyone is afforded this uninhibited development, and so the fallen state of society is both the cause and the effect of its own distortion, as well as the corrupter of its individual members” (484).
While primacy in expressivism is given to the subject, Berlin explains, external factors such as environment and language are considered, but only through the lens of the individual need and perception. For expressivism the only goal a pedagogue or theorist has in mind is the development of the individual voice and the supposition of a uniqueness in each individual relative to outside factors: “[a]ll [objective or external factors] fulfill their true function only when being exploited in the interests of locating the individual’s authentic nature” (484). That expressivism supposes an “authentic” and essential truth about each individual makes it no less positivistic than the supposition of objective truth outside of the individual.

Writing then would be an act of self-discovery, a means of accessing this individual authenticity, especially if done in a particularly efficient and self-satisfying way. All that exists outside of the self, for this matter, might also be used in service of these processes of self discovery. “The material world provides sensory images that can be used in order to explore the self,” Berlin explains, “the sensations leading to the apprehending-source of all experience” (485). These outside influences from that non-self part of reality exist, regarding all modes of self expression at least, entirely for the purposes of making this discovery, and language plays a very important role in that process because it is the medium of exchange. Combined with sense impression, language can “provide metaphors to express the experience of the self, an experience which transcends ordinary non-metaphoric language but can be suggested through original figures and tropes” (Berlin 485).

Fundamentally in expressivism there exists a belief in authentic self expression, that buried beneath all external influences and apprehensions there exists a solid and unchanging core of personal truth, and if one could find the means by which to express this personal truth, its expressive power would be beneficial to both the writer and to the reader. Were Berlin not
explaining it in such rational terms, this belief in inner truth would almost seem mystical; and in some other cases it does, as we shall see.

Where Berlin sees corporate ideology influencing the form and function of expressivism is in this emphasis on individual authentic expression. Opposite cognitive rhetoric’s role—to reinforce the sense of corporate identity—expressivism functions as reinforcement of the ultimately misleading but necessary belief in the importance of individual ambition and initiative. “The most important measure of authenticity,” he explains, “of genuine self-discovery and self-revelation […] is the presence of originality in expression; and this is the case whether the write is creating poetry or writing a business report” (485). To a great extent Berlin describes this feature as one of the more insidious elements of corporate capitalism because it makes individual motivation seem only partially linked to corporate motivation, that their interests coincide only in ways that are *mutually* beneficial, when in reality they are not. In the end, he explains, the positive truth of the individual writer supposes the same of a given writing context: “[d]iscovering the true self in writing will simultaneously enable the individual to discover the truth of the situation which evoked the writing, a situation that, needless to say, must always be compatible with the development of the self” (485).

Of the ideological foundations of expressivism specifically Berlin cites critics in the 1960s and 1970s who were the first proponents of expressivism championing this development and exploration of individual authenticity as a means to liberating oneself from external coercive influences. In this respect he credits expressivist rhetoricians with political awareness of ideological influence. The belief, he explains, was that “the alienation and fragmenting experience of the authoritarian institutional setting can be resisted by providing students with concrete experiences that alter political consciousness through challenging official versions of
reality” (485). He notes also that the expressivist movement in English composition studies had a political “wing” counter to that as a means to political awareness; he describes it as being “moderate” and preserving the fundamental emphasis on the self and the stance against ideology, albeit in a less politicized classroom context.

Of the variety of expressivists Berlin describes as more contemporary to our era, Peter Elbow, the author of *Writing Without Teachers*, the rare book that finds success within academia as well as out of it, is perhaps the most prolific and widely read because of his popularity. Elbow’s textbook *Writing With Power* draws Berlin’s attention first, however. From Elbow’s perspective there as Berlin describes it, “power within society ought always to be vested in the individual” (485).

Berlin’s quibble with rhetorics of this kind lies not in the political awareness of it so much as its model for the construction of meaning. For people like Elbow, he explains, “[p]ower is a product of a configuration involving the individual and her encounter with the world” (486). The extension of such a belief system outside of the composition classroom is a world governed by individual interest and a sense of reality and group dynamics filtered through a necessarily individuated perspective. “The community’s right to exist,” he explains, “[…] stands only insofar as it serves all of its members as individuals”; and further, “[i]t is, after all, only the individual, acting alone and apart from others, who can determine the existent, the good, and the possible” (486). At bottom expressivism bases itself upon the belief that reality exists only by the individual perspective of it, and no two individuals being environmentally affected in the same way, one must always begin with what one knows for him or herself before branching into communal considerations. It also carries with it a faith in civil virtue, a belief that what is good
for individual political liberation is ultimately good for the community at large. Berlin explains this faith as “[t]he underlying conviction of expressionist,” being that when individuals are spared the distorting effects of a repressive social order, their privately determined truths will correspond to the privately determined truths of all others: my best and deepest vision supports the same universal and external laws as everyone else’s best and deepest vision. (486)

Nothing of nihilism exists in this outlook about reality; on the other side of individual human perception they find no yawning void. On the contrary, it does embody an abiding faith in a rational and comprehensible truth of matters existing beneath the surface of corruptive human affairs, and for that matter a faith that a truly honest communicative act will be self-evident as such to a give reader. He cites Donald Murray in explaining this further in *A Writer Teaches Writing*. There he finds Murray arguing that “the writer is on a search for himself. If he finds himself he will find an audience, because all of us have the same common core. And when he digs deeply into himself and is able to define himself, he will find others who will read with a shock of recognition what he has written” (486).

To this extent expressivism finds a spiritual and intellectual foundation in Rousseau and European romanticism. Berlin notes that expressivists—Elbow specifically—accept those parts of “liberation pedagogies,” as Paulo Freire’s has come to be known, for their interest in the fostering of political awareness in the individual and “the contradictions of experience in the classroom,” but they refuse “to take into account the social dimension of this pedagogy” (Berlin 486), accepting, he notes of Elbow in *Embracing Contraries*, that which is psychological and ignoring the political and economic. One can only trust his or her individual truth and like Descartes begin from there.
Such a notion of individual truth and the universal derivative that Murray is implying connects us not only to Rousseau and romanticism at large, but also to what Abrams refers to when he addresses the concept of “vegetable genius” from German aestheticism and his chapter on “Unconscious Genius and Organic Growth” and then again particularly regarding “Coleridge and the Aesthetics of Organism.” There we encounter the notion of an organism—or we can in this instance imagine a written composition or a writer—encoded already with the information it needs to become what it will, individual exterior influences notwithstanding. As living, breathing entities participating in activities with the use of languages that exist long before ourselves, from this perspective, much of what is to be done has already been completed and set. In this way the expressivists can begin to address political issues, because individual concern might be regarded as universal concern in this way.

Case in point is William Lutz’s “Making Freshman English a Happening” and Geoffrey Sirc’s tangential response piece “English Composition as a Happening.” In Lutz’s piece he opens by reiterating a point from a convention in Miami from 1969, where he argued that teachers should concentrate on the creative dimensions of writing and on destabilizing the material conditions and the power dynamics of the classroom and the university to achieve that end. In that respect Lutz hopes to infuse the classroom with elements of the avant garde, with an anarchist’s eye toward restructuring and allowing those things which expressivists hold to be true to surface. Sirc retains much of Lutz’s revolutionary spirit, but responds in a way that is not entirely expressivist, but pertinent all the same. He argues that movements like the one Lutz proposed became institutionalized in their own part.

In terms of commercial and consumer and corporate realities, Berlin describes the interest of expressive rhetoric as achieving liberation from them through shaking the foundations of it by
exploring individual truth, emerging on the other side as “a new order.” After all, he explains, while resistance is “the correct response” to corporate reality, for expressivism this resistance “is always construed in individual terms” and justifiably so:

> [c]ollective retaliation poses as much of a threat to individual integrity as do the collective forces being resisted, and so is itself suspect. The only hope in a society working to destroy the uniqueness of the individual is for each of us to assert our individuality against the tyranny of the authoritarian corporation, state, and society. (487)

This issue of collective retaliation is one that Berlin does oversimplify a bit, and if one were to revisit certain basic elements of romantic theory, this becomes apparent, for there is nothing of romantic theory that excludes the importance of the collective conscious. Perhaps over-emphasis on the individual is something that romanticism became, but Elbow quite obviously stresses the group.

Berlin finds the individual resistance to political conformity in expressive rhetoric to be only half right, and completely ironic. His objections are manifold, but he begins by arguing against the notion that one can reliably and often mount an effective resistance as an individual, that such resistance would largely be symbolic. But his strongest and most interesting here is the notion that what parts of expressivism are most interested in individual expression and positive and authentic self-hood are easily and often co-opted by the very corporate influences it proposes to alienate and undermine.\(^\text{13}\) “After all,” he argues, “this rhetoric can be used to reinforce the entrepreneurial virtues capitalism most values: individualism, private initiative, the confidence for risk taking, the right to be contentious with authority (especially the state)” (487). He envisions expressionistic rhetoric appealing to the beliefs and interests of upper management
types and aspirants: “[t]he members of this class see their lives as embodying the creative realization of the self, exploiting the material, social, and political conditions of the world in order to assert a private vision, a vision which, despite its uniqueness, finally represents humankind’s best nature” (487). Further, this viewpoint is ultimately a classist one in the opposite sense of the self-loathing aspirant, in the notion that failure to attain relative wealth and autonomy is indicative of a weakness in will or character, a defective self-authenticity, in expressivist writing terms. Further enhancing this sense of self-loathing he uses as an analogy here for the effects of expressivist rhetoric, he finds that expressivist rhetoric encourages the separation of work experience from life experience, finding the individual fulfillment which one is conditioned to seek in conspicuous consumption (487).

The role of the teacher is a complicated one for Elbow and any expressivist, especially regarding the political role. Elbow does note in *Embracing Contraries*, for instance, that as teachers “we have an obligation to students but we also have an obligation to knowledge and society” and that “[s]urely we are incomplete as teachers if we are committed only to what we are teaching but not to our students, or only to our students but not to what we are teaching, or half-hearted in our commitment to both” (142). He points to the fact that the dual role a teacher fills is that of an adversary and an ally, as both a grader and standard-bearer and a learning enabler.

As mentioned above, Berlin develops the notion of expressivism in *Rhetoric and Reality* along more historiographical lines, arguing that it developed in the early part of the twentieth century out of an aristocratic and arrogant sense of individualism and adapted as the political climate moved along to a more democratic and politicized viewpoint. “The ideal of liberal culture indirectly encouraged the development of expressionistic rhetoric,” he explains, “through
its philosophical idealism and its emphasis on the cultivation of the self, both derived from its ties to a Brahminical romanticism” (73). While the form that expressivism ultimately took in the twentieth century appears to in a far more democratic form, he explains that those ideals of liberal culture from the period “helped create a climate” in which it would ultimately flourish in other ways. The actual changeover was allowed at the contact point between the philosophical viewpoint of nineteenth-century liberal culture and “the post-war, Freudian inspired, expressionistic notions of childhood education that the progressives attempted to propagate” (73). From examining the progressive beliefs of the period, we can see how with the admixture of 1960s political activism the kind of expressivism Berlin describes in “Rhetoric and Reality” could have been arrived at.

The two parts of this progressive movement in education that informed expressivism—individualism and Freudianism—in many ways grew out of a response to liberalism, taking what was useful about it and redirecting it. There was first the notion from it that each individual had exploitable and verifiable creative potentiality that, if fostered in the correct environment, could be a means to self-actualization—however that notion might be construed by the school administration. Regarding Freud, he formally conceptualizes the notion of the unconscious and the manifestation of its attributes in human life, and the early expressivists extend this concept into the mind of the learner, theorizing that development of the unconsciousness would yield results in the conscious life. This meant dealing with the effects of repression, and one can easily see how such a strategy translates into the politicized version of expressivism. Berlin notes here that expressivism from this period was decidedly unpolitical, emphasizing “individual transformation—not social change—as the key to both social and personal well-being” (74). We
should note of course that this is also near the period in American letters of New Criticism and an acute emphasis on aestheticism.

For that matter, of aestheticism Berlin notes that for expressionistic rhetoric, all writing “is art,” and in the generation of it “[t]his means that writing can be learned but not taught” (74). Expressivism through time, acknowledged or not, has carried this supposition as truth, and this truth has existed at least through implication down to the present day. Regarding the teacher’s role and the writer’s native abilities, this means that “[t]he work of the teacher is to provide an environment in which students can learn what cannot directly be imparted in instruction” (74). From Peter Elbow’s book, *Writing Without Teachers*, we see such a prospect exemplified in the title. It also supposes something interesting about language and knowledge, Berlin points out, that for expressivists “[t]hat which the writer is trying to express—the content of knowledge—is the product of a private and personal vision that cannot be expressed in normal, everyday language” (74). Language being metaphorical, and thereby to that extent only partially correlative, a communicative act will only reveal partially that which originates from a definite point in the individual consciousness. This being a given, the writing teacher “must encourage the student to call on metaphor, to seek in sensory experience materials that can be used in suggesting the truths of the unconscious—the private, personal, visionary world of ultimate truth” (74-75). Through this inner focus, the student then develops somewhat paradoxically a sense of the reality of matters beyond his or her own personal meaning:

Through writing, the student is […] getting in touch with the source of all human experience and shaping a new and better self. The product of this creative process is organic, representing the merger of form and content. Each grows out of the other; to change one is to change both. (75)
Berlin notes further of expressivistic rhetoric that from this first group of expressivists we begin to hear arguments of writing as a “process” rather than written “products.” Certainly the implications of such a changeover are important. In this notion we find expressivism to not be so different from cognitivism, regarding advances in cognitive science at the very least. Certainly the expressivist model of human meaning making does not follow the rationalism of cognitive science, but it was informed heavily, as we have noted, from Freudian psychology and was therefore in that side of things.

As noted above, perhaps there exists no expressivist text more influential and widely read than Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*. For that reason much of what has come to be understood about expressivist pedagogy—truthfully or not—has come to us exemplified in this text. First published in 1973, *Writing Without Teachers* opens implying most of what Berlin identifies as quintessential expressivist rhetoric. For one, Elbow establishes a political context and positions his audience on a wider scale than that of academia. “Many people are now trying to become less helpless, both personally and politically: trying to claim more control over their own lives,” he opens his Preface by saying: “[o]ne of the ways people most lack control over their own lives is through lacking control over words” (v). Simply put, he explains just below, “[t]his book tries to show how to gain control over words, but it requires working hard and finding others to work with you” (v). For Elbow it seems that his is a mission of clarification, that what is external to the individual is in the realm of words, that to assert oneself in it, one must exercise control and gain mastery of language.

Reality seems governed in that sense by expressive content, words flowing around and through the individual, capable of being harnessed or not, but comprising the realms of power regardless. To some extent language appears here as a commodity: his first goal, he explains, is
to help his readers “generate words better,” and to “not make judgments about words but generate them better” (v-vi). The act of writing, as the book and many acquaintances of Elbow seem to attest, is labor intensive, and he has no qualms about discarding a great deal of what is written. Indeed, another part of Elbow’s express desires for this book is, as he puts it, “to help you improve your ability to make judgments about which parts of your own writing to keep and which to throw away” (vi).

Of his notion of the teacherless writing class, Elbow’s faith in expressivist learning holds firm. He states rather unequivocally later in his Preface that there is no “necessary connection between learning and teaching” (vii) and notes that students might exist without teachers, but not teachers without students. Later, in his Introduction, he notes that “[t]eachers seem to play a big role in making it harder for people to write” (xii), and after that, that we can get along without teachers, but only if we make primary use of a group of people sharing their experiences with each other—using a process that invites the maximum multiplicity or divergence of views and asks participants not to quarrel with what looks odd or alien but to try to experience and enter into it. (xxv)

This divergent method of creative participation he calls “the believing game” and is the principle mechanism by which his kind of rhetoric operates: one enters into the communicative act without the need for a teacher to guide. For Elbow the building of community emanates from the individuals comprising it, meaning in this way that his notion of writing without teachers denies the validity of learning by directive or even learned guidance.

Elbow explains his notion of the believing game as it exists in an interrelationship with what he calls “the doubting game,” both of which are a part of attaining through writing what he calls “trustworthy knowledge” (xxi). As he explains further, by this he means that “we have to
get ideas and test ideas,” each activity corresponding to believing and doubting respectively. In Peter Elbow’s version of expressivism, doubting and believing appear as two sides of the same coin. Doubting, he explains further, “is my shorthand for criticizing, debating, arguing, and trying to extricate oneself from any personal involvement with ideas through using logic”; and believing “is my shorthand for listening, affirming, entering in, trying to experience more fully, and restating—understanding the ideas from the inside” (xxii). He makes his case in the Preface, and then focuses on it for the rest of the book, for taking that which writers most often do unselfconsciously—doubt—and offer up what he sees as just as viable of an alternative.

In the end he argues that there is a place, even when writing without teachers, for both modes of knowledge-making, but that full expression would not be possible without the benefit of using both. In some instances, as in testing ideas, we would not be able to do without doubting, but believing can work for testing ideas just effectively, only being done in a different way. Without the aid of logic or teacherly guidance, the believing game works for the testing of knowledge through group collaboration and the sharing of ideas. The advantage of logic and tradition work for the doubting game because it “tests an idea by helping us see its weaknesses and shortcomings,” but believing “tests an idea by helping us see the strengths of competing ideas” (xxiii).

Teachers are fundamental to doubting, and Elbow dismisses them for that reason. He admits to enjoying teaching earlier in the Preface (xiv), but he sees the institution of the teacher as incompatible with believing. Partially his argument addresses the power dynamic, and partly he derives it from a sense of optimism and good will. “Without other people to work with,” he says, we have no strong tool for coming up with competing ideas (xxv, emphasis added). To that extent the proper operation of believing depends, in economic terms, upon the sharing and
evaluation of ideas in an open marketplace. A teacher in the classroom, as Freire has noted, seems more consistent with a controlled market. For that matter, also, when believing we must think as our only object of creating a venue as open as possible and trusting that it will generate what is the best available:

we can get along without teachers, but only if we make primary use of a group of people sharing their experiences with each other—using a process that invites the maximum multiplicity or divergence of views and asks participants not to quarrel with what looks odd or alien but to try to experience and enter into it. (xxv)

Elbow does not use much of the terminology used here, particularly regarding rhetoric and virtue and technē; however, one can easily guess where these things apply. On the surface it seems that believing in Writing Without Teachers applies most easily to the invention part of the composition act. Certainly this is the case, but not exclusively. The major point is that all five minor arts are open to influence from the writing group. This is an important distinction because Elbow’s brand of expressivism is comprehensive.

Incidental to Elbow’s Preface and the issue of expressivism as a ideological arm of composition pedagogy, but apropos of Berlin’s critique of expressivism and this dissertation’s examination of both, he notes of “Rhetoric and Ideology” that in it Berlin argues that Elbow “is a Platonist who believes that knowledge is totally private” (Elbow xxvii) and then argues that Berlin has missed his point entirely. He insists there instead his emphasis, as ever, lies in “the teacherless class and the epistemology of the believing game,” which “can only function as group processes, and […] their validity derives only from people entering into each others’ diverse and conflicting experiences” (xxvii). In fairness to Berlin, it seems more accurate to say that Berlin was speaking there of expressivism as a whole, and it does seem that, given the
supposition that thought originates and emanates from the individual mind and the notion that a written, rhetorical act might be crafted through group collaboration and a marketplace of ideas, Berlin’s take on expressivism and Elbow’s belief in the teacherless classroom are mutually contradictory in the least.

Other than conceptualizing the teacherless classroom from an expressivist standpoint, two of Elbow’s other innovations are the dual concepts of “growing” and “cooking” as metaphors for the teacherless writing process. These he explains at length in two chapters following a chapter on freewriting after the Preface. As noted above, Elbow gears much of his rhetoric to the invention stage of composition, an emphasis fairly consistent with the notion of writing as a process because it is also consistent with the notion that the process of writing is never a complete act. For Elbow his explanation of the metaphors for writing he calls growing and cooking helps us to identify his notion of the composition and function of language and rhetoric in our lives.

He opens the discussion of growing by at once validating the notion that writing is a mysterious and difficult task, that we are “helpless before the process of writing because it obeys inscrutable laws” (13). His notion is that writing, at its basic level, is not what he calls the “common sense” approach of the “a two-step process”: “[f]irst you figure out your meaning, then you put it into language” (14). In other words, there exists no necessary correspondence between clarity of thought and clarity of expression. Instead, Elbow would prefer to “think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning—before you know your meaning at all—and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve” (15). Before thought would be clarified, words must come, and the document would grow from there; one would learn what he or she means through such a process. Instead of a transcription of
thought and a visual conceptualization, he argues, “[w]riting is, in fact, a transaction with words whereby you free yourself from what you presently think, feel, and believe” (15). In this very important sense he uses the word “efficient” comparatively to describe this process because his belief in the growing metaphor is that one considers the rhetorical context while considering meaning. It acknowledges, to its credit, a link between concept and rhetorical effect. The belief is that one cannot know what he or she is trying to say until it has been said (or written).

Growing applies to this notion of rhetoric in the sense that when one writes and develops his or her thoughts through the writing process, meaning eventually enforces itself or makes itself apparent if we are willing and able to recognize when this is the case. In the process of growing, in the organic and biological sense, while the words which comprise the linguistic environment do not change, he explains, their meaning can. We allow them to express our thoughts, and in turn they allow us, as he explains it, to “[l]earn to stand out of the way and provide the energy or force the words need to find their growth process” (24). Elbow describes the growing process almost as if it were a spiritual experience. This is because the act of “growing” when writing is an act of borrowing from structures outside of individual control, practically in an act of verbal communion as he describes it. “It seems not entirely metaphorical, then” he explains, “to say that at the end it is I who have borrowed some higher organization from the words” (24). Growing means allowing one’s thoughts to take form by borrowing from what inheres in language.

In his subheadings afterwards of growing, he encourages reader/writers to “Start writing and keep writing,” to welcome and work with elements of “Chaos and distortion,” and eventually to recognize the “Emerging center of gravity.” Fundamental to his beliefs here is the importance of producing content without enforcing meaning until necessary or self-evident and never fearing
the prospect of deleting that material from the project or document which does not seem to belong. One noteworthy part of it is the position of the composing “outline” in the development process compared to its preeminence in what he calls the “common sense” approach before. As he explains, this is because “[t]he developmental model,” which he proposes, “[…] preaches, in a sense, a lack of control: don’t worry about knowing what you mean or what you intend ahead of time; you don’t need a plan or an outline, let things get out of hand, let things wander and digress” (32-33).

From the twenty-first century post-word processor perspective, it seems strange that a rhetoric such as the one Elbow describes here would not have caught on dramatically, especially considering the dynamism of the virtual document compared with the analog version. One can only speculate on this matter. One might suppose that with the word processor words come so fast that management of them might be no easy task without the enforcement of some outside structure even from the early stages of a ten-page document. Also, one of the limitations of the digital environment is that one is rarely able to actually see more than a fraction of one page at a time, at least so far as technology allows us at this date. These explanations are certainly all partially correct, but it is likely that our cultural and ideological connections to the kind of ethos that Elbow represents have waned. It may be that he simply is not academic enough for any audience.

Elbow’s second process metaphor, “cooking,” he conceives as a corollary to growing, the activity by which a writer generates words which evolve eventually into the outcome of the growing process. To some extent it might be conceived as a matter of scope: the focus of cooking in the writing process is microscopic, contrasted with growing, which is macroscopic in interest. He explains that “[c]ooking is the smallest unit of generative action, the smallest piece
of anti-entropy whereby a person spends his energy to buy new perceptions and insights from himself” (48). He explains that cooking and freewriting are not exactly the same thing, that sheer volume of words and of energy and enthusiasm do not translate proportionately to quality writing, but that the cooking process is a way whereby one can direct that “energy” constructively. He begins by explaining this, that “[c]ooking is the interaction of contrasting or conflicting material,” and that

cooking consists of the process of one piece of material (or one process) being transformed by interacting with another: one piece of material being seen through the lens of another, being dragged through the guts of another, being reoriented or reorganized in terms of the other, being mapped onto the other. (49)

The remainder of the third chapter Elbow devotes to the explanation and validation of this point.

In it Elbow begins by thinking of this interaction in terms of two (or more) individual consciousnesses, ideas, metaphors, modes, and the interaction of those variables to one another. The interactions as he sees them occur in a controlled fashion, however, and as he sees it one learns to manage these interactions constructively. He makes the rhetorical situation work for him in such a way that one cannot disregard truth and meaning for a reader in favor of truth and meaning for the writer. To some extent this is Elbow’s counter to what he mentions in the Preface about Berlin’s charges of Platonism. While creative energy generates from the individual, meaning is still constructed out of interaction between individual entities. One noteworthy argument he does make in cooking is for the usefulness of interacting “words and ideas,” or as he also calls it in the subtitle, “immersion and perspective.” He refers to each as media and begins by wondering which is the most useful for finding what it is that he wants to communicate, ultimately deciding that both provide something different—perspective in the case
of ideas, immersion for writing—and can be taken advantage of accordingly through a cooperative process: “[w]orking in ideas gives you perspective, structure, and clarity; working in words gives you fecundity, novelty, richness” (52). Again he makes his argument a matter of scale, the distance one affords him or herself from the immediacy of producing words.

Perhaps the most academically alarming part of Elbow’s rhetoric appears in this chapter on cooking, and it is the way he defines language by way of thought. In doing this he gives us a keen insight into the basic suppositions of expressivism about thought and expression. He begins his subheading, “Cooking as interaction between you and symbols on paper,” with the observation that “[l]anguage is the principal medium that allows you to interact with yourself” (55). By this he seems to mean also that language, especially when written, functions as a repository for thought, thereby affording one a kind of distance between one thought and another. “A principle value of language,” he explains, “[…] is that it permits you to distance yourself from your own perceptions, feelings, and thoughts” (55). One supposition of such a conceptualization of language is that thought can correspond directly to expression.

Cooking works, he explains in this vein, only when thought translates imperfectly to words and when group energy is sufficient enough to provide both positive and negative critical analysis. Always when one is writing, he argues, a thought is cooking. Development of it is directed in the ways that he conceives of these things interacting.

Later in Rhetoric and Reality, in his chapter on major rhetorical approaches between the years of 1960 and 1975, Berlin reformulates his taxonomy of rhetorical approaches and directs our attention to the “subjective rhetoric” of this period, choosing not necessarily to sort these approaches by ideology, as he does in “Rhetoric and Ideology,” but once again to consider them by which part of the rhetorical exchange—subject, object, or transactional here—they consider
as a base from which to begin their inquiry into the nature of a communicative act. In it Berlin acknowledges that there exist more types of subjective rhetorics than expressivism, but his single interest area in this section rests with expressivism in its many forms, ranging from virtual “anarchy” to what appears to be transactional.15 “These rhetoricians”—the transactional ones, he explains—“see reality as arising out of the interaction of the private vision of the individual and the language used to express this vision” (146). As we have seen of Elbow above in Writing Without Teachers, particularly regarding his section on cooking, Elbow seems to fall into this transitional-transactional camp. As we shall see in more detail in Chapter Four, Berlin identifies social-epistemicism and epistemic rhetorics of all stripes different from this middle-ground expressivism to the rather fine but definitive distinction that “it falls short of being epistemic […] because it denies the place of intersubjective, social processes in shaping reality” (146).

“Instead,” he continues, “it always describes groups as sources of distortion of the individual’s true vision, and the behavior it recommends in the political and social realms is atomistic, the solitary individual acting alone” (146). For our purposes, here this becomes a very important distinction because it gets us a bit closer to ideology and to the proper consideration of rhetoric as a technē in the self-conscious sense.

Virtue and Technē

As we have seen in Chapter Two, because of certain differences between the modern and the classical mind, there exists no easy correlative between ancient virtue and enlightenment-era taste. To some extent the difference is one of ethics and aesthetics. As applications of rhetoric evolved to suit a very different kind of academy, we find a kind of virtue in taste. To that extent it might be most useful to discuss virtue in cognitive and expressivist rhetorics as departures
from the eighteenth-century aesthetic virtue taste. Berlin explains it very thoroughly above, though not in these express terms. His language carries a Marxist influence in it that is unfortunately suitable only for speaking of things in terms of economics.

It seems that both rhetorics similarly exchange aesthetic virtue for scientific and romantic virtue. It might be argued, furthermore, that academia has developed in such a way in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as to be the contact point between competing influences—romantic, rationalistic, Marxist, etc.—which continue to struggle for dominance and that cognitivism and expressivism exemplify the first two. As we shall see in Chapter Four the pedagogical school with which Berlin most closely aligns himself—social-epistemicism, especially as a brand of transactionalism—might be said to exist somewhere in the realm between the two, but is no less rational, or for that matter less of a technê, for it.

Regarding technê, particularly it is interesting to note that both cognitive and expressivist approaches define the act of writing differently in regards to the development of meaning. While for expressivists the development of an idea depends very much upon the timeline, cognitivists prefer to understand the mechanisms of the mind at a given moment. This is not to say that the cognitivists are uninterested in the development of an idea through stages, but that they are as interested in the complexity of a given interrelational cognitive pattern. Expressivists depend upon the timeline and the process necessarily because an idea develops for them in real time, as the words are written down. For expressivism, a writer is said to have a process for the discovery of meaning, whereas the development of an idea for cognitivists is taken by a series of snapshots.

Where Nussbaum’s criteria for the features of technê are concerned, like current-traditionalism, the emphasis on universality is a premium one. What all theory-driven pedagogies have in common is the belief in importance and universal applicability of their chosen theory-
apparatus of choice. Of virtue this means that, for cognitivism that which is methodologically consistent with scientific methodology will always deliver the correct solution, and for expressivism virtue means that which is consistent with the quintessential self. The criterion of teachability varies between the two, however. For the cognitivists they would prefer to understand better the mechanisms of the human mind and leave it to others how to apply those models to pedagogy, though everything about it encourages application. For expressivists—it coming from such an individualistic perspective—teaching methods vary from person to person.

To a certain extent, we find that cognitive and expressivist rhetoric share a root in twentieth-century psychology, though of different traditions as well. The only proper way to examine cognitivism and expressivism in a project of this length and scope is to speak of them somewhat generally and somewhat more figuratively. As we have seen in the application of them to the theory of Abrams and of Burke and of Emig and to the ideologically-framed histories that Berlin provides, it can be useful for us to consider them each in turn and satisfy ourselves with the understanding that each can apply, but none perfectly. At any rate, to do otherwise would be to fly in the face of the assertions made here of the influence of technê. To reiterate, this is no mere matter of convenience or of avoidance. If we revisit any of them, especially Abrams, perhaps, we see lurking in the shadows Aristotle’s position on the principle parts of rhetoric—ethos, pathos, and logos—because aesthetic theories predicated upon the relationship between the text and the author, the reader, and the universe can seem to apply.

This is the very perfect example (insofar as one could imagine a perfect example possible) to illustrate the point, because no aesthetic or scientific theory can do better than to approximate the rhetorical effect. Insofar as ethos, pathos, and logos correspond to expressive, pragmatic, and mimetic aesthetic theories generally, their comparisons do not seem to bear close
scrutiny. There still remains unquestioned the notion of objective theory and its correspondence to rhetorical theory. It seems that objective theory’s way in is through the New Critics and through Alexander Bain’s insistence that the elements of excellent prose are positive and abstractable and capable of being reapplied without the progressive loss of rhetorical power.

Certainly Kenneth Burke’s early work in The Philosophy of Literary Form goes a long way establishing that argument, though from a different angle, and from a completely different outlook on textuality. Burke distinguishes himself from the New Critics in a way that can be informative regarding rhetoric as well as poetics. The example noted above is in regards to perfect examples. As we have seen of Burke, particularly of Counter-Statement, there is much to be appreciated aesthetically from considering the manipulation of dramatic tension. What we must consider, as he does in Literary Form, is the importance of context in any communicative act to the discussion of meaning. He explains there that “[c]ritical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose” (1), which is to say of all communicative acts—we need not limit our scope to linguistic acts, though Burke seems to—that they derive their meaning from the context in which they are given. Surrounding any linguistic act always is a certain degree of what he calls the “magical decree,” or the establishment of some sense of truth to a term for the sake of convenience or otherwise, “for the mere act of naming an object or situation decrees that it is to be singled out as such-and-such rather than as something other” (4).16 The use of magic is almost always a matter of convenience, and “an attempt to eliminate magic, in this sense, would involve us in the elimination of vocabulary itself as a way of sizing up reality” (4). Ultimately, however, any attempt to systematize language is inevitably an attempt at magic and not an attempt to reduce its
power, for to exchange perceived flaws or inconsistencies in language is only a change in essence, rather than a change for the better.

Burke is something of a bridge for us between positivism and non-positivism in this regard. “The ideal magic,” he explains, “is that in which our assertions (or verbal decrees) as to the nature of the situation come closest to a correct gauging of that situation as it actually is” (7). We can suppose of any communicative act that an absolutely true meaning exists behind it and also accept that that truth may not be apparent to the speaker, the listener, or even to the critic, and in fact that it may not be accessible to those three, either.

Regarding techné, this means that any attempt to systematize rhetoric or language in such a way as we see in cognitivism and expressivism is only, as Burke would put it, an exchange of essence and not necessarily a closer approximation of true meaning. Fittingly, there is a note of the paranormal or the supernatural to his magic metaphor, which he also offers alongside religion; an element of faith in something other than aesthetic manipulability would be required. Cognitivism and expressivism are particularly suited for this purpose, as has been noted above. In both, alongside the discussion of writing and of understanding writers, we have these other elements attending it—science and romanticism. In doing so a dual role is required of them: in addition to teaching writing and rhetoric, they have to validate their respective philosophical underpinnings.
CHAPTER FOUR:  
THE PERTINENCE OF TECHNÉ TO THE FURTHER DISCUSSION OF SOCIAL-EPISTEMICISM

Often praxis can be very difficult to characterize in delineated terms when one wants to address pedagogy and theory, which is very much the heart of this matter. Determining the starting point—whether pedagogy is derived from and animated by theory, or if theory arises from teaching experience—can be difficult. Nowhere does this seem to be more the case than with social-epistemicism, namely because it draws its legitimacy from no readily apparent ethos. The transition to enlightenment-era rhetoric from the time-tested classical tradition was easy enough for the likes of Blair and Campbell; it involved little more than a recontextualization into a more modern and professionalized academic setting. The founders of the early American academy borrowed heavily from the eighteenth-century Scots. Cognitivism in the Flower and Hayes sense draws its legitimacy from perceived sense of infallibility we find in the scientific method, and expressivism seems to proceed out of some vestige of romanticism. Likewise, here and there we find derivatives of each of these movements drawing strength from this or that linguistic or psychological theorist. The point can be oversimplified, to be sure, but it seems that one or more of these factors is always lurking in the shadows when we try to categorize a kind of pedagogy.

It can be more difficult to do so with social-epistemicism because those principles from which it draws most heavily resist fundamentally notions of status quo, and its proponents place such a heavy emphasis on the critical examination of those things which seem to exemplify
surety and safe assumption. They do seem to be easily delineated, however, by their language, and all seem to rest comfortably and unselfconsciously upon Marx’s notions of social determinism and historical materialism. For this reason, social-epistemicists of all stripes do not consciously systematize Marx’s thinking. To some extent, fundamental elements of Marxism have come to be so ingrained in the academic ethos that we take them for granted. To that extent one can fully examine certain derivatives of social-epistemicism without encountering by name Marx at all.

On the other hand, for some, theorists and pedagogues of the Marxian tradition cannot avoid talk about his work after reaching a certain level of critical engagement. The primary sticking point which all seem to depart from regarding Marx is over the issue of “vulgar Marxist” historiography. For many, a progressive model for revolutionary or emancipatory classroom pedagogy cannot be achieved when one accepts as a premise that the overthrow of capital is inevitable but likewise out of the hands of the individuals involved. Marx’s historiography and by extension the Marxian critical aesthetic accepts that ideology holds in place certain harmful suppositions, but it operates by super-rational laws. Rather than accept the “base-and-superstructure” model that this implies, critics and theorists like Georg Lukács, Fredric Jameson, Kenneth Burke early on, the members of the Frankfurt School, and others prefer an explanation where agent and structure are mutually and responsively defined by one another.

This chapter proposes that, for all its interest in not taking power dynamics for granted in the formation of agent or of structure, like the other parts of Berlin’s taxonomy, social-epistemicism persists in continuing the myth of technai, which we have been examining thus far. In this case, we exchange aestheticism, scientism, and romanticism—capitalistic structures all—for a new kind of rationalism as fundamentally inhered to craft as any of the others have been.
Also beginning to make its way back into the conversation, as a continuation of Plato’s dialogues about the Sophists, is the question of pedagogy, a central concern to the social-epistemicists who, like Marx, talk a great deal about action and revolution. This chapter proposes as an extension of the question of power dynamics that just as agent and structure are theorized in a manner consistent with the myth of technai, so pedagogy becomes envisioned as a craft as well. To establish these points, we will do as we did in the previous chapter and examine the arguments of some of social-epistemicism’s key texts. Likewise, to demonstrate how the myth of technê lives on, we will examine some of the texts they consulted, for if anything, social-epistemicism might be considered a high-theoretical approach.

For educational theorists like Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Ira Shor, and more specifically for composition theorist-pedagogues like Patricia Bizzell, the agent-structure model offers the very important opportunity to make individual student agency a part of their classroom pedagogy. One might therefore have cause and motivation for critical responsiveness when there exists within it the potential for change. Without this possibility—with the base-and-superstructure model—the best one could do is to sit back and wait for the inevitable change. The critical difference between vulgar Marxism and the more progressive Marxism is that in the first instance the abuses and inefficiencies of capital become so egregious that the working class has no choice but to overthrow them once their collective outrage reaches critical mass, and in the second instance the development of a critical consciousness on the part of the working class might result in that change being brought about more quickly and perhaps less violently.

The sticking point of this model, however, which is where the primary problem lies, is that by necessity this change must result always in the same outcome, regardless of the method used. That which is real and just and that which is ideologically neutral is the goal. Social-
epistemicism seems to suppose a state of affairs where a fair and just reality is attainable. Some will argue that such a reality is an unattainable one and that the focus should be upon methods used to attain it rather than the unattainable final goal. The idea should suffice from this perspective. Giroux, for example, argues against positivism on the grounds that ideological structure supposes a set of circumstances which are transcendent and absolute and are to be safely taken for granted. His emphasis lies much less on content, therefore, than with method. He would prefer as a teacher to concentrate on critical analysis and rely on his faith in it to deliver students to the real set of circumstances. What Giroux does not address sufficiently is that this faith supposes still a definitive reality of some kind, which is just as definitive a pronouncement no matter how fleeting. That faith also holds critical analysis as a transcendent authority as well.

The second part of social-epistemicism that we find as an extension of the first is the concept of utopia, a word present nearly everywhere one turns in this body of work. A utopia in this sense would be a place—practical or theoretical—where justice and equality exist in operation. Utopia is once again something striven for and something the hope for which animates members of a society. It seems, however, that whether a utopia exists only in potential or in reality, its presence and its power occupy a certain place in the collective imagination. To that effect, utopia seems hardly different from ideology. In composition pedagogy it can become an institution no less harmful and warped than outdated handbook rules.

However, certain parts of composition studies that owe the most to Marx suffer the most for it because of what they take for granted. That neo-Marxist notion of utopia exists for many without having to consult the theory which gave birth to it. This chapter proposes that social-epistemicism exchanges one form of rationalism for another. Specifically, the machinations of ideology and rational determinism of historical materialism lead social-epistemicists and the
ideologues that they criticize to the same faulty conclusion: having a predominant world view is a sufficient and even useful means for formulating a script for explaining it to others.

At bottom, social-epistemicism identifies ideology as that part of human thinking and human motivation which, though dynamic in composition, directs our ways of thinking and acting to its own self-interest. For the most part, also, accepting that ideology enhances and likewise inhibits our understanding can also mean that the ethical entanglements that attend such a reality are relative as well. The issue of this chapter lies not with the importance of ideology, however, and not even with the argument that all variables are ultimately subject-variables. Instead, the disagreement lies with the usefulness of the rational motivation to apply that way of thinking to teaching. Even more importantly, it lies in the problem that one cannot be fully committed to postmodern thinking and to praxis at the same time.

Further, there can be found many derivatives of the Marxian influence in composition studies, and every one carries along with it a pedigree different from the last and different from the one following it. Again, all can be traced back to Marx, but a very important shift in Marxism occurred in the twentieth century that turned the conversation away from the base-and-superstructure model of Marxian analytics and turned the attention to a more dynamic historiographical model. That model seems to be the only thing the group comprising social-epistemicism can commonly accept. To what extent they apply this to their theory and to their pedagogy differs, but the model is applied nonetheless. For practical purposes, then, this chapter proposes to trace the lineage of composition theorist-pedagogues, Patricia Bizzell and Ira Shor. In both cases we work backward, uncovering the rationale of the educational, historiographical, and epistemological underpinnings of their praxes. In the case of Bizzell, we find Henry Giroux, select members of the Franklin School, Fredric Jameson, and Georg Lukács, each of whose work
seems increasingly less applicable to Bizzell’s work for reasons touched upon above. In the case of Shor, the path takes us to Paulo Freire, an educational theorist who must be included in this conversation, who is perhaps the strongest voice in it, but also whose work is undermined somewhat by the work of these others.

Theory

It seems that the influence of Marxism on composition studies depends largely upon the role theory plays as a constitutive element of a practical pedagogy. The telling factor seems to be whether the one speaking resists the drive to apply theory to practice or does not. One of those critics, Henry Giroux, opens *Theory and Resistance in Education* with a call for marriage of theory and pedagogy. He begins with an epigraph from Frankfurt School member Herbert Marcuse, which argues in part that of thought and action “theory may help to prepare the ground for their possible reunion, and the ability of thought to develop a logic and language of contradiction is a prerequisite for this task” (2). Giroux likewise imagines as possible and necessary “the need to develop modes of critique fashioned in a theoretical discourse that mediates the possibility for social action and emancipatory transformation” (2). He accepts Marcuse’s statement as a challenge and meets it, he says, by “developing analyses of schooling that draw upon a critical theory and discourse that interrelate modes of inquiry drawn from a variety of social science disciplines” (3), an argument, he claims, by which one could positively reach that state of critical awareness and by extension emancipation. Giroux prefers a more “radical educational theory,” whereby students would not be merely repositories of traditional and decontextualized knowledge. Instead, from this point of view, theory would be less abstract and knowledge gained through action.
The pitfall for this kind of discussion, Giroux acknowledges, is that far too often radical educators do not strike the proper balance between theory and practice with regards to human subjectivity. “While radical educators do make the relations among schools, power, and society an object of critical analysis,” he explains, “they do so at the theoretical expense of falling into either a one-sided idealism or an equally one-sided structuralism” (4). On one hand the classroom serves unproductively as a site for celebration of the human will or is pervaded by overwhelming pessimism. Almost certainly mindful of Lukács’s “Grand Hotel Abyss” critique of the Frankfurt School and Karl Popper’s pointed critique that the problem with the Frankfurt School was that, unlike Marx, with them there was no promise of a better future, Giroux does not address the critics directly but promises as he closes his introduction something similar to what they say is lacking: some revolutionary political action in the form of pedagogy. “Whereas the Frankfurt School provides a discourse that illuminates the social, political, and cultural totality in which schools develop,” he explains, “the various analyses of schooling provide a referent point from which to assess both the strengths and limitations of such work” (5). He wants also to think of the Frankfurt School and the work of likeminded critics as the “theoretical elements for a radical theory of pedagogy” (5).

Instead Giroux would prefer to borrow from the Frankfurt School “a sustained attempt to develop a theory and mode of critique that aims at both revealing and breaking with the existing structures of domination” (4). The theory he proposes would be decidedly political and interdisciplinary in the traditional sense. Giroux acknowledges in his first chapter that “critical theory must not become dogmatic or formulaic in the sense that traditional theory has. There exist layers of rationality—relationships of domination and subordination” (8)—which have no objective basis when one examines them critically. This, he explains, is a basic concept from the
Frankfurt School. One would need instead to accept that beneath this logic of oppression constituted by ideology matrices and material artifacts such as money lies a far less impersonal and more egalitarian world of possibilities. To that end, Giroux takes the fundamental suppositions and aims of the Frankfurt School as his ends and means to radical educational reform.

To this end, Giroux turns his discussion over to the term that nearly all of whom Berlin identifies as social-epistemicists turn, which is to the discussion of the importance of accepting critical possibilities over positivism as the preferred method of inquiry. From his point of view, and he explains from that of the Frankfurt School, “the outcome of positivist rationality and its technocratic view of science represented a threat to the notion of subjectivity and critical thinking” (15). Similarly, the same could be said of knowledge in general as this. Regarding theory itself, once again, it must be consistently self-critical and never allowed to be taken as final or crystallized into any form of “methodological correctness” (17).

When giving himself the opportunity to discuss the application of Frankfurt School suppositions to pedagogy, Giroux initially proposes to speak generally at first. More is needed than we already provide ourselves in the critique of positivist rationality, he argues, for it “lacks the theoretical sophistication characteristic of the work of [the Frankfurt School]” (34). The entire first section of the book focuses upon critiquing the problems with the American education system as it stands through the neo-Marxist lens of the Frankfurt School critics and other like-minded individuals. The second section turns its focus to developing the idea of resistance. There he sets his goals high as well. If anything, students and teachers would leave off thinking of schools as institutions of “sociocultural reproduction” and begin thinking of them more as “sites involving contestation and struggle” (115). When Giroux refers to pedagogy here he seems
talking less about technique than he is about a rhetorical stance and an epistemological policy, something grander still, in other words, than a script could provide because the answers to his questions will differ from one teaching context to the next. He explains that his “task is no less than finding a new discourse and a new way of thinking about nature, meaning, and the possibilities for working in and outside of schools” (115). The better part of this new way of thinking would be to approach teaching from a number of “crucial assumptions,” which would be a part of the critical discourse to which he is referring. Namely, for one, it would uncover to us “human beings from different social classes reacting to limitations to either change or maintain them” (115), which is to say that the critical discourse that he is proposing would show students as individuals enacting the struggles they face and responding to them productively. It is important also that in this new critical discourse schools “be viewed as contradictory social sites, marked by struggle and accommodation, which cannot be viewed as totally negative in terms of their effects on the politically dispossessed” (115). Likewise, as part of this, his third assumption would be “that the purpose of schooling and critical pedagogy must be linked to the issue of developing a new public sphere” (116).

The “public sphere” of which he speaks here plays a very important role in Giroux’s idea of resistance education; he is therefore very careful to characterize it because it would be the dwelling place for his students. For one, he explains, it “becomes both a rallying point and a theoretical referent for understanding the nature of the existing society and the need to create a critically informed citizenry that can fight for fundamentally new structures in the public organization of experience” (116). Also, the public sphere would represent, “in part, the ideological mediations and institutions that oppressed groups must struggle to develop in order to reclaim their own experiences and the possibilities of social change” (116). Typically, Giroux’s
vision of the public sphere is a utopian one, and one which exists in theory, but in potentiality at the very least.

From this notion Giroux then develops the concept of “radical literacy,” an intellectual state at which an individual would be able to engage his or her living context in such a way as to navigate the straits of ideology and reality. For that matter, radical literates would be engaging theory in a way different from modern convention, neither too idealistic nor structurally deterministic.18 His idea of radical literacy is that it “informs the way in which people critically and politically embrace the concept of citizenship and the task of demonstrating civic courage” (117). It seems in short that he is using the concept of radical literacy as a term to describe an individual in an appreciable state of cognizance about ideology and about culture.

Certainly Giroux owes a great deal to Marx, without whom hardly any of Giroux’s terminology and suppositional material would be available to him, but he offers a critique of Marx worth mentioning because it provides him and social-epistemical theorizing with the machinery necessary to draw up their rational structures, the origin point of which for all of them is the dialectical pair. Giroux first posits that “if Marxism, in its various forms, is to offer any insight into developing a critical theory of schooling, it will have to be critically interrogated to reveal the logic embedded in its failure to provide a dialectical treatment of subjectivity and structure” (120). His position is that both traditional and revisionary Marxisms fail to take into account the mutual subjectivity of the agent and structure, “orthodox Marxism” opting instead for “a positivist historicism and a one-sided emphasis on the determining force of the productive process” (120). He regards this as “Marxism’s crushing logic, a logic which believes in the power of capital to control all aspects of human behavior” (121). As Giroux says, his pedagogy would differ because it would not, as he says most Marxist and neo-Marxist pedagogies often do,
fear or resist engagement with the unstructured and subjective. This notion is exclusive to Giroux
only because he uses somewhat different vocabulary and a different theoretical apparatus than
many other social-epistemicists. It all seems to come down, however, to an argument for the
power of individual or collective agency.

Giroux concludes *Theory and Resistance* by addressing what he identifies as a root
problem: an educational system that values the reproduction and reinforcement of those norms in
society most conducive to the perpetuation of capital interests (among similar others) rather than
valuing cultural and social interest as well as autonomy. Such a set of circumstances could be
accomplished, he contends, through a radical pedagogy, but to attain it we would involve “a
discourse that illuminates the ideological and material conditions necessary to promote critical
modes of schooling and alternative modes of education for the working class and other groups
that bear the brunt of political and economic oppression” (235). The ends to which schools
would work in this regard are of course a viable public sphere, where individuals were actively
and publicly engaged. Such a place seems attainable to him, though he acknowledges it as an
ideal, while simultaneously regarding it as a site never quite achievable of perfection. In this way
the public sphere would be, as he puts it, representative of “both an ideal and a referent for
critique and social transformation”:

[a]s an ideal, it posits the need for the ideological and cultural conditions
necessary for active citizenship. That is, it signifies the need for an enlightened
citizenry able to rationalize power through the medium of public discussion under
conditions free from domination. As a referent for critique, it calls into question
the gap between the promise and the reality of the existing liberal public spheres.

(236)
To some extent Giroux tips his hand to the point of discussion here with his use from this quote of the word *enlightened* to qualify citizenry. Certainly citizenship plays an important role in his radical pedagogy because for him it involves one engaging others in the public sphere not from a position of self-promotion, but in the interest of being civic-minded; it is citizenship, as he argues in the fifth chapter, in the classical sense. The term *citizen* in this way is critical. But that they would be *enlightened* implies a citizenry cognizant of a reality theretofore unknown, but knowable and certain.

Again, how such a state of affairs would be achieved seems to involve less in the way of technique than attitude and approach, it seems. Classroom content would not be so important as whether it related to the lives of the individuals involved. For that matter, Giroux makes an extensive argument for the development of a radical pedagogy which can operate outside of the traditional classroom context. For him, and among others for Shor and Freire as we shall see, critical engagement means discourse without limitation to the classroom, to “take seriously the specific needs, problems, and concerns of everyday life” (238). It would also mean destabilizing the traditional notion of “teacher,” “student,” and distinguishing “education” from “schooling,” as he puts it. There are other terms as well. His main interest, however, rests with reforming the attitude teachers have toward students and about education, and likewise from the students’ end.

Giroux concludes the book with a mission statement and a clarion call, to clarify his purpose for radical pedagogy, and likewise to infuse a sense of common cause. For him as well as for most social-epistemists unresigned to the weight of capitalism this sense of purpose might be easily located in the motif of struggle:

> [O]ften, as radicals, we are powerless in the face of […] repercussions, and the only consolation is to know that others are struggling as well, that the values and
ideas that one fights for are rooted not only in ethical principles but in an obligation to the past, to our families, friends, and comrades who have suffered under these dismal systems of oppression. Of course, we also struggle for the future—for our children and for the promise of a more just society. (242)

The last few passages in this way key us in to Giroux’s sense of history, which is typical, and to his sense of transcendence. Words such as values and ideas may alert us once again to the idea that for social-epistemicism, absolutes are important, if not in reality at least in theory, for they provide for us something to strive toward and something to motivate us and to which to respond. He speaks of principles and obligations in this way as well, to behavioral codes and historical eras which are in his mind noble and absolute. Certainly Giroux also concludes with the at least tacit acknowledgement of a just society, existing at the very least in potentiality.

This sense of potential it seems by the end would be the force animating Giroux’s entire radical pedagogic movement, again not even necessarily as an absolute, but as a promise, as a perhaps unattainable goal to which one strives and approximates by degree. And again, what Giroux sees coming out of Marxism in terms of hard logic and rationalism he thinks radical pedagogy can make up for in purpose. Unlike Marx, Giroux does not imagine a set of historical circumstances leading to the inevitable outcome (revolution). Instead, his book “suggests […] that radical pedagogy needs to be informed by a passionate faith in the necessity of struggling to create a better world” (242, emphasis added). For Giroux, radical pedagogy is about taking chances and imagining what might be possible. In this thinking, as he puts it, “[i]t is a call for a concrete utopianism” (242). Ultimately, Giroux strides the fence a bit between Marxian rationalism and post-structural play. In that respect, as we shall see his argument is hardly an original one, except that he uses a new theoretical rationale and invents a different vocabulary to
express it. Theory and Resistance is useful here, however, in the sense that he provides us with an extensive take on the legacy of Marx in the early part of twenty-first century discussion of composition pedagogy.

Regarding Marxism generally, however, it seems unapparent to all the role it plays in composition studies. Marxism has found its place in the humanities generally for quite some time, and Marx’s presence is felt, if not in name in spirit, in the ongoing discussion not only about composition, but about literature also. However, Patricia Bizzell takes as her thesis in “Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies” that we would do well in this field to indulge ourselves in “some less inhibited discussion” (54, emphasis added) of Marxism in composition studies. From her point of view we would do well to run with the notion of ideology “as an interpretation that constitutes reality,” but also to think of ways of critically constituting it by making use of that model (55). Ethical commitments therefore prove false in her thinking because they pretend to a transcendent truth or authority that only appears transcendent from a necessarily limited and localized perspective, enmeshed as we are individually in a web of ideological construction. Instead, we should subscribe to a more “postmodern understanding of ideology” (55), which envisions a view where ethical commitments of any type necessitate a less encompassing understanding of the true order of things. Bizzell keys in on the role of postmodernism and its relation to Marxism, contending that not-entirely ethically neutral reality, but a reality wherein the composition teacher can accomplish the task of discovery and description: “[t]he value of Marxist work lies in its ability to offer methodologically sophisticated and ethically informed modes of social analysis, especially analysis of language use in the construction and control of knowledge” (56).
As we shall see in the next chapter, the recent history of composition studies has been dotted with similar attempts to reconcile the rational historiography of Marxism with the suppositions of postmodernism, eventually to the point where Marxism appears not at all in name, but effectively in spirit. Bizzell’s essay appears early enough (1991) that Marxism can be invoked by name unselfconsciously. She works initially from Fredric Jameson’s theory of literary criticism in *The Political Unconscious* derived from Georg Lukács concept of “totality,” noting its rejection of the “base-superstructure” analytical method, but dismisses it as impractical as a method for comprehending the reality of any given situation. Nevertheless, totality works conceptually for Bizzell to the extent that it admits of a reality where, although in constant flux, the nearly mind-numbing web of ideological interaction and ethical entanglement at least makes an accounting for all contingencies. Meaning is therefore determined in this way, she explains, and “to study history, or the sequences of modes of production, is to study changes in the ideology of form” (57).

For one, Bizzell turns her attention to the notion of community in Jameson’s study of aesthetic form to address the issue of false contextualization, arguing that an accounting of an individual writer’s successes and shortcomings can only be given fairly if his or her relation to the educational community is properly characterized. Community for her might be defined as “an extended and evolutionary concept” (57), and this is the reason why Bizzell and the group of composition scholars Berlin loosely describes as “social-epistemicists”—and particularly Berlin himself—focus a good part of their efforts on historiography: it enacts this notion of theirs where a community might be described accurately by means of its development, both diachronically and synchronically. In this respect academic writing is taken as a highly specialized and ritualized mode, made unintuitive to the generally literate through centuries of unsystematic
development. Those who are considered poor writers are in actuality merely uninitiated into the language of that community. This is how Patricia Bizzell finds the general concepts of power relation and struggle of Marxism applying to college writing in particular.

However, Bizzell extends a third part of Jameson’s interpretive process to address paradoxically the inevitable hegemony of a community such as the academic community, which, though potentially welcoming, appears different from each prospective member’s individual perspective on it. All individuals being influenced variously by the ideologies of all communities to which they belong, we must also acknowledge what patterns of resistance to community we see emerging in a student’s development, even when those communities are one or more of our own. For this she then turns to Giroux, who understands resistance in the classroom as “moments when the school’s socializing function does not proceed smoothly,” from Bizzell’s description (61). Further, patterns of resistance behavior Giroux believes show us “the inequities in the educational system that first evoked the behavior” (Bizzell 61). In short, resistance differs from opposition in the sense that, rather than being merely futile and self-destructive, it can be understood “in a certain way” and “can thus become the basis for further action” (Bizzell 61). The results, if examined critically, help us to recognize a pattern of social injustice. Hopefully, from Giroux’s perspective, we can change the meaning of oppositional behavior “from the ineffectual defiance of a monolithic process of reproducing social injustice [such as the academic institution is] to the intellectual basis for liberatory social change” (61).

More needs to be said in regards to this notion of totality, especially with reference to what Jameson and Lukács have to say about it, for it is easy to misrepresent. Jameson opens by noting that totality “and Sartre’s methodological ideal of totalization […] have generally been condemned by association with Hegel’s Absolute Spirit, a space in which all contradictions are
presumably annulled, the gap between subject and object abolished, and some ultimate and manifest idealistic form of Identity is established” (50). Instead, he explains, “[t]he content of Absolute Spirit may be better understood in the for us far more local context of a projection of the mind of the historian and his relationship to the past” (51). Jameson finds this an important distinction to make because the conversation here is in regards to larger collectives interacting with other large collectives. So far as totality goes, as Lukács posits it, he would read it “not as some positive vision of the end of history […] but as something quite different, namely a methodological standard” (52). To that extent one might argue that Giroux and Bizzell are fairly consistent with totality, especially in the sense that methodology seems to be their primary area of interest. Where it gets interesting is Jameson’s note that “[i]t has not been sufficiently grasped […] that Lukács’ method of ideological critique […] is an essentially critical and negative, demystifying operation” (52). Instead, he posits, “[w]e will suggest that such an approach posits ideology in terms of strategies of containment […]” (53), a heading under which he sees Absolute Spirit falling.

“Hegel’s great dictum, ‘the true is the whole,’” he further explains, “is less an affirmation of some place of truth which Hegel himself (or others) might occupy, than it is a perspective and a method whereby the ‘false’ and the ideological can be unmasked and made visible” (53). For that matter, “[t]otality is not available for representation, any more than it is accessible in the form of some ultimate truth (or moment of Absolute Spirit)” (55). Jameson dismises the postmodern position on totalization, which as he characterizes it does so “in the name of difference, flux, dissemination, and heterogeneity” (53), as “second-degree or critical philosophies, which reconfirm the status of the concept of totality by their very reaction against it” (53), and in the process affirms the role of critic: “the critic’s business—the task of
interpretation viewed from the standpoint of expressive causality—is [...] to seek a unified meaning to which the various levels and components of the work contribute in a hierarchical way” (56). He cites Louis Althusser in maintaining that the “current trend” (to postmodernism) does well to shine a light of disunity and dissonance, exploding a “seemingly unified text into a host of clashing and contradictory elements” (56), but that this is only the penultimate stage in the critical process. The inevitable outcome in Althusserian exegesis afterward “then requires the fragments, the incommensurable levels, the heterogeneous pulses, of the text to be once again related, but in the mode of structural difference and determinate contradiction” (56).

Jameson acknowledges that a totalizing criticism can be transcendent, but in the “bad sense” that it appeals to levels outside the bounds of the text. From that the position taken by Bizzell and Giroux we can see here the neo-Marxist response to charges of positivism on their own part and the difference drawn between it and Marxist critique; we might also note it as the contact point for Kenneth Burke. Jameson argues it succinctly. As such a strategy of containment, he says, Hegel’s Absolute Spirit “allows what can be thought to seem internally coherent in its own terms, while repressing the unthinkable (in this case, the very possibility of collective praxis) which lies beyond its boundaries” (53). Instead, what he and the others are arguing for Marxism is that it “is no doubt implied as that thinking which knows no boundaries of this kind, and which is infinitely totalizable, but the ideological critique does not depend on some dogmatic or ‘positive’ conception of Marxism as a system” (53). The very important distinction between what Jameson proposes and any strategy of containment, then, is what gets taken for granted: “[r]ather, it is simply the place of an imperative to totalize, and the various historical forms of Marxism can themselves equally effectively be submitted to just such a critique of their own local ideological limits or strategies of containment” (53). This is what
Marxism offers critique from Jameson’s angle, but the parallels to teaching composition are apparent.

For Lukács, specifically in *History and Class Consciousness*, his argument is even less still about theory than Jameson’s book is, and all the more than Giroux’s, which is about pedagogy. However, in his last essay from that collection, “Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation,” he addresses the pertinent point of the communist movement’s vision of its objectives. Namely, he addresses the question of measuring the maturity level of a communist organization by the extent to which its leaders and its members can envisage their collective goals. An immature movement—one which does not have a clear sense of its goals, except in the abstract—might have a small number of members able to conceptualize the best course of action, but they will “be unable to discern clearly either the concrete steps that would lead to that goal or the concrete means that could be deduced from their doubtlessly correct insight” (296). As Lukács points out himself, this speaks to utopianism and by extension to the kind of thinking that we refer to here. Using the analogy he explains here, Lukács acknowledges that when confronted with an injustice utopians “can clearly see the situation that must constitute the point of departure,” but “[w]hat makes them utopians is that they see it as a fact or at best as a problem that requires a solution but are unable to grasp the fact that the problem itself contains both the solution and the path leading to it” (296). It seems that the kind of utopianism to which Giroux and Bizzell refer differs with respect to the kind Lukács outlines because they seem to understand, at least in the abstract, what Lukács is saying.

For him, it seems that the kind of vision required of communist leaders to really mediate theory and practice. A utopian in his sense of the word responds to the problem itself—the characteristics of it—but lacks the will or the capacity to understand it from a critical viewpoint,
of which he calls “organisational.” His characterization seems not so far off from Giroux’s and Bizzell’s critical conscious, however. He explains that “[e]very organised action is—in and for itself—a tangle of individual deeds on the part of individuals and groups” (299), a set of actions which happen but without happening out of necessity or without being determinable as “good” or “bad,” correct or incorrect, but an incomprehensible tangle nonetheless. Instead, he explains, “[t]his tangle, confused in itself, can only acquire meaning and reality if it is comprehended within a historical totality” (299).

Perhaps Lukács’s explanation of organisation and the methodology attending it gets us as close to the critical consciousness we find throughout social-epistemicism, and more importantly, it gets us closer to understanding the theoretical foundations of faith placed in it. Lukács draws the line here—he outlines the course—between recognition and action. Comprehending a situation in totalizing terms means for him of course having an appreciable understanding of its significance on a grander scale, seeing such “an organised action in terms of the lessons it contained for the future,” and by extension “[b]y gauging the situation, by preparing for the action and by leading it such an analysis attempts to isolate those factors that lead with necessity from theory to the most appropriate action possible” (300). Possibly nowhere there exists in the materials consulted here a more apparent defense of the rational model. While acknowledging levels of degree (“most appropriate action”) and in the logical sense probability, Lukács also draws the line of necessity from one point to the next.

He rejects fatalism outright, however, de-emphasizing the role of individuals and of individual human error. Again, he does not limit his analysis to the judgment of individuals because his interest lies with the larger circumstance, with what happened and why. Instead, to gain a totalizing, organizational view “it is legitimate to investigate the objective range of
possibilities for action open to [the key players],” “[f]or this would be to direct attention towards the unity, holding the actors together and examine its appropriateness for a particular action” (300). Lukács, it seems, would prefer to examine such a set of circumstances synchronically, never accepting a fatalistic view and never simplifying what he sees. Again, the notion of necessity applies not to historical chronology, but to the linkage between theory and reality, between conceptualization and action. The only thing which is inevitable about history, it seems, is the fact that a group of individuals who truly understand an injustice and how that injustice operates and impacts their lives will take action against it.21 Such a situation establishes what he calls “the practical relationship to the whole, the real unity of theory and practice which hitherto appeared only unconsciously” (314).

Regarding writing students and any group of subjects relatable to Lukács’s revolutionary methodology, however, organizational control and management of revolution requires a balance between collective will and individual experience. The role of the individual in any discussion of collective will and shared goals is pertinent in that regard. While individual human action does not matter so much as historical events to the totality of a situation, individuals must personalize their situation in order to be conscious of it. He refers to this as a paradox: “[w]e said [earlier] that the discipline of the Communist Party, the unconditional absorption of the total personality in the praxis of the movement, was the only possible way of bringing about an authentic freedom” (320). He uses the term discipline connected with this to describe a quality of a communist party, “the conscious subordination of the self to that collective will that is destined to bring real freedom into being” (315). One would not be required to understand the situation fully, or even be expected to if realization is to be full, but action has to involve a kind of understanding:
without an at least instinctive understanding of the link between total personality and party discipline on the part of every single party member this discipline must degenerate into a reified and abstract system of rights and duties and the party will relapse into a state typical of a party on the bourgeois pattern. (320)

Lukács returns to the question of utopias from this point because certain ethical questions can be raised, he observes, because a line of distinction can be drawn here between the prerogatives of the Communist Part and the prerogatives of utopian “sects,” many of which unlike the Communist Party, focus almost entirely upon “the relationship […] between the individual and the aspirations of the whole movement to which he subordinates his whole personality” (320). This is of course an interesting point because there seems to be, in Giroux and Shor and Bizzell, no sense of a larger “movement” that we see glimpses of (at least) in Freire’s work. Lukács naturally has a problem with this kind of thinking because it disperses efforts and misrepresents its own self, unable to achieve its goals for the simple fact that “[i]t ceases to be correct when that relationship to the whole of the historical process is dissolved” (321). The sect should instead involve a relationship between the organization and the individual, while also interacting with the process of social revolution and with the revolutionary class of which it is a part (321).

In that respect it is interesting to examine the work of Shor and others as examples of utopian sects by Lukács’s meaning because at least from Lukács’s point of view utopianism is an incomplete and ultimately defective medium of critical engagement. They might argue that the issue is one of definition and that the utopian elements of composition theory and pedagogy differ philosophically from the utopianism to which Lukács is referring. The final logical questions regarding Lukács we may pose to social-epistemicists of this persuasion is whether or
not there is a revolution to which they involve themselves, and if not, by what rationale do they borrow totality and critical methodology and divorce it from the critical context of organization?

It can be difficult to tell how Bizzell and Giroux would respond because, as we note above, totality really arrives to the conversation about composition pedagogy third-hand, it seems. Again, the social-epistemicist methodology begins to unravel as the second factor considered here, utopianism, enters the equation, for while utopianism seems now fully informed by Lukács’s and Jameson’s newer critical methods, the concept carries with it lots of baggage from Marxist eras past and certainly needs to be interrogated for it.

Regarding totality itself, Lukács addresses it in just these terms, underlining the fact of the individual’s inability to conceptualize it.22 Instead as a Marxist Lukács is thinking of an individual primarily as a part of a whole. “The category of totality [...],” he explains, “determines not only the object of knowledge but also the subject” (28). He speaks rather abstractly here, but his theorizing of totality and of totality-formation underlines the importance of deemphasizing autonomy and individualistic thinking, while also insinuating the importance of action and a method of analysis. “The totality of an object can only be posited if the positing subject is itself a totality,” he explains; “and if the subject wishes to understand itself, it must conceive of the object as a totality” (28). Under such circumstances one could hardly wonder why method would be so important; without method, nothing could be clearly understood because there could be no individual human mind capable of making these kinds of judgments. This is why Lukács leaves it to classes of individuals to make these kinds of determinations and why by extension collective consciousnesses would be so important. Problems within a society must then be accepted as problems of the classes constituting it (29).
Giroux and Bizzell and Shor as well seem to accept this point on principle. There must exist for pedagogues who accept this kind of viewpoint, however tacitly or explicitly, a certain *faith* in the notion that a collective consciousness will on its own level perceive *correctly*. It seems to them not worth questioning, or at least to go without saying. One cannot help but wonder by extension, then, how Bizzell, Shor, and Giroux would respond to the question of who they are teaching—individuals or a small part of a collective group, and for what result?

At its base, as we can see from Bizzell and from Giroux as examples, we find what all rhetorician-pedagogues of this persuasion hold in common: an unswerving rejection of base-and-superstructure Marxian analytics. More in this vein is to follow, but it must be observed that their historiography differs markedly from their beliefs in critical change; it is a shining example of the difficulty of bringing theory to bear on practical matters. While one might accept abstractly that subject-composition exists relative to all variables related to it, there exists in social-epistemicism the rather arrogant belief that academic methods will suffice to enlighten us all.

Bizzell notes that those whom Berlin might identify as social-epistemicists, interestingly and unsurprisingly perhaps, often disagree on the nature of classroom ethical goals. The notable debate on this topic seems to be between Freire and Giroux: the former who takes a more directive approach with students, having clearly identifiable social conditions to be made transparent, whereas the latter figures liberation to be an understanding of ideology in a more constitutive sense (64). Ultimately, Bizzell argues, the problem lies in “a failure to join with Freire and Giroux in a utopian Marxist analysis that projects beyond struggle to an achieved collective unity embodying social justice” (64). This seems to be Bizzell’s primary goal, and one would presume Freire’s and Giroux’s.
Rather, she concludes, we should turn our focus from ideology and the resolution of the ethical contradiction which necessarily attend any discussion of the role of the teacher (as a liberatory sage or enabler) to the recognition and navigation of such ethical entanglements we all—teacher as well as student—find ourselves involved in, not to eliminate them, but merely (and at least) to address them on their own terms. Certainly, she argues, we all find ourselves in ethical self-contradictions which we might in a certain context understand to be a status quo and do not imagine “liberatory alternatives” to them (65). Ultimately, and more succinctly, this is the conclusion on which she lands, that “Marxist thought can help us learn to live with contradictions” (65). Often enough, the argument goes, even the most privileged of students will find him or herself in a contradiction of values and actions, at which point the lesson might not so much be how to resolve conflict so much as how to recognize its tension and to appreciate its effect on our lives and our motives. Perhaps one would even go so far as to discover that his or her values are different from the ones he or she supposed they were in the first place, or one might make the decision to change his or her actions accordingly. One learns to deal rather than to change, necessarily, however. “Living with contradictions means viewing those inner and outer tensions as opportunities to imagine liberatory change,” she explains, “not as problems we must either solve once and for all or accommodate” (66). She describes this stance as one more “complicated” and “generative” than a perhaps the more traditional, didactic lecture format, where the teacher directs the students’ attention to this or that contradiction or shortcoming in the status quo. Additionally, the thought as well is that a teacher would benefit with this stance by allowing his or her authority and motives to be problematized similarly, without simplifying his or her role into irrelevance or absolute dominion. Bizzell’s Marxist utopia is one where the institution of American individual autonomy is challenged, she explains, and where we instead
define ourselves where we relate to one another. The composition of ourselves, it seems from this point of view, arises from the many necessary contradictions attending our relation to others. The question lies in exploring and sharing those contradictions, or our perceptions of them at the very least. There, she argues, we find ourselves that much closer to uncovering what Jameson calls the “‘political unconscious,’ precisely that explosive realm of major contradictions in our national life that we seek to escape by avoiding Marxist ways of thinking” (67).

We can find from Bizzell’s essay as cogent an application of Marxian analytics to composition studies as one could find, especially when one considers that her argument applies Marxian principles so systematically. As it exists in composition studies more recently, however, Marxism most often makes its way into the conversation by means of theorist-pedagogues marked by his influence. One subset of social-epistemicism that we may find the most clearly differentiated is those scholar-pedagogues who rely heavily upon one specific work: Brazilian pedagogue and author Paulo Freire. Tonally Freire’s work and the work of his partisans seem much more consistent with that of Marx and the writers of socialist revolution. Though it might be reductive to say, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, possibly his best-known and most frequently cited work, occupies the same kind of space in composition pedagogy circles as Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth does of post-colonialism, and it serves a similar function (but with an admittedly less violent reputation). This is to say that Pedagogy of the Oppressed outlines the psychological effects of social-scale oppression on an individual and narrows its focus to the classroom context and to material conditions—the interpersonal and uneven dynamics of the teacher-student relationship, the site of instruction which is designed to foster such a relationship, and the insidious and harmful ideologies the curriculum holds in place.
The process by which one becomes indoctrinated in the belief that one best learns by thinking of him or herself as a student or as a teacher is dehumanizing, Freire explains in his first chapter. For that matter, “[b]ecause it is a distortion of being more fully human,” he explains that such a situation engenders, “sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so” (44). Here Freire offers little which is new so far from what we could read elsewhere, except for his use of the term struggle and the implications of its presence there. The object, he explains, to realize a state of full humanity is first to realize that one is oppressed and that there is an oppressive “context” which must be reversed or done away with by some other revolutionary means to keep the reality from perpetuating itself.23 To the extent that one does not realize and act upon this knowledge, he or she can never be a fully exist “authentically” (48), and the notion of authenticity plays a prominent role in Freire’s theory-apparatus.

From there, Freire derives his notion of his “pedagogy of the oppressed,” which he explains in terms fairly consistent with the development of a critical consciousness, but with a certain slant toward the discovery of modes of oppression and toward “liberation” from them. “This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed,” he explains, “and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation” (48). Freire presumes that critical consciousness is open-ended and an earnest stance of personal policy, but also he supposes certain truths about reality, particularly regarding the power mechanics of everyday existence.

An interesting and important thing about Freire is that he actively engages Marx’s work in a pedagogical context, something that many other social-epistemicists—the ones who heavily rely upon Freire as well as the ones who do not—seem to take for granted. This kind of
pedagogy he proposes, Freire is careful to explain, favors an act of “objective transformation” (50) and supposes an “objective social reality” (51), as opposed to the “subjectivist immobility” (50) common to individuals who recognize their oppressed (or oppressive) status for what it “is” but fail to act upon it in a way that suits everyone’s mutual interests. He explains that Marx accepts both subjectivism (“which postulates people without a world” [50]) and objectivism as variables in the objective truth of matters. Any other personal policy amounts little more than to acquiescence to an oppressive reality: “[j]ust as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance” (51).

Subject and object Freire describes as existing in a dialectical interplay, a seemingly baseless historiography that supposes a narrative where cultural, material, and historical circumstances shape the individual and group character, which in turn is composed of individuals actively enacting “real-world” events. The harm that Freire envisions originating out of such a situation—and what he means by “subjectivist immobility”—is that oppressed individuals have not yet recognized the conditions of their oppression because they do not recognize the influence of objective reality in their lives and minds.

This reality and these mechanics are givens, it seems, so far as Freire is concerned, so by this point he begins to address them in terms of “praxis,” the means by which he refers to as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (51). Realization without action, he argues, reinforces and adds to the oppressed condition, reiterating the distinction between oppressed and oppressor which has no objective reason for existence. Rather, students must realize the condition of their existence and act upon it because knowledge without action is still inauthentic and not “true” in the sense that it is inconsistent with the real-world subject-objective interplay that Marx describes. “A mere perception of reality not followed by […] critical
intervention,” he explains, “will not lead to a transformation of objective reality—precisely because it is not a true perception” (52).

It becomes clear that not only are the beliefs and suppositions of objective reality critically formulated, but that they form a very important base to critical pedagogy, that one could not fully implement the kind of pedagogy Freire proposes here without accepting these suppositions. Knowledge and critical engagement transform individual awareness and make one more “of” reality than perhaps he or she would have been otherwise. “There would be no human action if there were no objective reality,” he explains, “no world to be the ‘not I’ of the person and to challenge them” (53). For that matter, this objective reality exists as a medium of critical engagement: “there would be no human action if humankind were not a ‘project,’ if he or she were not able to transcend himself or herself, if one were not able to perceive reality and understand it in order to transform it” (53). For Freire this is the very heart of “the praxis,” for it is critical in liberation pedagogy that the individual make this objective discovery without having it explained. “The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption,” he says (54).

Resultant is a transformation of oppressor and oppressed into a reality where each is authentically human and fully unaware of the need for a distinction between the two or of the usefulness of such a dichotomy, for the liberation of the oppressed in turn serves to liberate the oppressor as well. To this end we find where Marx’s work and Freire’s most clearly coincide. The better part of the rest of this book is devoted to the examination and explication of the notion of “truth” and “authenticity” because at the very heart of Freire’s argument is, again, the supposition of a state of transcendence and, by negation, of untruth and inauthenticity. The oppressed and the oppressors occupy this space.
 Perhaps the most important element of this is action, which seems also to be the most overlooked. Freire envisions action to be a corollary to reflection and necessary to the kind of transformation he proposes, for reflection without action, without “true” words even, is decidedly untransformative: it does nothing to alter the objective reality of oppression. In this respect there is no praxis, only reflection without action. Idea must become reality, a maxim he borrows later from Che Guevara (170).

Regarding Berlin himself, who addresses the ideological constitution of the self in a similar fashion, Victor Vitanza argues that Berlin fails to go far enough and challenge the rational-humanist subject, that he is likewise suspicious, but “never suspicious enough” (142). Granted, he argues, “[t]eaching students how to write is also teaching them a view of (economic) reality and an ‘identity’ for themselves that is to be attempted, though never realized, in ‘sameness’” (142), but though he can appreciate a rhetoric that will bring questions of ideology to the table, this question of “sameness” must be addressed as a continuation of a tradition that social-epistemicism is a part of. He pairs Berlin with critical pedagogue Henry Giroux in critiquing this position. He notes that both have “an exclusive penchant for socialist rationalism” and of certain social ironies and their curricular counterparts, “which must be laid bare so that students might ‘resist’” (142). All of which Vitanza does not disagree with, but his argument is against that part of social-epistemicism which addresses knowledge, or the insight into reality one gains from critical insight. “I reject this approach of ‘rational’ thinking and acting, especially about language,” he says, because “[i]t only further remystifies and disempowers students and us all” (142), noting Lyotard’s observation that “Reason and power are one and the same thing” (qtd. on 142).
Ultimately, what similarities that we find between social-epistemicism and Marxism come down to their treatment of knowledge and of reason, for we inherit all of them from the rationalist-humanist tradition. Of Lyotard, Keith Crome and James Williams note that “reason seeks reasons, and in so doing looks to govern and predict all events, rendering them calculable” (121). This they note of Lyotard’s take on literature, but the principle seems to be the same. “Reason rationalises the given and neutralises the future,” they explain, “bringing everything under the control of knowledge” (121). Further, “through language we accede to adult consciousness and reason, yet […] language exceeds every intention and action of the individual and it cannot be entirely absorbed into the consciousness and reason it founds” (122). This position on reason is the fundamental difference between social-epistemicism and Lyotard’s own and the point at which no human activity—rhetoric or otherwise—becomes consistent with technê. As we shall see of social-epistemicism, knowledge exists in potential rather than in abstract, but more importantly, its composition does not differ so much in social-epistemicism from current-traditionalism, cognitivism, and expressivism as one might think.

In “Rhetoric and Ideology” Berlin notes of social-epistemic rhetoric that many of its “spokespersons” have many important intellectual disagreements and reinforces the assertion from Rhetoric and Reality that it exists in the middle range of a continuum. We will recall from Chapter Three the observation that the poles of this implied continuum, described in part by Berlin and in part by Janet Emig, address composition pedagogies centered upon the subject and upon the object, and that middle-ground pedagogies address both, but of differing proportions and with the use of differing theoretical apparatuses. The common ground that he can describe for them, however, in the range that they do occupy, is that “they share a notion of rhetoric as a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the
individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation” (“Ideology” 488). He also notes that social-epistemicists concern themselves with diachronic formulations as well: “[t]heir positions […] include an historicist orientation, the realization that a rhetoric is an historically specific social formation that must perforce change over time; and this feature in turn makes possible reflexiveness and revision as the inherently ideological nature of rhetoric is continually acknowledged” (488). Berlin spends the rest of his article unpacking these two statements.

Berlin’s language regarding the interests of social-epistemicism is markedly rationalistic and deterministic in outlook. Peppered throughout Berlin’s entire body of work we find the term reality or some derivative thereof, a notion, as we have noted before, that carries with it a supposition of a positive and determinable set of circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, especially regarding technê, is the position of knowledge in this formulation: it “is never found in any one of these [three abovementioned parts of dialectical interaction] but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all three come together” (488). This take on knowledge in rhetoric of this kind is perhaps the more overlooked part of social-epistemicism, and the part of it which provides it with its theoretical driving force.

In many very significant ways, however, this sense of the term reality cannot be ignored because it supposes “critical thinking” to be a kind of thought-machine suitable for the apprehension of absolute characteristics. We will find by examining the work of others Berlin might identify as social-epistemicists—especially that of Ira Shor—reality used liberally throughout. Regarding what we have seen of technê this appears fundamentally to be no different from the other parts of Berlin’s taxonomy because, as Vitanza has noted, it relies readily upon the rational-humanistic subject; it draws from it its ethos.
Certainly social-epistemicism comes to us through the Marxist tradition, as does the interest in understanding the contribution of material conditions to the interests and character of the individual and the community. That these principles are applied to rhetoric and composition, however, means that to some extent economic capital is replaced by a different kind of currency. “Most important,” he notes, “this dialectic is grounded in language: the observer, the discourse community, and the material conditions of existence are all verbal constructs” (488). He explains that while the conditions of which he speaks exist beyond our abilities to express them through language, we cannot deal with them in any meaningful or productive way without the use of language, and we cannot understand them for our own selves without language. Language being also dependent upon the conditions, historical and contemporary, in which it is spoken or written, everything therefore exists and is understood relative to the kind of social constructivism governed by the dialectical interaction of the individual, society, and materiality.

There exists, therefore, an interdependence between language and reality, and the mark of social construction is therefore traceable in all facets of language. Ultimately, he explains, “[t]his means that in studying rhetoric—the ways discourse is generated—we are studying the ways in which knowledge comes into existence” (489). Here he differs from Plato in the very important sense that “[k]nowledge, after all, is an historically bound social fabrication rather than an eternal and invariable phenomenon located in some uncomplicated repository—in the material object or in the subject or in the social realm” (489). As we shall see, however, there are many more ways in which Berlin and Plato occupy common ground.

Of the dialectical interactivity that Berlin describes, one could easily imagine how the efforts of a rhetorician of that persuasion could be pitched in the direction of any of the three, especially if that pedagogue or theorist is not thinking of him or herself as a social-epistemicist in
any self-conscious way. Berlin outlines a few noteworthy examples of this. For instance, if one does not accept the notion that the self, or the self’s essence, is socially constructed rather than stable enough to use as a point of departure, the real and the true exist for the individual, and a suitable and useful wealth of knowledge can be gained by understanding—through varying methods—what is real and true for an individual. Cognitivism and expressivism, as we have seen, show us that. One need only refer to *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* to see a study where researchers interested themselves intently on understanding the individual in the act of composing, the fundamental belief being that there may be something useful there.

The role of ideology in this knowledge system Berlin outlines for us seems to exist wherever these dialectical interactions stabilize, or wherever they *seem* to be, for we are seldom fully aware of how all of the pieces fit together. All parts of the dialectical influence one another, and “[t]hus, the perceiving subject, the discourse communities of which the subject is a part, and the material world itself are all the constructions of a historical discourse, of the ideological formulations inscribed in the language-mediated practical activity of a particular time and place” (489). This is why social-epistemicists like Berlin and Shor and Freire address their pedagogy toward the exposure and description of ideology at work; fundamentally the belief is that doing so allows one to understand reality more fully and see where injustice exists and hopefully rectify it in some small way.

And the term *injustice* is used carefully here because it guides us to the supposition that a mutually beneficial state of affairs is attainable, at the very least in theory or closer approximation. This also means that there exists in this rhetoric a belief always in something better or *more* perfect.
That rational structure cannot necessarily be value-neutral does not escape the notice of Berlin, however, in his assessment of social-epistemicism. “We are lodged in a hermeneutic circle,” he explains, the “scheme” of which “indicate[s] that arguments based on the permanent rational structures of the universe or on the evidence of the deepest and most profound personal intuition should not be accepted without question” (489). By this Berlin means no more than that one cannot accept rational structure as unchanging, and that any power structure that appears to be static can hold in place something harmful or ideologically dangerous. “The material, the social, and the subjective are at once the producers and the products of ideology,” he explains, “and ideology must continually be challenged so as to reveal its economic and political consequences for individuals” (489). Larger forces operate in the lives of individuals, for the social-epistemicist, and to a certain degree actions and their consequences in the material world are manifestations of operations of and clashes among dynamic, ideological spheres of influence.

Berlin’s response to Platonism is certainly similar to the one forwarded here. Notably, once again, “there are no arguments [in social-epistemicism] from transcendent truth since all arguments arise in ideology” (489). “Natural law” and “universal truth” operate in reality to hold in place certain ideologies, and since these things are exposed through social-epistemic rhetoric, “no class or group or individual has privileged access to decisions on these matters” (490).

This leads us to the question of virtue we have been addressing throughout. It can be more difficult to characterize virtue for this rhetoric than for others because of its hyper-sensitivity to transcendence. To an important extent, social-epistemicism is decidedly self-critical in ways that many other rhetorics are not and stands always in response to and in anticipation of ideology: “[h]uman responses to the material conditions of existence, the social relations they encourage, and the interpellations of subjects within them are always already ideological, are
always already interpretations that must be constantly revised in the interests of the greater participation of all, for the greater good of all” (490). To this extent social-epistemicism, as we have seen, concerns itself with justice and to the same extent with virtue because it supposes virtue, when it occurs elsewhere, to signify that which is a privileged attribute in any ideology but its own.

The flaw in social-epistemicism, of course, is its failure to recognize the privilege and virtue inherent to itself. Sensitive as social-epistemicism is to those qualities of rhetoric having to do with ethos, virtue can be a concept more difficult to pin down than it is regarding current-traditionalism, cognitivism, and expressivism. We can reference principles of proven stylistic and developmental excellence, the degree of faithfulness to scientific methodology, or the degree of faithfulness to true individual expression to make that determination with the others; and all of them draw their strength in some way from some fundamental belief about language and linguistic artifacts: that they are rationally reducible. However, that which is virtuous in social-epistemicism gets us much closer to the heart of the matter regarding rhetoric and technê than any of the others; indeed, it allows us to see what is really at stake when we teach rhetoric and composition. Even Blair rejected the notion that language is rationally reducible, as we saw in Chapter Two, but it does not seem that he really believed it.

Instead, however, Berlin takes social-epistemic rhetoric to be the determination of truth, what casts light upon reality as it actually is, rather than one which skews a situation to suit a reality determined otherwise. Social-epistemic rhetoric “offers an explicit critique of economic, political, and social arrangements, the counterpart of the implicit critique found in expressionistic rhetoric” (490). To that extent he echoes Jarratt’s position that the influence of Marx ought to be
constructive, in the formulation of explanation, perhaps, and to qualify this point he turns to Ira Shor’s landmark book, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*.

Of Shor’s work in the classroom, Berlin notes that “the liberated consciousness of students is the only education objective worth considering, the only objective worth the risk of failure”; and further, “[t]o succeed at anything else is no success at all” (492). As we shall see below, where Shor’s book is given as praxis for Berlin’s description here, objectives can be very important in these regards.

Berlin further notes here something similar to what the post-process pedagogues we see in Chapter Five note about teaching students, particularly regarding self-conscious and self-referential teaching. “Every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology,” he explains, “in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (492). Cognitivism, he argues, relies upon the supposed (but not actual) unchanging structures and operations of the human mind, while expressivism, though it critiques corporate capitalism, replaces it with “the ideology of radical individualism” (492), an ideology just as insidious as any other.

Interestingly, near the end of his argument in “Rhetoric and Ideology,” Berlin addresses outright the influence of Marx on his rhetoric. For this he turns to Kenneth Burke and *Rhetoric of Motives*: “we do not have to accept to accept the Marxian promise in order to realize the value of Marxian diagnosis for rhetorical purposes” (109). Burke’s stance there on the role of ideology in the study of rhetoric are certainly worth addressing. To be sure, ideology must be considered, as Burke explains it because it addresses human motive in ways that the general and the individual cannot; that is to say, it concerns itself with issues of *class*.
Certainly, however, where rhetoric and Marxism connect historically the correspondence is a bit more problematic, especially when one considers the position that Marxism is a “science.” Burke makes the concise but important observation that the terminology of Marxism actually “is not a neutral ‘preparation for action’ but ‘inducement to action’” (101). He notes that historically communist politics has been littered with examples of character defamation on ideological grounds and intense interest in propaganda, noting that early on, ironically, a deft political move was to foist upon capitalism and fascism the charge of rhetorical manipulation, without acknowledging it on their own part.

Berlin’s stance on social-epistemicism in *Rhetoric and Reality*, as we have seen in Chapter Three, appears under different names, the critical purpose of his study there being less simplified, but categorical nonetheless. Indeed, there is nothing from *Rhetoric and Reality* which contradicts his position in “Rhetoric and Ideology,” but it is Berlin’s positioning of his preferred pedagogical method in the composition pedagogy universe that bears mentioning.

He locates it in his first chapter, “An Overview,” decisively within the transactional realm, even going so far as to invoke the word, but differentiating it from other approaches also identifiable as being transactional. “Epistemic rhetoric,” he explains, “posits a transaction that involves all elements of the rhetorical situation: interlocutor, audience, material reality, and language” (16). The crucial difference between epistemic rhetoric, he explains, and classical rhetoric, as well as cognitive rhetorics and all contemporary rhetorics which take into account an interplay among these rhetorical elements, is that all reality is verbally constructed and that nothing exists independent of human expressibility:

In epistemic rhetoric there is never a division between experience and language, whether the experience involves the subject, the subject and other subjects, or the
subject and the material world. All experiences, even the scientific and logical,
are grounded in language, and language determines their content and structure.

(16)

Again, the nature of the interaction is dialectical and, more importantly, identifiable, not
necessarily in an immutable state, but in a kind of quality of transcendence. “Truth is never
simply ‘out there’ in the material world or the social realm, or simply ‘in here’ in a private and
personal world,” he explains. Rather, truth “emerges only as the three—the material, the social,
and the personal—interact, and the agent of mediation is language” (17).²⁴

Insofar as “Rhetoric and Ideology” offers us a look into social-epistemicism from an
ideological lens, *Rhetoric and Reality* makes a bit more use of an historical and theoretical
perspective. To accomplish this Berlin proposes to revise or remind us of the true function of,
and purpose for, the study of rhetoric. “Rhetoric exists not merely so that truth may be
communicated; rhetoric exists so that truth may be discovered,” Berlin explains later in his book
(165). In the process Berlin also provides us with a clarification of the epistemicist position on
meaning and on knowledge. “Meaning,” he explains, “emerges not from objective, disinterested,
empirical investigation, but from individuals engaging in rhetorical discourse in discourse
communities […]” (165-66). Further, “[k]nowledge, then, is a matter of mutual agreement
appearing as a product of the rhetorical activity, the discussion, of a given discourse community”
(166).

Certainly Berlin’s categorizations are general, and by his own admittance not drawn in
the way that the scholars and pedagogues he cites would—in this particular section, for instance,
of Michael Leff, by Berlin’s own admittance. Regardless, Berlin’s works are enormously
influential in the field, and accessible points of departure for many who are beginning to get their
feet wet. This means that, whether the critics he cites identify themselves as epistemicists, social-epistemicists, transactionalists, or otherwise, many others do.

Also lurking about in the background for nearly all social-epistemicists is John Dewey and his pragmatic philosophy. Of late many theorists have explored the means by which his educational philosophy might be applied to their field. Berlin describes Dewey’s “notion of progressive education,” which “reflect[s] his conviction that the aim of all education is to combine self-development, social harmony, and economic integration” (Reality 46-47). As we shall see in the next chapter, Dewey’s educational philosophy plays a part in the post-process movement as well.

Pedagogy

Social-epistemicism and Freirianism come down to the American institution in complicated ways, particularly considering the material, political, and cultural differences between the Brazilian classroom and the American university. Those who seek to apply Freire’s theory to the classroom cite his method and his position that his kind of pedagogy is dynamically applicable because its backing theory admits of any given material, political, and cultural climate, that where there are individuals oppressed of mind, body, or habit, there exists an opportunity for critical examination and greater knowledge.

Further, the influence of Marx imbues this kind of rhetoric not only with the kind of democratic idealism common to any abstract work—practical or otherwise—but these rhetorics appear to us also in a very populistic form, often delivered with a sense of the revolutionary. To some extent the realms of theory and pedagogy regarding these kinds of rhetorics are hopelessly intertwined, in fact, with revolutionary spirit.
One such scholar and pedagogue is Ira Shor, author of the massively influential and practical *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. From a theoretical standpoint, Shor offers very little that is different from Freire, and very little in the way of theory at all, for that matter. What he does provide us with, in this work and elsewhere, is arguments for his understanding of a student body he has observed from his own experiences in New York City valued for, and determined by, their roles in a vast network of consumption and production modes. He endeavors in the classroom to enlighten his students to this reality, that they have been lulled into behaviors consistent with their functions in these modes and inconsistent with healthy *human* behavior. Hopefully his students will understand the ways that they are being exploited and appreciate the need to act on behalf of themselves and of their families and communities. In the end these modes of exploitation are positively identifiable; the alternative would be a reality of such complicated dynamism that students would presumably throw their hands up in resignation.

Certainly, the book is for teachers, though, and while his examples are of things he has done in class that he found useful and successful, he writes for an audience who are colleagues. His goal, therefore, also seems to be to critically engage the teacher’s position in society as well. “We begin our teaching careers with little or no background in liberating theory and practice,” he explains in the second edition. “Therefore, our most likely method will be a passive transfer of skills and information from ourselves to our students” (xii).

Shor repeatedly and calculatedly invokes the term “liberatory” or some derivative to describe, variously, his pedagogy, theory, and his methods. His main goal seems to be to help his students to interact with their world more critically, the result being, it seems, a state not of critical enlightenment necessarily, but at the very least a useful skill set—not an enlightened understanding, but a *way* of understanding.
Again, however, Shor’s work supplements Freire’s in the sense that it provides for us the kind of rationalization and overarching categorization Marxian scholar-pedagogues like Freire do, but it applies it in a very specifically American context. For that matter, he also focuses rather specifically upon the teaching of writing within it, and of the critical thinking involved with finding something to write about. “Reading closely, writing clearly, thinking critically, conceptualizing and verbalizing,” he says, “are some means to penetrate the maze of reality” (37).

He addresses critical teaching as a transformative exercise, with the power to change at a very fundamental level. “The teachers’s investigation of daily life,” he explains, “and attendant reevaluation of his or her pedagogical mode, are preparation for initiating a process which transforms everyone involved” (84). This transformation occurs not without a theoretical apparatus to accompany it. Again, with social-epistemicism pedagogy can be difficult to distinguish from theory, but Shor does to some extent in his third chapter. The way he describes critical learning makes it seem a very potent tool for cutting through that which distracts us from reality, but perhaps more interestingly, it is a means to collective power. “Critical thinking challenges alienation,” he explains, “by connecting student awareness to the mesh between interior psyche and external control” (95).

Shor largely draws his theory from Freire, citing “conscientization” and emphasizing the importance and the role of dialogue in the creation of a “politiciied pedagogy”: “dialogue is a democratic model of social relations, used to problematize the undemocratic quality of social life” (95). Shor envisions this method working in the American classroom to undermine internalized classroom behaviors such as undue deference to the teacher and hierarchical authority, allowing for a “transition […] from one state of consciousness to another” (95). There
lies in this method the potential for “transcendence,” and he relies heavily on the supposition that “political and moral values,” which he sees classroom dialogue engendering, are “incompatible with social oppression” (95). Shor relies upon a fundamental belief in the transcendent power of democracy, even in the most isolated of contexts, to make itself self-evident and to grow stronger in a nourishing environment. For that matter, where democracy does become self-evident, social oppression suffers by contrast.

To some extent, also, “liberatory theory,” like the kind he outlines in Chapter Three, cannot be implemented abstractly. “Liberatory theory can be analyzed and systematized,” he explains, “but each liberatory class cannot be standardized” (96), a very important statement for Shor to make because it speaks to the contact point between theory and pedagogy. The interest of this kind of pedagogy lies in contextual, situational interaction, and not in speaking of democracy in the abstract. For it to work class discussion must be formatted democratically, but not necessarily be about democracy.

In large, such a pedagogy necessarily relies upon standing in dialectical opposition to all of which enforces or represents social oppression; its ethos occurs counter to much of everything the students might normally have expected. “It dis-orders reality with modes for self-ordering,” he explains (96). In this way Shor reconstitutes the teacher in ways that are important regarding the topic of technē. The teacher inhabits a new role in this pedagogy, certainly, but his description of such a teacher is markedly isolated nonetheless. “The design of transcendent counter-structure is an art which demands a high level of consciousness in the teacher who initiates the process,” he explains (96-97), but is to be accomplished ultimately out of altered policy rather than out of a cult of personality. Instead, the object is for the teacher to become “expendable” (98), only providing the space and time for students to abstract themselves from
their everyday experience in order to concentrate on ideas instead, learning by open contrast. The teacher necessarily blends into the background, facilitating when necessary or useful, but providing at least the opportunity for dialectical voice.

Perhaps the most interesting part of all of the social-epistemicists is that they readily accept the principles of dynamic and synchronic determinism, but are as constructivistic as any others, as bound in ethos by populism as any other theoretical approach. Certainly, this observation has been made before of Marxism in general. It seems that language stands at the forefront of this debate and that one’s understanding of language has a great deal to do with one’s position on rhetoric. If we accept Jean-François Lyotard’s hypothesis of language that, while it can be rational and figural, it exceeds individual action and “cannot be entirely absorbed into the consciousness and reason it founds” (Crome 122), then we have a complicated decision to make about rhetoric and technê. For one thing, we have to accept that the medium in which rhetoric operates—language—will not admit of reason entirely. At the very least one should conclude that speaking in absolutes regarding rhetoric and technê is problematic in this sense. Howsoever we should apply theory to the teaching of writing is a topic best suited for a later chapter, but the Marxian tradition seems no clearer or more definitive a mode than any other.

The primary question regarding social-epistemicism as technê lies in its relation to Marxist philosophy, and it can be very difficult to make the determination of how exactly it fits into the Marxist tradition. If we can be sure that it is, or that social-epistemicism could not exist without Marxian materialism, then the answer is simple. We need only consult Lyotard’s argument in The Postmodern Condition to determine the difference between what he is talking about and what Berlin, Shor, and Freire are. For him Marxism appears quite as rationalistic and conventional as any other theory-driven policy in the postmodern context. Indeed, his
terminology leads us to the conclusion. “‘Traditional’ theory,” he says of none in particular, though it becomes clear that he is referring at least partially to Marxism, “is always in danger of being incorporated into the programming of the social whole as a simple tool for the optimization of its performance; this is because its desire for a unitary and totalizing truth lends itself to the unitary and totalizing practice of the system’s managers” (12). Marxism originates and thrives in social and class struggle, he explains, but as these principles are implemented either in part or on the whole, by insinuation or by name, struggle becomes less of a key factor: in countries with liberal or advanced liberal management, the struggles and their instruments have been transformed into regulators of the system; in communist countries, the totalizing model and its totalitarian effect have made a comeback in the name of Marxism itself, and the struggles in question have simply been deprived of the right to exist. (13)

One wonders, as Lyotard does, what becomes of “critical” theory, as Shor so boldly presents it, and as Lyotard notes is such a fundamental part of Capital—indeed, it is the subtitle of it—in the postmodern cultural context. After all, Lyotard explains, “‘Critical’ theory,” in Marxian terms, especially, was always “based on a principle of dualism and wary of syntheses and reconciliations” (12).

In the far less grand context of today’s American composition classroom, the implications are much clearer. Lyotard notes not of Shor specifically, but of the Marxist model generally, that we cannot conceal the fact that the critical model in the end lost its theoretical standing and what reduced to the status of “utopia” or “hope,” a token protest raised in the name of man or reason or creativity, or again of some social category
[...] on which is conferred in extremis the henceforth improbable function of critical subject. (13)

Shor is of course famous for his course on “Utopias” given at CUNY in Staten Island. To some extent however, we find some utopian vision in the theory and pedagogy of nearly all social epistemicists. Ultimately, as Giroux has pointed out, the notion of utopia is what we get from the legacy of Marx: the vision of an ideal. What varies from one scholar to the next depends upon his or her actual belief in it and its possibilities for realization. For some it might seem that the promise of utopia would serve as a sufficient motivating factor, for students and for teachers. For others it might be surely achievable. Even still, as Giroux argues of the structural determinists (4), there are those who masochistically content themselves with a vision of utopia as a state which can never be, but can serve as a beacon of light on what actually is. In either case, social-epistemicism places a measure of faith in the notion of an ideal and transcendent state; their entire set of principles is based upon it.

However, regarding ideals, social-epistemicism differs from the other parts of Berlin’s taxonomy in the very important sense that utopias do not exist for them in fact, though they are no less so in effect. They are no less influential to us because of it. Ira Shor, whose Utopias class we have already addressed, in When Students Have Power describes the course and its setting in wholly ironic terms, contrasting the concept with the dismal conditions of the classroom. Here we find an instance where the notion of utopia gets confronted directly as a contrasting device. We know from his description that it is set in the basement of an unimaginatively named building (“Building B”). This he does for the benefit of his knowing readers, crafting the prose of his book to magnify the contrast between utopia as an ideal and the “reality” of his students’ learning conditions and attitudes. Since a great deal of the syllabus was negotiated, it seems
likely that Shor’s inclusion of “Utopias” in the title was used as an initiating device or a starting point from which to begin negotiations. Everything about the class, it seems, except for the reading list was negotiated, and that included three utopian books of which the students never heard.

With regards to technê, to the greatest extent social-epistemism, be it driven by Marxist philosophy in theory or in tone, seems hardly different from any of the other members of Berlin’s taxonomy. This is especially true to the extent that its pedagogical implementation so readily accepts the ethos of academic arrogance. In a composition classroom in this regard it can seem more than a little ironic. As we shall see in the next chapter, technê would not necessarily be a factor of consideration for social-epistemicists because in questions of content, their perspective might best be characterized by the position that material conditions and the reality of students’ everyday existence is their content, whereas elsewhere literature may be considered content, but what readers really learn are to internalize and cynically navigate patterns of ideological dominance. So, in either case, it seems that content is learnable, but the true content is the reality of everyday existence rather than the literature, which can or cannot (depending) enlighten us to these conclusion. Yet again, writing is a technê for social-epistemicists because these are knowable patterns.

What makes social-epistemicism as a technê so interesting, however, is the fact that it engages critically on a level unmatched by the other three. To be sure, Marx’s work has had a major influence on historiography and opened the conversation to new levels of complexity in the formation of the subject. In the teaching of composition and rhetoric specifically it has directed our attention back away from the document and from the rhetorical situation even and directed our attention toward the dynamics of subject formation. In the end, however, social-
epistemicism’s approach to knowledge tips its hand a bit, when we allow it to play out. It would be unfair to say that a social-epistemicist of any kind approaches his or her work as a current-traditionalist, cognitivist, or expressivist does, even with regard to technē; the similarity, however, lies in the ultimate supposition that a rational set of principles, taken or established in any context, could lead us to a correct conclusion about anything. If it does not suppose some absolute truth or meaning exists for any thought or action, it still supposes that thought or action can be understood and context can be established for a practical purpose.
CHAPTER FIVE:

THE POST-PROCESS MOVEMENT AND ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM: A CONTINUATION OF THE MYTH OF TECHNÊ

Inevitably, any examination of the ideological dynamics of technê will lead us explore the possibilities for theory which are not bound by ideological constraint. In the postmodern era, where the belief is that one might effectively teach any subject and remain faithful to the premise that every context—in or out of a classroom—is a situated one, composition theorists have adapted the larger body of work in postmodernism to a small corpus on English composition called “post-process theory,” a small group of which would implement it in the classroom.

This chapter proposes that what has been termed by extension “the post-process movement” undermines its own legitimacy insofar as it recognizes itself as a movement; and insofar as some of its proponents would make a pedagogy of post-process theory the whole thing collapses into something it seems to resist: the treatment of rhetoric as a craft. To better understand the post-process movement a few of the theorists self-identifying post-process scholars cite most frequently are given here. As individuals these theorists offer us some new and interesting ideas which are much less like anything we have heard for quite a while. The problem, however, it is suggested here as well as in the Conclusion, might actually be with the continuation of the discipline itself.

Another term that crops up on occasion regarding theory—the charge of which has been repeatedly leveled against process rhetoricians (and modernist thinkers of all stripes)—is foundationalism, a word meant to imply a way of thinking which Berlin would consider fairly
consistent with current-traditionalism, cognitivism, and expressivism, a term we have seen might be consistent with social-epistemicism as well, but as we shall also see a term ultimately applicable to post-process pedagogy as well. Foundationalism’s counterpart in the world of theory is anti-foundationalism, a stance taken against foundationalism and everything it implies in the new postmodern context. Perhaps Stanley Fish offers up one of the better descriptions of the difference between the two in “Consequences,” his essay from Doing What Comes Naturally.

In that essay Fish restates his position on theory, that it cannot transcend situatedness because the conditions of its creation—any theory’s creation—will always dictate its nature. He argues there that theory draws its context from “the mutable world” of practices and procedures, that it cannot guide practice because its rules and procedures are no more than generalizations from practice’s history (and from only a small piece of that history), and theory cannot reform practice because, rather than neutralizing interest, it begins and ends in interest and raises the imperatives of interest—of some local, particular, partisan project—to the status of universals. (321)

Certainly Berlin would once again accept this premise regarding the first three parts of his taxonomy, but to do so would be a partial conflation of “interest” with “ideology.” Absolutely do the terms apply, but not to the extent that “interest” could not encompass other fields. Fish acknowledges that anti-foundationalist theory can be “sometimes Marxist” (321), but he also argues that it would be more accurate to describe anti-foundationalism possibly as a stance, “an argument against the possibility of theory” (322). Foundationalists place their faith in the existence of some kind of objective standard or method—“theory hope”—rather than in historical accidents and eccentricities, which as he notes above is where theory really originates.
The anti-foundationalist argument supposes that theory could never deliver on what it hopes for and could therefore never be self-consistent, therefore never delivering on the consequences he refers to in the eponymous title (322).

So, in the same way that current-traditionalism, cognitivism, and expressivism all collapse under the weight of Berlin’s ideological lens, social-epistemicism must bear its own weight, the weight of ideological scrutiny. This much we have seen without the aid of Stanley Fish, and without the aid of the anti-foundational stance. At its spiritual core anti-foundationalism bears some degree of hope and consequence as well, in the way that theory does, which he characterizes as “the consequences of freeing us from the hold of unwarranted absolutes so that we may more flexibly pursue the goals of human flourishing or liberal conversation” (323). Fish directs our attention here to areas of human interest which are a bit broader than the study of English composition, but the anti-foundational stance has been liberally applied. The group of like-minded individuals in this field who has adapted Fish’s notions of anti-foundationalism is the post-process scholars.

Fish does address the issue of teaching writing, however, in his essay from the same collection, “Anti-Foundationalism, Theory Hope, and the Teaching of Composition.” Interestingly, Fish notes here as an example of the pedagogical imperative delivering many to the desire to implement anti-foundational principles in the classroom the emphasis on process over product normally given at the time. Famously, Fish observes, Maxine Hairston posited in “The Winds of Change” that “the admonition to ‘teach process, not product’ is now conventional wisdom” (Hairston 78), a very important point to this discussion to which we return below. He even goes so far as to assert that anti-foundationalism might in fact be conflated with rhetoric—
and sophism particularly—without doing violence to either concept, especially regarding the
teaching of writing:

    [t]he rehabilitation by anti-foundationalism of the claims of situation, history, 
    politics, and convention in opposition to the more commonly successful claims of 
    logic, brute fact empiricism, the natural, and the necessary marks one more 
    chapter in the long history of the quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric, 
    between the external and the temporal, between God’s view and point of view. 
    (347)

While it may be that case that anti-foundationalism can serve a rehabilitative function for 
rhetoric and make writing pedagogy interesting in new ways, Fish argues unequivocally that 
anti-foundationalism will not enable us to achieve its theorized epistemological state, or to 
inhabit our situated state “more effectively,” or even to help us teach writing more effectively 
than we already do (347-48). He refers us to Jacques Derrida in stating that “the realization that 
something has always been the case does not make it more the case than it was before you 
realized that it was; you are still, epistemologically speaking, in the same position you were 
always in” (348). The same can be said for self-consciousness as can be said for theory in this 
regard, that both arise from a subjective context. He cites a number of educators and scholars 
who attempt to incorporate the anti-foundational stance to one degree or another—even before 
the stance was theorized for composition pedagogy as “post-process”—but maintains that any 
and all attempts to do so will collapse under the weight of their own scrutiny.
A Post-Process Pedagogy Proposed

In one such recent attempt, Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch offers us a serviceable description of post-process pedagogy in her article from 2002, “Post-Process ‘Pedagogy’: A Philosophical Exercise,” but in so doing better exemplifies the difficulty of applying theory to practice. She imbues the topic with a wink and more than a hint of irony by placing *pedagogy* in quotation marks, but the subtitle proves more telling. In it she balances herself along the line between theory and practice, relying upon such knowing glances such as this to sustain her position. To the greater extent the importance of Breuch’s argument here lies not so much in the originality of her position as it does in its synthesis of that body of work loosely defined as “post-process theory” and the singular position it takes on pedagogy, for which reasons Breuch is addressed in lengthy detail here.

Breuch establishes the intellectual context by describing a climate where scholars and pedagogues have found themselves in a situation where the process paradigm seems no longer to apply accurately or helpfully to the teaching and act of composition. Postmodern and anti-foundationalist influences she awards the largest credit to this change in philosophy and tone. Directly she moves from this observation to a similar position on praxis, borrowing from Gary Olson the observation that the application of theory to writing leads us to the conclusion that a single, theory-driven approach to composition—“a Theory of Writing,” they both call it—might be discoverable, particularly involving process because a theory implies a codifiable narrative.

The problem, as ever, centers on the applicability of the term “process” to the act of writing. Breuch and other like-minded post-process scholars, would prefer at the very least an acknowledgement of a multiplicity of processes at work when writing. Part of the reason for
this, she argues, arises from the postmodern influence in composition scholarship, but also in slightly more pragmatic terms the application of the prefix “post-” and indeed the term “process” itself to this movement (rather than “postmodern rhetoric” or “anti-foundational rhetoric,” one could presume) is to some degree reactionary: the term “as it is cast by post-process scholarship is the scapegoat in an argument to forward postmodern and anti-foundationalist perspectives that are critical to post-process theory” (120). Breuch proposes instead to move forward from theory and discuss composition from a wholly new vantage point.

Breuch’s position seems to be a fairly typical one, in that with it she means to clarify the value of post-process theory to composition studies and teaching and identify it in a role somewhat separate from what preceded it. In this respect we find a similar debate raging over the usefulness of thinking of postmodernism next to modernism, for “post-” prefixed to anything implies a point of departure rather than an entirely new way of thinking, a response rather than an assertion. Breuch, as many others do, prefers to consider a rhetorical act or artifact with a new set of suppositions:

- post-process theory encourages us to reexamine our definition of writing as an activity rather than a body of knowledge, our methods of teaching as indeterminate activities rather than exercises of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students as dialogic rather than monologic. (120)

A desire for high-flying theory prevails in her article thereafter, animated it seems by a desire to move forward from skirmishes over the details of process, praxis, and the feasibility of establishing any as definitive. This she characterizes as her guiding purpose; she wants simultaneously to embrace the premises of postmodernism and post-process theory but to apply theory to practice by reformulating the old-style paradigm.
Breuch opens the body of her argument with the observation that, while many post-process scholars hold that writing cannot be taught in the conventional, process-driven sense, nothing exists in the theory to sustain this position except that the process paradigm can no longer suffice. Instead, we can continue to write and to teach writing, but not as a process; she rejects the notion of writing process, of course, but prefers to redefine the definition of process and of pedagogy. Breuch’s position, then, directly addresses the heart of the matter at hand. She maintains as her main position for the entirety of the essay that nothing about the body of work comprising what she calls “post-process theory” should necessarily exclude a discussion of pedagogy alongside it. In this respect Breuch herself succumbs to pedagogical imperative, however.

She begins by reiterating her point that a “casual” or “surface”-level reading of post-process theory might lead one to the conclusion that “teaching writing is a hopeless endeavor,” but that a more thorough examination indicates that pedagogy and this kind of theory are not mutually exclusive at all (121). She cites Thomas Kent’s statement in *Paralogic Rhetoric* that writing is inherently indeterminate and interpretive, and while accepting this position maintains that Kent’s understanding of the writing act does not necessarily preclude a teacher from addressing in the classroom issues of grammar (their example), for instance, as external to the act of writing and in no way contributory to the improvement of writing, but useful and informative regarding one’s assessment of the rhetorical situation and the mechanical coherence of a writing project (one would presume) in the final stages of composition. Here she and Kent assert that “system-based content such as grammar” might be useful so long as everyone understands that such tools have no transformative power in the act of writing, that no system or formulae will with application improve writing (122-23).
Regarding paralogy specifically, Kent borrows it from Jean-François Lyotard, and it seems that paralogy plays an important role in this discussion for the questions raised alongside it regarding the issue of pedagogy. Kent defines it as “the feature of language-in-use that accounts for successful communicative interaction,” and “[m]ore specifically,” he continues, “paralogy refers to the uncodifiable moves we make when we communicate with others, and ontologically, the term describes the unpredictable, elusive, and tenuous decisions or strategies we employ when we actually put language to use” (3). He allows very little room for technê in language from that definition. In fact, there appears to be not a bit of rationalism in it. By his understanding, paralogy “means ‘beyond logic’ in that it accounts for the attribute of language-in-use that defies reduction to a codifiable process or to a system of logical relations” (3). Lyotard himself addresses the question more briefly than Kent does of whether or not “any form of legitimation,” as he puts it, can be based solely on paralogy. He explains that “[p]aralogy must be distinguished from innovation: the latter is under the command of the system, or at least used by it to improve its efficiency; the former is a move […] played in the pragmatics of knowledge” (61). Additionally, in “Three Countertheses” Vitanza addresses the notion of paralogy in both senses in great detail, particularly regarding “pedagogy hope” (161-67), a point to which we will return nearer the end of this chapter.

Just after this point Breuch characterizes Kent’s position on pedagogy, as she does elsewhere, in terms not wholly unlike Paulo Freire’s, except not in a Marxian tone. She acknowledges that critical response to Kent’s pedagogy has regarded it as “less developed” than his theory (123), but characterizes it still as emphasizing dialogue and cooperative, stressing it as more of a “transformative model” than a “transmission model,” which as we have seen matches the language Freire uses to express a very similar thought. The operative term for our purposes
here, however, regarding these two mutually exclusive terminologies is “model” instead, for both imply a paradigm, or a codified system, or a way. They admit of technē, regardless of their theory pedigree.

Yet, response to Kent’s pedagogy have been swift, Breuch notes, as definitive, that any inclusion whatsoever of a discussion of pedagogy in talk about anti-foundationalism can never withstand the burden of its own contradictions. Pedagogy supposes, after all, something to be learned, and it situates knowledge in an artificial fashion. Afterwards, she notes that the designation “post-process” hardly indicates a unified theory-field (which is fitting), and that the attitude toward process and that the entrenchment of the pedagogical imperative so prevail, that “productive” “implications for pedagogy” exist that might pass our notice (127). The first of which, she explains, “is the recognition that writing is more than a body of knowledge to be mastered” (127). From her discussion thereafter, by this she seems partially to mean that writing should not be approached as a technē, as an activity that at least tacitly accepts a state of mastery. So long as this can be accepted by teacher and by student, Breuch seems satisfied in a pedagogy’s consistency with post-process theory. The problem that post-process scholars all seem to have with the process approach is that it accepts a process or a narrative of composition as legitimate and representative.

From here she reiterates Erika Lindemann’s point that the difference between how pedagogy has been traditionally done and how she proposes it ought to be can be expressed through the different interrogative stances of what and how. This is to say that instead of focusing on mastering a static body of knowledge—be it literature, grammar, or content of any kind—Lindemann supports a focus on activity. Lindemann and Breuch both note, however, that what-based scholarship and how-based scholarship occur historically as two sides of the same
coin, that there exists a thin line between one and the other (128). As we have seen of Blair and of Marx, theorizing about knowledge and about human action can inevitably lead to artificial situatedness in application. In fact, this turn forms the premises of each of the previous four chapters leading us up to this point. To say, for instance, of Blair and Campbell that they felt they understood and could express the effects of rhetoric and language on the human mind and then that they could begin to teach from that understanding and through that expression embodies this changeover altogether. At the very least, Breuch maintains, this paradox requires of us that “before accepting post-process arguments about the failure of process, we need to examine the assumptions informing them” (130).

For one thing, she continues, it seems that the rejection of process fundamentally seems to be a rejection of the notion of mastery, a desire which Breuch attributes to the influence of postmodernity. Instead, the cautiousness with which post-process scholars treat pedagogy has an ideological origin rather than a scholarly one. That is to say that she believes this to be a matter of frame: “given the postmodern and anti-foundationalist influence on post-process theory, post-process scholars are more concerned with the rejection of universal theories in general than the rejection of process pedagogy in particular” (131). This is a relatively salient point Breuch makes here and one of much larger implications. Certainly, one of the mitigating factors of the discussion of praxis, especially with regards to the complexities of post-process theory, is that the discussion of theory and the discussion of pedagogy, when conducted separately, occur on two very different levels of abstraction. Breuch believes it to be an oversimplification of the matter to reduce process to the position of Grand Narrative, especially in light of the difficulties in framing the what- and how-centered debate.
Instead, she supports Pullman’s position that the notion of process was originally formalized by critics of current-traditionalism, and thereby created for the purposes of criticizing it. Considering the post-process rejection of process, she argues, “[i]t could easily be argued that post-process scholars have created their own rhetorical narrative of process as content-based, thus casting process as the scapegoat” (132). After all, as we have seen, a theorist may or may not be thinking about his or her theory as a general description, and that theorist certainly may not be thinking of composition pedagogy while theorizing; but to bracket something that someone was doing that was theory-driven as being universally applicable would ironically be to create and perpetuate its situated status, in this case as a descriptive and generative process. Truly it is an interesting point, but not for the reasons that Breuch supposes it to be.

George Pullman himself means by his own admission to offer up an argument that the writing-process movement functioned to validate itself and its values by creating a scapegoat (current-traditionalism) and then suggesting that a better, absolutely rational, method might be devised in its place. There we find his position a typical one, arguing against the notion of process, but stopping short of talking about pedagogy. Further, he charges that

as long as we persist in believing that some epistemic system eventually will analyze writing so thoroughly that it will become possible for nearly anyone to teach anyone how to write […], we will continue to sacrifice our understanding of the past for the sake of promoting our current disciplinary needs. (16)

In it Pullman argues what we have seen from Robert Connors already, that the notion of a writing process developed in the nineteenth century out of a perceived unacceptable level of illiteracy from college freshmen, and well on into the twentieth century institutional changes necessitated the further development of the notion that English composition was remedial, a
therefore undesirable assignment for any instructor, and allowed for these and other reasons to develop an assembly line-type process. Pullman argues from this, however, that such a history fashions a sense of composition and process as a story of triumph, of a discipline beginning as a temporary, emergency course in remediation and then developing in a sophisticated fashion into an institution which has made itself indispensable to the academy. Pullman would prefer to address this issue instead “from a rhetorical perspective,” where he says, “its opposite can also be told with equal conviction” and can thereby “[point] out the prejudices inherent in the writing process, which in turn suggests that rather than being a real history, the triumph-of-reason-over-prejudice story, the great paradigm shift, is in fact a rhetorical narrative” (21). Certainly, his historiography is unconventional by his own admission, but his primary purpose, he explains, is to problematize the history usually given, and he does so by throwing out facts to undermine several of its points. His hope is to dispel in our minds the notion that writing is a process in the sense that it has normally been imagined.

Ultimately, Pullman arrives at the conclusion that the paradigm shift that was supposed to have occurred, from current-traditionalism to the writing process movement, never occurred because current-traditionalism never existed as it is supposed to have existed, and the notion of a writing process is insupportable and therefore wrong-headed. He takes issue with the notion that “it is actually possible to analyze writing so thoroughly that some step-by-step procedure with universal application will emerge, which is where the rhetorical problem [of creating a context-open method] becomes an insurmountable problem” (27), the supposition under which he sees writing-process thinkers and programs working. Regardless of how one teaches or administers, his position is that we cannot begin to do so by expecting students to write or even think by way of a rational process. Instead, as he sees it, “[w]riting is not epistemic in the sense that no one
true system of explanation can be constructed out of analysis and codified in a textbook in such a way that anyone can teach anybody else how to write in fifteen weeks” (28).

Again, Pullman stops short of offering any kind of pedagogical point, but seems to undermine the institution of college English at least and its wrongheaded way of thinking. “As long as we continue to search for the theory that will enable a universally applicable rhetoric,” he argues,

we will continue to step back into the same river of rhetorical history, where the textbooks that were written previously are used as proof that rhetoric was improperly grounded, despite the fact that textbooks are always pale reflections of the insights from which they were derived because they have been modified by the rhetorical situation of the classroom […], that the codes that can be written must serve only an introductory purpose and must never be mistaken for (or reconstructed as) real rhetoric as it is lived and practiced. (28-29)

A lengthy observation, to be sure, but his point seems again to be to undermine the entrenched authority of writing process thinking. Nevertheless, the presence of the word introductory in that last clause hangs in the air. The question remains when we stop talking about previous rhetorical practices, when we can know they are no longer (or ever were) effective. Further, how do we teach at all in such a set of circumstances?

Maxine Hairston’s paradigm shift does not address the issue sufficiently; the term paradigm itself does the notion no justice either, for as we have seen of Frank D’Angelo it implies a condition of relative stability. Her historical model for disciplinary evolution functions cyclically, dominating paradigms giving way to new ones as the communities complaints with the old ones reach a state of critical mass. Breuch and Pullman are both correct, of course, that
the main effect of situating one “model” against the other is to solidify both, when no need for a
distinction existed beforehand. “The traditional paradigm,” she calls it—and, alternatively, “the
current-traditional paradigm”—supposes “that no one can really teach anyone else how to write
because writing is a mysterious creative activity that cannot be categorized or analyzed” (78).
This she cribs from Richard Young. It becomes clear by the end of her characterization of the
traditional paradigm that Hairston means by this that the belief in “the mysterious creative
activity” pervades the beliefs of writers and writing teachers who are unaware of what new
research had been conducted up until that point and that their attitudes toward their students and
their professions belied that point, that everyone was frustrated because they sincerely believed
that writing is something that a given individual “just could” or “could not” do, very much, once
again, like Plato’s “knack.”

If one digs deeply enough, as we have seen above of Fish himself, one will discover that
process and product appear to us as wholly unstable terms, which can be said of any term when
one requires more of it than can reasonably be expected. A review of the literature will attest to
that. For one thing, the real difference between process and product in the criticism up until Fish
seems to have been geometrical. Excepting the hardcore rationalists like Flower and Hayes,
those of the new paradigmatic persuasion contend that writing could not be linear in the way that
current-traditionalism was supposed to be. Hairston herself notes the supposition is that an idea
exists in a writer’s mind fully formed before he or she begins to write and that organization and
style predominate; the old paradigm excludes the invention stage almost entirely (78). However,
Cicero’s stages appear no less linear for all of that. The application of the term product appears
problematic in this regard. Even Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, however, accept a cyclical,
recursive model.
The problem, however, has never been so much with the linearity and cyclicality of this or that paradigm or model. Instead, the problem once again lies with the application of the term *model* in the first place. Everything about it implies a state of relative stability, and its historiography supposes a state of affairs no less reductive than any one preceding it. Hairston attaches her argument to Thomas Kuhn’s because it prefers the cycle over forward progression; those paradigms or models occur in epochs and, as her title suggests, seem more like revolutions than evolution. Instead of narrative or of the history of an academic discipline advancing gradually through mutation and adjustment, a more accurate way of describing it is of fulfillment and then upheaval. So much can be said, of course, of the act of writing as well, but incorrectly—that one progresses from one phase to the next, or as Flower and Hayes model it, revisiting cognitive routines repeatedly in the process, eventually abandoning the project, at which point many before understand it as a product.

From Mikhail Bakhtin we understand that this or that paradigm shift occurs only in our perception of it. No appreciable changeover occurs, and whatever conceptual point from which our understanding departs ceased to be before it ever became. Breuch almost surely senses this, so instead of further exploring the notion that process is an invented and academically convenient scapegoat for postmodernists with an anti-praxis agenda, she chooses instead to move on to reiterate the “assumptions that are central to the post-process perspective,” taken directly from Kent’s introduction to *Post-Process*. Namely she responds to the notions that “(1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated” (1) in light of her angle toward pedagogy. While post-process scholars agree conceptually that the construction of meaning depends upon the tacit agreement of the participants, teaching this depends not so much upon technique as it does upon encouraging them to experience the public dynamics of a writing act.
This practice she attributes to Donald Davidson’s notions of “language-in-use” and triangulation (134), of embracing and taking advantage of the intersubjective features of language and recognizing “that meaning is not relative to a community or to discourse conventions but is a product of language-in-use,” where it is spoken, in public (134). Students, then, would situate themselves rhetorically in a public way and begin to write from there, negotiating meaning through public structure.

Breuch then makes the difference between focusing on “the public aspect of writing” and the teaching of content in composition pedagogy the hinge on which the entire notion of post-process pedagogy turns. That she characterize this difference clearly and carefully is critical in the sense that “how” and “what” with regard to teaching pedagogy must be differentiated. To accomplish this, she explains, a teacher must stress “communicative interaction” and can often be describable as “dialogic” rather than “post-process” (135), though she finds them to be parts of the same vision. For the purposes of emphasizing dialogue she and other like-minded pedagogues turn to Bakhtin and his cooperative “concepts of heteroglossia and addressivity” (135). The notion borrowed there carries with it a sense of plurality and diversity of thought and voice, an ethos which hopefully would infuse students’ work with new energy and breadth of insight. Combined with Davidson’s notions, Breuch’s incorporation of Bakhtinian dialogic composition pedagogy she argues would imply a pedagogy which philosophically holds that “writing is an activity—an interaction with others—rather than content to be mastered” (136).

Kent himself introduces Post-Process Theory with a kind of statement of purpose for the whole of the post-process movement—his own elaboration on the statement of three basic principles to which Breuch refers—though it functions as an introduction to a collection of essays, few of which we see here. Theorists of this persuasion, he argues, contend “that writing is
a practice that cannot be captured by a generalized process or a Big Theory” (1), a point to which we have been arguing for some time. His own assessment of the first tenet—that writing is public—is that “writing constitutes a specific communicative interaction occurring among individuals at specific historical moments and in specific relations with others and with the world and that because these moments and relations change, no process can capture what writers do” in these contexts (1-2). Certainly, he acknowledges, there exist many conventions and presuppositions, patterns of behavior and interaction of which no human can master or claim objective knowledge, but they can be navigated, or at the very least addressed.

Regarding Kent’s second assumption of the post-process perspective, that “writing is interpretive,” Breuch fundamentally relies upon the premise that, production and reception of writing being largely subjective meaning-making activities, meaning is necessarily unstable. For this part of her argument she turns to what has been called the “linguistic turn” in the twentieth century from what has been called the “epistemological turn” of the eighteenth century (Hiley 1).27 Both traditions have complex historical and cultural formations, but the primary difference between the two, Breuch explains, rests in the belief that meaning is subjective in nature and resists rationalization; having begun to understand this, our culture is said to have taken the “linguistic turn” (136). She notes of Hiley, et. al., that some disagreement exists, however, over the extent to which we should carry this belief that all meaning will be forever fully interpretive and altogether unstable, a debate certainly not limited to the discussion of composition pedagogy. Breuch makes no move to resolve that conflict, but acknowledges its importance to the discussion at hand.

Additionally, Kent’s specific argument on this second point, that writing is interpretive beyond just being public, that in a given situation, a degree of guesswork regarding its rhetorical
dynamics is required. One can understand those dynamics after the fact, putting what we learn to good use for later contingencies, but “even with this knowledge and experience, we still may miscommunicate” (3). Kent’s use of the term *miscommunicate* there is key because it presumes a fact of interpersonal communication where one would have *some* capacity in understanding of him or herself precisely what was intended.

She does use the notion that knowledge might be utterly and universally interpretive as a segue into Kent’s final supposition of the post-process perspective, that “writing is situated.” In this instance Breuch turns more directly to actual classroom pedagogy. “Situatedness,” she explains for the sorts of scholars and pedagogues whose work in the classroom demonstrates an influence of the postmodern, “[…] refers to the ability to respond to specific situations rather than rely on foundational principles or rules” (138). She directs her focus to James Berlin, among others, zeroing in on his emphasis on dialectical interaction, borrowed itself from Marx and developed for this context, as we have seen in the previous chapter, by the likes of Freire and Shor. To this end, Breuch elaborates on the importance post-process scholars place on conducting the classroom in such a way that students locate their work in living contexts rather than in the context of something as abstract as a writer’s handbook (for instance). Breuch even directly addresses, if only in passing, the issue at hand here: of Thomas Miller she notes his suggestion that “we need to teach technical writing not as *technē* (or cognitive skills) but as *praxis*, which means that writers must understand the situations and contexts that surround them” (139).

Kent entertains the complexities of such statements, however, to a further degree than Breuch and Miller seem to do. Certainly a stable point of departure—“a cohesive set of beliefs from which start in order to communicate with others” is his understanding of Davidson’s
“prior” theory (4)—cannot be found in any serviceable fashion because, as he notes just before, writing being an interpretive act, no two correspondents will understand and interpret their communicative context in the same way. Certainly, this is the very heart of the matter. Taken to a logical conclusion, this would require us to entertain the possibility that there would be no point in teaching writing in the first place; but for the time being, it can be safe to say that post-process pedagogues can at least help their students to understand that this is true. What Kent and the other essayists from this book hope to get us to understand is that they “hold that the writing act is public, thoroughly hermeneutic, and always situated and therefore cannot be reduced to a generalizable process” (5).

Her characterization of Kent’s post-process assumptions seems to imply a stance or a posture or even a partially articulated ethos more than a systematization, which is partially the point, yet such an attitude seems small compensation for a weak position. She turns to explaining how these post-process premises might “inform” our pedagogy, but not before stating that to see writing in the terms to which Kent directs us “encourages us to think of writing as an indeterminate activity rather than a body of knowledge to be mastered” (139).

After having characterized the basic suppositions of post-process theory and established some doubt as to the legitimacy of process theory as a stand-alone principle, Breuch asserts that it might be possible for one to allow post-process theory to inform his or her pedagogy while remaining faithful to the anti-foundationalist stance on the mastery of content. Her position is that, when done in an informed manner, “post-process theory resists pedagogical agendas that are comprised of content, but that it offers valuable pedagogical principles about the activity of teaching” (139). Instead of concentrating on the teaching of content, or more specifically the
teaching of writing as a process, the focus would be upon activities normally considered marginal.

She opens her discussion in this section with the acknowledgment that a programmatic application of anyone’s brand of post-process theory or of anti-foundationalism in general reverses the point of both critical stances altogether. She cites Fish himself in noting that the best that postmodern thinking can do for us is guide us to the understanding that our writing is situated, but to turn theory to praxis would be an act inconsistent with that belief. Indeed, it would be counter to it because it would stabilize the situatedness of writing in an artificial way. She borrows from (and returns to later) Michael Petraglia’s notion of “letting go” regarding the notion of content-based instruction, that “writing is built on a foundational body of knowledge and [instead] accept the idea that we need to focus on situational response” (141). Instead, she turns to two “main principles” afforded us by post-process theory which she argues address pedagogy and do not elaborate upon content: “the rejection of mastery and the engagement in dialogue rather than monologue with students” (141). For both of these she turns to consult the educational philosophies of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, in which respect Breuch’s position on post-process pedagogy seems no different from Berlin’s.

It seems recently that many scholars—Berlin included—have turned to Dewey’s work to substantiate their position on a national education system which, given the opportunity and the means in the period when Dewey was writing, swerved in a bad direction. In his case, Breuch cites his “My Pedagogic Creed,” maintaining that “[w]e find traces of the rejection of mastery and engagement in dialogue in [his] declaration that education is a social process instead of a subject matter” (141). His notion that students develop more fully when relevance can be demonstrated to their lives, especially contrasted with learning by way of memorization or the
building and application of abstract tools, “resonate[s] with the post-process rejection of system-based writing approaches and its emphasis on language-in-use” (142). Regarding Freire, however, whose work is more contemporary and much more politically charged, Breuch cites the banking concept of education we saw in Chapter Four, noting that his preference for active engagement over the one-way delivery of knowledge and his emphasis on the development of critical consciousness both foster dialogue and a sense of “partnership” between teacher and student.

Though it does not seem so, Breuch insists that not only can a synopsis and an amalgamation of post-process theory such as what she proposes here clarify a rather murky field, but it can also provide for us a new sense of pedagogical direction and purpose. “Although the principles of rejection of mastery and engagement in dialogue have been discussed in previous scholarship,” she says, “what is different about post-process theory is the combination of these principles in one theoretical perspective, as well as its sharp criticism of the dominant paradigm in composition studies” (143). Until this point in her essay Breuch seems not to believe such a combination to be expressible, and it seems not to be clear otherwise that a synopsis could be reached. Nevertheless, she offers her essay here up as a point of departure; and her “one theoretical perspective” seems still to fly in the face of the postmodern, anti-foundational “condition,” as Lyotard would have it, for a perspective or a vantage point on any topic could never do it justice.

Breuch would prefer that, rather than adjust our content to suit new theories of learning, or of writing, or of language acquisition, we should instead adjust our “stance” to reflect an interest in mentorship rather than lectureship, it seems, a relationship characterized more by dialogue and collaboration rather than monologue and monolithism. One can embrace
indeterminacy much more readily and honestly in such an arrangement. She makes a number of suggestions connected to this, particularly regarding tutoring and writing center instruction, noting the one-to-one interaction and mentorship constituting them; those learning contexts she sees as having potential for the most immediate impact. She finds this observation enchantingly ironic, in light of the traditional notion of writing centers as being the most remedial institutions of writing instruction.

She does have an answer for her detractors, however, for those who find no middle ground for “post-process theory” and pedagogy. To do so she returns to her discussion of “how-centered” versus “what-centered” pedagogy. “Critiques that deny any pedagogical relevance of post-process theory are […],” she asserts, “based on the expectation that pedagogy is what-centered and needs to produce a concrete pedagogical agenda based on content” (145). She does not fully develop this response, but she does frame her argument around the thorny issue of content, changing the perspective slightly to the notion that her sense of post-process pedagogy would involve content as context rather than subject: “as such post-process theory has much to offer teachers in any discipline […], for the pedagogical thrust of post-process theory is in its reminder that teaching does not equal mastery of content but rather how teachers and students can interact with each other about content” (145).

She returns then to Petraglia’s notion of “letting go” as her final subtitle, with the purpose of thinking of post-process theory not only as a critical response to process and foundationalism, but also as an opportunity and a means to which we can “let go” of the traditional teacherly stance. To this end, she seems to make her argument here into a means to sober realization. She means for teachers who make this implementation she proposes to “becom[e] teachers who are more in tune to the pedagogical needs of students, more willing to discuss ideas, more willing to
listen, more willing to be moved by moments of mutual understanding” (146). To say this, of course, is almost to say nothing at all about teaching in the postmodern university because of the degree of dilution she allows her position to reach. Breuch advisedly resists systematic application of post-process theory because its ethos will not bear it, but to maintain that there exists an appreciable difference between one’s teaching of content and one’s teaching stance is an impossible separation. Except for the staunchest of traditionalists, most pedagogues of the postmodern era would find it difficult not to be sensitive and responsive to the anti-foundationalist disposition of the times, whether they were familiar with post-process theory or were not.

Richard Rorty appears along with Donald Davidson as the “go-to” guy to address these matters, for both speak to the notions of scientific rationalism versus contingency and “made truth” from the highest of high theoretical conversations on this topic: language philosophy. Specifically, Rorty addresses the subject in “The Contingency of Language,” the first essay from his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. In it he falls solidly in the second camp, the camp opposed to scientific rationalism in language on the grounds that language is fixed only in the minds of human beings. He explains:

> The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that. (6)

What dynamics of the web of reality we inhabit are ideologically determined, but more importantly—one argument which distinguishes this conversation from the one in Chapter Four regarding the Marxists—the topic centers on language rather than economics. Further, he argues,
regarding truth and it regarding languages, “languages are made rather than found, and […] truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences” (7).

In the full text of his own argument, “Is There Life after Process? The Role of Social Scientism in a Changing Discipline,” Petraglia speculates how the post-process writing would affect empirical research, which is an interesting and novel point for this body of thinkers because in most other cases speculation runs to the question of how relevant empiricism could be in the first place. The mission of social science, he notes, is very similar to our own, but with obviously very different methods. Without comment or foreground, however, Petraglia makes the observation that, “[u]niquely among disciplines, perhaps, the purpose of research in writing was tied to the furtherance of pedagogy; an improved understanding of the composing process was worthless if it could not bring with it recommendations for how to improve students’ writing” (53). Possibly, at least part of this point is well-taken, but Petraglia’s purpose is not so much to establish this point as to argue that, in the process of treating composition studies in this way, the subject of writing has been allowed to further solidify itself as a technê and therefore a strange bedfellow with the social sciences. As we have seen thus far, there is a well-established precedent for the treatment of rhetoric as a technê.

From there Petraglia addresses the question of the meaning of the post- in post-process theory. His understanding, he explains, is that by that prefix we are to understand it means a “rejection of the generally formulaic framework for understanding writing that process suggested” (53), a charge of which we certainly find echoed by the other writers in Kent’s collection and almost certainly every scholar who identifies him or herself this way. Interestingly, though, Petraglia expands in explaining that, while one might describe composing a given text as a process in the narrative sense, thinking of it as a process, with any kind of
typicality, can be limiting to our understanding of the act and make thinking about writing
unnecessarily professionalized. However, our thinking about writing has led us to a point where
we have moved past thinking about writing as a process and into a territory where now two
“complementary observations” about writing can now be made:

   first, that writing genres, audiences, and writers themselves are socially and
culturally constructed, and second, that the ways in which writing gets produced
are characterized by an almost impenetrable web of cultural practices, social
interactions, power differentials, and discursive conventions governing the
production of text, making writing more of a phenomenon than a behavior. (54)

In this shift of our post-process thinking about writing he finds a similar perspective from the
new brand of social scientism, which is far less positivistic and accepts as fundamental premises
the notions that human identity construction is far more dependant upon cultural context and that
a methodological emphasis should be placed on the appreciation and exploration of the
multiplicity of contexts regarding a given situation rather than processes by which it can be
defined and replicated.

   The importance that Petraglia attaches to this comparison is that it might be possible with
it to provide for ourselves a new and postmodernistically bona fide accounting of the writing act,
to help us understand and comprehend it more openly, but no less comprehensively for all of
that. Whereas before, with the cognitivist method detailed here in Chapter Three, “[i]n both
teaching and research, the process approach did not deal with the gestalt of writing, only its
subprocesses and only one at a time,” he explains, with the new scientism its purpose “has
evolved from that of understanding processes in order to teach them to producing more and more
comprehensive accounts of what it means to be a writer and to write” (56). We no longer would
have to rely upon empirical verification for the last word in our understanding, but the mission would continue to be the improvement on earlier accounts.

One could easily imagine by extension how Petraglia’s linkage of post-process theory to the new social scientism and the promise of more comprehensive accounts in student authorship might turn the focus away from theorization and at least a bit more toward pedagogy. Freed from the shackles of empirically derived writing processes, it might appear from his observations that we find ourselves on the cusp of a brave new world of first-year composition. To some extent, this question of social scientism is the one we have been addressing here since Chapter Two. As we observe there after all, the notion that writing could be taught as a *technē*, in the way that rhetoric and speech had for centuries, emerged during Blair’s period, when the scientific community was completely taken with the methodology of scientific rationalism. One could scarcely wonder, then, at how similar we find our own situation. The present belief that post-process thinking could give us the answer to the problems apparent from the process period must certainly encourage us to think of how they might be applied in the classroom. Petraglia tenuously addresses that possibility in his final section, “In Search of a Post-Process Profession.” There he speculates that some time from now, perhaps centuries on, researches like ourselves will look back at this period

as a rare time when theory, research, pedagogy and profession were largely in synch: theories of process were furthered by empirical models of writing behavior, and teachers of writing could happily draw from both to support their claims to a hard-won space for composition in the academy. (59)

Petraglia knows enough about post-process theory to try and systematically apply its tenets to the composition classroom; everything about it flies in the face of application. His
thinking on this topic is quite a bit shrewder. For one, he proposes that the way that we think about writing will change. We will no be thinking about *technē* and about pedagogy, per se, bound up as they are in the notion of writing as a manipulation and a production of tradition and text. Instead, whatever derivatives we can imagine as post-process methods of inquiry are more likely to suggest the ways in which the enterprise of composition is misguided and why the explicit teaching of writing—as rhetorical *production*—is a losing proposition” (60).

In these respects Petraglia suggests in some ways that, as a research field developing in a direction away from *technē*, English composition as an institution might be destroying itself from the inside out. On the other side, what post-process theory means to composition studies and pedagogy, might be a new institution altogether, if a contiguous institution at all. His stated vision is not necessarily so apocalyptic, however. He envisions, instead, provided that his “assertion that writing research (and theory) can no longer support a generic writing *technē* is correct, a turn away from developing rhetorical skills and toward development of rhetorical sensibilities seems a reasonable one” (62). He develops his understanding of the distinction between rhetoric skill and rhetorical sensibility with an example from speech communications researchers Roderick Hart and Don Burks, who in the early nineteen-seventies held that “[r]hetorical education […] should direct a student toward the selection of those aspects of his or her self that could, and perhaps should, be rhetorically transformed when confronted with particular social conditions and situation” (62). The idea, it would seem, is that students would be encouraged in some way to make themselves aware of the rhetorical possibilities available to them in a given situation and be provided with some guidance on how they might select from among them. Theoretically, from such an approach they would develop the kind of rhetorical sensibility needed to address such unknown and unexplored situations they may face in the
future. One can easily see, as Petraglia observes, the Writing Across the Curriculum possibilities to which this may lead. When the only contingency provided in the composition classroom is literature, as is the case in many composition programs today, it is more difficult to imagine writing being the exclusive province of the English department. But when the focus is spread more evenly, a WAC-type situation is not so difficult to imagine.

Petraglia’s and Breuch’s drives for praxis are certainly not unique to themselves. There exists among scholars it seems a certain pedagogical imperative, a desire in a way to apply theory to practice, even when it seems that everything about that theory resists it. In the case of process theory we know that a major stipulation of it is that the application of it on any kind of principle undermines its relevance. Sidney Dobrin addresses this issue in his book *Constructing Knowledges*, characterizing the popular sense of the mission of composition studies, saying that

[i]t seems that the pedagogical imperative demands that for a theory to be of value in composition it must immediately effect classroom practice, so even those compositionists who do not shun postprocess theory because of what it suggests about discourse—about the relationships of students and teachers—feel obligated to bring it to the classroom because many believe that to be the testing ground for composition theory. (64)

Certainly, however, as Dobrin argues himself, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Far too often it seems that theory is required by composition scholars to answer for itself in the form of pedagogy, that the only place from which it can draw its relevance is the field work of classroom practice, even before its primary characteristics have been defined. For that matter, Dobrin continues, by virtue of the fact that we are only beginning to turn the conversation to post-process theory,
wholesale translation from theory to practice denies particular theories their revolutionary potential, discredits certain theories before they have been thoroughly explored, and, in effect, neutralizes the innovations individual theories offer the field in favor of already inscribed assumptions and practices.

(65)

We do not necessarily have to pose our query as Breuch does, of tacking on the word “pedagogy” to the post-process descriptor, even if we do put pedagogy in quotation marks. (And as we have seen thus far, so far as addressing issues of postmodernism goes, putting words in quotation marks can cover a multitude of “sins.”) Instead we can pose our questions in less utilitarian terms. Rather than ask how post-process theory affects our classroom pedagogy Dobrin argues that we might look instead to find “new ways in which these theories help us see discourse undeniably influence how we think about discourse, about our pedagogies, and about how our students learn” (83). He also notes that what Breuch was doing in 2002 has actually been done before, notably by Raul Sanchez nine years before. Again, however, in this case as well, when post-process pedagogy’s feet get put before the fire, the outcome looks far less revolutionary even than what Freire had been proposing long before. For that matter, as Dobrin himself points out, if it is true that there is a multiplicity of subject positions for any one student writer, as the theory behind the post-process movement holds as its cornerstone, the classroom discourse out of which students invent their arguments is necessarily limiting to that context.

Instead, it would almost certain be better for classroom pedagogy and for theory in general not to press too hard for a praxis. Dobrin agrees, and posits that it might be a disciplinary prejudice against composition studies, the assumption that composition fills the qualifications of a “service position within academia” (87). In any case, for this matter, resistance can be found
from the simple fact that anti-foundationalism cannot be taught by virtue of the simple fact that it flies in the face of the very notion that content of any kind can be communicated as one would hand over an object, which is a supposition centuries in the making in academia. For that matter, anti-foundationalism resists the notion that a body of content could be conceptualized by any one mind, resisting as it does the notion of individual objectivity.

Which brings us back to the discussion of Lukács from the previous chapter, the neo-Marxist theorist who posits that even in a reality determined by the intersubjectivity of the individual and culture, meaning can be understood on a collective level by class. It seems that post-process pedagogy, if such a thing were instituted systematically, would be little more than a rehashing of social-epistemicism. To presume that composition can even be taught, in the sense that Dobrin describes it—“we want to be able to go to our classrooms, teach writing, see our students engage in discourse; and we want to be able to identify that when we are finished our students are not only better writers […] but also better people, and if they are not, we want clear signs as to why” (89)—is to miss the point of anti-foundationalism in the first place.

From reading most of the post-process scholarship, especially regarding the heavy rationalism misappropriating rhetoric and composition, in vilifying process pedagogy it can be fairly easy to forget the very important detail that the question of “process over product” we refer to above is not so old a rallying cry. In the post-process literature the fact appears occasionally, but usually for the purpose of asserting that rationalism is applicable in the case of product to scrutinization of the artifact produced at the end of a writing act, whereas process concerns itself with the parts, which are often discrete, of writing leading up to the artifact, but is no less rational for all of that. Sharon Crowley notes that the shift to process from product was in many ways a response to current-traditionalism (188), and we have seen above Pullman’s assertion that
current-traditionalism is an invention of process scholars to vilify in order to set in place a fully rational system to address all stages of the composing sequence. Possibly it never occurred to Pullman that the post-process movement is a similar stage in the history of composition studies. If one looks through the history, many similarities can be found. The baffled and arrogant stance against a group of backward and entrenched practitioners can be found in either instance. In both cases as well, early on, we find scholars hesitant to apply, but simultaneously chafing at the bit to do so; in the case of post-process we have our theorist-pedagogues, and the data collectors in the initial phase of the process movement. The only appreciable difference seems to be the emergence of current-traditionalism in back-formation, whereas in the case of post-process, process scholars were calling themselves that from the very beginning. That seems not to matter very much, however, as both groups—current-traditional and post-process—seem to be identifying themselves through and in reaction to the process paradigm.

In Kent’s collection of post-process scholarship Gary A. Olson begins to make an argument perhaps closest to a post-process pedagogy before Breuch. In it he acknowledges the ways in which the work of Lyotard, Donna Haraway, and others inform his scholarship, but despite its conclusions argues that “it is incumbent upon us all […] to challenge received notions of writing, of composition itself, to move away from a discourse of mastery and assertion toward a more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive non-assertive stance” (14). These scholars show us how writing has been traditionally conceived, he explains, as being “driven by a discourse of mastery and a rhetoric of assertion” (14). For him the question remains how we can alter that perception of writing in the minds of everyone who uses that technology. This would seem that this is the difference between the theorists that post-process scholars cite and the post-process scholars themselves: when bringing to bear that theory to the work of composition scholarship,
that part of the composition studies mission and culture which makes it incumbent upon all to teach writing cannot help but insinuate itself upon everything the scholar does.

For Olson, this seems to appear in the desire to staunch the flood of mastery-narratives and to turn popular opinion in another direction through *stance*, a term popular among post-process types because it first stands in opposition to the driving force of the process aesthetic by being static and second because it addresses authorial identity rather than authorial purpose. The answer from Olson’s point of view seems to lie with further theorizing from the points we have addressed above, and further, he says, “if such speculations truly make sense, if they help us conceive of writing in new and potentially more useful and productive ways, then it is also incumbent upon us to adjust our pedagogies accordingly so as not to reinscribe naive or less useful conceptions of what it means to “compose” (15). He does not make any suggestions as to how that might happen, that pedagogies would be adjusted to post-process scholarship, but it does place a tremendous faith in the field’s ability to incorporate research into the curriculum in such a way as to be consistent philosophically from one level to the next, a topic for another day, to be sure. The two—research and pedagogy—seem never to translate well one into the other. Nevertheless, “undoubtedly,” Olson concludes, “such theorizing is likely to be much more useful than process-oriented efforts to ‘master’ the writing process, to define it, to systematize it” (15).

Dobrin entertains the notion of a post-process pedagogy in his book, but notes Raul Sanchez’s attempts to do so back in 1993 in what Sanchez was calling a “‘postpedagogical’ alternative to [the] traditional model” (Dobrin 83), and notes extensively that the results were inconsistent in transition from theory to pedagogy. By Olson’s suggestion and Sanchez’s efforts to create “a more complex view of the student teacher relationship: ‘one where the instructor creates and to some extent embodies the text’ (Dobrin 83), we find efforts on the post-process
scholars’ parts to craft a new teacher persona. It seems not to work, and in this case at least, we can attribute that to the disconnect anti-foundationalism in particular brings to the already complicated dynamics of theory and pedagogy. Ultimately, Dobrin concludes by wondering if such linkages are even necessary: “[w]hile I applaud Sanchez for attempting to further discussion about the importance of postprocess pedagogy and theory, I am confused by the perception that is put forth by him, Ward, and even Kent that in order for these theories to be worth discussing they must inform our practice” (86). Dobrin addresses directly here the pedagogical imperative that inexplicably animates our work.

Theory versus Pedagogy

Such a systematic solution of course cannot be found. The best we can do is to do what Victor Vitanza suggests we do in our scholarship: float the ideas we have out there and try not to make too many definitive statements that will only undermine our theories when placed under close scrutiny. Scholarship, he says of his book *Negation, Subjectivity, and The History of Rhetoric* specifically, in the form of an open letter to James Berlin, in response to a public query of “Victor, What is it you want? “would be about beginnings, but not what we think of as traditional, common-sense beginnings, but intrusions and interruptions” (2). It would be more a question of “desire” than anything else. Vitanza opts to enact his desires rather than just explain them, which presumably a pedagogue would do. He continues, inhabiting the notion of the “I,” and “this ‘I’ would become a series of flows, energies, movements, capacities,” he explains, “a series of parts and segments capable of becoming linked together in ways other than those which congeal them by standard academic operating procedures” (5). It being desirous, Vitanza describes it even as he would a force entirely beyond his own control: “I think this ‘I’ attempts
[…] to denegate and disperse even all minor languages into wild, savage babylonianisms. Wild, savage peculiarities” (6). Certainly a teaching ethos such as this would be fairly inconsistent with the traditional kind, and Vitanza is not referring to teaching so much as scholarship, but the idea remains. In the world of anti-foundationalism, there is no safe place for any part of traditional pedagogy. As they say, “all bets are off.”

Further, for Vitanza in “Three Countertheses,” the wisest and perhaps easiest solution to the problem of praxis might be to resist the abovementioned “pedagogy hope” so seemingly inherent to the field of composition studies. For one, he calls for a moratorium on the application of theory to pedagogy. A need for such a call, he argues, in not altogether unironic terms would be for composition studies’s own good, possibly even therapeutic: “[t]he field of composition demonstrates a resistance to theory by rushing to apply theory to praxis without ever realizing the resistance of theory itself to be theorized and applied” (160). What has not been apparent up until this point of history, it seems—that technê seems not to truly be the best, wisest, or even most natural approximation of learned content—is becoming a bit more apparent now that we have theorized our way into a situation where the incompatibilities of theory and pedagogy have become glaringly apparent. Vitanza “paraphrases” Paul de Man in restating this point in saying that “the field’s collective resistance to theory (the field’s attempt to turn its back on theory altogether and to embrace applied theory exclusively) is matched only by a still greater force of theory itself, which perversely resists being known, being totalized” (160).

From his proposed moratorium, Vitanza hopes that we can come to certain paradoxical conclusions about theory and teaching and to somehow be comfortable with them. Possibly during this hiatus, if “there will have enough time gained,” he explains, “[…]for enough of us to realize that critical theory paradoxically can, but cannot, be employed to critique and to found
praxis, this realization may, in turn, allow us to realize that our will to pedagogy is, like theory hope, only a form of pedagogy hope” (161). In short, Vitanza is thinking of this point of arrival as a “counterpedagogy.” To some extent truly this is the best for which we could hope, and truly it can be very tricky business, teaching a subject so as not to make it known (163). What we would prefer, he explains, using Lyotard’s abovementioned notion of paralogy, would be a “non-discipline,” or a “paralogic pedagogy” (165), which might also be characterized as “dissoi paralogoi,” similar to dissoi logoi, but fervently perverse. “Argument in this modification is not a means of achieving or accounting for consensus,” he explains, but “[i]t is, instead, a means of continuous ‘dissensus’; it ‘counterhopes’ to achieve an occasional, if not permanent, place of misology” (165). How such an approach could be actually administered is difficult, if not impossible to say, ironically, but then that is precisely the point of it. Certainly, it would require us to think about teaching and learning in ways that are ingrained into thousands of years of academic cultural development and tradition. The mission would be entirely changed: “[f]or paralogy, the goal is not renovation but innovation; not a stochastic series based on rules that allow us to guess effectively and efficiently but a paradoxical series that invites us to break with the former rules altogether” (Vitanza 166).

Careful scrutiny of any notion of a post-process pedagogy, as we have seen, inevitably leads to a carefully-worded, but ultimately diluted, proposal for running a classroom. Little difference can be found, in fact, between the kind of praxis Breuch proposes and the kind of classroom experience Ira Shor narrates in his books. For that matter, Marxist-based rhetorics seem more often than not more attractive because they carry with them over one hundred fifty years’ worth of desire and the promise of revolution. Without enacting the desire, even in their own scholarship, as Vitanza does, that sense of play does not seem to be communicated. Without
that, the same business about anti-foundationalism repeated for decades now begins to ring more hollow with each passing year. In fact, post-process theory seems a bit stale already, at least as a body of knowledge.

So far as technê goes in the classical sense—at it always has gone—Nussbaum’s criteria for technê seem to underline the point that there can be no appreciable difference between social-epistemicist, critical thinking pedagogies and post-process pedagogy where the application of theory to pedagogy are concerned. Once again, this specifically relates to the criterion of universality in Nussbaum’s list. A perspective on any human activity which supposes a final and all-encompassing sense of that activity, which supposes that it can know everything about it, seems to suppose that it can also authoritatively speak of how it should be done. Social-epistemicism and post-process both suppose that they are significantly different from the other parts of Berlin’s taxonomy because they do not take the situatedness of a subject for granted. It is where they suppose that the knowledge of situatedness can deliver a student to liberation or to a kind of enlightenment that they veer even from their own intended path. By the criteria of new senses of universality, they suppose the path of full enlightenment to be a virtue, even when they claim only to strive for but never able to fully achieve. Once again, in that case, we continue to veer off track into the same territories as before.

That may continue to be the case, especially if we move too quickly in the post-process era to find an application for it in the classroom, or even go on asking how an application could be found. The simple fact remains that an institution such as first-year composition carries with it baggage that would not allow it to be revolutionized in this way and also retain its status in the core curriculum and in any format like its current one. As Crowley has noted in the final chapter
of *Composition in the University*, we may be moving to an era where first-year composition has become obsolete.

It may be instead that what the future holds for composition is the more interdisciplinary, writing-intensive or writing-across-the-curriculum approach Petraglia describes, where what many scholars of many different persuasions, from administrators to humanists and scientists, agree to be the case—that writing is important to the educational process, that it serves a purpose for the mind that speaking and listening cannot provide. This would mean, however, that those humanists who profess the importance of anti-foundationalism would also have to make a choice between literature and educational theory. Their role would be something far more sophistical than one they or Plato could have imagined themselves performing. A real instantiation of a post-process classroom would look much more like this than many are possibly comfortable with.

With regard to pragmatics, perhaps the most honest question to answer would be whether or not we are prepared for that eventuality.
CONCLUSION(S)

Very broadly speaking, the question of *technê* directly addresses just about everything about the identity and direction of the composition studies field. One, to some extent, could argue that we might find the suppositions about human intellectual endeavor inherent to *technê* almost genetically encoded into every part of the discipline. Part of this encoding means, as we have seen here, that there seems to exist some compulsive force within the field driving its members to the inevitably premature conflation of theory and pedagogy.

Thinking of any human activity in terms of *technê* enables us to systematize our ways of doing things, but it does so at a serious ethical expense in the form of virtue. While we cannot know and fully comprehend these dynamic ethical systems, we do know now at the very least the ways that they have informed theory-driven pedagogies in the past. We would do better instead to think of where our thinking coincides with thinking of writing as a *technê* and in those cases to back away from those ethical obligations we have created for ourselves. In each case, so far as first-year composition goes, we find those ethical obligations to be arbitrary ones. In the case of current-traditionalism we obligate ourselves to an outdated and rigid code of aesthetic virtue. In the cases of cognitivism and expressivism we obligate ourselves to a mode of scientific determinism and a vague tradition of romanticism, respectively. And in the cases of social-epistemicism and the post-process movement we find at least an acknowledgement of ethical obligation but then a replacement sense of virtue in the form of critical consciousness. Only an acknowledgement of the praxis imperative inherent to the discipline and a deliberate movement to permanently separate theory from pedagogy would enable us to minimize the role of virtue.
From what we have seen here of the composition field, Nussbaum’s criteria for the status of *technê* seems to apply neatly to what we presently do. Once again, *technê* being “a deliberate application of human intelligence to some part of the world […],” and being “concerned with the management of need and with prediction and control concerning future contingencies” (95), one might easily have lifted her description right out of a course catalogue. All think of writing and of rhetoric differently, as we have seen, but the general sense of rhetoric seems fairly consistent with this definition. Probably none would have quibbled with any but the smallest of details in it, and the question for us would remain only of its applicability to writing. Obviously it has been applied in this way for a very long time, and few have made an issue of it. Hopefully at this point it has become apparent, however, that the wisdom in doing so is suspect.

English composition as it now stands as a field openly subscribes to Nussbaum’s criteria. Since Blair’s time we have seen a full acceptance of the notion that either writing itself, the teaching of it, or even the development of its content can be made into a repeatable process, irrespective of future circumstance. In other words, making writing into a *technê* supposes of language that it can be understood to such an extent that the production of it is a rationally reducible exercise. As we have also seen, however, particularly connected to Nussbaum’s criteria of universality and precision, to think of an activity as a *technê* means one has to make sacrifices: one has to embrace the paradoxical notion that *technê* addresses a phenomenon—language—on necessarily general terms, yet one must seem to know its unknowable functions and features intimately. All seem to have sensed this paradox. The humanists welcome this sense of ambiguity, and the pragmatists place their faith in their method which has delivered them to better understanding of other subjects, attributing this ambiguity to their currently incomplete understanding.
In either case, just as it did for Aristotle thousands of years ago, one has to make a leap of faith. Attending every technê, we have also seen, there is a kind of virtue, a sense of things no more definitive than language itself that supposes a state of perfection. The problem is that virtue is as unstable and subjective as its technê is, and in the case of rhetoric, this is truly an unstable proposition. Some, like the post-process pedagogues, realize that this state of perfection does not exist except as a convenience, as something for which to strive because the way it is done is better than what one is doing or will do. Post-process scholars place their faith in the knowledge that their way is the right way or the best of all possible ways. Blair thought that, too, as did Berlin and the cognitivists and the expressivists. Historically, we have seen that this leap becomes more and more difficult to make as this code of virtue makes less and less sense to the ones doing the leaping. Eventually, the field has to move on to something else if it still wants to think of writing as a technê.

During periods where one has to make the decision whether to continue making this leap or to move on to new approaches, certain disciplinary identity crises always arise. Nowhere, perhaps, is there a better example of this than the role of English composition in the general curriculum. In terms more specific to the conversations we find going on in the field, the question of general course content always arises, for so far as technê goes, content and craft always seem to go hand in hand. As we see here in Chapter One for classical rhetoricians craft seemed to arise from the features of those rhetorical performances judged to be effective and from the judgments of the scholars about what they could derive from the behavior of audiences generally and specifically. This is what Aristotle argues, anyway. However, the study of rhetoric seems not to be so specialized in this period. Instead, the content of one’s course of study would have been the entire body of knowledge available in what cities a student inhabited. To that end,
and so far as we can see in other periods, the structure of knowledge determines in some ways how a subject gets taught as much as what gets taught. We tend to take this for granted, also, that the ways things have been learned will be the point of departure for any new discoveries.

Such seems to be the case with rhetoric, which has been taught as a technê, as a craft, for over two and one-half millennia. While the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and our culture’s movement into the modern era pushed us into new directions regarding our understanding of language, cognition, and epistemology, it also preserved alongside it an abiding belief in our abilities and the usefulness of bringing these new theoretical understandings to bear on linguistic activities like writing and speaking. In either case we conceive of rhetoric as a technê, only exchanging one method for another. More specific to our discussion here regarding the Enlightenment, however, is during this period the birth of the modern academy and of its stance on writing and on the dynamics of the English department within it.

Since then, as the modern American academy has flourished, in the field of English composition we have seen changes generally reflecting prevailing notions of literature and critical response. These changes have certainly been far more subtle than the changeover we find during the Enlightenment period, but no less sweeping in the more localized context of the English department for all of that. In terms of our discipline, with its relatively brief history, these changes have been practically cataclysmic. Because English composition originated as a remedial branch of the English department and is taught by English faculty and graduate students, the content is very often similar to the content of an English department survey course. Increasingly, this arrangement seems more arbitrary.

Perhaps the best example of the role content plays in the discussion of technê and content is the outcome of the (in)famous debate over the proper role of literature in freshman
composition begun openly in a panel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1992 between Erika Lindemann and Gary Tate. Since that time, scholars in this field have gotten a great deal of mileage out of the issue and the discussion itself as a reference point. After their discussion, both scholars returned to their respective corners, and for the third issue of the 1993 volume of *College English*, each formatted his or her argument in journalistic form. From there we have witnessed the debate take shape and grow in many directions, not the least of which is the question of rhetoric and *technê*.

Small wonder that it would, really, because the role of literature in composition directly addresses the purpose of composition in the larger core curriculum, and by extension the future of English composition in higher education. The persistent and almost universal belief seems to be that every student, regardless of his or her major course of study, should have taken, or tested out of, the school’s composition sequence. At that point, the student would have demonstrably proven that he or she is capable of engaging a subject matter effectively through written discourse. The means by which this is accomplished, however, vary from one institution to another. Since its inception the English composition sequence has been a province of the English department, an asset which has sustained many departments of this kind through lean stretches, especially in institutional climates far more favorable to the sciences and the professions. Increasingly this seems less and less to be the case, and increasingly we have to ask ourselves if the role of literature in the composition sequence serves to rightfully enhance student learning in the humanities, or more cynically if the role of literature is to unnecessarily sustain the pertinence of English studies and perhaps even to recruit more students to the department.

This second explanation comes down usually from unsympathetic administrators and rival departments, but complaints come from other members of the English department as well,
who find that literature often leaves little room for rhetoric, and the study of rhetoric, as we have seen, has been problematic historically for those who would prefer understand things in certain and specific ways. This is owing in part to the dynamics of language. Plato, for one, at least recognized that language would not admit of the kind of systematization that a rhetoric-technē required, and for similar reasons Blair was unable to nail down a sense of rhetoric that could incorporate classical virtue with modern taste, and Berlin was unable to draw up a method for reading and thinking that fully addresses the influence of rhetoric on the modern psyches. Technē by definition seems to require that such a thing could be accomplished, but rhetoric seems always to have resisted it. Here and there rhetoric has found fresh legs, and that seems to be the case in the English department of today, and for these reasons, the tension between rhetoric and literature has as much to do with the curriculum as it does with the usual turf wars for grant money and institutional accolades.

Increasingly we find that, because of this influence the study of rhetoric has, the necessity of literature to the study of composition (and of composition to the English department) becomes less and less apparent. Some schools go so far as to divorce composition entirely from the English department, adopting instead any number of variations on the same theme: writing initiatives with a more multi-disciplinary approach. In some instances where literature remains a fixture of the composition curriculum and where composition remains a fixture in the English department, however, in light of the inter- or multi-disciplinary writing approach many others are taking, English composition is conceivable as only a single discipline in a larger multi-disciplinary sweep. Lindemann notes this trend in her follow-up article to the 1992 panel discussion.
While the debate proceeds from the question of literature’s optimal role in English composition, one need not necessarily fall into one camp or another. We do not necessarily have to accept the positions of Lindemann and Tate on this matter as polar opposites, in fact. How one addresses the role of literature in composition largely depends upon how one views the proper role of English composition in student education. The two debaters ask, and begin to answer, many questions in their respective pieces, but the role English composition ought to play in a student’s education is one of the few they both address. Regarding virtue and technē, the question of composition’s role is an unanswerable one, really, because the curriculum creating process is hardly any better than the composition process for actually achieving what Lindemann and Tate propose. In both cases we have a formula set in place, derived from theory, which can at best approximate its desired ends, and in the end it reflects whatever code of virtue it understands to be its own.

Lindemann herself links this debate up to the further discussion of the writing-as-process debate. She attributes our “rediscovery” of literature to the paradigm shift something like the one addressed last chapter. “For some,” she explains, “the discovery represents a welcome resurgence of interest in reading-as-process; for others, an antidote to writing courses that lack ‘content’” (311-12). Again, the question of the relationship between technē and virtue is a baseless and infinitely variable one, and in many respects technē as a form reflects back onto virtue as ideal. Subtle and multi-faceted changes such as the one to which Lindemann refers here underscore that point.

Gary Tate’s response seems indicative of the kind of sensitivity to the disciplinary sea change we refer to above. His ironically rhetorical statement of resentment over what he calls the Rhetoric Police during a period where so much changed reflects this kind of brokenness that
almost surely follows close behind a change in fashion. He characterizes this period as one where “self-imposed censorship […] for more than two decades has denied us the use of literature” (321). For Gary Tate the house of virtue for teaching English composition is clearly seated in literature; the wisdom in teaching writing as a technē in that case is simply not a matter of consideration. “I refuse to look at my students as history majors, accounting majors, nursing majors,” he says, and “I much prefer to think of them and treat them as people […] [struggling] to figure out how to vote and love and survive […], respond to change and diversity and death and oppression and freedom” (320). To this extent one might even argue that Tate’s position mirrors the classical position of educating the whole person, but to some extent considering what conversations have taken place regarding specialization and technē-specific virtues, positions like this can ring hollow at times.

It seems in many ways that when we study and when we write about matters of any kind, we place a measure of faith in something that is beyond our powers to comprehend fully. In the case of technē this incomprehensible something most often corresponds to whatever virtuous state of which we may or may not be aware, but which always attends a craft and is never measurable by any method. This measure of faith can be lessened or increased in degree, but never eliminated. The entire argument of this dissertation, however, has been that in every instance the problems we face in rhetoric are usually attributable to our willing or unwilling ignorance or unwillingness to address this faith. Plato avoided it with a complicated, and by now in many ways antiquated, metaphysical truth-construct. Aristotle, Gorgias, Blair, and others since dealt with the question of virtue by taking it as a given, and in so doing created a technē of rhetoric which, in its many different forms was imperfect, but in a way that was consistent with their beliefs in virtue and in that way was a level of imperfection that they could deal with.
We would do well to have the faith for a change that postmodernity will find its way into our pedagogy on its own, without having to be forced. It would almost certainly be subtle, but inevitable nonetheless and certainly more intellectually open. The proposal here is not for a way of doing anything, for that would undermine the entire point. The post-process scholars begin to do this, but they allow themselves to be undermined by giving way to the praxis imperative. Instead, the proposal here is that we should acknowledge that theory-derived pedagogy will never accomplish what we mean for it to accomplish.

At the very least we must imagine a field where theory and pedagogy are entertained, but separate from one another. As the relationship between theory and practice has borne itself out over time, particularly regarding rhetoric and composition, we see that a praxis has never been found that suits all times and all contingencies. It can likewise be said that no praxis ever will. The simple fact remains that, so long as we consider them technai, rhetoric and writing can never achieve their fullest expressive potential constrained in such a manner, for what systematization achieves in duplicability, it suffers for it in vibrance and originality.

Further, the issue should be addressed of the need for making technê a part of the discussion about writing and the teaching of writing, and it should be done in such a way that we do not say “writing is a technê” or use phrases like “the technê of writing” without considering the consequences to language, rhetoric, writing, and pedagogy of doing so. Instead, really an alternative could easily be imagined. Technê is important to the discussion of rhetoric and composition because it encompasses so much of what we take for granted about teaching composition. To a large extent critical thinking does interrogate the values of whatever subjects it chooses; but too often that mode of inquiry becomes nursed by some other tradition with its own ethos, and even when this is not the case, critical thinking has definite strictures on the
making of meaning. With the recent introduction of social-epistemicism and even more recently of post-process pedagogy it has become easy to rely upon the power of critical thought directed squarely upon the teacher-student relationship to counteract and to stabilize whatever negative, unprogressive, or even regressive effects *technê* has upon writing students and teachers alike, but in the end, whatever critical apparatus we choose to grapple with the subject and stabilize it or perhaps improve it, a new creature is birthed.

In the end a *technê* invariably becomes its own subject, its own topic, and develops a value system all of its own. As Nussbaum has pointed out of *technê* in the *Protagoras*, we “come to see that a deep modification of the ends is itself a part of the art—that Socrates’ *technê* […] creates new values and new dependencies” (119-20). In light of the topic of *technê*, what we do today when we teach composition more often than not could as accurately be called “the writing process” as “composition.” This results necessarily in an added degree of abstraction from the initial communicative act. This is nothing new, however. Socrates’s and Plato’s complaints about writing and the added layer of technological abstraction it engendered in recorded communicative acts take us further and further away from the initial inception of a speech-act. Indeed, technology originates etymologically from *technê* and shares space in the less accessed corners of our brains. One would have to assume that through this added layer of abstraction a bit of the intended purpose would be lost. Whether this loss is lamentable, unlamentable, or immaterial depends upon one’s personal beliefs about the nature of rhetoric, of course. We know from New Media theory that mediation leaves a psychic imprint on the speaker, author, user, etc. which is inherent to a particular medium.

Ultimately, and in light of the spirit of anti-foundationalism, one might ask what is the wisdom and consistency in applying an encompassing word such as *technê* to any part or period
of composition studies in the first place? There is no denying that the state of any writing program is defined by mind-numbingly complex ideological realities, and that anyone involved on any level of it must necessarily be subject to, and simultaneously contributing to, such complexities. The scale of this matrix ranges at an American institution from the lowliest teaching apprentice to the exalted state Board of Regents. All along the way there exist budgetary and logistical factors, the limitations and capabilities of the students involved (as well and the limitations and capabilities of the instructors and administrators involved), on top of which is whatever history a program has, evolving steadily from semester to semester, mutating only slightly with each regeneration, and possibly less and less so each time, the weight of history and expectation dragging behind.

All of these factors define the character of a writing program and in turn influence the responses of teachers and students (and parents and administration) to it. Somewhere within that matrix is a ghost that more or less constitutes the ethical code of the program, a code which is consistent in some ways with all others and is simultaneously only self-consistent. Anti-foundationalism could never or should never ignore that or explain it away. However, to attempt to address it directly or to alter it consciously is an exercise in futility. We cannot deny the history of English composition any more than we could the history of an individual composition program.

In the end it is the pedagogical imperative and the praxis imperative that technē falsely perpetuates. In the act of handling a human activity such as writing as a technē, we add a layer of abstraction to it. Our subject becomes “the writing process” or “critical thinking” or “modes of argumentation.” It also obliges us to feel the necessity of applying theory to our pedagogy and vice versa, for a theory supplements more pragmatic matters by fulfilling Aristotle’s criteria.
There exists no imperative otherwise. It would be preferential instead for us to go on theorizing and to go on teaching but not to do both at the same time.

Victor Vitanza makes the selfsame argument in “Three Countertheses,” wherein he argues against “‘rational’ thinking and acting, especially about language” (142). Again, an anti-foundationalist approach does not deny the existence and influence of ideologies. Indeed, from Vitanza’s viewpoint, the self is constituted by prevailing ideologies, and while it is beyond the power of the self to control them, they are not beyond the self’s power to problematize (156). Ultimately, he argues, “[i]t is no longer, in our profession, just a question (or a just question) of ‘the students’ rights to their own language’ or of ‘teaching the other self’ or of ‘empowering students,’ which I think is the biggest hoax ever perpetrated on ‘the student body’” (157). Social-epistemicism acknowledges and exposes ideologies, but in the very act of critiquing them does so in a programmatic fashion, building a rational structure for doing so and creating of technē of it in the process. Instead, “It is a question of students’ resistance to and disruptions of these so-called rights and other self” (Vitanza 157).

Vitanza addresses here the humanist subject. Humanist philosophy, he argues, “assumes that the (rhetorical) self is free and, therefore, an appropriate conceptual starting place for pedagogy of emancipation” (156). The humanist understanding of the subject (or self or ethos)—in present terms, the composition student—is not so “free” as humanism assumes, but instead “cannot be the liberating grounds/foundations for a society/education (any more than consensus can be) because to be a subject in our society is inevitably to be subjected, individually and collectively” (156). Further, “subjects are constituted […] by the prevailing modes of representation, by the prevailing ideologies of the production of knowledge, by the prevailing dominant discourse, all of which are fostered by the humanistic curriculum” (156).
Presumably, then, the constitution of a given writing program would follow a similar pattern as the constitution of the self, and the constitution of a writing program would correlate to the constitution of the self operating in it. This leads to the question of how writing instruction would appear as anything other than a *technē*. In providing a course of study for students and for teachers, how are we to balance instruction with a vision of discourse that resists consensus without talking ourselves out of a job? Vitanza calls such a set of circumstances a “legitimation crisis,” which places in doubt humanistic and conventional ways of thinking about authorship, the self, and gender; places in doubt representation; places in doubt the distinction between fiction and truth; places in doubt the modes/aims of exposition (valued as perspicuity) and argumentation (valued as consensus); places in doubt especially the revealed wisdom of even teaching students to write. (140)

Regarding *technē*, the constitution of the humanistic subject, as Vitanza characterizes it, relies upon the kind of rationalism upon which *technē* thrives. Further, language cannot be expected to operate with the same rationalistic consistency that a *technē* assumes. By nature, “[l]anguage, of which we have many foundational models, turns against the models that are constructed in its name, ever delegitimizing the models of language processing itself” (Vitanza 148). Writing cannot be taught and conducted as a repeatable process, as a *technē* because the operations of language do not allow for it.

*Technē* certainly never presumes to position itself as the guideline for all rhetorical situations, and it does not presume that all rhetorical acts will produce the same results when *technē* is used. But the issue is one of more than approximation. Vitanza makes use in this case of Deleuze and Guattari’s map-making metaphor to explain the fault in providing grand
narratives to enlighten students to a state of ideological subjectivity (corporate-capitalism in this case): “though [the] intention seems good—to invent, so to speak, the grand narrative of writing so as to emancipate student writers—[it …] only promises to ‘reterritorialize’ (or reenslave) these students. We should, instead, deterritorialize students and turn them into drifters” (149). Certainly there is nothing programmatic about Vitanza’s thinking, but that is precisely the point. Again, here as ever we toy with the notion that composition could not be “taught” in the sense that we normally accept it to be.

We could never accept Vitanza’s proposals as anything more than an option or an alternative and still remain faithful to the stance here against technê. At best we can say that “this is what Victor Vitanza does;” or, “that is what Sharon Crowley says;” and, “isn’t that interesting!” How we teach composition certainly could be informed by what these scholars have to say about the burdensome ethos of humanistic discourse, but to accept these things as new or better models for composition studies would be a perpetuation of the tradition in writing instruction that Hugh Blair began two and one-half centuries ago. We also know that this tradition proceeds from a much older supposition that linguistic activities such as writing and oratory can be reduced to rational operations, or at the very least that making these activities into technai can be more a matter of convenience than one of ingeniousness.

As Nussbaum points out, a technê enables us to streamline the production, comprehension, and improvement of words and communication, but it also seems that the cost we pay goes unnoticed. In many ways virtue is a measure of this cost; it is a measure of good and of the truth of matters, and unlike a technê, virtue cannot be rationally reduced. What innovations we have made over time according to the prevailing theories about the operations of the human mind provide for us the foundations of that virtue, but as we have seen over and over again—
when belletrism, rationalism, romanticism, and historical materialism failed us—codes of virtue
do not always provide us with the foundation of truth we require of them. Language resists
foundational definition. Something gets lost between the struggle to understand it and the
struggle to explain it and to produce it. We would do well at the very least to embrace its
ambiguity rather than to try reducing it.
NOTES

1 Steve North, The Making of Knowledge in Composition, p. 15
2 Here he first acknowledges a difference between “sophists” and “orators” but does not explain his thinking thoroughly. From his syllogistic matches he explains in 464b-d we cannot glean a clear difference from the cosmetics/gymnastics and pastry baking/medicine pairings; they both seem to be illustrating the same point—the difference between flattery (guessing) and care (knowing). He acknowledges a distinction among these activities but sees an especially illustrative comparison, and, vaguely, “sophists and orators tend to be mixed together as people who work in the same area and concern themselves with the same things” (465c).
3 Certainly the Roman rhetoricians might disagree, particularly Quintilian, who argued that the proper education of a child is to begin education in the earliest stages of youth with the most preliminary of preliminaries, building ever upwards from there.
4 John M. Cooper explains in his footnotes that this conversation is probably a complete invention of Plato’s and a blending or reworking of elements from Egyptian and Greek mythology. He explains further that Theuth (of Thoth) is “the Egyptian god of writing, measuring, and calculation” and that Ammon (Thamos) “was identified by Egyptians with the sun god Ra and by the Greeks with Zeus” (551).
5 Poulakos calls this outlook, where we are conscious of the legitimacy of other positions from our own, as a “multiple awareness” (58).
6 Certainly, the English academy, as well as the British and American academies, have changed quite a bit in these respects since this time, but as the development of composition studies goes, its birth lies in these cultural roots and developed relative to that historical point.
7 Both Crowley and Miller have noted that the faculty of taste plays an important role during this period in the formation of the bourgeois subject.
8 Such a position has been taken in English composition lore on the grading of student essays and is not without its problems for the very reasons explored in this dissertation. The thought is that with experience a teacher increasingly gains a more and more refined sense of “a good essay.” Certainly student writing and demographics, section demographics, generational, economic, etc. differences factor into the equation and problematize that position.
9 Stephen North describes the nature of the field of composition studies that this observation implies. As he observes, the culture of English composition is spread so widely across such a wide range of institutions that the research agenda which is so important in some schools is hardly present in others. Yet readers and textbooks are derived from research done in places relatively foreign in institutional perspective to some schools. In this respect those schools which do little research have little input into that part of the conversation, and adjustments in theory can come to them fairly late in the game. One might say, in this sense, that “current-traditionalism” belies the sense of disconnectedness between these separate features of disciplinary culture.
10 In fact, Blair dedicates the third through the sixth lecture in his second volume to essays from The Spectator, the seventh to an essay from Swift, and lectures eleven and twelve from that volume to the eloquence of the bar and eloquence of the pulpit, respectively. The remainder of volume two afterwards, in fact, touches generally upon contemporary rhetorical and professional contexts.
11 A short step from here, if one wishes to take it as Berlin does, leads us to a critique of capitalism and corporate sensibility, a part of which Locke certainly plays a key role. Berlin criticizes current-traditionalism for being the most baldly uncritical and capitalistic part of his taxonomy because its ethos originates from this period, where the theoretical foundations of modern capitalism were laid.
12 Notably, it seems that there is no appreciable difference between Emig’s use of the term actuality and Berlin’s term reality. Both seem to express a positive set of circumstances which often exist outside of the subjective realm of human perceptibility.
13 As evidence of this Berlin cites the fact that derivatives of sixties-era expressionism continue to thrive in parts of the public education system, evidence which suggests at the very least that public education policy views expressionism as a benignity, if not an asset, as Berlin argues below.

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Certainly, it has become much easier for us, in the age of the word processor and before that the typewriter, to conceptualize words as commodities, easier to produce and therefore easier to discard. It seems, however, that this has had no large effect on writers’ willingness to do so. Elbow seems to be the exception to this rule, however.

It seems that Berlin imagines in this section of his book rhetoric from this period to exist along a continuum ranging between extreme subjectivity and extreme objectivity. In the middle, in the ground where subjectivity and objectivity seem not to be properly describable as such, ranges the topic of transactionalism.

Victor Vitanza explores a similar topic a bit further in *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*, as we shall see in Chapter Five and the Conclusion.

This term is used loosely here. For the purposes of general example “working class” refers to labor as opposed to capital. In the case of composition theory and pedagogy it might mean students (as opposed to teachers or to the current educational system).

As in all cases where the word literacy is qualified with another word, the notion of literacy is being used metaphorically. Giroux seems to imply here that to be radical literacy enables a person to engage a set of circumstances (ideology and structure) in a complex and meaningful fashion. As he explains, “[l]iteracy in this case not only provides the tools for ‘reading’ oneself and the world critically, it also becomes the vehicle for demonstrating that education has broader implications than creating an educated and skilled labor force” (117).

Giroux sees fit to apply totality to radical pedagogy in his chapter on citizenship education, though he makes no mention of Lukács, Jameson, or even Bizzell there. He seems to find nothing impractical about it, but he also does not address it at length.

She notes, by contrast, the model of Flower and Hayes, which as we have seen offers merely “an acontextual model of composing processes.

This is especially the case, he explains, for the (apparently) imminent step where the bourgeoisie become overpowered by a proletariat bent on exploiting current economic trends. Previously, he observes, making use of the methodology he outlines in this chapter, revolutionary changes occurred in leaps. This one seems different because the proletariat would be required to make the step to realization consciously.

Further complicating matters is a bourgeois mindset which is a part of capitalist conditioning, a thought which instead “concerns itself with objects that arise wither from the process of studying phenomena in isolation, or from the division of labour and specialisation in the different disciplines” (28).

Freire notes, for that matter, that often it is the case that when one finds him or herself in the position of being advanced to the stronger variable in the power dynamic—from peasant to overseer in one example, and from student to teacher in another—he or she becomes animated by the same cruelty and inhumaneness of the predecessor.

In making this observation Berlin also makes an argument in defense of his own methodology, citing Robert Connors’s critique of it for being unsuitably subjective. He thereafter cites Karl Popper’s argument from *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, wherein that critique maintains that subjectivity is inevitable when writing histories and that, therefore, any attempt to pretend to write otherwise would be both naïve and misleading. He further cites Douglas Ehninger, who argued more to the point, that nothing new is to be gained from recording the “facts of rhetorical history” (18), and that the only remaining productive endeavor would be to offer up an interpretation of those facts.

This angle of approach is different from that of some cognitive rhetoricians who draw up diagrams of processes and sub-processes interacting in complicated fashions. We know from Chapter Three, for instance, that Flower and Hayes describe the writing process as a recursive activity, guided by a motivation for problem solving. The difference between the post-process approach to process and cognitive approaches of this type is that cognitive rhetorics suppose a complex but wholly rational description.

Bakhtin is of course talking about genre here, but the stability of the term genre is no less uncertain than paradigm or model.

Though Breuch does not note it in her essay, what Hiley, et. al. refer to as the “epistemological turn” is very much exemplified by the manner of thinking addressed here in Chapter Two. Many of Blair and Campbell’s fundamental beliefs about rhetoric and about language were predicated upon a belief in rational belief and cognitive mechanics.

Petraglia notes earlier that he imagines other post-strains of post-process theory informing the way we think about and approach writing. He namely mentions, for instance, the cognitive tradition we mention in Chapter Three. In that instance he imagines it to be a critical perspective morphed into something called “sociocognitivism,” where what we now understand about cognitive construction—that there are complex and therefore not altogether knowable social dynamics in the development of the human psyche—will turn our focus away from the rational model to a more socially dynamic he calls “sociocognitivism” (58).
He also argues here, quite rightly, that other potential scenarios played out in the wake of the post-process movement are (1) an increasing gap between theorists and the community of pedagogues who hand on to technē, thereby distancing the study of composition from the scholastic community, and (2) writing being “cast as another site of cultural studies lending itself to theorizations of power, ideology, and the construction of identity, and so forth, that seek little validation from empirical research” (60-61), two unappealing scenarios to him.
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