Reflections on *A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric*

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Early in 1987 I received a copy of Walter H. Beale's *A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric*, courtesy of a journal editor who wanted me to review it. When the book arrived, I was in the middle of a project of my own: *Four Discourse Theories*, an assessment of Kinneavy, Moffett, Britton, and D'Angelo. I mention the context of my first encounter with Beale's theory to make a point: if anyone should have been fortified to resist it, I should have been. In many ways it challenged the theoretical constructs I had spent years trying to understand and evaluate. And so my first reading of it could be likened to a friendly sparring match between boxers, as I filled the margins with notes, counterthrusts to Beale's argument.

"The text must be allowed to speak"; that is, the interpreter must be willing to hazard his or her own horizons of meaning before a genuine critical dialectic can occur (Gadamer 238). These notions from Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics have for me the status of axioms. But it was not so much my hermeneutical loyalties that opened up Beale's theory as it was the quality of the theory itself, which, after several readings and much study, asserted itself despite my prejudices. Consequently, though I always enjoy friendly sparring and even occasionally a serious fight, my purpose here is to come to terms with a theory that will, in my opinion, assume a significant place in our thought about rhetoric and discourse.

This essay, then, is exploratory, an effort to understand *A Pragmatic Theory* and to place it in relation to other theories; in short, "come to terms" here means to begin the process of discussion, assimilation, and questioning. I stress "begin" for there is far too much in Beale for a single essay to engage. Of necessity I have been highly selective.

Since my purpose is exploratory, I wish to set aside the question of overall evaluation. In my review I called Beale's theory "powerful and sophisticated," "highly original," and potentially a genuine alternative to Kinneavy. I reaffirm those judgments here. For anyone interested in rhetoric and composition theory, Beale's work is not only required reading but also required study. It is a major contribution to thought in our field.
Beale's Semiotic Theory of Written Discourse

We must first identify what we are dealing with—what kind of theory it is.

"My primary aim," Beale says, "is to construct a theory of written rhetoric which will provide both a rationale and a foundation for the study of rhetorical literature" (1). Unlike Kinneavy or Britton, then, he is not offering a *general* theory of discourse oriented toward the teaching or the study of student writing. In fact, he is even more focused than the term "written rhetoric" would suggest; his interest is in what he calls "discourse performances," extended, self-contained, published "pieces"—writing that we generally designate by the term "article." Moreover, by "rhetoric" Beale does not mean the art of writing in the sense of all kinds of writing, but rather *written persuasion*, a single aim or function of discourse. Although his theory isolates and describes three other kinds of written discourse, only the rhetorical aim is well-developed and within the domain of rhetoric; only discourse performances are allotted theoretical status.

In the context of most contemporary theory in our field, Beale’s thought has both an unaccustomed scope and purpose. Kinneavy, Britton, Moffett, and D’Angelo all emphasize writing by their choice of examples, but their theories have all discourse in mind, regardless of medium. At his most inclusive point, Beale takes in only extended, more formal *writing*; but most of the book (in terms of sheer number of pages) is devoted to *rhetorical* discourse performances.

There is nothing, of course, wrong with or reprehensible about Beale’s scope. Quite the contrary, we have long needed a theory of discourse dealing only with writing.¹ The focus alone guarantees a special, unique place for *A Pragmatic Theory*; however, it also cuts the theory off from direct comparative assessment. With relatively few allowances for differences in intent, one can pit Kinneavy against Britton, for example, since theirs are theories of basically the same kind and scope. But setting Beale against, say, Kinneavy, comes perilously close to proverbial apples and oranges. Indeed, with respect to scope they are just different theories and not commensurable; we must look to the ideational foundations of the two theories to find common ground for assessment.

Similarly, Beale’s choice of application or purpose for his theory also leads to both profit and loss. Again, his purpose is quite distinctive and distinguishing: we have no other theory of discourse explicitly designed for the study of rhetorical literature. In the almost pathologically dissociated world of the English department rhetorician, we teach and study composition and rhetoric but typically neglect, in Beale’s words, “the study of rhetorical literature, a field firmly established within the discipline of speech communication but much neglected by students of writing, literature, and the written word” (1). As we need a general theory of *written* discourse, we also need a
model for the study of written persuasive discourse. Beale’s theory would achieve both objectives.

The down side, of course, lies in Beale’s focussing of his theory away from praxis in the sense of the teaching of writing. Our theories normally earn their way by contributing to syllabus and program architectonics. But Beale stakes only an implicit claim in these areas. As a result, his work may seem at first glance tangential to the driving concern of most English department rhetoricians: how to teach writing better. Such a conclusion would be unfortunate, since composition pedagogy, especially at the college level, obviously needs not so much a general theory of discourse as specifically a theory of adult, written discourse—exactly what Beale is offering.

In any case, I have partly identified Beale’s theory by describing it as designed to cope with mature, written discourse performances, especially rhetorical performances, and as foundational to the study of rhetorical literature. Such a statement, however, while true, hardly is sufficient as an answer to the question, “What kind of theory is it?”

It is, in the first place, a semiotic theory—which is to say, a structuralist theory. But what does this mean exactly?

A theory by nature is either the laying of a foundation or the building of an edifice on foundations already laid. “Foundation” here means some irreducible minimum of belief or at least some positing of assumptions from which the entire theory is developed. The axioms of a mathematical system are a good example.

The problem for modern thought, however, is precisely the very metaphor of foundation. All our intellectual houses, it seems, are built on shifting sands, the granite-like solidity of the underpinnings of even math, formal logic, and natural science having proven illusory. If there is a last bastion of foundationalism, it resides in a line of thought that goes roughly like this: we cannot know reality apart from a knower; knowers, human beings, are typically symbol-using or language-using animals; therefore, theory must begin, must establish its foundations, in the intrinsic nature of either language as a system or in language use or both.

Needless to say, this line of thought itself is scarcely unproblematical. Nevertheless, something like it is how we justify a semiotic theory of anything. Beale’s foundation for a semiotic theory of discourse resides appropriately in what he takes to be true statements about the intrinsic nature of parole. They amount to four central features, the implications of which partly explain his main construct: the Discourse Hierarchy.

The principles are asymmetry, hierarchy, continuum, and context-sensitivity. The proposition, “language is asymmetrical,” means that there is no simple or direct correlation between the surface forms of language and intent/meaning, between linguistic units (words, sentences) and semantics, or, on a larger scale, between discourse forms and discourse functions or
motives. Asymmetry once motivated the distinction between surface and deep structure in linguistics; for Beale it justifies a distinction between discourse teleology and discourse forms, the theoretical implications of which we cannot understand apart from the second principle, hierarchy.

Hierarchy, of course, designates a feature of language as indisputable as asymmetry: at the sentence level, for example, its presence is most easily seen in the familiar inverted tree diagram of phrase structure; at the whole discourse level and beyond to context, its operation is clear in an example that Beale cites from Kenneth Pike—"the sonnet in a sermon in a church service," an instance of the so-called nesting phenomenon, structures-within-structures-within-structures (22).

The principles of asymmetry and hierarchy taken together provide the assumptional basis of Beale's Discourse Hierarchy, the central, organizing formulation (15-17). Basically, it is a set of overlapping categories that can be apprehended as either an ascending or descending movement—as, in other words, from the most abstract categories to the least abstract categories, or vice versa. At the top one finds categories having to do with purpose: Aim is derived from the two paradoxes about language use which we will shortly discuss; internal to each of the four aims is Genus, categories such as deliberation within the rhetorical aim; and internal to each Genus is De Facto Genre, commonly recognized discourse types, such as the editorial, typically deliberative rhetoric. At the bottom are two categories that designate almost purely formal concerns: (1) Mode, for Beale basically the choice among discursive, narrative and dramatic presentations; and (2) Medium, restricted according to the focus of his theory to writing and print, taking in such variables as format, the paragraph, and the sentence. The "middle" or pivotal category is Strategy, which "looks up" to purpose, in that one of its divisions is generic strategy, the appropriation of the norms of one genre for use in another, and "down to" form, in that another of its divisions is modal strategy, choices among presentational modes not compelled by genre or subject (53).

Clearly, then, the hierarchical principle "justifies" the Discourse Hierarchy itself, while asymmetry "compels" the division between purpose and form; Aim being, relative to the others, "purely" teleological; Medium "purely" formal. Furthermore, the other two principles are also at work. Continuum, of course, designates a ubiquitous feature of natural language categories: they tend to run together, one category overlapping with other, related ones. This principle is "embodied" in the bridging concept of strategy, merging on the one hand with genre, on the other with mode; but Beale resorts to it throughout his theory, perhaps most notably in recognizing lines of continua from various genera of rhetoric to the other three discourse aims (121-22).

Context-Sensitivity likewise informs the Discourse Hierarchy. The principle here is "features in context," the generally accepted notion that meaning in natural language depends on the language game being played, or
that surface forms depend upon correlation with situational context (27). Context-Sensitivity, then, is almost the reflex or corollary of asymmetry, the two principles implicating one another. Moreover, conceptualizing context is perhaps facilitated best via the nesting phenomenon, a characteristic of all complex structures, including language.

So far as the Discourse Hierarchy is concerned, the nesting of context-sensitivity works this way, if we take it from the bottom up: medium finds its place within choices of strategy and mode, which in turn are conditioned by genre and aim, the latter two including, among other features, exigence, or the motivating conditions of writing. For example, moving now from the top down, this essay is an instance of what Beale would call reflective/exploratory rhetoric: very typically of the genre, it leans heavily on various dialectical and formal strategies, such as division into parts and definition, and on the discursive presentational mode; its choice of format, the essay, is likewise typical of the genre; finally, the types of sentences and paragraphs used reflect the purpose/tactics of the whole. Thus, while there is always a range of choice, the choices actually made in any piece of writing must "cooperate"; they cooperate in part by nesting, by choices made within choices made within choices, by a hierarchy of contexts.

Stepping back for a moment from the details of Beale's theory, we can now see more clearly what the label "semiotic" means and why a semiotic theory is structuralist. Regardless of what was articulated first in the actual process of discovery, a semiotic theory begins with an irreducible minimum of belief about language itself—in Beale's case, the four principles just discussed. If the theory is rigorous or tight, the structures spun out from the foundations seem almost deduced from—that is, strongly implicated in—the foundational principles themselves. For example, given the communication triangle and the notion of foregrounding, Kinneavy's aims approach would be logically entailed by its foundation. While no less semiotic in assumption, Beale's Discourse Hierarchy cannot be "deduced" as Kinneavy's aims can. (This statement is descriptive, not evaluative.) For one thing, with the exception of aim, the categories (genus, de facto genre, strategy, and so on) are not deduced or derived but rather produced as simply common or traditional terms that the Discourse Hierarchy would organize. Consequently, the four foundational principles serve as justification for the Discourse Hierarchy; that is, we can see them at work in the Hierarchy, but the Hierarchy itself does not arise "necessarily" or "ineluctably" from the principles. But whether the foundation justifies the theory or serves as a basis of inference to the theory, a semiotic theory closely links universal principles of language to its central constructs.

Of course, the very notion of universal principles—"firsts," in the sense of features found everywhere and at all times—manifests the structuralist orientation of a semiotic theory, semiotics being a special case of structuralism. As an ahistorical, essentialist mode of thought, structuralism seeks principles
of a high enough generality to apply to all manifestations of whatever it is studying. Clearly, Beale's four principles qualify, and the Discourse Hierarchy itself makes at least an implicit claim to universality as well. Beale's other major construct (besides Discourse Hierarchy), the Motivational Axes, from which his aims of discourse are deduced as rigorously as Kinneavy's are from the communication triangle, likewise has a semiotic base and likewise implies universal claims about the functions of written discourse. I will explore the Motivational Axes and the aims derived from them in the next section.

At this point, however, while still trying to answer the question, "What kind of theory is it?" it is necessary to recognize that Beale's theory is semiotic or structuralist, but not purely so. Mixed with it is a thesis traceable to the Latin rhetorical tradition and radicalized by Nietzsche: that rhetoric is the central kind or art of discourse and therefore deserves a central place in our thinking about language use. Beale's version of the thesis is: "Rhetoric should occupy a privileged place in discourse education" (12), occupying, I assume, a place as privileged as literature occupies now in English departments. Beale makes a good case for privileging rhetoric, but for now I want to indicate the tension between Beale's semiotic commitment and his equally strong commitment to rhetoric as the central discourse aim.

Except with respect to its own ahistorical, essentialist assumptions, a semiotic or structural theory is scientific in attitude—that is, objective, value neutral, disinterested. Beale clearly wants his theory to enjoy the prestige of scientific inquiry, since he explicitly contrasts his semiotic framework with other beginning points not intrinsic to the subject matter and committed to various "isms" or "ologies" that may result in a narrowing of viewpoint. That is, Beale claims for his semiotic framework an intrinsic relation to discourse itself which makes it superior to a framework committed to ideas having nothing directly to do with discourse itself—say, Marxism. Moreover, like Kenneth Burke in A Grammar of Motives, Beale claims to transcend any single doctrinal commitment by "placing" or "anticipating" the basic philosophical approaches with his semiotic Motivational Axes.

Consistent with the scientific bent of his semiotic framework are Beale's two other major theoretical commitments—to speech act theory and to Aristotle. The former is structuralist, in that, for example, it seeks the universal conditions that make an act of promising a genuine act of promising, while Aristotle worked with a semiotic framework in all but name.

In short, everything in Beale accords with semiotic loyalties except for the special thesis about rhetoric. Historically, those who would privilege rhetoric tend to be humanistic in orientation—a- or anti-scientific, like the sophists or Cicero in the ancient world, Kirkegaard or Nietzsche in more recent thought. One would expect Beale to privilege scientific or referential discourse, as Aristotle does, or insist, like Kinneavy, that the various aims of discourse are different, no one being more central or privileged than the others. Kinneavy's
neutral position, of course, is more rigorous in the sense that it is consistent with its semiotic assumptions.

My point, however, is neither that Beale is inconsistent, nor still less that he is wrong about rhetoric's status. Rather, like the categories in his Discourse Hierarchy (with the exception of aim), his thesis about rhetoric cannot be extrapolated from his semiotic base, but constitutes a special argument that his semiotics can help to justify but not to generate. I suppose this makes his theory less tight and less pure, but rigor, for a healthy mind, is not an end in itself. Most of us would rather be right than rigorous, and, for reasons I will offer later, I think he is right to privilege rhetoric in the context of mature, written discourse performances.

In sum, then, A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric is a semiotic theory of discourse with a special case for rhetoric as "the central and least specialized art of human discourse" (113). It is also concerned solely with mature, written discourse performances, with "human accomplishment" rather than "human behavior" (2), and centrally with the study of rhetorical literature rather than the teaching of composition.

Beale's Contribution

The question of kind is fundamental: we cannot critique a theory on its own terms without answering it, and by implication the answer implies what a theory is not, and therefore to what other theories it may be fruitfully related. For example, Beale does not engage James Britton’s question about the development of writing abilities at all. Clearly, Beale's ideas about adult-level, written performances must be connected with Britton's understanding of development toward mature writing.

While the question of kind is fundamental, a necessary backdrop to most other inquiries, it is hardly the most interesting question one might ask about a new theory. Rather, we want answers to at least three other basic and closely related ones: "What is new about it?" "What exactly constitutes its significance?" "How does it align with or depart from existing theory?"

In Beale's case, the first question is easily answered. Although his theoretical allegiances may fairly be described as intensely conservative—structuralist amidst post-structuralism, product-oriented in an age fascinated with process, dedicated to problems of typology at a time when generic distinctions of any kind are suspect, and so on—nevertheless, his total synthesis and most of his concepts are strikingly new. It is typical of Beale's work, for instance, that he takes a worn-out term like mode and completely refurbishes it; that he takes two familiar notions like epideictic and performative and merges them ingeniously to produce a new category of written rhetoric. Even old terms used in established ways are rendered fresh by new places in an original theoretical framework.

What, then, is new about A Pragmatic Theory? Virtually everything.

As usual, the question of significance is a far harder question to answer.
One way to define the significance of a new theory is to attend to its direct challenges to existing theoretical assumptions and constructs. Choosing this route means taking up the second question in the context of our third question, significance in terms of departures from longstanding (if scarcely unquestioned) theoretical norms in our field.

One such norm is another semiotic framework, the communication triangle, associated with Kinneavy's *A Theory of Discourse*, but featured as well in Moffett and Britton, and having many analogues in other theories, perhaps most notably Roman Jakobson's functions for communicative acts. Beale's answer to the triangle is the Motivational Axes, his other major construct in addition to the Discourse Hierarchy.

Before examining the Axes themselves, I should note that they are not a direct challenge to the triangle itself. In Beale's own words, "I do not reject the triangle as a model of linguistic behavior" (59; emphasis added). That is, if one wants a theory of all discourse—including the speech acts of casual conversation and brief, purely functional kinds of writing, such as most letters—then Beale's position is that one should look to Kinneavy, Britton, or Jakobson. But if one is interested in written discourse performances, which Beale distinguishes from linguistic behavior in general by five criteria (63-86), then his position is that the Motivational Axes are better.

Indisputably, then, accepting Beale does not entail rejecting Kinneavy or Britton. As Beale says, "'Discourse function' (which relates primarily to speech acts) and 'discourse aim' (which relates primarily to discourse performances) are concepts of radically different status" (88). This is what I meant earlier when I said that the respective theories of Beale and Kinneavy are incommensurate, apples and oranges, "just different." They ought to be able to "coexist amicably" since they are not staking intellectual claims to the same territory.

And yet this metaphor does not exactly clarify the issue. Beale and Kinneavy/Britton are claiming some of the same ground—namely, that region of discourse consisting of sustained written performances, the chaining together of speech acts in complex hierarchies especially characteristic of chirography and print. In effect, Beale is negotiating: "Give me this one chunk of real estate and you can have the rest." Should his argument prove sound, we might be inclined to cede him so modest a claim in the huge domain of discourse. However, if we do, other problems will arise, such as what to do with expressive discourse, which is as central in Britton's theory as rhetorical discourse is for Beale but which has in Beale's theory no status as an aim. Negotiations will prove difficult, amicable coexistence harder to achieve than it might first appear. And, of course, we still have the general problem of "fit": unless we are willing to settle for unconnected theories, somehow we must articulate specific relations between Beale's Axes-aims and Kinneavy/Britton's Triangle-aims, which *A Pragmatic Theory* does not attempt.
Beale’s exposition of the Motivational Axes (60-80) is clear, but it is elaborated to a degree that exceeds our need for a basic understanding of its essential structure and implications. I will therefore attempt a simplified account, built step-by-step from the “ground up.”

Whereas Kinneavy and Britton derive their aims (Britton uses the term “function”) from the triangular relationships implicit in communicative acts, Beale’s structural principles derive from two paradoxes implicit in language use. The first is that parole is both referential and non-referential: on the one hand, at times, striving for a literal, objective representation of that which is external to mind; on the other, sometimes tropological and subjective, oriented more to the “in here” than the “out there.” But even the most empirical, positivistic science, as Burke, Lakoff, and others have shown, depends on “root metaphors.” Conversely, highly tropological discourse, like poetry and oratory, are to some degree always “realistic,” saying something about the human condition, the “out-there” world. Thus, reference/non-reference do not designate mutually exclusive domains or kinds of language; rather, they form the polarities or “opposites” of a dialectical relation, the interaction of which constitutes part of the tensiveness of all language use, which is never “purely objective” or “purely subjective” but always a merger of degrees of both.

The second paradox is likewise a dialectical polarity, a fusion of opposites. On the one side, language use is contemplative, non-participatory, constative; it is, so to speak, “up there,” “above it all” in the sense that language distantiates from event and action, being not just an event or an act but often a reflecting on events or acts. On the other side, to reflect is to act. Parole, then, is also performative, participatory, “down here,” “a part of it all” in the sense of being a kind of human action in the world.

Beale’s next step is to plot his antinomies on two axes, the first paradox being the “horizontal” dimension; the second, the “vertical,” as in Figure 1:

![The Motivational Axes](image)

**Figure 1**

The Motivational Axes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“up here”</th>
<th>“out there”</th>
<th>“in here”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>constative</td>
<td>referential</td>
<td>non-referential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contemplative</td>
<td>literal</td>
<td>tropological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“down here”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus laid down, each upon the other, the Motivational Axes yield four quadrants, each defined by a ratio formed from adjacent pairs of terms. From these ratios Beale "deduces" his aims. Moving clockwise from the top right quadrant, discourse that is contemplative/tropological is Poetic; tropological/active, Rhetorical; active/referential, Instrumental; and referential/contemplative, Scientific.

**Figure 2**
Discourse Aims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contemplation</th>
<th>_</th>
<th>_</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scientific</strong></td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Troptological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental</strong></td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the aims, Beale also "generates" or "anticipates" four "world hypotheses" (that is, basic philosophical approaches or Weltanschauungen) and four "prominent social and organizational character types." These are represented in Figure 3:

**Figure 3**
World Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Up here&quot;</th>
<th>_</th>
<th>_</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formism</strong></td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(theorist)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Out there&quot;</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organicism</strong></td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(poet/prophet)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In here&quot;</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanism</strong></td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(technician)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Down here&quot;</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextualism</strong></td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(statesman)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To correct for conclusions that one might too easily jump to based on these graphic encapsulations, careful note must be made of the following points. First, Beale is not saying, for example, that the rhetorical aims always consist of performative and/or metaphorical statements; his claim is only that the rhetorical telos "leans toward" action in the world and subjective constructions of the world. Relative to the others, rhetoric is "in here" and "down here." Second, the four world hypotheses—Formism (Classical Realism), Organicism (Absolute Idealism), Contextualism (Pragmatism), and Mechanism (Atomism)—should not be directly correlated with either the aims or the character types. That is, one might perform in the rhetorical aim while being, say, a philosophical idealist (a Hegelian, for instance) whose predominant role is theorist. Rather than direct correlation, which would be schematic in the bad sense of oversimplifying human performance, Beale's schema generates a cluster of mutually illuminating motivational dimensions, discourse aims, philosophies, and character types.

Thus, to summarize, first the two basic language paradoxes "generate" the Axes, which in turn "generate" the four quadrants. Second, each quadrant represents a motivational dimension, each with its own characteristic aim:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Aim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;up there&quot; (contemplation)/&quot;in here&quot; (thing as experienced)</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>Poetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;in here&quot;/&quot;down here&quot; (action-in-the-world)</td>
<td>Ethical/Pragmatic</td>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;down here&quot;/&quot;out there&quot; (thing-in-itself)</td>
<td>Operational</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;out there&quot;/&quot;up there&quot;</td>
<td>Formalistic</td>
<td>Scientific</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, each aim is associated with a world hypothesis and with a character type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>World Hypothesis</th>
<th>Character Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poetic</td>
<td>Organicism</td>
<td>Poet/Prophet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>Contextualism</td>
<td>Statesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Mechanism</td>
<td>Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific</td>
<td>Formism</td>
<td>Theorist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With this bare outline of the Motivational Axes in mind, we can now ask what comparative advantages the Axes might claim over the communication triangle judged solely as theoretical constructs, for it is here—in comparative
advantages—that we may find some ground for preferring one theory over another, since both are *prima facie* equally plausible constructions, the internal coherence of which is not in question in either case (though, of course, the semiotic assumptions that both depend on are permanently questionable). If we can detect some reason to prefer the Axes over the triangle, then clearly we also can begin to see the significance of Beale’s theory in its only appropriate context, theorizing in our field.

We need to be clear at the outset about the arguments I am about to advance in favor of the Axes over the Triangle. First, they are mine, not Beale’s. In saying as much, my concern is not proprietary, but a matter of settling responsibility. All Beale does is show us what his terminology produces. The result is an impressive synthesis, itself an implicit “argument” for the Axes, but Beale makes no explicit case for them at all, wanting us to appreciate them as a whole and in themselves. No one, then, should blame Beale should they be unimpressed by my arguments.

Second, the arguments do not really “establish” or “settle” anything. They amount to good reasons for taking a new theory seriously, for seeing it as more than “just another ingenious formulation.” They argue for a theory on theoretical grounds, grounds which are also questionable but which seem to me worth considering for one very important reason: they are given much credence in the contemporary intellectual community generally.

The first and most significant reason for preferring the Axes over the Triangle is that Beale does not separate discourse from reality construction as Kinneavy does. Early in *A Theory of Discourse*, we find the following crucial passage:

The modes of discourse are not an application of the communication triangle. They actually are grounded in certain philosophical concepts of the nature of reality considered as being and becoming. This is not surprising. The ultimate attempt of discourse to refer to reality should, as much as possible, be grounded in the nature of reality, not the nature of language. (36; emphasis added)

Here we encounter the positivistic streak in Kinneavy’s thought in its most patent manifestation: language, discourse, is “here”; non-verbal reality “there”; the latter can and ought to be approached “as much as possible” apart from the former. Partly for this reason, Kinneavy sharply dissociates his discourse aims from his discourse modes.

Beale follows Kinneavy in sharply distinguishing his strategies and modes—ways of discoursing, means or operations of discourse—from teleology, discourse ends or aims. However, as is evident from even my brief treatment of the Axes, Beale associates “world-making” or “reality construction” *directly* with the motivational dimensions generated from the Axes. There is for Beale no independently existing reality apart from language to which one
can mutely appeal. Rather, while one encounters many different realities in each of the aims of discourse, nevertheless their respective domains or fields of action also differ in general from one another. That is, the Technician does not typically constitute "reality" as the Statesman does; Instrumental discourse does not entertain the same world-assumptions that Rhetorical discourse does. The Technician works with a world of objects and causal relationships, with means-finding under conditions where purposes are normally established by someone else. Instrumental discourse, paradigmatically instructions for the successful execution of some lock-step process or procedure, likewise assumes the root metaphor of the machine. In contrast, the Statesman works in a world of agents, who cannot be just moved, but must be appealed to, "moved" in the sense of persuaded, and with a kind of discourse whose paradigmatic type is deliberative, concerned as much with ends as the Instrumental is with means.

In short, Beale "as much as possible" makes no attempt to separate reality from language, for his theory embodies the anti-positivistic assumption that such a separation is quite impossible. Reality is constituted in parole itself. Kinneavy's "certain philosophical concepts" are themselves linguistic. "The nature of reality considered as being and becoming" are not for Beale grounds for a theory of modes dissociated from the triangular basis of the aims, but rather one of the Axes, namely the "vertical" one—reality as "up here" (being) and "down here" (becoming), abstract contemplation of the world versus concrete action in the world. In other words, part of Kinneavy's modal rationale is actually part of Beale's rationale for his aims, for his merging of motive and reality construction in a "grammar of motives" which he likens explicitly to Burke's (10). Presumably, then, for Beale as for Burke, there is no unmediated reality, but only "terministic screens," vocabularies that compete with one another to characterize "reality."

Unquestionably, Beale's association of language use and "reality" accords more with contemporary philosophy than Kinneavy's positivism does. Positivism, of course, goes merrily on as part of the unscrutinized assumptions of normal science and quotidian common sense, just as Baconian naive empiricism does, quite oblivious to all refutation. But at least since Kant, conception (which is language-saturated) has seemed undetachable from perception, and recent historian-philosophers of science, such as Polanyi and Kuhn, have dealt blows to positivism which ought to prove fatal in the end. To the extent that contemporary rhetorical thought rejects positivism—and it does almost everywhere when it achieves philosophical depth—we must incline toward the assumptions of Beale's Axes rather than Kinneavy's Triangle.

The second advantage that the Axes have over the Triangle is closely related to the first: the Axes are more dynamic, more in keeping with the dialectical tensiveness of language itself. Beale comes close to asserting this edge when he criticizes the Triangle for using "unitary criteria" for classifi-
cation rather than "clusters of motives and traits" (59). What he means is that the Triangle yields a category such as "decoder-centered" (that is, rhetorical discourse), whereas the Axes yield categories based on pairs or ratios of terms, such as subjective/performative, which likewise isolates rhetorical discourse or the rhetorical aim. Beale goes on, partly independent of the Axes themselves, to discuss seven "distinctive features" by which one aim can be distinguished from another (95-104).

It may be the case that Beale develops a richer taxonomy than Kinneavy does and that one reason why it is richer is that his thinking starts from a ratio of determinants rather than a unitary criterion. However, while two heads attached to different bodies may be better than one, two terms are not so obviously better than one—if Kinneavy can adduce the same category with one term, might we say that his system is more elegant, not multiplying determinants beyond necessity? Furthermore, while Kinneavy might begin with a unitary criterion, his discussions of the aims employ "clusters of motives and traits" quite as much as Beale's do.

The real problem with "unitary criteria" has no inherent relation to the richness or power of a taxonomy. The real problem—which is inherent—is that a unitary criterion is the result of and results in dissociative or partitive rather than interactional or dialectical thought. That is, the Triangle, despite the rules of geometry, is "one-sided" in the sense of always stressing contrast among its elements—the addressee apart from the addresser, the code as distinct from "reality," and so on. Clearly, such dissociative thought led Kinneavy to the quite undialectical treatment of the structure of discourse, as if it could be somehow detached from the structure of reality—the difficulty we uncovered in connection with the first reason for seeing a theoretical advantage in the Axes. Indeed, the pervasive limitation of A Theory of Discourse is that it is a paradigmatic instance of what Hegel called Verstand, the Understanding, which achieves conceptual order at the price of a total or nearly total loss of dialectical fluidity of interrelation between or among terms. In other words, the understanding tries to eliminate conflict or tension in its determinations by "clean" or "clear cut" distinctions, by dissociative or partitive thought.

Beale is not a thorough-going dialectical thinker, but his theory is unquestionably more dialectical than Kinneavy's. In the first place, his Axes amount to a union or merger or interaction of opposites: parole is both subjective and objective, contemplation and action at once. The ratios generated from the Axes have relational thought "built into" them and so discourage the isolative thinking that must result from the concept of foregrounding in Kinneavy. Beale's Axes, then, emphasize the conflictual or tensive structure of language use and, simultaneously, its tensive unity, the aims being more "leanings" or "weightings" within the universe of discourse than contrastive categories. Consequently, the Triangle's reductive "logic," its tendency to see everything in a discourse in relation to a single determinant
(so, that, for example, a persuasive discourse must be explained only or almost only in relation to the decoder), just does not exist in the implications of the Axes.

At bottom, the choice between Kinneavy and Beale, the Triangle and the Axes, is a choice between kinds of thinking. Kinneavy, at least in A Theory of Discourse, represents traditional analytic thought, the isolate (abstract) and analyze tactics of mainstream Western philosophy and scientific rationalism. Beale, on the other hand, is a relational or integrative thinker, more akin to, say, Kenneth Burke and Mikhail Bakhtin than he is to the genius of semiotics or Aristotle. The kinds of thought, of course, are not mutually exclusive; nor is one absolutely better than the other; and neither theorist is purely one or the other. Nevertheless, the choice is scarcely a matter of indifference, and Beale must be taken seriously by anyone who thinks that a privileged, unmediated intuition of reality is not possible, who holds the alternate view (which seems to gain more adherents with each year) that there is a pluralism of realities relative to language communities and fields of inquiry, and who is critical of the limitations of analytical thought, too often taken as reason itself in the Occidental heritage.

A Question of "Aims"

At the beginning of this essay I said my purpose was to come to terms with A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric, which is not quite the same thing as giving reasons for taking it seriously. To me, "coming to terms" with a new theory means locating its place within existing theory. I want to begin that process by relating Beale’s aims to the Kinneavy/Britton aims/functions.

In Beale’s case, the problems of accommodation are lessened by the restricted nature of his theoretical claim, which is to account for written discourse performances by mature writers. This, coupled with his less than total rejection of the Triangle, amounts to an implicit invitation to combine the two models in some fashion. At least, on the face of it, there ought to be some way of relating them without contradiction.

To do so, however, requires concessions from both sides. Kinneavy and Britton must relinquish their claim to an adequate model of the mature aims—a crucial concession since, from a pedagogical point of view, the model adhered to functions as a goal, the "toward which" our composition instruction is always striving. In this regard it might be argued that Beale did not advance his aim model for the writing classroom, whereas Kinneavy did; so we might simply use the former for rhetorical criticism, some version of the latter for teaching writing. Certainly, there is no compelling reason to think that critical and pedagogical work in a field like rhetoric ought to be guided by a single theory—indeed, our generally pluralistic stance militates against it; nevertheless, if Beale’s aims are capable of capturing the teleology of mature, written discourse performances as he claims, I see no reason why they could not serve as the "toward which" of composition instruction as well. I
would argue at least that we ought to give careful consideration to his aim model, especially since Kinneavy's has encountered widespread resistance, much of which may stem from the limitations of partitive thought that Beale largely overcomes.⁷

In any case, supposing that we wish to integrate the Triangle model with the Axes, Kinneavy and Britton must concede the mature aims to Beale. On Beale's side, the stance toward expressive discourse requires, at minimum, modification. The Axes allot no place to expressive writing, and Beale argues that expression is not a mature aim at all, but rather "proto-discourse" or a "proto-genre," neither utterance nor discourse performance, but somewhere in between—like "shopping lists, bookkeeping entries, diary and journal entries," which, "by virtue of either the simplicity or indeterminancy of their motives and designs, as well as the restrictiveness of their situations, do not fully constitute discourse performances" (82-83). Kinneavy, in contrast, allot expression full status as an aim and makes a case for its psychological priority, in that the desire to "be heard" motivates much discourse activity in all the aims and functions (396). And Britton argues for its temporal priority on the quite plausible grounds that conversation, our first discourses, are predominantly expressive (as Sapir maintained) and that the conversation of children, in their egocentricity, is especially so. For this reason, Britton suggests that the way to mature performance in all the aims runs through expressive discourse, which makes expression as central to his theory as rhetorical discourse is to Beale's (81-83).

Clearly, then, the status of expressive discourse is a major sticking point for anyone hoping to reconcile Kinneavy or Britton with Beale. I think, however, if we introduce Britton's developmental dimension, altogether lacking in Beale and Kinneavy, we can overcome their apparently contradictory positions with respect to expression and glimpse the way to a synthesis of the Triangle and Axes models.

If Britton is wrong about the centrality of expression in discourse development, then much of our general understanding of child development and language is also mistaken. The relative egocentricity of the child, the typical restriction of his or her discourse to intimate/informal speech situations, the relative lack of acculturation, much of which instructs adults to confine expression to an intimate circle and to certain well-defined professional relationships (for example, doctor-patient), all argue for the priority of expression in discourse development. So too does the child's developing but still highly restricted code and the lack of experience with that "unnatural act" of writing, which inevitably distantiates, removing thought from utterance, writer from reader.

How could a child's discourse be anything else but what Britton says it is: expressive in general and "all purpose" at the same time, and by adult measures not well differentiated by function? The young child just tends to
say whatever he or she is feeling and thinking, to the delight and dole of parents.

Beale is mistaken in my view when he applies the concept of "proto-discourse" to expression, seeing it as neither speech act nor rhetorical act. Relatively spontaneous expression is the norm of informal, adult conversation in relaxed, intimate conditions, and so certainly belongs to utterance, if not performance; and expression is about the only category applicable to the immature discourse of children. Viewed developmentally, then, expression deserves full status as a function and probably is as central to a developmental model as Britton claims it is. That is, I hold tentatively with Britton that "first discourse" is immature expression, that the norms of mature expression are most congenial to a child's reading and writing, and that the other functions probably develop as movements away from expression toward what he calls transactional (that is, referential and persuasive) and poetic functions (82-83).

But is expressive discourse an aim in Beale's sense of aim: mature, written discourse performance? Is it justified to make expression central to early discourse and adult discourse, as Britton does? I would answer "no" to both questions.

My reasoning is as follows. Although there are occasions in which we must say or write something when we would prefer not to, the expressive impulse is what Kinneavy says it is: psychologically prior to most discourse, and therefore more or less a constant in discourse from early utterance on. But the expressive impulse is not expressive discourse, since it may issue in any function or aim. In the very young, impulse probably results most often in Britton's immature expression, for the reasons already discussed. What happens beyond this point depends on culture and society. Britton does not say that mature expression does develop first, but only that it should; given where children are developmentally, his contention is that reading and writing in the expressive function is most congenial to their mind and experience and therefore psychologically justified.

Britton's position seems reasonable, but we must recognize that expressive discourse cannot remain central to later discourse development. As egocentric speech proves socially maladapted and is suppressed to become that portion of thought called "inner speech," in somewhat similar fashion expressive discourse "goes underground," so to speak, and is replaced by rhetorical discourse as the central telos. There is, of course, no magical point where this shift "naturally" occurs, but surely it begins at about the time when the child cares more for peer-group acceptance than for old family ties. Although this stage is often conceived expressively as "being one's self," what is really going on is a massive persuasive "act," where (it seems) almost everything the child wears, eats, says, and does has something to do with "belonging"—that is, symbolic enrollment or identification with the peer group.
The hypothesis that we ought to be able to detect a slow shift from expression to persuasion is supported by the following considerations as well. The process of decentering, never complete and never wholly reliable, nevertheless makes audience awareness possible, which in turn results in conscious and nonconscious adjustment of discourse to auditor. The overall direction, then, is clearly toward the decoder, toward rhetoric, as even fairly casual speech becomes what Kenneth Burke calls "courtship" (A Rhetoric 208-12). The impact of literacy is also to push us more toward rhetoric, this time in the sense of calculated appeal, since writing allows us to construct and sustain persuasive strategies to a degree that non-textual discourse usually cannot approach. Finally, inseparable from the impact of literacy is the onset of formal operations, an intellectual potential that emerges around adolescence and without which sophisticated argument (so crucial to logos in the sense of rational appeal) can hardly develop (Grubar and Voneche 461-63).

If we hold that there is, in general, a movement away from expression toward persuasion, we can then link Britton to Beale developmentally, using some version of the Kinneavy/Britton model for the earlier stages, Beale for the later. Such a move accords with the foci of both theorists; but such a linkage does not imply that the expressive function disappears or should not be taught. Expression does not simply "go away"; rather, it goes "underground," mixing in complex ways with discourse performances in the poetic and rhetorical aims, confining itself in its more "pure" manifestations to private rather than public discourse and mostly to conversation. But even if my hypothesis about the shift from expression to persuasion should draw some degree of empirical confirmation, it is descriptive, not normative, and thus says nothing per se about what we ought to teach. With some justification, for instance, one might well argue that we ought to resist the submergence of expression on the grounds of psychic health, especially since modern Western technological democracies have to a pathological degree divorced the private and public life-worlds while nearly destroying the coherence of the former.

Whether or not we link Beale with Kinneavy and Britton developmentally (thereby achieving a degree of theoretical integration otherwise lacking), we will certainly need both theories to deal with mature discourse as a whole. Beale is only interested in discourse with a high degree of "extension, unity, design, publicity, and completedness." For less ambitious, more purely functional kinds of writing, we still have basically no other model than one drawn from Jakobson/Kinneavy/Britton/Moffett—all of which one can relate to the Triangle. Synchronically, then, we can at present not reject either the Axes or Triangle model, one reason why I have tried to detect some way of merging them diachronically.

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Notes

1Beale does not simply isolate writing arbitrarily. See his discussion of the principles that justify his theory of written discourse (3-8).
2See Beale's discussion of Jakobson, as adapted by Hymes (86-87). For the original source, see Jakobson (350-77).
3See, for example, Burke (Permanence 97-124) and Lakoff and Johnson.
4Taken from Stephen Pepper (141). See Beale's discussion of Pepper (69-73).
5See Burke's, "Terministic Screens" in Language as Symbolic Action.
6See Findley (60-69).
7See Fulkerson and Hunter.
8Associated with Piaget's work on the utterance of young children. See Vygotsky (119-42) for a detailed discussion of the relation between social speech and egocentric/inner speech.

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