Rearticulating the Rhetorical Tradition: The Influence of *A Theory of Discourse*

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A session at the 1987 MLA convention was devoted to the issue of "The Single Most Significant Contribution to Contemporary Theory in Rhetoric and Composition." Yet to argue in favor of a single text as the most significant contribution to contemporary theory in rhetoric and composition is highly redoubtable. How can a panel of three rhetoric and composition specialists arrive at even an uneasy consensus as to what defines "rhetoric" and "composition" and what differentiates them from each other, much less determine what constitutes "significance" and what method(s) should determine it? Further, this definitional problematic raises essential evaluative issues, in particular the criteria for judgment. What are the grounds upon which any twentieth-century text can be singled out as seminal to rhetoric and composition? It seems to me that there can be only one answer to this question: we privilege the work of a rhetoric/composition specialist precisely because of his or her contribution to the humanities in general, which, in turn, is privileged precisely because it is an essential component of the liberal arts tradition, which, in turn, is valorized for (among other reasons) its "liberating" properties—liberation in a particular sense (individuals benefit as they become emotionally and intellectually more free) and a collective sense (freed thinkers presumably are better equipped to erect and modify those structures and institutions that serve to benefit society).

This liberation was the classical heritage that served Greece and Rome for well over a millennium. As Wayne Booth points out, "The arts that at their best liberate us from our native provincialisms were once largely served by the systematic and universal study of the languages and monuments of the two civilizations that invented those arts" (36). I would argue that the humanizing process of the liberal arts is essential to general education, although I cannot deny that this perspective grows out of an indefinable, although always present, cultural ideology and all that that amorphous construct implies. Thus, the "movement" from rhetoric and composition to humanities to liberal arts to liberation shapes the individual, society, and the interrelationships between them. And more than any other text, James L. Kinneavy's *A Theory of Discourse* provides a rhetorical foundation for examining these complex relationships.
Rhetoric, the Humanities, and the Liberal Arts

Understanding the connection between rhetoric and composition and the liberal arts requires a brief historical summary. Rhetoric was, of course, an integral component of the classical trivium; indeed, it can be argued that rhetoric was the cornerstone of the liberal arts tradition. Children and young adults in Antiquity were required to study rhetoric, beginning with simple narrative exercises that led to sophisticated declamation and argumentation. Most important, however, was the purpose of rhetorical training: the young were trained to speak effectively because the life of the city required it. Establishing and modifying legal codes required a pragmatic rhetorical ability and the underlying freedom to articulate positions without restraint. Free speech and municipal cohesion were absolutely dependent upon the dynamics of one art: rhetoric. Rhetoric, then, is the essence of humanism. Greek literature often emphasizes freedom of action (particularly in the drama of Sophocles) and free thinking is also essential to dialectic, as Plato consistently demonstrates in his dialogues. It might, therefore, be argued that all of the original liberal arts required the condition of freedom to flourish. Rhetoric, however, was the one liberal art that privileged practical, humanistic discourse.

This assertion—that rhetoric is a liberating force within the humanities—cannot be advanced without acknowledging that the "integrity" of rhetoric has been long contested. Such criticism began at least as early as Plato's well-known denunciation of rhetoric in the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, was seen in Greek theologians such as Origin and Church Fathers such as Tertullian (both initially rhetoricians), continued in the seventeenth century with the anti-rhetoricians of the Royal Society in England, was followed by the anti-tropological movement of the eighteenth century, and emerged in much twentieth-century criticism of rhetoric and composition, symbolically represented by the rupture of English studies and the exit of speech and elocution members from English departments at the 1914 NCTE convention.

There is still controversy, of course, about the function of rhetoric in the humanities. However, no one can deny the historical importance of rhetoric in the liberal arts, and, I will argue, James L. Kinneavy's *A Theory of Discourse* is the most significant twentieth-century text in rhetoric and composition. I propose this text as seminal precisely because it rearticulates fundamental principles constituting the liberal arts tradition. There are pragmatic and theoretical reasons for the reflorescent of rhetoric as a liberal art, as the necessity of returning rhetoric to the writing classroom becomes increasingly apparent. National reports on writing and the humanities have expressed "profound disquiet about the humanities in our culture" (Commission 4) and call attention to the connection between writing and the liberating effect of the liberal arts (NCTE 219). As Robert Scholes warns, "We have turned writing instruction into a merely technical matter, not a road to liberal education through the serious study of rhetoric" (39).
A substantial contribution of Theory is its presentation of rhetoric and composition within a liberal arts framework. Kinneavy's Theory is significant in the usual sense of importance, but also in its signification, most particularly in the ways it integrates historical values of heterogeneous yet interrelated rhetorical traditions that have crucial applications and implications which shape contemporary practices in rhetoric and composition. These historical values of rhetoric and composition have informed the liberal arts tradition for well over two thousand years, educating people to perform their proper role as educated citizens in the democratic polis. What makes Theory particularly important is its reconstitution of these traditional values and principles within a twentieth-century context. Kinneavy systematically and comprehensively taxonomizes discourse in such a way as to serve specific and general humanistic purposes. And there is a constitutive ethics in Theory, which I will address after discussing links between this text and the rhetorical tradition; however, let me first attempt to define more precisely the relationship between Theory and the rhetorical tradition.

Kinneavy's A Theory of Discourse

Since the publication of Theory in 1971, Kinneavy has been recognized as one of America's major rhetorical theorists; indeed, it might be argued that he and Kenneth Burke are the two leading rhetorical theorists of the twentieth century. In Theory, Kinneavy systematically investigates the historical and theoretical bases of what he calls the "aims" of discourse (referential, persuasive, literary, and expressive) by extensively analyzing discourse and discussing a wide range of practical applications and implications. Kinneavy systematically analyzes examples representative of each of these aims, in each analysis examining the logic, organization, and style of the respective discourse and discussing essential attributes of members of that class of discourse.

Kinneavy has his critics, however, and his treatise has evoked its share of criticism, both theoretical and practical. Knoblauch and Brannon, for example, find Kinneavy's "spectra of ideal aims... a characterization of reader response" which "should not be mistaken for a description of types of writing or (still less) ways to write" (28). But this pronouncement attempts to deny generic language distinctions of any kind. According to Knoblauch and Brannon, "There is nothing intrinsically or identifiably 'persuasive' about one range of textual features as opposed to another and therefore no persuasion" (28). Clearly, this position denies, without evidence, the dominant form of rhetoric in Antiquity—persuasion—and fails to acknowledge most political, legal, and religious discourse, as well as the discourse of propaganda and advertising. Knoblauch and Brannon seem to be out of touch with "types" of language we encounter daily. And their denial of persuasion seems to contradict their stated interest in behavior modification: "We want to encourage writing teachers to become philosophers in their classrooms" (1). Indeed, much of their book is de-
voted to persuading the writing teacher to become more "philosophical."

Another objection to Kinneavy's theory addresses problems intrinsic to his semiotic approach to language. Walter H. Beale raises two objections to Kinneavy's semiotic structure, asking that the pragmatics of a theoretical exposition address what Lloyd Bitzer calls "the rhetorical situation":

The "ultimate aims" of discourse ought not to be classified by unitary criteria (as Kinneavy proposes), because they are not, after all, fixed natural or conceptual categories but complex historical developments; they need to be understood in terms that reflect the ways in which clusters of motives and traits come together in a discourse situation. Even if we can identify traits or principles that are "primary" and which tend to subsume others, the names that are extrapolated from such traits and applied to whole categories of discourse will not denote any special feature but a special way in which various features tend to be clustered.

A second defect of the communication triangle is its relative weakness as the "system of placement" that we hope to find in a semiotic model—that is, as a device for understanding the ways in which discourse interpenetrates and "understands" experience. By atomistically separating rhetoric from reference, Kinneavy's application of the communication triangle forfeits any hold on this crucial area of understanding. (60)

In his objections, Beale raises the critical issue of the relationship between a rhetorical act and the circumstances that contextualize that act. However, Beale is incorrect in asserting that Kinneavy ignores qualitative differences between "speech act" and "discourse act." Indeed, Kinneavy explicitly acknowledges the importance of context to the rhetorical act:

Beyond text lies the context of the situation of which text is a part. This includes such areas of investigation as psychological and social motivations for speaking and writing or listening and speaking; proxemics, the study of space distances in communication networks; haptics, the variant uses in different cultures of body contact in communication systems; kinesics, the study of gesture and posture in delivery. Some anthropologists and linguists have made much of the importance of the context of situation. Propaganda analysts, as might be expected, have also attempted to see the relation of language use to situational context. . . . Philosophers like Sartre also insist on the crucial importance of the context of situation.

Beyond the situation context lies the cultural context, the nature and conventions of which make the situational context permissible and meaningful. It can hardly be denied that cultural context and situational context determine text. In this large sense, no text is autonomous. (Theory 23-24; references deleted)

Kinneavy's subsequent discussions of informative, persuasive, and self-expressive discourse include extended analyses of particular circumstances that contextualize these kinds of discourse.

Another critic, Richard Fulkerson, argues that Kinneavy's evidence is insufficient and, therefore, unconvincing: "Kinneavy fails to provide compelling support for the theory and . . . a number of his specific assertions fail to hold up under examination" (43). This view—that Kinneavy argues for aims that operate independent of one another—is a common criticism, yet it cannot be reconciled with Kinneavy's explicit statement about the
interrelationship of discourse aims:

No one who has ever studied the matter of aims of discourse ever pretended that aims do not overlap. The distinctions which we and others have been making are valid theoretical and practical distinctions. We have to separate the aims in order to study them in a systematic manner. Any science has to make such abstractions when it studies anything, and the study of discourse is no exception. But it is palpably clear to anyone who takes a look at actual discourses that very few pure aims of discourse exist. Persuasion as a matter of course incorporates information about the product, maybe even some valid scientific proof of its superiority, and it may use such literary techniques as rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration in its slogan. Literature incorporates expressive elements and thematic or persuasive components. Scientific prose includes persuasive elements. The list could go on.

In many cases in these overlaps, one of the aims is dominant and the other is a means. Information included in an advertisement is there to further the persuasion, so that persuasion is the primary aim. In some literature, it is obvious that persuasion is a secondary motif. Instances of one's aim subsuming another or several as means can easily be multiplied. (Theory 61-62)

Fulkerson goes on to criticize Kinneavy for treating in detail "only about six examples of discourse" (44), not recognizing that Kinneavy has analyzed, in print, more than two hundred units of discourse according to the principles outlined in Theory.

Like Fulkerson, David Foster believes that Kinneavy's work is far too ambitious. He criticizes Kinneavy for his "inconsistent treatment accorded different kinds of discourse" (54), suggests that Kinneavy relies too heavily upon Aristotle, and argues that Kinneavy "is unable to synthesize Burke with other rhetorical approaches or suggest how useful Burke might be, along with Aristotle, in a genuinely fresh approach to persuasive discourse" (54). This criticism—that Kinneavy has not successfully integrated Aristotelian and Burkean theory—is perhaps the weakest criticism of Kinneavy to appear in print. Kinneavy, along with Corbett, was chiefly responsible for reinstating Aristotle into the writing classroom; this contribution alone is significant and "fresh." Since William Irmscher first attempted to systematically apply Kenneth Burke to the field of composition, there have been very few other detailed attempts to relate Burke to composition, which is quite understandable given the complexity of Burke's thought. But the point is that Aristotle and Burke offer quite distinct, comprehensive theories of rhetoric; to integrate their theoretical views, not to mention their pragmatics, would indeed be a lifetime project. Foster's suggestion surely cannot be taken seriously.

Some critics have attacked Kinneavy's primary concern with discourse purpose rather than with the process of composition, another questionable objection. Kinneavy never intended to examine the production of discourse in Theory. He addresses the process of writing in at least three different textbooks: Writing—Basic Modes of Organization, Aims and Audiences in Writing, and Writing in the Liberal Arts Tradition. However, these theoretical objections do raise important questions (as Fulkerson
suggests); any attempt to taxonomize discourse, especially one as systematic and comprehensive as Kinneavy's, is certain to contain some inconsistencies, limitations, and weaknesses. Indeed, the liabilities inherent in articulating a comprehensive theory of discourse explain, in part, the paucity of sustained and systematic theoretical investigations of discourse genres in Anglo and Continental rhetorical circles.

Nevertheless, the influence of Kinneavy's *Theory* cannot be denied; his work has been the cornerstone of at least fifteen textbooks on composition, many university and college programs, and entire state language arts systems. He has also written two influential essays about writing across the curriculum and has been instrumental in developing such programs at Beaver College, St. Mary's University, Brigham Young University, and the University of Texas at Austin. Kinneavy has influenced twentieth-century theory in rhetoric and composition by calling attention to modern definitions and uses of modes of discourse (narration, description, definition/classification, and evaluation), including the subordination of the modes to aims of discourse. *Theory* has also helped to derail traditional approaches to modes of discourse. Kinneavy has reassembled Alexander Bain's forms of discourse—narration, description, exposition, argumentation, persuasion, and poetry (which have provided the basis of many, if not most, composition textbooks in the twentieth century)—into the modes and aims of discourse. In *Theory*, Kinneavy divides exposition into "referential" discourse, which he sub-classifies into scientific, informative, and exploratory forms (77-146); persuasion and poetry also become aims of discourse (Chapters 4 and 5). Many current composition textbooks—far too numerous to cite—are based upon various combinations of Kinneavy's purposes for writing (or aims) and modes (or methods of developing those aims).

Kinneavy's *Theory* contributes far more, however, than a mere reassessment of Bain's forms of discourse. Kinneavy was also the first rhetorician to systematically and comprehensively examine (1) *self-expression*, giving it a philosophical basis in existentialism and phenomenology, drawing upon seminal works of Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georges Gusdorf, and Ernest Cassirer; (2) *informative discourse*, incorporating contemporary logical theory from Carnap and Bar-Hillel; and (3) *exploratory discourse*, integrating concepts from the philosophy of science and various continental influences on rhetoric and composition. Many composition textbooks now contain chapters on self-expression and informative writing, a trend that can be attributed to Kinneavy's articulation of these aims. Kinneavy is also the first rhetorician, to my knowledge, to revive the tradition of dialectic as exploratory discourse in rhetoric and composition studies, a significant contribution in itself. William Zeiger, drawing upon Kinneavy, points out how important exploratory discourse is to intellectual inquiry:
Inquiry, or exploration... aims to discover the fecundity of an idea (like a good post-modernist). It does not pursue a linear sequence, but holds several possibilities in suspension simultaneously, inviting the inquisitive mind to play among them. The art of inquiry entails a readiness to entertain alternatives, to examine two sides of an issue, to permit contradictory elements to coexist, the better to appreciate their differences. (456-57)

Other writing specialists have investigated exploratory discourse under the umbrella of "writing to learn" in the writing-across-the-curriculum movement. Kinneavy's revival of dialectic as exploration has, I believe, been partly responsible for the recent "respectability" of the study of rhetoric and composition. Yet Kinneavy's major contribution to contemporary discourse, I would argue, is the historical case Theory builds for the importance of rhetoric throughout Western history, specifically through his rearticulation of the aims of discourse as a reassertion of the liberal arts tradition.

Three Definitions of Rhetoric

Rhetorical investigations are necessarily bound to culture and time. As James Berlin notes, the rhetorical act must reflect the idiosyncracies of particular contexts: rhetoric is "a social invention" which "arises out of a time and place, a peculiar social context, establishing for a period the conditions that make a peculiar kind of communication possible" (1). This contextual circumscription is the principle of kairos, a dominant concept in classical rhetoric that Kinneavy applies to contemporary rhetoric and composition, principally as "situational context" in referential, persuasive, and expressive discourse. Yet any macroanalysis of the rhetorical tradition that attempts to be historical must acknowledge rhetorical genres, classes of discourse always present, irreducibly interrelated, yet always somewhat variant in expression. Over the past 2,500 years, rhetoricians' attempts to codify and, thereby, explain human discourse have resulted in explicit designations of discourse that define the Western rhetorical tradition. In order to suggest how Theory represents these designations, I would like to begin by first stepping backward to outline three definitions of rhetoric that dominated Antiquity and remain alive and well as we approach the twenty-first century.

The recorded history of rhetoric and composition begins with the early Sicilian Sophists, those professional peripatetic pedagogues who organized schools of rhetoric catering to the pragmatic forensic needs of dispossessed Sicilian landowners who had overthrown local tyrants. The general Sophistic rhetorical tradition came to be identified with "style" or "figuration," principally because of its emphasis on "ornamental" discourse. (I deliberately sidestep the complex issue of whether any linguistic structure can "truly" be literal.) "Sophistry," in late Antiquity and now, has evoked pejorative associations, principally because some later Sophists of the Platonic era were associated with eristic games, or "false dialectic"; however not all Sophists were deceptive, demagogic, and bombastic. The
concept "sophist" was, in fact, "originally free from any derogatory sense and not without even a religious tinge," although it "later acquired an uncomplimentary meaning, in particular because the Sophist was feared as a quibbler and the enemy of tradition" (Untersteiner xv). Early Sophists, like Protagoras, Gorgias, and Antiphon, were quite principled and effective teachers, notwithstanding their concern for style in formal discourse. And the "good" Sophists have been recognized as instrumental figures in the early development of humanism (Nestle 248), particularly because of their emphasis on "polymathy"—the study of universal knowledge that extends over every kind of specialized study (Marrou 54-55). The stylistic tradition of rhetoric which continued in the Middle Ages in the poetics of Geoffrey of Vinsauf was well represented in the Renaissance in the forms of hundreds of style manuals; in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is exemplified by such "figural" rhetoricians as Nietzsche, Paul de Man and, to a certain extent, the ubiquitous Jacques Derrida, who argue that all language is metaphoric. Although there are many important differences among those who perceive rhetoric to be fundamentally a matter of figuration or style, their patterns of association are similar enough to characterize "stylistic rhetoric" as a kind of discourse that has survived unabated for almost three millennia.

The second kind of rhetoric is the Aristotelian or "persuasive" form of discourse. Although style is a significant component of persuasion, persuasive discourse—as a purpose—involves a unique kind of thinking, with a distinctly limited range of applicability, and includes emphases on personal appeal, emotional argumentation, and a "limited" form of logical demonstration quite distinct from scientific or dialectical discourse. Rhetoric as persuasion was maintained in the Middle Ages primarily in medieval preaching (ars praedicandi) and secondarily in letter writing (ars dictaminis) and poetics (ars poetriae). Although persuasive discourse as an aim remained subordinate to literary aims in the Renaissance, the rise of persuasion can be seen in eighteenth-century satire, and it has been argued that much of early American literature, at least through the beginning of the nineteenth century, might properly be called persuasive in form and aim (see Jackson, for example). In the twentieth century, uses of persuasion abound in Madison Avenue's mercantile persuasion, in international religious fundamentalism, and in totalitarian demagoguery and propaganda, perhaps the most immorally effective use of persuasive discourse the world has ever experienced.

The third class of rhetorical discourse is more difficult to define, although historians of rhetoric have often classified it as the "communication" view of rhetoric. The history of this tradition, however, is no less distinguished than either of the two preceding kinds of rhetoric. The roots of the communication school formally began with Isocrates, teacher and mentor to both Socrates and Aristotle; indeed, Isocrates is arguably the most important teacher of rhetoric in Antiquity after Aristotle, and he might quite properly be called the father of the humanities and grand-
father of rhetoric. This master teacher of rhetoric, often ignored in Anglo
surveys of classical rhetoric, did not ignore style; yet "content" clearly
assumed primary importance in his rhetorical system. He called his
rhetoric the "art of discourse," considered himself a teacher of philosophy,
and directed himself to training in "all the forms of discourse in which the
mind expresses itself" (183). Isocrates's school emphasized ethics and Pan-
Hellenic communication in a pragmatic mixture of political science and
rhetoric. Cicero and Quintilian continued this tradition, which might be
summed up in these often-quoted words of Cicero:

The art of eloquence is something greater, and collected from more sciences and
studies than people imagine. Indeed, no man can be a rhetor possessed of every
praiseworthy accomplishment unless he has attained the knowledge of every­
thing important, and of all the liberal arts. (112)

For Cicero, as well as Isocrates, rhetoric embraced the general concept of
culture; indeed, the Isocratean tradition of rhetoric and its relationship to
humanism continued in the Roman world in the works of Cicero and
Quintilian. Cicero often refers to the artes liberales in his rhetorical treatise
on invention (De Inventione), which emphasizes rhetoric as an instrument
to improve the lot of mankind. In Institutio Oratoria, Quintilian defines the
rhetorician as "a good man speaking well" (vir bonus dicendi peritus), and
devotes this monumental tract to educating a youth in becoming a good
citizen.

Rhetoric as a "communicative" discipline did not die out in Antiquity,
as some believe, but remained an important force in humanistic education
in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance when, once again, students were
required to analyze and create full discourses on a variety of political,
religious, and legal topics. Their exercises in writing and speech, called
progymnasmata, provided the rhetorical link to the humanities through­
out much of Western history, and this comprehensive notion of rhetoric is
perhaps most succinctly articulated by George Campbell in the eighteenth
century: "Eloquence is that art or talent by which discourse is adapted to
its end" (23). This definition has clearly been accepted in the twentieth
century by such rhetoricians as I. A. Richards, Craig Bard, Roderick Hart,
Richard Cherwitz, and a host of others, many of whom reside in American
speech departments.

A Theory of Discourse: A Contemporary Rhetorical Paradigm

These three views or modes of rhetoric—as style, persuasion, effective
communication—have characterized the discipline or, more properly, disciplines
of rhetoric and composition since Antiquity. For several
reasons, Kinneavy's A Theory of Discourse is the most systematic and
comprehensive representation of this conflated tradition which maintains
the legacy of the liberal arts in the twentieth century. Although each
chapter is largely devoted to the logic of the discourse under considera­
tion, Theory is explicitly concerned with style; yet the exposition is
unique, in that Kinneavy systematically differentiates "styles" according to discourse purpose—that is, referential, persuasive, literary, and expressive discourse, each requiring its own idiosyncratic stylistic expression. Kinneavy is not unique, of course, in his attention to style; many theorists have examined persuasive and literary style, including such antipositivists as Derrida, de Man, and Harold Bloom, whose view is that stylistic differentia is as indeterminate as any other "false" linguistic distinction. Yet, historically, there has been relatively little analysis, rhetorical or otherwise, of scientific discourse, and even less investigation into the nature or formal properties of expressive language. What makes Kinneavy's examination of discourse styles important is his systematic, interdisciplinary approach to the idiosyncracies of style across discourse aims. His eclectic synthesis of semantics, grammar, and discourse features of expressive language, for example, are generically differentiated from those of referential discourse. Although Kinneavy subordinates style to discourse aim and situational context, style is no less a significant component of his theory. I am not suggesting that he valorizes figuration, except when it characterizes the nature of a discourse and, therefore, fulfills a purpose, as it does, say, in a literary genre. What Kinneavy achieves is a systematic recognition of discourse exigencies and contexts requiring a unique stylistic expression.

Most commentaries on Theory acknowledge the looming presence of Aristotle, whose influence is clearly not restricted to the chapter on persuasion. On the contrary, it is the other way around: persuasion informs the semiotic structure of the entire taxonomy. Aristotle's generic distinctions based upon probability (as found in the Organon, Rhetoric, and Poetics) and Kinneavy's division of discourse (as determined by the stressed component of the communication process) are both grounded upon probability theory. Yet there are other similarities between Aristotle and Kinneavy, including their common defense of the uses of persuasion. In his Rhetoric, Aristotle lists four reasons for the necessity of rhetoric:

- When truth and justice fail through inefficient advocates, the skilled rhetorician will set this right.
- It enables the rhetorician to state a case in popular, not scientific, language, so that the discourse will be intelligible to all hearers.
- It enables the rhetorician to prove opposites, and to refute an opponent who makes an unfair use of argument.
- It provides an efficient defense. (1.1)

As Kinneavy repeatedly emphasizes in Theory, these justifications seem even more urgent today. Theory, however, goes beyond mere derivation of proofs; Kinneavy takes the Aristotelian framework and modifies it according to twentieth-century circumstances, and every chapter considers the situational context of the discourse under examination. In his analyses of advertising, propaganda, modern political discourse, religious rhetoric,
media components of persuasion, audience, and forms and stages of persuasion, Kinneavy modifies Aristotle's template in attempting to demonstrate the pervasiveness of persuasion in the modern world. In his detailed examples and explanations, Kinneavy brings classical rhetoric into modern praxis, calling attention to classes of discourse that reflect levels of probability, with scientific, informative, and exploratory language representing a higher level of probability than persuasion, self-expression, or "literature."

The third view of rhetoric, the communication view, is arguably Kinneavy's greatest contribution to maintaining the rhetorical tradition. A major purpose of Theory is to identify and analyze the kinds of language we seem to be using—once again, with an emphasis on probability. Therefore, any explanation of discourse, however tentative, can only be problematic (as post-structuralism reminds us). Even though there is much to learn about functions of discourse, rhetorical probability plays an important role in the written and spoken judgments we continually must make; and, I suggest, Kinneavy's emphasis on probability is a major strength of Theory. The reader is explicitly reminded that purposes of discourse can be differentiated by levels of certainty. A scientific "proof" is still more acceptable to the populace and specialized communities than are proofs deliberately incomplete or rhetorically constructed on emotional and personal appeals. American pharmaceutical companies, for example, must furnish the Food and Drug Administration with detailed "proofs" demonstrating the safety and efficacy of their products before receiving formal approval. Kinneavy's substantive treatment of scientific proof in the form of induction and deduction in the chapter on referential discourse explains the operation of these kinds of proofs. Rhetorical proof requires a necessarily limited form of induction and/or deduction and often involves the use of personal and emotional appeals, as the chapter on persuasive discourse discusses in detail. Expressive discourse, by its very nature, is characterized by the personal and emotive, a sometimes impenetrable form of language, which Kinneavy attempts to explore in the concluding chapter of Theory.

It is important to re-emphasize that any taxonomy, particularly a generic study of language, necessarily contains incompletions, misdirections, indirections, inexplicable overlaps, irreconcilable distinctions, supplements, residues, and traces; to a certain degree, any sustained discourse is "unmanageable." Yet to accept the relative indeterminacy of language does not invalidate rhetorical forms and the functions they serve, particularly as components of the liberal arts tradition. As long as there is language, there will be attempts to analyze it. Aristotle's Rhetoric, in spite of its often contradictory, jumbled exposition, still remains the classical rhetorical paradigm, and Kinneavy's Theory is an influential contemporary rhetorical paradigm. However, there is an even more important parallel to Aristotle and one more reason underlying the importance of Theory. There is a constitutive ethics to Kinneavy's Theory, just as
there is to Aristotle's Rhetoric, which subordinates its discourse aim to larger ethical purposes. In the beginning of the Rhetoric, Aristotle speaks of the rhetor as one who "ought not to persuade people to do what is wrong" (1.1). This quotation suggests that Aristotle's ethical stance is implicit. Kinneavy's ethical stance, however, is more explicit as he calls attention to the potential for ethical abuse in scientific and persuasive discourse in Theory and subsequently addresses ethics in detail, calling for an explicit emphasis on ethics in the writing class ("The Liberal Arts"). It is this dimension of Kinneavy's work that represents the tradition of liberal humanism, and if that is not a rhetorical telos, what is? It is not important if we disagree about whether there is a "dominant" aim in any given discourse. The success of Kinneavy's text lies in its attempt to systematically analyze the history and characteristics of purposes and use of language, and this treatise represents what the best of the rhetorical tradition has always striven to achieve.

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Notes

1 There is clearly a need for an extended discussion of the distinction between rhetoric and composition in Antiquity, particularly since commentators often use the terms interchangeably. By rhetoric, the Greeks generally meant a "full" discourse, emphasizing systematicity and purpose; rhetoric was viewed as a techne, an art that reflected its history. Composition, on the other hand, emphasized the more immediate and practical, and usually meant attention to the components of discourse—principally syntax and word choice considered without regard to overall purpose. The Greek term for composition, suntaxis, usually meant "sentence combining" or "diction" exercises. To my knowledge, no one has explored the specific functions of composition before the early Middle Ages.

2 Although A Theory of Discourse was first published in 1971 (and reissued by Norton in 1980), many early chapters were copyrighted in 1966 and several appear in the little-known The Design of Discourse, which Kinneavy co-authored with John Q. Cope and J. W. Campbell. This book was published as a "preliminary edition" by Prentice-Hall in 1969.

3 This assessment is not intended to deny the significant contributions of Edward Corbett, who has done more than anyone to reintroduce the classical tradition into contemporary discussions of rhetoric and composition; however, Corbett is usually regarded as a historian rather than a theorist.

4 See O'Banion, Knoblauch, and Odell.

5 At least two states (Texas and Wisconsin) base their language arts system on A Theory of Discourse. For specific applications of Kinneavy to composition, including technical writing, see Hagaman, Harris, and Polnac.

6 In A Theory of Discourse, Kinneavy makes several references to Volume II, which will examine modes of discourse. Kinneavy has returned to this project and expects to complete it in the near future. He has written a quite useful guide to the modes, Writing—Basic Modes of Organization.

7 Kinneavy, more than anyone else, has demonstrated the importance of kairos to the
classical and contemporary rhetorical tradition. See his "Kairos."

*I* say "secondarily" in the sense that although letter writing and poetics employ formal techniques of persuasion, the persuasive purpose is often secondary to another aim. As James Murphy says, "If one defines 'rhetoric' as a set of precepts that provide a definite method or plan for speaking and writing, then each of these arts can be called rhetorical" (viii). Murphy's collection is perhaps the most representative survey of the rhetorical arts in the Middle Ages.

**Works Cited**


