PEDAGOGICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR A THEORY-METHOD DISTINCTION IN RHETORICAL CRITICISM

Jeffery L. Bineham

Though most rhetorical critics agree that theoretical illumination should be the primary goal of criticism, disagreement exists as to the proper relationship between theory and method. Some scholars argue that theory and method are merged in rhetorical criticism. Others maintain that theory and method ought to be distinguished. This paper argues that a theory-method merger benefits criticism, but that a theory-method distinction is justified on pedagogical grounds. An analysis of Francis Schaeffer's A Christian Manifesto illustrates how a theory-method distinction can inform rhetorical criticism.

Scholars in rhetoric have long expressed concern with the relationship between theory and method in criticism. Though it has been commonplace to identify rhetorical critics by what they study, contemporary thought focuses more on how critics study.¹ The “Report of the Committee on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism” (Bitzer & Black, 1971) asserts that “rhetorical criticism is to be identified by the kinds of questions posed by the critic,” and that “the rhetorical critic is identifiable by the nature of his inquiry” (pp. 220–221). This concern for method is coupled, nonetheless, with a clear emphasis on theoretical illumination. Indeed, the key methodological questions posed by the committee are, first, “how can one contribute to theory,” and second, “how can one illumine contemporary rhetorical transactions” (p. 223)? Such questions identify clearly the place of method in rhetorical criticism: methods are means by which theoretical and critical goals are accomplished. Methods are important only for the increased insight they provide into human symbolic action. Rhetorical methodology describes how critics might proceed in their efforts to develop theoretical insights which both explain and stretch beyond the specific case under examination.

Though general agreement exists that methods should not be the focus of critical activity, the theory-method relationship is explained in various fashions. A popular contemporary explanation of this relationship holds that theory and method converge in rhetorical criticism, so that no distinction exists between the two. Others maintain that theory and method are distinct; because method, even in rhetorical criticism, tests theory.² This paper argues for a rapprochement of these two positions. The rapprochement suggested is based on a pedagogical justification for a theory-method distinction which maintains the benefits of a theory-method merger.

To accomplish this task, the paper addresses two primary questions. First, how can a distinction between rhetorical theory and rhetorical method be maintained?
And second, how can such a distinction inform both theory and criticism? Answers to these questions presuppose an understanding of why theory and method are merged in rhetorical criticism. The paper begins, therefore, with an explication of that merger. Section two articulates rationale for a theory-method distinction and suggests some methodological guidelines which foster the rapprochement I seek. Section three examines Francis Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto* in order to provide critical illustration of how a theory-method distinction can benefit rhetorical criticism. I begin, then, with an assessment of the theory-method merger.

**THE MERGER OF THEORY AND METHOD IN RHETORICAL CRITICISM**

In a recent article, Brummett (1984) argues that though many rhetoricians view rhetorical theories and methods as analogous to those theories and methods associated with the social sciences, the two are actually quite different. He notes that while the social sciences measure a theory's validity by how well tests reveal it to explain or identify some regularity in the world, a rhetorical theory "is never tested in the sense that social science theories are" (p. 98). A rhetorical theory's validity is not tied to studies which replicate its usefulness, or to the accumulation of supporting evidence; indeed, only one rhetorical criticism may prove sufficient to establish a theory's validity. "Criticism," Brummett notes, "seems to illustrate theory. The usefulness of the theory is assumed" (p. 99). Because rhetorical theory presupposes usefulness, no need exists to test that theory through the methodological application of procedures which can be replicated by other critics.

This initial distinction between rhetorical studies and the social sciences leads to a second distinction even more important for my argument: because methods in rhetorical criticism are not used to test theories, the division between theory and method is less pronounced, if present at all. "A theory," as Brummett states, "is a method of experiencing rhetoric in the real world." Indeed, the characteristic method for applying theory in criticism "is nothing more than the everyday real life actions of looking and hearing *with sensibilities sharpened by the theory*" (p. 105). Theory and method are merged in rhetorical criticism.²

The principle characteristic of a rhetorical critic, therefore, is extensive knowledge of rhetorical *theory*. "The critic," writes Walter Fisher (1974), "possesses special, comprehensive knowledge of the nature and functions of the objects and acts that he examines" (p. 76). The focus on knowledge of rhetorical theory, rather than on formulaic methodological tactics, provides for "the full, free interplay of intelligence with the critical object" (Lucas, 1981, p. 16). Criticism, therefore, "is always related to theory"; it is not bound by "rigorous rules of procedure"; it is creative in its judgments, its choice of concepts and criteria, and its "manner of composition" (Fisher, 1974, pp. 77, 79; and see Fisher, 1969, p. 105). A theory-method merger enhances this popular and helpful perspective toward criticism. The informed critic approaches discourse armed not with a predetermined methodological battle plan, but with theoretical knowledge which prepares him or her to articulate a critical explanation that emerges from interaction with the object of study. The critic engages in the exposition of theory rather than the imposition of method.

A theory-method merger thus yields an important benefit for rhetorical criticism. If theory and method are merged, both can be assimilated to the critic as part of his or her critical apparatus. Method, like theory, emerges from and informs the analysis,
but it is not imposed upon the object of study. Campbell and Jamieson assert the danger of such an imposition.

But what, in one instance, is the discovery and description of a structure that reveals motive and symbolic power becomes, when applied as a formula, a Procrustean bed into which social action... is forced. ... discovering a structure is critically significant only when the structure emerges out of the analysis of symbolic action. (1986, p. 295, emphasis added)

The danger which Campbell and Jamieson describe results when critics approach a rhetorical situation with method already in hand and discover precisely what that method ensures they will discover.

A theory-method merger is meant to forego this possibility by encouraging that both theory and method be assimilated to one another and to the critic. As Robert L. Scott (1984) notes, “a person can be more successfully methodical if unaware of methods, for being unaware may be a sign that one’s way of working has become fully assimilated to performance” (p. 89). Black (1978) substantiates this perspective when he writes that “criticism, on the whole, is near the indeterminate, contingent, personal end of the methodological scale” (p. xi). In criticism, consequently, methods must become “an integral part of the critic’s mode of perception,” for if one applies rhetorical methods after the fashion of mathematical formulas, one forecloses on “the possibility of significant disclosure” and “is certain (yes, certain!) to produce work that is sterile” (p. xii). Only when a critic has assimilated rhetorical principles into the very acts of observation does one gain unique insight into discourse. When one’s method becomes the normal activities of reading, hearing, seeing, and experiencing from a theoretically informed perspective, then one is able to gain unique, singular insight into the object of study.

The merger of theory and method described in this section yields several important benefits. First, as Brummett notes, the merger accurately describes the theory-method relationship assumed in contemporary rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism tends to illustrate rather than test theory, and a theory is a method of experiencing rhetorical phenomena. A second benefit emerges from the first: because theory and method are indistinct, the importance of theoretical knowledge is emphasized. Indeed, the definitive characteristic of the rhetorical critic is extensive knowledge of rhetorical theory. Third, the merger encourages the assimilation of theory and method to one another and to the critic. Methods are most helpful when they become part of the critic’s mode of perception. The final and most important benefit results from the fusion of the first three. Because the merger emphasizes both the assimilation of theoretical knowledge and the function of that knowledge in the apprehension of discourse, a critic who appreciates the merger is more likely to produce work that is unique and insightful. The application of predetermined methodological formulas is discouraged. Critical conclusions are appropriate when they emerge from the analysis of discourse, not when they are imposed upon that discourse.

To state these benefits is, in some senses, to bely the purposes of this paper. For if a theory-method merger is so productive why argue for a distinction, even at the pedagogical level? The key is to make a theory-method distinction that maintains the benefits stated above. One can distinguish between theory and method for critical purposes without distinguishing between them in critical acts. Though a finished criticism need not make a theory-method distinction, I argue in the next section that critical activities can be fostered if the distinction is made for pedagogical reasons.
RATIONAL FOR A THEORY-METHOD DISTINCTION

Though the merger of theory and method is informative, some scholars argue that a theory-method distinction would be helpful. Charles Stewart (1973) states, for example, that "too few critical theorists are practitioners of the [critical] art" (p. 21). For Stewart, the articulation of methods in rhetorical criticism has suffered at the expense of theoretical concerns. "Theorists must develop the new emphases or approaches into useable methods," he writes (p. 24), "and must illustrate them for potential critics." Stewart indicates that modern criticism must direct itself toward an articulation of theory and method.4 A theory-method distinction would enhance the development of specific methodological instructions.

Brock and Scott (1980) echo Stewart's sentiment when they note that "rhetorical scholarship has been dominated . . . more by the theoretical than the critical" (p. 470). An ideal emphasis would facilitate an interdependence between theory and criticism. To achieve this interdependence requires that explications of critical methods be taken more seriously. And indeed, Brock and Scott note that Harrell and Linkugel's "On Rhetorical Genre: An Organizing Perspective," presents a methodology which enables rhetorical scholars to "serve a theory building function as well as a critical one" (p. 396). Brock and Scott take theory and method to be interdependent, but they do distinguish between the two. An understanding of method leads one to make theoretical contributions.

Edwin Black, cited earlier for facilitating the merger of theory and method, also makes statements which imply the value of a distinction. Black (1978) attributes the neglect of method statements to the critical notions of rhetoric's classical tradition. Aristotle, Cicero, Sophocles, and others, were concerned primarily with principles to guide the formulation of particular types of discourse, such as tragedy or forensic oratory. They were uninterested in the creation of methods for criticism.

They wrote primarily, not for the critic himself, or for the auditor, but for the artist. One searches the ancient critics in vain for an explanation of critical procedure. . . . Aristotle could define the scope and technique of the deliberative orator, but he did not write on the scope and technique of the critic of deliberative oratory. . . . That criticism itself could become a systematic methodology seems not to have occurred to our early critical precursors. (pp. 2-3)

Black contrasts this perspective with that of the modern critic, who "has assumed the burden . . . of defining and delimiting the nature of his own criticism." Indeed, Black writes that "the labor of the contemporary critic serves both to disclose the enigmas of an artistic product and to sanction, implicitly or overtly, its own methods of disclosure" (p. 2, emphasis added). Theory and method are concerns for the critic, and each deserves attention.

These statements by Stewart, Brock and Scott, and Black indicate that critical endeavors will benefit from increased concern for method. One way to encourage such concern is to suggest a clear distinction between theory and method. The paper's next two sections offer grounds for the distinction and explain how this distinction can maintain the benefits of the theory-method merger discussed in section one.

Grounds for the distinction

To this point I have offered no specific definitions for the terms "theory" and "method." My goal in this section is to advocate general definitions of these two terms which help to distinguish between them in a manner appropriate for rhetorical criticism.
Perhaps the most salient description of rhetorical theory is that it explains human communication in general terms. Campbell (1974) asserts that rhetorical theory is concerned with symbolic processes that "recur in different times, in different places, and in response to different issues" (p. 12), and Brummett (1984) defines theory as "a statement in the abstract" concerning rhetorical discourse (p. 15). Chesebro and Hamsher (1975) echo these sentiments, stating that "a theory ultimately provides a set of general or abstract principles for an art or science" (p. 324). Though a particular theoretical assertion will explain some rhetorical transactions better than others, it always will be a potentially useful construct for rhetorical analysis. Theorists provide summary statements about human communicative behavior that guide research and suggest avenues for criticism.

A method, on the other hand, is the means by which one observes rhetorical theory operating in a particular piece of discourse. Tompkins distinguishes method from the more general rhetorical theory when he asserts that "rhetorical criticism as a methodology" is the application of judgmental standards in order to assess public discourse (1962, p. 90). His concern is with the analysis of specific rhetorical instances. Critics interested in clarifying how they acquire knowledge about a rhetorical transaction will make methodological statements that reveal the focus of the analysis, the relevant "data," and the fashion in which they "transpose and describe" that data (Rosenfield, 1980, p. 158). Hugh Duncan, a sociologist who specialized in Kenneth Burke's critical theory, offers a clear description of a method statement's value.

Methodological propositions are supposed to demonstrate how we know what we say we know. If we say that social relations arise, and continue to exist, in the sociodramas of everyday life, how can we observe these relationships? (1968, p. 151)

A method, then, is a way to detect symbolic actions which are accounted for by theory. Critics, guided by theory, seek insight into a rhetor's discourse. Methods articulate how to pursue that insight. Methods are "ways into" written or spoken language that lead the critic to increased understanding of the discourse.

Several representative essays reveal that some rhetorical critics recognize this distinction between theory and method. Bormann (1972) devotes the first half of his seminal piece on fantasy theme analysis to a discussion of the theoretical basis for fantasy themes. He then spends the article's second portion answering the methodological question, "how might the critic making a fantasy theme analysis proceed" (p. 401)? Harrell and Linkugel's (1978) essay on generic criticism attempts not only to review genre theory, but also "to describe a methodology which can potentially aid in the systematization of research into rhetorical genres" (Brock & Scott, 1980, p. 396). In the realm of neo-Aristotelian criticism, some authors, such as Hendrix (1968), defend and refine the premises of classical theory. Others, such as Hill (1972), engage in methodic criticism of specific events. And the text edited by Stewart, Ochs, and Mohrmann, as noted earlier, contains essays devoted to the exploration of methods. Essays such as these point to the distinction between theory and method highlighted above.

In section one I argued that the merger of theory and method facilitates rhetorical criticism in several specific ways. Critics can be productive, perhaps even most insightful, if methodological statements do not intrude upon their analysis. Thus a lack of method statements is not debilitating to any particular rhetorical criticism.
But even if scholars do not make their methodological choices explicit, they ought to acknowledge and to understand the importance of methods. At least two benefits accrue. First, critics who appreciate methods are more sensitive to the methodological options available to them as they approach any given critical situation. Second, and of most significance, critics who appreciate methods are better able to engage in theory generative criticism. The theory-method distinction articulated above highlights the importance of methods and makes the realization of these benefits more likely. These benefits are negated, however, if concern for methods leads to the formulaic application of critical procedures warned against in section one. Guidelines are needed to explain how one can make a theory-method distinction and maintain the benefits of the theory-method merger discussed in section one.

**Guidelines for the distinction**

The theory-method distinction articulated in this paper is justified primarily by its pedagogical utility. The teacher of rhetorical criticism must train critics capable of informed and insightful analyses of human communication. Toward that end, the teacher’s first task is to ensure that students possess theoretical knowledge. The fledgling rhetorical critic must know what to look for, and that is a decidedly theoretical consideration. Often, however, the introduction to theory is not sufficient to produce able critics. Students still struggle over how to look for the symbolic activities explained by theory. Thus the fledgling critic must be taught how to look, and that is a decidedly methodological consideration. Both theory and method must be taught; both should become part of the critical apparatus.

While those who merge theory and method discount the importance of method statements, the distinction called for in this paper highlights the need for both theoretical and methodological knowledge. But the distinction must not be of the type embraced in the social sciences. The guidelines attendant to this distinction must serve to maintain the benefits of the theory-method merger described earlier: theoretical knowledge must be emphasized, the assimilation of theory and method to one another and to the critic must be emphasized, and the formulaic application of predetermined methodological frameworks must be discouraged.

In this section I discuss three general guidelines appropriate to the theory-method distinction articulated in this paper. First, criticism is the application of a critic’s trained intuition. Second, any method will shape critical findings according to that method’s terminology. And third, methods should not be the focal part of analysis, but should lead to the illumination of discourse. Teachers of criticism who instruct students in the use of specific methods ought also to articulate an orientation toward methods in general which embraces the benefits of a theory-method merger. These three guidelines comprise a suitable “attitude” toward method in rhetorical criticism.

**Criticism is the application of a critic’s trained intuition.** Edwin Black (1980) advocates an “emic” stance toward criticism in which one “approaches a rhetorical transaction in what is hoped to be its own terms, without conscious expectations drawn from any sources other than the rhetorical transaction itself” (p. 332). This position is designed to avoid the imposition of theoretical or methodological terms upon the discourse examined. But a critic need not do away with such terms to accomplish that goal. Michael Leff (1980), in his response to Black’s call for an emic perspective, argues that while “the critic may begin with an attempt to assume the
stance of innocence” and thus approach the situation or discourse on “its own terms,” one nevertheless must recognize that “what critics are trained to look for and what they see interact in creative tension; the two elements blend and separate, progressively changing as altered conceptions of the one reshape the configuration of the other” (pp. 344–345). Every critic comes to the critical act with a repertoire of theoretical and methodological knowledge. While a critic should strive to begin with a sensitive and “innocent” interpretation of the text, one should expect theoretical and methodological choices to stem from that initial encounter. A particular methodological tactic may present itself as appropriate to the trained and sensitive critic who approaches a text open-mindedly. The critic might then utilize that method to gain insight into the discourse.

Leff thus endorses Black’s rejection of formalized methodologies that are systematically applied in criticism. But he does recognize that while an emic approach “does not prescribe the specific steps to be followed in the conduct of inquiry,” neither does it do away with method entirely. Instead the specific methodological steps are left to “the trained intuition of the critic” (p. 349). The critic strives “to appreciate what is uniquely available—what shows itself—in one’s situation and from one’s point of view, and draws upon one or another method to interpret this” (Nothstine, 1988, p. 156). A method is not chosen a priori, but arises from critical interaction with the text. A critic with a large repertoire of methodological (and theoretical) knowledge is most apt to create insightful criticism because that critic has a broadly trained critical “intuition” from which to draw. This guideline encourages critics to assimilate theoretical and methodological knowledge so that it becomes part of their critical apparatus, and it discourages the formulaic application of predetermined methodological frameworks.

Any method’s terminology shapes the critical findings it engenders. Kenneth Burke states that no method “flatly and simply reveals reality” (1969a, p. 313). A method reveals only that which its particular terminology can reveal. Any method is a series of key questions which directs the critic toward insights that are produced as much by the method itself as by what is contained within the discourse. “Every question,” states Burke (1973), “selects a field of battle, and in this selection it forms the nature of the answers” (p. 67). It follows that most insights into discourse “are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made.” Any critical inferences, therefore, “may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms” (1966, p. 46). And a method, for rhetorical critics, is anchored in a choice of terms by which to approach discourse.

Given this principle, states Burke, one ought to devise methods with the widest possible circumference, so that they encompass a broad range of terms and possess a scope substantial enough to incorporate the maximum number of possible explanations for human action. Such methods should allow for a wide range of observations, so that to state, “the observations are implicit in the method’s terminology,” becomes not a criticism, but a compliment.

In accord with this advice, one should heed a most popular Burkean dictum: “The main ideal of criticism, as I conceive it, is to use all that is there to use” (1973, p. 23). Burke (1966, p. 41) states that three primary methodological procedures are available to the critic: one might restrict oneself to the discourse itself; one might emphasize how the discourse relates to the rhetor and the historical circumstances; or one might meet “tests of the first sort [while] also making observations of the second
sort.” Burke, as one might expect, favors the third, more inclusive, methodological principle. He contends “that truly humanistic meditations on a text are possible only if both kinds of analysis are welcomed.” The principle, “use all that is there to use,” emphasizes the concern for a broad-minded, humanistic emphasis. This guideline encourages that theoretical knowledge be emphasized, for even in the choice of methods one looks for those with a circumference substantial enough to allow for a broad range of theoretical explanations. And this guideline, like the first, discourages the formulaic application of a predetermined method. Critics are encouraged to use all of the appropriate knowledge at their disposal.

Methods should lead to the illumination of discourse. Though I argue in this paper for the importance of critical methods, I also recognize their subservient role to illumination and theoretical contribution. The two guidelines discussed thus far indicate that one’s critical method should not be the focal part of one’s analysis. A method, rather, ought to be a means by which one gains insight into the discourse or situation being examined. Brock and Scott (1980) describe this attitude toward methods in rhetorical criticism: The critic ought “to be more interested in the immediacy of experience than the abstract integrity of a system or a method. Such a person will argue that all methods are but more or less complete sets of tools with instructions by which to build scaffoldings and framework. They will argue that when what is made is made, the tools are laid aside, the scaffolding torn down, and the framework absorbed” (p. 138).

Brock and Scott make clear that methods are not the focus of critical activity. Once methodological terms have enabled critics to examine discourse, they should be discarded for more theoretical explanations of the discourse’s nature or function. Leff articulates this same ideal when he writes that “the sensitive critic may vibrate an extrinsic model against the text instead of imposing it on the text” (1980, p. 345). A methodological construct, in other words, ought to be appreciated for what it suggests. It need not be utilized in a manner that predetermines critical findings. This guideline emphasizes theoretical findings, encourages critics to develop a repertoire of theoretical and methodological knowledge, and discourages the use of methods as patterns into which discourse must fit.

These three guidelines comprise an appropriate attitude toward method in rhetorical criticism that is consistent with the theory-method distinction articulated in this paper. The guidelines provide for an orientation which recognizes the distinction described in the previous section, and maintains the benefits attributed to the theory-method merger described in section one. Critics who distinguish between theory and method for pedagogical purposes ought also to make clear to students these guidelines which guard against the inappropriate use of methods. This paper’s final section illustrates the use of methods by providing an example of criticism which draws attention to the methodological choices by which it is performed.

A CRITICAL APPLICATION OF METHODS

One reason for the dearth of method statements in rhetorical criticism is that published essays are predisposed to report not critical activity, but the results of critical activity. This section of the paper illustrates critical activity itself; it focuses upon the use of methods. Theoretical contributions and the illumination of discourse are the goals of rhetorical analysis. Only through methodic treatment of discourse,
however, are these goals realized. The following analysis of Francis Schaeffer’s *A Christian Manifesto* makes explicit those methodic critical choices normally implied within any rhetorical criticism. Rather than emphasizing the theoretical, *what* is discovered, the analysis emphasizes the methodological, *how* it is discovered. My use of derivatives from the term “emphasis” is purposeful and important, for in no way is the theoretical excluded from this analysis. At some points, in fact, the theoretical and methodological aspects of this criticism merge in the very way described in section one. The analysis thus highlights how knowledge of rhetorical methods, in addition to knowledge of rhetorical theory, can inform criticism.

Any critic must provide rationale for his or her study. The object of analysis may be shown to be “significant” or to recur in an important rhetorical situation. To establish this rationale the critic may employ a historical method to document the situation within which the discourse arose. For the present analysis this entails examination of the political context within which the discourse was voiced, and assessment of popular responses to the discourse.

In recent years religious conservatism has provided a basis for renewed political activism from the “Christian right.” The influences of politically active preachers such as Jerry Falwell and James Robison, and religiously oriented movements like the Moral Majority and the Christian Roundtable, have been discussed and analyzed extensively. There is little question that their presence indicates something significant about the nature of American life.

These forces are the outgrowth of an underlying ideology that, according to many, has been best expressed by Francis Schaeffer in his book, *A Christian Manifesto* (1981). Schaeffer wrote and spoke prolifically on religious issues. He published twenty-two books and spoke before various gatherings of conservative politicians and on religious television programs (Woodward, 1982, p. 88). The ideology he articulated is based on the supposition that “Christianity, as seen in terms of the Bible, and as applied to the world around us, is reality. Those who refuse the Christian solution live in conflict with the real world” (Whitehead, 1982, p. 44). In *A Christian Manifesto* Schaeffer states his rationale for this supposition. In doing so, he expresses the substance from which the religious right develops its agenda for addressing political issues. *Newsweek* emphasizes that Schaeffer’s work “reveals more about the emotional underpinnings of the modern fundamentalist movement than do any of the more polished position papers of the new religious right,” and that “it provides an intellectual underpinning to one of the most powerful social forces at work in America today” (Woodward, 1982, p. 88). Cal Thomas, former spokesperson for the Moral Majority, calls the book “a battle plan for the rest of the century” (p. 88). The significance of Schaeffer’s work is evident. *A Christian Manifesto* is invoked by the leadership of the religious right, it has political implications, and it suggests a value system for the American people.

Schaeffer describes the situation to which he responds in more specific terms. He argues that the Constitution’s creators based the United States’ government upon the Biblical concept of Christian absolutes, and that recent developments have resulted in the replacement of that base with a preference for the “arbitrary” administration of law.

As the new sociological law has moved away from the original base of the Creator giving the “inalienable rights,” etc., it has been natural that this sociological law has then also moved away from the Constitution. (1981, p. 42)
This, seemingly, is Schaeffer's burden. To combat this development he offers *A Christian Manifesto*. He proposes, in sum, that people should act to reinstitute the Fundamentalist Christian system of absolutes as the foundation for government. This, he says, would result in the "proper" balance between social order and civil rights. Schaeffer observes that those who originally instituted the "democratic" form of government "knew they were building on the Supreme Being who was the Creator" (p. 33). To base government on Fundamentalist absolutes, therefore, did, and will, result in the desired balance between order and rights. If a "humanistic" world view is embraced, society will drift toward authoritarianism. A critic seeking insight into the motives offered by the religious right would do well to examine this text. Indeed, the dictionary definition of manifesto is, "a public declaration of intentions, motives, or views" (Webster's, 1981, p. 693, emphasis added).

This "general" evidence provides a variety of rationales and clues for rhetorical criticism. The critic has examined how the discourse relates to historical circumstances and now may turn to the discourse's specific terminology. One approaches the text with a knowledge of various theoretical and methodological propositions. Which propositions will be most helpful remains to be seen, but the prepared critic begins the analysis with knowledge of a wide variety of rhetorical principles.

One interested in the attribution of motive is wise to employ the theoretical and methodological contributions of Kenneth Burke. Burke's pentad is a primary tool for attributing motive. For one who views Schaeffer's text as a statement of motive, this is a reasonable choice of method. The critic will ascertain how the pentadic terms can inform the analysis.

A critic using the pentad attempts to uncover the motive or ratio of motives predominant in a discourse. To do so, he or she looks for words, images, or other clues which indicate that a particular pentadic term is featured. To locate the featured term one examines the text systematically: the critic underlines recurring terms and images, and notes equations among them. By this method the critic seeks the work's key terms, which may be emphasized by frequency of occurrence, intensity, punctuation, italics, or other means. This activity reveals that the most common term in *A Christian Manifesto* is "reality." In the first fifteen pages alone, the term is employed twenty-four times. This emphasis, combined with Schaeffer's religious nature, indicates a possible *purpose* orientation.

For Burke this orientation corresponds to philosophic mysticism. He notes that "mystical philosophies appear as a general social manifestation in times of great skepticism or confusion about the nature of human purpose," and that the "unity of the individual with some cosmic or universal purpose is the mark of mysticism" (1969a, p. 288). A critic, therefore, might be especially aware of a purpose motive during times of social upheaval, when people seek direction. An emphasis upon terms such as "the divine essence," "the creative source," and the "Being of beings" indicates the featuring of purpose as a motive (p. 287). One might also find purpose "lurking behind concepts of 'Totality' or 'allness'" (p. 297). Burke thus gives methodological advice. He tells the critic how to look for a mystical orientation which features the pentadic term "purpose." A critic who follows Burke's advice finds Schaeffer's discourse to exhibit all of these characteristics.

Certainly Schaeffer's book was written at a time of perceived crisis in order to direct people to proper attitudes and actions. The book is premised upon the conviction that law and government "have become the means of licensing moral
perversions” and that “education has become the enemy of religious truth and values” (p. i). To counter this critical state of affairs Christians must “resist the state” through “legal and political action” and through “massive demonstrations of civil disobedience” (p. i).

And Schaeffer features terms of purpose. He states, for example, “that true spirituality . .. covers all parts of the spectrum of life equally . .. there is nothing concerning reality that is not spiritual” (1981, p. 19). Schaeffer identifies himself with this “true spirituality” and, even more specifically with its source, “the final reality” (p. 28), the God of Fundamentalist Christianity.

When I say Christianity is true I mean it is true to total reality—the total of what is, beginning with the central reality, the objective existence of the personal-infinite God. Christianity is not just a series of truths[,] but Truth—Truth about all of reality. (p. 20)

Those who reject Schaeffer’s view “do not know the truth of the final reality” (p. 25), and have “moved away from the original base of the Creator” (p. 42). This language indicates that Schaeffer believes he has found “the truth” and that he must clearly distinguish that truth from illusion. Schaeffer thus implies that he is able to comprehend absolute Truth and communicate it to others—an act grounded in mysticism. His choice of terms confirms mysticism’s predominance as a motive for action.

When one finds purpose emphasized, states Burke (1969a, p. 309), one also is likely to discover “an overly pointed consideration of all policies in terms of means and ends alone.” Agency, which is related to philosophical pragmatism, becomes a preponderant motive to the de-emphasis of act, agent, and scene. The mystical concern is formed by those means needed to accomplish one’s purposes. So to identify an emphasis upon agency one looks for terms which signify an instrumental function and treat actions as a means to something else. The critic does indeed find this emphasis in A Christian Manifesto.

Schaeffer’s primary interest is in the establishment of government and law that will accomplish his purpose. He defines government as a “vessel” for change. He states that “as Christian citizens . .. we must try to roll back the other total entity” (p. 74). This will entail supporting human life amendments, seeking to overturn the Supreme Court’s abortion decision, and advocating the inclusion of creationism in public school curricula (pp. 111, 118). These activities identify the means, or agencies, by which the Christian world view can be established as a basis for government. Schaeffer features the agency motive only in relation to his grand purpose (pp. 103-116). Agency is to purpose as Schaeffer’s suggested means are to his ends.

From the critic’s statistical analysis of the text, a purpose-agency ratio of motives has been discerned. But these methodological terms do not constitute the critical illumination. One can now rely on this ratio for insight into the presumptions of Schaeffer’s language.

According to Burke, the purpose-agency ratio is unhealthy, for it reduces human action to motion.

Agencies being related to purposes somewhat as motion is related to action, a statement when confined to terms of means and end eliminates “act” as a special locus of motives by treating the act simply as means to an end. In a dramatistic perspective, where the connotations of “to act” strategically overlap upon the connotations of “to be,” action is not merely a means of doing but a way of being. And a way of being is substantial, not instrumental. (1969a, p. 310)
When any human choice is emphasized merely as means, the kind of choice entailed becomes less important than its effectiveness. If the advice of Schaeffer’s purpose-agency motive is observed, one chooses not out of concern for who one is, for one’s “way of being,” but for expediency. Thus, while Schaeffer consistently invokes his knowledge of “who man is” as foundational for the world view he advocates, the alignment of motives implicit in his discourse contradicts this explicit acknowledgment of “true human nature” as the basis for action.

A number of methodological choices have been enacted thus far. An understanding of Schaeffer’s world view has been gained through pentadic criticism. Motive and other considerations have been employed to explain the critical yields. But the discourse also exhibits particular strategies. Indeed, the method of equational analysis which revealed a purpose-agency emphasis, also reveals Schaeffer’s rhetorical tactics. Burke (1973) argues that a critic concerned with how a rhetor is using words can acquire insight into strategies by examining “the company” particular words keep (p. 35). Analysis of a term’s contexts and its conjunctions with other terms can reveal the protagonists and antagonists in a particular discourse.

Equational clusters clearly reveal the dramatic alignments within Schaeffer’s work. The critic who, informed by Burke, looks for “what is with what” consistently finds the author’s Christian world view equated with “truth” and stability. Humanism, however, is equated with illusion, untruth, and instability. Two sets of terms symbolize these respective viewpoints. Christianity is commonly equated with “foundation” or “base.” Schaeffer spends an entire chapter detailing the Christian “Foundations for Faith and Freedom” (pp. 31–40, emphasis added). The United States was “born out of the Judeo-Christian base” (p. 55). This world view was also the “base” for the French Revolution (p. 37), and is still the only adequate “base for law” (p. 28), and the only suitable “basis of the government” (p. 32). A base is something sure, a capable support system upon which one confidently may build. Schaeffer clearly sees Christianity as the only acceptable societal base.

Humanism, because it has “no fixed base” (p. 41), is equated with the terms “chance” and “arbitrary.” It is a “chance concept,” or a “chance world view” (pp. 44,73) that has “arbitrarily” supplanted the Judeo-Christian base (p. 44). Decisions based on Humanism are arbitrary. What Humanists “arbitrarily decide becomes law” (p. 41). The Supreme Court “arbitrarily ruled that abortion was legal” (p. 49). This “arbitrary law,” as a product of chance, “produces chaos” (p. 136). The unsure, unstable connotations of these terms characterize Humanism.

The critic looking for “what is against what” finds these concepts of Christianity and Humanism pitted in agonistic competition. This alignment is signified largely by the term “total.” A critic who isolates this recurring term finds the following. A “total distinction” exists between these two world views (p. 22). They are “totally different concepts” that lead to “totally different conclusions” (p. 20). In sum, “it is one total entity opposed to the other total entity... And our view of final reality... will determine our position on every crucial issue we face” (p. 51). The Christian and Humanist world views “stand as totals in complete antithesis to each other” (p. 18). And while Christianity is “Truth about all of reality [that] brings forth not only certain personal results, but also governmental and legal results” (p. 20, emphasis added), Humanism is a false description of “who Man is” and its adherents “do not know the truth of the final reality.” They therefore “have no sufficient base for either society or law” (pp. 25–26). Schaeffer’s tactic is to set good against evil, truth against falsehood. America’s “Christian” foundation led to a social structure which protected
the “balance” between order and rights. The shift to a “Humanistic” world view “forced” society to impose “arbitrary” law, and is resulting in authoritarianism. Because only these two perspectives are available, and because they lead “invariably” to dichotomous results, Christian suppositions must be reinstated as the basis for government in order to avoid authoritarian rule (pp. 134–136).

The methodological tactics employed thus far have provided some clear critical yields, but the critic need not stop here. Burke (1969b) offers another method for analyzing “principles in opposition” that instructs one to observe positive, dialectical, and ultimate terms. Positive terms name things which have “a visible, tangible existence” and “can be located in time and place” (p. 183). . . . Dialectical terms “refer to ideas rather than to things” (p. 185). They define positions and place competing principles in opposition. Terms of the ultimate order place these opposing principles in a hierarchy that transcends the dialectic competition. Ultimate terms develop a “‘guiding idea’ or ‘unitary principle’ behind the diversity of voices” (p. 187). Burke provides clear methodological advice concerning how to observe positive, dialectical, and ultimate terms in public discourse. The critic can better understand the substance of Schaeffer’s position by isolating his use of these terms. One might initially presume his rhetorical operation to be fully on the dialectical level. He deals with principles of truth and falsity. Closer inspection reveals otherwise.

Schaeffer regards Christianity and Humanism as antithetical totalities. These central terms endorse clear opposites and belong in a dialectical competition. Though Schaeffer’s discussion establishes this competition, the terms are infused with the characteristics of the positive order. The “Truth” is “certain,” as is human nature, or “who man is.” Those who disagree with Schaeffer simply “do not know the truth.” Schaeffer’s definitive statements treat dialectical terms as though they were positive. They treat concepts of philosophical and theological truth with as much certainty as one might identify a chair. Consequently, Schaeffer is unable to move to an ultimate level of argument through which the dialectical competition between Christianity and Humanism might be transcended. Because he assumes that “total reality” is positively evident, he precludes the possibility of an ultimate transcendence.

A further example helps illumine Schaeffer’s rhetorical quandry. In accounting for the shift from an absolutist to a humanistic world view, Schaeffer makes the following statement.

This shift was based on no addition to the facts known. It was a choice, in faith, to see things that way. No clearer expression of this could be given than Carl Sagan’s arrogant statement on public television—made without any scientific proof for the statement—to 140 million viewers: “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” He opened the series, “Cosmos,” with this essentially creedoal declaration and went on to build every subsequent conclusion upon it. (1981, p. 44)

Schaeffer seemingly fails to recognize that this is exactly the same type of claim he makes about the Christian world view. Though he asserts that “true, absolute reality” transcends the humanistic position exemplified by Sagan, they remain in dialectic tension. Movement to the ultimate order of resolution has not and cannot occur.

The methodological choice to locate equational clusters, and positive, dialectical and ultimate terms results in a deeper understanding of Schaeffer’s rhetorical strategy. These tools supplement the pentadic method, and together they help the critic to apprehend the discourse. In section two of this paper I argued that a method is a way to detect symbolic actions which are accounted for by theory. An intimate
relationship between theory and method clearly exists. While the foregoing analysis utilizes terms and concepts which some may consider theoretical, my analytical emphasis is on how to identify the strategies, values, and implications of the discourse. That emphasis is methodological. The method terms can be discarded from a critical explanation of the book. They are how one gains insight, they do not constitute the insight itself.

Thus: A Christian Manifesto illustrates some of the dangers inherent in the dichotomous rhetoric of some sects of the religious right. Though Schaeffer's book teaches the value of respect for persons and emphasizes the egalitarian nature of humanity, it is predicated on the conception that one certain truth exists and only those who are obedient to it will find salvation. Schaeffer fails to recognize the centrality of symbolism in the development of one's understanding of God, or Truth. Consequently, the ground of existence is embraced dogmatically and those who act contrarily to it are just as dogmatically ostracized. Explicitly, A Christian Manifesto attests that human dignity is imperative; implicitly, it focuses not upon who we are, but upon whether or not our actions are consistent with a particular world view.

CONCLUSION

My point in the above illustration of critical methodology is not to say anything new about Kenneth Burke's methods of criticism, but to show how those methods, or any methods, can be explained and illustrated within criticism. I do not mean to imply, further, that all critical essays should provide this kind of illustration. The rationale for explicating methodological maneuvers is pedagogical, and as I argued earlier, one can distinguish between theory and method for pedagogical reasons without making that distinction in specific acts of criticism. My critical example, finally, should not be read to imply that any critic using the same methods I employed would reach the same conclusions. The theory-method distinction I suggest in this paper is meant to enhance creativity and insight by providing critics with a broader repertoire of methodological options. The distinction is not meant to encourage the standardization and replicability associated with social scientific methodology.

This paper suggests pedagogical justification for a theory-method distinction in rhetorical criticism. The paper offers grounds and guidelines for this distinction, and argues that the distinction can inform both theory and criticism. The distinction is shown to maintain those benefits accrued by contemporary scholars who articulate a theory-method merger. Finally, through an analysis of Francis Schaeffer's A Christian Manifesto, the paper provides illustration of how a theory-method distinction can benefit rhetorical criticism. The most able rhetorical critics will be those who have at their disposal the broadest range of critical choices. A thorough knowledge of rhetorical theory is most essential. Recognition of methodological options, nevertheless, will provide critics a wider assortment of tools with which to ply their craft.

NOTES

1 Charles J. Stewart's historical survey of rhetorical criticism makes clear that early studies were concerned with the explication of those persuasive effects associated with "single, great speakers of the past" (1973, pp. 1-31). Stephen E. Lucas (1981) also notes that contemporary distinctions between rhetorical history and rhetorical criticism "tend to be based more on what rhetorical analysts look at than on how they look at it" (p. 5). My goal in this paper is to articulate a theory-method distinction which preserves the focus on theoretical illumination.

2 The first position is most clearly articulated by Barry Brummett (1984, pp. 97-107). Perhaps the best proponents of the second viewpoint are Roderick P. Hart (1976), who states (p. 72) that as critics we should "refine our
analytical tools so that others ... can share in the 'how' as well as the 'what' of our researches”; and John Waite Bowers (1968) who suggests “that rhetorical criticism be viewed as an early part of a process eventuating in scientific theory” (p. 127).

3Brummett (1984, p. 98) notes that articles in the social sciences typically contain separate sections on theory and method. Rarely does this occur in rhetorical criticism. Rationale and justification for this theory-method merger are found in other sources as well. Stephen E. Lucas’ insightful analysis of “The Schism in Rhetorical Scholarship” includes the observation that rhetorical critics reject “the uniform application of predetermined formulas,” and, indeed, are so deeply committed to critical pluralism that they “eschew even the term 'method,' preferring instead to talk of critical 'orientations,' 'approaches,' and 'perspectives' ” (1981, p. 16). Black (1978) writes that “it is neither possible nor desirable for criticism to be fixed into a system, for critical techniques to be objectified, for critics to be interchangeable for purposes of replication, or for rhetorical criticism to serve as the handmaiden of quasi-scientific theory” (p. xi). To force these characteristics upon rhetorical criticism would be to import into rhetoric a theory-method distinction of the kind found in the social and behavioral sciences. Indeed, Klumpp and Hillihan (1989, p. 92) argue that the “dominant” image of the rhetorical critic as an objective observer springs from the assumed connection between critical methods and social science methods.

4Stewart, Ochs, and Mohrman’s book (1973) does articulate and apply methods. But since that publication relatively few studies have appeared which aim explicitly to show new critics how to engage in critical acts. Brock and Scott’s text (1980) identifies the philosophical tenets of various approaches and provides an illustrative anthology of articles, but it gives few methodological hints to new critics. Foss’s newly published text (1989) contains a chapter on “Doing Rhetorical Criticism” and explains specific procedures for the application of eight different methods, but this laudable focus is relatively rare.

5Burke himself articulates this same theory-method distinction: “Implicit in a perspective there are two kinds of questions: (1) what to look for, and why; (2) how, when, and where to look for it. The first could be called ontological [or theoretical] questions; the second methodological” (1973, p. 68).

6For discussion of how the religious right’s variety of forces influenced American life and politics around the time Schaeffer’s book was published, see Ellerin and Kesten (1981), Fairlie (1980), Lipset and Rabb (1981), and Wall (1980).

7Burke explains the pentad and its application in A Grammar of Motives (1969a). The pentad’s familiarity to students of rhetoric makes it a useful example in the context of this paper.

REFERENCES


