In his 1971 presidential address to the Speech Communication Association, Carroll Arnold urged his audience to "beg, borrow, or steal" the soon-to-be-released Official Report of 1970's National Developmental Project on Rhetoric (Rhetoric Project):!

Read it with care and meditate upon it with an active and open mind. I think you will find it the abstract of a manifesto for a new humanism in the study and teaching of communication. ... You will be shaken, and you will be rewarded. ... And you will seek with me for the learning, the erudition, in our professions to master the meaning of such a declaration and to begin in the 1970s to fulfill its promise (Arnold 1971, 8-9).

The official report of the Rhetoric Project is noteworthy because it articulates the conferees' answer to the basic question that exercised them: "What conception of rhetoric is needed in our time?" (Bitzer and Black, 238). The conclusions of the Rhetoric Project are instructive: "Our recognition of the scope of rhetorical theory and practice should be greatly widened" ... "A clarified and expanded concept of reason and rational decision must be worked out" ... "Rhetorical invention should be restored to a position of centrality in theory and practice" (Bitzer and Black, 238-9). These themes constitute, not answers to a basic question, but a "manifesto" for the restoration of rhetorical invention to architectonic status.

The task of subsequent scholarship that aims to conceptualize rhetorical invention as an architectonic art is, generally speaking, to underscore the limitations of formal logic and then argue that rhetoric fills some lacunae or another (thereby challenging the hegemony of hypothetico-deductivism). While such scholarship does help widen the scope of rhetoric, fundamental questions regarding the function of rhetorical invention require increased attention.

In classical rhetorical theories, invention was viewed primarily as a heuristic method which guides the analysis of situations, the discovery of issues, and composition of lines of argument. Yet, according to the conferees of the Rhetoric Project, "This branch of rhetoric has been largely neglected since the eighteenth century when theorists influenced by revolutions in science and philosophy dismissed inventio as trivial on the assumption that a single methodology — namely the new science — should be used by sensible people in all kinds of investigations and deliberations" (Bitzer and Black, 239). The Rhetoric Project concluded that the resolution of complex (modern) problems requires the application of rhetorical methods but
that, due to the neglect cited above, knowledge of those rhetorical methods most suited to resolution of tough moral problems was largely lost. Hence, they resolved to expose the limitations of deductivism and revive knowledge of the functions and practical utility of rhetorical invention. The quarter-century mark seems an appropriate time to assess the state of that restorative work. By what method ought one assay the progress of a revolution?

One could, of course, conduct an exhaustive genealogical survey of the works of the alumni of the Rhetoric Project and their intellectual heirs. Perhaps a more circumspect approach to the objective would be to review surveys and collections of essays by and about alumni of those magical Wingspread sessions and the movements they initiated: Robert L. Scott (rhetoric-as-epistemic); Herbert W. Simons (rhetoric of science/inquiry); Wayne Booth, Richard McKeon and E.P.J. Corbett (composition rhetoric); and Chaim Perelman, Henry Johnstone, Jr. and Wayne Brockriede (argumentation). Each of these movements will be discussed briefly, with an eye toward assessing their contributions to realizing theme #4 of the Rhetoric Project, which reads: "Rhetorical invention should be restored to a position of centrality in theory and practice" (Bitzer and Black, 239). A decade ago Jean Dietz Moss noted that the practical aim of theme #4 has not had as enthusiastic a revival as has the theoretical aim (Rhetoric and Praxis, 10). The genealogical survey of literature confirms Moss' observation; it is followed by another sketch of literature designed to establish the need for my proposal to achieve the practical aim of theme #4. If we fail to render accessible knowledge of the functions and practical utility of rhetorical invention to those practitioners who are most in need of it, then our restorative efforts will stall.

A Select Genealogy of Scholarship Spawned by 1970's Rhetoric Project

Robert L. Scott actually initiated the so-called rhetoric-as-epistemic movement three years prior to the Wingspread Conference with the publication of his essay "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic" (1967). Scott there argues that rhetoric is deprived of its due stature when viewed as a means of transmitting established knowledge only; that invention is also a way of generating truth. The rhetoric-as-epistemic movement gained momentum after 1970, almost as if in response to Scott's prophecy that, "With The Prospect of Rhetoric before us, questions of definition will be redoubled" (1973, 81). Definitions are the common coin of rhetorical epistemologists.

Leff (1978), Warnick (1983) and Brummett (1990) all conclude that rhetorical epistemologists demonstrate a preoccupation with challenging the hegemony in academic discourse of deductivism. Such a preoccupation is productive of critical lines of inquiry regarding the scope of rhetorical invention and establishes key definitions and matters epistemological. These are all issues that must be settled in order to give the discipline theoretical elegance, but what of practice? That currency is worthless that provides no cash value in "real terms." Brummett posits that the movement "perished from starvation, as academic warriors endlessly sharpened spears and arrows and complained about each other's weapons, while hardly anybody actually left the cave to slay and roast a real discourse" (1990, 71). Rhetoric will not be restored to a position of centrality in both theory and practice until its practical utility is established beyond the cave. If rhetoric is utterly academicized it will eventually be trivialized, then marginalized. The rhetoric of inquiry and science are similarly motivated to challenge the hegemony of deductivism, but they respond to the felt need to "slay and roast" real discourse.

The rhetoric of science (or rhetoric of inquiry movement as it is now called,) traces its roots to the University of Iowa Humanities Symposium on the Rhetoric of the Human Sciences (1984) and another such session, held two years later, at Temple University under the direction of Herbert W. Simons (also an alumnus of the 1970 Rhetoric Project). Scholarship in the rhetoric of inquiry has a twofold emphasis: First, to challenge the hegemony of rationalistic paradigms in the arts and sciences by, second, demonstrating the value of applying rhetorical analysis to scholarly and professional texts not traditionally treated rhetorically. The aim of the rhetoric of inquiry movement is: (a) to treat rhetorically academic discourse in order to demonstrate the heuristic value of rhetorical doctrine, and (b) to expose the relativity inherent in a variety of academic fields in order to challenge the hegemony in acrme of empirical and rationalistic methods of reason. Proceedings from the two conferences mentioned above, Nelson, et al (1985, 65-73) and Simons (1990) suggest a preoccupation with criticism. Criticism is a necessary and fruitful enterprise; but it is, after all, an exclusively academic
enterprise. That is, criticism serves to expand the theoretical scope of, rather than delineate practical applications for, rhetorical inquiry; it may illuminate practice, but its primary aim is contemplation, not action. Not so the aim of the composition rhetoric movement.

Leff (1978) applauds composition rhetoricians for their emphasis on practical outcomes with the “pure abstraction” of the rhetoric-as-epistemic movement. “Almost everyone in the discipline,” says Leff, “centers his inquiry on the problem of how to teach students to write good English prose,” and, consequently, rhetoric of composition has an outlet for practically applying their rhetorical speculations (Leff 1978, 90).

The composition rhetoric movement consciously traces its own heritage back to the Rhetoric Project. Jean Dietz Moss posits that “Two of the final recommendations of the Rhetoric Project—Wingspread Conference—might be regarded as the mandate for the essays in this volume, for they furnished the inspiration for the aims of the Conference on Classical Rhetoric and the Teaching of Freshman Composition” in 1983 (Rhetoric and Praxis, 9). The overriding concern of the composition rhetoric movement is with teaching composition; it is first and foremost a pedagogical movement.

Moss (1986) and Lunsford, et al., (1989) edited the proceedings of two important gatherings of composition rhetoricians; both reflect that preoccupation with pedagogy. The editors’ introduction to the latter, for example, states that the writers of those essays “make explicit how a reconceived doctoral program can deal with questions of the canon and of pedagogy and how PhDs trained in such programs will be able, as teachers and scholars, to integrate the study of texts and the composing of texts” (emphasis mine, xii).

E. P. J. Corbett’s essay in Rhetoric and Praxis (Moss, 43-57) details how composition teachers could use classical topics heuristically to improve compositions. A number of others, Covino (1988), LeFevre (1987), Sloane (1989) discuss classical topical heuristics in composition, but emphasize topics as promptuary that guide techne. Covino’s discussion of Vico paints a picture of rhetorical invention as a habit of moral inquiry, but, he uses very broad strokes and, on balance, praxis becomes synonymous with techne. Doug Brent (1992) is a notable exception to the rule because, insofar as his heuristic aims to improve research-based writing, he emphasizes the discovery aspect of rhetorical invention (critical reading) over techne (writing). Composition rhetoricians, then, have found outlets for practical application of their rhetorical theorizing, for the most part, but their project lacks the compass required of a major restorative effort.

Argumentation studies presuppose a broader view of praxis in a variety of contexts (Trapp and Schuetz, 1990). One interesting essay in argumentation even studies the function of Chaim Perelman’s taxonomy of argument schemes in actual ethical discourse (Warnick and Kline, 1992). However, given present concerns, our focus should be maintained on inquiry rather than argumentation. Therefore, although argumentation is a significant line of inquiry rooted deeply in the work of some of the most reknown participants in the Rhetoric Project (Perelman, Toulmin and Wayne Brockreide,) it will not receive further attention for reasons that will be made clear in a moment.

This brief genealogy suggests that the emergent themes of the 1970 Rhetoric Project have indeed mobilized scholars in rhetorical studies toward the common purpose of conceptualizing an architectonic art of rhetorical invention. Despite such singularity of purpose, we have yet to fully demonstrate and exploit its practical utility. In order to do so we must articulate and advance a stabilized conception of rhetorical invention. The following movement will establish the need for such a conception. Having done so, I will elucidate and justify the particular conception of rhetorical invention that I believe will benefit most our restorative efforts.

On the Need for a Stabilized Conception of Rhetorical Reason

The editors’ introduction to The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences illustrates how scholarship on the logic of inquiry turned toward the rhetoric of inquiry as interest in ordinary argumentation began to grow. “The catalysts were two books published in 1958, The New Rhetoric by Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, and The Uses of Argument by Stephen Toulmin” (Rhetoric of Human Sciences, 11). (The combined influence of these two books, along with E.P.J. Corbett’s text, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, generated the initial push for the Wingspread gatherings.) Toulmin’s Uses of Argument develops what he calls “working logic”, and his construct is nowhere explicitly associated with rhetoric. However, rhetoricians identified with Toulmin’s struggle to reconcile ordinary argumentative practices with pedagogy in formal logic. Chaim Perelman similarly defends informal
reasoning, but his program is influenced more directly by rhetorical theory than is Toulmin’s. Perelman distinguishes between the rational (hypothetico-deductive or formal logic) and the reasonable (ordinary logic which operates with respect to particular individuals and circumstances). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s work clearly establishes the realm of rhetoric, and their taxonomy of loci is heuristically fruitful to be sure, but, they (like Toulmin) nowhere elucidate the method of informal reasoning qua method. So, while Toulmin and Perelman helped revive the study of informal argument at mid-century, others have since helped inquiry into informal argument take a more complete “rhetorical turn.” Wayne Booth operates foursquare within the rhetorical tradition.

Professor Booth, for example, in The Vocation of a Teacher, develops matrices within which to examine various facets of rhetoric; rhetoric as a mode of shared practical inquiry (which emphasizes discovery), rhetoric as a mode of shared academic inquiry (which provides for verification of professional ethos) and so on. Booth calls these in various essays, “Rhetorics A, B, and C,” or “1, 2 and 3”. Booth’s conception of “rhetoric-B” is of especial interest for the manner in which it underscores how shared inquiry is informed by classical rhetoric. By means of Rhetoric-B “we seek to discover the topics, the topoi, the places or locations on which, or in which, a shared inquiry can take place” (1988, 108). Shared inquiry is “the art of reasoning together about shared concerns” (1988, 108). It is the sort of rhetoric “used by all disciplines, except insofar as those disciplines have available apodeictic proofs, what we call “demonstrative” or “scientific” proofs. Rhetoric in this view is not a dressing added to the case to make it persuasive; the rhetorician discovers the case itself, using the art of rhetoric as an art of discovery” (1988, 110). This is the conception of rhetorical invention that will be received, even applauded, by those who must make tough choices in an increasingly complex world.

By locating topical discovery at the heart of moral inquiry Booth makes a singular contribution. He makes one aware that, in shared moral inquiry, the judgment is discursively negotiated with reference to the crux of the case. When medical practitioners, for instance, engage in dialogue regarding the right thing to do in a tough case they employ rhetoric-B. Rhetoric-B is indeed “a marvel and a wonder” and it is surely “the very lifeblood of [medical practitioners’] daily lives together (Booth 1988, 110-11). Booth’s work is valuable for the way it emphasizes inquiry and because he suggests how the excellence of rhetorical invention is fully realized, not in the individual mind, but in its discursive or communal function. However, one is left to work out for oneself precisely how rhetoric-B is “marvelous” and precisely why it is so “wonderful.” In other words, elucidation of systematic methodologies is left to other scholars; scholars like Wendy Raudenbush-Olmsted.

Olmsted (1991) views rhetoric as an art of reasoning which, “adapts rules to the particularities of situation and action. Rhetoric uses ambiguous or relatively indeterminate terms, arguments and figures to discover and organize considerations for the sake of judging particularities” (21). Olmsted contributes to mastery of the subtleties of rhetorical invention by emphasizing particularity and indeterminacy. However, Olmsted’s primary objective is to critique deconstructionism, consequently, the method by which rhetoric discovers and organizes particularities never warrants her direct attention. Olmsted alludes to the importance of rhetorical invention without describing its nature or its operations. On the other hand, Lawrence Prelli and Carolyn R. Miller both make this their focus when they use classical rhetorical doctrine to depict rhetoric as a method of inquiry.

For Prelli (1989) “rhetorical logic” is exemplified by Cicero’s topical method of inventing persuasive discourse, or, “a methodical search for sayables.” Prelli conducts a fetching examination of Cicero’s doctrine of topical invention in order to develop a construct by which academics may engage in fruitful rhetorical inquiry (a “search for sayables”). I wish to delineate between that and another approach, one that emphasizes discovery as a methodical search for reasonable grounds for rendering particular judgments (the aim of which is action). Prelli’s interest in finding contemporary uses for Ciceronian topical invention and stasis theory parallels Carolyn R. Miller’s.

Miller wishes to enhance the practice of shared decision making by urging that it be understood as an art rather than a science. Miller develops her argument vis à vis Herbert A. Simon’s “decision science.” Simon’s is a social-scientific approach to decision-making that is, in a nutshell, deemed scientific by virtue of its attempt to quantify (via a utilitarian mechanism) participants’ preferences to a range of alternatives which, in turn, are ranked, ordered and evaluated. “Techniques such as linear programming and mathematical modeling are used to establish the probabilities of consequences, and economic expected utility theory is used to
establish the preferences of decision makers for those consequences" (The Rhetorical Turn 1990, 164). Miller argues that decision science violates the very nature of deliberation in contingent matters by assuming more certainty than the nature of the subject admits, and she shows how a rhetorical approach to deliberation approaches contingent questions with the degree of indeterminacy proper to such questions. Miller even lists some of the components of what she calls “rhetorical rationality” (stasis, pathos, enthymeme, etc.) but never elucidates them by explaining how they work in the practice of inquiry, opting rather to conduct an epistemological inquiry.7 She identifies the parts of rhetorical rationality, but, rather than turning to examine the method by which those parts combine to guide shared inquiry, Miller turns to challenge the hegemony of demonstrative reasoning.

This second swipe at the literature shows that there exists a consensus regarding the need for reviving and legitimating classical rhetorical modes of inquiry, but that, though the scope of a mode of rhetorical inquiry may be relatively secure, there is little consensus about what to call it or, more importantly, how it functions. In other words, we have made progress on the theoretical front, but in order to complete the task begun in 1970, rhetoricians need to focus on two particular aims: (1) to stabilize our conception of the method of rhetorical reason, and (2) demonstrate its utility as a guide in shared moral inquiry. Some scholars have gone so far as to identify key elements in the process of rhetorical inquiry, they have initiated a “grammar of rhetorical reasoning” as it were, but only these are only preliminary steps on the road to restoring rhetorical invention to a place of centrality in practice. We must agree, first, on what to call it, second on how it works, and third, we must make it accessible to practitioners.

An Immodest Proposal

First, what to call it? As mentioned above, Miller calls it “rhetorical rationality,” for Lawrence Prelli it is analogous to topical logic. Additionally, for Walter Jost (1989) it is synonymous with informal reasoning, for Chaim Perelman (1970 & 1979) it is none other than reasoning itself (as opposed to the rational). I propose that, following Perelman and others, the term “rhetorical reason” be used uniformly (in lieu of various ascriptions: “rhetorical logic,” “informal inference,” and the like) to signify the faculty of discovering the crux of the matter in hard cases, endemic to rhetoric but prior to argumentation, which serves as a guide to shared moral inquiry.

Cicero underscores how, before one “turns to the topics,” one must study the case in order to discover the issues at stake.8 On Aristotle’s view, as well, the work of rhetoric:

[1]s “to discover [theoréin] the available means of persuasion” (1.1.1355p25-6). It is thus a theoretical activity and discovers knowledge. This knowledge, which includes words, arguments, and topics, is then used by the orator as the material cause of a speech. There is thus a theoretical art of rhetoric standing behind or above the productive art of speech-making (emphasis mine)(Kennedy 1980, 63).

The theoretical art of rhetoric propadeutic to the art of speech-making is a faculty (dunamis) of discovery (theoréin) which identifies the heart of the case. The discovery element of rhetorical invention is cognitively prior to the techne of rhetoric because the best lines of argument are those which address most fully the issues at the heart of the case.

Now this distinction is admittedly artificial; of course discovery and argumentation are simultaneous mental operations. However, it is an important distinction to maintain for the sake of both analysis and pedagogy. Maintaining that distinction makes it possible to isolate the method of an elusive reasoning process and stabilizing the method of rhetorical reason is a vital antecedent to its restoration in practice. Isolating and stabilizing the method of rhetorical reason will render it accessible and also practically useful in ways that academized treatments of the subject will not. That is so because the faculty of discovery endemic to rhetorical invention serves as a useful guide to the resolution of hard cases; it has broad, practical utility where weighty questions are at issue and, ironically, where that issue at stake is unclear. As we say in South Dakota, we rhetoricians can theorize about rhetorical logic or rationality or reasoning “til the cows come home” and never achieve the aim set out for us 25 years ago.

The more technology progresses, the more practitioners must daily confront dilemmas that do not admit of demonstrative proof. Repugnant though it be to those of us who celebrate ambiguity and plurality, an accessible conception of shared moral inquiry will be well received.
Practitioners cannot afford to celebrate ambiguity. To practice one’s art in good faith presupposes that, “although the contingencies of nature and of individuals prevent our obtaining certainty about future political and social affairs, we still can use our reason to discover the best course to pursue. Such reasoning applied to human affairs to make decisions about what should be done is rhetorical reasoning issuing in praxis” (Moss 1986, 2 & 3).

The practical steps involved in rhetorical reasoning are:

1. Formulate a topology (or “collection of special topics”).

Experts study similar cases while considering the question: Which threshold issues must be covered in order to fully discuss cases like these?

2. Apply the topology: (The heuristic stage)

This is the stage in which the group analyzes the case by reasoning rhetorically. That is, they: conduct lines of inquiry guided by the topics; examine all particulars; reason dialectically about those particulars; distinguish between more and less relevant lines of inquiry; respond to maxims as they arise; follow the relevant lines of inquiry to the question at stake. A systematic, shared inquiry into the the nexus of the matter. The inquiry is guided by topics acting as proximate or discussion guides. When a topic is exhausted, the group transitions to the next, all the while aiming to discover the stasis. The winnowing process involved in managing the particulars in the hard case (and it is the complexity of that particularity that makes the case hard) entails the combined functions of topics, stasis, maxims and, most important, public phronesis. By public phronesis I mean the sort of practical wisdom that is the product of an ensemble of minds (as opposed to that phronesis exercised by individuals). The distinction is important especially to scholars of rhetoric insofar as we wish to demarcate the rhetorical grounds of civic discourse, because good judgment in the public arena entails shared moral inquiry, but thinkers have always approached the subject of phronesis from the standpoint of individual choice-making. The prospect for a “synergistically enhanced” type of phronesis is an exciting possibility.

3. Render judgment.

4. Defend the judgment. (The techno stage)

Once judgment is rendered one must fashion a defense. The lines of argument by which the judgment is defended derive from the discussion of the case. The act of bringing together arguments is, of course, the techne of rhetoric, and we are here concerned with the art of inquiry prior to argumentation.

I realize how troublesome is my suggestion regarding the need to stabilize the methodology articulated above. Consider, however, the analogue of scientific method (now I’m really in trouble!). We’re here to assess the impact of the Wingspread Conference and, in some sense, that project spawned a rhetorical revolution. However, the final measure of success for any revolution is its impact on public practices. In order to restore rhetorical invention to a position of centrality in practice, a position forfeited gradually over the past four centuries, rhetoricians must elucidate a coherent, stabilized conception of rhetorical inquiry. The novum organum kindled a revolution by virtue of an elegance derived from singularity of process and abundance of application. There will be no rhetorical revolution unless we follow suit.
NOTES

1 The two sessions of the Rhetoric Project were held at the Wingspread Conference Center, home of the Johnson Foundation near Racine, Wisconsin, (January 1970) and at Pheasant Run, St. Charles, Illinois (May 1970). The Project was originated and sponsored by the Speech Communication Association and supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

2 For concise overviews of Scott's project see Lefè (1978) and Warnick (1983).

3 Collections of essays were published from each symposium, respectively, as: John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey eds., The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) and Herbert W. Simons ed., The Rhetorical Turn, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

4 Rhetoric and Praxis, 8.


6 One must take care to distinguish between senses of the word “moral.” By moral inquiry I mean inquiry into practical matters (as opposed to speculative inquiry or scientific inquiry). Hans-Georg Gadamer uses “moral” in this same sense (1966, 3:4); Jonsen and Toulmin write that “moral knowledge is essentially particular” (1988, 330). An inquiry is moral, not because it involves questions of morality, but because it makes determinations of what is the right thing to do in contingent cases, where such judgments are not made deterministically. Moral inquiry is conducted in the contingent realm, and is concerned with the particular case.

7 See especially Rhetorical Turn, 174-6.

8 See De inventione 1.18-19; Topica sec. 79-95, and De oratore 2.23-28.

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