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Language, Self, and the Rhetorical Ethics of Spin:

A Study in Perspective

Joy E. A. Andrick

Regent University

Abstract

At no other time in the history of mankind has communication been so prevalent and available. How communication is both used and viewed must be evaluated for its ethical challenges and implications. The issue of spin in modern communication is a contentious one. An ethical criticism of spin using Richard Weaver's view of language as sermonic and two perspectives of ethics: one political and one Christian are conducted. However, it is not the criticism which yields the greater result, but the ensuing discussion of a change in the philosophical viewpoint of language and the self that drives this research.

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The dawning of the 21st century, more so than in any other time in human existence, communication is a greater and more intrinsic part of everyday life. From the internet to 24 hour news services, in every occupation and walk of life, humankind is being bombarded with messages about what to wear, what to drive, where to live and certainly what to believe.

In the midst of this communication overload there lays the need to understand communication, what guides it and what defines it. Therefore, the need for continued study and critique of communication is present.

At the very heart of human communication is language. MacKenzie (2000) states that language has been one of the most discussed topics of the last century, with regard to philosophy and psychology, but rarely is it applied to specific fields such as business or politics. It is his contention that there is a divide between the communicator and their communication; between the self and language. This divide manifests itself in “phenomena like ‘spin’” (MacKenzie, 2000, p.1). It is in the realm of business and politics that the use of spin is most often employed; therefore, a discussion of application to these fields is imperative.

What is spin? Is it a legitimate device of communication or is it simply a means of controlling others? With these questions in mind, inevitably, the issue of ethics is present. In order for understanding to occur with regard to this “phenomena” an ethical analysis is therefore demanded.

This study will focus on MacKenzie's contention with regard to language and self from a rhetorical perspective. A definitional discussion of spin and its use and role in specifically political language occurs as well as an ethical framework is established for critique. In addition to MacKenzie's work on language and self, this discussion utilizes supplementary sources as artifact material in order to provide a practical understanding of the use of spin.

Richard Weaver's theory on the sermonic dimension of language will serve as a foundation for two perspectives in ethical criticism compiled by Johannesen (1996). The first perspective is secular in nature in that it is derived from a political perspective and the second is rooted in religious scholarship. The need for a Christian perspective is two-fold. MacKenzie's work, which is serving as primary artifact material is, rooted theology and therefore a Christian scholarly perspective will evaluate that foundation. In addition, as a Christian scholar, this perspective is necessary for reconciliation of personal and professional beliefs.

Justification for Rhetorical Study

Academic justification for this study can also be found in Richard M. Weaver's theoretical work.

Rhetoric inevitably impinges upon morality and politics; and if it is one of the means by which we endeavor to improve the character and the lot of men, we have to think of its methods and sources in relation to a scheme of values. (Weaver, edited by Johannesen, Strickland and Eubanks in Brummet, 2000, p. 778-79).

It is this charge by Weaver that motivates the rhetor to discover the most exigent areas of question and utilize the elements of argument to provide understanding and therefore promote and advance rhetorical scholarship.

The Foundation of Language and Self

MacKenzie (2000) begins his discussion of language and self by establishing a link to communication and religious faith. The theological works of Augustine and Aquinas argue for an intimate link between language and self. As stated previously, he believes that in the modern world a divide has manifested itself in much general discourse with regard to Augustinian and Thomistic belief. A rediscovery of this relationship between what we say and what we are is necessary for proper discourse.

Theological Aspects of Language

The Christian tradition is rooted in the moral aspects of language: Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh is MacKenzie's starting point. In addition to God speaking creation into being in the book of Genesis, it is John's gospel that intrinsically links language and self.

The passage in question, specifically chapter one, verses one through two states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (Full Life Study Bible, 1992, p. 1582). The Word, incarnated in Jesus is identified with God. According to MacKenzie (2000), "The Word was not an instrument of God used for creation, but rather, is God" (p. 2). The study of Augustine and Aquinas sees an analogy to the human mind. As the Word was with God, so we have within humanity an inner word of the heart and mind that proceeds from us yet remains a part of us.

For MacKenzie the question is then raised, what is the relationship between this inner word and the words we speak, hear, write and read? While these words are not identical, they are in fact intimately related. Truth that is spoken as an expression of the truth apprehended by intellect, the outer world is an expression of the inner and the outer world is caused by the inner (MacKenzie, 2000). The implication of all of this on a human, as opposed to a theological level, is the relationship of language to the self.

Divide Between Language and Self in Modern Philosophy

MacKenzie (2000) continues his analysis by focusing on an ever-growing divide in modern thought with regard to language and self. The solid foundation of Thomistic tradition and popular wisdom that language and self are intimately related is established, however seems widely ignored by contemporary philosophy. Rather, a tendency toward treating language as a mechanism whose complex semantics is the focus has become the norm. The result of this, according to MacKenzie (2000) is a variety of technical treatments of semantics, but a gradual movement away from the larger picture. These issues are simply reduced to being a problem of language rather than a challenge to the larger philosophical problem concerning the external, discoverable truths about human existence (MacKenzie, 2000).

Utilizing the philosophical approach of Lacan and Derrida, the discussion continues by acknowledging the immense power of language, but it is a misleading thing devoid of any connection to the reality of the self. The more common sense tradition of seeing language as an expression of self and the deeper still Christian tradition of seeing language as a reflection of our relationship to God is a far cry from most of modern philosophical thought.

Language Abuse

Regardless of philosophical foundation, there is little argument that language can be and is abused. The trouble, according to MacKenzie (2000) begins when diagnoses such as those given by Lacan and Derrida are regarded as truth. If language is simply an external force, why shouldn't then, the communicator use this to the personal advantage? Why shouldn't this powerful tool, then be utilized as an instrument bringing the communicator closer to whatever means are desired. When language is reduced to a "mechanism," the ability to view the morality or immorality is diminished.

How Did Language Become Separated from Self?

According to MacKenzie (2000), there are two historical viewpoints, which lead to the result of modern linguistic culture. The first, took place during the time of Immanuel Kant. Following Kant, the human sciences, including that of language, adopted the schemes of the natural sciences and left the humanist tradition. Thus, common sense, taste, judgment, and the relation of the individual to the larger shared culture or community is the result of this shift.

Philosopher Giambattista Vico stated that what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason, but the universality represented by the community of a group, a people, or the entire human race. It is this communal sense that is important for living (Gadamer in MacKenzie, 2000, p. 12).

It is this continual historical and philosophical shift, which made it easier or even inevitable that language would become a mere tool and would lose, its sacred and communal qualities. The individual is alienated from language and therefore the individual's identity (MacKenzie, 2000).

The second historical viewpoint comes from the writing of Catherine Pinstock. According to MacKenzie (2000), Pinstock's writing is framed as a direct confrontation to the views of Lacan and Derrida (p. 13). Pinstock's views do not begin during the Post-Enlightenment but rather in the Middle Ages. Renaissance philosophers such as Ramus and Descartes solidified a slow trend toward "technologizing writing and rhetoric (p.13)." Again, this process, works in concert with the rise of science to reduce reality to what could be weighed and measured. Religion, for example became a set of propositions about faith concerned only with the soul of humankind and not with the integration of the mystical union of soul and body as believed by Augustine and Aquinas.

Specialization of Language

What then does this "specialization of language" look like? It looks like modern communication whose style is primarily passive, dominated by nouns and nominalizations and is for the most part, dehumanized (MacKenzie, 2000, p. 13).

The information society that we live rely mainly on mechanical communication tools and therefore language is also viewed as a tool. MacKenzie (2000) then asserts that as a result of this communication greatly suffers. The "communicative abundance" has the potential for real good, but the negative effects of the devaluation of language become the foreground (p. 14).

MacKenzie is quick to point out that technology is not a bad thing, rather just the opposite; it can become a negative thing when it is used by a society that views the human as predictable, non-mysterious, and unrelated to a transcendent God.

MacKenzie's assertion, early on in this work, is that language has been one of the most discussed topics of the last century with regard to philosophy and psychology but rarely

is it applied to specific fields such as business or politics. With the philosophical foundation of MacKenzie's argument with regard to language and self-outlined, it is imperative then to take his assertion into the practical application of communication in business and primarily politics.

The use of outright lies, a withholding of important fact from stakeholders, and the embezzlement of funds by deceptive communicative means in no doubt does great harm to the business or political figure itself, but also to the greater community. However, as MacKenzie (2000) contends there is possibly a more subtle practice that may do greater harm. This practice is what has become known as spin.

Spin

Defining the Challenge of Definition

MacKenzie (2000) asserts that spin eludes proper definition due to its nature. Attempts to research a single definition, which embodies the term in a balanced and fair manner, is challenging. Inevitably an attitude associated with the term itself is attached to definitions provided in both popular and academic literature.

The origination of the term comes from the world of table sport. Derived from a pool players' ability to "spin" the cue ball and thereby change its direction (Piccoli, 1994).

The denotative definitions of spin include Webster online, which identifies spin as a noun and defines it as "a special point of view, emphasis, or interpretation" (Webster online, 2003, see fourth definition under noun). The *Congress Dictionary* is more occupationally specific and defines spin as "Partisan interpretation, such as that given by a press secretary to the press. Those who specialize in political spin are known as spin

doctors and the art itself is call spin control” (Dickson & Clancy in Piccoli, 1994, p. C10). First appearing in 1984 in *Safire’s Political Dictionary* the meaning of spin was “restricted to what often were considered the unethical and misleading activities and tactics of political campaign consultants (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 2000, pp. 11-12.). Public relations consultant Robert L. Dilenschneider (1999), in a speech given at the Deadline Club in New York, defined spin as “mankind’s attempt to put its best foot forward” (p. 123).

In drawing from denotative as well as connotative sources from politics to public relations the definition of spin comes down to interpretation. For the purposes of operational function, spin is the deliberate act of molding interpretation to meet a specific objective.

What that objective is, remains to be seen. Analysis of those whose profession involves the use of spin, its history and rise in popularity as well as specific examples of its use in modern culture are forthcoming. In keeping with MacKenzie’s desire to discuss language outside the realm of the philosophical, the analysis of spin is focused primarily on business and politics.

The History and Business of Spin

Lawyers in many regards are the fathers of spin claiming “vigorous representation of a client” as justification for the ends justify the means argument presented by MacKenzie above (Kinsley, 2000). However, it is in the occupational world of public relations and politics that spin is most often associated.

Edward L. Bernays, an early pioneer in the field of public relations, is credited with writing the manual on the subject. *Crystallizing Public Opinion* bases its foundation

on the premise that attitude shapes action. If a professional can change the attitude, then behavioral change will automatically follow. Bernays' consistently justifies a "by any means possible style of persuasion"

Ironically, it is Bernays' daughter who sums up the foundation of spin in public relations (Bernays, 1996). Journalists with an agenda give rise to persuasion via emotional appeal in this nation, so too do professionals in the field of public relations emerge from their shell with an equally combative slant on persuasion (Bernays, 1996).

Stewart Ewan builds on this by emphasizing how "spin doctors, image managers, pitchmen, communication consultants, public information officers, and public relations specialists assumed so much influence in the 20th century" (Schmul, 1997, p.3). The "engineering of consent" laid out by Ewan comes to embody spin and the resulting role of professionals such as those listed above (Schmul, 1997).

It is the level of influence of these "professional communicators" over their sphere and the general public that brings this study to a second work, which serves a primary source impetus for the present analysis.

Lies and Spin: A Practical Approach

Similar to *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio in the United States, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Background Briefing*, tackles the news and human-interest stories from a multi-perspective "conversation" on a specific topic. One episode, produced by Stan Correy tackles the subject of spin.

According to Correy (2002), the probe of the day is in the smoky world of ambiguities, misinformation, dissembling and not so much lies, as an avoidance of the truth. Correy argues that the public is aware of these "masters of communication as

discussed above, which has prompted them to spin more than ever and gain a greater level of influence over the both the message and the discipline they represent (Correy, 2002, p.2).

For example, in the months following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States Defense Department (DOD) revealed it was ready to open the Office of Strategic Influence. One of the primary functions of this office was to put out disinformation. The public outcry over this blatant display of spin doctoring, led Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to close the office a mere 10 days prior to its opening. Initially, Rumsfeld sought to blame the media reports about the office which poisoned public perception, but it was later revealed that news reports were in fact accurate and that the DOD hired a Washington firm called the Rendon Group to attempt to improve the image of the U.S. in the Arab world by dissemination of misinformation (Correy, 2002).

Correy (2002) refers to incidents such as the example above as a phenomenon called an “agentic shift.” An agentic shift occurs when individuals or groups become obsessed with people in authority they lose their sense of independent thought. The argument is made that public servants (defined by Correy as those who assist and advise elected officials), by definition remained independent and gave frank and fearless advice to the elected officials. they served. Over the last two decades, these public servants have become politicized themselves or they were replaced by spin doctors, media advisors, or a new genre of consultants referred to as “contentious issues management specialists” (Correy, 2002, p.3).

The primary purpose of these “specialists” is to manage and control information and perception, not just of issues but of the political figure they represent. Maintaining office and avoiding political attack has become far more important than good policy and effective legislation. Loyalty to the person rather than to the government or the higher calling of loyalty to the people is the agentic shift (Correy, 2002). John Uhr of the Australian National University states that these advisors are the true power brokers in modern government and quite simply, they operate void of any ethical charge (Correy, 2002).

Moral philosopher Sissela Bok of Harvard University furthers the analysis of the political use of spin by commenting on the loss of community by the means discussed above. “Trust between people, between individuals or within organizations or between governments and citizens is crucial. And that is what is undermined.” (Correy, 2002, p. 15).

The quest for truth may seem too idealistic but according to Bok, if veracity is lost in public life, then societies begin to fall apart. Trust and integrity are precious resources easily squandered but hard to regain.

The Link of Language and the Self to Spin as a Mechanism

If the purpose of this study were simply to draw a line between the arguments made by MacKenzie and the apparent and gross abuse of language by professional communicators in the fields of public relations and politics, this work could end right here. However, simply relating the two articles and the glaring similarities in philosophical and practical application does not do this subject justice and in fact, is nothing more than one of the arguments presented by Correy.

To hide behind noble ideals while all the while presenting information from a narrow and deliberative perspective would be nothing more than academic spin.

As a student of rhetoric it is the duty of this work to be both justified and presented for analysis through rhetorical critique.

Rhetoric and Ethical Criticism

Rhetorical Justification and Definition

Black (1970) argues that discourse should be morally judged from a rhetorical perspective and Hochmuth argues that the critic has a special responsibility to judge the philosophy, values, and even the morality of discourse (Burchardt, 1995).

At this point, it is again vital to deliberately present definition of terms for the establishment of argument. The terms ethics, rhetoric, and criticism are specifically defined for use in this discussion. Additional terms will be defined as they become necessary.

Ethics, according to Johannesen (1996), is the general and systematic study of what ought to be the grounds and principals for right and wrong in human behavior (p. 298). While there are numerous sources for definition of this term and possibly others that are more definitive as to who determines the rightness and wrongness of human behavior, Johannesen's definition is used as it is Johannesen's text which is the primary source for the theoretical works chosen for this criticism, therefore it is his definition that guides those theories and the remainder of this discussion.

Brock, Scott and Chesbro (1990) define rhetoric as the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols. Aristotle in the Art of Rhetoric called rhetoric persuasion by any means possible. Rhetoric for Kenneth Burke (1950) is rooted in

An essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols (p.43).

As with ethics, rhetoric encompasses pages and pages of definition, however the common denominator of these definitions is stated above in its inherent and essential function to language and in relation to persuasion.

Criticism serves the function to point out, draw the attention of others to a particular case of type of symbolic inducement. This dimension is descriptive. However, criticism contains elements of evaluation and judgment. In one-way or another, the critics say that the rhetoric, product, or process is well done or lacking. Finally, criticism is interpretive (Brock, Scott, and Chesbro, 1990).

Rhetorical criticism is then the interpretative, descriptive, and evaluative analysis of language and discourse and in the case of this study, persuasive discourse in particular. Therefore, ethical criticism rooted in rhetoric is that which examines what ought to be the grounds or principles for right and wrong human behavior, specifically the behavior of communication. It is again important to note that this definitional frame is in no way definitive, but rather it is specific for understanding this work.

Ethical Criticism and Language is Sermonic

Richard Weaver, theorist of rhetoric along with contemporary Kenneth Burke, share the conviction that to some extent all intentional use of language is “sermonic.” The concept that language can be totally neutral and objective is a weak argument (Johannesen, 1996).

Patton and Griffin contend, “It is ridiculous to consider language a neutral medium of exchange. Specific words [language] are selected for use because they do affect behavior.” (Johannesen, 1996). Therefore, every intentional human communication exchange involves the purpose of persuasion and the possibility of impact.

The ethical theories used to evaluate the discussion above are derived from this sermonic dimension of human communication. Weaver is a strong advocate that all human use of language necessarily involves matters of ethical responsibility (Johannesen, 1996).

The ethical evaluation of this work is two-fold. The first perspective is the political perspective of Karl Wallace, which isolates four values basic to the survival of our political system. The second perspective developed by Veenstra and Vander Kooi which evaluates language through the link between humanity and their creation in the image of God.

A full explanation of Weaver’s Language is sermonic and the outlining of some basic issues of ethical evaluation are outlined prior to development of these two perspectives, followed by the results of the criticism of the language of spin.

Language is Sermonic

A host of descriptive terms can be used to define the work and the man that is Richard Weaver. Southern, conservative, Platonist are just a few most referenced in material on Weaver and his work. However, there is one term that embodies Weaver greater than any other. That term is rhetoric. It is the key to Weaver’s life work. According to Foss, Foss & Trapp (1991) the word rhetoric was often on his lips, it had

rich and vital meaning. He taught rhetoric, he wrote about rhetoric, and he used rhetoric to present truths in which he believed strongly (p.55).

The nature of the human being.

According to Weaver, the ethical capacity of the human determines the orders of goods and judges between right and wrong. The religious capacity, which is more intuitive, involves a yearning for something infinite and provides hint of destiny and nature (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, p. 59).

Two characteristics embody Weaver's conception of the human begin. First, humans are symbol using, which allows for a level of knowledge that communicates feelings and values thus creating culture and ultimately civilization. Second, humans are creatures of choice and our dignity rises from the power of choice. This is not however a license for doing as we please, but rather it means freedom to act according to criteria implicit in the notion of truth. We are free to actualize the truth (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991).

Rhetoric and Dialectic

Language, for Weaver, is the process through which the ultimate truth is conveyed. Dialectic is "epistemological and logical; It is concerned with discriminating into categories and knowing definitions. This would be sufficient if the whole destiny of man were to know." (Weaver, 1964, p. 64 in Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, p. 64).

Rhetoric then is a compliment to dialectic. Weaver contends that rhetoric is "truth plus its artful presentation (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, p. 64)" and it instills belief and action and cannot be separated from a concern with values.

Rhetoric moves people because it is not scientific; it goes beyond this and relates to the world. Although he would prefer for rhetoric to move people toward the ideal, he acknowledges that it can move humanity to serve evil ends by perverting and abusing language.

Because rhetoric promotes values by reflecting the idea of choice among goods, Weaver sees all rhetoric as sermonic; it is never innocent of intentions. As rhetors, we are “all of preachers in private or public capacities. We have no sooner uttered words than we have given impulse to other people to look at the world or some part of it in our way” (Weaver, ed. Johannesen, Strickland, and Eubanks, 1970 in Brummet, 2000, p. 784).

Decline of rhetoric.

Weaver did not write or speak about rhetoric and the role it plays in culture from a strictly theoretical standpoint. He applied his beliefs and ideas to the current culture to evaluate and assess it.

However, one of the greatest struggles of Weaver’s work was his belief in the decline of rhetoric. He argued that at one time, rhetoric and the rhetor were a vital and established part of the culture. The rhetor was somebody and regarded in the culture with great respect and dignity.

The decline in rhetoric, from Weaver’s perspective is further evidenced by the view that language is relative where meanings depend on the time and place in which words are used, the perspective of the user, and estimates about who will believe it (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991).

This view of rhetoric leaves questions with regard to the nature of truth. Changing the meanings of words and altering language for unfit purposes should not be done without careful consideration and a weighing of the consequences. The fear of Weaver was that language would no longer be the art of speaking truthfully, but rather the art of speaking usefully (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991).

As Plato argued, not all rhetoric is equally acceptable and as a Platonic idealist, Weaver claims that only principled rhetoric is acceptable. The rhetorician has two duties: to educate the audience on principles and to apply those principles to language. Weaver reminds us that the ethical dimension of rhetoric must be one of both theory and practice. What is relevant in Platonic times, and in Weavers time are certainly relevant in current time and for present study.

Final justification for ethical analysis.

The essay on Language is sermonic concludes with some personal thoughts and justification for this present analysis. Weaver states that he is in full agreement with Quintilian, the philosopher that posited that a true orator is the good man [person], skilled in speaking, good in formed character, and right in his ethical philosophy.

Therefore, those who study rhetoric must not lose sight of the values as the ultimate sanction of rhetoric. No one can live a life of direction and with purpose without a system of values.

As rhetoric confronts us with choices involving values, the rhetorician is a preacher to us, noble if he tries to direct our passion toward noble ends and base if who uses our passion to confuse and degrade us (Weaver, ed. Johannesen, Strickland, and Eubanks, 1970 in Brummet, 2000, p.784).

Responses to Weaver

No theorist of rhetoric is without critics of their own and challenges to the work. Weaver is no exception. The paradoxes of Weaver's life and work make him difficult to pin down and put in the box of rhetorical theory. As Foss, Foss & Trapp (1991) contend a number of different frameworks have been suggested to interpret and understand Weaver's thinking and writing (p. 78).

While he is clearly in the same school as Plato, some have argued that Weaver's work is best interpreted in a framework of Christian theology. Weaver's work reveals not only a religious foundation, but also a character to his mind and while he never explicitly claimed Christianity, his position is clearly Christian.

Weaver's ability to relate his work to a number of frameworks and to apply his work to a variety of disciplines has been a point of criticism. Some went so far as to attack Weaver's work by stating that a rhetor doing the work of a philosopher is tackling a problem for which they are not prepared or equipped.

A second area of criticism were the truths that Weaver espoused were decidedly those of Western thinkers, particularly American thought and especially Southern. His provincialism was challenged by those who felt this approach was ethnocentric and would alienate too many. However, despite the criticism and challenges to Weaver's work, critics recognize his influence is substantial and have called him a powerful and intellectual force.

So while Weaver may be criticized for his normative approach (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991), by attaching his own values and evaluating concepts rather than describing them, he is credited with the re-establishment of rhetoric in a central position with regard

to language and thought. The wide use of his theoretical position in contemporary rhetorical criticism and ethical thought is testament to his work. According to Foss, Foss, & Trapp (1991), his writings were meant to please no one but to make a contribution to the portion of the truth in which a system of values is embedded (p.81).

As stated above, Weavers work is substantial and respected. Johannesen (1996), while acknowledging the challenges of Weaver's work, uses his sermonic theory as foundation for his compilation of ethics in human communication. The ethical theories proposed are from this compilation and are in sync with Weaver's work.

Political Perspective

Because spin is so often employed in the field of political communication, evaluating it ethically from a political perspective is warranted. A political system contains both explicit and inexplicit values and procedures. According to Johannesen (1996), the assumption is that communication should foster a realization of these values and those communication techniques and tactics, which subvert or challenge these fundamental political values, should be condemned as unethical (p. 23).

Wallace's Four Moralities

Karl Wallace isolates four values which are basic to the welfare of [specifically] the United States political system: respect or belief in the dignity and worth of the individual; fairness or belief in equality of opportunity; freedom coupled with responsible exercise of freedom; and belief in each person's ability to understand that nature of democracy (Johannesen, 1996, p. 24).

In order to implement these values, one should promote freedom of speech, press, assembly, and should encourage general diffusion of information necessary for decision-

making. This includes a diverse array of public channels of communication. Wallace outlines ethical guidelines in the form of four moralities rooted in democratic values.

First, one should develop the *habit of search* stemming from recognition that during moments of communication we are the primary source of argument and information on the subject at hand. Thorough knowledge of the subject, sensitivity to relevant issues and implications, and awareness that public issues are complex are essential to message. As a test for this guideline, Wallace suggests asking: Can I answer squarely, without evasion, any relevant question a hearer or reader might ask?

The second guideline is the cultivation of the *habit of justice*. This includes selecting and presenting fact and opinion fairly. The communicator should not distort or conceal data, which his audience would need in justly evaluating argument. Emotionally loaded communication should be avoided as well as guilt-by-association in place of sound argument. The test for this morality: With the selection and presentation of materials is the communicator giving the audience the opportunity of making fair judgments?

Third, communicators should make it a *habit to prefer public to private motivations*. Responsible public communicators should reveal the sources of information and opinion. The communicator should then assist the public in weighing any special bias, prejudices, and self-centered motivations inherent in source material. The test questions are then: Has the communicator concealed information about either the source materials or personal motives which, if revealed, would damage the case?

Finally, Wallace urges the communicator to cultivate a *habit of respect for dissent* by allowing and encouraging diversity of argument and opinion. A communicator should

seek cooperation and compromise where appropriate and justified by conscience. However, Wallace stresses that a communicator should not sacrifice principle for compromise and should prefer conflict to appeasement. The final test question: Can a communicator freely admit the force of opposing evidence and argument and still advocate a position, which represents conviction (Johannesen, 1996).

Additional questions are presented for analysis of Wallace's framework and will be addressed in the application portion of this work. Wallace stresses consideration of an area that has previously been discussed in this work: do the ends justify the means? A rhetor must be concerned that the end success is exalted over the means used to achieve it. The techniques and appeals may undermine confidence by breeding distrust.

Before delving into the application of Wallace's perspective to spin and reconciling this framework with MacKenzie's argument, a second perspective of ethical theory is needed.

Christian Perspective

As stated above the need for a Christian perspective is implicit for two reasons. First, the research demands it. Both MacKenzie and Weaver present arguments that are biblically based and present theologically Christian arguments. Second, as a Christian rhetor and scholar, it is inherent in personal research to present an open and honest discussion of personal faith and values

Veenstra and Vander Kooi's A Christian Ethic for Persuasion

According to Johannesen (1996), Charles Veenstra and Daryl Vander Kooi developed a Christian perspective on ethics because humans are created in God's image and are endowed with a unique human capacity for ethical judgment (p. 99). Christians

honor God through worship and the quality of relationships with other people and their capacity for creative thought and communication is simply not seen in other creatures.

The “principles” developed by Veenstra and Vander Kooi is numerous. First, humans deserve full respect as reflections of God’s image. Humankind should communicate with others in the same loving and respectful way that they communicate with God in worship.

Second, honesty should be practiced in all aspects of persuasion. There should be openness with audiences with regard to intention and accuracy with facts relevant to ideas, policies, and products. However, one important note to Veenstra and Vander Kooi is their assertion that honesty does not demand full disclosure at all times (Johannesen, 1996, p. 100).

In this same point, these theorists posit a not previously mentioned area of the communication process: the receiver. Specifically, they discuss the responsibility of the receiver. According to Veenstra and Vander Kooi, receivers have the ethical responsibility to be honest in their feedback; in their expression of interest and attention, of feelings, judgments, and disagreements (Johannesen, 1996).

Third, only the best language should be employed. The question a communicator needs to ask himself or herself is, “Is this the best language I can use to show respect for the image of God in a person (p. 100).” Fourth, the genuine needs of the audience should be determined and an attempt made to meet those real needs. Needs cannot be manufactured where none exist. These appeals, according to Johannesen, should not be confused with appeals to audience wants and preferences.

The fifth and final principal mentioned pertains to the techniques of communication. The techniques and appeals should be appropriate for the subject, participants, and situation; relevant to the genuine needs being addressed.

As a Christian rhetor, conversation should stem from commitment of both heart and mind, consisting of both logical and emotional appeals.

Ethical Criticism in Perspective

Neither the Christian nor the political perspectives are richly developed in Johannesen, but they provide a checklist, if you will, of ethical consideration for the interpretation and judgment of the rhetoric of spin.

It is the contention of this scholar that MacKenzie's work will not only be reinforced by the application of these judgments upon the discussion of spin, but in fact, that MacKenzie's arguments pose a greater ethical guideline.

The constant back of the mind posit of this work has been the need for a paradigm shift from the obvious post-modern deductive conclusions of much rhetorical and ethical theory to one that argues for a return to Augustinian and Thomistic belief.

A second contention developing out of this mindset is one that puts the sermonic view of Weaver in line with MacKenzie that argues for strong and active persuasion that takes into account the inherent value of language, not as a tool of mankind but rather an intrinsic part of their being.

An Ethical Criticism of Spin

It was the expectation of this work to operate in a traditional rhetorical criticism in terms of form and function. However, the research has taken thought and forms in a completely different direction. At the same time, a firm belief has emerged that this

research will prove to be more beneficial for future ethical critique of specific spin artifact, rather than just the concept of spin as has developed here.

The criticism that follows takes on a near reverse order as the opening discussion. Evaluation of spin through lens of the political and Christian perspectives is followed by a lengthy application of MacKenzie's work to the results of this analysis and Weaver's theoretical grounding in language is sermonic. In addition to this analysis, this work will conclude with a discussion on the future implications of this research.

An Ethical Political Perspective of Spin

Weaver referred to rhetoric as artful presentation plus truth; however, this rhetoric cannot be separated from values. There is hardly a doubt that spin fits into the category of artful presentation plus truth. However, it is the question of separation from values that throws spin into a quandary. This is confirmed in Wallace's four moralities or habits.

The first habit is the habit of search. This habit stems from recognizing that during moments of communication, the rhetor is the primary source of argument and information. Knowledge of the subject, sensitivity issues and implications and awareness of the complexity of public issues is essential. Can the rhetor answer squarely and without evasion? In looking at both definitions examples of spin, the answer to this question with regard to the ethics of spin is not a solid yes or no. The key point of this habit is the issues with the complexity of public issues. Spin is often employed in times of distress and after the occurrence of a disaster (Hagerty, 1996). Discussion of national security immediately comes to mind. However, it is the test question that puts this complexity into perspective. Can the rhetor answer squarely? If that cannot occur even

with the complexity of the issue taken into consideration, the answer is no. Future research into specific examples of spin employed may further develop this point.

The second habit is the habit of justice. Is the presentation fair without distortion of data or emotionally loaded information? Can the audience make fair judgment? From definition the answer to this question can possibly be yes if the audience is engaged and willing to do their homework. Yet, as with the habit above, specific examples of spin employed in real life situations would need to be drawn through this framework.

The third habit, to prefer public motivation to private motivation links directly to Correy's article from Australian radio programming. Responsible public communicators must be willing to reveal sources and assist the public in weighing bias, prejudices, and self-centered motivations. The question that the communicator must answer deals with the concealing of information with regard to source material and personal motives. Will this concealing damage the case of the rhetor? Clearly, Correy provides the arguments that spin to this habit is clearly no.

To reveal a source or to assist the audience with regard to special bias would directly violate the spin doctor's modus operandi. The purpose of spin according to the arguments of both Correy (2002) and MacKenzie (2000) is to keep bias and to assist the audience in nothing more than seeing an argument from the point of the rhetor.

The fourth habit is a respect for dissent. This allows for and encourages diversity of argument and opinion. A rhetor should seek compromise and cooperation without a sacrificing of principle. The final test is answering the question: Can a communicator freely admit the force opposing argument and still advocate a position, which represents conviction?

In answering the habit of public motivation, dissent is clearly out of sync with spin and the same could be said of this point as well, however it is interesting to note that it is the presentation of dissent that can drive spin as well. For example, one of the key strategies of the Clinton Administration was to put out all of negative information regarding the administration as well the personal behavior of the President, themselves. By releasing potentially damaging information prior to those who opposed the President, the control of message was in the hands of the administration (Davis, 1999).

According to Presidential Advisor Lanny Davis (1999), the White House would use what was termed, “document dumps” in which large volumes of documents or materials were given to the press or made otherwise available to the public all at once. The Clinton Administration defied conventional wisdom and made it easy to get information. The advantage of this type of information and message control is the appearance of openness and cooperation with both the public and those in opposition. However, it also accomplished another goal that was purely in the President’s and his Administration’s best interest. The amount of information simply overwhelmed the various communication channels as well as put the story on the front page prior to the opposition so that by the time the opposing argument could be made; the story was old news and was buried in the back pages and listed only as an afterthought in other mediums (p. 38).

The concept of this fourth habit was there, however was the value present? Davis (1999) states, “Manipulative and strategic in the choice and timing of a story? I guess. But though we were obligated to be honest with reporters, we were not required to be suicidal (p. 38).”

This is the perfect example of spin. The fact go out, in context, and the impact of the story is diminished by the rhetor not by deception, but by what is thought of as ensuring a comprehensive and accurate treatment of the facts.

The answer to this habit is then one that is more complex than it would appear on the surface, and this is simply one example in that regard. Further analysis of this example and its relation to the ethics of spin is explained further in a future conclusion area of this work.

The conclusion of the ethic of spin from a political perspective leads us with a grand shout of maybe. That is the trick of spin. Ethics invariably searches for the black and white and this perspective opens the door to the gray that so inherently possesses the issue of spin. That is not to say this perspective is not valid for further analysis. Just the opposite. What this study has become is an analysis of the philosophical idea and concept of spin. Specific examples and situation such as those given in the discussion of this analysis would be best for full ethical critique. How spin is used pertains more to this perspective than spin itself, if a definitive answer is what the researcher is truly after.

Answers to a Christian Ethic for Spin

Veenstra and Vander Kooi stress the relationship of the human to their creation in the image of God and are endowed with a unique and inherent capacity for ethical judgment. A set of five principles is developed for evaluation.

The first principal is that humans deserve full respect as images of God. Spin is questionable with regard to this principle in that it cannot provide for the human in communication with other humans the same respect that a human provides in worship to

God himself. An inherent respect for the audience is nowhere included in the definition or above outlined practices of spin.

Second, honesty should be practiced in all aspects of persuasion. Spin does not lack honesty, however, as in many of the examples given in this analysis, openness of intention is where spin runs into trouble with this principle. While Veenstra and Vander Kooi assert the opinion of Lanny Davis given above in that the rhetor is under no obligation to provide full disclosure, the intent of the presentation, for example, with the Clinton spin machine, was only provided after the fact and without the ability of the public to make a fair and accurate judgment.

As Veenstra and Vander Kooi note, there is a certain level of responsibility on the part of the receiver or the public, however, once the public makes a judgment and then it is revealed later that the intent was questionable; this is dramatically disrespectful to the role of the receiver in the process of communication and persuasion.

The third principle deals with the use of the best language as a sign of respect for the image of God as a person. While this is not an impossible task to accomplish with regard to spin, simply stopping to ask oneself to reference this point as the persuasion is being developed may be enough to put a stop to the use of spin. If nothing else, this is an excellent checkpoint for the rhetor to consider prior to the act of communication.

The fourth principle relates to the third in regard to the audience. What are the needs of the audience? If the needs of the audience are not present, they cannot be manufactured. Again, from definition, spin does not take into account the audience. Spin is laden with intention that focuses on the needs of the rhetor and while the audience is necessary for spin to accomplish its objective, including the needs of the audience can

only be present if those needs meet the needs of the spin leaving this principle void with regard to spin.

The fifth principle pertains to the techniques of communication. For all intents and purposes, at this point, the assumption is there, even in background that spin falls into the category of technique or mechanism. On the surface spin appears to hold the possibility of being ethical when taking into account the subject, participants, and situation, however when the commitment of heart and mind in relationship to that of creator God, the technique becomes questionable.

Spin: Language and the Self

For MacKenzie (2000), the word spin, itself, invites humanity to lay aside ethics. Spin is more than the use of euphemisms and public relations technique. It is an attitude that in many professional environments has become demanded and expected. It is a job requirement. For example, a president should sound presidential (p. 6).

Yet, for MacKenzie, the problem is not so much with spin itself, but the resulting culture that has developed. This radical misuse of language is more insidious than lying; it is indifference to the truth (Kinsley, 2000).

The power of language to create and foster community is discussed numerous times throughout this study and is reinforced by MacKenzie. At the same time, when language is abused, it has the power to erode community and build cynicism. MacKenzie (2000) contends that any approach to ethics that does not make language a central concern will inevitably be empty. Language that is seen as a tool or a mechanism ethics is set aside and an attitude of amorality or worse develops. The separation of

language from self opens the door where language becomes “placating publics rather than an expression of self, a blindness to values or ethics has set in (p. 10).

There are two essential aspects of language that MacKenzie (2000) advocates throughout his argument. These relational aspects of language are critical to ethics. First, is the relationship of language to self as an expression of the inner word, which is intimately connected with our very selves. Second, is the relation to others and its ability to form bonds and community (p. 15)

Both of these relationships are stressed in the Augustian and Thomistic beliefs outlined by MacKenzie and in this research. The strength of MacKenzie’s approach is such that it becomes an overarching system of evaluation than those presented as the system of evaluation in this research. This is not to say that Weaver’s analysis and the two perspectives that emerge from this are inconsistent with MacKenzie. Just the opposite is true. Weaver’s view of language as sermonic and his Christianity laden arguments are a direct link to the foundation that MacKenzie lays with regard to the theology of language and self. It is the contention of this research that further development of MacKenzie’s work and advocacy would only strengthen the work of rhetorical research and the development of methodological ethical critique.

What MacKenzie’s (2000) work comes down to is an argument that what is ethically wrong in modern thought is the harmful view of the role language plays, of its relation to self and its capabilities. Anything less than a paradigm shift is bound to be inadequate to meet the needs of research. Those who study and work in rhetorical development and research must, then, too move from treating the symptoms to a system of treating the disease.

Spin is the as much the result of the languishing view of language as it is a continual eating away of language. A cycle that cannot be broken.

Conclusion

One only needs to look at voter turn-out on election day or read the opinions of young twenty something's to know that there is a rampant cynicism amongst the culture, especially American culture, with regard to politics and the methods employed to communicate political events or issues with the public. MacKenzie (2000) discusses the development of a community of suspicion rather than one of trust. It is the contention of this research that we are already there.

It was the intention of this research to look at ethical criticism and find a way to advocate that spin can be used for good as well as for negative persons. It was the opinion of this researcher that tools of communication are independent of the person with which they are employed and therefore, a criticism was needed that would view the object and not the person.

The establishment of rhetorical distance between research and the object of criticism was foundational to understanding issues such as spin. Therefore, all prior research into this subject was laden with a post-modern understanding of ethical research and spin.

What MacKenzie's article did for this research was put it in a direction that was unplanned. It changed very foundation from which this research was developed and it could not have been a better change. An entire new perspective of how to approach ethics and communication is opened.

Implications for Future Research

While the impetus of this research was for the purpose of ethical critique, it has developed into much more than rhetorical analysis. MacKenzie's article was intended to serve as a foundation of discussion, yet that would simply not do it justice.

To some extent, the actual subject of spin became lost in the contentions of this work. And therefore, a greater critique of spin and development of its history, motives and actual employ are necessary, including viewing spin through a number of additional ethical frameworks and perspectives.

What did develop from this work is a research need to look further at the arguments MacKenzie poses both in light of past rhetorical research as well as the future work of this and other scholars. First, a more thorough analysis of Augustinian and Thomistic theory and theology is warranted. Both in light of their personal works and rhetorical research into their philosophy.

Once greater understanding of these philosophies is known, more research is needed in the area of language and self from a rhetorical perspective and in relationship to ethics. Simply put, what is out there already that could both develop and challenge MacKenzie's contentions.

A perspective such as this could easily stand alone with regard to rhetorical research and scholarship, but also used in conjunction with established theories such as was done in this case. For instance, the link between Richard Weaver's philosophy and that of Augustine and Aquinas appears clear from this study, however more developmental research needs to be done.

What MacKenzie has done for this research as well as other areas of rhetorical study is open the door to the argument that a paradigm shift or at the very least a

challenge to modern philosophical research must be considered. The possibility of this shift will only truly be known with much more research and study in to the philosophy.

Specifically with regard to spin, more research needs to be done into the actually purveyors of spin. If the influence of these communicators is as great as is advocated in this work, what is their belief about the ethical challenges of their work. Lee Atwater, the late political consultant to the Reagan Administration and the first Bush Administration, viewed spin, not as lies, deception or misinformation as described in this research but rather making public logic out of a situation. Providing analysis that makes perfect sense and making every explanation appear as though it was well anticipated when in fact, the explanation was ex post facto (Schmuhl, 1997). Those on the inside view what those on the outside looking in see as insidious much differently. Again, the challenge to this implication is from what viewpoint language is approached. The question that must be posed to those who come after Atwater is how they view language and the power of the techniques of language employed.

Problems with Current Research

Due to the time constraints on this study, a general lack of primary sources with regard to contentions made within the artifact and theoretical portions of this work are lacking. Because the direction of the research changed once a great deal of the work had been accomplished, this need for more sources, specifically primary sources was not available. Future research and further advancement of this work demands those sources and the historical nature of this work is necessary.

While this work is qualitative in nature, a much more systematic approach to the ethical critique may have served to create a greater level of understanding. The choice of

theories used was based and an evaluation of the perspectives and their development from the work of Weaver. Additional perspectives that may provide greater insight are possible and should be thoroughly researched and analyzed in light of this work and for future research endeavors.

Concluding Thoughts

Spin is a subject that has intrigued and perplexed this scholar for sometime and an ethical critique of this area of communication seemed most appropriate. There is more work to be done. Simply knowing how to refer to the issue of spin has become a challenge. The viewpoint of this scholar has always been that of the “mechanism” perspective, but through the arguments and theology of MacKenzie’s work, that perspective has been challenged.

As a Christian, this research opened an entirely new area of study. There has long been the challenge of the need to separate personal belief from academic prowess, which seemed to work effectively. However, the viewing of language and self as an intimately intertwined part of being such as the relationship of body and soul creates a whole new world of possible research and self-analysis. John’s Gospel and the teaching of the Word made flesh has long been a part of this scholar’s education and upbringing, however, when placed into the realm of academic research, the intrinsic need for further study could not be greater. In as much as there is a newfound solid belief in language and the self, there is a similar belief in Christianity and the self. For the Christian, it is who they are as much as what they are.

While this new century is full of technology that Augustine and Aquinas could never have imagined their perspective on the nature of communication is as relevant

today as it was in their time. As the images of war are bombarding our televisions and computers and the reports are available in real time, the need to understand the ultimate truth is also as abundant.

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