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RHETORICS OF ASSENT: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF "GOOD REASONS" ARGUMENTS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE NONFICTION OF JONATHAN SCHELL, WENDELL BERRY, AND JOHN MCPHEE

BY


BRIAN TURNER

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Rhetorics of Assent: A Rhetorical Analysis of "Good Reasons" Arguments for the Environment in the Nonfiction of Jonathan Schell, Wendell Berry, and John McPhee*, submitted by Brian Turner in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, selected American nonfiction writings about the environment and nuclear arms are assessed as examples of "the rhetoric of assent." The term "rhetoric of assent" originates in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent,* where Wayne Booth defines it as a rhetoric that can elicit rational assent on value-laden issues by offering "good reasons" for its claims. The thesis modifies and expands Booth's definition in the light of rhetorical theories offered by the "good reasons movement." It is claimed that the reasons of any value-laden argument become "good" and thus warrant a degree of "assent" when they meet all or most of the following criteria: the reasons are connected to the assumptions of the audience to whom they are given, especially to the "transcendent values" of that audience--that is, to the values which that audience believes "constitute the ideal basis for human conduct" (Walter Fisher); the reasons appeal to and are confirmed by the personal experiences of the reasoner's audience and of the larger rhetorical community; the reasons are consistent with one another, and relevant to the argument; the reasons are never given anonymously--that is, they are given in such a way as to strongly suggest the reasoner's personal knowledge of and commitment to them; the reasons do not presume to establish irrefutable or final answers, but acknowledge the provisional and uncertain nature of truth. Defined in this way, the rhetoric of assent is considered as a rhetoric that might be particularly appropriate for dealing with environmental issues (here taken to include the issue of nuclear disarmament), since these issues are too complex and value-laden to permit straightforward statements of fact, in and of themselves, to serve as sufficiently "good reasons" for the public to alter their treatment of the environment. Nonfiction by three writers who consistently address such issues is considered. Jonathan Schell's arguments for total nuclear disarmament are shown to meet some of the criteria for "good

reasons," but his rhetoric as a whole is weakened by a degree of inconsistency, irrelevance, and anonymity. The rhetorics of Wendell Berry and John McPhee are shown to be more effective rhetorics of assent, in part because the topics with which these writers deal are more accessible to a wide audience, but primarily because the good reasons they offer suggest personal knowledge and commitment, as well as greater sensitivity to the assumptions of their audiences.

Key Terms:
rhetoric
assent
good reasons
environmentalism
nuclear arms
nonfiction
essay

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Chapter One: Introduction

I

In the opening chapter of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, Wayne Booth recounts an event that seems very characteristic of America in the 1960s. In 1969, while he was a dean there, the University of Chicago found itself embroiled in an unexpectedly bitter struggle after its administrators decided, for undisclosed reasons, to fire an assistant professor. One group at the university, comprised predominantly of students, wanted the instructor involved to be rehired; others, mainly administrators and the professor's colleagues from the Department of Sociology, recommended that she not be. Eventually, a "very large proportion of the nine thousand faculty and students . . . found themselves . . . split into two camps" over the issue (7). To Booth, it seemed as though this battle was marked throughout by distrust and ill will on both sides. While the students suspected any professors who supported the administrative decision of being "cool and aloof and rational," even "secretive and hypocritical" (8), the staff so accused thought of the students as irrational and perversely uncompromising. The disputing parties became intransigent in these attitudes, and the battle led inexorably to the expulsion of students and to an atmosphere of distrust on the Chicago campus. As a dean at the University, Wayne Booth was very much in the thick of things. Moreover, he felt personally compelled to seek solutions to the University's problem, even while being criticized by students and frustrated in his attempts to engage them in rational debate. This search for solutions eventually led him to conclude that events on his campus were just one battle in a much larger war. Everywhere, it seemed, the possibility of constructive debate was being undermined by the inability or the

unwillingness of disagreeing parties to find some common grounds for discussion. The larger problem, Booth decided, was that "we have lost our faith in the very possibility of finding a rational path through any thicket that includes what we call value judgments" (7). From this point of view, decisions about any value-laden issue, such as whether or not the assistant professor at Chicago *ought* to have been fired, are almost always founded, ultimately, on personal biases and on rationalizations that masquerade as support, rather than on the substantial support of what Booth calls "good reasons." The bitter struggle at the University of Chicago was in this sense merely one local consequence of what he calls the split between "facts" and "values."

For readers of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent,* it seems to me, Booth's opening narrative is doubly important. It is important, first, because the story it tells about events at Chicago poignantly exemplifies the larger problem with which the author is concerned, the problem from which spring the "modern dogmas" referred to in the title, and to which "the rhetoric of assent" is offered as a possible (though partial) solution. The story is a familiar one, and being familiar, it makes its point clearly and persuasively partly because it finds an echo in our own experiences. This is not to say that most readers will be acquainted with the particular campus battle described by Booth, or even that they will have experienced similar battles on other campuses (though no doubt many, especially the original audience for Booth's 1970 lectures and his early readers, would know first-hand of such incidents). I mean, rather, that most of us will be familiar with the kind of dispute Booth describes, the kind in which the lines are clearly drawn between a side that believes its position to be founded entirely on logic, clear thinking, and a concern for the facts, and a side that sees its position as the more ethical, more human one (and that sometimes resorts to physical protests, violent or otherwise, to

accomplish what logic cannot). To mention but two common examples of such factious disputes: when striking workers accuse their employers of callous indifference to "quality of life" issues, and the employers then accuse the strikers of "being unrealistic" in their demands or ignorant of "the facts"--both groups convinced they are in the right--can we not say that the lines drawn are rather like those described by Booth? What was the recent debate about free trade between Canada and the United States but a dispute between those who thought we must face the economic "realities" of a changing international market, and those who worried that our cultural values would be sacrificed and we would lose those immeasurable qualities that define us as Canadians? The impact of the fact-value split is not limited to these general cases. In our various capacities as specialists, we often encounter the same battle-lines. Those of us who are students of rhetoric and composition, for example, know that even in these fields, the very fields from within which Booth and others have made their appeals for a cooperative, unifying rhetoric, the split between fact and value has made its mark. We see signs of it in the textbooks used in our classrooms, many of which, accepting "without question the dogmas of scientism," have "in the past several decades" taught students "that the goal of all thought and argument is to emulate the purity and objectivity and rigor of science, in order to protect oneself from the errors that passion and desire and metaphor and authority and all those logical fallacies lead us into" (Booth, *Modern Dogma* 88). We see signs of the split outside the classroom as well, where recent research on writing has, as two respected scholars have argued, often exhibited an "unsophisticated confidence in empirical measures" (Knoblauch and Brannon 20). The "fact-value split" has an impact beyond the relationship between university students and university administrators at the University of Chicago, beyond even the relationships between the governors and the governed in any political body. As

Booth's opening narrative reminds us, it has influenced many of our pursuits, insidiously, in a variety of ways.

Booth's narrative is also important simply because it is personal. It lets us know that the author was there at Chicago and involved in the events he describes. At times, he may have acted in the capacity of Dean, but Booth also makes it clear to us--both in what he says and in the way he says it--that he was involved as more than an administrator, that the events made a deep and enduring impression on his way of viewing the world. He not only witnessed distrust and divisiveness, but suffered through them. And in openly acknowledging the influence that events at Chicago had upon him, Booth alerts us to something too easily neglected: historical events are not just facts, there to be recounted by any narrator sufficiently skilled to present events as they "really happened." The way in which one recounts events and, consequently, the persuasiveness of one's recounting, depend, among other factors, upon the kind of involvement one has with them. Living through and being moved by an event makes a difference; indeed, almost all of us, defenders of facts and defenders of values alike, listen just a little more closely to someone who has first-hand experience. First-hand experience is not *proof* that what one says is true (except for the most extreme of us). Rarely are we so strongly influenced as to think that, in and of themselves, a rhetor's personal knowledge and genuine, deep feelings constitute reasons for being *convinced* by his or her claims. Nonetheless, we do tend to find claims that are tied to such "reasons" persuasive, often to a much greater degree than claims based on even the best sorts of impersonal argumentation and second-hand evidence. That this is so is one of the arguments Booth himself offers us in his book. As an argument, it is hardly a revelation, or at least would not be for the fellow whom Toulmin calls "the man-in-the-street (or the man-out-of-the-study)" (1), were such a person to read Booth's book. However, as Toulmin says,

modern man "in the study" has come to look upon arguments in a way very different from the way he looks at them out of the study, and, as it happens, Booth's audience--"mainly . . . students, with some professors of English and philosophy eavesdropping" (xv)--is certainly man and woman "in the study." For this audience, the argument that a rhetor's personal involvement ought to carry some weight cannot be taken for granted. Thus the importance of the opening narrative: it serves to put us (the students and professors who are still, twenty years after the original lectures, likely to be his audience) in an appropriate frame of mind, and shape the way we read the well-documented, "academic" arguments that follow. And in doing so, in catching us before we can establish a disinterested stance--in having us admit, early on, that his personal involvement does indeed have a great deal to do with what he is arguing--Booth's opening narrative stands as a kind of evidence for the very claims he is making.

I place myself among the members of Booth's audience, and I admit to being "caught" by his opening story--as, indeed, I am by his personal approach throughout *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent.* When I open a book whose title clearly identifies it as "academic," all my years of academic training lead me to expect from that book impersonal supporting evidence, if not a tone that is predominantly disinterested and impersonal. And when I encounter, instead, an author who admits to being "puzzled" and "harried" by his subject (ix), and to having been brought up as a fundamentalist Mormon, and who uses as evidence for his arguments his own tears at a performance of Bach's *St. Matthews Passion,* his own naive sexual fantasies at the age of twenty, and his own embarrassment upon reading grafitti that singles him out for attack, my reaction is to think that the author is staking much more on a theory than would most.

Perhaps I should not be surprised by these frank and frequent references to personal experience. Appeals to one's own experiences are, after all, nothing new; indeed, the rhetor who bolsters his arguments by citing his personal knowledge of war, or politics, or foreign lands is merely using one of the most common of ethical appeals. Yet these are the kinds of appeals I have come to associate with writing outside the academic arena. Inside the academic arena--inside "the study"--such appeals have become far less common, and as a result, I think, much has been lost. I am not about to make the quite irrational claim that a writer who talks about himself ought, by virtue of that fact alone, to be more persuasive than one who does not. Emotional and ethical appeals should never replace close, careful reasoning or the support which facts provide. Nor would I claim that less personal academic works should have no influence upon us. It seems to me that such books as Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric,* E. J. Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student,* Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument,* and George Kennedy's various historical studies of ancient rhetoric are essential for every student of modern rhetoric. Yet these books do not speak to me in quite the same way that *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* does. They make it much, much easier for me to separate life from "work."

These close connections among Booth's life, character, and work--indications that he refuses to speak as a narrow specialist--are one of the main reasons why I have chosen to use the key term from *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* as the key term for my own title in this thesis. There are, of course, other reasons for calling this study *Rhetorics of Assent* --not the least of which is, quite simply, that I wish to acknowledge the considerable debt the thesis owes, both in its conception and in its development, to Booth's seminal work. But I also wish to maintain a connection between this study and Booth's because it seems to me that *Modern*

Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent is, even among those works which have advanced similar rhetorical theories, a rarity--one of those unusual theoretical books that tries to practise the tenets it proposes. As will become evident in the chapters that follow, Booth's book is not unique in its focus on the split between facts and values. Nor is its author alone in seeing a rhetoric based on "good reasons" as a plausible solution to the kinds of social and psychological divisiveness that the split has engendered. Indeed, contemporary rhetorical theorists now consider *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* as simply one of several important contributions to what has come to be called the "good reasons movement." Yet it seems to me that none of the other major contributions to this movement brings home its points with quite the same impact as Booth's book. And since one of the tenets that these and other "good reasons" theorists have emphasized is that rhetoric must, in Walter Fisher's words, make "a pragmatic difference in one's life and in one's community" ("Logic" 381), this ability to "bring home its points" is of immense importance. It is all very well to give us a theory supported by thorough documentation, logical validity, and empirically verifiable facts. However, when the theory stresses the value of other kinds of supports--the support derived, for example, from the familiarity of one's narratives, or from one's personal knowledge of events and deep personal commitment to the lessons drawn from them--then we have every right to expect more than "the depersonalized calculations of demonstrative reasoning" (Zyskind ix). We have a right to see something of the author, and to expect that he "sees" something of us.

The logician may call those old saws "Practise what you preach" and "Physician, heal thyself" forms of the *argumentum ad hominem*, and insist that the doctor and preacher can heal and teach well regardless of the way in which they conduct their personal lives. But as I myself have come to understand better during the course of

this thesis, such old sayings survive through the ages for a reason. These "commonplaces" encapsulate (or, to use another word that reminds us of ancient rhetorical theory, "locate") the topical ideas from which effective arguments spring; they tell us what men and women "out of the study" believe to be true. Out of the study, I am less likely to ignore contradictions between life and work or to find anything "illogical" about rejecting a man's arguments because of his life and character. And as Booth says, the rhetoric of assent is concerned not with "proving what is true according to abstract methods," but with "probing what men believe they ought to believe" (xiii).

II

Of the two parts in this thesis, the first depends most heavily on Booth's work. Indeed, much of the two chapters that make up the first part is, to all intents and purposes, a summary of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric,* intended to explain, from Booth's point of view, what the "modern dogmas" are and where they come from, why a "rhetoric of assent" is now needed, and what such a rhetoric entails. In the last part of the chapter, the ideas developed in Booth's book are supplemented by drawing on relevant arguments from the work of several like-minded theorists in the so-called "good reasons movement." The purpose of this chapter on rhetorical theory is largely expository; though I do not ignore what I perceive to be the flaws in good reasons theory, I am concerned mainly with comparing and contrasting ideas so as to arrive at an adequate working definition of the rhetoric of assent.

The second part of the thesis, I believe, offers something new to the study of a good reasons rhetoric. Whereas Booth's main goal is to outline a "new" rhetoric, one more suited to the times than are traditional rhetorics, this task of defining an alternative rhetoric is only preliminary here. My main purpose is to assess particular texts, seen as responses to a particular rhetorical problem, in the light of

good reasons theory. In other words, I wish to offer close rhetorical analyses of some contemporary non-fiction texts. Analysis of this sort has traditionally been the forte of rhetoricians--one thinks, for example, of the studies of seventeenth-century prose by Morris Croll, or James T. Boulton's *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* --but to date there have been no extended rhetorical analyses by those interested in a rhetoric of good reasons. This thesis offers such analyses in an attempt to bridge the gap between general theory and particular practices. Having established a definition of the rhetoric of assent in Chapter One, I try to determine in the four chapters of the second part of the thesis just how particular rhetorics of assent measure up to the general criteria set by theorists. More specifically, I examine the ways in which three American non-fiction writers, Jonathan Schell, Wendell Berry, and John McPhee, deal with perhaps the most divisive of contemporary issues, the issue that has come to be known simply as "the Environment." Of the four chapters, the first is devoted mainly to establishing a rhetorical context for the other three by discussing some rhetorical aspects of environmentalism. This seems to me necessary because the environment is a complex issue, involving a multitude of rhetorical variables, and one tenet of good reasons theory is that effective rhetoric always particularizes (in the sense of adapting to the complexities of particular audiences and occasions). Chapters Four, Five, and Six then analyze the rhetorics of Schell, Berry, and McPhee respectively.

The thesis is, then, a study of particular rhetorics in the light of contemporary rhetorical theory on a "rhetoric of assent" (or, alternatively, a rhetoric of "good reasons"). But it seems to me that one might also look at it as a study of the rhetoric of the middle ground. Used in this way, in the context of rhetoric, the phrase "middle ground" may evoke associations with a term much more commonly used in the long tradition of rhetoric, "the middle style." Yet though the association is not

entirely inappropriate--the rhetoric in which I am interested does, in fact, often take shape through something rather like the style designated by the traditional term--style is but one aspect of the rhetoric that concerns me here. Two equally important concerns, as the phrase "middle ground" suggests, are the *substance* of arguments (in the sense we mean, for example, when we ask "On what grounds does he argue his case?") and the rhetorical *stance* one takes to defend his ground (a stance partly determined by style). I am particularly interested in the ways that writers with strong opinions of their own move toward this ground as they attempt to reconcile differing and even opposing interests in their audience. The thesis finds its impetus in such questions as these: can one appeal to opposing factions successfully, that is, without compromising oneself and one's purpose so much that the appeals have no suasory consequences for the attitudes and actions of one's audience? If not, why not? What is lost in the attempt? If so, how does one make such an appeal? Are all such appeals similar, and in what ways do they differ? The task of this study is not to provide answers to these questions--they are, after all, the sorts of questions that have always puzzled rhetoricians, and if I had unassailable answers to them I would have a program for running the world--but the more modest one of considering some of the rhetorical variables faced by, and assessing some of the possibilities for, such a rhetoric of the middle ground.

From another point of view, the thesis can also be seen as a study of writing on the environment. Environmental issues are in some ways the ideal testing ground for the kind of rhetoric proposed by Booth and others in the "good reasons movement." For one thing, few contemporary issues have involved as many people. The depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, the erosion of topsoil, the use of nuclear energy: these are the concerns not only of "man-in-the-study," but of us all, in and out of our studies, and as such they are matters for public discussion

and debate, where "good reasons" are as important as proofs "according to abstract methods." For another thing, environmental issues have tended to divide people into camps very much like those that first prompted Booth's investigation into a good reasons rhetoric. In the continuing debate over how much environmental destruction we have caused and what we should do about it, battles may be fought on a much larger scale than the one Booth encountered at Chicago, but the stances of the opposing camps are much the same; there is often hypocrisy, distrust, and a reluctance to listen, and language is used to preclude rather than to foster discussion. In such a climate, moderate rhetoric is unusual. Yet I believe that it is precisely such a rhetoric--a rhetoric of the middle ground, which is strong but nonetheless compromises in the interests of achieving an active cooperation--that is most needed if we are to make progress in our treatment of the environment.

I am aware that such a rhetoric will be an object of scorn to many, and that among those who scorn it most will be the very people who are working hardest to remedy our environmental problems, people who act on rather than merely profess their concern for the environment. Moreover, I admit that the reasons moderate positions are thusly scorned can be legitimate; taking "the middle ground," after all, sometimes means nothing more than being soft, "selling-out," or using bureaucratic obfuscation and self-serving justifications for the status quo rather than meaningful arguments. I am aware, too, that there are times when extreme rhetoric might well be considered a much more appropriate reaction than moderate rhetoric. One can be patient and reasonable for only so long; when a rhetor continues to seek the middle ground despite unmistakable evidence that moderation will gain nothing, he inevitably--and perhaps rightly--becomes identified with the very forces he once claimed to oppose. These criticisms of "the middle ground" are valid in the sense that they point to some very real dangers of using a moderate rhetoric. In matters

environmental, it may well be the case, after all--no one can possibly know such things with certainty--that, because particular interest groups will never relinguish their luxuries voluntarily, or possibly because people in general are simply unable to acknowledge the destructive consequences of their actions, substantive reform in our treatment of the environment can be brought about *only* by aggressive actions, and possibly coercion; and if this is so, a rhetoric that pulls us toward the middle will only impede the inevitable and delay much-needed reform.

Yet it is my belief that a radical transformation in the way we treat our planet will not be brought about by aggressive moral suasion or by coercion. I say this for several reasons. One is that the problems with which environmental deterioration presents us are so massive and complex that they can be solved only by a cooperative effort. If what many environmentalists are telling us about the earth's state of health is accurate, not only must people take action collectively, by forcing changes in public policy, but they must change individually, by permanently transforming their daily habits and even their values. While one can easily imagine how an informed and powerful minority might become anxious enough to force the issue with environmental policies that the majority opposed, it is difficult to see how these unwanted policies could change people's values, let alone change them for the long-term. As history shows, substantive and enduring change must to some extent be voluntary. Furthermore, even if such a group could effect substantive change for the short-term, one must wonder what the long-term results would be if our immediate environmental problems were remedied with coercion rather than cooperation. Many environmentalists have argued that our present dilemma was brought about largely by our aggressive, self-serving attitude towards nature, and that among other values we must learn a new humility and respect for other forms of life if we are to turn things around. Would coercive environmental policies not

be, in a sense, fostering the same imperialistic attitude that brought to our present state of affairs? Would such remedies not be a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul? The moral and the practical reasons for believing that cooperation rather than coercion will be the most effective solution of our environmental problems are inextricably linked.

But perhaps the primary reason why I believe that cooperation will change our attitudes and public policies towards the environment most effectively is that we all have a vested personal interest in bringing about such change. As I have suggested, and as the following chapters will indicate in more detail, the question of what to do about the environment is certainly one that arouses faction, that divides not only one segment of the public from another, but even one environmentalist from another. Nevertheless, in a way that is rare in such factious issues, every side in this debate does have something--indeed, much--to gain from a cooperative resolution. That something is the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the scents, sights, and sounds we cannot imagine losing yet too often take for granted. In short, the Earth. As F.R. Leavis once said, in a different context (before he or anyone else knew just what our love of technology could do to our planet), "We have no other; there is only one, and there can be no substitute" (93). That, it seems to me, is a bond to be valued, and it is a bond which will be sealed not by radical but by reasonable language, and by a rhetoric which, without "giving away the farm," is conciliatory and pragmatic.

III

The full meaning of my opening points about Booth's own rhetorical practice, about the relationship between practice and theory, and about the "middle ground" will, I hope, become clearer in Chapter Two, as I examine Booth's theory of the

"rhetoric of assent" at length. However, it may prove of some benefit to offer brief definitions for the two key terms with which this thesis is concerned. One is the term "good reasons." Though modern rhetorical theorists may use the phrase with a greater awareness of its meaning than the layman has, its meaning for them is not an esoteric distortion of the common idiom. By "good reasons," rhetoricians mean much the same thing that we all do when we use the phrase in everyday conversation--as, for instance, when we defend someone accused of a minor offense by arguing, "She had good reasons for doing what she did," or when we warn students that if they arrive at our door asking for an extension on the very day an essay is due, they had better have a very "good reason" for such last-minute plea-bargaining. It is understood, I think, that when we use the phrase in such circumstances, we do not mean simply a reason that works, that is, one which succeeds only in the sense that it achieves its intended purpose. Such a definition would allow for the possibility that--to continue with my last example--a reason was good either because the student who offered it was accomplished in the art of deception, or because his instructor was too world weary (or just plain tired) to quibble about one more lame excuse. In our better moments, we know successes of this sort are founded not on "good reasons," but on a disparity between the participants in a rhetorical transaction, or on a temporary inability or unwillingness on the part of an audience to dispute the reasons given. A good reason, on the other hand, is justly persuasive; it is, as Booth says, a reason which "really warrants assent because any reasonable person ought to be persuaded by [it]" (xiv). Just who is reasonable, and why, will be explained more fully in the chapter which follows. As for my second key term, the "rhetoric of assent," the reader may think of it for now simply as a rhetoric comprised of good reasons. It is capable of eliciting reasonable

assent because the reasons it offers--not all of which need be articulated or, indeed, articulable--strike a given rhetorical community as "good."

Since the word "rhetoric" is used in such a variety of ways, not only in this thesis but throughout the field of rhetoric and composition, explaining my use of the term here may also help to prevent misunderstandings. Perhaps it could go without saying that I do *not* use the word "rhetoric" in the sense now commonly meant by the public and the popular media when, for example, they refer to a politician's speech as "mere rhetoric"--not, that is, in the sense of dazzling or generally disingenuous language, entirely without substance. Nevertheless, it seems to me that enough of a pejorative connotation hovers about the word to justify this qualification, even for an audience well-versed in literary and rhetorical traditions, especially since I am dealing with an issue as factious as the environment. When I speak of "the rhetoric" of Berry, McPhee, or Schell, I at no point wish to imply that their language is somehow deceitful, that there is a "real" meaning, an ulterior motive "behind" what they say. As I use the word in this thesis, "rhetoric" does not describe some surface property whose existence magically dissipates as honesty rises.

Just what "rhetoric" does mean is rather harder to say. During the course of my second chapter, as I try to establish a working definition of the rhetoric of assent, the meaning I assign to "rhetoric" in general should become clear. For the time being, however, Burke's definition will give a sense of where I stand: rhetoric, he says, is "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (*Motives* 43). The differences between this and more traditional definitions, such as Cicero's description of rhetoric as "speech designed to persuade," will be immediately obvious. Burke broadens the range of media for rhetoric to include written discourse and, presumably, the electronic media; he replaces the competitive, coercive implications of "persuasion" with the more

neutral (though, thirty years after Burke, perhaps somehow inappropriate, even ominous) "inducing" of "cooperation"; and he introduces--here, only with "by nature" but elsewhere more extensively--a suggestion of unconscious factors, factors which Cicero's "designed" seems completely to disregard.

Finally, I would add that "rhetoric" can also take three other related meanings. It can refer to the systematic study of language used in the way Burke describes (as it does, for example, in the title *The Prospect of Rhetoric*). It can, as I have suggested above, signify an author's characteristic means of symbolically "inducing cooperation" in one or more rhetorical acts (i.e. "the rhetoric of John McPhee's *Encounters with the Archdruid*, "or, more generally, "the rhetoric of McPhee"). And it can be used to refer to a theory (or a textbook) offering descriptive (or, in the case of textbooks, more often prescriptive) explanations of how language is (or should be) used to induce cooperation (e.g. Booth's theory of the "rhetoric of assent," or a textbook such as Aristotle's *Rhetorica*). Though I will use the word "rhetoric" in all of these senses, I believe the meaning intended in any given passage will be made clear by its context. Finally, it is worth noting that derivatives of the word "rhetoric" will be used as is conventional in the discipline. By "rhetorician" I mean someone who systematically studies, and who usually teaches, the rhetorical use of language (and I would include teachers of advanced writing or composition in this category). By "rhetor" I mean simply the agent of any rhetorical act, whether spoken or written.

Chapter Two:
"Good Reasons" and "The Rhetoric of Assent"

Though its origins and its membership are uncertain, the existence of a "good reasons movement" now seems to be an accepted fact in the field of modern rhetoric.[1] Indeed, one rhetorician, describing it as a "loosely affiliated 'school' of contemporary rhetorical theorists," has called it "probably the most important movement in contemporary rhetorical theory" (Watson 50). Among these theorists, the most prominent, and the ones most often mentioned in the discussions of good reasons theory, are Booth, Perelman, Toulmin, Karl Wallace, and Walter Fisher.[2]

The ideas this group of rhetoricial theorists has in common will be the focus of the present chapter. That they do have ideas in common should not be taken to mean that their views are virtually identical; in most cases, each of their positions

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[1] The key term for the movement, "good reasons," seems to have been first used as a term in rhetorical theory by Wallace, in his essay "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons." Watson (50) also assumes it was first used in rhetorical theory by Wallace, though Wallace himself acknowledges that it is "a special term from the field of ethics" (247). Though his bibiliography includes an entry for Wallace's essay, Booth does not say where he first encountered the term "good reasons," or where he believes it originated.

[2] Watson also mentions Robert Scott, Henry Johnstone, Carroll Arnold, and Lloyd Bitzer. Fisher does not use the term "good reasons movement," but speaks of others to whom his work on a "logic of good reasons" is indebted--Ralph T. Eubanks and Virgil L. Baker, Douglas Ehninger, Ray McKerrow, and John Hardwig. As can be seen in the paragraphs that follow, I consider Watson himself to be an important member of the good reasons movement, on the strength of his important paper "Polanyi's Epistemology of Good Reasons."

on rhetoric is, as Brockriede puts it, "interestingly unique" (62). Nevertheless, their similarities are far more noticeable and significant than their differences. And as the name of their movement indicates, these similarities all have to do with one central idea: good rhetoric is rhetoric which offers "good reasons." In the briefest possible terms, one might say that these theorists advocate a rhetoric that is concerned as much with substance as with style and arrangement, and that finds such substance not only in logically sound arguments or in what Aristotle called the *atechnoi pisteis*, (non-artistic means of persuasion), but in a wide variety of "reasons" considered acceptable to a given rhetorical community. As Brockriede says of Toulmin, Wallace, Fisher, Booth, and Perelman, "together they converge in denying the utility of depersonalized logic and insisting on reaching consensus through reasoned arguments" (62).

The chapter has three major sections. In the first two of these sections, I concentrate mainly on *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* as I try to explain, first, the problem to which good reasons theory is a response, and, secondly, Booth's rhetorical solution. Of the first section, it should be noted that although my summary of the fact-value split returns frequently to Booth's text, the Boothian description I give of that split could probably stand as an accurate description of the problem from the point of view of any of the good reasons theorists. I have chosen to concentrate on Booth and to relegate supporting comments from other theorists to my footnotes mainly for convenience. As I explained in the previous chapter, one feature which clearly distinguishes *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* from other important works by the good reasons movement is the rhetorical practice of its author; another is the length and breadth of his discussion of the fact-value split. In the third and final major section of this chapter, I draw ideas from other good

reasons theorists in order to support and refine Booth's theories, and ultimately arrive at a clearer definition of the "rhetoric of assent."

I

If one were to take the widest possible view of the problem, as Derrida and other post-structuralists have, one might argue that the whole tradition of western philosophy is founded on a split between facts and values. "Fact" and "value" may not be common terms in the lexicon of post-structuralism. Nonetheless, in claiming that language (especially written language) has always been granted second-class status in the West, that it has, in the words of Richard Rorty, often been seen as "an unfortunate necessity" (Culler 90), the post-structuralists have recognized a dichotomy much like the one described in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent.* According to Derrida, western philosophy has been a "metaphysics of presence," because it has operated on the assumption that its goal, as well as its foundation, is something other than language--"thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word" (Culler 92)--the realization of which can be impeded as often as it is assisted by language, particularly written language. One might say that in the very process of using words, philosophers in the West have sought to escape words; they have tried to say "the final word" and thus to eliminate the need for further interpretation:

> Writing, from this perspective, is the external, the physical, the nontranscendental, and the threat posed by writing is that the operations of what should be merely a means of expression might affect or infect the meaning it is supposed to represent . . . . The ideal would be to contemplate thought directly. Since this cannot be, language should be as transparent as possible. The threat of nontransparency is the danger that, instead of permitting direct contemplation of thought, linguistic signs might arrest or infect the thought. Worse still, philosophical thinking, which should lie beyond the contingencies of language and expression, might be affected by the forms of the signifiers of a language, which suggest, for example, a connection between the desire to write and to "get it right." (Culler 91)

This uneasiness about "non-transparent" language is evident in the work of Plato, particularly in *Gorgias*, where "philosophy and rhetoric are treated as mutually incompatible and exclusive" (Hamilton 9). Plato's was not a view which dominated classical rhetoric; the view taken by the sophists and Isocrates--that truth is something less certain and less determinable, something more dependent on language and probability--may well have been more influential in its day (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric* 13-15). Nevertheless, Plato's view did spawn a philosophical tradition of distrust towards rhetoric. It is "the idea of the unicity of truth," advanced so persuasively by Plato, says Perelman, "that has disqualified rhetoric in the Western philosophical tradition" (*Humanities* 12). Nor were philosophers the only ones influenced by Plato's disapprobation. Through Aristotle, Plato had an immense influence on the development of rhetorical theory right up to the Renaissance. I need hardly argue that Aristotle was no mere follower of Plato; the differences between the two men's understanding of rhetoric were far more significant than the similarities, as Kennedy and others have pointed out. But even where Aristotle differs most from Plato--for example, in elevating ethical and emotional proofs to the status of "somewhat" acceptable methods of persuasion--one can see in his *Rhetoric* the early influence of Plato (Kennedy, *Persuasion* 81).

In even the earliest stages of its development, then, rhetoric was viewed by some as a medium which does not simply convey truths, but which conceals, discolours, or distorts. As such it was subject to much criticism, particularly from those who felt threatened in some way by its influence over an illiterate or unsophisticated populace. One must keep in mind this long tradition of scepticism when considering Booth's discussions of the modern dogma about "mere rhetoric." Distrust of rhetoric is nothing new; it is deeply rooted in our attitudes towards language and truth.

But it seems to have grown over the years. About two millenia after Plato's hostile attacks had cast rhetoric under permanent suspicion, it suffered a particularly harsh blow when the educational reformer Peter Ramus recommended that the study of invention be transferred from the subject of rhetoric to the subject of logic. The alterations that this recommendation brought about in the curriculum of European schools effectively divided the study of style from the study of substance, and, perhaps more than any other single factor, they were responsible for the decline of rhetoric as a discipline into little more than the spotting of schemes and figures--the so-called "flowers of rhetoric" tradition. As Perelman states, "The extraordinary influence of Ramus hindered, and to a large extent actually destroyed, the tradition of ancient rhetoric " (*Humanities* 2), for it severed the connection with ideas that had made the study of rhetoric an important part of the study of argument and had helped it contribute to both the understanding and the quality of public discourse. "There is nothing of philosophical interest," Perelman adds, "in a rhetoric that has turned into an art of expression, whether literary or verbal" (*Humanities* 5).

The event that contributed most to our present scepticism about rhetoric, as Booth and others have argued, was surely the emergence of modern science and the reevaluation of knowledge that modern science gradually brought about. It has been generally acknowledged in modern rhetorical theory that the split between facts and values can be traced to the new epistemologies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By holding up critical detachment, inductive logic, and objectivity as ideals in the pursuit of knowledge, and by finding the senses to be the source of all our knowledge, both rationalism and empiricism gradually undermined faith, and not only religious faith, but faith in any prescriptive ethics, any code founded on the belief that some behaviors are "better" or more "fair" than others. Rationalism, says Booth, "began with doubt" and eventually "demanded explicit reasons for every

belief and every allegiance" (201). Such reasons were not forthcoming. Since one could never see, measure, or logically demonstrate beliefs about how one ought to conduct one's life, these beliefs became incompatible with rational pursuits, obstructions in the pursuit of knowledge.[3]

The hold these epistemologies had on the general public was strengthened as the star of modern science rose. When the application of "the scientific method" resulted in technological achievements as great as those of the nineteenth century, the correctness and absolute authority of the scientific perspective seemed to be confirmed. This is not to say that people uniformly adopted this faith in science. "Philosophies which . . . in some sense discover the *ought* in the *is* have always had adherents," says Booth (*Modern Dogma* 14). But he adds, nonetheless, "it is probably quite accurate to say that from the seventeenth century until quite recently, it grew increasingly unfashionable to see the universe or world or nature or 'the facts' as implicating values" (14).[4] And it is not difficult to see how this split between facts and values was particularly damaging to the public view of rhetoric,

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[3] For Perelman's views of seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century epistemologies, see, especially, "Philosophy, Rhetoric, Commonplaces" (52-61) and "Reflections on Practical Reason" (124-133) in *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities.*

[4] Other contributors to modern rhetorical theory, especially Perelman and Toulmin, with their background in philosophy rather than literature and rhetoric, would add logical positivism to Booth's list of sources of the fact-value split . But the thrust of their objections is much the same as Booth's. See, for example, Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric,* 26: "Value judgments, insofar as they are subject to controversy, have been considered by positivist philosophers as completely lacking in objectivity, unlike 'reality' judgments about which, thanks to experimentation and verification, universal agreement would be possible."

weakened as it already was by a long tradition of distrust. Rhetoric has always been at its most useful when people are faced with questions that cannot be resolved by recourse to facts alone, with what Donald Bryant calls "the undecidable questions [and] the unsolvable problems" (203). As we came to think that such problems fell outside the ken of science, even the best means of dealing with them came to be seen as worthless or disreputable. To many, rhetoric appeared as the refuge of irrationalists and hypocrites, the means by which the unscientific argue about issues that more rational people would ignore, or even worse, as the means by which the unprincipled try to persuade the uninformed and the unwary.

About this connection between the rise of science and the fall of rhetoric, most modern rhetorical theorists agree. In *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent,* however, Booth is concerned not only with tracing the roots of the fact-value split but also with describing the current effects of what has, "in the last seventy-five years or so," become "a truism"(15).[5] People in general now seem to take it for granted that, when disagreements arise over difficult ethical issues, these disagreements can be attributed solely to the differences in the values of the disagreeing parties, and that differences in values cannot be resolved or bridged. Consequently, they see little hope of reaching reasonable compromise in debate, and indeed little point in debating at all. As Booth says,

> Arguments for our beliefs and actions have become 'mere rhetoric' or propaganda or rationalization. Passionate commitment has lost its connection with the provision of good reasons. And reason has been reduced to logical calculation and proof about whatever does not matter enough to engage commitment. (xi)

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[5] Wallace makes much the same point in "The Substance of Good Reasons." See, especially, 239-240.

In response to this dilemma, Booth suggests, people are likely to do one of two things: they will hold to what they perceive to be the revelant facts, in the belief that reasonable people should not be swayed by immeasurables and unprovables; or they will embrace values, believing in what they "feel" is right, even if doing so means sometimes ignoring the factual claims of those who "feel" different. The former group, Booth calls "scientismists"; the latter, "irrationalists." Scientismists are those who have accepted the objective detachment of the scientific method as the one reasonable way of looking at the world and who avoid controversial commitments by confining themselves to the small domain of the empirically verifiable and the logically demonstrable. Irrationalists, on the other hand, are those who value commitment above all else, people who will use facts if facts will help their causes but who will sometimes resort to physical violence if it seems needed to defend what they feel is right. Taken out of context, Booth's characterization of these factions might seem like caricature. He even draws up columns to contrast the assumptions (the "modern dogmas" of his title) that govern the attitudes and behaviour of each side: "objective versus subjective, matter versus mind, mechanism versus vitalism, scientific reason versus faith or 'the heart' or 'the wisdom of the body'--and so on." Yet in spite of what he himself admits are "easy dichotomies," Booth is convinced that these factions exist, in various guises:

> . . . though what might be called front-line inquirers now often find the split unnecessary, illogical, or harmful, somehow our general intellectual climate--particularly our interdisciplinary and political controversy--continues to rely on it and the pairings that it spawns. (20)

The fact-value split has not only created what Booth calls "a befouled rhetorical climate" (99), but "has run so deep in our thought that many have clung to it as other men cling to traditional religious convictions" (22). Moreover, the split has

caused more than the sort of social and political faction Booth witnessed at the University of Chicago; it has caused a deep schism in the psyches of many people.

Bertrand Russell, claims Booth, offers a representative but particularly poignant example of the individual torn between allegiance to facts and allegiance to values. Immensely influential as "a popularizer of philosophy and propagandist of ideas," "sanctified, for many admirers, in the world of action" (44), Russell helped to "implant and strengthen the disastrous divorce" (85) between facts and values by arguing that "[t]he world of 'fact', as discovered by 'objective' science, is totally indifferent to man's values" (50). Yet in his personal life he also suffered the effects of this divorce. He "embod[ied] to the full both extremes of the [fact-value split]"--which is to say, he found himself "divided," "seriously torn," sometimes driven "to the edge of suicide" (45-46). As Booth puts it, "the split between scientism and irrationalism runs like a thread of torture through most of what [Russell] does . . ." (47):

> It is not surprising that this apostle of reason, who had preached the impossibility of reasonable arguments about what matters most, should have moved, along with many others in this tortured century, further and further away from argument toward mere assertion, and finally toward laying his body on the line, the last resort of those who feel that reason has failed. Whereas his protest against World War I had included published arguments about justice and war, arguments presented with a good deal of care, his protests as the years went by became more and more oracular, often with a final appeal to physical resistance and even--in the first hysteria after Russia developed the atomic bomb--to threats of violence. (79)

Still, if Russell suffered greatly in his personal life, his suffering was different in degree rather than in kind from that which many others have experienced. What distinguishes him is that he was "one of the most gifted men who ever lived" (45), and thus he defended the scientistic stance more articulately and acted with more passion than others who have tried to keep "Is" and "Ought" in neat and separate

parcels. Ultimately, Russell's life is, says Booth, "representative of the main intellectual achievements and problems of our time" (44).

Apart from what he has to say about Russell as both agent and victim, most of Booth's analysis of the fact-value split is not new, as Booth himself acknowledges. Others have recognized the effects and traced the causes of the split between facts and values. Indeed, what Booth calls his "biggest single surprise in reading for these lectures" was his discovery that there had been many "'post-modernist' reunions of fact and value" (19)--so many, in fact, that he felt compelled to offer the equivalent of a second "book" in his footnotes and appendix, "leading into perhaps a dozen distinct academic fields where the dogmas are being refuted and rhetorics of assent constructed, often with more precision than my account allows for and often without using the word rhetoric" (xv-xvi). Calling other studies of the split "rhetorics of assent" is, I believe, somewhat misleading, but Booth is nonetheless correct in noting the kinship between his own and others' work.[6] His dissatisfaction with the constraints placed on argumentation by science and logic, as well as with the elimination of the "human factor" in reasoning, is by no means unique. Others who have examined the problem would agree with Booth's claim that "modern

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[6]The reunions of fact and value cited in Booth's "second book"--that is, in his footnotes and the appendix "Two-Score and More Of Witnesses Against the Fact-Value Split"--include the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Thomas Kuhn, Michael Polanyi, and George Kelly. If, by "rhetorics," Booth means the sort of theoretical work which explains principles of or gives practical advice about rhetorical acts (a work such as Aristotle's *Rhetorica*), then these "reunions" of fact and value are clearly not "rhetorics." It would seem more fitting to call these "reunions of fact and value" philosophies of assent.

philosophy--at least until the last two decades--has saddled us with standards of truth under which no man can live" (xii).[7]

II

If one of the two main purposes of Booth's inquiry is to define the fact-value split and the modern dogmas that have resulted from it, the other is to propose one possible cure for these dogmas--that is, to propose a standard of truth and a rhetoric with which one *can* live. I use the phrase "one possible cure" advisedly, for as Booth reminds us again and again, he does not pretend "to have any final answers" (37): "It would be foolish to seek a simple, unified organon, hoping that at last we could eliminate differences among men and establish a great single new truth" (85). Indeed, as we shall see, to seek such an organon, to hold up one solution as the final answer to the fact-value split, would go against the very grain of what Booth and other good reasons theorists say. The "rhetoric of assent" is fundamentally a rhetoric intended to keep dialogue open rather than to say "the final word." Its ultimate goal is the effective pluralistic society.[8]

The definition of "the rhetoric of assent" that Booth gives us in his introduction, though general, is perhaps as clear as any in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of*

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[7] See also 66: "The notion that we have reasons to believe only what has been proved in the sense of withstanding all possible doubts, cannot be lived with by most of us for even a moment."

[8] In "On Rhetoric and Rhetorics," Douglas Ehninger argues that this goal of improving societal relations characterizes modern rhetoric in general, and refers specifically to the work of Burke and Richards. See also Ehninger's "A Synoptic View of Systems of Western Rhetoric," 451.

Assent. It provides us with a framework within which a more detailed picture can be drawn:

> The rhetoric [of assent is] the art of probing what men believe they ought to believe, rather than proving what is true according to abstract methods. It is thus always dirtying its hands in mere opinion, offering its services to both sides of a controversy, and producing results that are at best rather messy. . . . [It is] the art of discovering good reasons, finding what really warrants assent because any reasonable person ought to be persuaded by what has been said. (xiii-xiv)

Several parts of this definition need amplification. One is the notion of "probing," a word that, it seems to me, can apply accurately only to a rhetoric concerned with both "product" and "process" (to use terms that have been common in composition theory for some twenty years now). If we think of "a rhetoric" simply as a product, a body of ideas that has already been formalized, to a greater or lesser degree, according to particular conventions or strategies of expression and persuasion, then the notion of probing cannot apply--or at least not if one is concerned mainly with persuasion rather than with the exploration of ideas.[9] "Probing" implies an *ongoing*

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[9]In "The Exploratory Essay: Enfranchising the Spirit of Inquiry in College Composition," William Zeiger distinguishes between the "exploratory essay" and the essay that dominates composition classes today. Whereas the former, best exemplified by Montaigne, does "not argue or try to persuade" (455) but "aims to discover the fecundity of an idea" (456), the latter "represents a temporary victory of the art of demonstration, the modern way of 'proving,' over . . . the art of inquiry" (456). While I find much in Zeiger's essay that agrees with Booth's views, it seems to me that his division between exploration and persuasion is too absolute. Unlike Zeiger, Booth does not view all persuasion as an attempt to stifle inquiry. As always, his position lies nearer the middle, where one can try to persuade without precluding, or even discouraging, further inquiry.

exploration, and clearly, an author's exploration of "what men believe they ought to believe" cannot, in any real sense, still be going on in a body of ideas which has already been formalized. It seems reasonable to assume, then, even from this brief definition, that Booth's "rhetoric of assent," an "art of probing," has as much to do with discovery as it does with arrangement and style. In other words, it includes the process of invention.

A second part of Booth's introductory definition requiring further explanation has to do with the kind of thinking advocated by the rhetoric of assent. The definition makes it clear that the rhetoric with which Booth is concerned is not based on "abstract methods" of thinking (such as the inductive and deductive logic on which science relies), but is instead connected to "what men believe." In this sense it seems related to the rhetoric of the ancient sophists, for it is concerned with probability and possibility rather than certainty, and with opinions rather than universal truths. What the brief definition I have quoted does not make clear, however, is whether this connection with opinions somehow weakens the rhetoric of assent, as a similar connection was once thought to weaken the "sophistry" of classical rhetoricians such as Protagoras and Gorgias.[10] Booth's references to

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[10] According to Kennedy, the long-standing view of sophists as immoral "fast-talkers," willing to say anything to win an argument, is unfounded. As he says, "most sophists have believed that the orator should be a good man, and their most consistent theme has not been how to make the worse seem the better cause, but celebrations of enlightened government, the love of the gods, the beauty of classical cities, the values of friendship, the meaning of patriotism, the triumph of reason, and the artistry of speech" (1980, 40). More and more contemporary rhetoricians seem to be accepting Kennedy's view. See, for example, Jasper Neel, 204-210, and Brian Vickers, 122-123.

"dirtying its hands" and "mere opinion" indicate that he is fully aware of how a rhetoric connected to people's beliefs will be disqualified from consideration by some serious thinkers in the "purer disciplines" (xiii). But what does he himself think of this connection? In his introduction, he elaborates:

> [The concern which rhetoric has for audiences] might not be too bad if rhetoric worried only about "what all men believe," but more often than not it alters its conclusions, as it manipulates its devices, to suit the local opinions of special audiences: rhetoric not only uses different arguments when addressing different audiences, but it will prove conflicting conclusions, since it is finally and utterly bound to whatever convictions are shared by a given rhetorical community.
>
> This flexibility--not to say venality--can be made to look like a very serious fault, but it can also be turned into a resource, especially in a time when "everyone believes" that "there are no shared values any more." The commonplace that all eternal verities have been discredited feels threatening to those who think that without established eternal verities men must degenerate into a life that is nasty, poor, solitary, brutish, and short. But it is precisely in the handling of such a commonplace that rhetoric comes into its own. Who believes it? Why do they believe it? Do they *really* believe it? What other commonplaces about values do they share as they deplore together the loss of shared values? What "rhetorical communities" can be discovered that may in fact unite seemingly warring factions, and what are the real conflicts that separate rhetorical communities based on conflicting assumptions? (xiii-xiv)

Two of Booth's points are particularly important to the discussion here. The first is that, if it is to be effective--which is to say, if it is to elicit assent--the rhetoric of assent has no choice; it *must* be linked to "what men believe," since all rhetoric is "finally and utterly bound" to the convictions of "a given rhetorical community." One may regret this connection to community convictions, especially if one believes his given rhetorical community to be wrong-minded, but one ignores it at great cost. Arguing for what seems to him universally true, "according to abstract methods," the rhetor may sacrifice the possibility of persuasion. As Burke tells us, in a remark Booth uses as an epigraph to one of his chapters, "A man is necessarily talking error unless his words can claim membership in a collective body of thought" (86). The second point

of particular importance here is that this accommodation of audience, rather than being scorned, ought to be considered rhetoric's most valuable resource, *at this time in history.* It may well be that at other times and in other places, the "flexibility" of rhetoric was indeed "a serious fault"; perhaps, in his society, Plato was right to attack rhetoric as a force which weakened the social fabric (though Booth does not argue this). But in this society, where we no longer believe in the "unicity of truth," attacking rhetoric for its flexibility seems counterproductive. When half of our society (the 'scientismists') tells us there are no "eternal verities," and from the other half (the 'irrationalists') we hear a babble of voices chanting their various versions of absolute, not-to-be-questioned truths, what no one needs is one more voice asserting his eternal verities, and insisting that we had better listen to him if we know what's good for us. That sort of rhetorical strategy will result only in more faction of the sort that developed at the University of Chicago. Instead, we need voices that will open up dialogue, and that will either help us to determine whether there are *any* eternal verities, or--what seems more likely--help us to get along better if there are not. The rhetoric of assent, like all effective rhetorics, is to some degree pragmatic.

But clearly, more needs to be said about the values implied by a pragmatic, accommodating rhetoric, for, by itself, the notion that, to be useful, a rhetoric must be connected to the convictions of a rhetorical community does not even begin to answer the objections of those who worry about rhetoric's capacity for misleading audiences. If all that is meant here by the phrase "connected to convictions" (or, in Booth's words, by being "bound" to them) is that the rhetor must tell an audience what it wishes to hear, then we might well worry that Booth's rhetoric is little more than a convenient tool for success--and not just any type of success, but the type defined by a "social universe" such as exists in the theories of Irving Goffman, where "the goal of [each person] is effectiveness and success . . . is nothing but what passes

for success" (MacIntyre 108-109). In this type of social universe, Booth realizes, "The test of any mode of influence . . . becomes whether it works; the whole range of ways to influence men becomes a single indiscriminate conglomeration of devices, to be chosen simply on the basis of likely effectiveness in gaining agreement or compliance" (87). Yet this is clearly not what the rhetoric of assent is about; indeed, Booth criticizes this view of rhetoric in no uncertain terms. He does not want a rhetoric so pragmatically flexible that it can be all things to all people.

To understand just what Booth means when he says that rhetoric is "bound" to the convictions of a given rhetorical community, we need to know what is meant by the key term of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent.* The word "assent" implies more in Booth's scheme of things than "concurrence" or "agreement." Like a variety of etymologically related words--sentience, sentiment, presentiment, resentment--"assent" refers to a state of mind that has as much to do with one's "senses" or "feelings" as it does with deliberate thought processes. To assent is to commit a mental act that involves more than logic, more, even, than reason--though it need not dispense with these; it is to acquiesce in a complex way, with one's whole being. It is to give, at least temporarily, a person or an idea or a work of art what the psychotherapist Carl Rogers calls "unconditional positive regard."[11] This kind of "assent" Booth sees as "the primary mental act of man" (xvi). He also

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[11] "Rogers tells us in effect that the supreme *ought* is to pass no judgments until we have thoroughly taken in the point of view of the other man, whether he is a patient or an intellectual opponent" (*Modern Dogma,* xvi). As Booth acknowledges, the notion of assent developed in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* also draws on Michael Polanyi's notion of "tacit assent" and Newman's notion of assent (particularly, I believe, his notion of "real assent," explained in Chapter IV of *An Essay in Aid of the Grammar of Assent*).

sees it as a much-needed antidote to the kinds of doubt and scepticism that have become the habitual way of thinking of many people. Clearly, there is risk involved in assenting to another person in the way Booth recommends; as Samuel Watson has remarked, for example (in discussing Polanyi's view of assent), "A person who becomes a sympathetic audience risks being misled" (60). But we must realize that in this risk there is the chance of "seeing things anew" (Watson 60) and of learning things we might not otherwise learn. On the other hand, if we choose to withhold assent, if we continue to doubt, if we continue to believe that our primary "mental act" is "to detect error" and "to resist being taken in" rather than "to take in" and "to be taken in" (xvi), we may be safer, not to mention more confident of what we do know. But we will also be less likely to learn from other people's points of view, and we may, consequently, find ourselves less able to reduce faction.[12]

Booth's notion of assent helps to explain how a virtue can be made of rhetoric's pragmatic flexibility. When he tells us that rhetoric is "bound" to the convictions of a "given rhetorical community," and when he defends it for being able to "alter its conclusions . . . to suit the local opinions of special audiences," he is not endorsing a rhetoric of deception--that is, one that tells an audience what it wants to hear only in order to achieve some personal gain. On the contrary, the attitude of assent would seem to demand that a rhetor treat people, in accordance with Kant's categorical imperative, as ends in themselves, "never as a means only." It would seem to involve actually seeing as one's audience sees, or, to put the matter differently, to

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[12] In "Arguing: The Art of Being Human," Wayne Brockriede emphasizes the element of risk involved in the best kinds of "arguments." An arguer must be "open to the possibility of risking change" and avoid "coercion or manipulation" (58).

involve a process of entering intellectually and emotionally, as well as willingly, into their circle of assumptions.[13]

There is no need to assume that this sort of assent demands saintly altruism. For Booth, all values are "socially constructed," and, indeed, the very "self" is a "social product in process of changing through interaction, sharing values with other selves" (126). Consequently, both the rhetor and the rhetoree can benefit from a rhetoric founded on an attitude of assent:

> . . . . if all men make each other in symbolic interchange, then by implication they *should* make each other, and it is an inescapable value in their lives that it is good to do it well . . . and bad to do it badly. If even the most austere, isolated laboratory scientist cannot even claim to exist except as a social self who was made and is still being made in symbolic exchange with others . . . then his very existence depends on the many values he affirms when he respects the truth, refuses to cook his evidence, relies on the traditions and methods taught him by his mentors, and so on. The supreme purpose of persuasion in this view could not be to talk someone else into a preconceived view; rather, it must be to engage in mutual inquiry or exploration. In such a world, our rhetorical purpose must always be to perform as well as possible in the same primal symbolic dance which makes us able to dance at all. If it is good for men to attend to each other's reasons--and we all know that it is, because without such attending none of us could come to be and questions about value could not even be asked--it is also good to work for whatever conditions make such mutual inquiry possible. Whatever imposes belief without personal engagement becomes inferior to whatever makes mutual exchange more likely. The purpose of mental change is thus to fulfill one's nature as a creature capable of responding to symbolic offerings. The *process* of inquiry through discourse thus becomes more important than any possible conclusions, and whatever stultifies such fulfillment becomes demonstrably wrong. (137)

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[13] In this sense, Booth goes beyond Aristotle, who seems (in *Rhetorica*, 1367b) concerned only with surface accommodation of an audience. For a view of how this notion of a "circle of assumptions" might be related to Burke's idea of "identification" and the tagmemic distinction between "etic" and "emic," see Richard Young and Alton Becker, "Toward a Modern Theory of Rhetoric: A Tagmemic Contribution," in *Contemporary Rhetoric*, Ed. Ross Winterowd, 134.

As Booth goes on to say, emphasizing inquiry in this way is "not quite the same" as claiming that conclusions do not matter, or that good questions serve us better than answers: "The process [of inquiry] fulfills itself only when the reasons are good and the conclusions thus as solid as the problems and circumstances allow for" (138).

Finally, having considered in general terms the relationship between good reasons and a given rhetorical community, we need to address one last question about Booth's definition of the "rhetoric of assent": what, precisely, are the "good reasons" which the rhetoric of assent is to discover? What, in other words, "really warrants assent because any reasonable person ought to be persuaded" by it? There are, he tells us, a great many of these good reasons or, as he also calls them, "warrants of assent"--so many, in fact, that "the repertory of good reasons could never be constructed by any one person, since it would include all good discourse about the grounds of valid discourse in any subject" (143). He calls this repertory "the great reservoir of good reasons," and in Chapter Three of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent,* he selects from this reservoir some of the best good reasons why we should discard the split between facts and values. In his fourth and final chapter, his aim is less specific; he offers us a variety of good reasons that he believes are likely to influence us, and that should have some influence on us, in most value-laden debates.

Before considering these good reasons, I think it worthwhile to reiterate an important point (one that Booth himself repeats many times). Since his goal is to establish a standard of truth and a rhetoric with which we can live, rather than a standard of truth and a rhetoric with which we can find no logical flaws, we should not expect the good reasons in his "reservoir" to be unassailable:

> My goal is (once again) not to establish a philosophy: my concern is with a befouled rhetorical climate which prevents our meeting to discover and pursue common interests. What we must find, I think, are grounds for

> confidence in a multiplicity of ways of knowing. Such grounds need not be what was sought by philosophers who based themselves in science: a theory providing fixed and proved principles from which all genuine reasoning could proceed. It need only be a revitalization of what we naturally assume as we go about our intellectual and practical business in the world: namely, that there are many logics, and that each of the domains of the mind (or person) has its own kind of knowing. (99)

In a sense, the rhetoric of assent is not a solution to the problem of the fact-value split at all, but a means of arriving at, or at least opening constructive debate about, solutions to the problem. What Booth offers in his third chapter is "a considerably looser assemblage of good reasons than . . . systematic philosophers construct" (100).

The first of these good reasons for questioning the split between facts and values is simply the "disastrous consequences" of this dogma. "To show that a given truth destroys the possibility of life . . . surely should constitute some reason for reconsidering such a 'truth'," and the truth, "as 'everyone already knows'," is that the fact-value split has become "intellectually and morally and politically intolerable" (90). As Booth realizes, however, this sort of argument from consequences will carry little weight in the world today: "as modernists all, we know that such thinking is not thinking but 'wishful thinking,' 'rationalization.' Indeed we often act as if the painfulness of a conclusion should reinforce our conviction: if it hurts it must be true" (90). He therefore passes over this good reason very quickly. The second good reason Booth explains at greater length; it is the argument from authority, the testimony of "many major figures over the past three hundred years [who] have attempted a systematic disproof of one or more of the dogmas." Booth's summary of these "disproofs"--he himself calls it "a terrible oversimplification" (92)--need not be dwelled on at length. It is enough to say that the "reunions of fact and value" offered by these major figures are of three types: those (such as Whitehead's "process philosophy") that "revivify" nature and knowledge, by building "new pictures of man and nature that will see men's values as inseparable

from God's or nature's values" (92); those that "expand the domain of action or will to repudiate or encompass the scientific picture of a value-free world" (95) (for example, the pragmatism of Peirce, Dewey, and James); and those that "expand the domain of feeling to absorb all of what is called thinking and all other grounds for action" (97) (a group which includes the views of Nietzsche, Santayana, D.H. Lawrence, and Henry James).

There are also good reasons based on the assumptions we make "as we go about our intellectual and practical business in the world":

> . . . the domain of practical deliberation . . . must take into account whatever scientific knowledge is available but . . . in itself must at best be imprecise and chancy; still, as everyone knows, there really is a difference between a wise man and a fool . . . and part of the difference is in what they know. . . [Moreover] there is productive activity and thought about it, yielding a knowledge of how to make and enjoy the graces of life that life's other natural processes fail to provide; the arts are created and enjoyed not in a meaningless, relativized bedlam of 'what each person happens to like' but in communities that share, through direct experience and through talk about, the knowledge of good makings. (100)

What Booth is saying is that, contrary to what scientism has told us, there really is value in consensus, in what "everybody knows." When "common sense"--that is, "what we 'sense' and know in common" (100)--tells us something is so, we have good reasons for believing it. Indeed, those who trust common sense are often more balanced and "reasonable" than those who take logically and empirically defensible positions:

> Fanatics are always 'reasonable' in the sense of seeing rational connections between their abstract principles and their conclusions; their irrationality often consists in choosing the wrong principles validated by an inadequately considered group of 'significant others.' They have lost their 'common sense'--they do not test their commitments by seeking a genuinely common ground shared with the relevant fellow creatures. And the value-free scientismist is from this point of view equally irrational, because he too has chosen, on abstract principles, a validating group that ignores what the common sense he shares with his fellows would teach (101).

One's fund of common sense does not, of course, depend solely on what others think. Each of us will have experiences that teach us to disagree with others, and even to disagree with the consensus. Yet, as Booth argues, experience will also teach us that, as inevitable as such disagreements are, there are nonetheless many other, probably more occasions when we agree with the consensus, or at least with particulars of the consensual position; and if we accept that, we can learn to question the consensus without rejecting it. "Common" sense, in other words, can act as a kind of gauge and check on irrational, and even on excessively rational, thinking.[14]

And just what are the good reasons of common sense? It seems to me that all the reasons I have thus far considered for rejecting modern dogmas are to some degree the good reasons of common sense: to question the split between facts and values because it is harmful, as Booth's argument from consequences does, or to question it, as his argument from authority does, because it has been systematically attacked by many intelligent people, would be, Booth himself might say, the sensible thing to do--the sort of thing we do all the time, or at least until we are faced with seemingly irreconciliable differences over value questions and begin to distrust the substance and methods of one another's arguments. But Booth offers other "good" arguments from common sense. In fact, I think one could say that his rhetoric of assent is founded on the notion of common sense.

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[14] The notion of "coduction," which Booth advocates in *The Company We Keep,* is essentially another way of defending the role of common sense in the pluralistic society. Coduction is what each of us does when comparing his or her experiences "with other more or less qualified observers." It "can never be 'demonstrative,' apodeictic . . . . and it can never be performed with confidence by one person alone" (73). See, especially, 70-74.

Common sense tells Booth, for example, that ethical and emotional appeals can serve as good reasons. Emotional appeals were once considered an integral part of persuasion. Aristotle, for instance, devoted a large portion of his *Rhetorica* to an analysis of the human character, so that students of rhetoric might better understand the emotional needs of various audiences and thus plead their cases more successfully. But in the "befouled rhetorical climate" brought about by the split between facts and values, appeals of these sorts are now scorned--or at least in those circles most influenced by scientism. As Booth says, "The history of rhetoric since the seventeenth century could be described as a mounting suspicion and final rejection of ethical and emotional proof and then a progressive narrowing of the range of what is accepted as substantive proof" (145). We ought to see this dismissal of unquantifiable, unverifiable "proofs" for what it is: another case of "man-in-the-study" forcing a scientistic dogma upon us. Man-out-of-the-study--the "common" man, who relies on common sense--rarely dismisses emotional appeals so readily. This does not make him an irrationalist; one can be influenced by emotional appeals without being completely controlled by them. Booth is aware that "'gut reactions' can be very bad reasons for action," but as he says, "so can logical proofs" (164). "The real art lies always in the proper weighing -- and what is proper is a matter finally of shared norms" (164). He offers a similar defence of ethical proofs, based on "common sense" or, as he says elsewhere, the values of "a concurring public" (140):

> There are . . . great dangers for anyone who relies very heavily on ethical proofs in plotting his course through today's rhetoric: sincerity is more difficult to check and easier to fake than logicality or consistency, and its presence does not, after all, guarantee very much about the speaker's case. But it is a serious mistake for defenders of institutions to pretend that they are above its appeals, or that the sincerity of a proponent is not in some sense a good reason for his case. We all inevitably rely on our notions of the basic integrity of the rhetor who appeals to us; we all excuse gaps in argumentative cogency if we believe that the speaker or writer is essentially reliable in sharing values we share. And it would be unreasonable not to.

All the art, then, lies in assessing degrees of reliability. (157)

Finally, in addition to ethical and emotional "proofs," Booth mentions the "good reasons" of art. The split between facts and values has led us to conclude that the best novels, poetry, paintings, and symphonies never argue for anything. However, says Booth, describing his own reaction to this dogma, "if I consult my experience instead of modernist abstractions about what art should or should not do, I find myself with a problem: art works change me" (165). A beautiful work of art--the beautiful "dancing of an attitude"--indirectly argues for its ideas simply by better allowing us to "take them in," by making them more palpable, more believable, or more enduring than ideas that are "danced" poorly. Moreover, the changes made in us through this form of artistic "persuasion" are not entirely "emotional, non-rational, non-cognitive" (166), as has often been claimed.

III

In summary, then, one could say that Booth's "rhetoric of assent" is defined by four conditions. First, it is a rhetoric concerned with probabilities rather than certainties. Since our ability to solve value-laden problems is limited (and most problems with which we deal involve values), and since no one can claim certain knowledge of "the truth," any attempts we might make to persuade others of what we believe to be true ought to be made with an awareness that there are many "ways of knowing" and "many grades of dubiety and credibility" (89). The rhetoric of assent does not aim to say the final word or to close discussion, but to foster inquiry even as it seeks to persuade. We are all constructed through social interaction, particularly through symbolic interaction, says Booth. Given this, to profess certainty where certainty is not possible is not only to discourage symbolic interaction and stifle further inquiry, but to diminish all of us.

Secondly, because it recognizes the uncertainty of human knowledge, the rhetoric of assent admits non-quantifiable, non-analytical modes of appeal as having substantial weight. Traditionally, and increasingly so in the last hundred years, assessments of rhetoric have assumed that every inquirer in the larger rhetorical community ought to measure up to the standards of one particular part of that community--to the aims of scientists, for example, or of logicians. The highest standards of persuasion have therefore entailed the use of logical and non-artistic proofs rather than ethical and emotional appeals, as Aristotle called them. Booth's rhetoric of assent aims at a less exclusionary and more humanistic approach to assessing rhetoric; it would broaden the range of what has traditionally been considered effective persuasion, recognizing not just that people are persuaded by, for example, ethical and emotional appeals, but that these appeals can often be "good reasons" for being persuaded. Thus, whereas Aristotle admits "artistic" appeals only with considerable reluctance, attributing their success largely to "the defects of our hearers" (III, 1404a), Booth grants them a more substantial role, much like that of logical appeals and factual evidence. This shift in evaluation should in no way be taken to mean that the rhetoric of assent advocates emotionalism, or grants the rabble-rouser a status equal to that of the principled but plain speaker who relies entirely on "non-artistic" and logical appeals. This second condition of the rhetoric of assent, the admission of ethical and emotional appeals and of the testimony of authorities, is closely linked to the first condition, the recognition that certainty is not possible and that, consequently, we need a more refined assessment of the probabilities and degrees of truth. When dealing with value-laden issues, we must avoid the reductive simplicities of an either/or attitude, as well as the positivist tyranny that would have us believe the best arguments are always those which can be proved "true according to abstract methods" (xiii). If we have *some* doubt about

the ethos of a rhetor, we need not discard his or her claims *entirely* ; nor must we entirely disregard our instincts about a rhetor simply because they cannot be articulated. Booth would say that we ought to grant *some* degree of assent to evidence that a rhetor is sincere, or trustworthy, or deeply committed to his arguments, even though that evidence may be very difficult to assess.

The third and fourth conditions of a rhetoric of assent are also closely linked. The third is that the rhetoric of assent is bound to the convictions of the rhetorical community in which it operates. Booth claims that this is a condition of all rhetorics, and on the surface, it does seem to be much the same criterion that Aristotle calls for in his *Rhetorica* . "We must . . . ," says Aristotle, "take into account the nature of our particular audience when making a speech of praise. If the audience esteems a given quality, we must say that our hero has that quality . . . . Everything, in fact, that is esteemed we are to represent as noble" (I, 1367b). However, in the context of classical rhetoric, where persuasion tends to have an "agonistic or competitive stress" and "often implies the presence or threat of an adversary" (Burke, *Motives* 52), this accommodation of audience also carries with it an unpleasant possibility of deceit--that is, of a willingness to accept any means to achieve one's end. In Booth's socially constructed world, such deceit cannot be condoned; therefore, one must recognize that the rhetoric of assent is bound *authentically* to a given rhetorical community. The rhetor who accommodates his audience does so out of respect for them, because he recognizes that truth is uncertain and that they, too, have something to contribute to the exploration and discussion of ideas. This leads to the fourth condition of Booth's rhetoric: in rhetorical exchanges, Booth wants us to cultivate an attitude of "benign acceptance" (40) towards others, so that acts of persuasion are not acts of subtle coercion or deception but a genuine seeking for common ground between rhetor and audience.

We must enter the circle of assumptions in which our audience moves, and find the values we share. If we do, the benefits may be immense: by improving "the quality of our symbolic exchange" and thus our understanding of "our fellow selves" (202), the rhetoric of assent may "expand" each of us as individuals while at the same time reducing faction and fostering a sense of community.

By its very nature, the rhetoric of assent is not one for which the conditions can be laid out precisely, nor can the validity of its premises be established from some neutral, value-free point of view. Indeed, to expect such scientistic justifications would be to submit the rhetoric of assent to the very standards it seeks to overthrow. Booth acknowledges that his enterprise is somewhat circular, asking us to take on faith the claim that faith *ought* to play a role in rhetorical exchanges. Nevertheless, if we seek some kind of confirmation that his views have merit--as Booth himself would agree we must--we can turn to the testimony of others from the community of rhetoricians, many of whom have outlined rhetorical theories very much like Booth's. In short, his theory does not stand on its own. Even as it has been criticized or modified by other rhetorical theorists, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* has been consistently recognized as one of the seminal works in an entire "movement."[15] Considering the arguments offered by the theorists of the movement helps us to understand Booth's theories better and to see them as the product of "symbolic exchange" in a rhetorical community. Particularly useful is the work of Wallace, Watson, Perelman, and Fisher.

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[15] Says Fisher, "foremost among modern rhetoricians who have tackled the problem of 'good reasons' are Wallace and Booth" ("Logic" 376). According to Paul Bator, the good reasons movement is "led by Chaim Perelman, Wayne Booth, and others" (38). The most cogent criticisms of Booth's book are to be found in Fisher, Watson, and Weimer.

In "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons," Wallace takes a position much like Booth's. He is concerned that "for the last century or so students of rhetoric seem to have been trapped into accepting a sort of scientific realism" (239). If we accept the argument of this "naive realism," he says, we inevitably accept with it the view "that rhetoric is nothing more than the art of framing information and of translating it into intelligible terms for the popular audience" (239). For his part, Wallace believes rhetoric is more than a secondary art of style and arrangement. "Rhetorical theory must deal with the substance of discourse" as well, "the basic materials" of which are "ethical and moral values" and the "information relevant to these" (240). The "appearance and use of value-judgments in practical discourse are," he says, "the proper, although not the sole, concern of the theory and practice of rhetoric" (241). It is worth noting Wallace's emphasis on "practical" discourse; whereas "the science of ethics deals with moral principles and standards of conduct as they are abstracted from practice," "the art of rhetoric" deals with "moral principles in particular situations" (244). Moreover, Wallace makes it clear that this concern with value-judgments should not be limited to those practical discourses in which such judgments are made explicit; recognizing that "much exposition is functionally persuasive, whether in intent or effect," he argues (as has Burke, among other modern rhetorical theorists) that the scope of rhetorical theory ought to extend to "what is ordinarily thought of as informative utterance" (242).

In each of the respects mentioned above--in rejecting scientism, in claiming that rhetorical theory should deal with substance as well as style and structure, and in recognizing that ostensibly non-suasive modes of discourse can have a suasive function--Wallace's views resemble those of Booth. What is more important, however, is that Wallace also locates the foundation of value-judgments in community. He argues that any ethical statement (as an example, he gives the

statement "X should not have copied from Y's paper") is valid when it "can be supported by a valid general principle" (e.g. "Cheating is wrong") (248), and that, in turn, the general principle "is valid to the extent that it corresponds with the beliefs and conduct of the group which gives it sanction" (248).[16] Since the "beliefs and conduct" of a group are often understood by that group implicitly rather than explicitly, this community validation can rarely be determined with any certainty: "the examination of practical reason seems to indicate that reasons which govern practice are quite different from the syllogism as usually presented" (248). In practical terms, what this means is that there is little point in "worrying over our failure to find perfect syllogisms in the arguments of everyday life" (248). What we ought to look for in building and assessing arguments are "good reasons," that is, statements "offered in support of an *ought* proposition or of a value-judgment." These reasons may include "such traditional forms of reasoning as deduction and induction, the syllogism, generalization, analogy, causation, and correlation" (248), but, presumably, they can also include other, non-propositional forms of appeal, such as ethical and emotional appeals. To be "good," it is enough that reasons are "consistent with each other" (247) and relevant to the "ought proposition or value-judgment" that the rhetor claims they support. (As we shall see, these criteria of "consistency" and "relevance" are echoed in Fisher's work on good reasons.)

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[16] As Wallace adds, ethical statements that are supported by a valid general principle "are objective in the sense that they are independent of the speaker's subjective attitudes" (248). It should also be noted that the group which gives the principle sanction is influenced not only by community norms but also by universal "norms': "What a good reason is is to some extent fixed by human nature and to a very large extent by generally accepted principles and practices which make social life, as we understand it, possible" (248).

Samuel Watson suggests that the two main concerns raised by Wallace's pioneering essay on good reasons "continue to be central" for the "good reasons movement": "one is a search for some conception(s) of reason which, not restricted to formal inference, functions in the human realm of individual and communal decision; the other is a renewed interest in the content, substance, and significance of rhetorical discourse" (50). To the first of these concerns, Watson believes he has the answer; the conception of reason that the good reasons movement seeks can be found in the epistemology of Michael Polanyi. According to Polanyi, knowledge is of two types: on the one hand, "we can know an entity which we focally grasp and often can *explicitly* delineate"; and, on the other, we can know "myriads of clues *from* which we take our bearings" on an entity (56). The second kind of knowledge, in which all our explicit knowledge is grounded, is what Polanyi calls "tacit knowledge." It requires a complex kind of "indwelling"--the kind of assent or willingness to "be taken in" that Booth describes in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* --and it is the kind of knowledge on which we rely when we learn to use complex tools, or when we learn the language and theories that characterize a discipline. "Working a typewriter by touch, like riding a bicycle or strolling on a path," says Lewis Thomas, "is best done by not giving it a glancing thought. Once you do, your fingers fumble and hit the wrong keys" (Thomas 64). The process is much the same for learning the rules and rituals of any discipline. Anyone who aspires to become an accepted and effective "disciple" in a given discipline "must teach himself to indwell." He must learn to see reality "from the point of view which the intellectual framework of his discipline can afford him" (Watson 58). If he does not, he will fumble, address the wrong problems, and find the wrong solutions.

Insofar as I am seeking a more precise definition of good reasons rhetoric, the point that I wish to draw from all of this is that, in the Polanyian scheme of things, knowledge requires commitment ("impassioned efforts," as Watson puts it), even though it offers no guarantee of success. One *must* take a chance, give of oneself, in order to know. Thus, "Human reason is not an operation on propositions but an action of persons" (60). Since it is, and since persons are imperfect, we can assume that the acquisition of knowledge is an uncertain process:

> Reason is not completely explicit. It is not governed by a specified set of unchanging values, with conclusions guaranteed by evidence exhaustively comprehended, or by premises in which the conclusion already is entailed. The goal of reason is not analytic certainty but the achievement of new meaning, the creation of a new understanding of reality . . . . (61)

For the reader or auditor seeking new meaning as he attends to the claims of a rhetor, the degree of assent that those claims deserve "cannot be determined dispassionately by an examination of propositions' entailment or by some other checklist of impersonal and explicit features" (61). Instead, he is likely to see "good reason" for his assent in other, more subtle clues, such as indications that the rhetor is truly committed to what he is saying. As Watson says, "Good reasons are never anonymous; they receive the personal backing of the speaker who stands behind them, and they seek the personal allegiance of the audience to whom they are addressed" (63).

It would seem, then, that Watson would agree with Booth in finding certain kinds of ethical and emotional appeals to be "good reasons" for assent. Like Booth, however, Watson also recognizes that, by the very nature of its enterprise, good reasons theory cannot catalogue all the kinds of appeals that might serve as "warrants for assent" on various occasions and for various audiences. All we can say is that there is a "multiplicity of inconclusive warrants which humans reasonably

advance for holding some belief," and that "reason's actions reveal themselves quite differently when humans address different levels of reality within the contexts that their different communities provide" (61). "Beyond that point," he adds, "it is hazardous to go, not because clues are unavailable but because they may be interpreted too narrowly" (61). In other words, in seeking to define good reasons explicitly, we run the risk of becoming reductively scientistic, of succumbing to the very kind of rhetorical response that the good reasons movement hopes to avoid. (And, says Watson, those of us "whose concern lies in the theory of argumentation" may be the ones most likely to succumb to such narrowness of interpretation.)

Chaim Perelman also believes that reason is "not an operation on propositions but an action of persons." As he says in "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," "argumentation, unlike demonstration, presupposes a meeting of minds: the will on the part of the orator to persuade and not to compel or command, and a predisposition on the part of the audience to listen" (*Humanities* 9). One of the key distinctions Perelman makes throughout his extensive body of work is between "rational" arguments, the formal arguments by which logicians demonstrate the truth or falsity and the validity or non-validity of conclusions, and "reasonable" arguments, the less formal, and often non-formal, means of argument on which most people, in and out of their various disciplines, rely in order to reach qualified agreements (or disagreements), and on which depend such variables as the "personal backing" of the rhetor as well as the style and arrangement of discourse. Whenever we operate in "the domain of action" (*Humanities* vii), where we must deal with value-laden issues--in other words, when we discuss legal issues, or political issues, or even our daily affairs--we depend on reasonable rather than on

rational argumentation.[17] That is, we depend on rhetoric. For Perelman, as for Booth, Wallace, and Watson, this dependence on non-formal argumentation does not make rhetoric an inferior, secondary art--does not make it, in the conventional sense of the word, "irrational." Though its domain differs from that of formal logic, rhetoric nonetheless remains "within the sphere of reason" (Zyskind ix).

In Perelman's view, there is "no basis of logical necessity or experiential universality for judgments of value" (Zyskind ix); it is the audience, ultimately, who decides whether or not a rhetorical claim is "reasonable." Since "the claims we make in arguing are not self-evidently true . . . . [since] they cannot be 'proved completely . . . they must be *judged to be reasonable* by those to whom the claims and their supports are presented," and "this means that what the audience knows or thinks it knows must be brought into support of or at least rendered consonant with the claim being made" (Arnold xi). Like Booth and Polanyi, then, Perelman is telling us that the rhetor is bound to the rhetorical community he addresses. But Perelman adds to this argument an idea not found in Booth or Polanyi. Though he recognizes the fact that particular audiences vary, and that rhetoric must often adapt to these particular audiences, he also advances the notion that there are "universal audiences." A universal audience is not an actual audience, but an imagined one, comprised of all those "who are rational and competent with respect to the issues that are being debated" (Perelman, *Humanities* 48; see also *New Rhetoric* 31). This imagined audience can be a specialized audience; for example, the scientist who writes an article for an academic journal may be addressing a universal audience when he supposes that all the scientists who are likely to read it will be "rational and

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[17]For an extended discussion of this distinction, see "The Rational and the Reasonable," in *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, 117-123.

competent with respect to the issues" he raises. In such a case, the members of the audience, being trained to read in particular ways, may be influenced little by matters having to do with the rhetor's ethos or style; indeed, the conventions of their discipline may "tacitly" tell them that to be influenced by such rhetorical factors would be distinctly "unreasonable." But when a universal audience is not specialized--when, for example, it is composed of all the educated, intelligent lay readers who are interested in the environment, as, I believe, are the audiences of Schell, Berry, and McPhee--the matter is rather different. What is "reasonable" in such cases includes a very broad range of factors that influence one's response to arguments.

Like Watson and Booth, Perelman recognizes not only that a complete catalogue of such factors is a practical impossibility, but that, in trying to define them closely, the rhetorician risks making reductive generalizations about what constitutes a good argument and what does not.[18] Nevertheless, Perelman's major contribution to modern rhetorical theory may well lie in his having articulated a wealth of these factors without being restrictively normative. It will be sufficient to examine several of these briefly, concentrating on those that have the greatest relevance for my later chapters of rhetorical analysis.[19]

One factor that influences reasonable audiences is what Perelman calls simply "presence."

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[18] "A general rhetoric cannot be fixed by precepts and rules laid down once for all" (*Humanities* 25).

[19] For brief summaries of Perelman's analysis of factors influencing a universal audience, see Carrol Arnold's introduction to *The Realm of Rhetoric* and Perelman's "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," in *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities.*

> What an audience accepts forms a body of opinion, convictions, and commitments that is both vast and indeterminate. From this body the orator must select certain elements on which he focuses attention by endowing them, as it were, with a "presence." This does not mean that the elements left out are entirely ignored, but they are pushed into the background. Such a choice implicitly sets value on some aspects of reality rather that others . . . .
>
> Things present, things near to us in space and time, act directly on our sensibility. The orator's endeavors often consist, however, in bringing to mind things that are not immediately present. (*Humanities* 17)

As Perelman goes on to say, figures such as anaphora, enallage, and repetition are effective ways of creating presence (in the sense that, to use Shklovsky's term, they can help "defamiliarize" what we might otherwise take for granted). Achieving presence, however, can also "lead to problems," for the effective presentation of an object or event can "distract the audience" or even "lead them in a direction the speaker did not intend." "For this reason," adds Perelman, "the advice of certain teachers of rhetoric, stressing references to physical realities to move an audience, should not always be followed" (*Realm* 35). This qualification will be worth keeping in mind, particularly when we consider the disarmament rhetoric of Schell in Chapter Four.

Another feature of Perelman's work distinguishing it from that of other good reasons theorists has been his consistent attention to the rhetorical value of structural aspects of arguments.[20] "Nonformal argument consists," he says, "not of a chain of ideas of which some are derived from others according to accepted rules of inference, but rather of a web formed from all the arguments and all the reasons that combine to achieve the desired result." The persuasiveness of this "web" of

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[20] According to Arnold, Perelman has noticed "that claims to rationality are embedded in a number of verbal structures that have heretofore been treated as either exclusively ornamental or dispositional" (ix).

arguments depends, among other things, upon the order in which points are made, upon the ways in which points interact, and upon what Perelman calls the "fullness of argumentation." As he tells us in *The Realm of Rhetoric,*

> Since no one argument is compelling, but since each seems to contribute to the reinforcement of the argumentation as a whole, one could believe that the efficacy of the discourse is a function of the number of arguments.
>
> Several reasons, however, are opposed to this optimistic vision of things. Although it is true that the elements interact and at times appreciably reinforce the value of isolated arguments, this impression is not always produced . . . . If it arouses objections that prevail upon the mind of the audience, [an] argument will seem weak, and this weakness can reflect upon the whole discourse, because the image of the speaker--what Aristotle defined as the oratorical *ethos* --will be changed. The speaker might appear as if he is in bad faith, unworthy of confidence, because of his failure to advance better arguments in favor of the thesis he defends. (138-39)

More obviously, in addition to arousing inappropriate associations in the readers' minds, the attempt to build an overwhelming case through many arguments or through "the amplification of a single argument" (144) may simply tire readers. The effective rhetor must therefore always take into consideration not only the values of his audience, but their human limitations. Good reasons are not simply logical propositions; good arguments not simply a coherent presentation of claims that are logically sound and well supported by facts. This is a point to which I will return in my rhetorical analyses of Schell and Berry.

For Perelman, as for Booth and Watson, the ethos of the rhetor is also a significant factor in many arguments. That people are influenced by a rhetor's ethos need not be an indication of emotionalism or unreasonableness; their response is, rather, simply a result of their having recognized the connection between "elements of reality" (*Realm* 81)--which is to say, of their having recognized "the link that unites a person to his actions" (*Humanities* 21). According to Perelman, arguments that appeal to such "liasons of coexistence" (*Realm* 81) can be very effective. Often,

for example, a rhetor can bolster his arguments by heightening his audience's awareness of his reputation: "The good name a person enjoys becomes a form of capital embodied in his person, an asset it is legitimate to use in case of need" (93). On the other hand, when a rhetor passes judgment on other people, his judgment may reflect upon himself. Perelman mentions only the negative effect of such a reflection; as he says, "Someone who wrongly accuses another of thoughtlessness or partiality can be charged with these in turn" (92). However, as I will show of Berry, in Chapter Five, and even more of McPhee, in Chapter Six, the "reflections" that a rhetor's judgment of others casts on himself can also enhance his ethos.

What Perelman offers us, then, is a list of rhetorical factors influencing reasonable auditors that is more extensive and often more specific than Booth's "reservoir of good reasons." By contrast, Walter Fisher offers us what is, to date, the most coherent and most practicable means of distinguishing "the merits of competing good reasons" ("Logic" 378). Evaluation is his chief interest. As he tells us in "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," he wishes to establish a non-formal, yet systematic "set of criterial questions . . . so that one can ascertain the weight of reasons in any given message, including one's own" (379). There are five such questions:

> First is the question of *fact: What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message?* Second is the question of *relevance: Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon?* Included in this question is a concern for omitted, distorted, and misrepresented values. Third is the question of *consequence: What would be the effects of adhering to the values in regard to one's concept of oneself, to one's behavior, to one's relationship with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction?* . . . . Fourth is the question of *consistency: Are the values confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives and statements of others whom one admires and respects, and/or in a conception of the best audience that one can conceive?* . . . . Fifth is the question of *transcendent issue: Even if a prima facie case exists or a burden of proof has been established, are the values the message offer those that, in the*

estimation of the critic, constitute the ideal basis for human conduct? (379-80)

Though it asks questions rather than posing answers, this "logic of good reasons" is itself clearly not value-free. Fisher acknowledges that his scheme is based on a number of assumptions, all of which echo those of other theorists in the good reasons movement: "that value-judgments are inevitable, that they are not irrational, that consensus about them will never be realized, and that no analytically grounded hierarchy of values will ever claim universal adherence" (376-77). Universal consensus is impossible, Fisher believes, because values are "social constructs, socially derived and maintained" (380) from and by smaller rhetorical communities (e.g. scientists, or Kentuckians, or Americans) as well as larger rhetorical communities (the English-speaking world, or the human race). In order to persuade a particular rhetorical community, a rhetor must therefore know something of how its values agree or disagree with those of other communities. Furthermore, like Wallace and Booth, he believes that we need to rethink "argumentative forms, so that they include all modes of communication, not just those that have clear-cut inferential structures" (378).

Given that its underlying assumptions are so similar to theirs, it should not be surprising that Fisher's logic of good reasons accommodates the concerns of other good reasons theorists quite well. And since this scheme is so accommodating, and since it is essentially concerned with the evaluation of good reasons, as is this thesis, I believe that Fisher's five questions can serve as appropriate foundation for a more extended definition of the rhetoric of assent.[21]

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[21] The following synopsis deals only with Fisher's questions about values. However, it should be noted that, like others in the good reasons movement, Fisher does not exclude "substantive" or (to use Perelman's term) "rational" proofs from his proposed rhetoric. His

If, for instance, we ask Fisher's first question of any rhetorical act, and look for the implicit as well as the explicit values of a message, we allow for the possibility that ostensibly non-argumentative and non-suasive discourses can, in fact, "argue." We therefore satisfy Booth's claims for the "good reasons of art" and Wallace's claims for exposition as argument, as well as Polanyi's more general claim that we often "know" tacitly.

The question of relevance seems to me somewhat vague in its present form. However, if we assume that the "appropriateness" of implicit or explicit values is determined by the rhetorical community to whom a "message" is given, then this second question also echoes the concerns of Booth, Watson, and Perelman. Each of these theorists would say that reasons acceptable to one community may be not only unacceptable to another community but utterly irrelevant. A familiar Canadian example will clarify my point: if unemployment decreases in Canada subsequent to the recent free trade agreement with the United States, and apparently as a result of this agreement (so that no *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy is involved in assessing the relationship between unemployment and free trade), a community of economists may consider this decrease a "good reason" for considering free trade a success; however, this "reason" will be completely beside the point to the citizens of a small town whose major employer has left for greener pastures. This question of relevance also seems tied to the pragmatism characterizing all the good reasons theorists. As Fisher says, any value stated or implied in an argument becomes

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logic of good reasons can be "added to the criterial questions of the [conventional] logic of reasons" and "can be infused with the tests of different types of reasoning: example, analogy, sign, cause, definition, and authority" (380).

"valuable" because "it makes a pragmatic difference in one's life and in one's community" (381). We might say, then, that if it does not make such a difference, a value either does not provide us with a "good reason" for assent, or is simply not relevant.

As his own comments on the "disastrous consequences" of the fact-value split suggest, Booth would likely agree with Fisher that the third question, the question of "consequence," is essential to evaluating any rhetorical act. Indeed, Booth does more than defend arguments from consequence. By telling us that rhetoric which "violates the inherent values of free human exhange among persons" is simply "wrong" (148), he advocates a rhetoric that has particular kinds of consequences. So, too, does Watson, in claiming that "the goal of reason is not analytic certainty but the achievement of new meaning, the creation of a new understanding of reality." In this sense of being advocates for particular values, it might seem that Booth and Watson disagree with Fisher, who claims not to be an advocate. As Fisher says in "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," the purpose of his evaluative scheme is "to insure that people are conscious of the values they adhere to and would promote in rhetorical transactions, and to inform their consciousness *without dictating what they should believe* " (383; author's emphasis). I believe, however, that this disagreement is more apparent than real. By the very fact of his having recognized the central role of values in human interaction, as well as by the fact of his stressing, in his fifth question, the importance of transcendent values, Fisher becomes an advocate of sorts. His rhetoric of good reasons is not "dictatorial," but neither is it "value-free." Like the rhetorics promoted by all good reasons theorists, it is, in the words of Douglas Ehninger, "a socially oriented art aimed at promoting healthy and productive human relationships" ("Synoptic View" 448).

The question of consistency would also seem to be supported by the claims of all of the theorists I have considered. If, as Fisher says, we can look to "the lives and statements of others" for confirmation of the values on which an argument depends, then presumably it is reasonable to look for "liaisons of coexistence," as Perelman describes them. In other words, as Booth, Wallace, Watson, and Perelman all stress, it ought to count for something that a rhetor reveals a deep commitment to what he says, or that he lives a life which is consistent with what he says. Ethical and emotional appeals should carry some weight. In addition, Fisher's claim that one can evaluate an argument by asking whether its values are consistent with "a conception of the best audience that one can conceive" resembles (as Fisher himself point out) Perelman's notion that the best arguments are addressed to a "universal audience."

At first glance, Fisher's fifth criterial question may seem only to repeat his and Booth's concern for promoting what Ehninger calls "healthy human relationships." However, I believe that something new may be added to the idea of a rhetoric of assent by "the question of transcendent issue." As Fisher explains,

> This is clearly the paramount issue that confronts those responsible for decisions that impinge on the nature, quality, and the continued existence of human life, especially in the fields of biology and weapons technology and employment. Transcendent values are present in more ordinary cases but they are rarely a matter of dispute. They concern ultimate values, are generally taken for granted by the arguer, and, when brought to the surface, reveal one's most fundamental commitments. (380)

What Fisher seems to be saying here is that, in some cases, it is not enough that one satisfies a particular rhetorical community--or indeed even a universal audience of specialists. One must try to step outside one's role as a specialist, one's position within the smaller rhetorical community, to render judgments not from some (non-existent) value-free perspective, but from the broadest perspective available to us as

"valuing . . . reasoning animals" (376). From this perspective, the hypothetical economists whom I described above may decide that the "benefits" of free trade do not justify such non-quantifiable "costs" as the breakup of families and the sense of loss felt by those who are displaced from their communities. From this perspective, one may decide, as Booth does, that the "ultimate values" are those which "maintain and improve the quality of our symbolic exchange with our fellow 'selves'" (202).

On the other hand, one may decide that the ultimate value is simply "the continued existence of the species, or the continued health of our planet. These are the sorts of values on which we might expect environmentalists to base their appeals.

IV

Now that Booth's rhetorical theory has been compared with and supplemented by the theories of others in the good reasons movement and a more coherent working definition of the rhetoric of assent has been attempted, the remainder of this thesis will focus on rhetorical practices. My aim will be to determine just how particular rhetorics of assent might work, what they might look like, and whether they are effective. In assessing particular rhetorics, I will not rely on any single theoretical scheme, such as Fisher's five-part "logic of good reasons," for to do so would, I believe, violate the spirit in which Booth and others in the good reasons movement offer their theories. If there is one point on which all the good reasons theorists would agree, it is that we must avoid being reductive when we evaluate an argument, since reductiveness is precisely what has, in the past, resulted in our neglecting influential aspects of an argument simply because they are unquantifiable, unpredictable, and often subtle. I will refer to Fisher's schema in each of my three

chapters of rhetorical analysis, because it offers a convenient and consistent means of assessment, but I will not base my analyses solely on it. Booth, Perelman, and a variety of other rhetorical theorists will also be called upon when the need arises.

However, before assessing the rhetorics of Schell, Berry, and McPhee, I must first try to define the rhetorical situation in which these writers find themselves. Good reasons theory tells us that good arguments are bound to the particular rhetorical communities to whom they are given. Accordingly, we must know something of these communities if we are to accurately evaluate the arguments addressed to them. In the case of my three subjects, particularly Schell and McPhee, these rhetorical communities, or readerships, are too large to be identified precisely. Nonetheless, one can, I believe, by examining some of the technical, historical, and ethical aspects of the subject with which these writers deal, come to some reasonable conclusions about their readerships, and consequently sharpen one's evaluation of the rhetorical appeals they make. Such an examination of the rhetorical aspects of environmentalism will therefore be the purpose of my third chapter.

Chapter Three: Some Rhetorical Aspects of Environmentalism

To say that "the Environment" is currently a subject of interest to the public would be something of an understatement. I would go so far as to say that this interest borders on obsession. Whether the focus is on a minor incident, such as a chemical spill in a local river, or on a development of international significance, such as the depletion of the earth's ozone layer, the steadily increasing coverage given to such topics by the mass media attests to an almost insatiable thirst for information about the earth's state of health. Sometimes, it is true--especially now that being "green" has become "good business"--the information we are given is less likely to inform us than it is to elicit contempt or boredom; the mind can bear only so many sales-pitches for "environmentally friendly" products, only so much advice on how to "do our part" for Mother Earth. Yet from behind the barricades of our self-protective scepticism, we must remember that all the talk about "saving our planet" is *not* much ado about nothing. The evidence of our senses and the research of scientists both tell us that there are reasons for concern. Indeed, many scientists are saying that the condition of our planet has become critical. According to the Worldwatch Institute's 1989 *State of the World Report*, "We are now in a race to stop environmental deterioration before it becomes unmanageable, before it leads to economic decline and social disruption" (Brown xv). Though grave, this prognosis is not unusual. It would seem that the scientific community is now

divided mostly on the matter of how much, rather than whether, we have damaged our planet.[1]

This general consensus is, however, a very recent development. Though there was, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, a promising movement towards a new environmental awareness, many scientists either disputed or ignored warnings about severe environmental degradation, and the public consequently let the movement die. In the early 1980's, consensus did begin to emerge that the problem we had on our hands was genuine, serious, and possibly urgent, but if attitudes changed, our conduct did not. By 1984, "little change of a truly *fundamental* nature [had] been achieved by the environmental movement" (Pepper 3). Even as recently as 1989, an administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States could conclude, "With a few important exceptions, the environmental-protection movement [in the industrialized world] . . . has not had a substantial effect on the lives of most people" (Ruckelhaus 168). Our treatment of the environment still seems marked by insufficient personal initiative and a lack of strict government regulations. One might therefore say that, as we enter into the last decade of the twentieth century, environmentalists are playing much the same role as they played in the late 1960s: they are voices crying in the wilderness. They may be armed with more "facts" about environmental deterioration than they once were, and their dissemination of those facts to government, the public, and industry may no longer fall on entirely deaf ears, but these audiences remain for the most part *unmoved*. Informing the public has not been enough to mobilize it.

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[1] See, for example, McKibben, 26-29, and the September, 1989 issue of *Scientific American*, "Managing Planet Earth," especially Stephen Schneider, "The Changing Climate," 70.

This gap between informing and moving is just one of the reasons why I consider the problem faced by environmentalists to be a representative problem for modern rhetoric and a fitting case study for the good reasons movement in particular. For the problem environmentalists face is surely new. Dealing with issues that involve massive amounts of difficult scientific-technical information, they must not only mobilize vast and diverse audiences but do so urgently, if the prognoses of such groups as the Worldwatch Institute are accurate. Nor are these the only, or perhaps even the chief difficulties environmentalists face. In an age when traditional values have been seriously eroded, when people's confidence in science, religion, and language has been undermined, environmentalists are forced to operate in an atmosphere of faction and distrust. They must address their audiences in what Wayne Booth has described as a "befouled rhetorical climate" (*Modern Dogma* 99). Any verbal attempt to alter our conduct towards the environment therefore requires a delicate and innovative rhetorical balance. It is not enough to present the facts clearly or to insist that we do what is right; we must be given "good reasons" to change.

I am not suggesting that in other times and places rhetors had only to supply the appropriate information--to "tell the truth," as it were--to achieve their social or political purposes. As the work of Aristotle, or Cicero, or Longinus clearly indicates, rhetors and rhetoricians have long been aware that being informative, or telling "the truth," is rarely enough for any audience. Nor am I arguing that the difficulties of explaining complex technical matters to a non-specialist audience make writing on the environment a unique rhetorical problem, or that an ambivalent, divided audience is anything new. Such difficulties have always faced rhetors. What I am arguing, however, is that the gap between informing and moving has been especially difficult to bridge during the past twenty-some years, particularly for

environmentalists, and that traditional rhetorical theory is less effective than modern rhetorical theories both in explaining why this is so and in assessing how some environmentalists have attempted to bridge this rhetorical gap. Environmentalists face a rhetorical problem of new dimensions; one simply cannot take the measure of those dimensions best with the yardstick of traditional rhetoric.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to consider some of these dimensions, particularly those arising from the split between facts and values, in order to give a clearer picture of the rhetorical problem currently facing environmentalists. It must be acknowledged at the outset that the discussion is not intended to be anything like exhaustive. Such a discussion would in any case be impossible; because rhetorical acts are often shaped by innumerable factors, working together in immeasurably complex ways, one can no more account for all the variables in any rhetorical problem than one can, for example, exhaustively analyze the impact of the greenhouse effect. (Indeed, to attempt such an analysis would be to fall prey to the same *hubris* that, as I will later argue, seriously weakens the disarmament rhetoric of Jonathan Schell.) This chapter is therefore intended only to establish a general context in which to read the three chapters of rhetorical criticism which follow.

A few words are needed to explain my use of "environmentalist" and "environmentalism," terms for which, according to David Pepper, "there is no clear-cut and easily circumscribed definition" (13). For the purposes of his own discussion in *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism*, Pepper accepts the broad definitions given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1972 supplement), which describes an environmentalist simply as "one who is concerned with the preservation of the environment (from pollution, etc.)," and in the *Dictionary of Human Geography*, which considers environmentalism to be "The ideologies and practices which inform and flow from a concern with the environment" (Pepper 13). With the

proviso that these "ideologies and practices" include the rejection of nuclear weaponry as well as nuclear power (a link made by a number of environmentalists[2]), I see no reason to replace or even to refine these broad definitions. Indeed, for my purposes they are most suitable, for in being so broad they manage to encompass the work of two of my subjects in subsequent chapters, who at times explicitly dissociate themselves from self-proclaimed "Environmentalists." As my later chapters will show, John McPhee and Wendell Berry are clearly "concerned with the preservation of the environment," and this concern "informs" their practices, yet like much of the public, they want nothing to do with factions who *insist* that concern for the environment must precede *all else.*

I

If we accept the conclusions offered in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent,* the split between facts and values has had widespread effects on both the character of our thinking and the quality of public debate. The most extreme factions arising from the split have been well described by Booth: on the one hand, "scientismists," those who "stick to the facts" and try to maintain a position of reasonable disinterest at all times; on the other, "irrationalists," who follow "the reasons of the heart" and who often view reasons as mere rationalizations. As Booth himself cautions, however, we should avoid the simplistic assumption that most people cling single-mindedly to either facts or values. We may find it convenient to believe, as Yeats proclaimed of this century without common values, that "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity";

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[2] Speaking of the environmental movement, Pepper says "we include in this movement those who have attempted to reverse the arms race" (3). See also Cotgrove 20.

however, it seems to me that a more accurate, if less poetically appealing observation would locate a lack of conviction not in the best or in the worst of us, but in a third group. Though not so obviously dogmatic, it is this group which invests the fact-value split with a measure of political authority (that is, authority over the policies implemented by our elected officials), for it is this group, rather than factions of two-dimensional scientismists or two-dimensional irrationalists, which constitutes the majority in the United States. I am thinking of those whom Eric Hoffer calls "the inert mass of a nation," its "middle section" (29)--or, as they are more commonly referred to, the silent majority.[3]

For environmentalists in the United States, the silent majority is both the problem and the potential solution, for although this group may well have the collective power to do something substantial about the degradation of the planet, too often its members are personally irresponsible and politically inactive. It is not that they are completely ignorant of or indifferent to the threat to the environment; indeed, for the last two decades, "poll after poll has recorded the American people's desire for increased environmental protection" (Ruckelhaus 169). They are inactive,

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[3] It should be noted that the factions to which Booth refers are not strictly political in character; both the left and the right sides of the political spectrum harbour their share of scientistic as well as irrational elements. To confirm this view of the right, for example, one need go no further afield than the previous Republican administration in the United States; supported by "disinterested," scientistic supply-side economists throughout his two terms, Ronald Reagan also found considerable support--at least until the effects of his supply-side policies were realized--from those "irrationalists" who admired his "old-fashioned" American values, which included strong stances against the ERA, abortion, and "the evil empire" of communism.

rather, because they have yet to be persuaded that a substantial change in *their* conduct is *necessary*. Some seem to think that enough is being done already by those whom they consider more qualified to take care of environmental problems, such as scientific experts and environmental activists. These people feel that the environment needs more protection, but as O'Riordan puts it, "these feelings merge with deeds" only in "a tiny minority of truly active citizens"; "the conviction that he could play an active civic role if need be keeps the passive citizen content, most of the time, to let the elites act authoritatively for him" (230). Other citizens are active, but not active enough to make a significant difference; because they do not see the problem as serious enough to require more substantial action, they are reluctant to make substantial, and thus difficult, changes in their behavior. These people seem to believe that "something will turn up," that we will "arrive at a more secure tomorrow with little strain" (Ruckelhaus 166).

Both of these groups, one might argue, would soon find more substantial changes to their conduct "necessary" if government regulations provided them with greater incentives to act or threatened them with more serious penalities for not acting.[4] Certainly, the importance of such measures cannot be denied; an adequate response to the environmental crises will require extensive government involvement (Durning 172). Yet it seems to me that this sort of behaviorist, regulatory solution to public inactivity will not be nearly enough. In *The End of*

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[4] Ruckelhaus (168-69) is one environmentalist who argues that "benefits" and "sanctions" are the best means of "encouraging" change. For my own part, however, I tend to agree with Wendell Berry: "I do not believe that all of our abuses of the world can be stopped by law" (*The Long-Legged House* 42).

Nature, Bill McKibben makes the case against legislated solutions in vivid, concrete terms:

> If we decided . . . against every family's owning a washer (which is to say, against a pervasive individual consumerism), then taking your own clothes down the street to wash them would be the most obvious idea in the world. If people *hadn't* changed their minds about such things, these would be obnoxious developments--you'd need to employ secret police to make sure they weren't washing in private. It wouldn't be worth it, and it wouldn't work. (190)

McKibben's point is clear: if solutions are to prove adequate, they cannot be forced on people. We must choose them.

What, then, is likely to prompt such choices? Is it possible that the dissemination of more facts about the environment will do so? Does the public simply need more information before taking action? No doubt such information will play a role. For this reason, it is important that environmentalists show an "ability and willingness to translate [their] findings into terms understandable by non-scientists" and that the media "better serve the public's need for information" (Brown et al 194). Yet we must also recognize that facts, like regulations, will not in themselves be sufficient. As environmentalists are constantly telling us, the problem we face is unprecedented, and so elusive that even those who spend their lives studying it can scarcely agree about its dimensions. Says McKibben, "most of the experts have simply thrown up their hands" (124) rather than try to forecast events precisely. If these "experts" have difficulty in grasping the problem, in knowing how immediate or how large the danger is, is it likely that being offered more physical facts about environmental degradation will convince the rest of us that danger is imminent, or that it will suddenly inspire us to change? As one environmentalist admits, "It is hard for people . . . to change in response to dangers that may not arise for a long time or that just might not happen at all" (Ruckelhaus 166). Yet these are precisely

the kinds of dangers we face, and if we are awaiting certainty about the world's condition as an inducement to action, we may never act. "The challenge is to act before it is too late--which means before the scientific evidence is conclusive" (Durning 158).

"Social changes occur," say the authors of *State of the World Report,* when "people cross a 'perceptual threshold' that forces them to see and judge some aspect of their world in a new light" (Brown et al 5). We may cross this threshold suddenly, when "spurred by a dramatic event" (such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident), or we may cross it gradually, through education, but at whatever speed and by whatever means the threshold is crossed, our crossing will have "a decidedly ethical component" (5). Like many contemporary environmentalists, those at the Worldwatch Institute are telling us that the delivery of facts from scientist to the public will not of itself bring about the "perceptual shifts" needed to deal with the growing environmental crisis, which are of "profound proportions" (7). Barring the unlikely but horrifying possibility that we *all* learn through some tragic personal experience with an environmental disaster, environmentalists are going to have to appeal to our values. But to which values, and how? Almost ten years ago, those who studied public responses to the environmental movement in the United States could argue, "Efforts to achieve environmental quality pose a direct threat to cherished values: to individual freedoms, property rights, free enterprise, and material comforts" (Cotgrove 10). For this reason, "the environmental movement [was] forced to change from a consensual to a conflictual movement, from a concern with reform within a framework of consensual values to a radical challenge to societal values"(10). In 1990, there are still environmentalists who consider such conflictual approaches to be the best means of attaining change. Among them is Earth First!, a group whose "confrontational tactics [including "tips for sabotage, or

'ecodefense'"] have earned the group far more publicity than it could have gotten any other way" (McKibben 179-180). But is there not a sense in which conflictual solutions resemble regulatory solutions? Because they would force rather than encourage changes in our conduct, would these solutions not inevitably face the same resistance McKibben describes above, in his hypothetical account of imposed restrictions on washing? Would they not, that is, require constant policing to be effective? (The thought that this policing might be done by the same people who advocated physical violence to achieve change only adds to the anxiety that such an image arouses.) Moreover, as evidence of environmental degradation increases, one wonders whether such a conflictual approach is really the best one, which is to say the one that will alter our treatment of nature most quickly and substantially. Is it not now possible, instead, to persuade people by showing them, for example, that their "material comforts" will soon be a function of "environmental quality"? In other words, to put the question in the more concrete terms of McKibben's example, might there not be a way to persuade them that if they do not soon accept the inconvenience of "taking their own clothes down the street to wash them," they may find themselves faced with much worse concessions?

Given all of these questions, one might well wonder whether it is even possible to persuade the public not only that immediate action is needed, but that they themselves can make important contributions to the preservation of the planet. But if one can judge by the frequency with which environmentalists tell us, in Rachel Carson's words, "the choice is ours" (277), it would seem that many do believe the public is capable of substantial, voluntary change.[5] Moreover, one might argue that

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[5] On the significance of the topic of choice in disarmament literature, see my Chapter 4, 117-118.

the huge number of "Green Guides" and "how to" books now on the market in itself indicates a considerable degree of optimism (unless one makes the rather cynical and, in Booth's terms, "motivist" assumption that their authors are merely out to "cash in" on the latest fad). The very practical focus of these guides suggests that their authors believe the public has the potential, and still enough time, to make a difference. If such optimism is justified, perhaps the most important question to be addressed by environmentalists is not one of fact--not, that is, one of ascertaining precisely how serious the problem is, or of disseminating information about it. The most important questions have to do with values and with rhetorical strategies: to what values does one appeal, and how does one appeal to them, in order to persuade the public of the urgent need for their help?

If persuading the public were a matter of appealing simultaneously to opposing and intransigent factions, whose values were diametrically opposed, this task of persuading a wider audience might well be considered impossible. However, as I have argued, the fact-value split leaves most people--those in the silent majority--ambivalent rather than single-mindedly "scientistic" or "irrationalistic." Reaching this wide audience is thus a matter of appealing to readers with divided loyalities. Though this division makes persuasion difficult, it can also be considered a resource, for as Burke says, in the moral tension created by such division we find "the characteristic invitation to rhetoric" (*Motives* 25).

Yet how is the rhetor to accept this invitation?

II

Before I venture any answer to this question, it will be of some help to consider the impact of the fact-value split from another angle and see how environmentalists themselves are affected. I have argued thus far that the public's acceptance of the

split presents environmentalists with a problem. But we would be wrong to think that every environmentalist understands the connection between fact and value and is consistently guided by that wisdom in his research. The split is not just a dogma of which a naive public must be divested. Frequently, it determines the way in which environmentalists themselves see the world and practise their discipline.

The effects of the fact-value split on environmentalists are less obvious than might first be assumed. One might think that, dealing as they are with physical facts about the earth's deterioration, most environmentalists would operate from something of a "scientismist" position, and indeed, as I will explain shortly, it is true that many do just this. However, the special conditions of environmentalism can also encourage a more radical approach. Its scope, for example, is so vast, and its variables are so multitudinous, that its complexity is to all intents and purposes infinite.[6] As Barry Commoner has said, the "first law of ecology" is that "everything is connected to everything else" (28). Though this infinite complexity does not preclude the use of techniques employed by other scientific communities, it does force environmentalists to rely on an unusual amount of "guesswork." Such guesswork has always been an important part of any scientific endeavor (public myths about science aside); however, in the case of environmentalism, dealing as it does with an infinite number of variables, the scientist must acknowledge that his conclusions are almost always highly speculative and provisional. Even the man who has "fine-tuned" the most sophisticated computer model of the environment admits, "In some cases . . . we simply don't have enough knowledge to do more than

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[6] See Clark, 53; Graedal and Crutzen, 66; and Schneider 73-76.

make educated guesses."[7] Furthermore, the focus of environmentalism, like its scope, seems to place its practitioners outside the circle of traditional scientific endeavors. Since one focus of environmentalism is the destruction that human beings have wrought and continue to wreak upon the earth, principally by means of technologies derived from the scientific approach, many environmentalists find it difficult to remain "objective" about that approach, for to do so would, in effect, mean remaining loyal to it. To draw an analogy, I might say that these environmentalists feel uneasy about scientistic "investigations" of pollution for much the same reason that the rest of us feel uneasy about "internal investigations" of police crimes.

Because of these special conditions, then, environmentalists are to some extent--to a greater extent, I think, than specialists in other scientific disciplines--forced to reassess their connection with traditional science. Their reassessment will pull them in one of two directions. On the one hand, many environmentalists, while admitting that science has played a role in the degradation of our planet, will claim that our problems were brought about not by the scientific approach itself but by misguided technological applications of scientific knowledge. This group will remain loyal to the methods of traditional science in spite of their concerns about the environment, for they believe that science alone has the wherewithal to get us out of the mess we got ourselves into. (McKibben offers several examples of such faith in science, the most extreme of which involves a proposal, made by a Princeton professor, to use "a laser to 'scrub' chlorofluorocarbons from the earth's atmosphere before they have a chance to reach the ozone layer") (68). On the other hand, many

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[7] The comment is made by James Hansen, of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. See McKibben, 30 and also 20-27.

environmentalists who reassess the role of traditional science may criticize it more harshly for our present dilemma. Believing that the scientific view of nature as a kind of giant laboratory (there to serve our needs) leads inevitably to a misunderstanding and mistreatment of nature, they may abandon not only this view but many of the methods of traditional science.

According to Pepper and O'Riordan, these two approaches characterize the practice of modern environmentalism. The former, more scientistic approach is what they call "technocentrism"; the latter approach, "ecocentrism."[8]

Technocentrism is environmentalism as practised by proponents of traditional science, with its roots in the work of Copernicus and Newton, in the Baconian method and in positivism. Whether they are academics or government bureaucrats, technocentrics may not be those we normally think of as "environmentalists," partly because, in popular usage, the word has connotations too radical to allow for such an association. But according to Pepper, the technocentric view represents, "in modern Western societies, the *official,* dominant set of attitudes to the environment . . . the outlook of those groups in society which exercise most power" (37). Technocentrics profess to be *the* rational spokesmen for the environment, realists who acknowledge the existence of environmental deterioration but who also stress the need for sustaining "progress":

> The technocentric mode does not necessarily declare itself in favour of environmental degradation: usually the reverse. But it holds that this is

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[8] O'Riordan cautions us against taking this dichotomy too strictly:

> [W]e should avoid the temptation to divide the world neatly into an ecocentric camp of environmentalists and a technocentric camp of manipulative professionals and administrators. In real life the boundries are much more blurred. There is every reason to believe that each one of us favours certain elements of both modes, depending upon the institutional setting, the issue at hand, and our changing socioeconomic status. (2)

> rather a matter for efficient *environmental management* ; for "cleaning up" after the mess made by necessary modern industrial processes, the abandonment or amelioration of which would be regarded as a reversion to some form of primitive behavior. (Pepper 29-30)

The foundation of modern technocentric environmentalism is "the power of objective analysis"; its building blocks, such ostensibly "value-free" and "rational" "resource-allocation techniques . . . as cost-benefit, systems dynamics, and programme budgeting" (O'Riordan 15).

As an alternative to technocentrism, "ecocentrism" offers a view rooted in nineteenth-century American transcendentalism, which "advocated a democracy among God's creatures, such that nature was respected for its own sake, above and beyond its usefulness or relationship to man" (Pepper 27). The notions of "plenitude" and "The Great Chain of Being" are at the heart of ecocentric morality, which "preaches the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care" (O'Riordan 1). As Pepper argues, these may seem like "essentially non-rational and even emotional belief[s]" (27), but they are no more so than the beliefs on which traditional science depends (among which Pepper mentions the idea of progress through material achievements, "the superiority of 'high' over 'lower' technology," and "the sustainability of economic growth" [29]). And the ecocentric's beliefs do not in any case preclude the use of traditional science altogether. Ecocentrism can make use of the logical-analytic methods of traditional science, but is careful not to be dominated by them. "Rather than seeking to break the 'machine' into its component parts," as the technocentrics do, ecocentrics take a "systems approach," seeking "to study how the parts work *together* " (Pepper 103). This holistic approach is what unifies their practical and their ethical recommendations. By keeping in mind appropriate values when we study environmental "facts" and develop environmental policies, by thinking of what is good for *all* planetary life *over the long term,* we will, say the ecocentrics, not only reduce the impact we now have on

the environment, but perhaps find alternative, less destructive ways of living, so that the planet can regain its health, and endure.

My main concern in this thesis is not so much the perspectives of these two groups as it is the rhetorics that make those perspectives known. And, not surprisingly, the rhetorics of technocentrism and ecocentrism differ from each other as much their outlooks. The rhetoric of the former, as the terms used for their methods of "objective analysis" would suggest, relies almost entirely on the appeals that we commonly associate with the traditional scientific approach: on impersonal, presumably neutral "terminology"; on logical, perhaps even syllogistic argumentation; and on what is known in Aristotelian rhetoric as *atechnoi pisteis*, or "non-artistic" means of persuasion, such as statistics and expert testimony. The rhetoric of technocentrism is the rhetoric of the specialized "expert," and as such it clearly does not appeal to the silent majority. Indeed, it divides the expert "from the public at large by a gulf of ignorance and jargon" (O'Riordan 12). Nor do technocentrics even wish to bridge the gulf; like many "professionals," they are, as O'Riordan adds, often reluctant to bother with "the opinions of people who are regarded as uninformed" (13). In this sense, their outlook and accompanying rhetoric prolongs the traditional division between knowledge and opinion, and thus is the very antithesis of the rhetoric with which this thesis is concerned.[9]

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[9] McKibben's opening acknowledgements in *The End of Nature* suggest that the attitude of "technocentrics" may be changing of late: "[T]he investigators in this field [of global climate change]," he says, "have made many efforts to communicate their findings to the public . . . ." (vii). However, if one may judge from a recent special issue of *Scientific American* (which includes an essay by one of the scientists whose help McKibben acknowledges), such changes in

The rhetoric of ecocentrism is rather more varied and more complex than that of technocentrism, and requires a closer look. Of course, one can easily imagine its most extreme versions; couched in loaded language, bolstered by the selective use of facts and statistics, the rhetoric of the ecocentric extremist--like that of all revolutionary extremists--relies on blatant emotional appeals, designed to stir up loyality or hatred and to instigate action quickly rather than to generate real thought. Yet such an extreme rhetoric is not my concern here, any more than is the rhetoric of the technocentric (which in its own way is just as extreme). Though they are not entirely unpersuasive, both of these rhetorics influence only the narrow groups that have already accepted their premises. They preach to the converted. What interests me more are those rhetorics that seek prompt, extensive, but nonetheless reasonable changes in our treatment of the environment, and that must therefore aim at an audience wide enough to effect such changes rapidly. In these cases we could say with more accuracy that the "invitation" to rhetoric has been accepted. They do not play loose with the facts, nor do they either neglect the public or force values upon it, but try instead to meet us half-way, on the "middle ground."

III

If, as Pepper tells us, the "official" and even "dominant" set of attitudes towards the environment has in modern times been that of the technocentric, I would argue that the most publicly visible set of attitudes has been that of the ecocentric. One does not have to look far to find reasons for this high visibility. The ecocentric, convinced as he is that the preservation of the planet demands a change not just in

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the attitude of technocentric environmentalists have not been matched by changes in their rhetoric.

the technologies developed by specialists but in the policies of government and the conduct of the public, has felt compelled to make broader, more urgent appeals than the technocentric (whose perspective allows him to ignore a popular audience). The ecocentric has been forced to "go public" with his concerns. And in going public, he has needed to rely on the resources of rhetoric. To some extent, this rhetoric has been successful; the ecocentric has unquestionably gained a following. But at times, given the prevailing rhetorical climate over the past thirty years, it has also brought him considerable criticism, both from the scientific community and from the public.

We can better understand the rhetoric of ecocentrism if we know at least something of the history of the modern environmental movement in the United States.[10] In general, the movement can be divided into three periods: an early, optimistic period of success, roughly a decade in length; a period of reassessment, in the face of a backlash; and the most recent period, of about the last five years, during which the movement *seems* to have developed a broader and firmer base of public support. (It is too early to say whether this support is broad enough or firm enough to result in substantial changes in policy or personal conduct.) In *Catastrophe or Cornucopia: The Environment, Politics, and the Future,* written in 1982, Stephen Cotgrove describes the first two of these periods:

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[10] I am not arguing that environmentalism was born in the 1960s. Individuals and small groups concerned with preserving the environment have been around for a long time. (In England, for example, a national environment group had been formed as early as 1865, and in the United States, the Sierra Club was founded by John Muir in 1892.) However, since my interest is in broad rhetorical appeals, I am concerned only with environmentalism after the second World War, when "[e]nvironmental concerns entered mass consciousness through the mass media" and protests began to develop on a large scale (Pepper 14).

> In its early stages, the new environmentalism won widespread popular support, and clocked up impressive legislative gains, particularly in the U.S.A., where its youthful supporters were drawn from the ranks of those who had sympathized with the range of radical student concerns of the late 1960s. There was early optimism that the goal of environmental quality would soon be achieved. Indeed, there appeared to be a widespread consensus that cleaning up the environment was in everyone's interest, and that all were agreed on the desirability of clean air and water. The movement has now lost much of its momentum, and has been forced increasingly into defending its gains against mounting attack. (9)

As Cotgrove goes on to say, one reason for this loss of momentum was the changing economy in the United States. Faced with economic stagnation and the "energy crisis" of the early 1970s, people began to question environmental controls, particularly those that restricted the delivery of fossil fuels and retarded the development of nuclear power plants. A second (and related) reason for the slowing of the environmental movement was that its early success "generated organized opposition, a 'counter-movement,' an ecological backlash from those whose interests were threatened and on whose shoulders fell the burden and cost of reform" (Cotgrove 9).

Cotgrove is no doubt right in explaining the opposition to environmentalism mainly "in terms of costs and benefits" (9). However, it seems to me that this opposition may have been bolstered by public and professional distaste for the rhetoric of early environmentalism. Not surprisingly, linked as it was to "the counter-culture of the late 50s and 60s and the students' movement" (Jungk 149), this rhetoric often resembled that of the students described in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent;* to use Booth's word, it was at times "irrationalist." But it was not only the students involved who aroused distrust with an overblown rhetoric; the intemperate style and tone of the movement's intellectual leaders also contributed to public scepticism. "He had the audience gripped," said one eye-

witness of Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*, in the late 1960s, "and it struck me that there was more than a touch of the revivalist technique in his accusatory style, in the way he brought home to his eager listeners their own guilt and complicity."[11] "To put it mildly, there is something evangelical about [David] Brower," said John McPhee in 1971 of the infamous director of the Sierra club, and he added: "He thinks that conservation should be 'an ethic and conscience in everything we do, whatever our field of endeavor'--in a word, a religion" (McPhee, *Encounters* 37). These are representative descriptions. As Cotgrove tells us, "In its early days, the movement was marked by the messianic fervour of its message. If mankind was to be saved, the change must be radical: piecemeal tinkering would not suffice" (8).[12]

When it was not messianic, the rhetoric of early environmentalists was often negative. In the first period described above, beginning with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, much of the literature about the environment was characterized by an almost morbid concentration on the end that awaits us if we do not change our ways, as though the dangers with which it was concerned were both huge in scope and ever-present. This rhetorical strategy was to be expected, given the circumstances. After all, early post-war environmentalists such as Barry Commoner "had worked for years to generate public recognition of the

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[11] Anne Chisholm, as quoted in Cotgrove, 8.

[12] See also *The Closing Circle*, in which Barry Commoner mentions the "outburst of . . . preaching, and prognostication" that accompanied Earth Week in April of 1970: "having spent some years in the effort simply to detect and describe the growing list of environmental problems . . . and in tracing some of their links to social and political processes . . . ," Commoner was surprised to discover during Earth Week that "reticence was far behind the times" (6-7).

environmental crisis" (Commoner 6) yet were largely ignored; they must have felt provoked to make their case as dramatic as they could so that it would be impossible to ignore. Nevertheless, their urgent prophesying struck many in the scientific community as unnecessarily negative, even counterproductive. In 1972, in his book of the same name, John Maddox called this approach "the doomsday syndrome." The rhetoric of "latter-day doomsday men" such as Carson, Commoner, and Ehrlich was, he argued, based on the assumption "that the worst will always happen" (vii). Its "hallmark" was "gloom" (215), and its effect was to undermine morale:

> The most insidious danger in the environmental movement is that it may sap the will of advanced communities to face the problems which no doubt lie ahead. Throughout history, hope for the future has been a powerful incentive for constructive change. What will happen if it is now needlessly blighted? (viii)

Maddox considered the book said to have first sparked broad public concern about the environment, Carson's *Silent Spring*, to be representative of "the doomsday movement" (2). With her "fable for tomorrow," the book's opening chapter, "Miss Carson . . . provided a model of calculated exaggeration which has since put its stamp on the literature of the doomsday movement" (15-16).[13]

In retrospect, it is Maddox's account which seems exaggerated, at least in regard to *Silent Spring*. Carson's book seems quite restrained.[14] Moreover, "the public response" to it was "strong and favorable" (Sears 172), strong enough, in fact, to bring

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[13] According to Paul Sears, Maddox's criticism of Carson was not unusual among the scientific community (172). For similar criticism of the "spate of horror books" published in "the late 1960s and early 1970s, see McKibben, 196-97.

[14] See Ward and Dubos, 60: "Again and again [in *Silent Spring*], the plea was for more knowledge, more research, more exact information about performance and consequences."

about legislation to control the use of pesticides in Britain within a year of its publication, and in the United States not long after. Still, Maddox articulates a perspective that must be taken into account. We must ask ourselves whether the public response to *Silent Spring* was strong and favorable largely because the book's arguments were so unexpected, because what it had to say about the consequences of our thoughtlessness seemed such a revelation. Are we likely to be so strongly influenced now that the time for revelation has gone? And if the thousands of environmental books published in the years since 1962 had taken a "doomsday" approach--that is, if they had dwelled on the likelihood of global disasters--would we have been moved to act, or even have listened? Or would it not have been the case, as McKibben says, that "with every unfulfilled apocalyptic projection, our confidence in the environmentalists [would have] waned, our belief that we'll muddle through [have] been bolstered" (197).

It seems to me, in any case, that the literature of environmentalism has not remained predominantly negative, nor has it remained "irrationalist." It is true that there are still vestiges of the "doomsday syndrome" that characterized environmental rhetoric in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (Recent popular appeals such as McKibben's own *The End of Nature* and David Suzuki's *It's a Matter of Survival* offer examples.)[15] Moreover, there is a growing belief among radical ecocentrics that words, whether irrationalist or highly reasonable, are no longer sufficient; only militant action can bring about the kinds of reforms they feel are necessary (McKibben 178-185). Yet there is also a new variety of literature about our

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[15] Only the name of the "doomsday syndrome" has changed. When recently interviewed on the CBC (Morningside, May 1), one Canadian scientist, Dr. Harry Taylor Jr., called the current popular view of the greenhouse effect "the calamity syndrome."

environmental problems, one that is strikingly different in tone and substance from its predecessors. One can sense the changes simply by browsing through the titles of books in print. *Green Future: How to Make a World of Difference; Hints for a Healthy Planet; Clearer, Cleaner, Safer, Greener: A Blueprint for Detoxifying Your Environment; 50 Simple Things Kids Can Do To Save the Earth; 50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save the Earth; The Daily Planet: A Hands-On Guide to a Greener Environment; Hints for a Healthy Planet; Good Planets are Hard to Find: Prescriptions for Everyday Environmental Action; Shopping for a Better World; The Canadian Green Consumer Guide* --these are just a sampling of titles from books published recently. Far from being apocalyptic, these books offer the most practical kinds of advice. And the very fact that they flood the market suggests changes in public attitudes towards environmentalist causes. It would seem that we no longer need to be convinced that something is wrong; we now want to hear what to do.

Though there is no simple explanation for this change, it seems to me to be a function of a new kind of appeal, stemming from a new phase of environmentalism in the early 1970s. With the publication of books such as *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of the Small* and, most prominently, E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful,* the environmental movement began a gradual shift away from the sort of negative, apocalyptic rhetoric that had earlier characterized it, and towards a more moderate, positive, practical kind of appeal. In Aristotle's terms, one might say that the movement discovered its best available means of persuasion in an effective use of the common topics of degree and size. For reasons not entirely clear to me, the general public was not taken by this new appeal for some time; it may be that, in the United States, at least, other issues such as the Vietnam War distracted people from environmental issues, or it may be that the backlash of which Cotgrove speaks nullified any sympathy for environmentalism in the 1970s. Whatever the reason

for the delay in its effect, during the last several years we have all become familiar with this new appeal. Indeed, one of the reasons for its effectiveness is its capacity for being encapsulated in memorable phrases: "small is beautiful"; "the power of one"; "think globally, act locally"; "reduce, reuse, recycle." But there is more to this appeal than memorable phrases: by empowering small, simple, palpable human acts, this approach bridges the vast gap between the seemingly limitless destruction of which environmentalists warn us and the all-too-limited powers of the individuals to whom these same environmentalists appeal. It reduces incomprehensibly large, abstract, and complex threats, such as the Greenhouse Effect or depletion of the ozone layer, to a scale that is human. Whereas Maddox may once have been justified in complaining that the "doomsday syndrome" undermines morale, appealing to the value of small acts by individuals provides a positive counterweight to the prophecies about the future. In short, it tells us that our daily deeds--the mere reuse of a bag, for example, or the flick of a light switch--can make a difference, and, perhaps, we are told, even save our planet. We like this; it makes us feel good, and it is easy. And thus we are moved to act, and keep acting.

Whether or not the appeal to "the small" will lead to truly substantive practical changes remains to be seen. One could make the case that personal change will have to be accompanied by political change. As McKibben says, "A purely personal effort is, of course, just a gesture--a good gesture, but a gesture" (204). Moreover, one could argue that the plethora of environmental "how-to" books now on the market might inadvertantly have a negative effect. Few "consumer guides," it seems safe to say, depend on what Booth calls the "good reasons of art" for their appeal, and I suspect that no one will be transformed by their message, or devoutly wish to "dwell in" them. On the contrary, in sufficient quantities, these books may create so much background "noise" that people are discouraged from attending to those messages

that do have the power to endure and transform. In other words, by the sheer weight of their numbers as well as by the easy optimism that their message about car-pooling and composting and recycling suggests, these practical guides may eventually induce complacency.

Nonetheless, considered only in rhetorical terms, the appeal to the value of modest acts of environmental responsibility has already been successful, for it has captured the attention of the public and remained memorable. And it is a success upon which, as I will later argue, Wendell Berry builds--adding to it the good reasons of art.

IV

The reasons for the rhetorical success of the appeal to "the small" can, I think, be better appreciated by considering why the same appeal has not been successful for one flank of the environmental movement: the protest against nuclear arms. Indeed, the very fact that my grouping the environmental movement and the protest against nuclear arms together sounds to contemporary ears somewhat odd says something about the relative lack of success which the latter has had in appealing to broad public support. At one time, the two forces were closely connected, as were their rhetorics. In recent years, however, they have parted company, as can be seen by anyone who has even a casual acquaintance with the current state of their respective literatures.

In the United States, the environmental and peace movements converged in the early 1950s, when the scientific community discovered some unexpected results of American nuclear testing. "Until then," says Barry Commoner, many scientists had "taken the air, water, soil, and our natural surroundings more or less for granted." However, on April 26, 1953, when radioactive debris from nuclear tests in Nevada

rained on New York, their attitude changed: ". . . the nuclear tests revealed how little we knew about the environmental network" (49), and led to new studies of wind patterns and currents in the stratosphere, new research into the effects of radiation and toxic substances, a new awareness of the limits of science, an increased scepticism about government. Though at first this new focus affected only a few scientists, before long it led to public action. Armed with new information, large protest groups (e.g. the Pugwash Movement) began to emerge in the late 1950s to wage their own battle against the threats of nuclear war and nuclear testing. Starting with "the big anti-nuclear-bomb protests of the late 1950s," says Pepper, there was "a continuum of mass protests over concerns that can be broadly interpreted as environmental . . . . These movements have been about what is clearly the greatest environmental threat, the atomic, hydrogen and neutron bombs--their power to pollute being spectacular and [illegible]ate "(16).

If Cotgrove is correct in arguing that environmentalist rhetoric was characterized in its early stages by a "messianic fervour," I think one could say that the rhetoric of the peace movement was characterized by a similar fervour in its mid-life. In the early days of the peace movement, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, its rhetoric seemed, if gloomy, almost measured, in view of the prevailing circumstances. In the United States, for example, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had established a policy called "massive retaliation" or "brinkmanship," which "required the United States to rush toward the brink of nuclear war each time a crisis broke out somewhere in the world, and then to draw back at the last moment, having, it was hoped, frightened the foe into complying with American wishes" (Schell, *Time of Illusion* 347). The cold war between the super-powers was at its worst, and the nuclear threat was in fact "a real and present danger." Bertrand Russell's *Has Man A Future?*, published in 1961--only a year before the Cuban missile crisis--suggests

something of the prevailing attitude about the nuclear threat. After his introduction, "Prologue or Epilogue?," has recounted a brief history of mankind's struggle for existence, Russell offers a prayer for our survival to Osiris, Egyptian god of the underworld and judge of the dead. In the concluding chapter, he comments, "I am writing at a dark moment, and it is impossible to know whether the human race will last long enough for what I write to be published, or, if published, to be read" (127). The human race did survive, however, and indeed the cold war began to thaw somewhat by the mid-1970s (Schell, *Time of Illusion* 233-238). On the other hand, nuclear arms continued to proliferate, and the rhetoric advocating disarmament became proportionately alarmist. People clearly became frightened by the threat of a nuclear war that, though perhaps less probable, seemed to portend ever greater destruction. By 1982, the year in which Jonathan Schell's popular *The Fate of the Earth* was published, the public had become so concerned about the nuclear predicament that "the number of American magazine articles dealing with nuclear weapons had shot up to a level attained only once before, in 1964" (Weart 376). What Cotgrove says of the early environmental movement could by this time just as easily apply to much of this literature: it was so urgent in tone as to be "messianic." Indeed, the literature advocating nuclear disarmament gradually came to be loaded with references to Armageddon and the Apocalypse, a development that is, of course, not particularly surprising, in view of the kind of war with which the increasing number, power, and sophistication of nuclear arms threatened the entire world--a war both sudden and final. By 1980, what Spencer Weart calls "the war fear revival" (375), was in full swing, as "people in every nation [became] increasingly concerned about plain survival" (381). Titles such as *Apocalypse Now?*, *Apocalypse: Nuclear Catastrophe in World Politics*, *The Final Epidemic*, *Damnation Alley*, and

of course, *The Fate of the Earth* became commonplace in the literature advocating disarmament.

Unlike much environmentalist rhetoric, disarmament rhetoric has not altered its path dramatically since its "doomsday" period. Though new, less "messianic" voices have occasionally been heard since the 1982 peak of activity (the most prominent of these is *Living with Nuclear Weapons*, produced by a group of scientists from Harvard), these remain the minority, and they have in any case been castigated for their moderation by the anti-nuclear veterans, who call the idea of accommodating nuclear weapons (that is, "living with" them) "intellectually and morally scandalous" (Lifton, 1987 120). In general, one now finds far fewer books published on the subject than one did a decade ago, but those that are published are still characterized, as were those of the 1970s and the early 1980s, by the sense of urgency in their tone and by an emphasis on the apocalyptic threat of nuclear war. Two recent collection of essays, *The Long Darkness* and *Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Humanity* (both published in 1986), are representative. In the former, Carl Sagan's opening essay, focusing on the horrifying outcome of a nuclear war rather than on the means of preventing it, establishes in tone and substance an emphasis that most of the other essays follow. His purpose is to prove, "with higher standards of evidence," that "apocalyptic predictions" about nuclear war are accurate (9), to convince his readers that there is "a real danger of the extinction of humanity" (58). The latter collection includes four essays whose titles emphasize the cataclysmic and universal destruction that the buildup of nuclear arms seems to portend: "Risking Armageddon," "Preventing the Final Epidemic," "The Triumphant Apocalypse and the Catastrophic Apocalypse," "Genocide and Omnicide:Technology at the Limits." The last two appear in a subsection entitled "Apocalypse Revisited: The Culture of Nuclear Threats." To establish the appropriate mood, the book's cover is dominated

by a reproduction of Albrecht Durer's woodcut *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. The editors' preface then opens with the statement, "Four horsemen herald apocalypse at the close of the 20th century: the population explosion, environmental deterioration, resource depletion, and, above all, the prospect of catastrophic thermonuclear war" (Cohen).

That the forces for disarmament have continued to rely on such apocalyptic rhetoric certainly cannot be explained by the success of their appeals. The public anxiety that peaked in 1982 has been neither sustained nor translated into substantial changes in attitude or defence policies. Indeed, while the environmental movement generally has, at least, been making the kinds of gains in popular appeal that may lead to substantive changes (and I emphasize "may," for as I have argued above, the likelihood of such changes remains uncertain), the battle against nuclear weapons has lost ground over the years. As Spencer Weart observes,

> A psychiatrist who brought up nuclear war problems with acquaintances in the early 1980s found results exactly like those reported in the early 1950s: 'The people interviewed shrugged their shoulders, continued their activities, remained uninvolved, and the dialogue ceased.' Around the same time a science fiction editor issued an invitation for new after-the-bomb stories, and got tales full of elves. 'Our writers, the communicators of our collective unconscious,' she explained, found it too hurtful 'to grapple with the subject matter directly.' Most insightful was a 1981 poll that gave Americans a choice for describing how they felt about future war. Now as always since 1945, some professed little concern and others admitted serious fear. But half the population agreed with the statement, 'While I am concerned about the chances of a nuclear war, I try to put it out of my mind'. (178-79)

This attitude of the general public has also been reflected in the protests of the peace movement. "After 1983," says Weart, "attendance at demonstrations . . . fell with remarkable speed" (385). Meanwhile, "The government, with the acquiescence of a majority of American citizens, remained determined to build more weapons" (386).

It is always impossible to determine to what degree rhetoric brings about changes in public attitudes and to what degree rhetoric is itself affected by such changes. Certainly, in the case of protests against nuclear weapons, one of the explanations for their limited success is that there have in the United States always been "powerful interests" in support of military spending, as Weart points out. However, since it is clear that corporate and government interests also play an important role in restraining environmentalist forces, economics and politics alone cannot account for the differences between the two movements. Other factors must be at play here: moral factors, psychological factors, sociological factors, and--of primary concern here, and in some ways encompassing the others--rhetorical factors.

In retrospect, perhaps the parting of the environmental and peace movements should be considered inevitable. Beneath the surface similarities of their rhetorics, there are, after all, real and significant differences between environmentalism in general and the movement against nuclear arms. The threats with which these movements are concerned manifest themselves differently and thus allow for different modes (and degrees) of cathartic reduction; whereas environmental deterioration is, one feels, visible and remediable, the threat of nuclear war arouses an anxiety without a palpable source or an obvious means of release. The two do not play upon one's consciousness in anything like the same way. Protests against nuclear arms have lacked the very appeal that has helped environmentalists capture the public imagination--the appeal to action and effects on a human scale. An essential part of the rhetorical problem faced by these protests is that there is no ready connection between MX missiles and the lives most people live. Whereas the environmental movement can reach a broad audience with books such as *How to Get Your Lawn and Garden Off Drugs*, what is the disarmament movement to do? It has no objective correlative in which to ground its apocalyptic warnings, or at least

none whose near and constant presence might remind us that a threat remains. Almost every day, each of us can see, smell, taste, and even hear some of the effects of which environmentalists speak, but how many of us have witnessed a nuclear explosion or experienced the nuclear fallout that the New Yorkers in Commoner's story experienced? How many have seen the factories in Hanford or Rocky Flats where bombs are assembled, or for that matter even heard of these places? For most of us, the bomb exerts pressure on the consciousness more as rumor than as palpable and proximate fact.[16]

It is the nature of this pressure that accounts at least partly for what Spencer Weart calls "nuclear fear," another factor distinguishing the rhetorical problem faced by the anti-nuclear movement from that faced by other environmentalists. Robert Jay Lifton defines the main effect of nuclear fear as "numbing," a reaction whereby the brain, in the face of seemingly incomprehensible occurrences, refuses to respond to stimuli, "lest it be so overwhelmed as to lose its capacity to organize or respond at all" (*Weapons,* 100). This reaction is of three types: "the numbing of massive death immersion; the numbing of enhancement; and the numbing of everyday life" (104). The first two types, which characterize the reactions of those who have either witnessed or in some way been responsible for the use of nuclear weapons, need not concern us here. It is the third type--the kind of numbing that lets most of us "learn

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16 In his preface to *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb,* Robert Del Tredici explains that his book of photographs "began the day it dawned on me I'd never seen an H-bomb factory" (ix). His book, which I will discuss further in the next chapter (and for which Jonathan Schell wrote an introduction), is an attempt to help others overcome "the amazing invisibility" of the bomb.

to live with the bomb" and "get on with life"--that has the greatest bearing on the rhetorical problem presented by the nuclear peril. As Lester Grinspoon says,

> Many people repress their fear, anger, and rebelliousness in response to the nuclear threat; instead they anesthetize themselves. They avoid acquiring information that would make vague fears specific enough to require decisive action; they contrive to ignore the implications of the information they do allow to get through; they resign their responsibilities to leaders and experts; they treat the accelerating nuclear arms race as simply none of their business and convince themselves that there is nothing they can do about it. Just as some dangers are too slight to arouse concern, this one is, paradoxically, too vast to arouse concern. (4)

Many of those who, like Schell, seek to effect changes in public attitudes and government policies regarding nuclear arms, are convinced, firstly, that to effect responsible public action, they must thaw this psychological numbness, and, secondly, that the best means of thawing it is to have us look squarely at prospects we do not want to consider. They are convinced that we must, to use a phrase which Lifton often borrows from Martin Buber, "imagine the real." But is this possible?

> It is not an easy task to help people grasp affectively as well as cognitively the immensity of the danger. This is not just because we are all so psychologically well equipped to defend ourselves against anxiety that might threaten to overwhelm, but also because the horror itself is so abstract. (Grinspoon 4)

How does anyone grasp a remote threat such as the nuclear peril "affectively as well as cognitively"? Grinspoon continues:

> Physicians, even though their work is often pressured and stressful, continue to be the professional group that smokes the least, and among physicians, thoracic surgeons have the lowest prevalence of smoking. Clearly, direct exposure to the consequences of smoking makes it difficult to deny them. Similarly, physicians have been in the vanguard of the movement to arouse the consciousness of the populace to the dangers of nuclear war. Working in the emergency room makes suffering from blast, fire, cold, radiation sickness, starvation, and infectious disease less of an abstraction. People who have or have had such experience are less likely to suffer from this failure of imagination. (4)

One cannot help but agree with the main point here: such involvement is likely to make seemingly abstract dangers more palpable and thus to reduce anxiety. But just how does one become involved in disarming the world? It is easy to think globally--or at least to be kept busy--when one can not only act locally but see the local consequences of those acts; but when one's best recourse for solving an unseen problem lies in a protest march or a letter to a politician, when one's rewards--if one receives any--are neither immediate nor local, how can one ease one's fears? This, surely, is one of the central questions for a rhetoric that promotes disarmament.

V

These, then, are a few rhetorical aspects of environmentalism. There are, first, difficulties that might be described as inherent to the subject matter, which not only tests our cognitive abilities, in the sense that it is sometimes technically complex, but which also tests the limits of our imagination, in that it requires us to think of physical destruction that *may* occur on a scale heretofore unknown. In the latter respect, the threat of nuclear arms is a subject that makes particularly difficult demands on the imaginative capacities of the general public, for not only do most of us lack first-hand experience of the effects of a nuclear attack, but we see nothing whatsoever of the nuclear weapons that might be used in such an attack. The prospect of nuclear war seems, therefore, quite unreal, virtually "unimaginable." Secondly, these difficulties inherent in the subject matter are related to difficulties stemming from the makeup of the audience to whom environmentalists must appeal. If, for example, the ecocentric environmentalist chooses to alleviate the technical difficulties of his subject by offering the simplest sorts of practical advice, he may well reach and move his audience only at the sacrifice of deeper, more enduring

changes. The American public is concerned about the environment, as I have shown, but it is also reluctant to give up the luxuries it enjoys; consequently, it may be only too pleased to hear that it can do its part by performing painless little tasks (such as buying a smaller car) rather than making radical changes (such as giving up one's car). Thirdly, any ecocentric environmentalist who presently seeks to change public attitudes and conduct towards the environment faces difficulties inadvertently raised by others who have sought earlier changes. The extremist claims made by previous environmentalists, the background noise generated by a plethora of information about the environment, and the optimistic claims made by "technocentrics" who are convinced science will solve our problems are all factors that make the ecocentric's case a much more difficult one to plead. And, finally, underlying all of these difficulties, there is the fundamental problem with which this entire study is concerned: the split between facts and values. In the "befouled rhetorical climate" of our times, many will not merely be sceptical of but *completely* reject the claims of the ecocentric environmentalist simply because those claims cannot be proven irrefutably true.

It is obvious that no writer is going to come up with a rhetorical solution to all of these problems and thus satisfy everyone. Good reasons theorists say that consensus on complex, value-laden issues is highly improbable, if not impossible, and that disagreements are and always will be part of a pluralistic society. Nevertheless, I do believe that any writer who wishes to change our attitudes towards the environment will be more likely to achieve a degree of rhetorical success--that is, to persuade a broad readership to take action--if he takes into account the factors I have discussed here. And if we wish to determine whether the rhetoric of such a writer offers good reasons for broad public action, and, if it does, to assess how good those reasons are, we must also take these factors into account.

Chapter Four: Jonathan Schell and the Rhetoric of Disarmament

> Our problem . . . should be not to insist on a precision that is beyond our grasp but to inquire into the rough probabilities of various results insofar as we can judge them . . . . This embrace of investigative modesty . . . would itself be a token of our reluctance to extinguish ourselves. (Schell, *Fate* 82)

The "embrace of investigative modesty": though the phrase seems to me typical of Schell's inability to vivify the abstract or make the word sing, I also hear in it an echo of modern rhetorical theory, of its awareness that an insistence on demonstrative proof has outlived its usefulness, and has become in many circumstances a liability. In value-laden disputes, as we have seen, such an insistence breeds doubt, distrust, faction, and intransigence. When the disputing parties argue about matters of modern warfare, such an insistence breeds dangers immeasurably worse. To preserve the *status quo* simply because we do not *fully* understand the danger that nuclear arms represent, to justify political inaction by arguing that nuclear war *may* not occur or *may* remain "limited," is to follow the modern dogma of scientism to the brink of our elimination as a species. Whether or not we can gauge the likelihood of nuclear war or measure the destructive potential of nuclear weapons precisely, we must, says Schell, operate on the assumption that they can utterly destroy us, or we risk extinction. "In these circumstances . . . toleration of uncertainty is the path of life, and the demand for certainty is the path toward death" (77). One hears this echo often in *The Fate of the Earth.* In what amounts to a motif running through the metadiscourse of his text, Schell rises above his ongoing arguments for disarmament to remind us that political remedies for the

nuclear threat cannot await a foundation of certitude:

> Of all the things to be said in a discussion of the global effects of a nuclear holocaust, this is by far the most important: that because of the exent of what we know that we don't know, we are simply debarred from making confident judgments. (73)
>
> In weighing the fate of the earth and, with it, our own fate, we stand before a mystery, and in tampering with the earth we tamper with a mystery. We are in deep ignorance. Our ignorance should dispose us to wonder, our wonder should make us humble, our humility should inspire us to reverence and caution, and our reverence and caution should lead us to act without delay to withdraw the threat we now pose to the earth and to ourselves. (95)

In implying that we should act on the basis of cautious guesses rather than demonstrable proofs, and that our calculations about nuclear arms must include a sense of wonder about life, the second of these passages seems particularly attuned to the tenets of the good reasons movement. It suggests that we can acknowledge our limitations as human beings, accept ignorance as well as mystery, yet still be guided by reason. It suggests that here, in *The Fate of the Earth,* we might discover just how the rhetoric of assent might offer solutions to a contemporary rhetorical problem.[1]

And yet: if a practical rhetoric of assent required only this--only the *admission* that we as human beings are ignorant of many things, coupled with *assurances* that reason and reverence can nonetheless guide us, and even work in unison--then one could surely find such a rhetoric without difficulty. It would be practised by every criminal who "really wants to change," by every politician who promises to "do his best." Making the right claims is not enough. Even if we are not given to habitual scepticism, we will accept such claims only from some rhetors, and even then only

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[1] See also *The Abolition,* 16-28, especially 25: "To accept uncertainty in facing the nuclear peril honestly, and to learn to make judgments, and to act on them, in the midst of uncertainty is the beginning of wisdom in dealing with the nuclear predicament."

in circumstances when other available evidence gives them support. This "other available evidence" may include the facts and figures, as well as the testimony, offered by those whom a community has designated as "experts," but if our personal experiences cannot verify these sorts of evidence, we will consider further data. As I explained in Chapter Two, such data are sometimes found, contrary to the dicta of traditional argumentative fallacies, in *ad hominem* sources, in the rhetor's tone of voice, in his demeanor, in his deeds. And when we read and are without such physical data, we seek instead for evidence of other kinds--whether additional claims made in a text, for example, are consistent with the claim at issue, and whether the rhetor's manner of proceeding confirms that the claim at issue has been made in good faith. In short, before assenting to an appeal, we require not just reasons but good reasons--reasons, that is, which find support not only in what we are told by experts but also in what we are told by our personal experiences, including our impressions of the rhetor. The rhetor must convince us both that he and his rhetoric are one and that his personal experience does not contradict ours. Otherwise, his numbers will seem to be "mere statistics"; his supporting witnesses, "mere experts"; his verbal arguments, "mere rhetoric."

By these measures, it seems to me, Schell's rhetoric is deeply flawed. It may be true that all readers will sympathize on some level with his appeal to the ultimate value of human life itself; in this sense, Schell answers what Fisher calls the question of "transcendent issue" ("Logic" 380) and thereby fulfills one condition of a rhetoric of good reasons. Moreover, on some level, many readers will even accept one of Schell's most philosophically demanding arguments for total disarmament, the argument that human knowledge of highly complex events is and always will be limited, so we must take preventive action in the absence of demonstrable proof that the buildup of nuclear arms threatens the human race with extinction. One might

say that he thus answers "the question of consequence" ("Logic" 379). What makes such appeals inadequate, however, is that Schell does not provide us with sufficient warrants for taking action on the basis of his claims; in Fisher's terms, he fails to answer the questions of "relevance" and "consistency." For one thing, however accurate they are, however convincing they "ought" to be, the data and expert testimony Schell relies upon to support his claims are not borne out by the personal experiences most people have. It is all very well to amass evidence about the quantities and explosive powers of nuclear weapons and to argue from this evidence that the nuclear threat is real and urgent, but if this is so, one is inclined to say, why can I carry on with my daily affairs without thinking of such a threat or encountering any evidence of its physical reality? For another thing, the claims that Schell explicitly states over and over again in his metadiscourse seem to contradict the implicit message of his discourse, as though he were arguing in bad faith. Reading *The Fate of the Earth,* one gradually discovers that the author's embrace of "investigative modesty" is at best a superficial affair, a concession to an appealing alternative; at heart, he is married to the very mode of thought against which he warns us. One might say of Schell what he himself says of the public's stance on the nuclear predicament: he "fails to fashion" or "discover within himself" the kind of response needed to reduce a new kind of threat.

The focus of this chapter is, then, Schell's rhetoric in *The Fate of the Earth,* particularly those aspects which limit its persuasive power. Though the chapter is not, as my title might suggest, intended to be a study of disarmament rhetoric in general (in view of the abundance of discussion about nuclear arms, that subject would in itself require a book), it does consider rhetorical factors that I believe any advocate of disarmament must take into account in order to be effective, and that any critic must consider as he assesses a rhetoric advocating disarmament. These

rhetorical factors were outlined in the previous chapter: the physical remoteness of nuclear weapons, the lack of adequate historical precedents for assessing or even imagining the destruction they might cause, the absence of plausible political alternatives for reducing the likelihood that they will be used. Only if we read *The Fate of the Earth* with an awareness of such factors can we appreciate the rhetorical problem Schell faces, let alone assess his particular rhetorical solution.

A few words need to be said about just who the audience is for *The Fate of the Earth*. Broadly speaking, one might say that most of Schell's readers would be educated members of the American public. However, if his audience could be so easily defined, Schell's rhetorical problem would not be nearly so difficult. When his essays made their first appearance in *The New Yorker*, his potential audience was largely identifiable: well-educated, relatively affluent Americans--the sort of audience, it would seem, that might support arguments for disarmament (Stover 45-47). But who became his potential audience when these essays became a best-selling book? My guess is that this audience was less homogeneous than the one for *The New Yorker* essays. Certainly, the evidence indicates that the public, taken as a whole, was ambivalent about nuclear arms. When a poll was taken at the time *The Fate of the Earth* was published, only sixty per cent of Americans favored "a verifiable freeze on the development, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons." Moreover, after just a few months of listening to President Reagan claim that such a freeze would "simply lock the United States into a position of inferiority," this level of support dropped by at least thirteen per cent.[2] (It should be noted that the

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[2] The figure thirteen per cent is an optimistic estimate, judging by the remarks of Frank Kelly, a former speech writer for Truman and a staff director of the U.S. Senate's majority policy committee. As he says, "Public opinion polls taken for the President [at that time]

resulting figure of 47 percent represents the proportion of the public that favored a nuclear freeze, not the proportion that favored nuclear disarmament--a considerably more drastic measure.) I would not want to argue that this ambivalence among the general public would have been precisely mirrored by Schell's readers; as Stover has argued, the well-educated are more likely to support arms controls, and it seems safe to assume that Schell's readership would have been a fairly well-educated lot. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that when the *The Fate of the Earth* first appeared, in paperback, in bookstores across the USA, it would have found an audience somewhat less predisposed towards nuclear disarmament than were the refined readers of *The New Yorker.* In Perelman's terms, we might therefore say that the readers of *The Fate of the Earth* constitute a "universal audience," for whom arguments founded on special interests or transient circumstances will not be compelling (*New Rhetoric* 31-35).

I

In ancient as well as modern rhetoric with an exhortative function, vivid, moving description has often served as a means of provoking one's audience to act. The Roman rhetorician Quintilian called such description *enargeia* and defined it as

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showed that his speeches denouncing the freeze and calling for more arms had a major impact in swinging many Americans to his side." Kelly later adds, "The treatment of news events by the broadcasting media and the newspapers--often used by Presidents to sway public opinion--may swing millions of citizens from one position to another"; "the views of the American public can shift with astonishing speed." See "The Role of the Public in Preventing Nuclear War," 258-259.

a device intended "to exhibit the actual scene," so that "our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence" (Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric* 27). E.J. Corbett provides the following example from *The Iliad*, where *enargeia* is used by Odysseus as a means of arousing Achilles:

> We are confronted by a disaster, your highness, the magnitude of which appals [sic] us. Unless you rouse yourself to fight, we have no more than an even chance of saving our gallant ships or seeing them destroyed. The insolent Trojans and their famous allies are bivouacking close to the ships and wall. Their camp is bright with fires . . . . Hector has run amuck . . . . [and] . . . . is itching to hack the peaks from the sterns of our ships, to send up the ships themselves in flames, to smoke us out and to slaughter us by the hills. (See Corbett 21-27)

Compared with other passages in *The Iliad*, this description seems quite moderate--tame enough, in fact, that one might wonder why Corbett cites it as an example. However, the effectiveness of *enargeia* depends not on its being, in a conventional sense, spectacular, but on its being appropriate to a particular audience. As Corbett points out, "Since to the Greek mind, fire was intimately associated with the emotion of anger," the images of fire in this passage seem "subtly calculated to arouse Achilles' anger" (27). Other circumstances might call for a less subtle kind of calculation. There is, for instance, a particularly gruesome description in *Henry V*, when Henry warns the Governor of Harfleur to surrender immediately, or see

> The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
> Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
> Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
> And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;
> Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
> Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
> Do break the clouds . . . . (III. iii. 34-40)

Here, as in the last half of the passage from the *Iliad*, the description is of a scene that has not occurred but is nonetheless rooted in fact. That this vivid description of

brutal violence should not be taken as an idle threat or an exaggeration is clear from the Governor's reaction: he immediately opens the gates to his town so that Henry's troops can enter. As far as he is concerned--and as far as Henry is concerned--this horrible vision is without question a future possibility, a kind of factual report of what has not yet happened. The passage advances not with the vain posturing of the subjunctive, but with the terrifying force of the conditional and the imperative: do this, or you shall witness that.

If all of this makes the use of *enargeia* seem a straightforward affair, it is not: the device raises the most fundamental sorts of questions about the art and practice of rhetoric, questions that constantly play upon one's response to Schell's *The Fate of the Earth.* They are questions that have to do with the complex and perhaps ultimately unknowable relationship between fact and fiction, falsehood and truth. What does Corbett mean, for instance, when he says that the descriptive images used by Odysseus are "subtly calculated" to arouse emotions? Does Odysseus lie? Does he exaggerate? Or is the rhetorical impact of his description a consequence of his choosing and of emphasizing particular details, rather than of distorting or simply fabricating them? Though the appeal of *enargeia* is clearly, in Aristotelian terms, pathetic, can it nonetheless be used with restraint and with artfulness to bolster a statement of fact--that is, to make a factual account more persuasive? Richard Weaver comments:

> The practice [of *enargia*] has given rise to a good deal of misunderstanding . . . . We know that one of the conventional criticisms of rhetoric is that the practitioner of it takes advantage of his hearers by playing upon their feelings and imaginations. He overstresses the importance of his topics by puffing them up, dwelling on them in great detail, using an excess of imagery or of modifiers evoking the senses, and so on. He goes beyond what is fair, the critics often allege, by this actualization of a scene about which the audience ought to be thinking rationally . . . .
>
> Beyond a doubt, whenever the rhetorician actualizes an event in this manner, he is making it mean something to the emotional part of us, but that

> part is involved whenever we are deliberating about goodness and badness . . . . Our attitude toward what is just or right or noble and their opposites is not a bloodless calculation, but a feeling for and against . . . . the speaker who arouses feeling may only be arousing it to the right pitch and channeling it in the right direction . . . .
>
> [W]e are all men of limited capacity and sensitivity and imagination. We all need to have things pointed out to us, things stressed in our interest. The very task of the rhetorician is to determine what feature of a question is most exigent and to use the power of language to make it appear so. (217-220)

As Weaver says elsewhere, "A speech intended to persuade achieves little unless it takes into account how men are reacting subjectively to their hopes and fears and their special circumstances" (205).

As the quotations opening this chapter indicate, Schell would likely agree with much of what Weaver says here. We have seen, for example, that Schell not only acknowledges the "limited capacity" of human beings but points to those limitations as one reason why we must be reverent and cautious "in tampering with the earth." I think it would also be accurate to say that, in principle at least, Schell would agree with the last of Weaver's claims--that effective persuasion depends upon taking the "hopes and fears and special circumstances" of one's audience into account. Indeed, his concern for audience is why, as I will demonstrate shortly, Schell speaks directly and early in *The Fate of the Earth* about the fear that the nuclear threat is likely to arouse in many of his readers. Yet in spite of this agreement in principle with what Weaver says both about the characteristics of audiences and about the need for rhetors to take those characteristics into account, Schell's rhetorical practice often seems to be informed more by "conventional criticisms of rhetoric" than it does by Weaver's defence of it.

The problem may be that Schell is unclear about his rhetorical purpose. A substantial body of evidence in *The Fate of the Earth* suggests that his first chapter, "A Republic of Insects and Grass," is intended to have a rhetorical effect like that of the passages quoted above. Of course, there is the obvious difference that, for

example, in Shakespeare's play, Henry elicits immediate surrender, whereas in *The Fate of the Earth* Schell counsels immediate action, warning us that we must rouse ourselves from slumber and move quickly if we are to obviate a terrifying future. But apart from this distinction between the kinds of reactions they are intended to evoke, the description of a nuclear holocaust offered early in Schell's book serves much the same purpose as the descriptions did in the passages quoted above. Like Odysseus, Schell knows his audience is one for whom "the facts of the matter" are sometimes insufficient; he is aware not only that many others before him have written informatively about nuclear war--his first chapter lists "a considerable number of excellent studies" on its effects (4-5)--but also that, in spite of such studies, the buildup of arms continues and shows no signs of abating (54, 95). He therefore knows that informing the public has in the past not brought about the sorts of attitudinal and political changes the disarmament movement desires. And that gives Schell a greater sense of urgency:

> [I]f a description of the [nuclear] predicament, which is the greatest mankind has ever faced, cannot in itself reveal to us how we can escape, it can, I believe, acquaint us with the magnitude and shape of the task that we have to address. And it can summon us to action. (220)

It would seem, then, that a change in attitude alone is not enough. Action, immediate and concerted, is essential to our survival. And accordingly, in view of the public's history of inertia over questions of nuclear arms, exposition is not sufficient to Schell's rhetorical purpose; he must move us. He must not only inform, but exhort. Thus, one might say that he faces a rhetorical situation entirely suited to *enargeia* : he must place directly before his readers the prospect of nuclear devastation, so that they will grasp the consequences of their present inertia in a fuller, more immediate way, and act appropriately.

That the intended function of "A Republic of Insects and Grass" is primarily

exhortative rather than informative is also indicated by Schell's use of what Perelman calls the "loci of the preferable." By privileging "the loci of quality" rather than "the loci of quantity"--in other words, by arguing that the threat posed by nuclear arms is different in kind rather than in degree from any the world has faced before--Schell adopts a rhetorical strategy calculated to move us.[3] He could, of course, choose instead to compare nuclear war with conventional wars gone by; certainly, such comparisons would make Schell's subject more accessible to his

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[3] The "loci of the preferable" is a modern theory of topics that Perelman discusses in several of his studies on rhetoric. In "Classicism and Romanticism in Argumentation," where the theory receives its clearest treatment, he defines it in this way:

> Every argument aims at provoking or augmenting intellectual adherence to theses which are proposed for agreement. It cannot be based uniquely upon the adherence to facts, to truths or to presumptions; it must be able to rest equally upon agreements concerning values, hierarchies, and very general preferential statements, capable of being evoked so as to orient our choices and which we call *loci of the preferable.* (*Humanities* 159)

By way of example, Perelman compares "the loci of quantity" to "the loci of quality." The former "are those which affirm that a thing is worth more than another for quantitative reasons, those which maintain the superiority of what lasts the longest, what is more constant, what renders service to a large number of people, what is useful to the greatest number, what is useful in the greatest number of circumstances, what has the greatest chance to produce or to succeed or what is easier or more accessible"; whereas the *loci* of *quality* affirm the superiority of the unique, the rare, the exceptional, the precarious, the difficult, and the original" (160-61). Much like the "binary oppositions" of which the deconstructionists speak, these loci of the preferable operate in pairs, of which one item is, implicitly or explicitly, privileged; the abstract might be privileged over the concrete, reason over imagination, philosophy over poetry, analysis over intuition, theory over fact, and so on.

readers, for as Isocrates once argued, "the unknown may be learned most quickly from the known."[4] One wonders, however, whether readers educated about the threat of nuclear war in such a manner are most likely to be moved to take political action to prevent the threat. Might we not, instead, conclude that we will survive in spite of our inertia, just as previous generations have survived previous wars? Indeed, as Jerome Frank has argued, might it not be the case that by "using the word *war* to describe . . . a [nuclear] catastrophe, we [would] also conjure up the possibility of victory" (195), and even of the wealth that sometimes follows wars? On the other hand, by convincing us that his subject is unique, that "the shape and the magnitude" of the nuclear threat are without precedent, Schell is more likely to persuade us of the urgent need for immediate corrective action, and thus overcome our inertia. It is clear from the outset that this emphasis on the "loci of quality" rather than those of quantity will be part of his rhetorical strategy:

> [Nuclear] bombs were built as "weapons" for "war," but their significance greatly transcends war and all its causes and outcomes. They grew out of history, yet they threaten to end history. They were made by men, yet they threaten to annihilate man. They are a pit into which the whole world can fall--a nemesis of all human intentions, actions, and hope. Only life itself, which they threaten to swallow up, can give the measure of their significance. (3-4)

These comments are representative of Schell's rhetorical strategy. Later in the first chapter, for example, we are told "a nuclear holocaust would be unique in its suddenness" (92) and in its effects. In the second chapter, half-way through the book, we are reminded of the same point: "A nuclear holocaust, because of its unique

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[4] According to Isocrates, "when you are deliberating, regard things which have happened as examples of what will happen. For the unknown may be learned most quickly from the known." See Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, 98.

combination of immensity and suddenness, is a threat without parallel" (111). And in the third chapter, after the author has argued that the build-up of nuclear arms constitutes a threat to the very survival of the human race, we are urged repeatedly to do something about "this unprecedented global emergency" (184).

This strategy of emphasizing the uniqueness of nuclear war may seem appropriate enough, given the almost incomprehensible power of today's nuclear arsenals. Certainly, Schell is not alone in using it.[5] Yet there is a difficulty involved in carrying out such a strategy--one might even call it a paradox--that takes us to the heart of what has been called "the nuclear predicament." If the unique is, by definition, irreplaceable and incomparable, then presumably one's grasp of the unique must depend upon personal knowledge of the irreplaceable and incomparable object or event; it must depend, in other words, upon one's experience of the historical fact. The strategy may well be effective when the author wants to awaken his audience to objects or events they once knew (in childhood, perhaps, or in moments of heightened perception) but have gradually come to neglect--as, for example, Romantic poets do when they beseech us to see "ordinary things" in "an unusual way" or "eternity in a wild flower." But the rhetorical problem is quite different when the unique fact has *never* been experienced by one's audience. And as Schell realizes, few people in his audience have witnessed any kind of nuclear explosion, let alone a nuclear attack. A full-scale nuclear war--a nuclear holocaust, as Schell usually calls it--seems scarcely a possibility, the multiplication of a fact never experienced, the product of instruments lying hidden in silos or gliding beneath the

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[5] Indeed, among those with whom I am familiar, almost all rely on the same strategy to some degree. See, for example, Cohen and Lee. 1; Jerome D. Frank, 194-195; Lester Grinspoon, 5; and virtually any of the relevant works by Robert Jay Lifton.

ocean's surface, far from sight and infinitely more powerful than their antecedents. Such a war, to use a word that appears again and again in the literature about nuclear arms, is simply "unthinkable."

Schell's self-assigned rhetorical task, then, is not only to make a possibility seem a reality, as King Henry and Odysseus did, but to construct that reality out of objects and events that his audience has never experienced first-hand. To use the phrase he repeats several times in *The Fate of the Earth* (it is originally Herman Kahn's), Schell must make us "think the unthinkable" (140):

> Usually, people wait for things to occur before trying to describe them . . . . But since we cannot afford under any circumstances to let a holocaust occur, we are forced in this one case to become the historians of the future--to chronicle and commit to memory an event that we have never experienced and must never experience. This unique endeavor, in which foresight is asked to perform a task usually reserved for hindsight, raises a host of special difficulties. There is a categorical difference, often overlooked, between trying to describe an event that has already happened (whether it is Napolean's invasion of Russia or the pollution of the environment by acid rain) and trying to describe one that has yet to happen--and one, in addition, for which there is no precedent, or even near-precedent, in history. Lacking experience to guide our thoughts and impress itself on our feelings, we resort to speculation. But speculation, however brilliantly it may be carried out, is at best only a poor substitute for experience. Experience gives us facts, whereas in pure speculation we are thrown back on theory, which has never been a very reliable guide to future events. (21)

The central rhetorical problem for Schell seems to be this: when dealing with such an unprecedented scene, just how does one make an audience feel as though they were, to quote Quintilian, "present at the actual occurrence"? To convince people with the prospect of violence to their flesh and blood, to make vivid the cries of mothers and daughters, is by comparison an easy task. However horrifying, events such as these are within the range of imagining, not only because they arouse deep-seated fears about those who are closest to each of us, but because their like have been known and recorded, and they are thus part of the memory of our species. But how does one describe the faceless, final, and unrecordable battle, in which an entire

species extinguishes itself with machines?

It is in his answer to this question that we begin to see how unclear Schell is about his rhetorical purpose, for as much as *The Fate of the Earth* indicates its author's desire to move his audience, it reveals signs that he is uneasy about exhortation, that he fears losing the very audience he wants so much to convince. The problem is not that Schell is insensitive to his readers. On the contrary, he clearly expresses concern for them, not only in his brief comments about experience and speculation but in several paragraphs in which he acknowledges the "nuclear fear" of his readers, "the powerful and conflicting emotions" (7) that arise when we consider nuclear war: "When one tries to face the nuclear predicament, one feels sick, whereas when one pushes it out of mind, as apparently one must do in order to carry on with life, one feels well again" (8). The problem may lie instead in Schell's misperceiving the needs of his readers and in being too sensitive about his relationship with them. There is about him an all-too-earnest desire to be scrupulously honest. (It may have been this attitude that prompted John Hersey to say Schell argues the case for disarmament "in an absolutely uncompromising way.") As Schell says in his final comments before describing a nuclear holocaust,

> Because denial is a form of self-protection, if only against anguishing thoughts and feelings, and because it contains something useful, and perhaps even, in its way, necessary to life, anyone who invites people to draw aside the veil and look at the peril face to face is at risk of trespassing on inhibitions that are a part of our humanity. I hope in these reflections to proceed with the utmost possible respect for all forms of refusal to accept the unnatural and horrifying prospect of a nuclear holocaust. (8-9)

As far as Schell is concerned, this "utmost respect" means that he must try never to exaggerate, to make unwarranted claims, or to suggest he knows anything that he does not. And he will avoid "playing" upon his readers' emotions. Where others have, for example, associated the nuclear holocaust with the Biblical Armageddon,

he refuses to do so: "To imagine that God is guiding our hand in this action would quite literally be the ultimate evasion of our responsibility as human beings" (127). Where others may rely on "science fiction and other types of pure fantasy" to help readers think the unthinkable, Schell believes such approaches offer nothing more than "an escape in imagination from the tight trap that our species is caught in in reality" (126). And where others, chiefly military strategists, paint speculative "scenarios" and exhibit an "unfortunate tendency . . . to pretend to a knowledge . . . that it is not given to human beings to have" (22; 33), Schell assures us that he will never indulge in such "misrepresentations" (93). On the one occasion when he does hypothesize at some length, even though it is only to clarify a point, he feels compelled to confess his motive for mentioning "far-fetched, wholly imaginary programs" (100).

Indeed, Schell seems reluctant to use any device that might suggest he is fictionalizing. He assumes that his readers' assent depends upon frankness and honesty, and that frankness and honesty depend upon sticking to the facts:

> Faced with uncertainties . . . some analysts of nuclear destruction have resorted to fiction, assigning to the imagination the work that investigation is unable to do. But then the results are just what one would expect: fiction. An approach more appropriate to our intellectual circumstances would be to acknowledge a high degree of uncertainty as an intrinsic and extremely important part of dealing with a possible holocaust. (25)

Is this blunt dichotomy between fact and fiction tenable? A few pages earlier, Schell himself undermines it, with both his imagery and his assertion, by suggesting that an understanding of the nuclear holocaust requires a temporary "descent" into the "hell in imagination" (5). But even without this evidence that his position is contradictory, one might ask what he means by "our intellectual circumstances." The phrase is nowhere explained. Is he suggesting that in dealing earnestly with serious subjects--with "reality"--we must not only admit the limits to our knowledge

but avoid any "artistic" device which might help us overcome them? Is he suggesting that the good and honest purpose can never be served by art? If so, Schell is guided by one of the oldest and perhaps most fallacious criticisms of rhetoric. We might recall Weaver's comments:

> [W]e are all men of limited capacity and sensitivity and imagination. We all need to have things pointed out to us, things stressed in our interest. The very task of the rhetorician is to determine what feature of a question is most exigent and to use the power of language to make it appear so.

To make the nuclear peril appear urgent: given the remote and unprecedented dimensions of this peril, that task is difficult enough. But when the one who undertakes it distrusts the imaginative resources of language, the task is almost unthinkable.

II

As early as the second paragraph of *The Fate of the Earth,* there are signs that, while urging us to look nuclear holocaust squarely in the face, Schell himself will remain at a distance:

> In what follows, I shall offer some thoughts on the origin and the significance of [the nuclear] predicament, on why we have so long resisted attempts to think about it (we even call a nuclear holocaust 'unthinkable') or deal with it, and on the shape and magnitude of the choice that it forces upon us. But first I wish to describe the consequences for the world, insofar as these can be known, of a full-scale nuclear holocaust at the current level of global armament. We have lived in the shadow of nuclear arms for more than thirty six years, so it does not seem too soon for us to familiarize ourselves with them--to acquaint ourselves with such matters as the 'thermal pulse,' the 'blast wave,' and the 'three stages of radiation sickness'. A description of a full-scale holocaust seems to be made necessary by the simple but basic rule that in order to discuss something one should first know what it is. (4)

The use of the first person "we" identifies Schell with his readers, acknowledging

that he, too, finds nuclear holocaust difficult to think about. At first glance, this identification with his readers seems an appropriate rhetorical tactic. However, the tone of the passage works against the explicit message; the author seems curiously resistant to the unpleasant descriptive task that lies ahead--resistant, that is, to do precisely what he expects his readers to do. In addition to the almost total absence of concrete nouns, the patient, almost mechanical movement of the syntax (characterized, most notably, by parallel structures, by coordinate pairs, by repetition, and by the positioning of the interruptive clauses) creates the impression that Schell is intent on giving us an impersonal, informative account in the description which will soon follow. And this impression is strengthened by the final sentence in the passage, when he justifies his decision to describe a nuclear holocaust with a bland allusion to logical necessity, to a "simple but basic rule." There is nothing here to suggest exhortation; indeed, there is scarcely anything to suggest emotion. And yet the passage exerts some force even through exposition, a hint of an authorial presence imposing order on unthinkable facts. One senses this forcefulness particularly in the careful dichotomies of the first sentence, where Schell not only anticipates the ontological, psychological, and ethical parts of his discussion, but subdivides each. He is suppressing any signs of emotion beneath disinterested classifications, marched out in measured prose.

As the description develops, however, this propensity for classifying shows itself as an ever greater force, until Schell's classifications become obtrusive, and eventually sap his prose of any energy it may have had. The following paragraph, though long, is by no means unusual in *The Fate of the Earth.* I quote it in full to give some indication of the demands which Schell's prose places on the reader:

> The initial nuclear radiation, the electromagnetic pulse, the thermal pulse, the blast wave, and the local fallout may be described as the local primary effects of nuclear weapons. Naturally, when many bombs are exploded the

scope of these effects is increased accordingly. But in addition these primary effects produce innumerable secondary effects on societies and natural environments, some of which may be even more harmful than the primary ones. To give just one example, nuclear weapons, by flattening and setting fire to huge, heavily built-up areas, generate mass fires, and in some cases these may kill more people than the original thermal pulses and blast waves. Moreover, there are--quite distinct from both the local primary effects of individual bombs and their secondary effects--global primary effects, which do not become significant unless thousands of bombs are detonated all around the earth. And these global primary effects produce innumberable secondary effects of their own throughout the ecosystem of the earth as a whole. For a full-scale holocaust is more than the sum of its local parts; it is also a powerful direct blow to the ecosphere. In that sense, a holocaust is to the earth what a single bomb is to a city. Three grave direct global effects have been discovered so far. The first is the "delayed," or "worldwide," fallout. In detonations greater than one hundred kilotons, part of the fallout does not fall to the ground in the vicinity of the explosion but rises high into the troposphere and into the stratosphere, circulates around the earth, and then, over months or years, descends, contaminating the whole surface of the globe--although with doses of radiation far weaker than those delivered by the local fallout. Nuclear-fission products comprise some three hundred radioactive isotopes, and though some of them decay to relatively harmless levels of radioactivity within a few hours, minutes, or even seconds, others persist to emit radiation for up to millions of years. The short-lived isotopes are the ones most responsible for the lethal effects of the local fallout, and the long-lived ones are responsible for the contamination of the earth by the stratospheric fallout. The energy released by all fallout from a thermal nuclear explosion is about five per cent of the total. By convention, this energy is not calculated in the stated yield of a weapon, yet in a ten-thousand-megaton attack the equivalent of five hundred megatons of explosive energy, or forty thousand times the yield of the Hiroshima bomb, would be released in the form of radioactivity. This release may be considered a protracted afterburst, which is dispersed into the land, air, and sea, and into the tissues, bones, roots, stems, and leaves of living things, and goes on detonating there almost indefinitely after the explosion. The second of the global effects that have been discovered so far is the lofting, from ground bursts, of millions of tons of dust into the stratosphere; this is likely to produce general cooling of the earth's surface. The third of the global effects is a predicted partial destruction of the layer of ozone that surrounds the entire earth in the stratosphere. A nuclear fireball, by burning nitrogen in the air, produces large quantities of oxides of nitrogen. These are carried by the heat of the blast into the stratosphere, where, through a series of chemical reactions, they bring about depletion of the ozone layer. Such a depletion may persist for years. The 1975 N.A.S. report has estimated that in a holocaust in which ten thousand megatons were detonated in the Northern Hemisphere the reduction of ozone in this hemisphere could be as high as seventy per cent and in the Southern Hemisphere as high as forty per cent, and that it could take as long as thirty years for the ozone level to return to normal. The ozone layer is crucial to life on earth, because it shields the surface of the earth from

> lethal levels of ultraviolet radiation, which is present in sunlight. Glasstone remarks simply, "If it were not for the absorption of much of the solar ultraviolet radiation by the ozone, life as currently known could not exist except possibly in the ocean." Without the ozone shield, sunlight, the life-giver, would become a life-extinguisher. In judging the global effects of a holocaust, therefore, the primary question is not how many people would be irradiated, burned, or crushed to death by the immediate effects of the bombs but how well the ecosphere, regarded as a single living entity, on which all forms of life depend for their continued existence, would hold up. The issue is the habitability of the earth, and it is in this context, not in the context of the direct slaughter of hundreds of millions of people by the local effects, that the question of human survival arises. (19-21)

In addition to its length (almost 800 words, but, as I indicated, no longer than many paragraphs in *The Fate of the Earth;* indeed, the paragraph preceding this one is much the same), it is the information this paragraph offers that is likely to intimidate readers and eventually dull them. This information is by no means technical, nor is the language used to convey it jargonistic or obscure. Apart from a few words--'troposphere" and "stratosphere," perhaps, as well as "isotopes" and "oxides of nitrogen" (and these are in any case defined here or in earlier passages)--the language is easily accessible to the layperson. One might also argue that Schell arranges and develops the information competently; the passage exhibits what E.D. Hirsch calls high "relative readability." Yet the information tires us because it proliferates relentlessly. This is not simply another way of saying that Schell is long-winded. The problem is deeper than that, and directly connected both to the difficulties inherent in disarmament apologetics and to Schell's confused rhetorical stance. What results from Schell's earnest refusal to make emotional appeals is not only the peculiar flatness of tone in this paragraph, with its lack of variety in sentence patterns, its paucity of strong, energetic verbs and agents, its preponderance of passive constructions, and the plodding frequency of its sentence connectors. The passage also exhibits flaws in substance. Sceptical about the kinds of methods that exhortation would require, yet nonetheless determined to move his audience, Schell

is driven to provide all the information he can. Despite his call for "investigative modesty," he can leave nothing out; the need to be honest with his readers will not allow it, nor will the urgency of his task. And thus his subject--incredibly complex, incomprehensible, unthinkable--begins to control him.

Facts flood in. I am not speaking only of the most prominent facts catalogued in this passage--of the local primary and secondary effects, and the global primary and secondary effects. Keeping those divisions clearly in mind as one proceeds through the passage is taxing. But there is also the information nested within those divisions. What purpose is served, for example, by the many paired modifiers in this passage, by telling us that bombs have secondary effects on "societies and natural environments," that nuclear weapons generate fires "by flattening and setting fire" to large areas, or that fallout rises "into the troposphere and into the stratosphere" and descends over "months or years"? Why does Schell tell us that "some" of the "three hundred radioactive isotopes . . . decay to relatively harmless levels of radioactivity within a few hours, minutes, or even seconds"? These are logical distinctions, yes; and they do add information to Schell's account. But do they help us *realize* how serious the nuclear threat is? In any of these examples, does the pair of modifiers offer information which readers can or need to absorb? Is this information offered to move us? To inform us? Or is it not rather the case that, as Schell moves from class, to subclass, to example, one begins to feel that it is offered because Schell has confused his rhetorical purposes? He wishes to be accurate, to be factually precise, to be scrupulously honest, and to make it perpetually clear that he will not lay claim to a knowledge he does not have; yet he seems to have forgotten that his readers--who are human, and thus limited--have other needs.

It is ironic that, in this passage, Schell would choose to speak of a sum greater than its parts, for it is that sum--the big picture of nuclear holocaust, the picture that

would impress us as "a human truth" rather than "a handful of figures" (36)--which is missing entirely from this catalogue, and indeed from the whole of "A Republic of Insects and Grass." The passage is representative. Within the first chapter of *The Fate of the Earth,* Schell classifies nuclear attacks according to the proportion of their arsenals that attackers are likely to use, the targets at which attackers aim, the method and time of attack, and the kinds of hostilities that are likely to occur after a nuclear attack (30), and then he follows all this up with a catalogue of predictions about nuclear attacks, classified according to "intellectual fashion" (31). He classifies the factors that make the effects of a nuclear attack uncertain (59), the components of radiation, the dosages of radiation required to put various species of life at risk (60-61), and the effects of the destruction of the ozone layer (80-88). And in what may be the most grotesquely off-key passage in his entire book, Schell even classifies the kinds of death that a victim of nuclear holocaust might face: "Let us consider, for example, some of the possible ways in which a person in a targeted country might die" (24). In its fraternal, almost ministerial appeal ("Let us consider"), in its calm, even tempo ("for example"), in its fussy precision ("some of the possible ways"), and above all, in its macabre associations with, of all things, one of the best known love poems in our language ("Let me count the ways"), the tone of this sentence is so grossly unsuited to its substance that it turns our attention abruptly from the message to the messenger--in Aristotle's terms, from logos to ethos. The sentence backfires, in a way that encapsulates much of what is wrong with *The Fate of the Earth.* Schell wants to keep fact and speculation clearly distinct, because he wants to avoid playing upon our emotions, yet his subject, so complex as to be fantastic--even "unthinkable"--will not permit such a distinction easily, nor can the emotions it arouses be suppressed. When Schell tries to contain nuclear holocaust with the logic of his classifications and the measured qualifications of his prose, he succeeds only in

channelling our emotions in a direction altogether different from the one he intends.

III

> As notions come of abstractions, so images come of experiences; the more fully the mind is occupied by an experience, the keener will be its assent to it, if it assents, and on the other hand, the duller will be its assent and the less operative, the more it is engaged with an abstraction . . . . (Newman, *Grammar of Assent* 30)
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> . . . . Assent, however strong, and accorded to images however vivid, is not . . . necessarily practical . . . . However, when there is preparation of mind, the thought does lead to the act. Hence it is that the fact of a proposition being accepted with a real assent is accidentally an earnest of that proposition being carried out in conduct, and the imagination may be said in some sense to be of a practical nature, inasmuch as it leads to practice indirectly by the action of its object upon the affections. (*Grammar of Assent* 59)

The flaws in *The Fate of the Earth* are by no means limited to the attempted *enargeia* in Chapter One. The last two chapters, "The Second Death" and "The Choice," similarly fail to provide Schell's large audience with good reasons to act against the nuclear peril. Reasons, certainly, Schell does give. In "The Choice," for example, he offers several sound arguments against the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which states that nuclear war is least likely when each nuclear power has a force capable of destroying the other. According to Schell, this doctrine of "mutually assured destruction" not only places intolerable pressure upon us, but wrongly assumes that the nuclear powers involved would, after a first strike by an enemy, make retaliatory strikes for no purpose other than revenge; moreover, the doctrine is a logical contradiction, since "we cannot both threaten ourselves with something and hope to avoid that same thing by making the threat--both intend to do something and intend not to do it" (197). Though I find myself in agreement

with these reasons for reducing and perhaps even eliminating nuclear arsenals, they "are not new," as at least one reviewer has pointed out (Holyoke 483). Furthermore, since nuclear arsenals have continued to grow in spite of them, one wonders whether Schell's arguments have struck a responsive chord among the public. A newer argument against nuclear arms, and, if one is to judge by the emphasis that the title of his second chapter gives it, the argument that Schell himself considers his most important, is his moral argument on behalf of human beings as a species. It is in "The Second Death" that Schell makes his appeal to what I earlier called (borrowing the term from Fisher) a "transcendent value"; that is, he bases his case for total disarmament on the broadest of foundations by reminding us that nuclear war may cost the lives not only of the readers and of those close to them, but of the human race itself. The problem, however, is that this transcendent appeal is not connected, through images, to the personal experiences of Schell's readers; consequently, as Newman's comments suggest, any assent one does give to it is likely to be dull and unenduring.

What Schell offers instead of vivid, moving images is a prose continually deferring the concrete and the particular, and continually defying imaginative engagement. Amid the convolutions of syntax and the tangle of abstract negatives, his appeals sometimes edge towards bathos:

> In one sense, extinction is less terrible than death, since extinction can be avoided, while death is inevitable; but in another sense extinction is more terrible--is the more radical nothingness--because extinction ends death just as surely as it ends birth and life. (119)

> Extinction is, in truth, even less tangibly present than death, because while death continually strikes down those around us, thereby at least reminding us of what death is, and reminding us that we, too, must die, extinction can, by definition, strike only once, and is, therefore, entirely hidden from our direct view; no one has ever seen extinction and no one ever will. (138)

> Lacking the possibility of experience, all we have left is thought, since

extinction is locked away forever in a future that can never arrive. (140)

> It is the murder of the future. And because this murder cancels all those who might recollect it even as it destroys its immediate victims the obligation to 'never forget' is displaced back onto us, the living. It is we--the ones who will either commit this crime or prevent it--who must bear witness, must remember, and must arrive at the judgment. (168)

> And if at first we find these future people to be somewhat abstract we have *only* to remind ourselves that we, too, were once 'the future generation,' and that every unborn person will be as vivid and important to himself as each of us is to himself (172; emphasis mine)[6]

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[6] To these particular passages--the collective force of which, it is to be hoped, will give one some sense of how "The Second Death," as a whole, reads--I could easily have added many others. Schell's analogies are especially interesting, since they seem to involve all the problems resulting from his rhetorical approach. The analogy is of course a device traditionally used for expository rather than argumentive purposes. As Corbett says, "By comparing something unfamiliar or abstruse with something familiar, one can facilitate his explanation" (*Classical Rhetoric* 118). Given his audience's lack of familiarity with nuclear arms, it is not difficult to see how essential such a device might be to Schell's arguments: if successful, analogy would convey a foreign subject into their realm of experience--that is, into their "circle of assumptions." And there are other grounds for employing analogies in *The Fate of the Earth*. Says Weaver, "We make use of analogy or comparison when the available knowledge of the subject permits only probable proof" (213), as is the case with any speculations about a nuclear holocaust, or, indeed, with any speculations about the future in general, as Schell often acknowledges. At the same time, however, we must remember that Schell might be said to have forfeited the advantages of easy comparison when he elected to emphasize the uniqueness of the nuclear threat, when he chose, in other words, to stress the "loci of quality" rather than the "loci of quantity." One cannot simultaneously argue that an event is unlike any other and describe that thing by likening it to other events. Moreover, since, as Weaver argues, "this type of argument seems to be preferred by those of a poetic or non-literal sort of mind"

That "only" of the final sentence, like a flag planted at the top of some cloud-covered peak, marks the distance between Schell and his audience. As he says towards the end of his second chapter, "reflection on extinction must lead . . . to arousal, rejection, indignation, and action" (184). Yet who can believe that this negative abstraction--this "ungraspable loss" (115); this "radical nothingness" which is "locked away forever in a future than can never arrive"; this "intangible, incomprehensible," "entirely hidden presence," a "murder" which "cancels" the "unborn"--can motivate people sufficiently to overcome their political inertia?

The rhetorical ineffectiveness of all these negative abstractions is made more obvious by comparing Schell's procedure in "The Second Death" to the procedure of Rachel Carson in the opening chapters of *Silent Spring*. Both authors explicitly state the "transcendent value" to which they appeal. In Carson's case, it is, as the title of her second chapter tells us, "the obligation to endure" (6); in Schell's, "the obligation to save the species" (174). These appeals sound much the same, but in fact Carson is primarily concerned not with the threat that human beings themselves might become extinct if they do not alter their ways, but instead with the threat that we might "destroy the earth" (as her epigraph from Albert Schweitzer puts it). Moreover, she does not dwell on this "obligation to endure," but instead makes us

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(213), Schell's distrust of "non-literal" devices of any sort would seem to inhibit recourse to analogy. Not surprisingly, therefore, the analogies Schell offers are often rather confused or opaque. For instance: "To employ a mathematical analogy, we can say that although the risk of extinction may be fractional, the stake is, humanly speaking, infinite, and a fraction of infinity is still infinity" (95). Another: "The system of sovereignty is now to the earth and mankind what a polluting factory is to its local environment" (187).

feel its weight indirectly, by reminding us of the pleasures nature gives. Her opening chapter, "A Fable for Tomorrow," for example, offers an abundance of concrete images. First, the mind's eye sees nature's beauty: "laurel, viburnum, and alder, great ferns and wildflowers"; "shady pools where trout lay"; deer, passing silently "in the mists of the fall mornings"; "fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drift above the green fields" (1-2). Then, less vividly, but still with concrete images, we are shown how all this was blighted by humans, how "the roadsides, once so attractive, were now lined with browned and withered vegetation as though swept by fire" (3). Reminded by such images, like "spots in time," of particular percepts most of us have had, we are, I think, more likely to *realize* Carson's general point: that the world has much to offer, and that its offerings can be quickly taken from us. (As McKibben says, "We draw our lessons from what we can see and feel and hear around us . . . . [from] the temperature, and the rain, and the leaves turning color on the maples, and the raccoons around the garbage can" [83]). By contrast, Schell concentrates directly and relentlessly on the most abstract of ideas, the extinction of our species--comparing and contrasting, defining and forever qualifying, in an effort to convince us of the urgent necessity for action, in an attempt to force us to think of his subject and even grasp its full significance. In the nearly eighty pages of his second chapter, one rarely finds concrete images, but is instead confronted by a negative abstraction, by elaborate discussion of what is *not there.* As a result, any assent one does grant to Schell's "transcendent" appeal is almost exclusively of the less "keen," less "operative," less *moving* type that Newman calls "notional."[7]

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[7] I suspect that T.L. Brink, who described the structure of *The Fate of the Earth* as "three gigantic chapters with no subheadings," was thinking particularly of this chapter when

At first glance, one might see this excessive abstractness as nothing more than the sort of common problem that we as composition teachers encounter regularly, and for which we always have ready advice; "Be more specific," we might say, or "Be concrete." Yet the solution to Schell's problem is not quite so simple as one might first think. Once again, I believe, his difficulties are more deeply embedded in his rhetoric; the absence of concrete images in his text is only a symptom of an ill-conceived strategy. Just as he stakes his entire case on a comprehensive picture of nuclear holocaust in Chapter One, he stakes almost everything in Chapter Two on his appeal to "our obligation to save the species," perhaps out of the misguided notion that the greatest of threats will be obviated only by the noblest of motives. And having committed himself so fully to the claim that our obligation to the species is our highest and most noble motive for acting against the nuclear threat, he can scarcely afford to image the joys of the present. To do so would undercut the very basis of his claim; it would pull us back to the present, away from the one great reason that makes the nuclear threat unique and action against that threat more urgently necessary than ever before.

The final chapter, "The Choice," offers as little in the way of specific, practical advice as "The Second Death" offers in the way of vivid, concrete imagery. Having, he believes, through his description of a nuclear holocaust and his reflections on the extinction of human beings, already given us good reasons to act, Schell purposes to convince us that preventive action is possible. The strategy he uses to this end, seen often in rhetoric about nuclear arms and the environment, is one whose motivating

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he complained of being left "more dubious and confused than convinced . . . [and] . . . not always sure what his points are" (395).

idea is perhaps best summarized by Thoreau: "It appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left."[8] As Schell puts it in his closing paragraph, "Two paths lie before us. One leads to death, the other to life" (231). The difficulty for the reader, however, is that the latter path seems rather fragile underfoot and foggy in its destination. Indeed, after more than two hundred pages bloated with information and abstruse, often confusing arguments about the necessity for political action, Schell does not offer us a single concrete indication of how such action might be undertaken. He tells us only that the solution to the nuclear predicament lies in revising the entire "system" of sovereignty upon which world politics are founded, a system that, he admits, "can be described as entrenched" (214):

> In this book, I have not sought to define a political solution to the nuclear predicament--either to embark on the full-scale reexamination of the foundations of political thought which must be undertaken if the world's political institutions are to be made consonant with the global reality in which they operate or to work out the practical steps by which mankind, acting for the first time in history as a single entity, can reorganize its political life. I have left to others those awesome, urgent tasks, which, imposed on us by history, constitute the political work of our age. (219)

One might agree with Schell that although these tasks are "urgent," they are also too "awesome" to be undertaken at this stage of his book. Still, the fact of his leaving them for others does place in doubt the wisdom of his entire procedure. We are all dressed up with no place to go: Schell has simply replaced the irremediable anxiety

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[8] The treatment of this appeal most strikingly similar to Schell's is Rachel Carson's. Early in her final chapter of *Silent Spring*, entitled "The Other Road," Carson tells us, "The choice, after all, is ours" (277). See, also, McKibben, 195, and Ruckelhaus, 167, where "the conventional image" of a crossroads is rejected in favor of "a canoeist shooting the rapids": "survival depends on continually responding to information by correct steering."

his readers feel about nuclear arms with an equally irremediable anxiety about politics.

In reading "The Choice," I am reminded of an important difference between the rhetorical problem faced by those who protest against nuclear arms and the rhetorical problem faced by those who protest against, for example, the pollution of our air and water. The strength of much environmentalist rhetoric is in its appeals not only to what is familiar but to what can be easily accomplished; environmentalism thrives on the market for how-to books and "green" guides. *The Fate of the Earth,* on the other hand, can appeal to neither: weakened in the first chapter by Schell's inability to actualize the source of anxiety, in the last, it offers anxiety no outlet for release. For the reader, it fails to answer what Roger Walsh has called "the most important question of our time" (34): What can I do?

IV

As much as I have, in this chapter, concentrated on its flaws, *The Fate of the Earth* should not be dismissed as an entirely ineffectual apology for disarmament. As Cohen and Lee have said, the book "helped to trigger a large public interest" (xii) in the question of disarmament; indeed, it was "the first nonfiction book about nuclear war to become a best-seller since Hersey's *Hiroshima* of 1946" (Weart, 376).[9]

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[9] I might add that many of Schell's reviewers praised *The Fate of the Earth* in the most enthusiastic terms, saying that it "may save our lives," that it may "turn us around," that it may even be "the most important book of the decade, perhaps of the century." (These comments, from Studs Terkel, John Hersey, and Harrison Salisbury respectively, can be found on the cover the 1982 Avon paperback edition of *The Fate of the Earth.*) This immediate reaction

Nor should Schell's rhetoric be considered entirely antithetical to the tenets of the good reasons movement. By linking his arguments explicitly to a transcendent, universal value (the value of human life itself), by claiming that we must recognize when to act without the benefit of empirical proof or logical demonstration, and by respecting the emotions which his subject arouses in his audience, Schell indicates that he endorses, at least in principle, a rhetoric based on good reasons.

Yet in practice, Schell's can hardly be considered a persuasive rhetoric of "good reasons." Taken out of context, his claim--that the nuclear threat demands immediate and substantive action from his audience--does not seem to outstrip his warrants, which are based mainly on the scientific evidence that the nuclear threat is in fact a threat of holocaust, and on the moral argument that the possible cost of the nuclear threat, the extinction of the human species, is too great to risk by remaining political inactive. When one considers these warrants in the context of Schell's rhetorical problem, however, the matter is rather different. Because most of Schell's vast and diverse audience lacks personal knowledge of nuclear weapons, and in spite of their fearing the destruction of which such weapons are said to be capable, they

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need not, however, contradict or even weaken my claim that the rhetoric of *The Fate of the Earth* is fundamentally unsuited to its task. As Edwin Black has pointed out, there is more to assessing any rhetorical discourse than evaluating "its effects on its immediate audience" :

> A critic can, after all, interest himself not alone in the short-range effect on its immediate audience, but also in its effect on later audiences and its indirect effects to the extent that all of these audiences, under the influence of the discourse, themselves exert influence in speaking, writing, and acting. He can inquire into the effects of its ways of arguing--its rhetorical techniques, which may have consequences quite distinct from its arguments. . . . The critic can, in short, assess all the differences a rhetorical discourse has made in the world and will make, and how the differences are made and why. This range of interests will take the critic far beyond the simple mechanics of polling an audience, or measuring the volume of their applause. (74)

may very well be moved to act only if shown a palpable connection between the nuclear threat and their daily existence. They need to be reminded that the threat is real and present in their lives, and to be shown some meaningful avenue for reducing that threat. As one apologist for disarmament has said, "The 'one good reason' which our listeners sometimes demand is not one sound logical reason, it is one reason that really moves them, that makes sense to them, that satisfies feelings long held and deeply felt" (Stone 7). Schell never satisfies such feelings. Instead, all-too-respectful of his audience's nuclear fear, and spurred on by the seriousness of his task, Schell offers a text bloated by exhaustive classifications and diluted by abstract definitions, a text whose tone lacks the richness of personal conviction and whose conclusion lacks the sort of advice that might give *The Fate of the Earth* a practical connection to personal experience.

Given the difficulties inherent in any broad public appeal to take action against the threat of nuclear arms, one wonders what the alternatives to Schell's approach might be. Perhaps the essential factor is the size of the audience. It may be the case that, because most of us lack a daily, personal acquaintance with nuclear weapons--because, that is, disarmament rhetoric has no common, concrete basis for appeal--Schell and others like him should not even try to appeal to the sort of vast and diverse audience at which *The Fate of the Earth* is directed. Lifton, for one, has pointed out that in Japan, there are those in the peace movement who prefer to work in small groups, believing that mass political organizations are counter-productive and lead inevitably to self-aggrandizement (*Immortality* 41). Wendell Berry, the subject of my next chapter, has offered a similar criticism of the environmental movement:

> For most people, [the Civil Rights Movement and the Peace Movement] have remained almost entirely abstract; there has been too little personal involvement, and too much involvement in organizations that were

> insisting that *other* organizations should do what was right.
>
> There is considerable danger that the Environment Movement will have the same nature: that it will be a public cause, served by organizations that will self-righteously criticize and condemn other organizations, inflated for a while by a lot of public talk in the media, only to be replaced in its turn by another fashionable crisis. (*Harmony* 72)

As I will explain in the next chapter, Berry believes that the only way to avoid such self-aggrandizement, the only way to discover practicable solutions to our most serious problems, is to be personally active and to "think little." Writers or politicians who try to "save the world" with what he calls "heroic solutions"--that is, the kind which purport to solve problems entirely, once and for all, without repercussions--usually do more harm than good, for they not only deflect our time and effort from more modest, more workable solutions, but often create new, unforeseen problems.[10]

If it is not the size of one's audience and the scope of one's appeal, perhaps the essential factor for the rhetoric of disarmament has to do with the medium in which appeals are made. Possibly, the written word itself, the purely verbal message, is inappropriate for those who advocate nuclear disarmament--especially if, as Schell, Lifton, and others believe, people must "imagine the real" if they are to be moved to prevent it. *Enargeia* can certainly be more easily achieved with film. For example, in 1983, *The Day After*, "the most famous nuclear television show ever," gave "hundreds of millions of people their first look at what a real nuclear war might be like" (Weart 380), and in doing so, Schell says, the film "performed a public service" (*Abolition* 12). Or if not a film, it may be that a book incorporating at least some

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[10] And there are, of course, those would argue that the most practical and effective steps the disarmament movement can take are not rhetorical at all, but physical, acts of civil disobedience against state and industry, possibly with the intention of garnering media attention and through it more political activists. See, for example, William J. Stover, 44-47.

visual component would have a better chance of persuading us than does a book such as Schell's. At least one reviewer has made just that point. Comparing *The Fate of the Earth* to Raymond Briggs' *When the Wind Blows* -- a book of only thirty-three pages, most of which contain "about 20 comic-book-style frames"--T.L. Brink says, "in terms of riveting my attention and leaving me with a lasting impact, the Briggs' book wins hands down" (3[illegible]). Robert Del Tredici, in the preface to his collection of photographs, *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb,* also argues the advantages of this visual component:

> When the U.S. bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one reason given was that the power of atomic weapons had to be seen to be believed. But news of the Bomb's aftereffects quickly vanished, censored in Japan by the Occupation's Press Code. For seven years people in Japan and abroad were kept from seeing survivors' stories, medical reports, news articles, poems, and private letters depicting the Bomb's ongoing impact. So the drama of survival in those first atomic cities was eclipsed by the Bomb as an idea: a breakthrough in physics, a device for ending war, it was, in the minds of some, even a way of saving lives.
>
> Ever since that time nuclear weapons have been seen chiefly from the victors' point of view. Our mental picture of the Bomb includes the distant mushroom cloud, a city turned to ash, rockets in the atmosphere, the tapered cone--icons worn smooth by time and use.
>
> [In this book] . . . . I am aiming to close the gap between our icons and reality in the matter of these weapons by showing the nuclear arsenal at its source--and the people of the Bomb on their own terms. I want to give the collective imagination something accurate and graphic to hang onto as it tries to come to grips with the Bomb's reality. (ix)

Schell himself believes that Del Tredici's photographs are an important contribution to the nuclear debate, as he tells us in his introduction to *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb.* They do not, it is true, capture "the ultimate peril posed by nuclear weapons," for "that event, in its very nature, must always remain invisible to us--not because there won't be a great deal to see but because, by definition, when the last act is played there will be no one left to see it" (Del Tredici ix). Nevertheless, these photographs do "offer, for the first time, a basic visual vocabulary for the processes by

which we are preparing our self-destruction":

> He has pitted his camera against all forms of the bomb's invisibility . . . . A plant at which uranium salt crystals are converted into metal is no doubt a less exciting sight than the destruction of the world. But precisely because we can't see the destruction of the world, the preparations for bringing it about deserve our special attention.
>
> This view of the nuclear peril is necessarily an oblique one, but Del Tredici has the qualities needed for oblique observation: quiet attention to detail, the ability to find meaning in "ordinary" sights, a feel for "the spirit of a place." (xi)

Schell's comments shed light on his own rhetoric. Was his mistake in *The Fate of the Earth* in aiming for maximum impact, in trying to grip his audience with a description of "the ultimate peril"? Are he and others who advocate disarmament mistaken in believing that the "real" we must imagine must be nuclear war itself? As Schell himself was to say in his following book, *The Abolition*, "It seems not to be given to human beings to hold great horrors unremittingly before their mind's eye" (12). It may therefore be that the advocate of disarmament needs to find, as others in the environmentalist movement have found, some means of appeal that is less ambitious in scope but more striking in effect because it is more "thinkable." Perhaps if Schell had taken an "oblique" view of the nuclear peril, *The Fate of the Earth* would have been a more persuasive book.

But confronting nuclear war head-on, trying by force of will and words to somehow think the unthinkable, is not the only feature distinguishing Schell's book from Del Tredici's. While *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb* is enriched, as Schell himself argues, by Del Tredici's personal involvement in his project--by his meeting "the Bomb on its home ground," by his "encounters with atomic pioneers" and his "expeditions to America's aging bomb factories" (ix)--*The Fate of the Earth* is curiously lacking in this quality. One has the feeling throughout the book that amid all these arguments for humanity, Schell has not sufficiently humanized his own

ethos; he has not been made to seem like a man who feels the nuclear peril in his bones, who knows what it is to wake in the night at the thought that we have build ourselves a death machine. As one reviewer says, Schell carries "his arguments as far as logic permits, but not further" (Holyoke 483). The emotional flatness of tone in *The Fate of the Earth* certainly contributes to this feeling, but it is not the only cause. There is also the curious fact that the only truly moving passages in "A Republic of Insects and Grass" are the eye-witness accounts given by survivors of the attack on Hiroshima, and even these Schell has taken from the pages of a book. When one moves from these personal testimonies about the horror of nuclear war, to the unimpassioned, impersonal prose of the author who quotes them, the contrast weakens Schell's ethos considerably. One might compare Schell's book with John Hersey's. Even forty years after the event, *Hiroshima* grips the reader because one senses that Hersey knows of what he speaks; his personal encounters with survivors gave him the wisdom and humility necessary to quiet his own voice and take their perspective.[11]

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[11] In Roger Rosenblatt's *Witness: The World Since Hiroshima*, one finds another instructive contrast to *The Fate of the Earth*. Rosenblatt's approach is much like Hersey's; the "four perspectives on a reality" offered by its "witnesses" (a boy, a physicist, a president, and "the people"), taken together, have a vividness and force that Schell's account lacks. On the other hand, Rosenblatt does not--explicitly or, I believe, implicitly--argue for *total* disarmament, as Schell does. Though *Witness* makes one feel the horrors of nuclear war and thus wish for a better, nuclear-free world, it also seems to legitimize the perspective of the president (Nixon), who argues that proposals to abolish or freeze nuclear arms offer simplistic solutions to a complex problem. Unless I misread him, when the author reports Nixon's claims--tempered by regrets--that Hiroshima was "good for the world" (81-82), he does so without

The oblique perspective, and the personal: in Chapter Six, I will examine one approach to persuasion that combines these elements in its treatment of the nuclear predicament, John McPhee's *The Curve of Binding Energy.* However, one need not look to McPhee to see the possibilities for a rhetorical alternative to Schell's approach, for there is evidence that Schell himself has sought alternative solutions. In 1987, two reports he had written for *The New Yorker* in the late 1960's, together with a new introduction, were published under the title *The Real War: The Classic Reporting on the Vietnam War.* The introductory essay, fifty-two pages long, offers a striking contrast to *The Fate of the Earth.* There is no attempt, as there was in Schell's earlier book on disarmament (claims of "investigative modesty" aside), to provide any sort of definitive word or master statement about his subject. Instead, he divides his discussion into twenty-five sections, whose various lengths (from seven pages to one brief paragraph), headings ("Vietnamizing Vietnam," "Public Opinion in Action," "Time," "The Reluctant Emperor," "Tet," "Quagmire") and contents indicate a willingness to forfeit consistency and completeness for the sake of single penetrating insights. As Schell says in the first section, after posing more than thirty "unresolved" questions about the Vietnam war, he does "not try to address all the questions that have been raised by the war," but hopes to "shed light obliquely" on many of them (15). His personal experiences in Vietnam unquestionably help him do this; the two reports that make up the bulk of the book, "The Village of Ben Suc" and "The Military Half," are based on "what he saw and heard first-hand during several weeks . . . spent with [the American] armed forces" (191). Realizing, possibly, that the Vietnam war was far too complex to be summed up--and that, in

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sarcasm, irony, or even criticism.

any case, to offer a summary of that war would be to relinguish any chance of making his readers feel some of the bewilderment and confusion that characterized it (not only for soldiers and reporters, but for Americans who remained home, trying to understand the war from the conflicting reports of government and newspapers)--Schell chooses to dart in and out of his subject, viewing it from various angles, offering pieces of an infinitely complex puzzle, which his readers can put together as they see fit. The liveliness of this approach to structure in general, as well as Schell's first-hand knowledge of his subject, is also reflected in the details of Schell's prose; the diction is more colloquial and concrete, the syntax more energetic, and there are none of the abstruse and often confusing generalizations that mar "The Second Death." As its title suggests, *The Real War* captures its subject in a way *The Fate of the Earth* does not.

No single quality is sufficient to make a given rhetoric a "rhetoric of good reasons." Nor should any rhetoric, however good its reasons, expect unconditional assent from its audience. Those who advocate a good reasons rhetoric are not arguing for absolutes and unconditionals. Nevertheless, they do argue that if a rhetor hopes for some degree of "real assent"--the kind of assent that, according to Newman, may lead to action--his rhetoric must have certain qualities. I believe that Schell's rhetoric offers sound logical arguments for total nuclear disarmament, but I have also argued that it lacks the necessary connection between logic and what Booth calls "gut proof" (158). A classical rhetorician might say that *The Fate of the Earth* lacks the ethical and emotional appeal needed to move a wide audience; a modern advocate of a good reasons rhetoric might agree, but only with the proviso that nothing pejorative be implied by the words "ethical," "emotional," and "a wide audience." For the fact that a wide audience needs more than logic if it is to act is surely no indication of its lack of intelligence or its rhetorical naiviety; that need is,

more than anything else, simply a condition of "the amazing invisibility" of the bomb (Del Tredici x). And if a case for nuclear disarmament is to make "a pragmatic difference in one's life and in one's community" (Fisher, "Logic" 381), that need is a variable with which the rhetor must deal. "The aim of argumentation," says Perelman in *The Realm of Rhetoric,* "is not to deduce consequences from given premises; it is rather to elicit or increase the adherence of the members of an audience to theses that are presented for their consent. Such adherence never comes out of thin air; it presupposes a meeting of minds between speaker and audience" (9-10).

Chapter Five: The "New Speech" of Wendell Berry

In theory, as I argued in Chapters One and Two, the rhetoric of assent seems like a promising solution to some of the problems that plague contemporary debate. If we could replace our scepticism with an attitude of "benign acceptance" and our desire for certainty with a willingness to accept "degrees of belief, opinion, and assent," we might open the door to a wide range of "good reasons" for changing our minds, for compromising, or at least for discussing our differences more frankly and productively. In practice, however, such a rhetoric is extremely difficult to achieve, as my examination of Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* in Chapter Two has indicated. Being logical or sincere is not enough, nor is it enough to ask one's audience to suspend disbelief. Even when the rhetor frankly acknowledges that his claims are beyond demonstrative proof and warns his audience of the dangers inherent in expecting such proof, he will provide us with "good reasons" for assenting to his arguments and acting accordingly only if he gets inside our hearts as well as our minds. In Jeremy Stone's words, the rhetor's appeals must above all "make sense" to us, and satisfy "feelings long held and deeply felt" (7). They must enter our "circle of assumptions," however ill-advised the rhetor may believe those assumptions to be. In the case of nuclear disarmament, the main such assumption, tacitly but nonetheless deeply held by Schell's large audience of readers, is that the threat of nuclear war is too vast and complex to be eliminated, perhaps even to be understood; and their lack of first-hand knowledge of the processes and products of the nuclear weapons industry only ingrains this assumption ever more deeply. Because the nuclear threat is, in effect, an abstraction, never made palpable during the course of one's daily life or through the evidence of one's local surroundings,

the rhetorical problem faced by the advocate of disarmament requires that he make urgent a task that seems not to be. Moreover, he must offer specific advice on how to execute that task once he has convinced us of its urgency. It is, I think, a problem that proves altogether too difficult for Schell--but then it must be admitted that the rhetorical aspects of the "nuclear dilemma" pose a problem that tests even the capacity of the written word.

The problem posed by other environmental issues may be more amenable to rhetorical solutions, as I argued in Chapter Three in comparing environmentalism in general and the movement for nuclear disarmament and in showing how their rhetorics have diverged since the early 1970s. Whereas the threat of nuclear war seems to most of us "unthinkable," not only because it means destruction on an unprecedented scale but because the instruments of such destruction are physically remote, other threats to the environment are--or at least are perceived to be--an altogether different matter. On a local scale, each of us can witness some of the insidious effects of abusive or thoughtless behavior--polluted lakes and streams, trees damaged by acid rain, the fouled air of large cities--and we are thereby reminded that global destruction is a very real possibility. For this reason alone, it seems to me, many environmentalists' appeals to fundamental values carry greater weight than do Schell's pleas for humanity; the evidence of our senses provides us with one very "good reason" to alter our ways. Moreover, because some kinds of environmental damage may be reduced by the actions of just a few people, the individual has--or believes he can have--at least some effect on the health of the planet, and he may thus be encouraged not only to take action as an individual but to engage in broader collective and political action. In short, unlike the nuclear threat, many threats to our environment are both palpable and, one feels, remediable.

But if all of this makes the case for environmentalism a less difficult one to plead than the case for nuclear disarmament, it does not by any means make the former case easy. Particularly for the so-called "ecocentric," who believes that we will safeguard our environment best through changes in our conduct rather than through changes in our technology, these advantages may prove to be double-edged. His audience may readily acknowledge that a problem exists and be willing to take ameliorative action, but these are clearly no guarantee of a sufficient or even an appropriate cure; indeed, it may even be the case that the obviousness of both sickness and cure will lead to quick fixes and undue complacency. People may, in other words, become convinced that by following a few glib slogans they are doing all that can or need be done to preserve the environment. Seen from this perspective, the long list of environmental "handbooks" and "consumer guides" I gave in Chapter Three takes on new significance; it is evidence not of how committed we are to reforming our attitude, but of how quickly and completely the ecocentric's troubling plea for deep reform can be subdued and even subsumed by the same mass-market, free enterprise forces that take his message to the public (Brown and Crable 259-272).

In this chapter, I want to examine the ways in which one contemporary writer deals with this and other related problems in an attempt to change our attitudes towards the environment. My sense is that, to a greater degree than Schell, Wendell Berry has developed an effective rhetoric of assent, one that provides us with "good reasons" for making such changes in attitude. There are certainly similarities between Wendell Berry and Jonathan Schell. The explicit rhetorical purpose of both writers, for example, is not only to alter the attitude of their audiences but to move them to act; their approaches are to some degree shaped by their awareness that thinking differently about the environment and nuclear arms amounts to little if

not accompanied by appropriate behaviour. As Berry says in *The Unsettling of America*, "The split between what we think and what we do is profound" (18). Both are also aware that, historically, we have reached the point at which we must reconsider the grounds on which we reform our behaviour. In view of the fact that the nuclear and environmental threats now facing us were largely brought about by our abuse of science and technology, we can no longer afford to valorize scientific "proof" as the sole judge of truth and impetus for public endeavors, or technological "efficiency" as the goal of such endeavors. "Our power over the atom has made *us* the prospective authors of Doomsday," says Berry, sounding rather like Schell, "though it has not made us capable of guessing the full implications and requirements of such power" (*House* 47; author's emphasis). Both writers thus reject, at least in principle, the tenets of "scientism." By no means, however, do they reject science; it is only that they seek a kind of middle ground, a ground on which human desires and fears are also granted a degree of assent, on which fact is reunited with value. They believe that much of what is beyond demonstration--even, perhaps, much of what is scarcely within the range of language--can also serve as a "good reason" for making certain choices in one's life. As Berry puts it,

> To call the unknown by its right name, 'mystery,' is to suggest that we had better respect the possibility of a larger, unseen pattern that can be destroyed and, with it, the smaller patterns . . . .
>
> The modern scientific program has held that we must act on the basis of knowledge, which, because its effects are so manifestly large, we have assumed to be ample. But if we are up against mystery, then knowledge is relatively small, and the ancient program is the right one: Act on the basis of ignorance (*Home Economics* 4).

"The truth or falsity of some things," he says elsewhere, "cannot be objectively demonstrated, but must be determined by feeling and appearance, intuition and experience" (*Home Economis* 90-91).[1]

These are significant similarities in outlook and rhetorical purpose. But beyond these, there is an equally striking, perhaps more fundamental difference between Berry and Schell: Berry's rhetoric is not weakened by the gap between stated intentions and practice, by the disjunction between metadiscourse and discourse, which mars Schell's arguments against nuclear arms. When Schell rises above detailed analysis of the nuclear threat, he speaks wisely of the need for "investigative modesty" in the face of a new kind of problem; when he descends back into particulars, he relies on all the old rhetorical solutions. Berry knows better what he is about. He knows that new problems call for a new rhetoric:

> Much of our present destructiveness . . . is in defiance of rules that have been in existence for many years, but whose applicability to present lives has been blurred by new circumstances or obscured by old rhetoric. If the rules are to apply and be observed, they must not only be written and publicized and learned, but understood, *felt*, accommodated to the particularities of the lives of particular people . . . . There must be a new contact between men and the earth . . . . such an era, like all eras, will arrive and remain by the means of a

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[1] See also "A Native Hill": " . . . we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it" (*Essays* 196). One should not read this as evidence that Berry would replace the scientistic emphasis on fact with an "irrationalistic" emphasis on value. See, for example, *Recollected Essays*, 312: "Invariably the failure of organized religions . . . lies in the attempt to impose an absolute division between faith and doubt, to make belief perform as knowledge . . . ."

> new speech--a speech that will cause the world to live and thrive in men's minds (*Harmony* 14; author's own emphasis).

Just what this "new speech" is will become clearer during the course of this chapter. But this much at least should be made clear from the outset: it will look nothing like the disarmament rhetoric of *The Fate of the Earth.* Where Schell labors with what Berry calls "the big solution," the "heroic solution," to a world problem, Berry admonishes us to "think little." Where Schell seems uneasy about the artistic resources of language, Berry finds them essential: "ecology may well find its proper disciplines in the arts, whose function is to refine and enliven perception . . . . " (*Harmony* 100). And where Schell seeks to build an irrefutable case on a foundation of compelling numbers, impartial testimony, and disinterested argumentation, Berry seeks his strength in "the humble exactitude of the personal" (*Harmony* 61). What Berry says of his procedure in *The Unsettling of America* might well be said of his entire rhetoric: "I have intentionally placed experience ahead of 'proof,' feeling that the ordinary visibility of . . . [environmental problems] . . . ought to take precedence over statistics and expert testimony" (*America* 160).[2]

Before this "new speech" can be defined more specifically, this chapter must first describe Berry's larger aim in using it; we must know of what the author wishes to persuade us in order to determine how and how well he does so. In the section immediately following I will therefore summarize Berry's position on environmental issues. In many respects, as will become apparent, this position is close to the ecocentric's position, which I described in Chapter Three.[3] However, it

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[2] See also *Recollected Essays,* 282: "It is not necessary to have recourse to statistics to see that the human estate is declining with the estate of nature . . . ."

[3] In emphasizing the need for regional loyalities and "a proper human scale" (*Home Economics* 16), Berry takes a position particularly close to that enunciated by E.F. Schumacher

also should be kept in mind that Berry's approach to environmental questions strongly resists convenient labels such as "ecocentric." Though he agrees with the ecocentric claim that "everything in the Creation is related to everything else and dependent on everything else" (*America* 46), he would add that "Environmentalism" itself is counterproductive when practised apart from other equally important concerns in our society--that is, apart from other issues, such as literacy, racial discrimination, commercialism, and national defence (to name but a few of his concerns). To focus singlemindedly on the environment, to accept for oneself a label such as Environmentalist, is to diminish one's sense of what it is to be fully human and to undermine one's proper relationship with nature. It is to be part of the problem rather than the solution. As he says in "The Reactor and the Garden," "Any effort that focuses on one problem encourages oversimplification" (*Good Land* 164). Thus it is that his essays rarely address only one subject, and more often weave two or more together into a complex interdependence.[4]

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in *Small is Beautiful*. Indeed, many of the terms that Pepper tells us are "key words in the standard ecocentric vocabulary" (4)--limits, small-scale production, low impact technology, recycling, zero economic growth--find correlatives in Berry's essays. In addition to these connections, the kind of admiration that Berry shows for the notion of "The Great Chain of Being" is, according to Pepper, not uncommon among ecocentrics. See, especially, "Two Economies" (*Home Economics* 54-75), an essay which, incidently, quotes Schumacher.

[4] Berry's essays "are as diverse as his concerns--and as interrelated" (Miller 165). On Berry's resistance to labels, see also "A Few Words in favor of Edward Abbey" in *What are People For?* While recognizing that the similarities between Berry and Abbey are in many ways less striking than the differences, I believe that some of Berry's remarks in this essay

I

Five prominent ideas may be said to define Wendell Berry's stance on the environment. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say five imperatives, for though only the first of them is actually stated as an imperative, all five are advanced with the kind of rhetorical authority and sense of urgency that lend them imperative force, as I hope the discussion that follows will demonstrate. We *must* follow these general rules of environmentalism, he suggests, if we are to preserve the earth. "To preserve the earth": the phrase should be accompanied by a caveat, lest these environmental imperatives be seen as absurdly inflexible and ambitious. If any preserving of the earth is to be done, Berry believes, it will be done not by world governments or by committees, but by each one of us, in our own ways, in small steps. The imperatives are therefore universal, but their specific applications personal. For Berry himself, good farming is the specific means by which they are applied; to be a good farmer is to be a good steward of the land, and to be a good steward of the land is to be the best kind of environmentalist. Accordingly, his environmental imperatives are, as we shall see, often defined and defended in agricultural contexts. Keeping in mind this qualification, then, I would argue that "preserving the earth" is indeed one of Berry's foremost motives, if not his primary motive. As surely as he believes "there is only one value: the life and health of the

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would apply equally well to Berry himself, e.g. "He is, certainly, a defender of some things that environmentalists defend, but he does not write merely in defense of what we call 'the environment'" (37); "He is fighting for the survival not only of nature, but of *human* nature, of culture, as only our heritage of words and hopes can define it" (40).

world" (*Harmony* 164), he knows that "nearly every one of us, nearly every day of his life, is contributing *directly* to the ruin of this planet" (*Harmony* 74; author's emphasis).

The most fundamental of Berry's imperatives is to "think little." As he tells us in the essay of the same name,

> For most of the history of this country our motto, implied or spoken, has been Think Big. I have come to believe that a better motto, and an essential one now, is Think Little. That implies the necessary change of thinking and feeling, and suggests the necessary work. Thinking Big has led us to the two biggest and cheapest political dodges of our time: plan-making and law-making. The lotus-eaters of this era are in Washington, D.C., Thinking Big. Somebody comes up with a problem, and somebody in the government comes up with a plan or a law. The result, mostly, has been the persistence of the problem, and the enlargement and enrichment of the government. ("Think Little," *Harmony* 80)

The generalizations of Thinking Big are what Berry often calls "heroic solutions," and it is not only governments that indulge in them. So, too, do the citizens of first-world countries, with their large-scale technological solutions to every problem. As Berry says in "Preserving Wildness," "The worst disease of the world now is probably the ideology of technological heroism . . . . the ideology of the professional class of the industrial nations . . . ." (*Home Economics* 150). Indeed, "it is the overwhelming tendency of our time to assume that a big problem calls for a big solution" (*America* 218). Elsewhere, Berry cites a familiar example of such big solutions:

> A typical example of the conduct of industrial heroism is to be found in the present rush of experts to 'solve the problem of world hunger' . . . . As is characteristic of industrial heroism, the professed intention here is entirely salutary: nobody should starve. The trouble is that 'world hunger' is not a problem that can be solved by a 'world solution'. Except in a very limited sense, it is not an industrial problem, and industrial attempts to solve it--such as the 'Green Revolution" and 'Food for Peace"--have often had grotesque and destructive results. 'The problem of world hunger' cannot be solved

> until it is understood and dealt with by local people as a multitude of local problems of ecology, agriculture, and culture. (*Good Land* 280)[5]

For his part, Berry does not believe in these big solutions, for "they not only tend to prolong and complicate the problems they are meant to solve, but . . . cause new problems" (*America* 219). Heroic solutions deflect our attention from "small, obvious, simple, and cheap" solutions (*America* 218); when we "rush to nuclear energy," we neglect "the possibility of a small-scale energy technology--which is to say the possibility of small-scale personal and community acts" (*Words* 59). What is worse, heroic solutions are inherently simplistic, blind to details and to complexities; when we think big, we often cause "large scale effects" that we "do not foresee" and "cannot control" (*Home Economics* 150). Particularly ironic in this respect are the practices of "agribusiness," as Berry calls modern industrial farming. In their rush to use bigger machines to derive greater yields and earn bigger profits, agribusinessmen are gradually destroying the very source of their livelihood:

> [O]nce agriculture shifted its dependence from solar, biologically derived energy to machine-derived fossil fuel energy, it committed itself, as a matter of course, to several kinds of waste . . . . The waste of solar energy . . . . The waste of human energy and ability . . . . The waste of animal energy . . . . The waste of soil and soil health. (*Good Land* 131-32)

By contrast, the man who works a small farm (or family farm, or subsistence farm, as Berry also refers to it) is "less interested in technological 'breakthroughs' than in technological elegance." He not only recognizes the need for but operates on "a proper human scale" (*Home Economics* 16).

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[5] See also *The Long-Legged House*, 55: ". . . . the War on Poverty is a big generalization."

Another problem caused by big thinking is that it tends to separate public crises from private conduct. Both the civil rights movement and the peace movement were characterized by "too little personal involvement, and too much involvement in organizations that were insisting that *other* organizations should do what was right" (*Harmony* 72), and as far as Berry is concerned, "There is considerable danger that the Environment Movement will have the same nature." Thinking big, people spend their time marching in protest rather than picking up litter or tending gardens. Protest marches are not the sort of action Berry advocates:

> A man who is trying to live as a neighbor to his neighbors will have a lively and practical understanding of the work of peace and brotherhood, and let there be no mistake about it--he is *doing* that work . . . . A man who is willing to undertake the discipline and the difficulty of mending his own ways is worth more to the conservation movement than a hundred who are insisting merely that the government and the industries mend *their* ways. (*Harmony* 79-80)

According to Berry, we must do, rather than merely talk about doing. But clearly, nothing is to be gained merely by acting for the sake of acting. It is imperative that we *act responsively.* I use the word "responsive" here in the fullest sense--not only in the sense of being ready to react to suggestions, influences, or appeals, but also in the sense imparted to the word "responsible" by the Latin root stem *spond* ("to make a solemn promise, to pledge, to betroth"). Acting responsively to preserve the earth therefore involves pledging oneself to act in harmony with the earth, to make the kinds of particular adaptations and adjustments that nature itself, ever-changing, makes. This, says Berry, is "the forever unfinished lifework of our species" (*Home Economics* 139). If our conduct is not flexible in this way, we will inevitably answer complex questions about the environment with impracticable generalizations, over-simplifications, or abstractions. We will gradually start to think big, and then *impose* our solutions on the earth. Real solutions, solutions that will prove

effective in the long-run, must be based on responsive encounters with a particular place. As Berry says in "Three Ways of Farming in the Southwest," "it is in the presence of the problems that their solutions will be found. Solutions have perhaps the most furtive habits of any creatures; they reveal themselves very hesistantly in artificial light, and never enter air-conditioned rooms" (*Good Land* 49). What is wrong with the environmental solutions of academic specialists, Berry believes, is that they work, or seem to work, only by ignoring or avoiding what should be essential considerations. Because their solutions are discovered not in the presence of the earth but in air-conditioned rooms and think tanks, they are too often based on "some oversimplifying *thought* that subjugates nature, people, and culture" (*Words* 74; author's emphasis).

More than any other single feature of his environmentalism, it is, I think, this concern for responsive, particularizing action that distinguishes Berry from those he calls conservationists. He certainly agrees with conservationists in some respects. They are justified, for example, in pleading for wilderness preserves, as Berry argues both in *The Unsettling of America* and in "Preserving Wildness." But he is also worried that many conservationists see such preserves as the big solution to our environmental problems. As he says in his first collection of essays,

> We cannot hope--for reasons practical and humane, we cannot even wish--to preserve more than a small portion of the land in wilderness. Most of it we will have to use. The conservation mentality swings from self-righteous outrage to self-deprecation because it has neglected this issue. (*America* 30)

This issue of "use" and its neglect by many environmentalists are topics Berry addresses time and time again. In "Poetry and Place," he argues that "one of the most distressing things about the 'ecology movement' . . . . [is that] . . . . It does not tell us how to act" (*Words* 135). And in "Preserving Wildness," perhaps his clearest statement on "the proper relation of humanity to nature" (*Home Economics* 138),

he even suggests that conservationists who neglect the issue of proper use are as simplistic and wrong-headed as those who implicitly advocate use of any kind:

> At the one extreme are those who sound as if they are entirely in favor of nature . . . . They believe, at least in principle, that the biosphere is an egalitarian system, in which all creatures, including humans, are equal in value and have an equal right to live and flourish. These people tend to stand aloof from the issue of the proper human use of nature . . . .
>
> At the other extreme are the nature conquerors, who have no patience with an old-fashioned farm, let alone a wilderness. These people divide all reality into two parts: human good, which they define as profit, comfort, and security; and everything else, which they understand as a stockpile of 'natural resources' or 'raw materials,' which will sooner or later be transformed into human good. (*Home Economics* 137-38)

In the former's neglect of practical considerations, and in the latter's avoidance of difficult ethical ones, these factions are reminiscent of the "irrationalists" and "scientismists" described by Booth in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent.* Moreover, like Booth, Berry tries to situate himself in the ground between the two: "If I had to choose, I would join the nature extremists against the technology extremists, but this choice seems poor, even assuming that it is possible. I would prefer to stay in the middle, not to avoid taking sides, but because I think the middle *is* a side . . . . (*Home Economics* 138).[6] For Berry, this middle side lies in good farming--which is to say, in farming that avoids neither the practical nor the ethical dimensions of use. Farming, he says is "a practical art," and "Good farmers . . . . are

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6 See also *The Unsettling of America,* 18: "And so we are by no means divided, or readily divisible, into environmental saints and sinners"; and *A Continuous Harmony,* 51: "If you aren't for us you're against us, somebody is always saying. That seems to me a sad little pair of options, insofar as to any kind of intelligence the possibilities ought to be numerous, if not infinite. . . . "

responsive partners in an intimate and mutual relationship" (*America* 87; my emphasis).[7]

Though Berry's emphasis on "proper use" indicates that he can be pragmatic, I do not want to suggest that he strikes me first and foremost as a pragmatist. There is another, quite different aspect of this emphasis, one that plays at least as strongly upon my response to his position on environmental issues and that leads us to his third imperative. This is his concern for ideals, for having something positive on which one can focus one's vision and with which one can sustain hope. I am reluctant to use the word "idealistic" to describe this concern, because at a time when facts have been split from values, the word connotes a kind of naivete, as though the idealist were necessarily someone out of touch with "the facts"--someone, that is, who is "unrealistic." But Berry, as his concern for the issue of use shows, does not embrace values at the expense of facts. Indeed, as one critic has argued, "Berry has arrived at his position precisely by facing facts."[8] He is well aware of how easily ideals can become divorced from realities and thus render themselves useless. When he tells us in "An Entrance to the Woods," "A man cannot despair if he can imagine a better life, and if he can enact something of its possibility" (*Essays* 240), we ought to recognize that the imagining and the "enacting" are both essential to the

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[7] "Kindly use depends upon intimate knowledge, the most sensitive responsiveness and responsibility. As knowledge (hence, use) is generalized, essential values are destroyed" (*America* 31).

[8] According to Richard Pevear, someone who takes Berry's position is "inevitably accused of various lapses--romantic utopianism, nostalgia for the past, reactionary agrariansim--all of which come down to a refusal to face the facts. But Berry has arrived at his position precisely by facing facts" (342).

attitude he is recommending. Berry knows that "where there is no accurate sense of the real world, idealism evaporates in the rhetoric of self-righteousness and self-justification" (*House* 48). Nonetheless, without any ends in mind at all--without any goals or ideals or imaginative visions--the mind wanders or despairs. This is why Berry would, I think, find Schell's *protest* against nuclear arms of dubious value; not only does it offer no means of "enacting" the possibility of a better life, it articulates no vision of a better life, nothing positive for which to strive. As he says in "A Statement Against the War in Vietnam," "a great danger to the cause of peace is the possibility that the peace movement might become merely negative, and instrument of protest rather than of hope" (*House* 73)[9].

Part of what I am getting at here is, then, this notion of ideals; we must have something positive to believe in and to guide us. In this regard, examples are of the utmost importance to Berry; without the grounding that particular, real-life examples provide, ideals may become too flimsy, too ambitious, *too* hopeful. This is why he argues, in "In Defense of Literacy," that students must read the best literature: "The only defense against the worst is a knowledge of the best." Yet there is still more to Berry's "third imperative" than these notions of ideals and of examples suggest. To benefit fully from ideals and examples, whether cultural or agricultural, we must make an imaginative commitment to them. We must, in other words, *assent*. Berry himself does not use the word, but I think that if we give it much the same reference that Booth and Polanyi give it, "assent" is precisely the right word to describe what Berry means when he advocates a "willingness to relate

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[9] See also "A Poem of Difficult Hope," *What Are People For?* (62), and "The Reactor and the Garden," in *The Gift of Good Land* : "Protests, demonstrations, and other forms of 'movement' behavior tend to divide people into the ancient categories of 'us' and 'them'" (164).

to the world as student and servant" (*Harmony* 4). In "The Loss of the University," for example, Berry speaks of the contemporary tendency within academe to treat religious literature "merely as artifacts, cultural relics, bits of historical evidence, or things of 'aesthetic value (*Home Economics* 92). We will, he says, learn *about* such literature, but we refuse to learn *from* it, and because of that attitude we "remain, in an important sense, outside the work" (94). By contrast, the nature poets whom Berry describes in "A Secular Pilgrimage" are "immersed in the world" (*Harmony* 4). Their attitude is "worshipful, in the sense of *valuing* what one does not entirely understand, or aspiring beyond what may be known" (5). The point to be drawn from both essays is that certain types of knowing depend upon assent, or as Berry says, valuing. Sometimes the assent need only be a mental act of commitment, the sort of willingness to listen that helped Booth to enter into the spirit of a poem by John Lennon (*Modern Dogma* 174). Other times, however, the mental act of assent must be accompanied by a physical commitment. To Berry's way of thinking, it is this latter type of assent that is most important to the health of the earth. If people do not make a mental and a physical commitment to a particular place, they will never come to know the earth or learn to respond to its needs.

The fourth of Berry's environmental imperatives, therefore, is that we must belong. If we are to develop the particularizing, responsive attitude towards nature Berry advocates, each of us must first gain familiarity with the characteristics of a given location, as well as the feeling that we must be loyal to that location. We must, that is, first gain "a sense of place." Says Berry in "The Long-Legged House," "There is no word--certainly not *native* or *citizen* --to suggest the state I mean, that of belonging willingly and gladly and with some fullness of knowledge to a place" (*House* 166). I can scarcely overestimate the importance of this idea in Berry's thinking. Its significance for him is implied, often, even by the titles of his works--*A*

Place on Earth, "A Native Hill," *The Unsettling of America,* "Poetry and Place." Moreover, the frequency with which he returns to it, particularly in his most personal essays, suggests strongly that the idea is born of experience. In two of his earliest works, the autobiographical essays "The Long-Legged House" and "A Native Hill," he speaks of coming to the realization (after returning from two years on the West Coast, in 1961, to his native home of Kentucky), "that one of my ambitions, perhaps my governing ambition, was to belong fully to this place, to belong as the thrushes and the herons and the muskrats belonged, to be altogether at home here" (*House* 150). This sense of belonging to a particular place, he tells us, has made him a more effective environmentalist:

> When I have thought of the welfare of the earth, the problems of its health and preservation, the care of its life, I have had this place before me, the part representing the whole more vividly and accurately, making clearer and more pressing demands, than any *idea* of the whole . . . . It seems to me that because of this I have a more immediate feeling for abstract principles than many of my contemporaries; the values of principles are more vivid to me. (*House* 173)

Judging by his comments, I would say that this conviction about belonging has informed most of Berry's work since *The Long-Legged House.* [10] Indeed, it seems to be the main reason why he became a farmer in Kentucky:

> No matter how much one may love the world as a whole, one can live fully in it only by living responsibly in some small part of it. Where we live and who we live with there define the terms of our relationship to the world and to humanity. We thus come again to the paradox that one can become whole only by the responsible acceptance of one's partiality. (*Essays* 303)

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[10] See, for example, *A Continuous Harmony,* 52, and *Standing By Words,* 92.

By contrast with Berry's responsible acceptance of his partiality, most Americans want to be everywhere and do everything. Like the boatmen whom Berry describes in "The Nature Consumers," riding in their "embodiments of restlessness and anxiety" (*House* 38), like "the driver of a speeding automobile," "running now with a speed that produces blindness" (*Essays* 240), Americans never remain in one place long enough to appreciate the land on which they live. Nature "cannot be understood by passing through" (*House* 33); yet "[a]t present," says Berry in "The Regional Motive," "our society is almost entirely nomadic" (*Harmony* 68). This lack of a sense of place among most Americans is largely responsible for the environmental destruction they have caused: "Without a complex knowledge of one's place, and without the faithfulness to one's place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed" (*Harmony* 68-69).[11]

The idea that one's knowledge of a place must be "complex" leads us to the last of Berry's environmental imperatives. As he says in "Men and Women in Search of Common Ground,"

> Everywhere we look now, the axework of division is going on. We see ourselves more and more as divided from each other, from nature, and from what our traditions define as human nature. The world is now full of nations, races, interests, groups, and movements of all sorts, most of them unable to define their relations to each other except in terms of division and opposition. (*Home Economics* 114)

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[11] The connection between the loss of a sense of place and America's obsession with movement of all kinds--with fast vehicles, with "upward mobility," with progress--is a theme to which Berry returns repeatedly in his work. See, for example, *Recollected Essays*, 234-240; *Standing By Words*, 167; and especially *The Unsettling of America*, 4.

In "The Body and the Earth," he makes a similar remark, referring to the "radical disconnections between body and soul, husband and wife, marriage and community, community and the earth" that together "add up to a condition of critical health" in "the modern urban-industrial society." He then suggests a cure: "Only by restoring the broken connections can we be healed" (*Essays* 323). Berry's fifth imperative, then, is clear: we must connect. We must connect "the abstract and the particular, the organizational and the personal, knowledge and behavior, production and use, the ideal and the world" (*Harmony* 127). Because it makes such connections--indeed, because he believes that it fulfills *all* the conditions of a wise environmentalism--Berry once again points to subsistence farming as a model for how we might preserve the earth. Subsistence farming may be "bad for the industrial economy and for the paper economy of the financiers," he says in "Does Community Have a Value?" but "it is good for the actual, real-world economy by which people live and are fed, clothed, and housed" (*Home Economics* 185). The reasons for its advantages are clear. When the producer uses his own product, he has a personal stake in both its quality and in the long-term preservation of the resources that help him make that product. He must come to know his land, respond to its particular needs, develop a sense of loyalty to and even a love of place. Moreover, as a result of these ties to one place, he is, as well, inevitably bound to his community. One might say, in short, that the relationships among his life, land, work, and community suggest a "continuous harmony."[12]

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[12] "[I]n our country and in many others, the best farms have always been homes as well as workplaces. Unlike factory hands and company executives, farmers do not *go* to work; a good farmer is *at* work even when at rest" (*Home Economics* 124).

Think little, act responsively, assent, belong, connect: these, then, are the five imperatives Berry thinks we must follow to preserve the earth. For the sake of definition I have tried to distinguish each from the others, but as I mentioned earlier, in drawing attention to the "ecocentric" elements in Berry's stance on environmental issues, in reading his essays one can not make such distinctions quite so easily. Indeed, in keeping with the first and fifth "imperatives" defined above, Berry shuns extensive, systematic descriptions of his "world-view" and tries to connect rather than classify ideas. His use of the personal essay plays an important role in this respect. The form allows him to "think little," to plead the earth's case by degrees and in stages rather than constructing a "heroic solution," a *magnum opus* on "the fate of the earth." In this way he avoids an essential contradiction to which Schell falls prey. By choosing to consider various environmental problems again and again, by viewing them from various angles and at various stages of his life rather than attempting to envelop them in one sustained effort, Berry implies both that these problems are too complex to be dealt with in a single book, and that the process of finding solutions is for him a lifelong task. If Berry's aim is more modest than Schell's, it is intentionally so, just as his rhetoric is more consistently shaped and contained by an awareness of his own and his audience's limitations--that is to say, of human limitations. One might argue that by choosing the essay as the form through which to plead the earth's case, Berry simply does what his own awareness of the human condition tells him he must: "Our choice may be between a small, human-sized meaning and a vast meaninglessness" (*Home Economics* 118).[13]

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[13] In his review of *Home Economics*, Dick Allen points out that "some of the ideas in 'Property, Patriotism and National Defense' . . . have originally been explored in much greater detail by Jonathan Schell, but Berry's reasoning has the virtue of compression" (411).

II

> It seems to me inescapable that before a man can usefully promote an idea, the idea must be implemented in his own life. If he is for peace he must have a life in which peace is possible. He must be peace-able. To be a peaceable man is to be the hope for the world. To be only an agitator for peace is to be a specialist, one in a swarm of random particles, destructive in implication, however pacific by intention. How can a man hope to promote peace in the world if he has not made it possible in his own life and his own household? If he is a peaceable man, then he has assured a measure of peace in the world, though he may never utter a public word. ("Some Thoughts on Citizenship and Conscience in Honor of Don Pratt," *House* 85)

The distinction drawn by the passage above--and drawn quite clearly, it seems to me--is that it is *better* to be mute and to promote an idea by example than it is to promote it by word, however eloquently, without "implementing" it in one's own life. It is a sentiment with which, I would guess, most people today would agree, as I argued in Chapter Two. Certainly the "irrationalist" element in and among us would agree, in any case; when facts have been split from values, we learn to distrust the "public word," especially when the word is almost all we have to go on. Indeed, this is why people "agitate for peace": sensing the futility of using words to convince a distrustful audience, they resort to protest marches or sit-ins, and even lay their bodies on the line to demonstrate the value of their beliefs. But in this study I am not dealing with mute inglorious geniuses. I am dealing with men who promote particular ideas by uttering public words. Moreover, the audience for whom these men utter their words is large enough that only a very small portion will witness their actions; few will know first-hand whether these men do as they say. The question concerning me, therefore, is not whether the deed is better than the word, but this: assuming that the rhetor *has* implemented certain ideas in his own life, how does he promote them so as to persuade readers of that fact? It is, I think, a

question Jonathan Schell considered insufficiently, if at all, in writing *The Fate of the Earth.* It may well be that "in his own life" Schell has implemented the ideas he promotes, but I cannot see evidence of that implementation in any part of his rhetoric. He seems to me to think that impersonal words about a public problem are what is most needed, that if he stockpiles logical arguments in sufficient quantities, he will diminish the threat of which he speaks.

Berry, on the other hand, is constantly assuring us that in his own life he practises his own precepts.[14] In regard to environmental issues, he does this most noticeably by arguing that small farming provides the best model for responsible environmental stewardship and at the same time telling us--frequently, directly, and proudly--that he himself is, among other things, a farmer. It is an ethical appeal of the most direct sort--too obvious, one might think, to be worth special consideration. Yet in Berry's rhetoric, I find this most direct of ethical appeals unusually forceful, for it depends not only on explicit claims of commitment to principles and practices, but on the kind of knowledge he implicitly demonstrates in his essays--knowledge that is derived from his own hard work, from his love of his land, and from "the discipline of details" (*Harmony* 41). "A bad solution solves for a single purpose or goal, such as increased production," says Berry in "Solving for Pattern." "And it is typical of such solutions that they achieve stupendous increases in production at exorbitant biological and social costs" (*Good Land* 137). His own solutions, on the other hand, are complex, particular, and practical; they involve actions as seemingly insignificant as replacing a power tool with a manual tool. That they are not "heroic" is their greatest virtue, for they can be implemented by a single person

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[14] Speer Morgan emphasizes this connection in "Wendell Berry: A Fatal Singing." See especially 873-874.

without the assistance of "expert advice" (*Harmony* 100), if only he will "think little" and act responsively.

There is no better place to turn for illustrations of these practical appeals in Berry's rhetoric than *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural.* These essays are consistently attentive to the details of farming practices and to ways in which those practices might become more ecologically sound. Indeed, words "practical" and "practice" appear frequently in the author's foreword, which explains the purpose and contents of his book. The interests of the audience for *The Gift of Good Land* are also, one assumes, quite practical; most of the essays were written originally for *The New Farm* and *Organic Gardening.* Yet one should not assume that with all this concern for the practical considerations of farming, Berry forgets other considerations, considerations of a rhetorical nature. As we are told in a passage I quoted earlier, Berry believes the new speech needed to bring about a more thoughtful treatment of the environment must "accommodate" its message "to the particularities of the lives of particular people" (*Harmony* 14). For these particular readers, he must offer examples that demonstrate his first-hand knowledge and prove that he himself has been where "the expert" has not, for his audience knows farming--knows, if only instinctively, that it "is not a laboratory science, but a science of practice" (*Harmony* 98):

> To the textbook writer or researcher, the farm--the place where knowledge is applied--is necessarily provisional or theoretical; what he proposes must be found to be *generally* true. For the good farmer, on the other hand, the place where knowledge is applied is minutely particular, not *a* farm but *this* farm, *my* farm, the only place exactly like itself in all the world. To use it without intimate, minute particular knowledge of it, as if it were *a* farm or *any* farm, is, as good farmers tend to know instinctively, to violate it, to do it damage, finally to destroy it. ("Whose Head Is the Farmer Using? Whose Head Is Using the Farmer?" 28)

Representative of Berry's concern for accommodating audience and for applying knowledge in a minutely particular fashion is "A Good Scythe," a short essay that points out the merits of a useful but generally neglected farming tool. Its style does not draw attention to itself; at times almost conversational, the essay is for the most part written in what one reviewer of Berry's work calls "elegantly plain" prose (Coiner). Like many of the essays in *The Gift of Good Land*, "A Good Scythe" even offers numbered lists of practical considerations--as though the author knew that his audience wanted the facts straight up, with a minimum of fuss or complicated qualifications. But if all of these traits suggest that the essay is unimaginative, serviceable exposition, nothing could be further from the truth. In "A Good Scythe," Berry makes his case for preferring "an old-fashioned, human-powered scythe" to a motor-powered scythe with an easy grace that disguises the complexity of the piece. Ultimately, the various impressions I have as I read the essay coalesce in a suggestive phrase offered in its penultimate paragraph. The differences between the two scythes, says Berry, have come to have for him "the force of a parable" (*Good Land* 175). It seems to me that the larger lesson of this parable is best articulated by a sentence in "Getting Along with Nature": "In the hurry of technological progress, we have replaced some tools and methods that worked with some that do not work" (*Home Economics* 15). We have, that is, replaced complex qualitative considerations with simplistic quantitative considerations.

Though more than a third of "A Good Scythe" is taken up with lists comparing the motor-powered tool with the manual tool, this straightforward comparison ("parable" is from the Greek *parabole*, meaning a juxtaposition or comparison) is also framed by an engaging personal narrative that quietly echoes some of the main ideas in the author's position on farming. Berry informs his readers, for instance, that he began to recognize the value of the manual scythe and overcome "a lot of

assumptions" about "motor-powered solutions" (172) only after he had lived on his land for some time, had developed a strong sense of place, and had begun to deal with the specific problems of caring for his "little farm in the Kentucky River Valley." Moreover, all the while he is telling them these things, he is also deftly suggesting, by some seemingly incidental remarks, that human knowledge is a long, slow process of growth--intuitive, sometimes serendipitous, often difficult to "account for" or "take stock of": "I don't remember what I paid for it . . . . "; ". . . I am always amazed at how slow I have been to see the obvious"; "I don't remember how long I used that 'labor-saving' power scythe . . . . "; "Nor do I remember all the stages of my enlightenment" (172-73). Such comments are endearing; they obviate any feeling readers might have that the author sees himself as a know-it-all, the didact come to free the unenlightened slaves of modern technology. But it seems to me that these off-hand admissions of personal imperfection have another, equally significant effect: they create a context in which "we grant the possibility of a proper human scale" (*Home Economics* 16). So, too, do other aspects of the essay--the seemingly whimsical movement from narration, to exposition and description, to narration again; the obvious pleasure the author takes in holding the manual scythe; even such a minor detail as the disparity between the lengths of the lists. All of these seem an integral part of a rhetoric that argues against a thoughtless dependence on technology and science not by itself masquerading as scientific, but by openly declaring the differences between--indeed, widening the gap between--humans and machines. As a result, one feels more inclined to accept the practical advantages Berry claims for the manual scythe, even though the value of these advantages (its graceful handling, for instance, and its reliability) cannot be measured or quantified. Indeed, this attitude of assent is extended even to those advantages described by Berry as "not so practical":

> Using the Marugg [manual] scythe causes the simple bodily weariness that comes with exertion. This is a kind of weariness that, when not extreme, can in itself be one of the pleasures of work. The power scythe, on the other hand, adds to the weariness of exertion the unpleasant and destructive weariness of strain . . . . like all motor-driven tools, [it] imposes patterns of endurance that are alien to the body. As long as the motor is running there is a pressure to keep going. You don't stop to consider or rest or look around. You keep on until the motor stops or the job is finished or you have some kind of trouble. (174)

Why is labor with a manual scythe pleasing? As Berry says elsewhere, by way of explaining the pleasure he and his neighbors take in cutting alfalfa "on an extremely hot, humid afternoon," "the matter is too complex and too profound for logic" (*Good Land* 181). The same could be said, I think, of "A Good Scythe" itself.

III

> It is necessary . . . to recognize a difference in kinds of cultural change: there is change by necessity, or adaptation; and there is contrived change, or novelty. The first is the work of species or communities or lineages of descent, occurring usually by slow increments over a long time. The second is the work of individual minds, and it happens, or is intended to happen, by fiat. Individual attempts to change cultural form--as to make a new kind of marriage or family or community--are nearly always shallow or foolish and are frequently totalitarian. The assumption that it can be otherwise comes from the faith in genius. ("Poetry and Marriage," *Words* 211)

As eloquently as it particularizes the imperative "think little," as persuasively as it testifies to the author's practical commitment to his precepts, "A Good Scythe" is, nonetheless, "only" Berry's own personal testimony. The quality of that testimony may make it much more persuasive than many others would be--may make it, indeed, a "good reason" for granting *some* degree of assent to Berry's claims--but in and of itself, it clearly cannot be considered a *convincing* reason for accepting his defence of traditional farming tools and of "a proper human scale." As Berry himself has pointed out in a recent essay, any public defence that relies solely on the

defender's testimony is "rightly suspect" (*People* 183). To be convincing, his claims need broader support; they must, in keeping with his fifth imperative, be connected to the claims of others.

One further point about "A Good Scythe" must therefore now be made: it suggests, ever so subtly, the communal foundations of the author's personal judgments. By sharing two ostensibly minor details in the ongoing "parable"--that he was enlightened about the benefits of a manual scythe by one neighbor ("Harlan Hubbard"), and that he "donated" the power scythe "to help enlighten" another--Berry creates the impression that his lesson and his way of learning are not idiosyncratic; among traditional farmers, they are representative. In other essays, these sorts of references to like-minded members of a larger community are often more direct and more extensively developed. They can also be more wide-ranging; indeed, beginning with his neighbors in Kentucky, Berry's references to other "good farmers" spread outward in ever-widening circles, to embrace the Amish in the Midwestern States, the Papago and Hopi in the Southwestern States, and the Andean farmers of Peru. But however wide-ranging they are, all such references perform at least one similar suasory function: they indicate that Berry's imperatives are generally practicable. Through his accounts of responsive stewardship by other farmers, one sees that Berry's case for subsistence farming, derived from *his* response to the demands of *his* particular farm, has wider application. In this way, these accounts provide strong warrants for Berry's essential claim--that by practising a complex, responsive, particularizing environmentalism, we may create a "continuous harmony" between life and work, and between the earth and its inhabitants.

In some essays, Berry will use personal testimony from other farmers to support his case for a particular practice. In "Going Back--or Ahead--to Horses," for example,

one of Berry's Kentucky neighbors performs this universalizing function for the author, whose aim is to defend the use of horses on modern farms. Nick Coleman, "an old-fashioned, conservative" grass farmer, tells Berry that he prefers horses to tractors simply because, "I like horses. I like to use them . . . . for the satisfaction of farming right" (*Good Land* 191). These non-quantifiable "values and preferences" (195) carry weight partly because Berry explains how they also make quantifiable economic sense, and partly because they are so clearly less simplistic than the views of "the experts," who raise "such a fuss about the 'impossibility' of farming with horses" (189). Moreover, just as Berry's case is strengthened by Coleman's testimony, Coleman's testimony is itself strengthened by its roots in community. "'Find somebody who knows how'," he says of using horses, "'You can't learn it by yourself, and you can't read it out of a book'" (192). In "Horse-Drawn Tools and the Doctrine of Labor Saving," the supporting testimony for Berry's defence of horses is offered not by someone he has actually met, but by "an old-time English farmworker and horseman, Harry Groom, as quoted in George Ewart Evans's *The Horse in the Furrow* " (*Good Land* 107). Yet even this second-hand support has considerable personal appeal, for Berry juxtaposes the horseman's lively colloquial speech with "the testimony of the equipment manufacturers themselves," whose clumsy, naked appeals to technological "efficiency" of the crudest sort seem to recommend speed at the expense of care. "'Today we have multi-row planters that slap in a crop in a hurry, putting down seed, fertilizer, insecticide, and herbicide in one quick swipe across the field'" (106), Berry quotes them as saying. For comparison, he then offers us the language of Groom, whose honest peasant brogue confirms that "It's all rush today":

> "Speed is everything now; just jump on the tractor and way across the field as if it's a dirt-track. You see it when a farmer takes over a new farm: he goes in and plants straight-way, right out of the book. But if one of the old farmers

> took a new farm . . . he wouldn't plant nothing much at first. He'd wait a bit and see what the land was like" he'd *prove* the land first. A good practical man would hold on for a few weeks, and get the feel of the land under his feet. He'd walk on it and feel it through his boots and see if it was in good heart, before he planted anything: he'd sow only when he knew what the land was fit for.

To some extent, this testimony can stand by itself; the simple, concrete diction, the non-standard grammar, and especially the closing metaphors, with their suggestion that the land, like a person, is a living, breathing thing--these bespeak a man whose knowledge of farming comes not "out of the book" but first-hand, someone who cares for his farm as a "good practical man" must. Yet this testimony does not need to stand by itself. Recognizing just how much his own value-judgments will benefit from this endearing plea for a more careful stewardship, Berry is careful to place it in a context that increases its authority as much as possible.

In other essays, Berry seems less interested in arguing for a particular practice than in showing us exemplary lives, the kinds of lives that help us "imagine a better life, and . . . enact something of its possibility" (*Essays* 240). "Everywhere you look you see the signs of care" (*Good Land* 210), Berry says of Tom and Ginny Marsh's farm in "An Excellent Homestead." Much of this essay is devoted to describing particular signs of such care, as though its sole purpose were to convince readers to like the Marshes' homestead as much as the author does. But Berry also makes general comments which--if we know something of his environmental "imperatives"--clearly have a broader suasory function. "The natural character of a place [can] be respected, and yet . . . made to accommodate gracefully the various necessities of a family's life and work" (210), says Berry, reminding us of the general rule to be drawn from the particular example of the Marsh homestead. Similarly, in "Elmer Lapp's Place," we hear of a subsistence farm that is in "economic and ecological good health" (*Good Land* 217) precisely because its owner has conducted his farming in the way Berry would say we should all conduct our lives. "Giftedly

practical," Elmer Lapp "is as fine a farmer as he is because liking has joined his intelligence intricately to his place" (226). He is attentive to the details of his work, as Berry's own detailed account of Lapp's practices convinces us, but he is just as attentive to the details of his life. Indeed, Lapp's farm *is* "his home, his life, and his way of life--not just his 'work place' or his 'job'" (220). As a result, it produces not only a cash income but much that "cannot be valued in cash" (220). The invaluable benefits of this attitude go beyond the borders of one farm. As Berry tells us, Lapp "is also aware that the pattern of subsistence is a community pattern"; he therefore "deals with the little country stores," which "support the life of the community," rather than "the supermarkets in the city," which "support 'the economy' at the expense of communities" (221).

As much as Elmer Lapp and the Marshes lend a validity greater than the merely personal to Berry's imperatives, so, too, does Berry himself gain from association with such exemplary farmers. In the terms of traditional rhetoric, one might say he benefits ethically as well as substantively. It is all very well to tell us to "think little," but if one tells us too often, one risks seeming dogmatic, even when the telling is backed up by the eloquent showing of one's own practices. In other words, one risks weakening one's ethos. Berry's accounts of exemplary farmers help him continue both the "telling" and the "showing" with impunity. Because they are consistently shown to be good people, responsive and particular in their treatment of their land, the author who visits and carefully listens to these farmers (and, in the case of the Marshes, breaks bread with them) benefits by association with them at the same time they are advancing his own claims. Berry does not tell us explicitly that *he* and *his* practices are exemplary, but through his "identification" with "good practical men" of like mind one gains the impression that this is so. However, having invoked Burke's term to describe what happens in these essays, I also want to divest that term

of any negative associations; in Berry's work there is no trace of what Burke calls "cunning identification" (*Motives* 35). I would say, on the contrary, that his work attests to his genuine affection for and admiration of his subjects. This is not to say merely that he enjoys their company (though he clearly does). What is more important is that he is responsive to them in the way he would like us to be responsive to nature--not "objectively," but from an attitude of assent, out of a willingness to learn "from" as well as "about." He tries to see as they see.

This attitude is most clearly demonstrated in three of the longest essays in *The Gift of the Good Land*, "An Agricultural Journey to Peru," "Three Ways of Farming in the Southwest," and "Seven Amish Farms." "Studies" might be an appropriate name for these essays, for the factual information in them is precise, their purpose is serious, and their focus--agricultural alternatives to "agribusiness"--is limited without being narrow. The "student" who writes them, however, makes no attempt to be impartial or "scientific" in the conventional sense. As Berry says elsewhere of his relationship with the Amish, "I shall not pretend to be 'objective' about them. I admire and respect them deeply, with few reservations; in many ways I envy them" (*America* 217). Since this statement provides a key to understanding the persuasive function of these essays, if not Berry's entire rhetoric, we must be careful not to misread it. By acknowledging a lack of "objectivity," Berry is not implying that his views of Amish farming are "merely subjective" or "idealistic"; as I argued earlier, he does face facts. But he also believes that "Knowledge . . . is not value free" (*Good Land* 243). What Berry's professed lack of objectivity means, rather, is that

admiration and respect allow him to see some "facts" in ways others might not.[15] As he says in "Seven Amish Farms,"

> Amish farming has been so ignored, I think, because it involves a complicated structure that is at once biological and cultural, rather than industrial or economic. I suspect that anyone who might attempt an accounting of the economy of an Amish farm would soon find himself dealing with virtually unaccountable values, expenses, and benefits. He would be dealing with biological forces and processes not always measurable, with spiritual and community values not quantifiable; at certain points he would be dealing with mysteries--and he would be finding that these unaccountables and inscrutables have results, among others, that are economic. Hardly an appropriate study for the 'science' of agricultural economics. (*Good Land* 259)

"An Agricultural Journey to Peru" similarly reminds us that the significance of a "fact" is determined by the eye of the beholder. Where many Americans would think of Andean potatoes, for example, as the product of an inefficient agriculture and a backward culture (as the travel brochure quoted in the essay indicates), Berry has enough respect to look more closely, and, as a result, he sees these smaller, harder "tubers" quite differently. He sees that Andean farmers, by developing variations in the size, density, and yield of their potatoes, have with remarkable effectiveness answered the geographic, climatic, and economic difficulties facing their communities.[16] For the reader, the many factual details cited in these essays

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[15] In "An Agricultural Journey to Peru," Berry says of his guide, Stephen Brush, "he has made himself a friend to the farmers whose fields he studied. He likes and respects them, which carries him far beyond the role of 'objective observer', and appropriately complicates his insights and his tasks. This makes him, so far as I am concerned, many times more trustworthy than any 'detached' scholar" (*Good Land* 41).

[16] "The methods and reasons are assuredly complex--this is an agriculture of extraordinary craftsmanship and ecological intelligence--but they were worked out over a long

provide yet another good reason for listening to Berry's claims. His environmental imperatives are, demonstrably, not airy ideals, founded exclusively on his personal experience or on a romantic love of the earth; on the contrary, the evidence argues strongly that the responsive, particularizing stewardship he recommends does have practical results, beneficial for nature as well as for entire communities. What is just as important as the factual details themselves, however, is the very process of uncovering these facts. As we watch Berry assent to his subjects, attend to particulars, and find connections between agriculture and culture, not only do we see that he obeys his own imperatives; we also begin to realize that he discovers practicable solutions for preserving the earth--possibilities that a more ambitious problem-solver might neglect--*because* he assents, "thinks little," and connects. The ethical appeal in these essays thus becomes a kind of substantive appeal as well, for in the arena of his supporting arguments, Berry's way of arguing seems in itself to support his claims. As he says in "Discipline and Hope," "The end is preserved in the means" (*Harmony* 131).

IV

> . . . ecology may well find its proper discipline in the arts, whose function is to refine and enliven *perception*, for ecological principle, however publicly approved, can be enacted only upon the basis of each man's perception of his relation to the world. ("Discipline and Hope," *Harmony* 100)
>
> . . . there are times, according to the only reliable ethics we have, when one is required to tell the truth, whatever the urgings of purpose, audience, and situation. Ethics requires this because, in the terms of the practical realities of

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time, long ago; learned so well, one might say, that they are forgotten. It seems to me that this is probably the only kind of culture that works: thought sufficiently complex, but submerged or embodied in traditional acts" (*Good Land* 27).

> our lives, the truth is safer than falsehood. To ignore this is simply to put language at the service of purpose--*any* purpose. It is, in terms of the most urgent realities of our own time, to abet a dangerous confusion between public responsibility and public relations. ("Standing By Words," *Words* 30)

Without exception, the essays in *The Gift of Good Land* are, I believe, balanced and thoughtful. Not only does Berry "accommodate" his imperatives "to the particularities of the lives of particular people" (*Harmony* 14), as he said a "new speech" must, but he does so eloquently, with the kind of grace, flexibility, and cutting power exhibited by the good scythe he so admires. He "refines and enlivens perception." Indeed, when I consider the cumulative effect of his various appeals in these essays "cultural and agricultural," I am inclined to say of Berry's rhetoric, "any reasonable person ought to be persuaded by what has been said" (Booth, *Modern Dogma* xiv).

On the other hand, anyone who has read more of Berry than the essays in *The Gift of Good Land* knows full well that Berry is not always so balanced or moderate. Sometimes, his voice is aggressive, and though this aggressiveness can be persuasive, even compelling, it can also be alarming, almost self-righteous. The second of the statements quoted above reveals Berry in a considerably less accommodating frame of mind than that described thus far. I take issue with the statement not because I disagree with what Berry means. I know that Berry means "the truth" *as one sees it* ; the rest of his work bears evidence of his belief that one's apprehension of truth is never complete or objective--as indeed does the page that precedes the quotation. But here, in this statement, he gives me the impression that he is carried away by his case against those whom he sees as relativists, that he has let his emotions get the better of him. It is the tone of that second quotation to which I object--the certainty suggested by the absolutes ("only," "whatever," "any"), the universal application implied by the agency of the sentences, the implicit accusations of immorality ("ignore," "abet"). The tone of the passage argues that Berry has

temporarily forgotten the role accommodation must play in any moral suasion. As he says in "Discipline and Hope," "To choose principle over community is . . . to accept as the condition of being 'right' a solitude in which the right is ultimately meaningless; it is to destroy the only ground upon which principle can be exacted, and renewed . . . . " (*Harmony* 154). Yet here, it seems, Berry has very nearly made just such a choice. And in other essays, when he does not address ethical questions so philosophically, he seems to an even greater degree to be driven by principle--by "the condition of being right."[17]

Two such essays are his attacks on strip-mining, "Mayhem in the Industrial Paradise" and "The Landscaping of Hell: Strip-Mine Morality in East Kentucky." His anger in these essays is to a great extent justifiable, for as an industrial practice, strip-mining certainly deserves censure. The damage it causes is highly visible and severe, and its benefits are dubious. Indeed, it is a practice from which no one but the absentee owners and executives of coal-companies profits in any real or substantial sense: "of all methods of mining, strip-mining is the most enriching to

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[17] Berry's own term for what I call "relativism" is "standardless functionalism." He is referring to contemporary ideas about the arbitrariness of signs and, as I understand it, to the claim of situational ethics--that "'Rightness and wrongness are determined' by purpose, audience, and situation" (28). Those he singles out for criticism are Ross Winterowd and Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike, the authors of *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*.

Though his point is slightly different from mine, I find it interesting that Gary Davenport, in his review of *Standing by Words*, has chosen to criticize Berry for his lack of "clarity and credibility" (112) in the same section of "Standing by Words" that I draw attention to.

the rich and the most impoverishing to the poor; it has fewer employees and more victims (*Harmony* 177). Moreover, as Berry learned first-hand from attending government hearings on strip-mining practices in Kentucky, the companies that wreak such environmental destruction show no willingness to compromise their profits; even when minimal proposals for regulating their practices were requested, "the opposition of the coal companies was inflexible and absolute" (*House* 13). Given these circumstances, one could understand if Berry chose, as many an environmentalist would, to criticize the coal companies severely. Such criticism would in all likelihood appeal to a wide audience, and find it only too ready to assign total blame where some is so clearly due. But Berry will not accept this all-too-easy us *versus* them dichotomy or let his readers off so lightly. The mining companies are unquestionably to blame, for they will "stop at nothing" to increase their profits, but as we are told in "The Landscaping of Hell: Strip-Mine Morality in East Kentucky," the companies are not the only culprits: "They have been abetted by the mischief and greed of local officials, by public indifference, by state paralysis, by federal cross-purposes and confusion" (*House* 20). Nor does the blaming end there. In the later "Mayhem in the Industrial Paradise," the "public," which found some anonymity in that list of culprits, is singled out for more extensive attack:

> The damages of strip mining are justified in the name of electrical power. We need electrical power, the argument goes, to run our factories, to heat and light and air-condition our homes, to run our household appliances, our TV sets, our children's toys, and our mechanical toothbrushes. And we must have more and more electricity because we are going to have more and more gadgets that will make us more and more comfortable. This, of course, is the reasoning of a man eating himself to death. We have to begin to distinguish between the uses that are necessary and those that are frivolous. (*Harmony* 180-181)

Much as I sympathize with Berry's cause, I cannot help but feel that the author of this passage is setting himself apart from community, in spite of his use of the first-

person plural. In its repetition of that belittling, mindless cry for "more," and in the all-too-easy, all-too-rapid movement from "necessary" to "frivolous" items in its series, the so-called "argument" Berry describes is as improbable as it is impersonal. It is clearly based on a caricature, a stereotype--as though there were no essential or necessary uses of electrical power, as though none of "us" can make the distinctions Berry tells us we must. We may very well indulge in such frivolities, but almost all of us, it seems to me, do so against our better judgment; none of us argues for them. The passage is too unforgiving. But it is nonetheless a passage typical of "Mayhem in the Industrial Paradise," which begins with an angry epigraph from Jeremiah, and ends with a promise of hellfire.

Though there are few other essays in which I find it to be this extreme, the tone of "Mayhem in the Industrial Paradise" and "The Landscape of Hell" is not confined to the subject of strip-mining, nor even to the collections of essays from which they come; one can find similar passages in "The Body and the Earth," in "Standing by Words," in "Higher Education and Home Defence." Nor is my assessment of this tone unique; others have commented on the self-righteousness that sometimes mars Berry's writing (Coiner and Flower 177).

And yet there is also in his essays much that compensates for this tone. Often, when Berry's emotions rise, a more moderate voice suddenly intervenes, letting us know that the vigorous defence of one position is, after all, balanced by an awareness of alternative positions. This voice often meets us as we enter a new paragraph. "I am aware that . . . " says Berry, or "I don't pretend to know . . . " On such occasions, Berry exhibits an accommodating sensitivity to the relationship between speaker and audience.

What needs to be said, moreover, is that even though they sometimes alienate, even *as* they alienate, Berry's arguments can not be easily dismissed. His anger, it

seems to me, derives from the same source as his appeal: he has convictions, and he stands by them in words as well as actions. He accepts his "partiality." In this there is considerable risk, for it requires being stubborn sometimes and offending some people, but Berry is prepared to take that risk; indeed, he believes it is a necessary part of communication. As far as he is concerned, a language without risk is a language that tries to be all things to all people; consequently, inevitably, it is a language "that will not *bear* scrutiny" (*Harmony* 91). It is the language of those who cleverly avoid "standing by words." "The speech of politicians," Berry says, "grows out of the pretense that the politician is not a man, but is somehow infallible" (*Harmony* 61). The speech of scientists, he says, suggests "an embarrassment about any statement that depends for confirmation upon experience or imagination or feeling or faith" (*Home Economics* 92). Berry, on the other hand, willingly accepts the condition of being human, of being but a single individual, and he values experience, imagination, feeling, and faith. The language "that is most useful to us, that has most devotedly sought the humble exactitude of the personal, never makes the deathly pretense of being more than human, and if we read it, it will help to keep us from making such a pretense" (*Harmony* 61). We should not misunderstand Berry when he tells us in "Preserving Wildness" that he takes "the middle side" on environmental issues; he is not relegating himself to the role of facilitator, someone prepared to mollify all factions with "the tone of divine good will and infallibility" (*Harmony* 90). Berry's middle side is far removed from "the extreme middle," where words "have departed from facts, causes and arguments" and language "ceases to bind head to heart" (*Harmony* 88). Where he stands is in the "New Middle" (*Harmony* 87), made up of people who want "a chance to live and speak as a person, not as a function of some political bunch."

I am arguing, then, that Berry takes his stand very deliberately; he risks offence knowingly (though never, I think, intentionally commits it), because he understands what public discussion requires if it is to bring about change. The price of being forever inoffensive is to be forever uncommitted and forever unengaging. Berry makes a commitment. We may criticize him for occasional lapses in tone, but we must also recognize that these lapses are an inevitable consequence of his view of language and society. And he is deeply aware of the role language plays in society. As he tells us in "Standing by Words,"

> My impression is that we have seen, for perhaps a hundred and fifty years, a gradual increase in language that is either meaningless or destructive of meaning. And I believe that this increasing unreliability of language parallels the increasing disintegration, over the same period, of persons and communities. (*Words* 24)

Berry is not arguing in this passage that the link between the deterioration of language and the disintegration of persons and communities is simply one of cause and effect. Nor does he think that the precise use of language will be our universal panacea. Nevertheless, he does believe that "language is at the heart of the problem" (*Home Economics* 78); and he believes that a more disciplined and moral use of language would help to create the kind of community that could discover and enact solutions.

We must recognize, too, that Berry's commitment to words, though personal, is not idiosyncratic. Just as his farming practices found their validity in and gained sustenance from a broad community of traditional farmers, so too is his writing linked to a broader community--the community of those who share the "common tongue" (*Home Economics* 79; *Words* 9), and who respect "the literary tradition that joins the sharers of literature, writers and readers, living and dead" (*Words* 10). For Berry, "The past is our definition. We may strive, with good reason, to escape it, or

to escape what is bad in it, but we will escape it only by adding something better to it" (*Words* 14). Consequently, the "new speech" needed to bring about a more thoughtful stewardship of the environment will not be "new" in the sense that it is "always hastening from the essential to the novel" (*Harmony* 144). It will instead be firmly rooted in traditions, its speaker as respectful of what has been said before as a good farmer is of what has been sown before:

> We must speak . . . a language precise and articulate and lively enough to tell the truth about the world as we know it. And to do this we must know something of the roots and resources of our language; we must know its literature. The only defense against the worst is a knowledge of the best. (*Harmony* 172)[18]

Language and literary traditions are central to Berry's rhetoric. But he is not recommending that literary traditions never be criticized. To merely accept the old as is would be to worship the letter rather than the spirit, to become narrow, rigid, and dogmatic. Our relationship to literature should be like our relationship to the land: "Knowing it is . . . like breathing. it can happen, it stays real, only on the condition that it *continue* to happen" (*Essays* 248).

It is not only his general comments about language and literary traditions that indicate their central importance in Berry's thinking; so, too, do his many references to specific works and words. Even in essays about ostensibly "non-literary" subjects we find that Berry's arguments are frequently advanced through literary allusions--to Tennyson and Dante in "People, Land, and Community"; to Milton and Henry James in "Home of the Free"; to Shakespeare and Yeats in "Men and Women in Search of Common Ground"; to Aubrey de Selincourt, Whitman, Pope, Lao Tzu,

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[18] See also *The Unsettling of America*, 156: "One learns to order one's thoughts and to speak and write coherently by studying exemplary thinkers, speakers, and writers of the past."

Blake, and the Bible in "Two Economies." Discussions of words also pervade Berry's writing; indeed, it is by closely defining the terms of his discussion, or by explaining the derivations of particular words, that he often advances his arguments most effectively. Through these he makes our knowledge of language "continue to happen." When he tells us that the word "agriculture" is etymologically rooted in notions of tillage, of worship, of revolving, and of dwelling--when, in short, he reveals the values embedded in the word--not only does he better reveal "the threatening diminishments implied by the term 'agribusiness'" (*Amer...* 87); he also indicates that his arguments for subsistence farming are rooted in our very way of thinking. He shows us, in other words, that *his* way of valuing is not only personal, but derived from history. In this sense his reasons for preferring the practices of small farms to those of large agribusinesses become "good reasons." And if we have evidence in his many references to words and works that Berry's own speech has strong connections to the past, we have as well a kind of evidence that Berry has strong connections with community, since language is one of the ways we continue to share our shared past. To know and appreciate what has been said before is to keep alive our connections not only with our ancestors but with our neighbours. Community thrives on communication; communication, on the disciplined study and use of "the common tongue."[19]

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[19] Berry may reap yet another rhetorical benefit from his allegiance to literary traditions. By stressing the value of literature and ideas past, he identifies himself with a time when people were ostensibly wise enough to appreciate nature, and simultaneously dissociates himself from the present age of ecological destruction; in the words of rhetorical critic Roderick Hart, Berry's comments on the value of his literary and intellectual precursors "elongate" his rhetoric by appropriating the past (*Rhetorical Criticism* 27-28). I must qualify

V

In my opening to this chapter, I argued that in some ways the rhetorical problems Berry faces are less formidable than those faced by Jonathan Schell. The rhetor who discusses environmental issues such as soil erosion, "agribusiness," or wilderness preservation has, after all, the considerable advantage of a familiar and vital subject matter; time and time again, he can refresh both language and reader simply by dipping into the well of nature's images. Discussions of nuclear arms, on the other hand, lead away from life; they are almost inevitably, as Berry says of nuclear weaponry itself, "too general . . . to be meant by any individual person," so that to be persuaded by them "requires personal abandonment to a public passion not validated by personal experience" (*Home Economics* 100). Still, as I argued in the previous chapter, the flatness of tone and diction in *The Fate of the Earth* cannot be attributed solely to its subject matter. It also results from the author's distrust of rhetoric.

By contrast, Berry knows that language is inevitably rhetorical. On one level, this knowledge is reflected in his many explicit comments on the role of language and the need for a "new speech." Our conduct towards the earth, he argues, is not going to be changed simply by carefully reasoned criticisms of scientistic tenets or by statements of alternative tenets, however many new facts are employed in the

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this identification, though, by noting that Berry often scorns Romantic appeals to a pre-industrial Eden or lost "state of national innocence"; his feet are planted too firmly on the ground to indulge in that familiar theme. All the same, his respect for the past may well gain him points with an American audience that seems just as inclined to "expel the machine from their Eden" as it is to "pay homage to industrial progress" (Brown and Crable 259-60).

service of such ends. Indeed, it will not be sufficient even that such alternatives are "publicized and learned" (*Harmony* 14). To assume that it will is to view language as a mere conduit for information and the public as disinterested receptacles for that information, and if the relationship between language and human action were so simple and straightforward, stating the "facts" about nuclear arms and the environment would have provided sufficient incentive to reform long before now. As Berry knows, new ideas must be not only "written and publicized and learned, but understood, *felt*, accommodated to the particularities of the lives of particular people" (*Harmony* 14). Only in this way will the reasons we are given for changing our conduct seem to us to be "good reasons." It is therefore crucial that, on another level, a level that distinguishes his attempts at persuasion even more clearly from Schell's, Berry's writing is actually informed by his awareness that language is inevitably rhetorical. He promotes his own alternatives to the tenets of scientism--his environmental "imperatives," as I have called them--not only through carefully reasoned arguments supported by facts, but also through a kind of "new speech" that accommodates these tenets to his audience, that exemplifies them, and that thus makes them "felt."

It is, I think, this combination of tenets and practice that makes Berry's rhetoric a more plausible example of a "rhetoric of assent" than was the rhetoric of *The Fate of the Earth*. Indeed, in Fisher's terms, Berry's rhetoric meets all the criteria demanded by a "logic of good reasons." As did Schell, Berry answers both the question of "transcendent issue" and the question of "consequence"; that is, he explicitly bases his appeals on a value that constitutes "the ideal basis for human conduct" (Fisher, "Logic" 380) ("the life and health of the world"), and he shows us, through examples, how our conduct towards the earth might be improved by adhering to this transcendent value, as well as to the imperatives that spring from it. Furthermore,

Berry's rhetoric meets two criteria that Schell's rhetoric does not: the criteria of "relevance" and "consistency." In reading Berry's essays, I feel not only that far fewer relevant considerations, fewer considerations "appropriate to the nature" ("Logic" 379) of his case, have been neglected, but also that the reasons Berry gives me are better "confirmed or validated in [my] personal experience," in "the lives or statements of others whom [I admire and respect]" (380), and by the evidence of Berry's own text. This is not to say that I give Berry my unconditional assent. I am still somewhat doubtful, for example, that his imperatives sufficiently take into account economic realities that limit the effect of "thinking little" or acting responsively, and I am uncertain about whether the sharp edge of his prose, which demonstrates such strength of mind and purpose, does not also reveal an irreconciliable tension between commitment to principles and "accommodation" to community. Yet there is no need to let such doubts counteract one's larger impression of Berry's arguments, for there is much that is persuasive in them. Moreover, as Booth and those in the good reasons movement have defined it, a rhetoric of assent dealing with complex issues can never achieve unconditional assent. All we can ask of the reasons any rhetor gives us is that they be able to "make a pragmatic difference in one's life and in one's community" (Fisher, "Logic" 381). To do this is to give us "good reasons." And this, I believe, is what Berry gives us.

Chapter Six: Cooperation and Community: The Rhetoric of John McPhee

Like much of his nonfiction, the opening, title essay of John McPhee's third collection of essays begins in *media res*. What follows is the introduction to both "Giving Good Weight" and *Giving Good Weight:*

> You people come into the market--the Greenmarket, in the open air under the downpouring sun--and you slit the tomatoes with your fingernails. With your thumbs, you excavate the cheese. You choose your stringbeans one at a time. You pulp the nectarines and rape the sweet corn. You are something wonderful, you are--people of the city--and we, who are almost without exception strangers here, are as absorbed with you as you seem to be with the numbers on our hanging scales. (3)

Though the informal, almost conversational diction, the repetition of casual openers, and the atmosphere of light and color created by the imagery in the paragraph suggest simplicity and openness--everything seems, metaphorically and literally, out in the open--they also bely a complex rhetorical function. I find, in fact, that in seeking to make sense of the text before me, I am puzzled by a series of questions the paragraph raises--implicit questions, only half-formed, but nonetheless pressing. There is the question, first, of who "you people" are. I can quickly deduce an answer that will make sense of the passage; if they "come into the market" and handle the produce, these people are likely to be customers of "the Greenmarket." Yet in seeking to confirm or refine this first rapid deduction, I also find myself implicated in important value-judgements. And as I seek an answer to the first question, there are others playing upon my consciousness. Who, for example, is the speaker? Is it the author himself? Who are the "we," the "strangers" with whom he groups himself? If they are the greenmarket's produce sellers, is the author literally

on their side of the table, selling sweet corn and stringbeans? Only a full two pages later do explicit answers arrive: McPhee has "been working for [Hodgson Farms] off and on for three months, summer and fall" (5). In the meantime, I must take *some* perspective on the action and dialogue, and the only ones that suggest themselves are those established by the dichotomy of the author's direct opening address. If my point of view is not allied with "you people," is it then allied with the "we," those who are as much strangers to this place as I the reader am to this text?

The images of plunder guide my choice. They evoke associations with the violence of urban life ("you slit the tomatoes" and "rape the sweet corn") and with the destruction caused by urban expansion (you "excavate" the cheese); and as they do so, they elicit from me an uneasy recognition. I know--almost with certainty--of whom the speaker speaks *before* he tells me explicitly: "you are--people of the city." And thus in a sense it is I, the reader, who do the naming, I who do the judging as well as the speaker himself. My judging is a distancing too, because I am unwilling to see any kinship between myself and these pillagers of fruit and slaves to the wallet. I am repelled by them and simultaneously attracted to the greenmarketers, to the people, that is, who are more "absorbed with" the variety of human life than with "the numbers on . . . hanging scales." In Burkean terms, identification is established. And in making this first identification, I make a second as well. If I am allied with the greenmarket producers, I am allied as well with the author. We are all strangers to this text/place, absorbed with the people of the city who parade themselves before us.

So it is that by the end of the first paragraph, the foundations have been laid for all that McPhee hopes to do in "Giving Good Weight." Our questions have engaged us, setting in motion an interior dialogue with important consequences for our reading of the entire essay. As much as this dialogue directs our understanding of

what is happening in the essay, it shapes our identifications with the author, with his subjects, and with the values for which they stand. McPhee then sustains these identifications throughout "Giving Good Weight," mostly by means of sympathetic portraits of the greenmarket producers and by a kind of ethical feedback derived from his own respectful and respected association with them.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the effect of this essay is to draw attention to its governing metaphor--which happens, not so incidentally, to be its title as well--and more specificially to the way in which this title/metaphor brings to fruition the identifications established in the opening paragraph. "Giving good weight" apart from its prominent post as title of the title essay, it is a phrase used only three times in the essay, yet it reverberates throughout one's reading of the piece--or more accurately, it galvanizes all the unspoken responses one has to the varied themes that play across the essay. To "give good weight" means, literally, to be generous when selling produce, to give three and a quarter pounds of tomatoes for the price of three. But it also means, not only metaphorically but actually, the fostering of human fellowship and trust--the forging of an almost palpable bond through an act of commercial generosity. When customers find out that a young teacher selling produce in the Harlem Greenmarket will soon return to school, "they bring him things," for "he has always given [them] a little more than good weight" (129). A similar thing might be said about all of the greenmarket sellers and all of their customers. What the greenmarket offers the city is much more than fresh, healthful, inexpensive produce; it offers warmth and vitality, and, above all, an infectious feeling of community. Moreover, a similar thing might be said about the author himself. Let me push the comparison to its limits: though McPhee sells us nothing, we have come to the text to sample his reportage, and we find not only a fresh and healthful produce, a clear and reliable exposition, but something

considerably more. As the alliance established in the opening paragraph is reiterated and reinforced at every turn of the essay, we come to see that McPhee, too, arouses one's sense of community. He is no more a mere conduit for the exchange of information than the green marketers are conduits for monetary exchange: his very choice of subjects, his way of viewing them, their responses to his interest--all these are bound up in our assessment of what he gives us. What he gives us is good weight. And by doing so he elicits assent to the values for which he stands.

I

I have begun this chapter rather abruptly, speaking at length and in some detail about a single essay by McPhee. But the reason why I have done so will, I hope, by now be clear: "Giving Good Weight" demonstrates a remarkable kinship with Booth's "rhetoric of assent." It demonstrates, that is, McPhee's willingness to accede, authentically, to all the conditions a rhetoric of good reasons calls for: to step into the other's circle of assumptions (in the case of the greenmarket farmers, quite literally); to address both his readers and his subjects in a non-confrontational, non-agonistic mode; not only to write but to act in accordance with his professed values; and to acknowledge the tacit, unquantifiable factors that play such an important role in human relations. Moreover, the essay seems to me a representative work. I might even call it a window on McPhee's rhetoric; its field of vision may be too small to illuminate the whole range of his methods and interests, but its surface is clear and unblemished. Thus to understand how this essay affects us--by which I mean both how and of what it persuades us--is to a considerable extent to understand how all of McPhee's nonfiction affects us.

To speak of McPhee in connection with persuasion of any kind is unusual. Though in recent years his substantial body of nonfiction--a total of twenty-one

books, four of them collections of essays--has begun to receive the kind of critical attention it deserves, McPhee is still seen mainly as the expositor par excellence. The suasory function of his nonfiction has been neglected almost entirely. We are told by two of his most sympathetic interpreters, for example, that McPhee is both "a self-professed fact writer whose stock in trade is information" (Roundy 75) and "one of the finest practitioners of aesthetic nonfictional prose in the twentieth century" (Schuster 604), but little is said of how--or indeed whether--his work supports particular values. As far as they go, these assessments are essentially accurate, but I believe that McPhee represents still more than they suggest. And I hope to show this in the present chapter.

Once again, my port of entry will be environmental issues--issues I have repeatedly characterized as a kind of lightning rod for all the rhetorical difficulties resulting from the split between facts and values. As they did in the work of Wendell Berry, these issues occupy a central position in McPhee's nonfiction. Moreover, McPhee's environmental stance resembles Berry's in an important respect: both take the middle ground. Berry, as I explained in my previous chapter, is explicit about this stance: "If I had to choose," he says in "Preserving Wildness," "I would join the nature extremists against the technology extremists, but . . . . I would prefer to stay in the middle, not because I would prefer taking sides, but because I think the middle *is* a side" (*Home Economics* 138). McPhee is less often explicit about such matters, but as I will demonstrate, a multitude of evidence indicates both that he also prefers to stay in the middle and that for him, too, "the middle is a side."

Yet in spite of the similarity I believe characterizes their stances on the environment, anyone familiar with their work can easily see that McPhee differs markedly, as well as significantly, in the ways in which he tries to move us toward the middle ground. Without arguing for any sort of absolute dichotomy between

ideas and their expression, I might say that what distinguishes the two writers is their rhetorical rather than their philosophical stance. The rhetoric of Berry, as we have seen, is characterized by what Wayne Brockriede calls "restrained partisanship"; explicitly suasory, it is characterized by a passionate yet reasonable commitment to environmental (and especially agrarian) reform. In addition to a variety of what have been traditionally considered "logical" and "substantive" proofs, Berry appeals to us by demonstrating this commitment both directly, through his active involvement in farming and his appreciation of nature, and indirectly, through his concern for language and for appropriate forms of address; and these appeals succeed, I believe, largely because he tempers this commitment--keeps it, that is, from seeming factious or fanatical--by demonstrating considerable self-awareness and a compelling attention to detail. In short, he reconnects passionate commitment with "the provision of good reasons" (Booth, *Modern Dogma* xi). Nevertheless, one senses in reading Berry that his passion sometimes counteracts his reasonableness, and his partisanship, his restraint. McPhee's rhetoric, on the other hand, is characterized by a much less passionate tone. He too is committed to environmental causes, but he exercises this commitment not by stressing the urgent need for a particular stance on environmental issues, but by demonstrating the value of open-mindedness in approaching such issues. Whereas Berry argues energetically for a specific kind of intelligent and active commitment, McPhee quietly encourages a cooperative pluralism, in the hope that trust may lead to reform.[1]

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[1] "McPhee does not write out of an impulse that is didactic or reformatory; and if he is on the side of the angels, he takes pains not to show it" (Core 738).

We should read all of the ostensible similarities and dissimilarities between McPhee and Berry in the light of this essential difference in rhetorical purposes. For instance, I would argue that McPhee, like Berry, does demonstrate a sensitive awareness of the aesthetic nature of language--an assessment for which I find support in Schuster's description of McPhee as one of the finest modern "practitioners of aesthetic nonfictional prose." Yet his prose has little of the literariness one associates with Berry; in McPhee, the aesthetic is always subordinate to the functional. Nor does it exhibit any of Berry's sharpness--his indignation, his frustration, or his anger; argumentation, and even evaluation, seem always subordinate to exposition. For these reasons, one can easily read McPhee (as the prevailing critical view of his work suggests he has been) with little if any awareness that he is persuading as well as explaining. We still expect persuasion to be garbed in language that calls attention to itself, and when it is not, we scarcely suspect its presence.

I need hardly point out that Berry's literariness and his openly suasory, explicitly judgmental approach to environmentalism place the reader on a kind of rhetorical red alert, aware of implicit suasory purposes in an ostensibly non-suasory statement. Even the explicit appeal can have a suasory function beyond the one openly declared. We can guess, for example, that the Amish whom Berry describes in *The Gift of Good Land* have a suasory function which goes far beyond their explicitly stated role as good models for the farmer, not only because their farming practices so clearly embody the kinds of fundamental life-values for which Berry explicitly argues in many other essays, but also because of the simple fact that Berry so often argues explicitly. What may need to be pointed out, however, is the obverse side of this connection between the explicit and the implicit in any piece of nonfiction: that the absence of explicit argumentation and literariness can blind us to the existence of

implicit appeals. I think this is what happens in McPhee's case. Because McPhee's prose style strikes us as expository rather than "rhetorical," and because the subjects in McPhee's nonfiction obviously do serve as expository guides--as "experts," whose information McPhee, as a kind of middle man, filters for and distributes to us--it is all too easy to see them *only* as expository guides. Yet I believe they have a suasory function every bit as important as the farmers in Berry's essays do. Indeed, if one extends the comments Kenneth Burke makes about form to include the sort of demanding technical exposition common in McPhee, one can appreciate that McPhee's subjects may have a more important suasory function than do Berry's. As Burke says, in a passage that describes the "case" of environmentalism as precisely as any, "in cases where a decision is still to be reached, a yielding to the form prepares for assent to the matter identified with it . . . And this attitude of assent may then be transferred to the matter which happens to be associated with the form" (*Motives* 58). In McPhee's nonfiction, one "yields" instead to the demands of exposition, but the effect is similar. Without one's rhetorical guard up, the assent one gives of necessity to exposition is readily "transferred" to other elements "associated" with it: to our expositor, McPhee; to his own expert, expository guides; and to the various other subjects whose physical proximity and shared interest in a given pursuit often suggest an ethical affinity as well. This is one of the features of his rhetoric on which the present chapter will concentrate.

In the preceding chapter, my emphasis was as much on the author's explicitly stated positions on environmental questions as it was on his rhetorical methods for persuading us to take similar positions. That is not the case in this chapter. McPhee does make explicit statements indicating his stance on the environment, and indeed, in order to define this stance, I draw on some of these statements in the section that immediately follows. But explicitness about such matters is quite rare in McPhee's

work, partly because (as the author himself has publically stated) (Gzowski, *Interview with McPhee*), he does not want to be seen as someone whose aim is to persuade, and partly because--and I suspect here that I may be making the same point from a different angle--he wants to facilitate rather than determine discussions. My emphasis in this chapter is therefore placed on the methods by which he indirectly persuades us. It should be understood that my aim is not to unearth arguments lying beneath the surface of ostensibly pure exposition. I do not see McPhee as someone with a hidden agenda. My aim, rather, is to describe some of the ways he moves us towards particular values without either concealing his position or drawing attention to it.

II

Almost always, it seems to me, McPhee's main subject is people--their ways of working, their relationships with one another, their joys and frustrations. Beyond that, his interests are so diverse and his emphasis on the interconnectedness of things such an important part of his approach that it is difficult to distinguish the "secondary" subjects which seem of greatest interest to him. Yet there is one that stands out: as Core puts it, "It takes no Edmund Wilson to perceive the author's continuing interest in the natural world and in conservation" (739). I would qualify Core's remark by adding that this interest is not always and unambiguously in favor of "the natural world." *Oranges* (1967), *The Pine Barrens* (1968), *Encounters with the Archdruid* (1971), *The Survival of the Bark Canoe* (1975), *Coming Into the Country* (1977), *Basin and Range* (1981), *In Suspect Terrain* (1983), *Rising From the Plains* (1986), *The Control of Nature* (1989), as well as a number of essays from *A Roomful of Hovings* (1968), *Pieces of the Frame* (1975), *Giving Good Weight* (1979),

and *Table of Contents* (1985)--in all these, McPhee does reveal a deep and enduring curiosity about nature, but it is a curiosity tempered with an even greater interest in people. He moves in the penumbra between nature and human society, as much a student of how we treat nature, and nature us, as he is of nature in and of itself. As a result, he is constantly confronting what we have come to think of as "environmental issues": "the tension of preservation versus development, of stasis versus economic productivity, of wilderness versus the drill and the bulldozer" (*Country* 79)--in fact, "the whole spectrum of tensions that have accompanied the rise of the environmental movement" (*Plains* 180).

McPhee's love of nature is almost palpable in most of his work. Whether he is gliding peacefully in a bark canoe with its maker, Henri Vaillancourt ("a rite of oneness with certain terrain . . . an act performed not because it is necessary but because there is value in the act itself") (*Canoe* 25), riding the river in a "wild-water race for eager hacks" (*Pieces* 71), or hiking in Alaska ("I embrace this wild country") (*Country* 398), McPhee exhibits a kind of youthful exuberance in outdoor activities, a buoyant pleasure in and excitement about nature's offerings ("I . . . have liked places that are wild and been quickened all my days just by the sound of the word") (*Country* 258). But he is also well aware of how much nature has suffered at the hands of greedy or thoughtless people, indifferent to any but their own special interests, and he knows that those of us who now enjoy material luxuries must alter our ways. Too often, Americans have listened to the siren call of "a handsome benefit-to-cost ratio," and found themselves stranded with an unnecessary, even gratuitous megaproject such as the Lake Dickey Dam, which provides a mere "soupcon" of electricity for the price of nature's beauty (*Good Weight* 174-75). Too often, they have treated nature like a trash bin, dumping into it the unwanted remains of their bread and circuses: "tires, washing machines, refrigerators,

mattresses, and automobiles into the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers" (*Pieces* 255); "aerosol cans, plastic bottles, boat cushions, sheets of polyethylene, bricks, industrial scum, globs of asphalt, and a tattered yacht flag" into the Hudson (*Encounters* 109); "two tons of trona . . . into the Green River every day merely from the washing of freight cars" (*Plains* 195); "thirty-five million gallons of partially treated sewage and forty million gallons of raw sewage into [the Chattahoochee] every day" (*Pieces* 52).

In spite of all this, however, McPhee's position is that of an ecological moderate, the proponent of reform rather than radical change in attitudes towards and public action on environmental issues. McPhee is never dogmatic; for him, particulars take precedence. As he tells us near the end of *Coming into the Country,* his reaction to environmental problems depends upon context--on the time and place of their occurrence, and on the people involved:

> This pretty little stream is being disassembled in the name of gold . . . . Am I disgusted? Manifestly not. Not from here, from now, from this perspective. I am too warmly, too subjectively caught up in what the Gelvins are doing. In the ecomilitia, bust me to private. This mine is a cork on the sea. Meanwhile (and, possibly, more seriously), the relationship between this father and son is as attractive as anything I have seen in Alaska . . . . Their kind is more endangered every year. Balance that against the nick they are making in this land. Only an easygoing extremist would preserve every bit of the country. And extremists alone would exploit it all. Everyone else has to think the matter through--choose a point of tolerance, however much the point might tend to one side. For myself, I am closer to the preserving side. (410)

Though closer to the preserving side, McPhee is not an "Environmentalist." Indeed, he would probably cringe at the thought of being placed in that camp. Environmentalists sometimes strike him as "odd ecologue[s] attired in alienation" (*Control* 65), as "friars" and "evangelists" (*Basin* 124), "noisome ecomorphs" (*Country* 20) who are altogether too ardent in their devotion to environmental causes. And of these, Dave Brower, former executive director of the Sierra Club and

"its preeminent fang" (*Encounters,* 11), is "the most unrelenting" (87). In what Booth calls the "meaningless logomachy between the adherents of reason or knowledge or science and the adherents of values or faith or feeling or wisdom or 'true knowledge'" (14), Brower is clearly on the latter side. Indeed, he seems at times like a parody of Booth's "irrationalist." Says McPhee in *Encounters with the Archdruid,* "Brower feels things. He is suspicious of education and frankly distrustful of experts. He has no regard for training per se. His intuition seeks the nature of the man inside the knowledge" (87). Like Booth, McPhee is disturbed by this "modernist dogma." If one so completely embraces values at the expense of facts, one may see only what he wants to see: "The force of nostalgia in Brower is such that it can in some instances bend logic" (29). But what is worse than this effect of the fact-value split on the perception of this one person is its concomitant effect on the rhetorical climate within a community. When one believes that "objectivity is the greatest threat to the United States today" (241), as Brower does, he will almost certainly, inevitably (if inadvertantly) begin to treat his audience, like "his" facts, as a means to an end. Thus when Brower needs statistics to support his arguments, his standards are less than exacting: "What matters is that they feel right" (86). And when inflated figures are insufficient, he will go even further:

> While Brower was executive director of the Sierra Club, the organization became famous for bold full-page newspaper ads designed to arouse the populace and written in a style that might be called Early Paul Revere. One such ad called attention to the Kennecott Copper Corporation's ambitions in the Glacier Peak Wilderness under the heading "AN OPEN PIT, BIG ENOUGH TO BE SEEN FROM THE MOON." The fact that this was not true did not slow up Brower or the Sierra Club. In the war strategy of the conservation movement, exaggeration is a standard weapon and is used consciously on broad fronts. (37)

As Booth argues, in what sounds uncannily like a description of Brower, "the prophet and activist who feels strongly that certain values and purposes ought to

prevail in the world can have only one rhetorical purpose: to win" (77). But winning is a difficult thing to measure ("Conservationists have to win again and again and again," says Brower [85]). Short-term gains made by questionable practices may not advance one's cause over the long haul, however worthy that cause may be. In Brower's case, exaggeration eventually led to the removal of tax-deductible status for contributions to the Sierra Club (37). And it seems likely (though McPhee does not make the point) that such exaggeration also intensified public suspicion of the environmental movement at a time when public support would have meant a great deal.

Encounters with the Archdruid can teach us much about McPhee's position concerning matters of rhetoric and persuasion, because its main character is not just an environmentalist but the most single-minded and uncompromising spokesman for environmentalist causes. Brower's extremism helps us situate McPhee. And clearly, McPhee positions himself far from Brower; in fact, I would argue that on the whole McPhee is, at the very least, as critical of Brower as he is of any of the major figures in his nonfiction. This does not indicate an anti-conservationist stance. We know from passages such as those I have quoted above that McPhee supports preservation of wilderness areas and better protection of the environment generally; and, if so inclined, anyone familiar with the terrain could find in McPhee's work many additional signs of his love of nature. It indicates, rather, McPhee's rhetorical stance; what distresses him is Brower's methods of pursuing a cause rather than the cause itself. Even if it is true, as one of Brower's supporters says, that "somebody has to be a little extreme" (87), this is not McPhee's way.

In contrast to Brower's one-sided approach to environmentalism, McPhee gives voice to a plurality of perspectives--not the least of which is the perspective of those who value Brower. The chairman of the President's Council on Environmental

Quality "Thank[s] God for Dave Brower" (87). Stewart Udall considers Brower "the most effective single person on the cutting edge of conservation in this country" (5). And McPhee himself suggests that Brower is a complex figure, at times endearing, and his behavior not always "simple to predict" (138). In short, McPhee does not counteract Brower's extremism with a biased view of an environmentalist boogeyman. He tries instead to be even-handed, showing us several sides of Brower, and letting us draw our own conclusions. And he does give us other yardsticks by which to assess the arch-druid (as well as environmental issues generally)--in the person of the other major characters in *Encounters*, each of whom McPhee treats in similar even-handed fashion. As the U.S. Commissioner of Reclamation and sometime advocate of dams, Floyd E. Dominy could easily be depicted as a government henchman for free enterprise and an arch-enemy of conservationists, and indeed, with the kinds of telling descriptive details that enrich so much of his work, McPhee seems at times to toy with the idea of painting such a portrait: "His belt buckle is silver and could not be covered over with a playing card. He wears a string tie that is secured with a piece of petrified dinosaur bone. On his head is a white Stetson" (153). But on the whole, after McPhee recounts the commissioner's personal history and shows him in conversation with the arch-druid, Dominy emerges as a substantial voice, flawed but neither fool nor ecological bad guy, his views as worthy of consideration as Brower's. The same could be said of another figure in *Encounters*, Charles Park, geologist and mineral engineer; he may be optimistic, even naive, in arguing that "The future can take care of itself" (74), but he is also "more aware of the natural world" than anyone McPhee has met (67). Like

Brower, Park and Dominy are not ideological cardboard cutouts but complex individuals whose views warrant "degrees of belief and assent."[2]

By containing David Brower's extremism within a broader, more pluralistic view of environmental issues, *Encounters with the Archdruid* not only clarifies McPhee's position on such issues but argues for it. His even-handedness is, in effect, the first of our "good reasons" for assenting to his position; one does not feel as though he has a hidden agenda, an ecological axe to grind. In traditional terms, this appeal is largely ethical. It has much to do with McPhee's ability to empathize and thus to gain his subjects' as well as his readers' confidence (a point that I will expand upon shortly). But McPhee's pluralistic view has more than ethical appeal; indeed, as appeal, this pluralistic outlook raises questions (as does *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*) about the value of calling some appeals ethical or emotional, and others logical. The fact that McPhee remains open to angles and avenues on which Brower has turned his back, thereby taking into account additional details relevant to environmental problems, effectively improves both his ethos and the substance of his implicit arguments. Not only, we say of McPhee, is this someone who is even-handed; it is someone whose pluralistic perspective gives us more variables with which to assess environmental issues. He is persuasive and/because he is informative; he is informative and/because he is open-minded. Thus it is that McPhee's "multiradial vision" (Howarth xxi) and his pluralistic or dialogical

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[2] "The measure of [McPhee's] objectivity and power may be seen in *Encounters with the Archfruid*, for Brower is matched by his opponents." See Core, 737.

presentation of this vision constitutes a good--and, it seems to me, logical--reason for granting at least some degree of assent to his position on environmental issues.[3]

III

In an age when "facts" have been split from "values," when, as Booth argues in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, we gravitate towards extremes of scepticism or faith, one of the cherished prejudices of sceptic and believer alike is that arguments are independent of the people who hold them. For the faithful, the messenger is what matters; if he or she has--or appears to have--enough personal integrity, the logic and substance of their message can be ignored, or at least enhanced by the sympathetic ear. Among the nature-worshippers and "ecomorphs," there is undoubtedly plenty of such sympathy for militant environmentalists like Brower, a "visionary" and evangelist who in some ways resembles Billy Graham (83). (McPhee relates one amusing incident about a hiker who encounters Brower unexpectedly, then repeats his name with a kind of awe, as though prepared "to bend over and draw a picture of a fish in the sand" [207]). But such unquestioning faith in reputation and authority is surely no worse than ignoring the messenger altogether, as the sceptic is inclined to do. Even those of us who have made a commitment to studying and teaching rhetoric can find ourselves parroting the easy dichotomies of an enlightened age: we counsel against the *ad hominem* fallacy, and caution students not to be taken in by or depend upon style and personal charm. To some

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[3] See also Booth, 148: "Whenever any person or institution violates the inherent values of free human exchange among persons, imposing upon anyone a diminution of his nature as a rhetorical animal, he is now shown, in this view, to be wrong--not just inconvenient or unpleasant but wrong."

degree, such counsel is of course reasonable; no one ought to be persuaded by arguments lacking any substance. Yet there is just as surely no need to reject such personal appeals altogether. As Booth says, "We all inevitably rely on our notions of the basic integrity of the rhetor who appeals to us; we all excuse gaps in argumentative cogency if we believe that the speaker or writer is essentially reliable in sharing values we share. And it would be unreasonable not to" (157). The key to rhetorical sophistication is not to recognize and summarily dismiss lop-sided appeals--whether based on hard data, testimony, logos, pathos, or ethos--but to gauge *how much* assent any type of appeal deserves: "All the art . . . lies in assessing degrees of reliability" (157).

We have a number of good reasons for believing that McPhee is a very reliable guide, someone who is unlikely to distort his subjects, scientific or personal, in order to advance some cause of his own. I have already suggested that the formal enactment of his "multiradial vision," his even-handed treatment of a variety of voices, strengthens his ethos; through this we are informed and encouraged to trust the information we receive. We see that McPhee is in no way dogmatic. But his approach to nonfiction also carries other, equally significant ethical appeals. Indeed, it is a curious feature of McPhee's work that although he is anything but self-promotional (as Howarth and others have pointed out), his presence is often and strongly felt in most of his nonfiction. His ethos plays subtly upon our response to virtually every part of his work. In a general sense, his ethical appeal is of the sort described by Aristotle: McPhee strikes us as a good man, and "We believe good men more fully and more readily than others" (1356a). But Aristotle places some conditions on how a man might persuade us of his goodness. He argues, for instance, that ethical appeals "should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he speaks" (1356a). Conditions such as this

prove awkwardly and unnecessarily restrictive once we have allowed for the possibility that the ostensibly expository work (among others) can also, as Booth argues in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* and as Burke so often stressed, have a suasive function. Indeed, in McPhee's case, what the author says to his readers can at times indicate, albeit indirectly, "what people think of his character" before, during, and after he speaks to them. Though he does appeal by means conventionally associated with more explicitly suasive modes of discourse--for example, by his mildly self-deprecating humor--the stronger of McPhee's ethical appeals are a function of his New Journalistic approach to nonfiction. As one of the characters in his own expository narratives, McPhee gains a kind of reflected charm: whether explicit or implicit, his subjects' responses to his presence seem to verify his "goodness" for the reader. Fred Brown and Bill Wasovwich (both from *The Pine Barrens*), the Gelvins, Otto the chef (from "Brigade de Cuisine"), Euell Gibbons ("The Forager"), and others clearly feel comfortable with this man who takes such an interest in their lives. And their trust in him fosters ours. As one sees McPhee move within a world to which he has given formal substance, and one watches him interact with the people to whom he has given voice, it becomes clear that McPhee behaves in accordance with his expectations of others. We can see that practice--not just literary practice, but social behaviour--is at ease with ethical precept.

Spencer Brown has commented, "McPhee's method of interview, of living with his expert source, is his trademark and is probably a major attraction for his work" ("Prose Miscellany" 264). Though I agree with Brown's observation, I would expand upon the idea of McPhee's "living" with his subjects. Unlike Tom Wolfe, for instance, McPhee is no curious outsider, descending from on high to see how the other half lives. Partly because McPhee so often chooses congenial subjects, he seems better able to understand them; the proximity, even the overlap, of his interests and

theirs allows him to enter their circle of assumptions, to see as they see. As he says in one of his essays, "There is a lot of identification, even transformation, in the work I do--moving along from place to place, person to person, as a reporter, a writer, repeatedly trying to sense another existence and in some ways to share it" (*Contents* 249). The connection between this attitude and Booth's rhetoric of assent is clear: rather than taking an "agonistic" posture, alert to the differences between himself and his subjects and ready to justify his own position, McPhee offers them what the psychotherapist Carl Rogers calls "unconditional positive regard"--he assumes that others (virtually everyone in his nonfiction, not just the major figures) have something worthwhile to say and that the best way to hear them is to subordinate "his own feelings and evaluations in order to listen with understanding" (Booth, *Modern Dogma* xvi).[4]

The rhetorical benefits of this attitude of assent can once again be observed in McPhee's treatment of environmental issues. Because he can place himself in the position of either camp in the battle over our environment, he seems always to be the insider, someone who does not let easy generalizations interfere with his understanding, and, as such, he reminds us not to judge others too quickly. He exercises and engenders good will, compelling us to recognize that environmentalists and their "natural enemies" are sometimes more closely connected than either party is willing to admit. One can see something of his

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[4] Howarth describes how this attitude determines McPhee's methods of interviewing: "When McPhee conducts an interview he tries to be as blank as his notebook pages, totally devoid of preconceptions, equipped only with the most elementary knowledge. He has found that imagining he knows a subject is a disadvantage, for that prejudice will limit his freedom to ask, to learn, to be surprised by unfolding evidence" (xii).

sympathetic imagination at work in *Encounter with the Archdruid* ; however, in that book, because his main subject is so militant in his approach, McPhee appears uncharacteristically detached, and even critical, so that the reader unfamiliar with McPhee's larger body of work may find him no more sympathetic than any journalist who gets close to his subjects. A more representative example of his approach to his subjects can be found in his essay "The Atlantic Generating Station." It is an account of a megaproject that many, and by no means only the Browers of the world, would consider an environmental nightmare: "a huge nuclear-power plant . . . floating on the sea" off the coast of the eastern United States (78). As fond as he is of nature, one might well expect that even McPhee would approach this subject with a great deal of suspicion. Yet he does not, and indeed, aware that many of his readers might quickly assume a defensive posture, he seems determined to prevent us from taking sides before we understand the project (and the degree to which impending energy shortages make such a project at the very least an option worth examining).

The key to McPhee's rhetorical effectiveness in this essay is his handling of the opening pages. By introducing us immediately to the project's chief engineer, McPhee fulfills two purposes. One is simply to ease our entry into some demanding technical discussions about the design and testing of nuclear power plants; the opening description of Richard Eckert engages us, arouses our curiousity, and ultimately makes the exposition in the essay's body seem very accessible. The other, more rhetorically significant purpose of McPhee's opening description is to persuade the armchair environmentalist in each of us to see that the enemy has a human face. "[L]ean . . . amiable, slightly bald," Eckert is a boyish, mildly eccentric man whose first grand vision of the floating power station came to him almost inadvertantly, as he mused early one morning, "wet, naked, and soapy in his shower" (78-79). Details of

this sort encourage us to see Eckert as the author himself does--as an unthreatening, concerned, and even somewhat endearing figure. To supplement their effect, McPhee teases us and undermines any inclination to stereotype by holding up a comic caricature of an environmental nemesis: Eckert, he says, does "not by appearance in any way suggest the fearsome, two dimensional, fictive American businessman with reinforcing rods in his jaws, emerging from some dark, polluted labyrinth to hand out the wages of fear" (79). The effect of all this is to obviate stock responses. Indeed, after McPhee's descriptions, we are inclined to reject depersonalizing attacks on Eckert. That is when the author tells us this:

> In an anonymous way, [Eckert] would soon be the Antichrist to several hundred thousand people along the barrier beaches of the state [of New Jersey]. Yet he was one of them. And he had not invented the electric toothpick or the electric scalpel or the aluminum beer can or central air-conditioning or the six-thousand watt sauna, or any of the other hardware, large or small, vital or vulgar, that had helped to make a necessity of something that had not existed--not in commercial form--a century before. All those people on the beach had, in a sense, given Eckert his job . . . . (80)

For readers, there would be something almost shameful, now, in dismissing Eckert's project--and thus McPhee's essay--out of hand. To do so would be to succumb to crude caricatures of complex individuals and simplistic, self-righteous divisions between right and wrong. Thus are we inclined to listen to the approaching account of "The Atlantic Generating Station." As was often the case with Berry, McPhee's larger purpose is to convince us of our complicity in environmental crimes, so that we seek solutions rather than point fingers. But the immediate rhetorical purpose of this passage also sets it apart from anything in Berry's work. Here, McPhee wants us not only to stop pointing but to listen to other views, to see that just as each of us has helped create environmental problems, each of us can offer solutions. I would even go so far as to say that he is temporarily acting as a kind of advocate for the "technocentrics"--the very faction that has traditionally been attacked by

environmentalists. However, one must not assume that this occasional defence of technology makes McPhee himself a technocentric. He simply believes that we must keep our minds open to the possible benefits of all proposals. If we make up our minds about this unique source of nuclear power before we have even understood what it is and how it might work, our judgment can hardly be considered reliable.

Nor is this opening portrait of Eckert the only means by which McPhee keeps us in the middle, where we might be more receptive to his complex and detailed expository account of how the generating station gradually takes shape. Once he has reminded us that the responsibility for environmental problems knows no ideological boundaries, he lets us know as well that all parties can benefit from a search for solutions:

> Where once someone might have sized up the wind drift and then sited the plant, it was now necessary for scientists of multiple and overlapping disciplines to describe the New Jersey coast and adjacent seas probably in more detail than had ever been contemplated by anyone. It was a bonanza for the scientific community. Research grants that had once been copious from the federal government had dwindled considerably, causing panics in universities, and now, thanks to the friends of the earth, money was flowing from the corporate world for everything from core-borings in the bed of the ocean to exhaustive studies of pelagic life. (84)

This connection between camps is made more explicit shortly afterwards: "As seen even from conflicting points of view, the floating nuclear plant could make a considerable contribution to the developing fate of mankind" (87). By the end of the eleventh page of this forty page essay, we have, I think, been divested of at least some of our assumptions about the evils of nuclear power, and we are more likely to follow the remaining pages, primarily exposition, with greater interest and respect. Reminders also appear from time to time to inform us that the floating nuclear power plant is not some Frankensteinian creation, the offspring of blind technocentric ambition. For example, the author refers to "gossip around the

nuclear-safety circuit," about how the fish near the generating station "were getting even more consideration than human beings" (97); a parasitologist informs McPhee that everyone on his staff "is wary of fission" (103); and an oceanographer (a "professional environmentalist--not a cocktail environmentalist, self-appointed") tells us that he and all of his colleagues had hostile reactions to the plant at first, but they changed their minds after they "got into it" (108). These reminders help keep us on an even keel throughout the essay.

IV

The rhetorical techniques used in "The Atlantic Generating Station" suggest to me that McPhee's "sympathetic imagination" extends not only to his subjects but to his readers. Though he tries to dissuade us from stereotyping or prejudging, he also seems willing to put himself in our place--and then to do all that he can to make his subjects as accessible to us as possible. On the most practical level, one result of this approach is simply that we can better understand the difficult technical subjects with which he often deals. But on another level, something quite different results: we develop a kind of openness towards the text. Through his skill in demonstrating an attitude of assent towards his subjects, McPhee elicits a similar attitude from us. And our assent embraces not just the people to whom McPhee introduces us, and not only the special interests of those people, but also the author himself.

Figurative language is another means by which McPhee both eases the process of reading about unfamiliar subjects and extends a welcoming hand to the reader. His metaphors certainly have an important expository function. When the behavior of the common loon, for example, is described with words such as "cruises," "maximum airspeed," "conning tower," "takeoff," and "runway," that behavior does become easier for a "metropolitan *New Yorker* audience" to visualize, as Roundy

claims (81). So, too, are various geological formations more easily seized by the mind's eye when McPhee describes them as "a rippled potato chip" (*Basin* 45), "a snowball splatted against glass" (*Basin* 68), "Hershey's Kisses on a tray" (*Basin* 187), or "pieces cut from a wheel of cheese" (*Terrain* 113). A related figurative device is the use of concrete images to give numerical quantities a human scale; by describing various amounts of uranium 235 as "the size of a football," "slightly smaller than a grapefruit," and "about the size of a stick of chewing gum"(*Binding Energy* 14-15), McPhee inconspicuously lightens the burden of reading about nuclear physics. As effective as such language is in conveying information, however, its expository function does not fully explain its unusual appeal in McPhee's nonfiction. After all, figurative language of this sort is surely part of the standard repertoire of any good expository writer. Something else is at work here. While I agree with Roundy's claim that McPhee's figures "construct a bridge between the world familiar to his reader and the rather more alien world of his subject" (81), I would also argue that what travels across this bridge is more than information. I have no ready label for what does reach us--respect, perhaps, or simply courtesy--nor do I wish to claim for it more than a subsidiary role in his use of figurative language. But whatever we call it, however subtle it may be, these figures provide yet another indication that McPhee is willing to meet his readers on their terms, to enter what I have referred repeatedly as "the circle of assumptions" in which an audience moves. Moreover, his use of terminology suggests an equal willingness to enter the circle of assumptions in which his expository guides move. Says Howarth, "A good part of his style rests on knowing the professional 'lingo' of a subject" (xviii).[5] All these

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[5] See also Roundy, 83: "McPhee characteristically immerses himself in the vernacular of his subject . . . ."

details of style seem to me to be surface signs that we are reading someone who cares about both his readers and his subjects. They sustain understanding, yes, and therefore help transmit technical information; but what is just as important is that they sustain a deeper sense of community. And in this way they give us good reason to listen to what McPhee has to say.

The structures of McPhee's nonfiction demonstrate more clearly the extent to which McPhee will go out of respect for his reader and his subject. Howarth's vivid account of it leaves little doubt that the process of composing is for McPhee a "tortuous" one, in part because he never resorts to a particular structure simply because it may be the easiest or the most practicable. He considers a wide range of strategies in an attempt to find those that will best suit his audience and his subject matter:

> . . . writers have infinite options for order, and McPhee delights in playing any that do not violate his story's 'logic' . . . . He has a certain preference for mechanic form, since it arises from human logic, but he trusts the organic principle enough not to condone formal manipulation for its own sake. Too much shuffling of [the note cards from which he composes] leads to fussy and baroque patterns, reflecting the self-indulgent mind of their maker. Yet he is also wary of simple organicism, where subject matter dictates a work's form . . . .
>
> McPhee wants to create a form that is logical yet so unobstrusive that judgments of its contents will seem to arise only in the reader's mind. (Howarth xvi-xvii)

McPhee's criteria for determining whether a form is adequate are not just "the facts" (though, as Howarth points out, McPhee "never trims evidence to fit a narrative pattern"), but values as well--the unquantifiable, sometimes only tacitly sensed needs of a subject or an audience. This, I believe, is one reason why we learn so easily from his exposition, and why this learning is such a pleasure; though the inherent complexities of subjects such as nuclear physics or plate techtonics force most of us to extend ourselves, when reading McPhee's accounts of such subjects we

are at least extended every possible courtesy from our expositor. He does not have the attitude, "widespread in certain rationalistic and scientific circles, that facts speak for themselves"--that to "mention certain facts, or enunciate a certain number of truths [should be] enough of itself to automatically arouse the interest of . . . readers" (Perelman, *New Rhetoric* 17). Nor does he have the attitude--widespread in certain artistic circles--that readers should endure any obstacle to comprehend the work of an acclaimed writer. As much as we must come to him and his subject, McPhee comes to us. This is why, as Howarth says, "Structural order is not just a means of self-discipline for McPhee the writer; it is the main ingredient in his work that attracts his reader" (xv).[6]

Consider, for example, *The Curve of Binding Energy*, McPhee's study of the nuclear threat--or more specifically, of the security weaknesses in the American nuclear weapons industry and the degree to which these weaknesses increase the threat of nuclear terrorism. Like most of his longer works, the book has no chapters as such, but is divided into untitled, unnumbered sections--in this case, twenty-three of them, the longest of which is twenty pages long, and the shortest slightly more than one page. This physical division of the contents in itself makes the task of reading about nuclear physics in *The Curve of Binding Energy* a considerably less daunting prospect than it was in *The Fate of the Earth.* (In this regard, I might recall one reviewer's hostile description of Schell's book as "three gigantic chapters with no subheadings" [Brink 395]). But what is more important for the reader than the

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[6] For a different point of view, see Spencer Brown's "A Prose Miscellany." A consistent and usually a very enthusiastic reviewer of McPhee's work, Brown criticizes the author's handling of structure, especially in *Basin and Range* : "He is somewhat confusing on first reading: the speed of description makes it hard to absorb and retain the information" (264).

physical division of contents is the pattern of exposition that emerges from this division. After an opening that raises the central issues of the book and introduces us to McPhee's expository guide, the nuclear physicist Theodore B. Taylor, the following ten sections alternate the subject matter from one section to the next, offering brief narratives about Taylor in the even-numbered sections, then explaining various technical matters in each of the odd-numbered ones. The immediate effect of this pattern of alternating narration and exposition is, I find, to ease the burden of reading about very complex subjects. Caught up by the narratives, with their highly accessible, chronological movement and their engaging anecdotes about the pranks and pitfalls of Taylor's childhood, I find that my attentiveness gains a kind of momentum which carries me through the demanding, almost purely expository sections about nuclear physics and the nuclear weapons industry. At the same time that it engages me (and perhaps somewhat paradoxically), the easy flow of the narratives provides me with the sort of restful break that was lacking in Schell's accounts of nuclear arms. I can therefore sustain my interest longer in the book as a whole. The pattern of alternating discourse is discontinued in the second half of *The Curve of Binding Energy,* where the line between narration and exposition begins to blur, but by that time I have already digested a substantial body of information--enough, in fact, to see me through the book's remaining discussions of technology.[7]

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[7] In "Crafting Fact: Formal Devices in the Prose of John McPhee," Jack Roundy recounts an interview with McPhee, in which the author described the structure of "A Roomful of Hovings" as a "V": "Biographical vignettes hung from one 'clothesline,' while art sleuthing vignettes hung from the other. At the conclusion of the profile, the two clotheslines came together, as did the two tracks of the Hoving profile." Roundy then goes on to say that "the pattern for *The Curve of Binding Energy* was another 'V'" (74). I would qualify this description

The purpose of *The Curve of Binding Energy,* however, is not only to inform but also to warn. What McPhee says of his expository guide might also apply to McPhee himself: he "earnestly wishes to demonstrate to the public that the problem [of possible nuclear theft] is immediate" (7). Accordingly, even while lightening the burden of reading about nuclear technology, McPhee does not soften the threat that such technology entails. It is true that the brief narratives about Taylor's life make it easier for us to comprehend the products and processes of the nuclear arms industry, and in this sense they make McPhee's entire discussion accessible--and thus at least potentially persuasive--to a degree that *The Fate of the Earth* is not. But as much as these narratives enable us to comprehend the science and technology discussed in the book, they also influence *the way in which we comprehend* this science and technology. One might say that *The Curve of Binding Energy* demystifies as it delineates, and in doing so it makes the nuclear threat more "real" than it ever seemed in Schell's book. McPhee's study of the nuclear threat also reaffirms a point that I made earlier, and that will be made again at the end of this chapter: when McPhee "adjusts ideas to people and people to ideas," he is careful not to distort or to ignore inconvenient considerations about either one.

The groundwork for various thematic connections between the personal and the scientific sections in *The Curve of Binding Energy* is laid in the book's opening. Neither narration nor exposition (at least not in the sense that the subsequent technical sections are), this opening is comprised mainly of a loose assemblage of dialogue from "contemporary chemists, physicists, and engineers" working in the

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only by adding the observation that the "two clotheslines" of *The Curve* come together long before the conclusion.

field of nuclear science. It seems to me that no reader can overlook the element of hubris, not to mention the almost frightening detachment, in the comments that these "professionals in the nuclear world" make about the threat of nuclear terrorism; their talk of the protective "power of dirt" and the "calculated risk" of lenient safeguards in the nuclear weapons industry is simply too glib. As one voice says, "*x* number could die with *y* frequency in nuclear blasts and society would absorb it" (6-7). On the other hand, the "general attitude" expressed by these unnamed professionals--"that there is little to worry about" (7)--is not shared by the person whom McPhee introduces in the penultimate paragraph of the opening. This, of course, is Ted Taylor. He has "a sense of urgency" about the threat of nuclear terrorism; indeed, he worries about it "full time." And because he opposes the impersonal, seemingly inhuman, "scientistic" voices we have just heard, Taylor (the first person named in the book) is someone with whom we feel an almost immediate urge to identify. In arousing this identification, *The Curve of Binding Energy* resembles "The Atlantic Generating Station"; here, too, we come to like our expository guide and hence listen to what he has to say. However, there are also significant differences between these pieces, as the narrative section that follows soon indicates. The details about Taylor's childhood given in this first of McPhee's biographical narratives may reinforce our identification with McPhee's expository guide, but they are also vaguely unsettling. We are shown, for example, that the work of the nuclear scientist is rooted in the play of a little boy:

> When he was ten, he was given a chemistry set for Christmas, and he steadily built it up, year after year . . . . He enjoyed putting potassium chlorate and sulphur under Mexico City streetcars. There was a flash, and a terrific bang. . . . He made a yellow-and-red powder that was a combination of picric acid and red lead . . . . He would set a little pile of it on a piece of one-sixteenth-inch steel plate and heat the plate from below. Flash. Bang . . . . He added ammonia to a concentrated solution of iodine crystals in alcohol. The resulting precipitate, filtered out, was a wet, blackish blob of nitrogen iodide . . . . with a feather . . . . Ted would reach gingerly toward a mound of nitrogen

> iodide. Flash. Bang. A purplish-brown cloud. A miniature mushroom. (12-14)

We learn that the boy's sense of mischief finds vent in the pranks of the teenager:

> He lightened [the grind of Cal Tech] somewhat by making nitrogen iodide, the stuff he used to tickle in Mexico; and he would put it wet into the keyholes of the doors of friends who were off on weekends . . . . A friend would return to Cal Tech and put his key in his lock. Flash. Bang. (31)

And we see as well that this child-like playfulness lives on in the young man, making it all too easy to neglect the deadly import of what he does:

> Los Alamos people were always taken aback when they first went to a test site and saw a bomb explode. The light came first, and then the waves and waves of heat. Many seconds later came the sound, which varied from a dull thud to a sharp crack . . . . Fifteen seconds after Scorpion flashed, Ted reached down to the parabolic mirror beside him and took from behind it a smoldering Pall Mall. He drew in a long, pleasing draught of smoke. He had lit a cigarette with an atomic bomb. (94-95)

By linking the atomic bomb to Taylor's experiments with primitive explosives, details like these help to make the bomb as technological achievement more "thinkable" for readers; it is as though McPhee had foreshortened history, juxtaposing a puff of smoke from the world's first gunshot with the deadly mushroom cloud. What's more, by creating a macabre association between adolescent pleasure and apocalyptic power, these details also undermine the claims made by the voices in the opening pages, and thereby make the threat posed by this achievement frighteningly unpredictable, something governed as much by irrational as it is by rational forces. If such destructive weapons can be created by the play of a young boy become a man, how are we to interpret all that impartial professional talk of the "calculated risks" of nuclear terrorism? And the young Taylor, though exceptionally good at designing bombs, was, it seems, no exception in disregarding the moral question they raise; as one unnamed physicist in *The Curve of Binding*

Energy says, "Like many of us, [Taylor] was at first fascinated with the technical problems, and only later it caught up with him. I went through the same experience. What catches up with you is that you find out the people who are in charge of these things aren't as wise as they should be" (187-88).[8]

Still more unnerving to discover is that man can become a builder of bombs inadvertantly. The theme of chance is one McPhee plays upon constantly in *The Curve of Binding Energy.* Taylor's lonely childhood, his "incredibly tolerant" mother, his academic setbacks at Berkeley--unless we assume that the author's references to biographical details like these are entirely gratuitous, they cannot help but influence our reading of Taylor and, less directly, our response to his case against the nuclear weapons industry. The implicit point, I think, is this: it is these circumstances, at least as much as any foresight or careful planning, that have resulted in Taylor's becoming "a conceptual designer of nuclear bombs"(8). Indeed, after learning of Hiroshima, Taylor swore to his mother that "he would under no circumstances ever work on a nuclear explosive" (34), and when he found himself, four years later, doing just that, he was "a little taken aback" (60). Still, as his wife Caro was to say, Taylor also "found a way to see that it was a good thing" (85). The entire nuclear weapons industry--which readers might assume to be a vast and highly organized academic-scientific-government endeavor, the province of specialists and of experts--is similarly governed by chance and is just as likely to

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[8] The youthfulness of those associated with nuclear weapons is a topic mentioned several times in *The Curve of Binding Energy.* See, especially, 118-119, where Taylor recounts a story about a fourteen-year-old boy who attempted to blackmail a city in Florida. Not only did the boy threaten to use a hydrogen bomb on the city; he sent along a diagram of the bomb--which, according to experts, was entirely "creditable."

indulge in rationalizations. It is McPhee's unobstrusive use of facts and quotations, rather than any explicit authorial commentary, that encourages us to see the connection between Taylor's past and the life of the nuclear weapons industry. Sixty kilograms of Uranium 235 disappear, the author tells us, yet no one knows how ("the Chinese must have stolen [it]. Where? No one could guess. [19]). And so common are such disappearances that the industry has a term for the nuclear material that "inevitably gets lost"--"Materials Unaccounted For" (64). Says one authority, Charles Thornton, "The aggregate MUF from . . . three diffusion plants alone is expressible in tons" (70). Since the industry does not like to acknowledge that it "is not controllable," Thornton is, "by his own description, 'fired'" for such comments. Still, his employers, the Atomic Energy Commission, find a way to see that such a firing is a good thing: "He was not actually fired. He was lateralled off the field" (71).

"Life," David Hume once said, "is governed more by chance than by reason." In *The Curve of Binding Energy,* in which McPhee's narratives about Taylor's life serve as a kind of cautionary tale, this might well be the central message. The message is never delivered directly. All the explicit persuasion comes from Taylor; he is the one who argues that it would be all too easy "to steal nuclear material and, step by step, make it into a bomb" (7), and to support his claims, he even shows McPhee how to do this. But this is not the only kind of persuasion that goes on in the book. For his part, McPhee supports Taylor by implying that the physicist's own life is an example of how difficult it is--even for nuclear scientists--to control or even predict complex events. Taylor himself may not be fully aware of the connection, and were it not for McPhee's deft control of structure and theme, we, too, might easily overlook it. But after we have, in our desire to comprehend its complex subject, willingly yielded to the book's structure of alternating discourses, we can

scarcely avoid yielding as well to other suasory matters associated with that structure. We are therefore inclined to assent to Taylor's claim that the production and protection of nuclear weapons are cause for worry, and that "the problem is immediate" (7). And ultimately, I believe, we are also inclined to assent to the larger point that McPhee's nonfiction implies time and time again: that scientific argument and personal opinion, reason and rationalization, the impersonal and the personal, are not quite so separable as we sometimes assume. Fact can never be split from value.

V

The characters in McPhee's nonfiction provide us with yet another "good reason" for assenting to his moderate position on environmentalism. Whereas his inclusion of various viewpoints functions dialogically, the characters themselves function epideictically--that is, they encourage us to position ourselves as they do by eliciting admiration for their attitudes and actions. McPhee's work is not predominantly epideictic; in fact, as a mode of exposition incorporating elements of modern fiction, it can be identified far more closely with a contemporary genre like New Journalism than with any of the three traditional genres of rhetoric.[9] Nonetheless, in several respects it is strongly epideictic--most obviously, in the proportion of attention it allots to praise (criticism of subjects like Brower is exceptional), but also in its lack of explicit argumentation, or indeed of a thesis, as

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[9] Compare Howarth, whose comments seem more indicative of personal distaste for the claims and the personalities of the New Journalists themselves than of a dispassionate assessment of New Journalistic techniques: "He is not one the so-called New Journalists, those celebrities who parade their neuroses or stump for public causes" (vii).

well as in its concentration on "apparently uncontroversial" topics (Perelman, *New Rhetoric* 48). (*Encounters* is again a rarity in this respect; McPhee more often addresses environmental issues obliquely, in the midst of dealing with such uncontentious topics as oranges, or canoes, or geological theories.) The first of these epideictic traits is particularly persuasive. McPhee's praise of not-so-famous people, positioned much as the author himself is on environmental issues, earns from us a degree of assent "by increasing adherence to the values it lauds" (50). Or as Aristotle has more plainly said of epideictic's main suasive function, "To praise a man is in one respect akin to urging a course of action" (1357).

Usually, those whom McPhee praises are people of relatively modest accomplishments. A few, such as Bill Bradley and Arthur Ashe, have attained a degree of fame through their achievements, but even these are unassuming figures. Though he is "what college students nowadays call a superstar" (*Sense*, 12), basketball player Bill Bradley nonetheless "dislikes flamboyance, and . . . has apparently never made a move merely to attract attention" (20). When one of McPhee's subjects sees himself as larger than life, he usually does so at some cost--he may sacrifice his connection with the human community, for instance ("Brower is somewhat inconvenienced by the fact that he is a human being, fated, like everyone else, to use the resources of the earth, to help pollute its air, to jam its population" [86]), or he may be diminished somehow as a person, becoming, as William Howarth has said of tennis player Clark Graebner, "wholly predictable, doomed to lose because he is not flexible in a changing situation" (xxi). What is important to McPhee is engagement with life, and it is this quality, along with a degree of humility, that McPhee's more endearing characters share. They are fully (though never blindly) committed to what they believe in, attentive to the details of their work, seemingly

indefatigable. And their humility leads them to respect not only the complexities of their chosen pursuits, but other people who feel a similar commitment.

Tom Cabot, one of the author's companions on a canoeing trip in Maine, provides us with a good example of how these traits operate in conjunction with positions on environmentalism that are much like McPhee's own. A man of considerable academic, personal, and professional experience--"Qualified to be at least a dozen kinds of snob" (*Good Weight* 164)--Cabot will nonetheless "walk and talk with anybody" (163), and in "The Keel of Lake Dickey," McPhee quickly and consistently makes us like him. As is often the case, we are first warmed by McPhee's physical description: "trim and athletic," toting a rucksack that "must be fifty years old," Cabot is "statistically . . . old and decrepit" but "looks sixty and acts forty" (162). Later, it is Cabot's kindness and sense of humour that win us over. After two paddlers are rescued by McPhee's party of four, one of them, apparently unaware that he was (as we learn from McPhee) clinging to the wrong side of his capsized canoe and that "the river could have kept him," responds to his rescue with "fury, frustration, disappointment--like an athlete who has had his big chance and blown it" (172). Cabot, "more seasoned by far" (142) than even his own experienced companions, might easily take offense at this ungrateful reaction from a somewhat foolhardy novice, but instead he displays a marvellous sensitivity to the needs of others, and camaraderie prevails:

> The other paddler is short and thin, and is shaking deeply from cold. He minimizes it, tries to be nonchalant, but does not seem disappointed to be standing on the bank. His T-shirt is dark grey, and above the left breast are small black letters-- "YALE."
>
> Tom Cabot questions him about the shirt, asking if it means that he's a student there.
>
> "Yes. I'm there now."
>
> "And how far along are you?"
>
> "I'm '78."

> Over Tom's face comes a small-world smile, and he says, "How about that! I'm seventy-eight, too." (172-73)

This good man, learned, experienced, and sympathetic, also has his opinions on environmental issues; and though McPhee does not play them up, they clearly carry weight in the context of the essay, in which the struggle between preservation and development provides a significant theme. It is no coincidence that these opinions are close to the author's own: "He knows both sides of the wilderness argument, and he is not *always* with nature in its debate with man" (169; emphasis mine). Though his principal concern may be to portray Cabot accurately, McPhee also benefits rhetorically from his companion's status as exemplary character.

Many of the most sympathetic subjects in McPhee's nonfiction perform a similar epideictic function. Primarily, they are McPhee's expository tour guides as he informs us about the complexities of plate tectonics, or the arcana of foraging, or the Sisyphean frustrations of controlling the Atchafalaya River, but they are also moral guides of a sort, implicitly appealing to us to take an involved yet balanced approach to matters environmental. Among other things, this balance involves the kind of knowledge that can be derived only from a "hands-on" familiarity with nature, as well as the ability to see both sides of the environmental debate. As the geologist David Love says, "Reality is not something you capture on a blackboard" (*Plains* 147). This is why Love--"a frequent public lecturer who turns over every honorarium he receives to organizations like the Teton Science School and *High Country News*, whose charter is to understand the environment in order to defend it" (180)--stays close to the land ("To compete with Dave, you'd have to do a lot of walking") (144), and why he is "not always predictable" in his stance on debates between environmentalists and scientists or commercial interests: "It isn't all or nothing," he says, "It doesn't have to be" (202). This is why Ed Gelvin--"admirably

unassuming" (284) and "self-reliant beyond the usual reach of the term" (410), a man who remains in Alaska because "a sense of place registered higher with [him] than a sense of accumulating wealth" (281)--is puzzled by an article on Alaskan wolves published by the Friends of the Earth: "I couldn't believe the misconceptions. Some of the things it said were outright lies . . . . People like the Friends of the Earth and the Sierra Club have the idea that we want to kill *all* the wolves up here. We like wolves. They're a part of everything else" (296). Love and Gelvin, as well as others whom McPhee clearly likes and encourages us to like, such as Anita Harris (*In Suspect Terrain*), Carol ("Travels in Georgia"), Fred Brown (*The Pine Barrens*), and Charles Park, are not "cocktail environmentalist[s], self-appointed" (*Good Weight*, 108). From first-hand experience, they know nature well, can distinguish among and name its progeny. This is an important skill to McPhee, and in the context of his nonfiction, where definition guides us so skilfully through complicated processes, it necessarily becomes important to us.[10] The ability to name is a sign not only of the extent of one's knowledge but of the kind of knowledge one has; without it, one is like the PhD's of whom Anita Harris complains (*Terrain* 122), or like the anthropologist in "Firewood," who is "the president of Pure Planet, a conservation organization so much above the fruited plain that it did no conservation work of its own but existed solely to encourage other conservation organizations" (*Pieces* 210),

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[10] On several occasions, McPhee indicates his admiration for someone who has the ability to name things. Fred Brown, for instance, has "a name for almost every rise and dip in the land" (*Pine Barrens* 21). On the other hand, Dave Brower collects rocks, "for their beauty alone": "In most cases, he did not know what these rocks were, nor did he appear to care" (EA 54-55). The implication here--that "knowing" means being able to name--is perhaps an inevitable one for a writer whose main task is exposition.

and who can recognize neither a chain-saw nor a pick-up truck and is in "no hurry to find out" (198) about either. In McPhee's scheme of things, participation and engagement shape knowledge, and, without them, one's interpretation of problems will be severely skewed.

I want to make it clear that the epideictic functioning of McPhee's nonfiction subjects does not replace or diminish a concern for journalistic accuracy. As Howarth has argued, McPhee "replicates [his subjects] for our judgment as fully as he can" (xxii). Even David Brower has stated, in his recent autobiography, that McPhee's account of him is essentially accurate. If the characters who people McPhee's books move us in the direction of his own attitudes, it is not because the author has dressed each of them up as he wishes and strategically deployed them, like so many toy soldiers, just where his nonfiction requires; rather, it is because McPhee seems genuinely to like most of them, and this attitude enables him to bring out their most endearing qualities--the qualities most likely to reduce faction and to lead, for example, to cooperative reform in our treatment of the environment.[11]

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[11] When asked by Peter Gzowski if he worries about the feelings of his subjects, McPhee responded: "All the time. The first thing I want to do is sketch people as well as I can in their milieu, and the last thing I want to do is be unfair to them or hurt them" (*McPhee Interview*). I'm reminded here as well of what Berry says about his guide, Steve, in "An Agricultural Journey in Peru": Steve "has made himself a friend to the farmers whose fields he studied. He likes and respects them, which carries him far beyond the role of 'objective observer,' and appropriately complicates his insights and tasks. This makes him, so far as I am concerned, many times more trustworthy than any 'detached' scholar" (GGL 41).

VI

With all this talk of assent and the middle ground, of good men and of a "sympathetic imagination," the reader might be inclined to wonder whether the rhetoric described in this chapter is rather too good to be true. Can the world really be a place with so much potential for cooperation and community, or is McPhee altogether too optimistic, perhaps even ingenuous? Herman Melville once said of another "popular and amiable" New Englander, Ralph Waldo Emerson, that he owed his reputation to "the studied avoidance of all topics but smooth ones" (Melville 545). One cannot fairly charge McPhee with the "studied avoidance" of all difficult topics; as I mentioned early in this chapter, the pursuit of his two chief interests, nature and people, almost inevitably compels him to face "the whole spectrum of tensions that have accompanied the rise of the environmental movement" (*Plains* 180). Nonetheless, in reading his nonfiction, one may feel something akin to Melville's impression of Emerson. Does the amiable McPhee sometimes smooth over irreconciliable differences? In appealing to our sense of cooperation and community, does his nonfiction serve mainly to uphold the status quo? These seem to me valid questions. Indeed, the criticisms they imply may be an inevitable repercussion of McPhee's rhetorical approach. As Perelman has observed, "There is an optimistic, a lenient tendency in epideictic discourse"; it is "practised by those who, in a society, defend the traditional and accepted values, those which are the object of education, not the new and revolutionary values which stir up controversy and polemics" (51).

The problem with defences of "traditional and accepted values," of course, is that we live in a world where there are unquestionably real injustices, and in a rhetorical climate that cautions us to "look for the secret motive" in everything anyone does (Booth, *Modern Dogma* 25). Defences of anything traditional are too easily seen as

defences of *everything* traditional, and the defenders of traditions, as smug, or naive, or perhaps even malicious people, interested in preserving their own level of comfort but blind or indifferent to the consequences that doing so may have for others. No reader will perceive McPhee as malicious; I find it difficult to imagine how anyone could consider him smug. But it is all too likely that when he treats issues as volatile as the environment, some will seen his outlook as naive. There are, after all, a growing number of people who believe that reasonable discussion no longer has a role to play in solving our environmental problems; they publish journals advocating sabotage, or what they call "ecodefence" (McKibben 179). How would these people view McPhee? Would they see him as a comfortable WASP male? Would they pass him off as a harmless nature-lover, wandering through the jungle of environmental politics with only a butterfly net in hand? When one has few enemies, and treats even the most aggressive opposition with courtesy and good humour; when one chooses not to insist and assert, and rarely states an opinion explicitly, but instead advocates obliquely, by his personal conduct and his praise of exemplary individuals--when one conducts himself in these ways, he risks being seen as a person of weak opinions, or of no opinions at all. And for some, he seems to be the pawn of those who like things just the way they are. As Burke puts it in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, "one can protect an interest merely by using terms not incisive enough to criticize it properly" (36).

I cannot bring myself to dismiss *entirely* the possibility that McPhee's rhetoric of cooperation and community is a rhetoric that favors the status quo. I feel just a little uneasiness, for example, about the account he gives of the U.S. Commissioner of Reclamation in *Encounters with the Archdruid*. When McPhee turns an ear to the strident protests of David Brower, does he let Floyd E. Dominy and the U.S. government variety of environmentalism slip by him? At a time when nature may

already be overused, is Dominy's belief that we should "[put] water to work for man" (*Encounters* 172) granted too much assent? It may be that in his concern for the quality of dialogue and of human relationships, McPhee does not worry quite enough about the quality of nature and of the relationship we have with it. Fisher's point about "transcendent values" is apropos. A rhetoric of good reasons must, he claims, always be linked to a "transcendent value," a value that constitutes "the ideal basis for human conduct" ("Logic" 380). But if the environmental crisis is as serious as many environmentalists say it is, can McPhee's appeal to cooperation and community be considered, at the present time, the ideal basis for human conduct? Or are we more likely to endure by valuing, as Berry does, "the life and health of this planet" above all else?

I will attempt to deal with these questions in my final, concluding chapter. But this much, at least, can be said now: no rhetoric of good reasons can be all things to all people. There will inevitably be differences of opinion about what the ideal basis for human conduct is, not just from culture to culture, but within a culture, and within a community. That is why this thesis has been called "rhetorics of assent" rather than *the* rhetoric of assent.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The lure of monism, Perelman has argued, is its promise of escape from conflict and uncertainty. All monist ideologies are alike in this sense. Whether claiming that "there is but one true God" or that "there is but one method to follow to reach the truth" (*Humanities* 62-63), they offer "a systematized and rationalized conception of the universe, thus securing a single and true solution to all conflicts and differences of opinion" (63). But such a solution does not come free of cost. The society that follows the siren call of monism pays a high price:

> The drawback to monist ideologies is that they promote a reductionism which is sometimes barely tolerable. When they do not succeed in persuading everybody of the truth of their point of view, they may justify coercion and the use of force against the recalcitrants in the name of God, or reason, or truth, or the State's or party's interest. Those who resist have to be reeducated, and if they do not allow themselves to be persuaded, they must be punished for their obstinacy and reluctance. (63)

The rhetoric of assent and the good reasons movement come into focus more clearly against this backdrop of reductive, coercive monist ideologies. Not only do good reasons theorists believe that value-judgments are inevitable; they also argue "that consensus about [values] will never be realized" and "that no analytically grounded hierarchy of values will ever claim universal adherence" (Fisher, "Logic" 376). Consequently, as an alternative to a society controlled by one person's or group's idea of what is right, the good reasons theorists advocate a society based "on respect for individuals and for the many groups which sometimes cooperate with each other and sometimes oppose one another" (Perelman, *Humanities* 67). In short, they advocate pluralism.

Moreover, they advocate a particular kind of pluralism. Theirs is not the sort of pluralism defined solely by legal parameters and maintained by the state--which is to say, not the sort that can be fulfilled simply by allowing all citizens to exercise various rights and freedoms and by penalizing the "most dangerous excesses" (Perelman, *Humanities* 67). Such a pluralism, it is true, already helps us to reduce coercion of various kinds; however, as valuable as its benefits are, pluralism by law represents little more than a standard of minimal acceptability for conduct. It says nothing about whether a society is healthy or how it can be improved. Indeed, if the quality of our conduct towards one another were to be determined only by the laws maintaining this kind of pluralism, the best we could look forward to would likely be what we have right now. And what we have now, say Booth and others in the good reasons movement, is distrust and divisiveness--a "befouled rhetorical climate" (*Modern Dogma* 99), a state of "chaotic warfare" and "shouted invective" (Booth, *Critical Understanding* 4-5), in which too many of us are concerned only with asserting our point of view and attacking other viewpoints, in which we are so busy exercising our rights to say and do as we like that we overlook the possible advantages to be gained from listening closely to others who say and do differently.

For their part, the good reasons theorists aim at something more constructive. To complement the pluralism enforced by the state, which provides a check against excessive control by some individuals or groups, these theorists advocate what Perelman calls a "philosophical pluralism" (*Humanities* 71), based on the belief that coercion of any kind is not only legally wrong but ethically wrong and even practically counterproductive, in the sense that the diminishing of others ultimately amounts to a diminishing of oneself. Tolerating a "multiplicity of ways of knowing" (Booth 99) is necessary but not sufficient for our social well-being in a pluralist state. We must actually foster diversity and encourage "mutual inquiry" (137) by revising the ways in which we speak with one another. We must, say those in the good

reasons movement, discover new rhetorics, based on an attitude of respect for various audiences, an attitude of assent towards various ways of knowing, and a broad, humanistic definition of what is reasonable.

I have assumed throughout this thesis that this attitude of respect, as well as what might be called a judicious flexibility in one's ways of arguing and choices of evidence, is indispensable to any rhetoric deserving of the name "rhetoric of assent" or "rhetoric of good reasons." I still believe that assumption to be correct. Respect (thought of as a kind of willingness to assent, a willingness to "'to take in' and even 'to be taken in'" [*Modern Dogma* xvi]) is by itself certainly not enough, as the example of Jonathan Schell indicates. Much as I sympathize with Schell's cause, much as I admire his unwillingness to enter into polemical attacks against proponents of nuclear arms or to berate his audience for their inactivity--indeed, much as I see his non-polemical stance as an appropriate means of advancing the peace he ultimately seeks--I also find his arguments for nuclear disarmament unpersuasive, largely because they seem based on too rigid and impersonal a notion of what constitutes good evidence. Having acknowledged that demonstrative proof of the need for total disarmament is unattainable, Schell then fails to find the kinds of alternative "proofs" that might move his audience. Still, I cannot completely discount Schell's rhetoric, for, as Booth says, "all the art" of assessing good reasons "lies in assessing degrees of reliability" (*Modern Dogma* 157). Much worse, in the view of good reasons theory, would be a rhetoric that relied on polemic and "shouted invective." To persuade audiences by continually abusing those who see matters differently--in effect, to divide in order to conquer--is to sacrifice the well-being of the larger rhetorical community for the sake of a particular cause. Respect for other rhetors and other ways of seeing may not be sufficient, but it is necessary to any rhetoric that would foster the kind of pluralism advocated by good reasons theorists.

If I remain convinced that Schell's rhetoric is weaker than that of either of my other primary subjects, I have, during the course of this thesis, become somewhat more ambivalent in my responses to Berry and McPhee. In the early stages of this study, I was moving towards a comparative judgment of these two that I now consider too simplistic. My tacit assumption was that *any* manifestation of disrespect or *any* polemic necessarily weakens, and often seriously weakens, a rhetoric that in other ways gives good reasons. I assumed, in other words, not only that good reasons are offered by good people (in the same sense in which Cicero says good orators are invariably good men), but also that, in offering their reasons, these good people always conduct themselves respectfully and even generously, mindful both of how every viewpoint has its merit and of how attacks on differing viewpoints may undermine a community's potential for "mutual inquiry." This rose-coloured view of the good reasons rhetor was implicit in my arrangement of all three chapters of rhetorical analysis. Nowhere did I explicitly argue that McPhee exemplifies good reasons theory better than does Berry; nonetheless, my instincts told me that this was so, and, accordingly, I reserved my study of McPhee for the last in a process of analysis that took me from the rhetoric I considered least likely to gain reasonable assent to the one I thought most likely to do so.

McPhee, in effect, became my touchstone, partly because his rhetoric suggests a temperament strikingly like that of Booth. In fact, at times I have thought of their rhetorics as the two faces of a coin; although they operate in different modes--Booth analyzing with "conceptual" rhetoric, McPhee performing with "primary" rhetoric (the distinction is Kennedy's [*Classical Rhetoric* 3-7])--the essential value of both is that they improve "the chances for understanding" among people (Booth, *Critical Understanding* 341). Whether implicitly endorsing environmental stewardship or explicitly advocating greater fellowship and "mutual inquiry," they are both, by nature, "philosophical pluralists." Their reasons seem to me "good" in at least two

senses: they are well-supported and well-crafted, and therefore elicit reasonable assent from their immediate audiences; and they are advanced from a position of consistent respect for others, and therefore foster the kind of good will that might lead to further discussion among people with varying points of view.

With McPhee as my touchstone for Booth's theory, some doubts about whether Berry's was an equally effective rhetoric of assent were inevitable. The anger, the polemical tone, and the occasional invective in Berry's writing are unlike anything in McPhee (or Booth, or Schell), and hearing these, I have sometimes thought of him as a man defending ground against hostile forces, motivated less by his connection to community than by the dictates of principles and of what he perceives to be the truth. Temperamentally, Berry seems less hospitable to community than McPhee. It is true, I know, that Berry explicitly argues for community. "To choose principle over community" he says in that crucial passage from "Discipline and Hope," "is even worse, it seems to me, [than choosing community over principle,] for that is to accept as the condition of being "right" a solitude in which the right is ultimately meaningless" (*Harmony* 154). But if this is what he argues explicitly, he also argues it at times with a vehemence capable of undermining his message. Says Richard Weaver, "A man's method of argument is a truer index of his beliefs than his explicit profession of principles" (20). In the formative stages of the thesis, I judged the effect of Berry's rhetoric under the tacit guidance of some such axiom, and thus inevitably found it--at least in terms of the criteria set by good reasons theory--wanting in some respects.

I am less inclined now to compare Berry unfavorably with McPhee, for at least two reasons. For one thing, my investigations have made it clearer to me that Berry's rhetoric is simply too complex--the "dancing" of his evidence too fine, his demonstrations of assent towards his subjects too persuasive--to be substantially weakened by a few passages of polemic. I do not want to ignore what still seems to

me the least appealing aspect of this rhetoric. But I also believe that measuring Berry by an axiom such as Weaver's would result in the kind of "motivist" argument that Booth deplores; Berry *says* that he believes in the pluralistic society, such an argument would go, but since he sometimes argues his position so aggressively, he really *means* a pluralism exercised by people who see things pretty much as he does. Good reasons theorists take a more balanced, holistic approach to the assessment of a rhetoric than any motivist would. They argue that one's style and ways of arguing are indeed indices of one's beliefs, but not necessarily "truer" indices than one's "explicit profession of principles." In other words, a rhetoric that is not all sweetness and light can give us many good reasons--as Berry does in asking us to alter our attitude and conduct towards the earth.

All of which leads me to a second reason for reassessing Berry: having juxtaposed my analysis of his rhetoric with my analysis of McPhee's, I now see more clearly that the "middle ground" is not a rhetorical place occupied by those who manage, somehow, to find a perfect balance between community and principle. *That* middle ground--the ground precisely in the middle--may be uninhabitable. One can at best continually search for it, hoping neither to accommodate community to the point of sacrificing principle nor to hold fast to principle at the expense of community. No rhetoric can please everybody, since "consensus about values will never be realized." On the one hand, the rhetor who stands on principle inevitably offends, even when he tries to accommodate, at least a few members of his rhetorical community (those who would stand on other principles). So it is with Berry, as it would be with any environmentalist openly arguing that we had better mend our ways. One need not be an ecocentric extremist, pursuing radical environmental ends by militant means, to offend those who think that the pursuit of material happiness is an inalienable right; one need only stand firmly on the principle that "the life and health of the earth" oblige us to alter the way we live.

On the other hand, when a rhetor takes the path of fostering open dialogue among members of the community--as McPhee does in moving from viewpoint to viewpoint, assenting to various viewpoints, and, in general, avoiding offense--he inevitably forfeits some of the strength other rhetors derive from standing firmly on principle. Sounding other voices, McPhee's own can too easily be heard as ambivalent about environmental causes--and this in spite of the fact that the entire body of his nonfiction attests to his love of nature and his respect for those who treat it well.

Thus McPhee, like Berry, occupies an imperfect place *near* rather than at the middle. It is, as I have suggested, a place very much like the one Booth occupies, in its weaknesses as well as in its strengths. Booth's voice could, for example, very well be McPhee's when he describes his efforts in *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* : "I have . . . made understanding into a supreme goal, "running the risk of implying that it is better for two human minds to share erroneous views than for one to have the truth and the other to misunderstand him. Thus my pluralism is . . . close to . . . a . . . stance that serves not truth but human community" (341-42). "Running the risk of implying," but not arguing that; "close to," but not the same as: in these qualifications, too, Booth resembles McPhee. Hoping for greater social harmony and a better rhetorical climate, both McPhee and Booth support community so enthusiastically that they often *seem* to value community above all else. As I hope this thesis has shown, their valuing of community is not the same as a disregarding of truth and principle--not, that is, a matter of valuing *whatever* will help people get along better. Nevertheless, there is a very real "risk" that they will be read in this way.

Is this risk of over-valuing community any less serious than the risk of offending community? If the rhetorics of Berry and McPhee both offer us good reasons for altering our treatment of the environment, each can also be seen to be flawed in

some way, off to the right or to the left of a hypothetical, ideal "middle ground"--as indeed all rhetorics must be when seen from a position that advocates pluralism. If Berry *sometimes* harms his own cause with invective, alienating those who might otherwise stand with him, should this be considered a more serious flaw than McPhee's reluctance to declare his principles *explicitly* ? An answer to this question would require more than the kind of evaluative criteria outlined by Fisher; it would require that these criteria be ordered hierarchically, so that the evaluator of various rhetorics could determine, for example, whether the criterion of "consequence" was more important than that of "consistency" or "relevance," and if so, precisely when. And this fixed hierarchy, in turn, would clearly violate the emphasis that good reasons theorists place on the non-demonstrable qualities of any argument and on the capacity of human beings to make their most subtle judgments tacitly. I am not suggesting that "it's all relative," and I am not avoiding the question of evaluation; I have already made explicit my claims that the rhetorics of Berry and McPhee are more effective in achieving their goals than is Schell's rhetoric or the rhetorics of more radical environmentalists. I am suggesting only that the relative quality of two rhetorics of assent, especially two so similar in strength and purpose, cannot be weighed by formula. Better, from a pluralistic perspective, to avoid choosing between these two rhetors and to keep in mind the considerable strengths and the minor weaknesses of both. As Booth says, "the pluralist, unlike the monist, must live with no hope whatever of getting everything clear at last" (*Critical Understanding* 340).

What has become clearer during the course of this thesis is that certain kinds of appeals are appropriate to effective, reasonable environmentalist rhetorics in a pluralist society. For example, epideictic rhetoric (in the broad sense in which I defined it in Chapter Six) is potentially, at least, an effective means of appealing to contemporary audiences. "It is not possible," Perelman has said, "to conceive and to

make comprehensible, even in an imprecise way, what we desire to realize . . . without recourse to models . . . both for the individual and for society" (*Humanities* 134). I might add that such models are necessary not only to make comprehensible but also to make *persuasive* whatever it is that a rhetor desires to have us realize, especially when that rhetor speaks in a society comprised of diverse perspectives and opposing values. Without actual, particular examples of environmental stewardship, an audience inclined to be sceptical can all too easily dismiss environmentalist arguments as pie-in-the-sky idealism or "so much rhetoric." It is harder to ignore the living "proofs" of exemplary people. By praising those who actually do something about the environment rather than merely talk about it, Berry and McPhee provide clear, practicable models of environmental stewardship. It should be emphasized as well that the models provided by epideictic approaches to argumentation are effective not just because they are particular and factual but because they are positive. If we are to restore the health of the planet, environmentalists agree, we must not merely avoid certain kinds of conduct but actively engage in other kinds. The arguments offered by doomsayers do not give us specific, alternative ways of conducting ourselves; indeed, when they ask us to dwell on problems so large as to be scarcely comprehensible, many of us will give up environmentalism as a hopeless cause. "What can *I* do about the Greenhouse Effect, or the depletion of the ozone layer, or the razing of the rainforests?" we are inclined to say. On the other hand, by keeping our eyes on the here and now and on the humanly possible, on small acts of stewardship and cooperation rather than on the doomsday that awaits us if we do not collectively change our ways, the epideictic approaches of Berry and McPhee suggest *how* as well as why we must act. In short, their approaches are positive. Perelman links this element of the positive in epideictic to the personal and the specific. It is easier "to show the odiousness of hell than that of devils," says Perelman, and "easier to describe a saint than paradise"

(*Humanities* 134). Doomsday environmentalists, intent on shocking us into awareness of the hellish consequences of our misconduct, tend to be general and impersonal, to talk of universal pollution rather than specific polluters. Berry and McPhee, on the other hand, describe exemplary people, people who, without being dogmatic or militantly environmentalist, *act* on their concern for the planet; saints, these nonfiction subjects are not, but they do at least point out paths that might be taken.

I have also become convinced that ethical appeals are not only helpful but essential to the environmentalist's cause. Since contemporary audiences are, on the one hand, generally sceptical of "mere rhetoric" and, on the other, ill-equipped to deal with the plethora of available technical, scientific information about the environment, and since environmentalism, by its very nature, demands action and thus provokes the contemporary tendency to look beyond words, the environmentalist seems to me to be faced with a rhetorical situation requiring a certain kind of authorial presence. Schell's rhetoric lacks such presence; from my earliest readings of *The Fate of the Earth,* I was persuaded both that his ethos was weakened by his impersonal tone and that this undermining of his ethos significantly undermined the impact of even his best arguments. In McPhee's case, however, only after continued reading of the entire range of his nonfiction, as I became more and more familiar with his voice, did I fully realize the extent to which and the ways in which his ethos makes his implicit arguments for the environment persuasive. In general, as I have said, McPhee avoids talking about himself explicitly; when he does, on rare occasions, open up to the reader, his humour and modesty are endearing, but they are not the main reasons why he gains our sympathy. The real strength of this ethos derives instead from several other, interdependent factors: from the simple fact of his persistent concern for the environment, as indicated by his returning time and time again to environmental

topics; from his openness to and genuine fondness for his various subjects, however different their environmental viewpoints may be; from the ways in which his subjects react to him; and from his close association with good people, whose diligence, open-mindedness, and concern for the environment reflect favorably on the man who has chosen to pay them heed. In this last sense, we see yet another benefit of the epideictic approach; praising good people in the way he does, McPhee earns himself praise, though always obliquely. And when dealing with divisive topics and with audiences suspicious of rhetoric, this indirect approach is crucial to McPhee's success.

Though he is often far more direct than McPhee in arguing for the environment, Berry also depends upon a variety of implicit ethical appeals to persuade us that he "stands by words." For example, responsiveness to the environment--one of Berry's five "environmental imperatives"--is a state of mind and mode of conduct that many ecocentric environmentalists could explicitly advocate, but because Berry also demonstrates his willingness to learn from others and to adapt to the needs of his own farmland, this environmental imperative becomes unusually forceful in his rhetoric, as he persuades us of his own ability to respond sensitively to the world around him. Similarly, Berry's explicit arguments, often repeated, that the health of the planet depends upon our learning to "think little" resemble those of other ecocentric environmentalists, such as Schumacher; but what makes Berry's defence of this imperative unusually effective is that he also demonstrates--by his thoughtful attention to the merits of a simple farm tool such as the scythe, by his care with language, and even by his dependence on the essay--his own willingness and ability to learn "the discipline of details." Any environmentalist, it seems to me, could state a few sensible environmental imperatives. Berry's rhetoric is persuasive because, at a time when words alone are often greeted with scepticism, it shows us how the author's words are wedded to his deeds.

In short, various ethical appeals throughout their work persuade me that both Berry and McPhee act on their concern for the planet, and not only in the sense that they plead its case publicly. Whether they are arguing implicitly or explicitly, whether they are arguing for nature itself or for community, in the hope that cooperation will lead to more rapid, more effective environmental reform, I know from the evidence of their texts that their lives complement their words. This connection between words and deeds is one of the main reasons why I consider their rhetorics to be rhetorics of assent. The reasons they give us for altering our conduct towards each other and towards the earth become "good reasons" because McPhee and Berry seem to live by what they say.

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