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Richard A. Lanham, The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1993. [orig. 1988]

What I have called the "Q" question emerges every time technology changes in some basic way. In each case, we have to ask ourselves, "What are we trying to protect? The old technology itself or what it carries for us, does to us?" The answer usually returned when considering the movement from book to screen has been the first. The book itself is sacred. Let's protect it. The codex book creates the vital central self. The codex book defines human reason. Our cultural vitals are isomorphic with the codex book. Its very feel and heft and look and smell are talismanic. We must have an agency of the federal government to protect it.

As I have said several times already in this, well, in this book, I am hardly against books. I have spent my life reading them, writing them, buying them, and walling my house with them. But I don't think the codex book provides the real center we want to protect. And defining that center is now an exigent task, which I try to begin in this essay.

The reader might be amused by the genesis of this seemingly heterogeneous essay review. I had agreed to review one of the books I discuss, but kept putting off writing the review. Meanwhile, I was reading all kinds of other books, reading them for amusement and distraction in a time of personal troubles. I woke up one night, literally in the middle of the night, realizing that all these books I had been reading bore upon the root problem I was trying to address in my scholarly life—the "Q" question. I sat down before the computer at sunup and wrote the essay in a single day.

The "Q" Question

At the beginning of book 12 of the *Institutio oratoria* Quintilian confronts what is for him a crucial question. Is the perfect orator—whom he has, for the eleven long books preceding, sought to form—a good man as well as a good orator? Begging the essential question of the entire *Speculum principis* genre, and hence of Western education from that day to this, he replies, "Of course! Such a man is the very one I seek to describe, the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* that Cato has defined." And then, sliding back a little to the question he has just begged, he reflects that if oratory serves only to empower evil (*si vis illa dicendi malitiam instruxerit*) then what has he spent his life doing? And not only that, what has nature done to us, if she allows something like that? Turned language, man's best friend, into a potential enemy? To confront this question honestly would imperil his entire endeavor and so, with that genial resolution which illustrates his sweet nature throughout the *Institutio*, he assumes the answer he wants and then goes on to bolster it with inventively adapted Platonism.

The problem itself, which I shall call the "Q" question in honor of its most famous nonanswerer, has underwritten, and plagued, Western humanism from first to last. We have a paideia, a "discipline of discourse," to translate Isocrates' *hē tōn logōn paideia*, which, from his day to ours, we all like to teach and always, in one form or another, have taught. But no one has ever been able to prove that it does conduce to virtue more than to vice. In fact, as we know from our first department meeting, much evidence points the other way. So, like Quintilian, we first deny the problem resolutely, and then construct something that I shall call "the Weak Defense." The Weak Defense argues that there are two kinds of rhetoric, good and bad. The good kind is used in good causes, the bad kind in bad causes. Our kind is the good kind; the bad kind is used by our opponents. This was Plato's solution, and Isocrates', and it has been enthusiastically embraced by humanists ever since.

Weak Defense

This permanent postponement of the problem works well enough for us, but not for the locus of so much rhetorical theory and practice, the law courts: there the advocate cannot prejudge the case lest he threaten both justice and his own livelihood. This unavoidable confrontation explains, perhaps, why Isocrates thought the legal aspect of rhetoric so *infra dig*, and why so many commentators have thought Cicero's *De oratore*, which does confront the issue from time to time, so much more one-sided an argument than it is. It certainly explains why Quintilian, when he comes to address the advocate's dilemma in book 12, hides in another patch of up-market flummery. The law's answer to the "Q" question is generally taken to be "No!" And yet jurisprudence in the West from the Greeks onward has offered the opposite answer, a "Yes!" which I shall call "the Strong Defense," and which Samuel Johnson summarized with his usual absence of cant as, "Sir, you do not know it to be good or bad till the Judge determines it." The Strong Defense assumes that truth is determined by social dramas, some more formal than others but all man-made. Rhetoric in such a world is not ornamental but determinative, essentially creative. Truth once created in this way becomes referential, as in legal precedent. The court decides "what really happened" and we then measure against that. The Strong Defense implies a figure/ground shift between philosophy and rhetoric—in fact, as we shall see, a continued series of shifts. In its world, there is as much truth as we need, maybe more, but argument is open-ended, more like kiting checks than balancing books.

Strong Defense

Much as we want to evade it, however, the "Q" question is coming after us these days. It presses on us in the university, for the university is like the law courts: it cannot dodge the "Q" question. It must design a curriculum. And it is, more and more insistently, being asked to design one that situates and justifies the humanities. To do that, you must answer the Question, or at least self-consciously beg it. For clearly it applies not only to rhetoric, but to all teaching of the arts and letters, to everything we call the humanities. To design a humanities curriculum (or even, as we more often do, to decline to design one), you must know how you get from a theory of reading and writing to a curriculum, and that requires having a theory of reading and writing in the first place. Requires, that is, answering the "Q" question. So we humanists are being pressured from without. But we are also being pressured from within. For the implications of the "Q" question have been worked on, if not always out and not always with Johnson's absence of cant, by the postmodern critique that began in the arts when the Italian Futurists attacked the codex book and all that it represents at the beginning of the century.

Several recent books have reflected these pressures, external and internal. Coming from a number of fields which the university's disciplinary structure does its best to keep apart, they have re-posed the "Q" question in divergent ways. The answers given to it fall, with a nicety that can help clear the mind, into the two defenses sketched above. By reflecting on these books as a group, we can perhaps begin to look beyond the customary evasions to some more persuasive explanation of what the humanities are and do.

Perhaps the most celebrated answer to the "Q" question in modern times—we might, in fact, argue that this answer started "modern times"—was supplied by Peter Ramus. He begins his *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian* by attacking it head on:

> And so first of all let us put forward the definition in which Quintilian outlined for us his ideal orator. . . . "I teach," he says, "that the orator cannot be perfect unless he is a good man. Consequently I demand from him not only outstanding skill in speaking but all the virtuous qualities of character." . . .
>
> What then can be said against this definition of an orator? I assert indeed that such a definition of an orator seems to me to be useless and stupid. . . .
>
> For although I admit that rhetoric is a virtue, it is virtue of the mind and the intelligence, as in all the true liberal arts, whose followers can still be men of the utmost moral depravity.[1]

I am quoting Carole Newlands' recent translation, which appears with the Latin text of 1549 and an extended introduction by James J. Murphy (in which he tells us that Quintilian himself brings up the "Q" question twenty-three times!). For the debate about the humanities and the humanities curriculum in which we currently find ourselves, a more splendidly useful and well-timed volume can scarcely be imagined. To read it is to learn how the "humanities crisis" started, how the conception of language as value-free and ideally transparent underwrote the modern world.

Ramus separated the traditional five parts of rhetoric into two divisions, giving invention, argument, and arrangement to philosophy, and leaving "style and delivery [as] the only true parts of the art of rhetoric" (90). Ramus also separated thought from language: "There are two universal, general gifts bestowed by nature upon man, Reason and Speech; dialectic is the theory of the former, grammar and rhetoric of the latter" (86). Rhetoric and grammar thus become cosmetic arts, and speech—and of course writing—along with them. Reason breaks free of speech and takes on a Platonic self-standing freedom. Add to a free-standing reason the Ramist zeal, one might almost say obsession, for dividing the seamless web of learning into self-standing and self-sealing divisions, divisions that later became academic disciplines, and we can see anatomized the two crucial elements that separate the traditional rhetorical paideia from the modern curriculum. Ramus, or the broad cultural change that he focused, not only settled the "Q" question by breaking rhetoric down the middle, but also reversed the centripetal flow the rhetorical paideia had built into its heart. In the traditional rhetorical curriculum, all subjects exfoliated out from the *ars disserendi.* This central focus meant that the arts were perpetually shifting position and overlapping one another. Such shifting is what Ramus hated the most: "For arts ought to consist of subjects that are constant, perpetual, and unchanging, and they should consider only those concepts which Plato says are archetypal and eternal" (99). And the self-contained discipline meant the possibility of a real textbook. As Father Ong, whose work has allowed us to accept Ramus as a major figure, puts it: "A Ramist textbook on a given subject had no acknowledged interchange with anything outside itself. ... [I]f you defined and divided in the proper way, everything in the art was ... complete and self-contained."[2]

We can hardly make too much of this decision. Value-free language and the possibility of a self-contained discipline make possible both modern science and that mapping of humanistic inquiry onto a scientific model which has created modern social science as well. And they create a concomitant problem, one Richard McKeon, in a discussion to be noticed later, finds characteristic of our own time: they render problematic the relation of thought to action. Thought now had its own disciplinary arena. Knowing could now be a self-enclosed activity all by itself, pursued "for its own sake," a claim that simply makes no sense in the rhetorical paideia, tied as it was to public action.

Restricting rhetoric to style and delivery, Ramus solves the "Q" question by definition. Rhetoric is a cosmetic, and bad girls wear makeup as well as good ones, probably better. The rhetorical paideia, as Quintilian described it, existed to hold rhetoric and philosophy together. Ramus rips them apart. By so doing, he makes possible a secularity in education that, for all the Platonic objections to it, the rhetorical paideia never permitted. Envaluation was everywhere in rhetorical education. From now on, ethics would have a special "department," religion first and then philosophy, where it could be studied in and for itself. And the Ramist division, by dividing the curriculum into separate subjects and texts, separated intellection and values in yet another way. The rhetorical paideia was built upon the student's experience through time; no treatise illustrates this better than Quintilian's. But once disciplines and texts supervened, the student's development would always be at odds with the boundaries of disciplinary inquiry. Thus began the world we have now, where students change intellectual worlds every hour on the hour. Thus also begins another adjustment of inquiry to abstract schema rather than human experience: Ramus divides up rhetoric, and the range of learning to which he applied his attention, to facilitate inquiry.

If you separate the discipline of discourse into essence and ornament, into philosophy and rhetoric, and make each a separate discipline, it makes them easier to think about. Thus begins modern inquiry's long history of looking for its lost keys not where it lost them but under the lamppost, where they are easier to find. The consequences of these Ramist decisions, as the texts I will now notice illustrate, extend from how we interpret Renaissance education to how we read our own, from how we write about economics to how we manage big corporations, from the Platonic zeal of Allan Bloom to the supercilious treason of Anthony Blunt.

* * *

Arthur F. Kinney, in his ambitious *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England,*[3] describes the rhetoric-centered world Ramus upended. Kinney started out to write a book on Renaissance English fictions but came to something much broader, an attempt to understand the English Renaissance as animated by rhetoric, not by philosophy. "What may at first be startling, but is nevertheless essential to understand, is that philosophy was displaced by rhetoric among humanists and humanist educators. ... Reason, as man's distinguishing characteristic, was to be realized primarily through speech. *Oratio* is next to *ratio,* as Sidney puts it in the *Defence of Poesie.* ... [I]n the beginning was always the Word. We can see this wherever we look" (7). The texts Kinney discusses—*Utopia, The Courtier, The Adventures of Master F. J., Euphues,* Sidney's *Arcadia,* Greene's romances, Lodge's tales, and Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*—all grow directly out of rhetorical education. The rhetorical neophyte's endless training in epistles, themes, and orations invites him "to frame narratives and characters in conflict: the authentic roots of western fiction, they set the imagination leaping. ... The line between a developing rhetoric and a developing poetic for fiction thus becomes perilously thin" (22). Kinney traces these and many other ways in which the rhetorical paideia of the English Renaissance led directly and specifically to the kind of literature it produced. Kinney restricts himself to fiction, but the mapping to all of Elizabethan literature is easy enough to do once we know the moves. To have shown us how to do it, in such informed detail, removes a long-standing task from the Renaissance agenda and represents a very considerable scholarly and critical accomplishment.

But Kinney is after bigger game. He wants to confront the fundamental implications of the rhetorical paideia as a philosophy of education, and this means confronting the "Q" question. It stands at the center of his book, and by that I mean not only at the center of his argument about Renaissance education but at the center of his textual interpretations as well. Here, in my view, he is less successful in what he sets out to do. In his reading of both the educational philosophy and the literary texts, he follows Quintilian's procedure almost exactly. He poses the "Q" question; he says that he sees its difficulties; he then takes refuge in Plato, in "good rhetoric," in the Weak Defense. Finally, when the unsolved question threatens to get out of control—as it does in every text he examines—like Quintilian he begs the question, usually in a ringing phrase.

In his opening discussion of rhetorical education, for example, Kinney poses the "Q" question by quoting Sextus Empiricus: "For the orator, of whatever sort he may be, must certainly practise himself in contradictory speeches, and injustice is inherent in contradictions; therefore every orator, being an advocate of injustice, is unjust" (26). And then, by way of Cicero, Isocrates, and Puttenham, he comes to Plato. "Plato seems to have been the first to foresee this, to sense the endangering possibilities. In rescuing a rhetoric for a usable poetic while confronting such dangers openly, he established grounds for a fiction that might reliably teach. He gave philosophic and rhetorical validity and purpose, that is, for More to create Utopia, Castiglione his Urbino, or Sidney Arcadia" (27–28). But Plato did nothing of the sort. He did not confront the rhetorical paideia. Much of his work, as Eric Havelock has pointed out, exists not to confront it directly and "openly" but to distort and obscure it. If Kinney had confronted this Platonic critique (and it is hardly restricted to Havelock), he could not have rescued his "usable poetic." Plato allows as "good rhetoric" only the kind that enhances an argument we already know, from a priori grounds, to be true. As with Ramus, reason is one thing, and primary; rhetoric is another, derivative and cosmetic. Permitted in the service of truth, it is otherwise an abomination. Whether Tudor educational theory, which Kinney correctly describes as being rhetorical to the core, adopted in theory this Platonic nonanswer to the "Q" question is a very doubtful proposition, though Kinney argues it.

What stands beyond question, however, is that Tudor education could

not carry it out in practice. In practice, rhetorical education is education in two-sided argument, argument where the truth is decided by the judge or jury, where truth is a dramatic criticism handed down on the forensic drama which has been played out according to the rules laid down by a rhetorical education. Such an education stands fundamentally at odds with any absolute or a priori system of thought, and no amount of Platonic evasion, at first or second hand, can conceal this. The current religious fundamentalists of the "moral majority," with their fear of "secular humanism," as they call this interior logic, understand the danger. The Renaissance humanists understood it too. However frequent their euphoric flights about the unlimited powers and malleability of man, they knew that rhetorical education, in practice, saw man as limited, not unlimited, living in a world of play, not of ideal forms. Such an education inevitably involved the full range of human motive, our agonistic contentions and impulses of pure play as well as the ostensible purposes, or arguments, at issue.

Kinney fails to understand that the Strong Defense is required here, and he completely fails to imagine how one might construct it. This is a crucial failing, and it leads him repeatedly astray when he comes to read literary texts—*Utopia, Praise of Folly, Arcadia*, the fictions of Gascoigne, Lyly, Greene, and Lodge. Kinney keeps talking about "redeeming" rhetoric, but when rhetoric empowers literature, it is unredeemable. That is what rhetorical literature, I am tempted to say Western literature, is all about. I will argue later in this essay that a failure to confront the "Q" question disempowers humanistic study in general. Kinney's failure to see how rhetoric works in particular texts provides, for the Renaissance, a paradigmatic illustration of this disempowering.

Because the most acute reenactment of the Strong Defense in the Renaissance, and perhaps ever since, is Castiglione's in *The Book of the Courtier*, it is especially interesting to notice what Kinney makes of that. Castiglione resolves the immiscibility of rhetoric and philosophy, of truth and Truth, by creating a cultural ideal he calls *sprezzatura* that puts the two into a perpetual oscillation.[4] The conversations in Urbino model the continual "conversation" which is human culture in a rhetorical, interpretive universe of discourse. Truth and truth are put in a continually reversing figure/ground relation that answers the "Q" question by putting it back into time. Castiglione implies a literary, as against a philosophical, answer to the basic humanistic question. Kinney completely misinterprets this argument, which is a vital one for his thesis:

> The twin motives that inspire and govern *Il Cortegiano* (and in turn govern us) are, then, the inductive establishment of the pure human-

> ist community and the securing of its permanence. Such impulses resemble those of Hythlodaye. The fatal difficulty is that, in so shaping Urbino, Castiglione insists on realizing perfectibility in an imperfect society whose flaws are caught in a discernible time and place. Yet, confronted by the problems of mortality, Castiglione has, by a courageous act of the imagination, made his men and women *im*mortal, impervious to time, by rendering them into the verbal art of a book, *Il Libro*, of the courtier.[5]

Philosophy and rhetoric, taken as the two great opposites of the Western cultural conversation, can be harmonized only by reversing the Platonic effort, by putting them back into time. Kinney's Platonizing makes sure that he misses the point. But once you have decided the "Q" question as he has, the point could not be there in the first place.

That the "Q" question takes so central a place in Kinney's effort to account for Renaissance literary rhetoric has an importance beyond the particular texts he seeks to explain. What stands at issue is how we read Western literature in general. Depending on which answer we bring to the basic question, we shall confront two different literatures. This becomes a matter of some moment when a series of self-teaching Great Texts is urged as the answer to all our educational and cultural problems.

The "Q" question, as posed by Renaissance rhetorical education, has been addressed in another recent book, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine's *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe.* "The subject of this book," they tell us, is "the sense in which the *bonae artes* are 'good.'"[6] They are interested, more narrowly, in the gap Kinney discusses between the claims the Renaissance made for rhetorical education and the actual practice of it. They offer a rich set of case studies from original documents which no one interested in humanistic education, Renaissance or modern, should fail to ponder.

Grafton and Jardine view the failure to ask the "Q" question as the endemic failing in earlier discussions of Renaissance education: "The few intellectual historians [as against social historians] who have worked on early modern education have been more intent on grinding old axes than on testing new hypotheses. Themselves believing in the preeminent value of a literary education, committed to preserving a canon of classics and a tradition of humanism, they have treated the rise of the classical curriculum and the downfall of scholasticism as the natural triumph of virtue over vice" (xii). In other words, these historians have, with Quintilian, simply assumed that a rhetorical education, and the literary one that evolved from it, brought with it moral improvement and civic virtue. So, when the Renaissance educators pronounced this creed, surely that was what their educational practice produced. Educational practice, that is, was read with the same assumptions Kinney brings to Renaissance texts, and with the same results. Theory and practice are found to agree because the agreement was decided on beforehand. Grafton and Jardine read with a more jaundiced eye, and find that rhetorical education, in practice, did not support the claims made for it. It educated scoundrels as well as statesmen, and it served as a class badge for both. And if the meticulous patterns of rote repetition and memorization, verbal analysis, and dramatic rehearsal which made up the core of rhetorical education in Latin had any real connection with producing either scoundrels or statesmen, rather than unthinking parrots and poseurs, no one then was able to demonstrate it.

Erasmus, to take but one example from their discussion, "maintains that there is an intimate and vital relationship between the piety of his intentions ... and the systematic works on humanistic eloquence" (139). But the connection is never demonstrated. Instead, as we have seen Quintilian do, Erasmus resorts to iteration: "The fact that Erasmus returns again and again in his letters to the connection between his publishing activities in the secular sphere and his scriptural and doctrinal studies suggests that the welding of profane learning to lay piety requires a certain amount of intellectual sleight-of-hand" (144). The "sleight-of-hand" is simply to repeat, as Quintilian does twenty-three times, what you cannot prove, and such repetition has been the basic defense of humanism ever since, the generator of the endless tautological justifications of the humanities that have accompanied our requests for handouts, private or public, ever since.

Erasmus also uses that other staple evasion of the "Q" question, the great literary text itself:

> In the *Methodus* Erasmus lays careful emphasis on the proper procedure for "disciplined" reading. He argues in detail that the only way to draw the true message from the Bible is to read it as a good humanist would read a classic pagan text: as the record of Christ, that incomparable orator, and Paul, that incomparable theologian, addressing specific audiences and dealing with specific issues. By keeping the context always in view, by bearing in mind the speaker's and writer's situation, the student will be able to avoid the doctrinal errors and evasions that the scholastics—those insensitive readers—have committed.
>
> ...
>
> What Erasmus does not explain (what from his point of view as a humanist pedagogue requires no explanation) is how the young the-

> ologian can be sure that simple, straightforward reading will produce guaranteed right doctrine. (146–48)

This "great text + right reading = moral truth" equation, this "convenient confusion" of the methodical with the morally sound, as Grafton and Jardine style it, has—as evidenced in Gerald Graff's history and Allan Bloom's revivalist tract to be considered below—caused trouble right up to the present moment.

Perhaps the most provocative discussion in the book is the chapter on "Pragmatic Humanism: Ramism and the Rise of 'the Humanities.'" Ramus did not think he had split rhetoric from philosophy, only separated them so that, in due course, they would find their natural unity *in forum, in Senatum, in concionem populi, in omnem hominum conventum.* It is a touching faith that, as Grafton and Jardine make clear, did not always work out in practice. This great curricular Judgment Day when all things that humanist specialization has rent apart will come together, though we continually believe in and plan on it, continues to elude us.

On the one hand, we have the "humanism" of their title, the kind of liberal education which is moral in its essence, which answers "Yes" to the "Q" question. Ramus replaces that with the second key term of their title, the "humanities." The *ars disserendi* was to be converted into a series of techniques that anyone could use to get ahead in any field. "It opened the prospect that the purpose of education was to purvey information and skills, not to be morally improving: Ramist teaching might make you a good grammarian or a good mathematician; there was no guarantee that it would make you a good person" (170). "A committed Ramist finds himself free to pursue the *ars disserendi* simply as a route to high government office, without worrying about being a *vir bonus* (a good man)" (189). This represents "the final *secularisation* of humanist teaching—the transition from 'humanism' to 'the humanities'" (168).

This pattern of root self-contradictions has lived, then, to the present day, and its *Nachleben* is part of the story Grafton and Jardine tell. They begin by talking about Eliot and Leavis and their assumptions and, even closer to home, about the pressures that Mrs. Thatcher (she is not named but alembicated into an impersonal passive) exerted on English universities in recent years:

> Where, it is asked, is the marketable end-product in the non-vocational liberal arts faculties that justifies the investment of public money? Where indeed? This book is offered in part as a contribution to our understanding of the long history of evasiveness on the part of teachers of the humanities—an evasiveness which has left them vulnerable to the charge of non-productiveness, irrelevance to modern industrial society, without those teachers themselves having deviated from their commitment to the liberal arts as a "training for life." (xiv)

They pose the question rather than simply evade it. But, alas, they don't answer it, or even begin to. Instead, they end their courageous study with laconic regret:

> [W]e watch as our most gifted students master the techniques and methods of textual analysis, the command of ancient and modern languages (which they can transpose effectively to new and developing disciplines), but in the main discard that over-arching framework of "civilised values" by which teachers of the humanities continue to set such store. Whether we like it or not, we still live with the dilemma of late humanism: we can only live in hope, and practise the humanities. (199–200)

□ □ □

McKeon

How energizing it is to turn to the new collection of Richard McKeon's essays that Mark Backman has edited, and for which he has supplied a superb introduction: *Rhetoric: Essays in Invention and Discovery.*[7] Unhappily for America, our two greatest rhetoricians, Kenneth Burke and Richard McKeon, are for most people very hard to understand. Of the two, Burke, the Great Amplifier, is far the easier to follow. McKeon condenses. I have always thought that he took as his model Aristotle's Greek at its most elliptical. For someone new to McKeon, Backman's introduction is worth its weight in gold. Let me give an example. Here is McKeon:

> When the philosophic arts are conceived of as arts of being or of thought, rhetoric is not treated as a philosophic art, although it is used extensively in the controversy and refutation which constitutes communication among philosophies. When the philosophic arts are arts of communication and construction, rhetoric is made into a universal and architectonic art. (108)

And here is Backman's translation:

> In the curriculum of the schools rhetoric has been assigned a much reduced role when the motive has been to establish discrete disciplines marked by unique subject matters and methods. Conversely, rhetoric has organized the entire course of study when the goal has been to bridge the gap between distinct subject matters. (xix)

McKeon's great theme emerges from these two sentences. He projects the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, conceived both historically and theoretically, across the breadth of Western culture. From this overarching theme, of the greatest interest (Aristotelian prose and all) to anyone studying rhetoric, I can extract only the principal strand of argument, which focuses on the "Q" question. McKeon distinguishes between two kinds of rhetoric, "verbal" and "architectonic." "Verbal" rhetoric is the cosmetic and ancillary discipline left after the Ramist split occurred. "Architectonic" rhetoric is the overarching paideia Cicero and Quintilian sought to describe. The two definitions describe two basic orchestrations of reality. And from these two orchestrations emerge the Weak Defense and the Strong Defense of rhetoric. If we conceive the world as somehow externally fixed and sanctioned, then rhetoric, and by extension the arts, will be derivative and cosmetic, "verbal." If, on the other hand, truth is what the judge and jury, after a suitably dramatic proceeding, decide it is, then rhetoric is architectonic. McKeon puts it this way: "Rhetoric has replaced metaphysics as an architectonic art, in the past, when the organization and application of the arts and sciences was based, not on supposed natures of things or perceived forms of thought, but on recognition of the consequences of what men say and do" (18). McKeon argued that the reality to which rhetorical terminology referred was continually changing, making standard histories of rhetoric—which assumed that reality was a constant and the terminology changed—derivative functions. The meaning of the terms did change, not because their relations changed but because the reality underneath them changed. It changed, furthermore, in a bipolar pattern: it was either philosophical or rhetorical, or, in Kenneth Burke's terms, "dramatistic." Beneath the continual shifts there is a broad general oscillation between the philosophic and rhetorical world views, and this McKeon took to be the basic plate-tectonic of Western thought.

And so, on a very large scale indeed, McKeon puts our crucial question back into time precisely as Castiglione did, suggesting an answer to the "Q" question that is *sprezzatura* writ large. If we make the Platonic or Ramist assumptions, then to the "Q" question the obvious, indeed the tautological, answer must be "No!" If, on the other hand, we make the rhetorical assumptions, the assumptions built on a dramatistic theory of human reality and a metaphorical theory of language, then the answer, equally obviously, indeed tautologically, must be, as Quintilian has it, "Yes!" How could it be otherwise, since the orator creates the reality in which he acts? He must be at one with it, "just" and "good" in its terms, since it is created for his purpose. Now it becomes apparent that either answer, in its pure state, is logical, true, and useless. And so both sides, once they have returned the answer of their choice, proceed to hedge it. Quintilian brings philosophical coordinates into his discussion continually, so that the basic tectonic oscillation is set in motion without his acknowledging or, most of the time, even knowing it. Ramus, having separated the two, trusts that in practice they will get all mixed up together again. Who cares, since the purpose is not to describe reality but to make inquiry and teaching easier? (Back to finding your keys under the lamppost.)

McKeon is thinking, in a systemic and literally global way, about how to get out of the "Q" question dilemma that has stymied the humanities for so long and made thinking about the humanities curriculum so stultifying an exercise in self-serving cliché and ritualized complaint. As so often with McKeon, however, the range and power of his argument do not immediately communicate themselves, at least to me; the reader is urged to try "The Uses of Rhetoric in a Technological Age," from which I have drawn the following passage, direct:

> The growth of science and communication, the increase of knowledge and the formation of world community, have begun to lay out the field of systematic organization both as a system of communication for a universal audience, mankind, and as a system of operation of an ongoing development and inquiry, technology. It is a field which provides grounding for the intersubjectivity of communications of persons and groups and for the objectivity of conclusions of inquiry and action. It is within this field that the possible worlds, which are discussed in plans and policy, are constructed, and theses which are posited are stabilized into principles. Theses and principles have a history which carries back in tradition to principles that were called eternal and universal but were also derived from theses which posit being in the context of an agent, his environment, and his subject. It is the field of reflexivity and responsibility, which must be explored in rational action concerning rights and justice, laws and conventions, sanctions and obligations, utilities and values, and opinions and truths. The field of the new dialectical rhetoric, of debate and dialogue, is being travelled and cultivated by chance and by art. An architectonic-productive survey of the field of these activities could make its beginning by orienting rhetoric from the oppositions of the past to the understanding and projection of the new processes and needs of the present. (23–24)

He is exploring the interface between absolute and contingent statements, the perpetual frontstage/backstage oscillation of human attention, and trying to distinguish the oscillation as the final integer. We cannot define a front stage, a rhetorical reality, without assuming a back stage or philosophical one. And we never define a back stage without knowing that in another act of attention, or in another time, it will be a front stage.

McKeon is trying, that is to say, to create an architectonic rhetoric which includes "philosophy" as a less than Platonic absolute. "In the emerging community of the world the first problem of philosophy—the new metaphysics or at least the new prolegomenon to all future metaphysics—will expound the sense in which what is on some grounds or in some circumstances true is at other times false and dangerous" (220). And, unlike almost all the professional humanists, but in sync with the postmodern critique in the visual and musical arts, he sees modern technology as a potential ally in this Herculean endeavor. Indeed, in describing what his architectonics would look like, he comes close to restating the postmodern critique itself:

> It should be a rhetoric which relates form to matter, instrumentality to product, presentation to content, agent to audience, intention to reason. It should not make technology the operation of a machine, in which the message is a massage; it should not take its form from its medium. ... It should be positive in the creation, not passive in the reception, of data, facts, consequences, and objective organization. ... In a technological age all men should have an art of creativity, of judgment, of disposition, and of organization. This should be adapted to their individual development and to their contribution to forming a common field in which the subject of inquiry is not how to devise means to achieve accepted ends arranged in hierarchies but the calculation of uses and applications that might be made of the vastly increased available means in order to devise new ends and to eliminate oppositions and segregations based on past competitions for scarce means. (24)

If rhetoric is "an economics of language, the study of how scarce means are allocated to the insatiable desires of people to be heard," as Donald McCloskey argues in the volume noticed next, McKeon is suggesting that technology fundamentally alters this economy, and so the frequency and wavelength of the oscillation that underlies an architectonic rhetoric. His argument is a profound and (still rarer) profoundly forward-looking attempt to confront the "Q" question, not by waffling or resignation, but by thinking the problem through, and in terms likely to bear upon contemporary circumstance.

It may perhaps surprise us that Donald McCloskey's brilliant and witty *The Rhetoric of Economics*[8] (Imagine it, a book about economics and rhetoric that is both brilliant and witty!) refers both to Quintilian's posing of the "Q" question at the beginning of book 12 and to the Ramist critique of it. McCloskey's book provides a perfect example of how McKeon's vision might be implemented. McCloskey's "rhetoric" is what McKeon would call architectonic rather than merely verbal: "Figures of speech are not mere frills. They think for us" (xvii); and, in a fine pun, "Virtuosity *is* some evidence of virtue" (71). Such a conception of rhetoric involves broadening the range of human motive from the economist's Man rationally balancing his possible benefits: "The understanding of individual motivation in economics could use some complicating" (65). McCloskey would make economists self-conscious about their rhetoric, in order to teach them that what they do is "a collection of literary forms, not a science." He argues that social science—he would extend this to "science" *tout court*—does not use value-free language, that value-free language does not exist, and that we cannot posit a purely transparent language devoid of distracting ornament, through which we transact business with pure facts.

McCloskey is attempting, that is, to correct an imbalance that he sees, as we would expect, as beginning with the Ramist division we have just discussed. To split language and thought, giving us the modernist, "objectivist" way of teaching, is dangerous for the same reason Ramism was. It is easy to teach: "Modernism and methodology have intruded into the classroom. The modernist routine is easy to teach, which is one reason it is taught so widely. This is a pity, because the way we teach becomes the way we think" (178). Those who oppose this act of self-awareness on the part of social science view it as one kind or another of "nihilism," and McCloskey makes a great deal of sense in showing how silly this charge is: "An irrational fear that Western intellectual life is about to be overrun by nihilists grips many people. They are driven by it to the practice of Objectivity, Demarcation, and other regimens said to be good for toughening, such as birching and dips in the river on New Year's Day" (41).

McCloskey's attempt to read economics as literature, to "use the humanist tradition to understand the scientific tradition," brings with it a defense of rhetoric, and an answer to the "Q" question which he does not appear altogether to understand. His stated defense is the Weak one: "Rhetoric is merely a tool, no bad thing in itself. Or rather, it is the box of tools for persuasion taken together, available for persuaders good and bad" (37–38). But what he succeeds in doing, with his splendid close readings of the rhetoric of economics in action, is to suggest the Strong Defense we began to see emerging with McKeon. To read economics as McCloskey suggests is always to be toggling between looking at the prose and through it, reading it "rhetorically" and reading it "philosophically," and this toggling attitude toward utterance is what the rhetorical paideia was after all along. Train someone in it and, according to Quintilian's way of thinking, you have trained that person to be virtuous. "Virtuosity *is* some evidence of virtue." To think of this at/through toggle switch as "virtuous," as implicitly moral, is to comprehend the deeply felt "reasoning" behind Quintilian's evasive answer to his own question and to glimpse, perhaps, the beginnings of a legitimate explanation of, and justification for, what the humanities do—or at least can do.

□ □ □

I have been mapping, on my "Q" question grid, various efforts to return to the "architectonic rhetoric" of the rhetorical paideia. With E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*,[9] we encounter an effort to flee from it. The great enemy for Hirsch is "romantic formalism": "The decline of American literacy and the fragmentation of the American school curriculum have been chiefly caused by the ever growing dominance of romantic formalism in educational theory during the past half century" (110). This is Dewey out of Rousseau's *Emile* by Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Against it, Hirsch calls for an education in the brute facts, as these are imbibed in a good traditional education, the kind that proves in the end much more useful than fancy "progressive" new ones: "For we have learned the paradox that traditional education, which alone yields the flexible skill of mature literacy, outperforms utilitarian education even by utilitarian standards" (126).

This book offers so limited a perspective and such maddening simplifications that it is hard to focus its root self-contradiction as turning on the "Q" question. For Hirsch believes that a positive answer to the "Q" question, the production of individual and civic virtue, comes from the citizenry's sharing the same body of facts, acquired from the same basic, Anglo-Saxon, canonical texts. These texts are self-interpreting, and the facts they contain can float context-free in long quiz sheets that have reminded many readers of the Trivial Pursuit game. That is, Hirsch preserves the same Ramist perspective that has informed his work as a theoretical critic—the belief in an "objectivist" world which is just out there, and a "merely verbal" ornamental rhetoric which is tacked onto the plain words that precisely describe it. He takes the Ramist view and insists, again without any proof, that it produces a "Yes" answer to the "Q" question, rather than the resounding "No" that Ramus himself returned: "What distinguishes good readers from poor ones is simply the possession of a lot of diverse, task-specific information" (61). And good readers of this sort are, he assumes, good citizens.

This is begging the "Q" question in the most embarrassingly simplistic way. Ramus was right about splitting utterance into "facts" and "style," Hirsch would argue, but wrong that this was no guarantee of virtue. The rhetorical man is not always good but the factual man is. We were right all along; the well-informed man is the virtuous citizen. As our civics teacher promised, the world will be saved by the current events club.

The proof Hirsch offers for his case provides proof for the opposite one. It is proof that learning comes only in a context, with a specific purpose. You cannot learn a list of facts and dates because they hone the mind or simply are good and good for you. He opposes the teaching of reading as a value-free activity: "I cannot claim to have studied all the recent textbooks intended to train teachers or educate children in the language arts, but those I have consulted represent learning to read as a neutral, technical process of skill acquisition that is better served by up-to-date 'imaginative literature' than by traditional and factual material" (113). He advocates a contextualized reading, tied to particular texts, the "traditional and factual material." But to do this is to read economics, say, the way McCloskey says it ought to be read, self-consciously. It is to assume that language is intrinsically value-laden and that every "fact" comes with values attached. You cannot assemble a list of neutral facts which every citizen in a secular society can safely learn as a factual bible, a body of knowledge beyond cavil, which once absorbed guarantees public virtue. Put in this plain way, the contention sounds preposterous, but this is what Hirsch claims. And, having claimed it, he then equates it with the rhetorical paideia, which embodies the opposite conception of the world and works in exactly the opposite way:

> The founders of our republic had in mind a Ciceronian ideal of education and discourse in a republic. . . . The Ciceronian ideal of universal public discourse was strong in this country into the early twentieth century. In the Roman republic of Cicero's time, such discourse was chiefly oral, and the education Cicero sought was in "rhetoric" rather than "literacy." But the terms are equivalent. [You can see him begging the "Q" question right here, by making this equivalence.] Literacy—reading and writing taken in a serious sense—is the rhetoric of our day, the basis of public discourse in a modern republic. The teaching of Ciceronian literacy as our founders conceived it is a primary but currently neglected responsibility of our schools. (109)