Judging from some of his more offhand remarks, Wayne Booth has had uneven relations with the discipline of philosophy. As he introduces a group of essays in *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me*, for example, he expresses a general commitment to the spirit of reasonableness he finds in eighteenth-century philosophy. But he seems less generous toward some of the more recent voices. One of these, he tells us, suggested that Booth's own attempts at philosophy are "a shameless form of revenge on modern philosophy" (79). In *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, clearly his most philosophical book, Booth gives the impression that he knows philosophers would find his arguments an easy target: "[T]hey know how much could be said about many of the questions I seem to settle with a twist of the wrist." Lest we take this as good reason to leave his book behind and turn to the true philosophers, he adds, "But it is part of my point that modern philosophy—at least until the last two decades—has saddled us with standards of truth under which no man can live" (xii).

We could write two different stories about Booth's attitude toward philosophy based on these sparse comments. On the one hand, we might portray him as a philosophical conservative who longs for the times when philosophy was relevant to everyday concerns and when even the most important philosophical works were accessible to the lay reader. On the other hand, we could use these same remarks to make Booth into something a little more trendy: an antiphilosopher. He seems to want
to rescue academic argument from the logic-chopping his imaginary philosophical opponents would use against his own ideas. If we wanted to extend this image, we might say that in denouncing the "saddle" of rigorous standards of truth, Booth questions the philosopher's right to stand in judgment over the argumentative practices of other disciplines. This image, in short, might portray Booth as an opponent of what Richard Rorty calls "foundationalism."

While I suspect that Booth himself feels more comfortable with the first image, in this chapter I examine the antiphilosophical potential of Booth's writings. The reason for my choice should be apparent to anyone familiar with the body of research and argument now called "the rhetoric of inquiry." Booth's antimodernism already has been enlisted in the service of a project that seeks both to set aside formal epistemology and to reconstruct academic inquiry with rhetorical self-consciousness. Economist Donald McCloskey, for example, lets Booth and not Aristotle define rhetoric in *The Rhetoric of Economics* (29). And while he does not rely on Booth for his antiphilosophy, McCloskey certainly makes it clear that for him, promoting rhetorical thinking about science requires dethronement of the epistemologist: "The philosopher undertakes to second-guess the scientific community. . . . Such claims from the easy chair are hard to take seriously" (20). Elsewhere in the literature on the rhetoric of inquiry, Booth's name turns up alongside such famous antiphilosophers as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and of course Rorty (Nelson and Megill; Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 3–18).

Given their goal of understanding the rhetorical dimension of inquiry, it is hardly surprising to find McCloskey and others citing Booth as an authority on the weaknesses of scientific epistemology. At least in the respects that he resists positivism, behaviorism, systematic doubt, the is–ought distinction, and other dogmas of modernism, Booth belongs with the antiphilosophers. But to what extent is Booth a participant with the more strident among them? And if he is not, what differences in Booth's approach to the rhetoric of inquiry might have significance for that line of scholarship? To answer these questions, it will help to have a good example of an antiphilosopher to compare with Booth. Simply because of his popularity among rhetoricians of inquiry and his unequivocal opposition to systematic philosophy, Richard Rorty makes an obvious choice (Nelson and Megill 26; see also Lyne 67). I will therefore explore some of Booth's antimodernist arguments in relation to Rorty's. My exploration will not make any new contentions about antiphilosophy; that discipline seems to be thriving quite well enough. I
hope instead to use this comparison to provide some suggestions about how to say that inquiry is rhetorical without saying it is the worst sort of sophistry, or what Booth would call "the art of winning." I am in search, then, of a rhetoric of inquiry that is also an ethic of inquiry.

Readers of *Modern Dogma* and *Critical Understanding* can see plainly enough that Booth rejects certain philosophical ideas popular in this century. We know, for example, that Booth has little regard for Bertrand Russell's brand of modernism (*Modern Dogma*, chap. 2). But to say that he dislikes certain philosophers or their ideas is not to say that Booth altogether rejects the philosophical impulse, however defined. Rorty, on the other hand, seems committed to just such a rejection:

> People have, oddly enough, found something interesting to say about the essence of Force and the definition of "number." They might have found something interesting to say about the essence of Truth. But in fact they haven't. The history of attempts to do so, and of criticism of those attempts, is roughly coextensive with the history of that literary genre we call "philosophy"—a genre founded by Plato. So pragmatists [such as Rorty] see the Platonic tradition as having outlived its usefulness. (*Consequences* xiv)

It is difficult to imagine Booth ever entertaining such a sweeping dismissal. In what sense, then, can I even begin to compare Booth and Rorty for their antiphilosophical inclinations?

First, whatever generalizations Rorty may make about the whole gamut of Western philosophy, he does not intend to denounce everything that we call philosophy, and he does not anticipate the closing of philosophy departments. His enemy is Philosophy with a capital "P," defined as the discipline that seeks to "underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge," and more generally as literature that "proceeds on the assumption that all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable" (*Mirror* 3, 316). He invokes a great many philosophers, including many who make their livings in contemporary philosophy departments, to earn his antiphilosophical conclusions. By repeated appeal to his heroes—Dewey, Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein—he further refines his concept of Philosophy. What really bothers him, it seems, is the attempt to make philosophy "systematic." In Rorty's view philosophy can still play an "edifying" role by constantly reacting against "the latest claim that such-and-such a discipline has at last made the nature
of human knowledge so clear that reason will now spread throughout the rest of human activity” (Mirror 367).

So Rorty's antiphilosophy turns out to be a reaction against a particular kind of philosophy and the ambition that gives rise to it. When Rorty questions this "foundationalist" conception of philosophy in these more limited senses, he seems to have entered territory familiar to Wayne Booth. In Critical Understanding, Booth tries to find a pluralistic approach to critical argument. His concerns are largely with modes of literary criticism, but with just a little broadening, they come to resemble some of Rorty's rejections. Booth, for example, questions any form of critical "monism," or the view that there is one true critical conclusion to draw about a literary work (12-17). Rorty's rejection of foundationalism seems to be based on the same suspicion of final pronouncements, except that he rejects any claim to final truth in any domain.

Yet perhaps at this point the similarity between these two writers must end. As I suggested, Rorty rejects not just any claim to finality in matters of truth, but any claim to "systematicity." For Rorty, procedural rationality is inherently problematic (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 40). He would prefer to support philosophies precisely to the extent they mock any pretension to formulate recipes for reaching truth—or as he would put it, to the extent they "edify." At first glance, Booth's resistance to various modernist philosophies arrives at very different conclusions. Booth would replace one kind of systematicity with another: an exchange of systematic doubt for systematic assent. Would all of Rorty's dismissals of systematic philosophy apply equally to the procedures of systematic assent?

Again, however, a closer look at these two positions reveals their resemblance. Booth defines systematic doubt as "assent pending disproof" in deliberate contrast to the Cartesian and modernist formula of doubt pending proof (Modern Dogma 101). But when he discusses systematic doubt in detail, it becomes more than a mirror image of the modernist formula. The traditional conception made doubt an individual affair. Booth deliberately and consistently replaces the modernists' "I" with "we": "Instead of making doubt primary, let us see what happens if we know whatever we can agree together that we have no good reason to doubt, whether or not we can apply other more formal tests of doubt" (Modern Dogma 106, emphasis added). This simple change in pronoun has some important consequences. Once the process of assent becomes communal, it also becomes considerably more susceptible to the charge that it lacks the kind of systematicity Rorty objects to. Indeed, at such a
formulation of the essence of knowing, Booth's imaginary philosophical opponents might assume that he has settled some very important questions with a twist of the wrist. Until we have reached some conclusions about who "we" are, we cannot say much about the kind of knowledge systematic assent will get us.

I will let Booth answer the obvious question about what he means by "we" in a moment. First I must note the important sense in which the notion of communal assent pending disproof converges with Rorty's ideas about the attainment of truth. Rorty is famous—perhaps notorious—for adopting an unrepentantly local and communal notion of truth: "[T]here is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society—ours—uses in one or another area of inquiry" (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 42). In this way truth-seeking becomes nothing more than a matter of letting academic conversations proceed with the hope of intersubjective agreement, and the only universal value to sustain in inquiry is the desire to keep the conversation going: "The application of such honorifics as 'objective' and 'cognitive' is never anything more than an expression of the presence of, or the hope for, agreement among inquirers" (Mirror 335).

Booth does not make any of these "nothing more than" arguments about the nature of truth. Indeed, he makes a point of avoiding the latent foundationalism that inheres in Rorty's embrace of consensus and conversation (Critical Understanding 25–26; Modern Dogma 99). Yet both Booth and Rorty are asking us to show a respect for honestly obtained consensus that their modernist predecessors either ignored or explicitly rejected. As a matter of everyday scholarly practice the need for consensus is difficult to challenge. Even philosophers with a distinctly individualistic notion of how truth is acquired tried to persuade their colleagues that their view of truth was correct. Then why not celebrate the virtues of tolerance, honesty, and willingness to listen that make conversation and consensus possible? Booth and Rorty want us to pay more than lip service to these simple virtues, and in this way they both authorize attention to the rhetorical practices on which scholarly inquiry depends.

Up to this point I have stressed the senses in which Rorty's attacks on foundationalism and Booth's resistance to critical monism and the dogmas of modernism resemble one another. We have seen that they both want to challenge any claims to finality and systematicity in matters of
scholarly justification. They both authorize careful attention to scholarly consensus as well. But I have not attended to the arguments Booth and Rorty adduce in support of these notions. Critical differences between the two become apparent as soon as one turns away from their conclusions and begins to ask how they arrive at them.

Several strategies recur in Rorty’s meticulous arguments against foundationalist philosophy. Overall, he relies on a version of Occam’s razor: we can do all the work of scholarly justification we need to do without appealing to some immutable epistemological standards. In evidence for this, he notes that in spite of the failure of philosophers to agree on such standards, the practices of justification have continued anyway. In themselves, these strategies are not greatly different from anything Booth might use. But to apply these arguments, Rorty traces a path through the history of philosophy that begins with what he calls “the invention of the mind” in the seventeenth century. According to Rorty, a great mistake of modern philosophy was Descartes’s decision to single out the mind as the special ontological realm where thought takes place. Once philosophers came to believe in such a nonspatial substance, they had to theorize its relations with the material in some way. The results were a preoccupation with that metaphysical relationship, a skepticism about the existence of other minds, and a host of other philosophical pseudoproblems cleared up hundreds of years later by Wittgenstein, Quine, and their followers (Mirror 17–127).

Rorty would prefer to do away with the notion of “mind” as an inner eye requiring a special theory of inner representation. Only once philosophers have stopped worrying about this “Glassy Essence” can they begin to see the problem of justification for what it is: a problem of “what our peers will, ceteris paribus, let us get away with saying” (Mirror 176). Rorty anticipates the obvious objection to this elimination of the concept of mind. He knows that for many, the notion of “self” or “personhood” is intimately connected to mentality. Without any conception of mind, so the argument runs, human beings lose their unique right to the respect of their fellows. But Rorty contends that the connection between mentality and personhood is a crucial mistake, perhaps even a historical accident. Once the notions of consciousness and reason are separated historically, “then personhood can be seen for what I claim it is—a matter of decision rather than knowledge, an acceptance of another being into fellowship rather than a recognition of a common essence” (Mirror 37).

At many points these arguments stand deeply at odds with Booth’s
whole approach to problems of rational justification. For Booth, the impulse to question modernist epistemology comes from its disastrous consequences for contemporary rhetoric. He finds that when systematically applied, the demand for rigorous doubt pending proof leaves arguers affirming truths at one another; again, rhetoric becomes "the art of winning" (Modern Dogma xi). When Rorty writes that truth is nothing more than "what our peers will ... let us get away with saying," he seems to invite a view of rhetoric little different from the one Booth's whole effort sets out to overturn. One of the lessons of Rorty, then, is that even a dramatic and thorough rejection of constraining epistemologies is not enough to solve the rhetorical problems they have created. A winning argument against logical positivism, for example, does not guarantee a rosy future for practical reason, even though strict logical positivism inhibits the development of practical reason.

But there is another respect in which Booth's argument diverges from Rorty's. Booth depends heavily on the integrity and independence of the mind in both the premises and conclusion of his arguments for a responsible rhetoric of assent. Indeed, it often seems that Booth assumes the same interdependence of "mind" and "self" that Rorty so carefully dissolves. Modern Dogma's opening question, "When should I change my mind?" surely presupposes that there is something to the notion of mind that is worth inquiring about. This something cannot be understood merely as a collection of dispositions toward certain behaviors, as Booth's frequent criticisms of behaviorism make clear (Modern Dogma 114; Critical Understanding 112, 262). Once Modern Dogma arrives at the concept of systematic assent as a guiding rhetorical principle, Booth first applies that principle to the mind itself. Among other things, he discovers that human beings do have the capacity to understand each other, that they do possess intentions, and that they are capable of inferring the intentions of their fellows. Throughout this discussion, Booth makes no distinctions between the mind and the self (111–25).

Thus, on this question of the nature of mind and its relationship to personhood, the differences between Booth and Rorty are so great that to accept the arguments of one in any degree precludes the acceptance of the arguments of the other. If we agree with Rorty that the path away from foundationalism requires abandoning the belief in the mind's intimate connection to personhood, then all of Booth's arguments about the changing of minds become unintelligible. If, on the other hand, we agree with Booth that abandoning the dogmas of modernism requires a fresh respect for the integrity of the mind and the self, the first step of
Rorty’s complex argument becomes equally unintelligible and perhaps reprehensible.

Of course, I will choose the latter path. I have already suggested the problem with a rhetoric of inquiry based on Rorty’s reduction of knowledge and truth to a matter of victory in argument. That problem is partly the one that prompted Booth to write Modern Dogma in the first place. Its cause is similar as well, for under the banner of “epistemological behaviorism,” Rorty dismisses all claims for the philosophical importance of the concept of “mind” (Mirror 98–99). But no doubt Rorty would say that anyone who accepted Booth’s story on this basis begs the question. Rorty is arguing that we can have respect for persons without recognizing a common essence, the mind, lying behind each of their utterances. Surely our peers will not let us get away with arguments that in some way grossly neglect personhood. So what have we to worry about in saying that truth is what we can persuade people to believe?

Answering Rorty on this point will require something more than the Booth I have already discussed. Specifically, the answer must show that in giving up our notions about the mind we are giving up something of vital importance in spite of the failure of modern philosophy to reach any final conclusions about what the mind is. And, because the answer cannot rely simply on what this or that community or culture finds persuasive (for that would be Rorty’s point all over again), it must aspire to some degree of transcendence, perhaps even a latent “foundational” status. Finally, any well-rounded answer to Rorty must show concretely that it can do a better job of promoting respect for personhood than any purely consensual notion of truth.

Booth has more than fulfilled these apparently tremendous requirements. He does so in a way that Rorty never appears to anticipate, even though parts of the argument are not unique to Booth. The argument begins where Rorty leaves off—with the practical necessities of striving for and living with consensus in all human affairs. From the fact that all of us try to persuade each other to live and think similarly Booth infers the necessity of doing so. And from this necessity it is but a short step to the conclusion that persons and minds are essentially a matter of the persuasions they engage in and respond to: “What is a ‘mind’ and what is a ‘self’ in this rhetorical view? It is essentially rhetorical, symbol exchanging, a social product in process of changing through interaction, sharing values with other selves. Even when thinking privately, 'I' can
never escape the other selves which I have taken in to make 'myself,'
and my thought will thus always be a dialogue" (Modern Dogma 126).
Here Booth begins to reply to that important question about who we
are that I left dangling. At least as far as answering Rorty is concerned,
the important point about this definition is not that it makes statements
about what is essential to being human, although Rorty would probably
object to that. Its significance lies in its constitution of a mind and a
self that ought to be responsible for their persuasion precisely because
they are partially remade in their attempts to shape other minds and
other selves: "But if all men [and women] 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—whatever
that will mean—and bad to do it badly" (Modern Dogma 137). On
this view, the reason rhetoric should not degenerate into the art of win­
ing is that while mere victory might make others into what the rhetor
wants, by itself it does not guarantee that it will help remake rhetors
themselves into that same image.

To see the importance of this self-actualization for real academic
arguments, it will be helpful to consider a rhetor who tries mightily to
disregard it. Philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend, another resource
for the rhetoric of inquiry, also argues against the traditional notions
of formulaic rationality. One of his favorite strategies is to adopt his
opponents' beliefs as an important resource for persuading them. For
example, he challenges his opponents to be consistent, even though he
does not recognize any problem with his own inconsistencies. In reply
to the obvious criticisms of this tactic, he announces, "Some readers [of
Against Method] objected that though I do not seem to mind inconsis­
tencies I still present them as parts of my argument against standard
views of rationality. I reply that I assume my readers to be rationalists.
If they are not, then there is no need for them to read the book" (14).
Elsewhere he explains that the mistake of these critics is to assume that
an argument reflects the commitments of the arguer: "An argument
is not a confession, it is an instrument designed to make an opponent
change his [or her] mind. The existence of arguments of a certain type
in a book ma, permit the reader to infer what the author regards as
effective persuasion, it does not permit him [or her] to infer what the
author thinks is true" (28).

With this stark theory of the purposes of rhetoric Feyerabend per­
mits the construction of a clear line between Booth and Rorty, and
he also reveals where Booth's notion of "the self as a field of selves"
can have an important application. Clearly, Rorty could have very little to say against Feyerabend’s strategy. Possibly he would say that Feyerabend’s own use of inconsistency does not avail itself of the practices of justification endorsed in his own scholarly community—if indeed that audience of “rationalists” he addresses is Feyerabend’s scholarly community. But to the extent that Feyerabend’s audience lets him “get away with” his appeals to their inconsistencies, what challenge could Rorty raise?

Booth, on the other hand, would probably object to Feyerabend in the strongest of terms. Feyerabend’s rhetorical appeals make Feyerabend, just as they hope to remake his opponents. What sort of Feyerabend comes into existence when he rebukes the rationalists for their inconsistencies while tolerating his own? Surely not one who hopes to engage in mutual inquiry, who would be as open to the persuasion of his fellows as he appears to want his opponents to be. Feyerabend probably would respond that respect for mutual inquiry and the constitution of a community of inquirers was never his intention anyway. But at this point we come to the bottom line of Booth’s argument, indeed the bottom line of many of Booth’s arguments. Feyerabend attempts to persuade his opponents. Booth has argued that the mere presence—or perhaps omnipresence—of attempts to persuade sets in motion a chain of inference leading to the conclusion that persuaders ought to attend carefully to the kinds of persons they make of themselves and their fellows as they inquire together. Thus even as Feyerabend tries to argue with his opponents he is already illustrating the importance of building a community of inquirers. Booth clinches this point in one of the more memorable sentences of Modern Dogma: “If a committed doubter says to us that he [or she] will not accept the valued fact of [our] rhetorical nature, we see now that he [or she] cannot avoid illustrating it as he [or she] tries to argue against it: we discuss our doubt together, therefore we are” (138). No doubt this argument also would not pacify Feyerabend. Indeed, as he sees no harm in his own inconsistencies he might simply deny the intention to persuade his opponents, even though he flatly states that effective persuasion is the proper goal of argument. But, as Booth says, once the objections reached this level of absurdity, “we may well continue to worry . . . about the intellectual climate that can make his kind of intellectual game seem less in need of defense than our own” (Modern Dogma 138). But what about that notion of “mind” that is so crucial to the differences between the arguments of Rorty and Booth? Notice that the force of these criticisms of Feyerabend depends on some degree of
continuity of consciousness beyond the effects of Feyerabend’s individual pronouncements on their readers. Once Feyerabend makes himself and his readers in the rhetorical process, then his opponents earn the right to question his inconsistencies because they have inferred his intentions and have assumed they live beyond his words. Without the ability to raise such challenges, of course, there would be no possibility that Feyerabend and his opponents could continue their conversation with any hope of agreement.

I have argued, in short, that while Rorty separates the “acceptance of another being into fellowship” from the “recognition of a common essence” of humanity, Booth gives us good reason to see such acceptance as an essential constituent of humanity. Without such a recognition, we lose the ability to make a certain kind of argument. This argument allows us to reason from the fact of our persuasion to the requirement that we do it with a respect for the kind of community our persuasion builds. While Rorty worries about “keeping the conversation going,” his own arguments against the philosophical importance of the concept of mind prevent him from articulating any good reasons to be so concerned.

These differences have important consequences for the rhetoric of inquiry. That discipline has justified itself partly as an attempt to promote rhetorical self-consciousness among scholars (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey ix; Bazerman). From Booth’s standpoint, such rhetorical self-consciousness has an inescapably moral dimension: we build ourselves and our scholarly communities through our persuasion, and thus we have the responsibility to examine our own persuasion if only to find out about the sorts of people we are making of ourselves. That concern does not reinstate any particular formal system of inquiry, nor does it plunge us again into vexing and possibly insoluble philosophical problems of the sort Rorty dismisses. But it does allow us to recognize that some scholarly arguments, like Feyerabend’s, inhibit the possibility of mutual inquiry. For this reason I would recommend Booth over Rorty as a rhetorician of inquiry who both attacks the foundationalist or modernist project and who reveals what more one can do with a rhetorical perspective on inquiry.
Bibliography


