

Idealism and Pragmatism in the Rhetoric of John Boehner:
A Weaverian Analysis of Congressional Discourse

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To Chuck and Kathy Hawley,

My beloved parents,

Responsible for

All I am,

And all I hope to be

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ABSTRACT

American political rhetoric is characterized by a synthesis of contradictory idealistic and pragmatic elements, both of which are necessary if there is to be convincing persuasion. The way in which politicians rhetorically approach this dichotomy is significant, however, current studies on the topic are limited to presidential discourse. There is little research on this topic in other settings such the United States House of Representatives. This criticism analyzes John Boehner's congressional rhetoric in the idealistic-pragmatic dichotomy. The critical method utilized is Richard Weaver's four forms of argument—genus, similitude, consequence, and circumstance. Eight speeches of John Boehner, four from his position as Minority Party Leader and four as Speaker of the House are analyzed using this model. The thesis asserts that Boehner's primary argument was one of consequence, which is practical in orientation, but is complemented by idealistic arguments from genus that while ultimately inferior to consequence, were still major considerations with implications on the merit of legislation. In addition, he relies on common lines of argument which can be encapsulated in Walter Fisher's materialistic myth of the American Dream. Limitations of the study and its implications on the American rhetorical tradition are discussed.

Keywords: Richard Weaver, John Boehner, American Rhetoric, Idealism, Pragmatism, Rhetorical Synthesis, Congressional Rhetoric, House of Representatives

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“The honest rhetorician therefore has two things in mind: a vision of how matters should go ideally and ethically and a consideration of the special circumstances” (Richard Weaver in “Language is Sermonic” 1048).

CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

In its current public disfavor, rhetoric as a term has been pushed to the fringe, relinquishing its place as an honorable Western intellectual tradition in trade for a status as some paragon of dishonest demagoguery. This unfortunate descent in public opinion has been well noted, and to explain that one is a student of rhetoric is to arouse suspicion, as well as a general ignorance to what 'rhetoric' actually means.

In much of the same way, it would be possible to track the descent of another term, 'idealism,' from a respectable belief in transcendentals to a bunch of abstract nonsense. The overall distrust of idealistic thinking can be well expressed in the common heard dictum to 'snap back to the real world.' Hence one must forego intellectual pursuits for a 'real job' with 'real world experience,' and must put abstract principles behind if quantifiable success is to be found. Materialistic emphasis becomes the standard for the determination of value, and what cannot be empirically proven becomes little more than mawkish sentiment. The matching term for this general materialistic line of anti-idealistic thinking is 'pragmatism.'

It is odd then that in this current state of affairs, with the elevation pragmatism and cynicism toward idealism, that American rhetoric is characterized by a seemingly contradictory synthesis of idealistic and pragmatic appeals, both of which must be met by rhetors if they are to successfully persuade the American people. Idealism may be held in current contempt, but in practice it is an integral part of American rhetoric. Hence for politicians to be effective, they must acquiesce to both ends of the idealistic and pragmatic dichotomy.

Beginning with the Puritans and making its way to modern times, has been a rhetorical blend of these two opposing paradigms (E. Bormann; Arnold). Rhetorical idealism is a focus on

the transcendental principles or definitions to guide decision making, while rhetorical pragmatism concerns itself with the tangible particulars or circumstances as the chief consideration (Weaver, *Ethics of Rhetoric*). This dichotomy is intricately tied to the American Dream, which is perhaps the most powerful source of rhetorical persuasion available to American politicians (Fisher, “Reaffirmation and Subversion”).

Every U.S. politician must find a way to reach out to as many members of the American public as possible in order to keep popularity for office, justify their decisions, or rally support for a cause (Zarefsky et al; Foss; Bostdorff). In the process, it becomes essential to reach those who would consider themselves idealists, those who consider themselves pragmatists, and those who would classify themselves somewhere in between. Arguing too often or too strongly from one perspective has shown to be detrimental to public support (Bostdorff; Foss; Zagacki). In short, successful political discourse in America must find a way to merge the two apparently incongruous rhetorical arguments (Arnold; Rowland and Jones, “Brandenburg Gate”; Bostdorff and Goldzwig; Nichols; Chapel and Jensen).

That this conflicting tension between rhetorical idealism and pragmatism is central to the American political discourse experience may be well established; what has been little studied is how this dichotomous tradition in rhetoric occurs outside mainstream executive oratory. That is, nearly all research concentrating on rhetorical idealism and pragmatism has focused on how prominent politicians—namely and almost exclusively presidents, have formulated their speeches to balance the two for the American public (for exceptions see Nichols; Chapel and Jensen; Chapel; Rushing and Frentz). As important as Presidential rhetoric may be, the public persuasion by other politicians too is worthy of inquiry. For example, few have considered how rhetorical

idealism and pragmatism functions in another branch of government essential to the American tradition—the legislative branch.

For predictable reasons, the study of Congressional rhetoric is not as popular as executive oratory. For one, legislative representatives receive much less media coverage and are less identifiable to the layperson (Johnson and O’Grady; Dabbous and Ladley). Another reason may be the complexity of the legislative process which involves strategizing, party politics and other factors that may limit rhetorical inquiries. Finally, rhetoric in Congress takes a much different form than in other political public discourse. The discourses tend to be much shorter, legislatively focused, and polarized to name a few considerations (Rocca).

Regardless of the reasons, there has been little attention given to the rhetoric of congresspersons by the communication discipline as it relates to idealism and pragmatism. This is a deficiency in the dialogue of scholarship on American rhetoric in general; as well it is a specific deficiency in the idealistic-pragmatic tradition. Although in another context and distinct rhetorical situation from presidential discourse, surely many of the same oratorical patterns and strategies apply. At the same time, one would expect to find unique rhetorical strategies because of the influence of party politics, coalition building, distinct strategizing and their political duties. In fact, the strategies of rhetorical idealism and pragmatism in Congress are intriguing because of the complexity. For example, the existence of coalitions would probably foster a stout idealistic rhetoric. Simultaneously, the nature of Congress, being at some point to pass laws for the country, requires compromise and reaching across the aisle. It would be assumed then that pragmatic rhetoric would be an important function of congressional discourse as well.

For these reasons, scholars need to shift more attention to congressional discourse. These reflections come together to form the outline of this study, a rhetorical analysis of political

rhetoric within Congress. And even with all the work that has been devoted to illuminating the American idealistic-pragmatic tradition in discourse and all the challenges it presents to orators, few have attempted to see how it operates in this congressional setting. This study would allow for a more thorough and diverse understanding of its contemporary functions.

Selecting exactly who and what to study is among the chief challenges in approaching this analysis. Perhaps the best place to begin would be to isolate a single individual, prominent and influential in their party and legislative body, and observe how she or he approaches the rhetorical situation. This would be beneficial because the individual would have great sway over the other members of their party. One person who fits this bill is House Representative John Boehner of the 8th District of Ohio. Boehner has served in the U.S House of Representatives for 24 years, including the roles of Majority Leader and Minority Leader before taking his current position as Speaker of the House. Boehner played a central role among Republicans throughout his tenure, especially in the past decade. Because of Boehner's influence and longevity in office, he is a prime candidate to study for idealistic and pragmatic rhetorical strategies.

The next consideration must determine what type of framework or model would be best to use for this study. Although numerous rhetorical theorists have written on ideological and practical rhetoric, perhaps no one has been used more to study it than Richard M. Weaver. Weaver, who has remained a controversial theorist ever since his writings in the early twentieth century, developed a hierarchy of arguments which classifies rhetorical arguments into categories of idealistic or pragmatic reasoning. Now while Weaver himself argued that philosophical idealistic arguments are ethically superior to pragmatic ones, some scholars have disagreed with him (D. Bormann; Foss; Titsworth). There is a consensus, however, that his argument types align with either idealistic or pragmatic rhetorical reasoning and his model has

been commonly utilized in that way (Rowland and Jones, “Regan at Brandenburg”; Foss; Enholm; Gilles).

Weaver classifies arguments into four categories: the arguments from genus or definition, similitude, circumstance and consequence. The first two are considered idealistic reasoning and the latter two are considered practical (*Ethics of Rhetoric*; “Language is Sermonic”). The argument from definition or genus frames the issue in a certain way by “categorizing things according to their type,” focusing on the “transcendentals,” and seeking the nature of the thing in question (*Ethics* 56). The argument from similitude compares entities to discern the proper belief or course of action (*Ethics*). The arguments from consequence and circumstance use cause and effect reasoning and make their decisions in relation to the particulars and situations respectively (*Ethics*).

Using this framework to study rhetorical idealism and pragmatism, scholars have identified trends in discourse, especially presidential, to recognize reasons for persuasive success and failure, synthesis, and even categorizing individuals into a worldview (Foss; Rowland and Jones, “Brandenburg Gate”; Bostdorff; Enholm). Others have used it to examine the media, Taiwanese government, and even Richard Weaver’s own rhetoric (Gilles; Lin; Bliese). While the model is not without limitations, it is one of the most utilized by rhetorical scholars and fits the goals for this study (see Crowley; D. Bormann; Titsworth; Campbell). The specific limitations of the model and why it is still a useful approach for this study will be expounded on in the literature review.

With that in mind, the purpose of this study is to further the understanding of rhetorical idealism and pragmatism in American political discourse by shifting the focus from executive to legislative oratory, with the goal of understanding how it functions in this different setting. By

looking for patterns in argument type, preference, and blending of idealistic and pragmatic reasoning the researcher hopes to begin building a better understanding of legislative rhetoric for the communication discipline.

To achieve this, the rhetoric of John Boehner, current Speaker of the House and previous Minority Leader, within the House of Representatives will be examined over a four year period from 2009-2013 using Richard Weaver's hierarchy of arguments. This range was chosen because it gives sufficient material to develop patterns and habits of idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric, while it examines Boehner at the height of his influence. To have a full view of how this phenomenon occurs in congress would of course demand studying more than one individual and more than one issue. Unfortunately, that is a project unreasonable for the size of this thesis. It is a perfect area, however, for more research to be conducted by the discipline.

In this study the terms *pragmatism* and *idealism* are not referring to their philosophical or political ideologies per say, but to their rhetorical definitions—although they are frequently related. *Rhetorical Pragmatism* then is discourse concentrated on the material world, consequences and the circumstances which prompt certain beliefs, attitudes, or courses of action. It is concerned with what is expedient, effective and physically desirable, In short, rhetorical pragmatism is concerned with what works. This type of discourse is often expressed under the labels of pragmatism, or realism. Conversely, *Rhetorical Idealism* is discourse centered on abstract or transcendental principles which are used to suggest a belief, attitude, or course of action. It is less concerned with expedience but rather what is right. This often comes under the heading of idealism, moralism, romanticism or transcendentalism.

Although often tied to political pragmatism and idealism, their rhetorical counterparts are not synonymous for the following reason. It would be expected that politicians ascribing to a

pragmatic worldview would argue through pragmatic means, and conversely with idealists. This is generally the case but not always. As Dennis Bormann points out a politician firmly committed to a particular course of action may use every argument possible to try and persuade his or her audience to agree with their position, or in other words, find “every available means of persuasion” (301). The result could be a pragmatist using idealistic forms of argument and vice versa for the idealist.

This work is focused then on rhetorical idealism which uses the arguments from definition and similitude, as well as rhetorical pragmatism which makes use of the arguments from consequence and circumstance. These lines of reasoning will be further developed later in the literature. From now on, rhetorical idealism and pragmatism will simply be referred to in shorthand as idealism and pragmatism respectively.

The central question which this study hopes to answer is: How does John Boehner incorporate rhetorical idealism and rhetorical pragmatism in his speeches? Stemming from this central research questions are three sub-questions: Does he favor one type of argument over another? Does he shift his rhetorical idealism/pragmatism based on the issue? Does Boehner shift his rhetorical idealism/pragmatism based on majority or minority party status? Overall the question this thesis asks, what is Boehner’s strategy with these two opposing concepts?

This thesis does not propose that observing Boehner through this time period will serve as a representative synecdoche for all of congressional rhetoric. The goal is instead to provide illumination that may stir a discussion among scholars and lead to more research. To situate this study better within the existing academic dialogue a thorough investigation of the related literature is presented next.

CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review the importance of idealism and pragmatism in American political discourse and its implications on political rhetoric will be presented. Then through explaining the relevance of John Boehner the need for this particular study will be supported. Finally, literature concerning Weaver's rhetorical paradigm focusing on his hierarchy of arguments will be presented as the best method for this study.

Idealism and Pragmatism in the American Rhetorical Tradition

In the American rhetorical tradition, the two opposing schools of idealism and pragmatism are of vital importance. While these form a dichotomy of sorts with assumptions of the world that appear to be in direct contrast to each other, the literature shows that to be effective in American political discourse, both must be utilized in some manner (Foss; Rowland and Jones, "Brandenburg Gate"; Fisher, "Reaffirmation"). This utilization can be difficult to accomplish, so how rhetoricians approach reconciling the two is important to study. The literature reveals at least three main theories or explanations of why complementary rhetorical idealism and pragmatism must be included in successful American political discourse: Earnest Bormann's conception of romantic pragmatism, Walter Fisher's elements of the American Dream, and Gage Chapel's rhetorical synthesis.

ERNEST BORMANN'S ROMANTIC PRAGMATISM

Ernest Bormann in *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream* traces the root of American discourse to what he calls the "Romantic Pragmatism" of the Puritans (26). Because of the strict form of the Puritan sermon, a standardized method of preaching became common throughout the colonies. On a mission they believed was ordained by God, the Puritans always

considered their action as it related to the overall story of their Lord. As Bormann explains, the Puritan sermon, which played such a vital role in early American society, consisted of an extrapolation of a Biblical text, sometimes a single verse, to discern the transcendental law or principle (29). Simultaneously, their sermons always gave adherence to their everyday problems and needs, especially that of survival in the dangerous New World. This balance or “romantic pragmatism” paved the way for future discourse in America of all types, with political persuasion included (26).

Carroll Arnold too sees the American rhetorical tradition as stemming from the Puritans (74). Arnold argues that there are three main themes essential to American Discourse. He explains: “public debates have been marked by an almost anti-philosophical mixture of transcendental, doctrinaire, and pragmatic claims and arguments” (74). To demonstrate his claim, Arnold shows the progression of these three considerations, summed up in idealism and pragmatism, from Puritanism, to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Franklin Roosevelt, and finally culminating in modern times. Each generation of Americans sought ways to reconcile idealistic and pragmatic themes in their arguments. Arnold concludes that “to succeed in the United States, rhetors have almost always had to be *at once* transcendently confident in some visible ideal, systematically, doctrinally cogent, and at least apparently practical” (84).

A prime example of this pattern can be seen by Charles H. Nichols, who shows that Theodore Parker argued influentially against slavery in this way:

Clearly as a basis for argument the transcendentalist needs the sobering effect of proved facts and ethical principles based not only on good will and sense of duty but pragmatically rooted in an understanding of the normality of human

differences. *Parker's rhetoric attempts this fusion of the ideal and the practical.*

He states a moral proposition and attempts to prove it by facts. (75)

It can be seen that central to this American tradition is the balancing of these apparently incompatible ideologies. Failure to do so can result in disastrous consequences. Fisher explains that when the rhetor overemphasizes one value system too much over another, as a whole the American people suffer from lack of unity ("Reaffirmation and Subversion"). Denise Bostdorff points out that relying too much on idealistic argumentation in discourse can limit the array of actions the country can take because the situation has been framed in a certain light. Contrary courses of action may be seen as violating the country's ethical principles. Yet at the same time, neglect of idealism can make the rhetor seem unprincipled or even immoral.

As previously noted, almost all of the contemporary work on idealism and pragmatism in contemporary American political discourse has focused on executive rhetoric. One such example can be seen in an article by Foss, who through analyzing the speeches of Jimmy Carter, Lyndon Johnson, and Jane Byrne came to the conclusion that politicians often use idealistic rhetoric, specifically the argument from definition, while trying to get elected because it portrays hope and promise. However, through the frustration of public office, a shift in their worldview occurs and can be inferred from a change in their rhetoric. By the end of their terms, prominent politicians tend to forsake idealism instead developing a more pragmatic rhetoric based on the arguments from consequence and circumstance. Foss recommends that a successful politician should continue to argue idealistically from definition but "temper" it pragmatically to hold credibility (378).

Bostdorff took a more in depth look at Jimmy Carter's presidential rhetoric concentrating on the Iranian Hostage Crisis. During the crisis Carter argued almost exclusively idealistic

principle. Bostdorff demonstrates that it handicapped his ability to act because it limited his actions to one particular framing of the situation, causing a drop in popularity. Going against his initial idealism would appear to be by his own standards a break of ethics. There are two important implications from this study. First, a rhetorician giving significantly more focus to idealistic arguments brings the rhetor's worldview to the public's attention for scrutiny. Second, a balance of idealistic and pragmatic arguments is necessary to satisfy the American people (24).

Similar results were found by Bostdorff and Goldzwig's analysis of Kennedy's formal speeches about Vietnam, where Kennedy would argue mostly from idealism, however, in personal interviews Kennedy spent significantly more time on practical concerns. Bostdorff and Goldzwig explain the effectiveness of this rhetorical strategy: "by shifting ground between these two forms of argument, the President accrued rhetorical and political advantages for himself" (516). At the same time, there were repercussions for his strategy. In his public discourse Kennedy framed Vietnam idealistically in a way that his successor had virtually no choice but to go to war. Another lesson here then is that while it is essential to blend idealism and pragmatism in public discourse, "Presidents still must frame issues with care, for to define an issue in idealistic terms is to give that issue a great deal of significance and to raise expectations that might be unmet (527).

Ronald Reagan is one individual who has been studied frequently for the way he mixed idealistic and pragmatic themes (Rowland and Jones, "Brandenburg Gate"; Jones and Rowland; Enholm; Zarefsky, C. Tutzauer and F. Tutzauer). Rowland and Jones examined Reagan's famous 'Tear Down this Wall' speech as an act of idealism and pragmatism. They found that Reagan committed strongly to the idealistic argument from definition, but complemented it with a focus

on the tangible circumstances. The result was an effective, balanced discourse that appealed to a diversity of perspectives in what was a tense and difficult rhetorical situation.

A continuing study in much of the same vein was conducted by Jones and Rowland analyzing Reagan's speech at Moscow State University. On this particular occasion Reagan had two conceptually incompatible goals, one idealistic in critiquing the Soviet system and one practical of giving support to Gorbachev's reforms. He achieved it rhetorically through finding common ground and using "first ideological principles" (100).

As can be seen successful, politicians have been forced to find ways of synthesizing the two apparently incompatible attitudes of idealism and pragmatism to satisfy the American people—albeit using numerous different strategies and approaches. It is now necessary to transition to a second perspective that explains the existence of the idealistic-pragmatic paradigm through analysis of the American dream.

FISHER'S MORALISTIC AND MATERIALISTIC MYTHS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Fisher claims that the American dream is a key source of rhetorical power, but that it is composed of two opposing myths: the materialistic and the moralistic. He states that "the American dream is two dreams, or, more accurately, it is two myths that everyone shares in some degree or other and which, when taken together, characterize America as a culture" ("Reaffirmation" 160). At the one end of the spectrum is the materialistic myth. The materialistic myth "is grounded on the puritan work ethic and relates to the values of effort, persistence, 'playing the game,' initiative, self-reliance, achievement and success" ("Reaffirmation" 161). While these concerns give credence to individualistic values, they also concern themselves with the practical affairs of everyday life and what it takes to achieve material results. At the other end of the American dream spectrum is the "moralistic" myth which "naturally involves the values of

tolerance, charity, compassion and true regard for the dignity and worth of every individual” (161). Often labeled under ‘community values,’ the moralistic myth also directs itself toward attaining the ideal society.

These two myths have strong parallels to the focus of this thesis on idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric. The concepts of the American dream and the idealistic-pragmatic dichotomy are not identical concepts; however, the similarities are striking and certainly help explain their prevalence in American political rhetoric. Fisher explains that both ends of the American dream are always around. He describes it best when he says these two competing myths create “schizophrenia” in the American people (161).

Often in elections the two competing politicians confiscate one end of the myth for themselves. Fisher shows this through a case study between Nixon and McGovern (“Reaffirmation”). Nixon seized the materialistic (pragmatic-oriented myth) while McGovern made use of the moralistic (idealistic-community) myth. Nixon won the election by successfully subverting McGovern’s end of the American Dream. While Fisher believed this to show that at the time of the election American’s identified more with the materialistic myth, his more important argument shows that America need both ends. Abraham Lincoln is offered as a paragon for appealing to the “whole” American dream because both his pragmatic achievement of success as a poor boy starting from nothing, and his community-oriented idealism which incredibly altered the American experience. This wholeness is an important lesson in successful American rhetoric.

In another study, Fisher believed Ronald Reagan to be nearing the status of American Hero because he captured the materialistic myth, the American “romantic strain,” and elements of the moralistic myth (“Romantic Democracy” 299). Reagan had an aura of the Western “town

marshal” that mixed with his wholeness of the idealistic and pragmatic ends of the American dream, captivated a great number of Americans (304).

Another study which showed the effectiveness of this dichotomy looked at the movie “Rocky” and its commercial success. Rushing and Frenz identified Fisher’s two American myths as the key to understanding Rocky’s appeal. In their view, the film should have been a failure, but because it met the moralistic and materialistic myths it captured America’s imagination (68). Frenz and Rushing explain “Audiences experienced in ‘Rocky’ the creation of an integrated set of values that merged materialism and moralism, while reaffirming the central worth of both value orientations” (238). This synthesis is a concept that will be approached shortly.

Finally, Rowland and Jones attributed the idealistic and pragmatic strains of the American Dream to the success of Barak Obama’s speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. In their view, the American dream had been appropriated by the Republican Party since the time of Ronald Reagan as a rhetorical device. Explaining that the opposing moralistic and materialistic myths are simply the embodiment of classical liberalism, they argue that Obama recast the dream as a liberal narrative (Rowland and Jones, “Recasting the American Dream” 427). This apprehended great rhetorical power for the Democratic Party and eventually helped Obama ascend to the Presidency.

As a whole these studies serve to show that the American dream, as a strong rhetorical force, is composed of opposing idealistic and pragmatic elements that must both be accounted for. The review will now turn to a third perspective of rhetorical synthesis to explain this contradiction in American discourse.

CHAPEL AND JENSEN'S RHETORICAL SYNTHESIS

Instead of opting for an either/or approach, Chapel and Jensen offer a way of handling the dialectical tension through a rhetorical balance of idealism and pragmatism in “rhetorical synthesis,” which integrates two opposing ideologies into one comprehensive whole. In their study of Mary Baker Eddy the creator of Christian Science they found:

Eddy appealed to her audience by constructing a “rhetorical synthesis” in which she united two central cultural themes operating at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth: a deeply embedded American idealism and an equally embedded Jamesian pragmatism. This synthesis was a central reason for the success of her heroic rhetoric. (97)

This form of “rhetorical synthesis” can be positively compared with Bormann’s “romantic pragmatism” stemming from the Puritans and the idealistic-pragmatic dichotomy seen so frequently in contemporary political rhetoric. While a rhetorical synthesis can concern any opposing paradigms or cultural values such as liberalism and conservatism, the compatibility of idealism and pragmatism seems to be one of the most common fusions.

The concept of rhetorical synthesis offers good additional evidence to why the idealistic-pragmatic tradition is so important to political rhetoric. Chapel explains that there are four key benefits to arguing from rhetorical synthesis. First, a “synthesis is persuasive because it offers a positive, consistent and coherent vision that fosters conciliation and reduces psychological and sociological stress in individuals and groups” (355). Because all cultures hold a multitude of values, many of which are inherently contradictory, synthesis allows for less internal dissonance when forced to pick certain values over others.

Another benefit of rhetorical synthesis is that the orator does not “alienate many on either side of the issue” (356). There are enough values and fragments of ideology from each position to prevent losing support. The third related benefit supposes that “synthesis enhances persuasion because the style and substance of the synthesis are attractive to many people on both sides of the controversy, people often caught between the appeal of opposing sides, many in the middle, or the undecided” (357). In other words, rhetorical synthesis offends virtually no one and appeals to almost everyone because it incorporates aspects of different worldviews.

Finally, rhetorical synthesis “is attractive because it offers an alternative to the debate” (Chapel and Jensen 99). Instead of making individuals choose sides, it enables them to transcend the dichotomy by coalescing them together. These explanations can clarify why having a balance between rhetorical idealism and pragmatism is necessary for successful public political rhetoric. This synthesis allows for little isolation and great persuasiveness and Eddy Baker is offered as a model example of this strategy.

These three approaches, best advocated by Bormann, Fisher and Chapel respectively, conjoin toward a more complete understanding of the idealistic and pragmatic strains in American political discourse. There is, however, a sizable gap in this area of study. According to the literature no one has ventured to look at how idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric occurs in the contemporary United States Congress. The research is skewed toward the rhetoric of the Executive Branch delivered to the American public. Perhaps equally as important and intriguing approaches to rhetoric can be seen in the legislative process in discourse among representatives.

Current Speaker of the House John Boehner provides a perfect opportunity to observe one example of how idealism and pragmatism is approached in congressional discourse. He has served as both the Minority Leader and Speaker of the House affiliated with the majority party.

The literature review will now concentrate on John Boehner and studies in Congressional rhetoric.

John Boehner and Congressional Rhetoric

The dynamics pressing on any United States Legislative Representative at any time is complex. While the President too has many of the same factors which undoubtedly impact the composition of their rhetoric, by the nature of the position executives command more power to be heard. A Congressional Representative meanwhile is but one individual in an enormous assembly. They are not privileged with the same power, influence, or name-recognition of Presidents. This section will look at the forces influencing congressional rhetoric and how they may affect idealistic and pragmatic rhetorical tendencies. It will then look to John Boehner, specifically.

CONGRESSIONAL RHETORIC

The first factor impacting congressional rhetoric is tied to individual political ambitions—congresspersons' lack of media coverage. Graber shows that congressional representatives get less media attention than the Executive branch and that members jockey against each other for this influence. Studying the instances in which the media does cover congressional personalities, Johnson and O'Grady found that it increases in times of power change, scandal, increasing conflict and bill passage (521). For example, the acquisition of the House of Representatives by the Republican Party riding the momentum of the Tea Party in 2010 fostered abnormally high amounts of attention. Instances such as congressional corruption or personal moral failing would also gather more media interest. One is reminded of the media response to Newt Gingrich and the book deal scandal with Harper Collins. Gingrich received a large amount of attention and his "self-defense rhetoric" was analyzed in an interest article by Kennedy and Benoit.

These types of coverage bring mixed benefits to congresspersons. With the exception of political scandal, a good rule is that any media attention is good attention. It would be expected then that during times of transition, conflict, or bill passage the congresspersons would use rhetoric as a further tool of self-promotion. In order to better understand some of the influences on legislative representatives, it is beneficial to turn to the political science literature.

Some of the factors impacting congressional rhetoric include coalition building and agenda setting (Herrnson and Patterson), minority or majority party status (C. Jones), committees (Wright), and legislative vs. non-legislative debate (Rocca). For example Rocca found that ideologically “extreme” and disadvantaged members of the House of Representatives are more likely to make use of nonlegislative debate options such as 1-minutes, 5-minutes and special-order addresses as a means to extend influence. Building on this, Morris found that members of the minority party use this type more often for partisan rhetoric, although both sides engage in it frequently. Also noteworthy is the impact that C-Span has had on congressional debate. The opportunity to be seen in millions of homes makes the option of unfettered speeches more appealing to representatives for self-promotion (Morris). Acknowledging these factors, Harris emphasizes that individual motives and themes are only a small portion of motivation for these less formal speeches, but that political parties take a major role in structuring those speeches as well. Going against this party rule (and ideology) can be very dangerous for the politician and is done somewhat infrequently (Miller and Squire).

In much the same way as CSPAN, the internet has given congressional representatives another opportunity at self-promotion. Many if not all politicians now have their own websites and upload their speeches online. Taken collectively, advanced media gives greater possibilities for publicity and the ability to self-advertise.

Self-promotion aside, the objective of legislative bodies, at least ideally, is to pass legislation. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs coalition, type of debate, partisanship and length of tenure all come into play when motivating members. Taking all these influences as a whole the question becomes “how do legislators approach idealism and pragmatism in their rhetoric?” It would be assumed that the influence of partisanship and party politics would encourage stout idealistic rhetoric. Meanwhile, the gritty process of passing legislation almost always demands pragmatism—especially if one is in the minority party. Furthermore, with the broadcasting of congressional speeches to the public and potential the politicians will want to appeal to as many voters as possible. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca recognize this dynamic challenge for rhetoricians: “thus, a member of Parliament in England,” or Congress in America, “must address himself to the Speaker, but he may try to persuade those listening to him in the chamber, and beyond that, public opinion throughout the country” (19). This must entail a complex construal of idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric to appeal to the many audiences. It becomes apparent that congressional representatives are in an exceedingly tough situation.

Congressional rhetoric is worth investigation, but it would be impossible to study the idealistic and pragmatic rhetorical strategy of every representative in both houses. For the sake of this paper, a case study of the one important individual, John Boehner, will suffice to give an example of how the dichotomy is approached.

JOHN BOEHNER

John Boehner of Ohio’s eighth district is the current Speaker of the House of Representatives. He has served as the representative of that district since 1991 and has served as Majority Party Leader (2006-2007) and Minority Party Leader (2007-20011) before ascending to the Speakership in 2011. Boehner grew up with 12 siblings and eventually became a successful

business owner, thus leaving his humble circumstances—which he often refers to as a source of persuasion in his rhetoric as an example of the American Dream.

He served politically in the Ohio State Legislator before being elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1991. Since then he slowly worked his way up the Republican ranks through such events as the Contract with America of early 1990's as well as serving on several committees. Working across the aisle with Senator Ted Kennedy, Boehner helped pen the No Child Left Behind Act. Since this time Boehner has been among the most important and influential members of the Republican Party, being intricately involved with debate and legislation on the budget, Affordable Care Act, and the War in Iraq. As Speaker of the House after the emergence of the Tea Party movement, he has received much media attention, especially after the government shutdown of 2013.

John Boehner is an important figure in American Society because of his longevity of office and influence on House proceedings. He is also someone who has lost some favor among Republicans in current years, especially among Tea Party Conservatives. Some challenge his authority questioning if he is really conservative enough. There are some who even go the extent of calling for his replacement as Speaker of the House because they do not believe he has control of the many factions of his party. Yet in an opposing view, there are many who would not doubt his firm commitment to conservative principles. Regardless of the particular view, Boehner has enjoyed success, prominence, and popularity as a congressperson for most of his tenure. Because of this, he is a prime agent to analyze for idealistic and pragmatic tendencies in rhetoric.

Little academic research has centered on John Boehner and so this thesis will be in large part a pioneering study. One project that did observe Boehner looked at the ways in which the news agencies reacted to John Boehner's tendency to cry in public speeches. Gesualdi found that

the media attempted to either “redefine masculinity,” discuss the “double standard” between men and women or question the “political fallout” of his tearful episodes (311-313). The only other main academic work deals with a lawsuit between Boehner and his political rival McDermot (Self).

While interesting, neither of these studies are much help to the scope of this paper. There are no studies which analyze Boehner’s rhetoric and especially none that looks at his idealistic-pragmatic tendencies. While there are many methods that could be utilized to analyze Boehner’s rhetoric, Richard Weaver’s theory has been selected.

Richard Weaver’s Rhetorical Model

Classifying Richard Weaver among the rhetorical community has been a difficult task. While no one would disagree with his strong conservative commitment, the extent of his Platonism and Christian influence is been debated (Follette; Johannesen). More recently, claims of Weaver as a Neo-Aristotelian and a political reactionary have been put forth as well (Beasley; Crowley). Weaver himself identified with the “Platonic-Christian thinkers” and generally that is accepted as the best categorizing of his thought (Johannesen). While Weaver’s impact on the renaissance of rhetorical theory is well documented (Natanson), as is his current influence (Beasley), many of his ideas are disputed (Crowley; D. Bormann). To best understand his rhetorical hierarchy of arguments, a brief overview of his seminal thinking will be given. Then space will be devoted to his four forms of arguments, genus, similitude, consequence and circumstance and their implications for idealism and pragmatism in political discourse.

Through his time at the University of Chicago as a professor of composition, Weaver became an influential political philosopher, cultural critic and rhetorical theorist. His books *Ideas Have Consequences* and *Visions of Order* are widely attributed to helping grow the Neo-

conservative movement in the early Twentieth Century. As for his rhetorical theory, if it be called that, it was discussed most extensively in his book *The Ethics of Rhetoric* and several articles such as “Language is Sermonic.” Due in part to his identification with Platonic views, Weaver saw rhetoric as concerned with ethics, transcendentals and “prudential conduct” (“Language” 1054).

Weaver affirmed the classical notion of rhetoric and dialectic as counterparts, each of which must complement the other: “There is...no rhetoric without dialectic” (“Language is Sermonic” 1057). In *The Ethics of Rhetoric* Weaver defined dialectic as “a method of investigation whose object is the establishment of truth and doubtful propositions” (15). While the concept of establishing truth is central to Weaver’s mission, his idea of truth is particular. In his conception of knowledge there are the three levels—the third in which truth can be established.

In the first level of knowledge there resides numbers, facts and realities of the physical or material kind. Of this data there is a broad consensus among humanity because as Weaver explains “there is never an argument, in true sense of the term, about facts. When facts are disputed, the argument must be suspended until the facts are settled. Not until then may it be resumed, for all true argument is about the meaning of established or admitted facts” (*Ethics* 52-3). Rhetoric and dialectic then are not concerned with this level of knowledge.

The second level of knowledge he calls “facts in elaboration” (*Ethics* 49). These are essentially statements about facts or personal theories. Finally the third level of knowledge Weaver calls propositions about statements which come to form a person’s paradigm. Rhetoric and dialectic are primarily concerned with this level. Dialectic discovers the truth and rhetoric delivers it: “truth plus its artful presentation” (*Ethics* 15).

Weaver the conservative idealist believed that philosophically or idealistically formed paradigms were superior to pragmatic ones, but this is a political/philosophical statement more than a rhetorical one (Foss; D. Bormann). Weaver's more important claim for this paper states that certain kinds of argument reveal a metaphysical position or line of reasoning which stems from their third level of knowledge. This is where his rhetorical ideas especially concern themselves.

Weaver believed that four primary types of argument exist, each of them aligning to a particular worldview. Based on the types of argument a person "habitually uses" the critic can place the rhetor into a paradigm. For example, Weaver wrote that Abraham Lincoln consistently argued from an idealistic source of argument called genus, which shows he thinks idealistically. Conversely, he claimed that Edmund Burke continuously used a pragmatic type of argument called circumstance, so he was a pragmatist. Although Burke may have claimed to be conservative or espoused ideals, Weaver firmly believed that "a man's method of argument is a truer index of his beliefs than his explicit profession of principles" (*Ethics* 58)

Weaver labeled those who argue idealistically Conservative and those who argued pragmatically Liberal, but this inference has met harsh scrutiny from other scholars (D. Bormann). Surely, Weaver was politically motivated in this redefinition of terms, as he was always looking for an "unorthodox defense of orthodoxy" (4). Johannessen, Strickland and Eubanks acutely point out that he seems to break the "linguistic covenant" he espouses as fundamental to social cohesion in "Relativism and the Use of Language" (24). Moreover, Weaver placed all his arguments into an ethical hierarchy with idealistic reasoning being ethically superior to pragmatic reasoning. This too has not been universally accepted (Titsworth). In defense of Weavers hierarchy, however, his ethical ranking is cognitively consistent with his

worldview. Most critics of his work, whether knowingly or not, attack his rhetorical ideas (such as hierarchy of argument type) but fail to recognize the coherence it holds to his philosophical premises. If his ideas about reality are true, and there are transcendentals and an actual 'Good,' then his arguments hold up. In fact, he has admirable consistency based upon his premise of reality. Assuredly this is why there is such polarization with Weaver's ideas. They do not match a postmodern conception of reality but of a more primitive philosophy, which Weaver tacitly admits. Most of the academics that critique Weaver, with exception, are merely disagreeing with his worldview or conception of reality, not his rhetorical ideas, creatively worked out from these premises. Or as wisely puts it Gilles, "in other words, most rhetoricians would agree with the application, if not the intent, of Weaver's system" (128).

Perhaps the best critique, as an exception to the previous paragraph, comes from Dennis Bormann in his article who claims a person's type of argument is not an adequate indicator of their political disposition. In the case of Edmund Burke, Bormann argued that he was merely utilizing "every available means of persuasion" as Aristotle defined true rhetoric (300). Certain types of arguing do reveal something about philosophic and advisory beliefs, however, the challenge for the critic using Weaver becomes how to discern who is "habitually" arguing, and who is creatively designing for optimum persuasion. These criticisms notwithstanding, what no one disputes is that certain types of rhetorical arguments reveal certain lines of reasoning, namely idealism and pragmatism. Next discussed are Weaver's four types of arguments: genus, similitude, consequence, and circumstance.

GENUS

The first type of argument Weaver presents is the argument from genus or definition. Johannesen, Strickland and Eubanks explain the distinction between genus and definition, with

genus arguing from an already established class and definition establishing the class in the rhetoric (22). When the rhetorician argues from genus he or she is classifying entities according to their type. Weaver explains that “all arguments made through genus are arguments based on the nature of the thing which is said to constitute the genus” (*Ethics* 56). Reasoning founded on definition then, is concerned with the true essence of things, a reflection of the natural order and ideals.

Weaver concludes that “those who habitually argue from genus are in their personal philosophy idealists. To them the idea of genus is a reflection of existence” (*Ethics* 56). Weaver gives an example of the argument from genus or definition by using Lincoln’s debates with Stephen Douglass. When discussing the immorality and role of slavery in America, Lincoln continuously used this line of reasoning. First, Lincoln defined the genus of the man, believing all to be endowed with rights, one of which is the right to self-govern. Second, he argued for the nature of African-Americans as men. Consequently, Lincoln’s conclusion was always that, merely because the African-American was a part of the genus of Man, he deserved the right to freedom.

Definition is used to frame an idea or situation in a certain light as a more abstract type of reasoning. While Weaver is not the only person to write about the argument from definition, as McGee points out “the argument from definition is attributable to Richard Weaver, who has written the landmark essay in rhetorical studies on the subject” (B. McGee 143). While Weaver may be credited with giving attention to this type of argument, several other scholars have added to its understanding.

Edward Schiappa for example in the article “Arguing about Definitions” made three distinctions in understanding the arguments from genus: the argument *about* definition, *from*

definition and *by* definition. The argument *about* definition is an attempt to find a better definition for something. An example of this would be when two parties debate the true meaning of the word ‘tolerance.’ Meanwhile the argument *from* definition is used when a definition is created or already accepted by the audience and the rhetor argues from it as a premise, such as the previous example of Abraham Lincoln including African-Americans within the class of Man, concluding that they have the right to be free. Finally the argument *by* definition occurs when definitions are “simply stated as if they are indisputable facts,” and used to argue (5). This is often the case in the labeling some entity, like the term “socialized medicine.” These distinctions are helpful to understanding the different dimensions of Weaver’s “argument from definition.”

Another theorist who has greatly assisted the understanding of the argument from genus or definition is David Zarefsky, who says there are four main strategies in arguing from definition. The first way is defining by “creating associations with other terms, expanding the meaning of a term to cover the new case at hand” (“Presidential Rhetoric” 612). He calls this *analogy*, which is similar to Weaver’s second type of argument, the argument from similitude. While Weaver gives analogy a whole different type of argument, there are certainly parallels to the argument from definition. Analogy defines in that it presents a new angle from which to view the entity in question, such as when liberals denigrate the so-called “war on women” and conservatives lament the arrival of the Affordable Care Act as “socialized medicine.” To be sure there is no actual “war” on women and the Affordable Care Act is a capitalist system, but the rhetorical connection to violence and socialism respectively, help to influence how it is received. For this reason, similitude is considered a more idealistic form of argument. A second strategy of definition is *dissociation* which deconstructs a term or idea into fragments “to identify one’s proposal with the most favored part” (612). A third strategy is that of *condensation symbols*

which brings terms and values together through implicit meanings. Finally there is *frame shifting* which encourages the audience to view an issue in a different light than is currently seen.

Kenneth Burke makes a distinction between two primary kinds of definition—contextual and familial. Contextual definition determines an entity by marking “its boundaries” through “negation, which is another way of saying that, to define a thing in terms of context, we must define it in terms of what it is not” (24, 25). Meanwhile familial definition delimits “in terms of ancestral class” (26). This can look to either etymology or history to clarify its meaning. Regardless of the specific kind definition the rhetoricians will assign the object to a class and assign its behavior to the membership in that genus. These classes can be anything from a biological genus of “stone” to a socially constructed group, such as Burke’s example of “bald headed carpenters under forty” (28).

Finally, Charles Stevenson’s book *Ethics and Language* makes the fundamental point that definitions are frequently if not always persuasive in nature, in that they are designed by the person as a means to further their framework and conclusions (210). An entity craftily defined for argument will inevitably end up at the conclusion the rhetor wants. Such was the case in many of the Platonic dialogues. In summary, the argument from genus can be considered idealistic because it focuses on abstract reasoning. By defining something one outlines the principle to decide the action rather than the particulars of the situation.

SIMILITUDE

Weaver’s second kind of argument is the argument from similitude or analogy. This rationale sees the connectedness of all things and demonstrates the truth of a proposal by its commonality with another idea. Those who mostly argue from analogy “expresses belief in a oneness of world,” and “tend to look toward some final, transcendental unity, and as we might

expect, this type is used widely by poets and religionists” (*Ethics* 56). Weaver claims that this type of reasoning is “hinting at essence” that is not yet attainable to understand (“Sermonic” 1048). This too should be seen as a more idealistic ways of arguing because as Zarefsky asserts, when comparing and associating one is really defining by giving a new framework and way of understanding. The inherent assumption of analogy as a form is that things share similarities of which humans can learn. It implies that there is something abstract besides a world of separate, isolated specifics. Weaver writes on similitude, “there is no universal ground for predication. Yet behind every analogy lurks the possibility of a general term” (1049). This “general term” is the abstract idealistic definition Weaver seeks.

Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca write on similitude that “no one will deny the importance of analogy in the workings of the intellect. Yet, though everyone recognizes it as an essential factor in imaginative thinking, it has been viewed with distrust when used as a means for proof” (*The New Rhetoric* 371-372). This distrust of analogy is somewhat unfair, they explain, as it is attributable to unethical rhetoricians. For some philosophical schools, such as those stemming from Plato and Aquinas, similitude is not only a legitimate form of argumentation, it is essential to their particular views of reality (372). Analogy is most permissible and effective in discourse, they write, when dealing with the “opposition between finite and infinite” (374). Similitude allows for a glimpse of the essence of the infinite or transcendental which is not directly attainable, hence similitude in this usage, is in full agreement with Weaver’s delineation of analogy to idealistic reasoning.

These rhetorical analogies, however, are not all indicators of idealistic discourse. It is more than possible that someone uses an argument from similitude to advocate for utilitarian means. Furthermore, analogy so permeates language that terms such as “light,” “weight” and

countless others are used to describe phenomenon in every day discussion which are not meant idealistically, although their very infiltration into the language suggests an inherent assumption of connectedness between things. Instead, analogy is most idealistic when it compares the finite and the infinite or is used in a way to shine light upon a transcendental principle.

CONSEQUENCE

The third category is the argument from consequence, or cause and effect. In reasoning from consequence, one attempts to predict what will happen in the future if a certain action is taken. It is a less philosophically founded argument and is an approach generally taken by pragmatists. The argument from consequence follows generally a pattern of ‘if *A* then *B*.’ It is considered a more practically-oriented rhetorical argument because it concerns itself less with what is right or what ideal principles should be followed, but rather what tangible impact will be caused by a certain course of action. Of course the consequences are argued to be either desirable or undesirable which is surely a value judgment, however, the first ideological or philosophical principles are not made explicit, and they are not the central concern.

On cause and effect Weaver shows that “it is heard most commonly from those who are characteristically pragmatic” (“Sermonic” 1049). In agreement with Weaver’s conclusion, Perleman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write “we call that argument pragmatic which permits the evaluation of an act or an event in terms of its favorable or unfavorable consequences” (266). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca claim that this is a natural common sense way of reasoning which does not need to be defended, unlike the antithesis which must always be defended, such as when a person says “truth is to be commended, whatever the consequences may be” (267). This clearly demonstrates the polarization of pragmatic and idealistic thought, and why Weaver denigrated practical argument as pernicious if left alone without complementary reasoning. The

argument from cause and effect is of strong rhetorical force because it is of obvious, material significance. Humanity, in Weaver's view, must fight against merely considering the physical circumstances to attain right behavior.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca go further in dissecting the cause and effect argument, making a distinction between observed consequences and foreseen consequences. As the name implies, observed consequences are those that can already be perceived while foreseen consequences are hypothetical in that they predict what will happen if certain actions are or are not taken. Furthermore, rhetoricians may make use of causal arguments "generally accepted connections" or those that are personally known only to the rhetor.

The argument from consequences leads to a 'means to ends' perspective, but can only be successful when the audience and the rhetorician identify with each other as to the value of the consequences espoused. If they disagree in their assessment of worth, persuasion will not take place.

Kenneth Burke, for what it is worth, writes that "we can say that people interpret natural sequences in terms of cause and effect not because of something in the natural scene requiring this interpretation, but because they are the sort of agents that see things in terms of necessary relations" (177); indicating that the human mind interprets in terms of cause and effect. There seems to be expressed disagreement over the natural tendency to perceive existence in terms of sequence, but it is sufficient to say whether from natural phenomena or social inculcation, humanity frames the world in this manner.

It is also worth noting that Weaver frequently made use of this argumentative method, even though it scores lower on his ethical hierarchy. Bliese aptly points out that it was his most "habitual" method, and his seminal work is entitled *Ideas Have Consequences*, even if he at first

fought the name. This seems to negate his ethical thesis and validate the neutrality taken in this Thesis toward the desirability of each type of argument.

CIRCUMSTANCE

Finally there is the argument from circumstance which Weaver believes to be the most pragmatic of all, and Weaver shows it to be a subvariety of cause and effect reasoning (“Sermonic”). Weaver personally derides this type of argument in his definition of it explaining that “this argument merely reads the circumstances-the ‘facts standing around’-and accepts them as coercive, or allows them to dictate the decision” (*Ethics* 57). He explains that this is the “least philosophical” of all reasoning but instead, this approach focuses on the tangibles (“Sermonic” 1050).

Weaver cites Edmund Burke as someone who argued pragmatically from circumstance by analyzing his discourse on the American and French Revolutions. An example he uses is Burke’s inclination toward supporting the Americans, not because it was morally, politically or philosophically right, but because “of the magnitude of the situation” and the appearance that “America is a growing country, of awesome potentiality, whose strength, both actual and imminent, makes it advisable for the Mother Country to overlook abstract rights” (*Ethics* 63). In this argument it can be seen, that Burke decided not to argue from principle or definition, instead opting to reason from circumstance.

John Campbell, reflecting on Weaver’s conclusions of Edmund Burke and the argument from circumstance, writes that “Weaver’s observation that argument from circumstance simply makes use of the ‘facts standing around’ therefore only partially describes Burke’s use of it in Reflections. Circumstantial argument is simple to employ and is of ready application when there is common agreement on the force of and direction of contemporary trends...” (1772). The

argument from circumstance then, is applicable to those who interpret the particulars in the same way. In addition, Campbell writes that the “argument from circumstance has a fundamental role to play, not simply in forcing certain choices and thereby avoiding argument, but in making certain choices seem natural and attractive and others undesirable” (1773). It is especially appealing “to those who benefit by the given social order” because it does not reflect on what philosophically or ideally should be, but what is most advantageous in the context. This weakness leads Campbell to labeling the argument “shortsighted”.

But it is not an inherently base form of reasoning either, as much as Weaver may like to make it seem. If complemented by other kinds of thinking, circumstance can help fit the principle to the situation, synthesizing the transcendental within the transient. While Weaver personally esteemed less the argument from circumstance, this paper makes no value judgment on which reasoning type is by its nature superior. That is a question open for debate and is outside the scope of this thesis. It is sufficient to acknowledge that this is a more pragmatic, material approach to issues.

So among Weaver’s four types of argument genus and similitude consist of a *rhetorical idealism* while the arguments from consequence and circumstance compose a *rhetorical pragmatism*. It is worth mentioning that Weaver mentioned three other types of argument as well. There is the argument from authority which is an appeal to what somebody else has said. Weaver comments that this argument is only as strong as the source. Additionally, Weaver mentioned that Abraham Lincoln used the argument from “opposites,” but he does not go on to explain precisely what the argument entails or its assumptions (*Ethics of Rhetoric*). Finally Bliese argues that at the time of Weaver’s premature death, he was on the verge of discovering a new argument genre that would “transcend” his hierarchal system—the argument from history

(275). For the sake of this study, however, only the four main kinds of argument will be used because they give a clear and reasonable alignment with either idealism or pragmatism.

Weaver of course is not the only rhetorician to write about idealism and pragmatism, as the ideas of other theorists both affirm and develop his claims. While Weaver believes the arguments from Genus and Similitude constitute an idealistic rhetoric, Stephen Toulmin for example, makes a distinction between substantial and analytical modes of argument. Foss, Foss and Trapp explain his position when they write, “individuals using analytic arguments base their claims on unchanging and universal principles. Those who use substantial arguments, on the other hand, ground their claims in the context of the particular situation rather than in abstract, universal principles” (120). Analytic argumentation then, in the mind of Toulmin, is representative of idealistic thinking while substantial reasoning is practical. Kenneth Burke too reflecting on idealistic thinking and discourse explains that it features the pentadic term *agent* as of primary concern (171).

As for pragmatism, Kenneth Burke stresses that the term of *agency* as of primary concern, or a focus upon means and method (275). Utility and exigence are of the foremost concern. He explains that “in one sense, there must be as many ‘pragmatisms’ as there are philosophies. That is, each philosophy announces some view of human ends, and will require a corresponding doctrine of means” (275). Instead of being a unified front, pragmatist philosophies vary widely in their agencies. Their similarities lie only in their focus upon ends and means.

These ideas help expand and verify Weaver’s concept of rhetoric. It also shows that Weaver’s method is not the exclusive way to conduct this study. Burke’s pentad, for example, could analyze the speeches of Boehner to see which terms he features with agent as a signpost of idealism and agency as a signpost of pragmatism. Weaver’s model, however, is specifically

designed for the revealing of position, and the precedent set by other scholars further bolster's this method. It is to the other scholars' remarks on and application of Weaver's model to which this will now turn.

APPLICATION OF WEAVER

Now that the types of arguments have been explained, this Thesis will look at how different scholars have utilized Weaver's arguments. Ever since Weaver wrote in the 1940's and 1950's he has been a controversial theorist. Several harsh criticisms have come against him and his work attacking his platonic idealism, political bias, and sample size (D. Bormann; Crowley). Yet others consistently affirm his importance, usefulness and contributions to rhetorical theory (Natanson; Jones and Rowland; Bliese; Johannesen). For analysis he has been used frequently to discern political positions such as in "Reagan and the Mixed Forms of Argument" (Enholm). Gilles used his hierarchy of arguments to determine the types of reasoning most used by the media.

As for rhetorical idealism and pragmatism, Weaver's framework has been used quite frequently. Scholars have made use of Weaver to determine idealistic and pragmatic elements of rhetoric in Jimmy Carter, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Jane Byrne, Ronald Reagan and even the American Revolution (Bostdorff; Bostdorff and Goldzwig; Foss; Enholm; Rowland and Jones, "Reagan at Bradenburg"; Sproule, "Emerging Rationale").

Because of this precedent, Richard Weaver's model is more than justified as an appropriate framework to analyze the idealistic and pragmatic tendencies of John Boehner. This literature review has served to show the strong history of "romantic pragmatism" in American rhetoric, the importance of John Boehner and congressional discourse to American society, and the dynamics of Richard Weaver's critical methodology.

CHAPTER 3- METHODOLOGY

As mentioned previously, the goal of this work is to promote an understanding of how idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric occur in the United States House of Representatives, through analyzing John Boehner's discourse. This study will limit the discourse to intra-house rhetoric, thereby excluding other public statements and news coverage. Instead, the text will be limited to speeches given in Congress. This is not because public statements and press conferences are irrelevant to the happenings in the House—the opposite is true. However, the goal of this thesis being to analyze speeches *in* Congress necessarily makes this limitation. This is the distinction between congressional rhetoric and rhetoric by a congressperson.

For the scope of the text, it is necessary to analyze speeches of significant length. This is challenging because of the nature of the House of Representatives. In a body composed of 435 members it is implausible for everyone to speak at length and generally, if given an opportunity to speak, there are strict time constraints. It is therefore impossible to analyze numerous speeches longer than an hour because with the exception of filibusters, they do not exist. Yet, there can still be significant depth encoded in speeches of a more reasonable length, preferably between 10 and 20 minutes. Additionally, John Boehner's current position as Speaker of the House discourages him from speechmaking as compared to when he was in the positions of Majority and Minority Party Leader between 2006 and 2010. There are still occasions when Boehner makes speeches in his current role but they tend to be short in duration. For the purpose of feasibility, this study will limit the timeframe from 2009 to 2013, which includes Boehner as Minority Leader and Speaker of the House. This timeline seems to provide a sufficient window to study because Boehner is in his more influential roles during a diverse period of legislation in both the minority and majority party—including any influences on his discourse they may bring.

According to these criteria, there are eight speeches of satisfactory length which will be analyzed. The median length of the speeches is between 10 and 20 minutes, with a few at five minutes and one longer speech of an hour. From these eight speeches, two are on the Affordable Care Act, one on budgetary concerns, one on the Cap and Trade legislation, one on the government shutdown, one where John Boehner accepts his new role as Speaker of the House and one on school choice legislation. The variance of topic is beneficial because Boehner can be observed on different issues that he may rhetorically approach differently. Analyzing speeches on just one topic such as the health law could present an inaccurate portrait.

The number of speeches is determined and limited to what is jointly transcribed in the *Congressional Record* and available on YouTube. The Congressional Record gives a detailed transcription of all the activity formally conducted in Congress and it serves as the best source for textual analysis. The critic is not involved in the transcribing of words so any error that may occur is due to the transcription of the Congressional Record. The written text will be crosschecked simultaneously by watching the speeches on YouTube—allowing for a better discernment of nonverbals, emotions and emphasis.

Besides being varied in topic, eight speeches seem to be workable number. Many speeches in the House of Representatives are one-minutes given at the beginning of each day or 5-minute special-order addresses. These may be valuable to study, however, on their own they do not give an adequate substance to display the complex patterns of idealism or pragmatism. These eight speeches taken as a whole provide a sufficient sample to draw patterns and themes, but is limited enough to be workable. The specific speeches of John Boehner which will be analyzed are as follows: February 12th, 2009 against the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; June 26, 2009 in a mini filibuster opposing Cap and Trade legislation; March 22,

2010 against the Affordable Care Act in a discourse titled “Boehner Floor Speech Opposing the Democrats’ Government Takeover of Health Care”; November 7, 2010 against what Boehner claimed as “Speaker Pelosi’s government takeover of healthcare”; January 5th, 2011 containing Boehner’s remarks and as the new Speaker of the House; March 20, 2011 in support of H.R. 471 or the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program; Apr 27, 2012 on the Interest Rate Reduction Act; And finally September 30, 2013 on the Government Shutdown.

The eight speeches will be rhetorically analyzed using Weaver’s four types of argument as the primary tool, categorizing arguments into either idealistic or pragmatic reasoning—with the arguments from genus and similitude being considered idealistic and the arguments from circumstance and consequence counted as pragmatic. The literature on Weaver identifies two approaches, with one being much more frequent than the other. The first way approached by Floyd and Adams looked for the major premise behind each argument and labeled it by argument type. Then they quantitatively analyzed the total number of each argument type and ran the statistics to see any significance with argument preference. This method was adequate for their study which sought to validate Weaver’s findings on Edmund Burke, however, a numerical representation is insufficient for the purposes of this current study. A numerical representation does not capture the picture as a whole, showing the intricateness of wording or demonstrating how argument types are blended together. In addition, no other study found in the literature makes use of Weaver’s model in this way. What is beneficial of this first method, however, is the focus on the major premise behind each argument. As prescribed by Weaver, the major premise is where the rhetorician’s idea about reality resides and the argument type stems from. When categorizing arguments then in this current study, special attention will be given to the major premise.

The second and primary way Weaver's four types of arguments have been utilized is by approaching the inquiry qualitatively, incorporating such variables as judgment and strategy as a holistic method. For example Rowland and Jones showed Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate relied primarily on idealistic reasoning from both human nature and the role of government. He continuously "tempered" his idealistic prominence by showing how it must work in reality (Rowland and Jones, "Bradenburg Gate"). By in large, this method is preferable for the topic at hand. The Reagan example does a better job of showing how the dichotomy is approached and balanced than a quantitative method would.

Following these precedents, the current study will look at Boehner's text qualitatively for patterns, habits, themes, clusters, preferences, topics and apparent strategies in idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric through Richard Weaver's model. The role of the researcher will then be as critic and interpreter with the intent of accurately representing the discourse in how it approaches the dichotomy.

In this study the primary research question is as follows: How does John Boehner incorporate rhetorical idealism and rhetorical pragmatism in his speeches? Sub questions related to this include: Does he favor one type of argument over another? Does he shift his rhetorical idealism/pragmatism based on the issue? Does he shift his rhetorical idealism/pragmatism based on majority or minority party status? The thesis does not claim to be able to take in to consideration every factor which may influence the discourse of John Boehner in the House of Representatives. What the thesis does hope to achieve is a viable rhetorical analysis and the beginning of a discussion in the discipline of House Rhetoric.

Now that the scope of speeches has been named and the research questions of the project have been presented, it is necessary to outline the specific methodological approach and manner in which it will be narrated in the final two chapters.

The Analysis chapter of the thesis will be separated into two major headings. The first will be labeled “Individual Speeches” and the second “Synthesis, Structure and Strategies” which analyzes the speeches as a whole. The specific steps in analyzing the text will be as followed: First, all the text of the discourses will be collected and organized chronologically. This will allow for the flow and progression of ideas to be developed. Next the speech material will be scrutinized, reread and watched several times to gain a general sense of the major themes, strategies and types of arguments. The first part of the results section will approach the speeches chronologically, analyzing them one at a time before progressing to the next speech. The analysis will be presented alongside the historical context and circumstances surrounding both the speech and legislation to better situate it within its scene. For each discourse, a basic summary of structure and major points will also assist in correctly portraying the idealistic and pragmatic themes.

For each particular speech there will be four primary subheadings: one for each genus/definition, similitude, consequence, and circumstance. The idealistic arguments of genus and similitude will be developed systematically by their major premises, much in the same way as Weaver in *Ethics of Rhetoric*. For example, when presenting the way Abraham Lincoln made use of the argument from definition, Richard Weaver listed the common arguments in clusters and gave a few paragraphs to describing them. Weaver cited Lincoln’s “Argument from the nature of all government” and the “Argument from the nature of contract” (*Ethics* 97). Each of

these was trailed by an extrapolation of the argument's main idea and implications. In this current study, the major reasoning will be represented much of the same way.

The pragmatic arguments will entail essentially the same framing and means of analysis with exception that the arguments from consequence and circumstance will be highlighted. After the four main subheadings, any strategies, patterns, and themes correlating the idealistic and pragmatic arguments will be scrutinized. Tactics such as favoring one type of argument over another and tempering idealism with pragmatism will be looked for, however, the findings in this subsection are mostly emergent from the speeches themselves. Therefore, the approach to discourse will dictate the strategies mentioned, rather than imposing a pre-existing framework.

This pattern of analysis will reoccur for all eight speeches. After this will come the second phase of analysis concentrated under the major heading "Synthesis, Strategies and Structure." The major idea of this section is to bring together the results from the eight major speeches into one comprehensive, unified whole. This section will look at the common strategies, patterns, topics, of the speeches as they relate to one another. For example, it is possible that Boehner shifted his preference for arguments over time from more idealistic to pragmatic, or vice versa. Additionally, Boehner could have the consistent pattern of tempering one type of argument from another or the outward circumstances could have major implications. Finally, there could be common tropes that Boehner relies on to form his discourse. Obviously much of this work is under the qualitative judgment of the author. Almost all of the results to be found under the "Synthesis, Strategies and Structure" section will be emergent. The exception of course, is relating these findings to the specific research questions of the study.

Regardless of the specific findings, that major patterns found will be broken down into clusters that that represent major issues, themes or topics. First, if there are any reoccurring

arguments they would be presented. Second, any consistent patterns or themes in the ways the arguments are presented and balanced will be presented. For example, if Boehner often uses idealism to attack his rivals but pragmatism to reach out to them, that would be considered a pattern. Finally, any development over time or change due to a switch in political situation would be noted.

The fifth and final chapter of the thesis, labeled “discussion,” will deal mostly with the implications of the “analysis” chapter as it relates to the larger academic dialogue in the literature. Specifically, the results will be compared to the research questions of the study to see what principles can be gleaned. The meaning of John Boehner’s strategies will also be discussed. Furthermore any explanations and implications available with the findings will be presented. This will lead into a discussion of the particular limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Finally, the fifth chapter will serve as an adequate summary of the entire study--an interpretation of the findings and what it means to future and prior research. Because the goal of this paper is to create a portrait of Congressional rhetoric, the interpretation will be less evaluative than it is neutral. In considering ethics, it should be clear that aim of this study is not political, but concentrated on understanding. Efforts will be taken not to advocate for any particular political position or to praise or blame John Boehner. Instead, the hope is to give personal reflections using Weaver’s model.

To summarize, American discourse is marked by an almost contradictory synthesis of idealistic and pragmatic rhetorics; a tradition that can be shown to persist from the romantic pragmatism of the early Puritans and manifesting itself in the moralistic and materialistic elements of the American Dream. Because every politician and rhetorician must creatively discover some tactic to satisfy both philosophies, their strategy, whether successful or not, is of

significance to the rhetorical critic. And while there have been some criticisms on the role of idealism and pragmatism in presidential discourse, the counterpart of congressional rhetoric has been so far omitted. To pioneer in this area, eight speeches of John Boehner between 2009 and 2013 will be analyzed from Richard Weaver's hierarchy of arguments. These include the arguments from genus and similitude which suppose an idealistic tendency, and the arguments from consequence and circumstance which convey a pragmatic propensity.

The findings of this rhetorical criticism will investigate Boehner's rhetorical strategy and its implications on American political rhetoric (especially congressional), idealism and pragmatism, and the rhetorical ideas of Richard M. Weaver. The narrative that will emerge if this thesis meets the goal will shine new light on a neglected aspect of the American Rhetorical Tradition.

CHAPTER 4- ANALYSIS

Individual Speeches

SPEECH ONE: ECONOMIC STIMULUS

At the time of this first speech, February 13th 2009, the United States was firmly fitted in economic recession. The crash of the housing market and the raging credit crisis were but a few factors which led to the difficulty for both American citizens and citizens of the world. In response, the Democratic led house drafted legislation entitled the American Recovery Reinvestment Act of 2009. With a total expense of 890 billion—or 1.1 trillion with interest factored in—to help stimulate the struggling economy, the bill called for spending in areas such as education and infrastructure among a myriad of others with the intent of saving jobs. Minority Party Leader John Boehner, although in favor of some form of stimulus, rose up against this specific bill. His dissent was unsuccessful as the bill passed 244-188 and was signed into law on February 17, 2009.

His speech structured around showing the negative impacts of the act on the American people, the unethical methodology used by the Democrats to draft it, and the breaking of contract between the representatives and their constituents. Although the frequency of argument type between idealism and pragmatism was somewhat balanced, his point was founded upon a practical basis. The specific arguments and strategies will be developed here.

First referencing the idealistic arguments in this discourse, Boehner made use of definition as a way of establishing and clarifying the goals which the act is supposed to attain. In it, he reminds his fellow Representatives of their duty to the American people and of the proper ethical process that should be followed when drafting legislation. So definition or genus was an important element of this speech, even though it was subversive to consequential concerns. In

addition, similitude was omitted entirely, which is an occurrence which will be repeated frequently in Boehner's speeches, seeming to indicate that he either does not think in this manner or that he does not use every available means of persuasion. As for the idealistic arguments he did include, exclusively those of definition, they will now systematically be established.

Genus/Definition

Argument defining the ideal goals of stimulus legislation

“But the bill that was supposed to be about jobs, jobs, jobs has turned into a bill that’s all about spending, spending, and spending” (“American Recovery”). Framing is one of the most effective strategies of definition and was implemented early to create the standard from which to judge the legislation. The previous quote demonstrates how Boehner immediately clashed the ideal purpose of the bill with the ugly reality, i.e. jobs with wasteful spending. So already the bill falls short of its proper execution. He continues that the act must “work for the American people, work for families, work for small businesses, and get our economy rolling again” (“American Recovery”). He wisely chooses principles with which all parties could identify.

Argument from the proper process of drafting legislation

Here Boehner laments the partisanship with which the bill was created. In his eyes, the polarization that excluded Republicans from participating in the process violates the abstract contract of goodwill and free exchange of ideas that should define the House of Representatives. He states, “not only were we not included at the beginning of the process, we weren’t even included at the end of the process” (“American Recovery”). This argument is more jeremiad than detraction from what is in the bill, but it fits in with his list of complaints. It also flows smoothly into the next definitional argument.

Argument from the responsibility of the legislator's position

After outlining the partisanship bias, Boehner points to the transgression of responsibility committed by the Democratic Party when they are about to pass legislation that they have not even read: “1,100 pages not one Member of this body has read” (“American Recovery”). Instead of this shady practice, in Boehner’s view, the House owes it to the American people to be transparent and accountable in their actions.

Argument from the will of the American people

In one of the most reoccurring and intriguing arguments as at concerns idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric is Boehner’s reliance on what the American people want, or put another way, the will of the American people. In this instance, the people want jobs and disparege spending; “to give American families and small businesses the ability to keep more of what they earn to help their families, to help their businesses, to create more jobs. That’s what the American people want” (“American Recovery”). On the surface this is idealistic reasoning because it reminds the legislators of their abstract commitment to represent their citizens; however, continuous referral to the will of the American people to guide legislative policy is in itself a circumstantial and practically-oriented way to approach decisions. This is because public opinion is a mere state, fickle and ever changing. By this principle, in a time of war, hypothetically, whatever public opinion says determines the action. So, if the American people want to go to war, the United States should, but if the citizens do not want war the United States should refrain. An abstract idealistic principle such as the justice of the war must then submit to the people, giving circumstantial realities the preference. In the same way, public opinion on the legislation, if allowed to determine the outcome, is not very idealistic at all. Instead it is more cloaked in a romanticized idea of the role of Congress. This is the first example of a complex

rhetorical synthesis of the transcendental and the transient, or the idealistic and pragmatic. His strategy was to put a pragmatic argument into an idealistic form of argument.

Argument from the proper role of Government

As a final principled way in which to evaluate the pending law, Boehner espouses a “smaller, less costly, and more accountable federal government,” criteria which this proposal does not meet (“American Recovery”). For this reason it transgresses the principle and should not be passed. Noteworthy of this definition is that it is the first with a partisan basis. How could members of the left, if philosophical advocates of big government, identify with this premise as determining bad legislation? It is fair to wonder whether Boehner is trying to reach Democratic legislators or his supporters at home. Either way, the principle of limited government example shows that when using ideological rhetoric, not all people will agree with the idea, making persuasion unlikely.

In sum, idealistic considerations played a role in Boehner’s speech against the economic stimulus bill, especially as a way to promote requirements that the underlying piece of legislation must meet. In specific, it was definition instead of genus, because he rhetorically constructed the class ‘ideal stimulus legislation,’ and then argued from it as a premise. This definitional idealism, however, is best understood in the speech as a complement to his consequential reasoning founded in pragmatism.

Any speech that hopes to persuade in political America must show its implication on everyday living. A bill then must meet the test of bringing good effects and avoiding negative outcomes for the American people. For this economic stimulus package, Boehner warns of the numerous harms it will cause.

Consequence

It would be extravagant and unnecessary to go through every consequence that Boehner predicts if the legislation is passed. It is enough to show the primary effects and the way in which he utilizes sequential reasoning to discredit the legislation. He does so in a three step pattern: giving the desired consequence, showing the undesirable consequences the legislation will encourage, and showing the desirable consequences of the republican alternative.

The desired consequence of legislation

In much of the same way he outlines the ideal method that congress should follow in passing legislation, he outlines the specific results that will judge the merit of bill in question. In fact, what earlier appeared to be an idealistic argument from genus has its true founding in the material and the practical. His use of methodologically defining in part represents utilitarian ends. It seems the ideal will always have grounding in the real world, making a pure distinction between the two complex in practice. Regardless, the specific consequences that Boehner outlines in this argument as desirable are more jobs for average Americans, a boost in the economy, and low amounts of wasteful spending: “I don’t think there is anybody in this chamber that disagrees that this bill needs to be about jobs...helping to create new jobs and get our economy rolling again” (“American Recovery”). All of these are practical concerns and any bill that does not meet these criteria simply will not do for Boehner.

The undesirable consequences which this legislation will cause

The list of grievances that Boehner has with the stimulus legislation are numerous and persuasive and all of them go against the economic objectives outlined. They include what Boehner sees to be such horrors as pointless overspending and no jobs. The goal of the bill is to create jobs but Boehner believes, “when you look at some of the spending in this bill, it will do

nothing about creating jobs in America” (“American Recovery”). According to Boehner, the undesirable consequences themselves are enough to vote against the bill.

The desirable consequences achieved through the Republican alternative

After attempting to derail the Democratic bill as counterproductive, he presents the Republican alternative as better because it produces better results: it would “create twice as many jobs as the bill that we’re debating at exactly half the cost” (“American Recovery”). Hence Boehner believes he has shown that the bill should create jobs, but it does not. He claims that the Republican alternative proposal does so, and consequently, it is the better practical bill.

This three part pattern should be considered the heart of the speech—it is the major premise from which his argument flows. The rest may be considered ornamentation and support, but consequential reasoning is the primary reasoning. Before moving on, however, it is necessary to see how he made use of the other practically founded argument, circumstance.

Circumstance

The argument form circumstance, as a sub-variety of cause and effect reasoning, takes an important role for Boehner, not as a determining factor of whether to pass or reject legislation, but rather in creating urgency and identification with the other representatives. While the only time circumstance was acknowledged was in the introduction, it was used to show the importance of finding an adequate legislative remedy, such as when he says, “The American economy needs help” (“American Recovery”). Because the citizens are hurting something needs to be done.

Circumstance is also used as the bridge toward unity with the Democratic Party. Because the circumstances (recession) are so bad, the chamber “on both sides” must come together to find a solution. This practical concern serves to bring two opposing organizations together to

overcome barriers and work with one another. One needs only to look to Kenneth Burke to understand the importance of identification to persuasion. Circumstance in this speech was the only time Boehner exhibited a bipartisan spirit, and because it was at the beginning, it served as an alley to open persuasion and create urgency.

Brief Remarks on Speech Strategy

In this first discourse, Boehner used the different argument types to form a narrative of sorts about why the legislation should not be passed. He at first employed the argument from circumstance to create urgency amongst the representatives, challenging them to make the right choice. This in turn built identification. He next uses definition to outline the proper ethical procedure for creating laws and how to evaluate its practical merit. Finally, he turns to consequential reasoning to show that negative effects would follow and that the Republican alternative is superior.

Also worthy of note is that two of the “idealistic” arguments—the outlining of ideal legislation and the argument from the will of the people—had their ultimate grounding in pragmatism. It appears that “idealistic” argument forms such as definition, may not exclusively entail idealistic considerations but can instead involve synthesis. The following speeches will show whether this is a pattern or just one isolated instance. For the sake of brevity and avoiding redundancy, common lines of argument and strategies, if used repetitively in his speeches and are not essential to the specific oration analyzed, will only be briefly touched upon. This will allow for a more thorough scrutinizing of the different methods and the patterns. While reoccurrences are important and will be noted, they will be dealt with and developed in the “synthesis, strategies, structure” section.

SPEECH 2: AMERICAN CLEAN ENERGY AND SECURITY ACT OF 2009

This second speech of note given by Boehner occurs approximately four months later on June 26th, 2009. The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 was a legislation attributed to Congressman Waxman, who hoped to achieve a comprehensive system to provide new alternative energy sources for the American people and a cleaner environment for all. Boehner's speech against the act took the form of a mini-filibuster to both delay the vote and inform the legislators of what was in the bill, since a 309 page manager's amendment was added at 3:09 in the morning, just hours before the vote. Boehner still in the minority fighting majority legislation was somewhat successful; ultimately the bill barely passed in the House 219-212 but was rejected by the Senate.

In both structure and argument format, this second speech is remarkably similar to the first—allowing that this analysis can be more concise. The major difference is the length. While the role of circumstance, consequence and definition is essentially the same, he employs consequence on a more systematic basis, which ultimately frames the underlying bill as a practical absurdity.

Prevalent yet not the deciding major, idealistic forms of argument emerged somewhat frequently at the beginning and end of the speech. The core was consequence; over half the speech was a systematic derailment of the foreseen practical devastation, but idealism again served as a supplement and in a new role, as an attention getter and closer.

Genus/Definition and Similitude

Argument defining the ideal goals of American Clean Energy legislation

In the same way that Boehner outlined ideal economic stimulus, he early on sought to make clear the standard from which the underlying bill should be judged. He states, “The

problems that this bill attempts to go after are the issues of climate change and cleaning up our air, and, secondly, to build a new alternative energy industry in the United States. Those are really the two issues. Well, I guess a third would be jobs” (“American Clean”). So the three goals he defined were to clean up the air, create a new energy industry, and create jobs. As mentioned previously, this definition may have its ultimate founding in pragmatism, however it is also included here because it is certainly a *definition* of the legislation therefore falling categorically under an idealistic form of argument, at least according to Weaver. The difficulty is to know whether clean air and new energy is a goal driven by some metaphysical conception that Boehner simply omits or if it is purely pragmatic. Regardless, the strength of establishing the criteria for an adequate bill is obvious. It allows for Boehner to frame the bill on his terms and gives a sense of structural unity to the entire speech

Argument from the will of the American people

Unsurprisingly, Boehner invokes this argument again as well: “I’m sure our constituents want our money being shipped overseas to plant trees,” is a quote that adequately sums up how this argument is implemented (“American Clean”). The American people, in Boehner’s mind, would be appalled at much of the wasteful spending in this bill. Instead they want legislation that creates jobs and provides cleaner energy, all without a raise in taxes. Each of these are materialistic concerns.

Argument from the responsibility of the legislator’s position

It appears that either Boehner has a reservoir of arguments he frequently employs in his rhetoric or that he takes serious issue with the Democratic Party’s process. It is probably both. Regardless, Boehner has a legitimate frustration that partisanship is encouraging the Democrats to engage in unethical legislative practices. Again at issue is the fact that an additional

amendment, 309 pages, was added to the bill at 3:09 a.m. the morning of the vote. No one, he claims, would be able to read the amendment in the allotted time. Therefore, to vote affirmative on the bill would be a violation of their responsibility to the American people.

Definition of the true nature of the choice before the House of Representatives

In the first idealistic argument not seen in the previous speech, Boehner uses the argument from definition to frame the real question the underlying bill represents. He states that “if we give the American people the right incentives, they’ll make the right decisions. *But that’s not what we have on the floor today.* What we have on the floor today is typical big government. And the fight that we have between the two sides of the aisle really boils down to one word: it boils down to freedom” (“American Clean Energy”). It is Stevenson’s persuasive definition at its finest, using the method of negation. In Boehner’s view this bill does not believe in the responsibility of the American people but is rather a limitation of freedom, and the American people demand more. With this consideration Boehner ends his speech on an idealistic note.

An interesting development occurred during the analysis of this speech. While there was again no use of similitude in the conventional sense, Boehner did make use of an argument of *likeness*. Boehner rehashed the negative outcomes and precedent of previous events that year in congress and then compared it to the contemporary state of affairs with this bill. His argument was that in the same way that previous legislations were negative, this legislation too was no good. So in a sense, it was comparison and therefore similitude. This begs the question: should the argument from history be considered an argument from similitude? And if so, should this be considered an idealistic way of reasoning? Bliese claims that Richard Weaver was on the verge of discovering the “rhetorical-historical” argument at the end of his life which would transcend the hierarchy (287). It is a synthesized argument type that combines tradition with an abstract

principle, so it *could* be considered idealistic. After analyzing if and how Boehner uses this in his other speeches the question will be dealt with in the discussion section. Now that the idealistic category of arguments has been looked at, the stronger pragmatic elements are to be considered.

If this speech is essentially the same as the first in approach and argument structure, the major difference is in how Boehner develops his consequential reasoning. Pragmatism, being the stern evaluator, makes a mockery of the American Clean Energy and Security Act.

Consequence and Circumstance

Boehner's rhetorical triumvirate of consequence—desired, transgressed and fulfilled—is still the determining factor of a bill's merit. The *desired* outcomes are jobs, a clean environment and alternative energy, however, they must be instilled in a way that works. Boehner foresees outcomes that *transgress* the desired ends, and it is Boehner's method of detailing the transgression which is most successful and interesting in this speech. Finally the desired outcomes are *fulfilled* by the Republican alternative which would more quickly create new energy, and generate more jobs in the process.

As a mini-filibuster of sorts, the speech is designed to take up a long period of time and voice protest over the law. To meet both those goals, Boehner systematically derails the practical transgressions of the 309 page amendment—in part out of frustration that it was added that morning. His specific process, after a few circumstantial and idealistic sentiments were presented at the speech's beginning, was to work his way from page 1 to 309 plucking out every consequential transgression as an opportunity to show the absurdity of the law. For example:

page 16.. we are going to require now every car sold in America, it has to have an engine capable of operating on alternative fuel. So what if your car doesn't have alternative energy?...page 24, there are authorized such sums as may be necessary

to carry out this paragraph [the government buying back cars and reimbursing citizens] . Sounds like a blank check to me. Or on page 26, this section applies only to States located in the Western Interconnection and does not apply to States located in the Eastern Interconnection, to the States of Alaska or Hawaii or ERCOT. So are we going to have different rates for different parts of the country under this amendment that was filed at 3:09 this morning? (“American Clean”)

It does not take much more than this to see that Boehner rhetorically paints the underlying act to be a practical catastrophe that could only result in chaos. He carried this strategy out for the entire amendment, showing with each remark that the bill was not properly planned.

To be sure there were idealistic and circumstantial objections as well, but the consequential ones were forefront and the most powerful. Circumstance was used once again as an introduction, which seems to be a pattern developing with the purpose of expressing gravity of the situation, although this time it created a partisan divide instead of bridging the gap with identification.

The other and new use of circumstance was to further show the impracticality of the pending legislation. For example Boehner says, “steel will increase 30 to 40 percent if this bill were to pass. And at a time when we’re trying to help the American automobile industry get back on its feet,” or in other words, ‘during the present circumstances,’ this is the last thing America needs (“American Clean”).

Brief Remarks on Speech Strategy

This is the second time Boehner ended an essentially pragmatic speech on an idealistic note. Perhaps he does this as a memorable persuasive device, the goal being to couch the issue in

balanced terms and end with a challenge. When used in this way, idealistic sentiments become more of a dramatic ornament than a major premise.

So as can be seen, a pattern is starting to develop as it relates to Boehner's rhetoric when opposing majority legislation. He founds his speech on consequence with idealism in support. His idealistic reasoning uses the same basic premises even though the issue is entirely different, and his pattern of consequence is one of desired outcomes, transgression and the remedy or path to fulfillment of original intentions. While these first two speeches align significantly in method, this third speech takes a different rhetorical approach.

SPEECH 3: HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION RECONCILIATION ACT OF 2010

Unlike the first two speeches which reject bills on practical grounds, this line of attack diverges. It is apparent that Boehner is appalled by the health law in question and wants to stop it because it is a major transgression of his principles. So it could be said that this is a speech morally adverse to the legislation, with pragmatism being supplemental.

The speech is of an especially somber note and one can only sense the anger and frustration of Boehner. He begins the discourse with a vision of where congress should be, how it *ought* to function, and how it has failed the American people. The act, in his view, will weaken Medicare and hurt the economy overall, but the main frustration is the violation of ethical practices—responsibility and fairness among them.

It becomes clear that Boehner tries to create guilt among his opponents as a means to elicit votes against the legislation. 'Shame on us when we disgrace the values of lawgivers,' is essentially the plea. It has been shown previously that Boehner's primary method for wielding consequential arguments is through a sort of *rhetoric of transgression*. What this speech makes

clear is that Boehner uses transgression for his definitional arguments as well and it is starting to form a guilt-pattern. This next section will look at the specific arguments and strategy.

Genus/Definition and Similitude

Argument from an ideal future missed

“I rise tonight with a sad and heavy heart. Today we should be standing together reflecting a year of bipartisanship and working to answer our country’s call...but it is not so.” (“Health Care”). The reason that it is not so, Boehner makes clear, is that the bill is unsatisfactory, and in so doing the House of Representatives have “failed to listen to America. And we have failed to reflect the will of our constituents. And when we fail to reflect that will, we fail ourselves, and we fail our country” (“Health Care”). This argument makes clear that there is for Boehner an abstract responsibility to honor the American citizens, and he sees that it must include reflecting their will. This prompts the question, is following the will of the constituents best even if the representative disagrees with the constituents’ opinion?

Argument from honorable legislative making practices

While this too is not a new method of argument, it seems Boehner’s frustration had boiled over. For Boehner, this bill was drafted secretly, exclusively and without responsibility. And again he reiterates, “Have you read the bill? Have you read the reconciliation bill? Have you read the manager’s amendment? Hell no you haven’t” (“Health Care”). The American people deserve representatives who honorably approach their work and that includes the responsibility to actually read what they are passing.

Argument from the sanctity of human life

Next this is a minor consideration in this speech to be sure, but he sees it as a legitimate ethical objection to the law. Boehner rhetorically asks, “Can you go home and tell your

constituents with confidence that this bill respects the sanctity of all human life and that it won't allow for taxpayer funding of abortions for the first time in 30 years? No, you cannot" ("Health Care"). The health care proposal will not do for Boehner because it violates the principle of life's intrinsic value. More specifically, it forces those whose worldview objects to something they see as morally disagreeable not only to permit it, but to pay for it.

Unfortunately, the manner laid out in this analysis does not adequately represent the founding on idealism of these three specific arguments. Boehner uses some of the same idealistic arguments in the first two speeches clearly having a habitual reservoir of arguments, but the important difference comparatively is in the speech's structure. The beginning, middle, and end were to definitional arguments and the others types of argument were merely mixed in. To be sure, Boehner objects to the practical implications of the health reform legislation but he saw fit in this speech to focus on the principles of honor, responsibility and life.

His single use of similitude bolstered his idealistic concentration: "Around this Chamber, looking upon us are the lawgivers from Moses, to Gaius, to Blackstone, to Thomas Jefferson. By our actions today, we disgrace their values. We break the ties of history in this chamber" ("Health Care"). This is not a straight similitude, but Boehner compares the modern legislator to the historically famous and renowned, as a way to rhetorically situate congress within the grander narrative of human existence. As a result, their moral responsibility is to do things right, which of course in his view they are not. The major consideration then is moral obligation, with other arguments as support.

Many of the negative practical implications must have been omitted for Boehner alludes to them without necessarily articulating them. Consequence and circumstance had a role to play

in the speech, but they were secondary to the guilt Boehner tried to produce from the violation of principle. The few practical considerations he did mention will be presented here.

Consequence and Circumstance

“Ask yourself, do you really believe that if you like the health plan that you have that you can keep it? No, you can’t. You can’t say that” (“Health Care”). Here Boehner predicts the first unfortunate consequence of the health law, which was met by an eruption of both objection and support in the crowd. Hindsight shows that at least this prediction came to fruition despite the assurances of the President. Boehner also predicted that the Affordable Care Act would result in weakened Medicare and a weakened faith of the American people in their congressional representatives.

So it seems that his few cause and effect arguments on the Health law had merit, but consequence can be a difficult method of persuasion to convince the majority since his claims are at the time unprovable. This could explain why in this speech he took a more idealistic strategy. Whatever the reason, these foreseen consequences were more peripheral to his guilt strategy.

The argument from circumstance played a minor role as well. He states, “In this economy, with this unemployment, with our desperate need for jobs and economic growth, is this really the time to raise taxes, to create bureaucracies, and burden every job creator in our land” (“Health Care”). So in other words, the circumstances are not well suited for this bill. This argument alone, would not necessarily disagree with the legislation’s goal but only the timing, hence the pragmatic emphasis. Left alone it probably would not convince too many idealistic people, but in this supporting role circumstance can be inserted to make sure all “available means of persuasion” are explored and the argument is well-rounded.

So in review, the consequential and circumstantial arguments seem to have merit but are underdeveloped in favor of the idealistic focus—and this is the first speech analyzed in which Boehner favors this route. It can be wondered whether this was chosen out of urgency, principle, or based on influences surrounding the issue. Surely related is the rise of the Tea Party movement around this time and their extreme commitment to principles of limited government and opposition to ‘Obamacare.’ Fortunately, Boehner gave many speeches during the health care debates to either confirm or disaffirm this strategy as habitual, including the following speech.

SPEECH FOUR: AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICA ACT

In this final speech as Minority Leader analyzed here, Boehner attempted another tirade against the Affordable Care Act. Boehner’s speech was both against the health law and in defense of a Republican substitute. Ultimately the underlying bill did not become law and the Democrats elected for the Senate alternative bill instead. This time Boehner continues his idealistic diatribe but with the negative practical implications holding an equally central role. The structure of the speech is as follows.

Boehner returns to consequence as the main focus of the speech but with strong statements of value and for the first time, analogy. Like the mini-filibuster, Boehner adopts a tactic of systematic derailment by showing both the imminent and deleterious effects the Health Care Act will have on the American nation. After showing the undesirability of the legislation in pragmatic and at times ideological terms, Boehner promotes the Republican alternative bill because it would simply work better, in his words a “commonsense approach” (“Affordable Health”). This speech is near to a return in form to the pattern of the first two speeches analyzed, but it is with a heavier dose of ideology and a few new tactics.

Genus/Definition

Argument from the dangers of big government

Here in the first argument of the speech is a partisan definition of government. The common Conservative belief that government should be small and limited to maximize individual freedoms is used as a resource against the law. His line of reasoning states that freedom is what makes America great, but big government steals away freedom. Boehner asserts that, “I think all of us can understand that the bigger government gets, the more that it takes from the American people” (“Affordable Health”). For him, this bill represents big government thus it violates the principle of limited government and should therefore be tabled. He next links this principle to that of the American dream.

Argument from the obligation to preserve the American dream

“If there is one obligation that we have, it is to ensure that the American dream that is available to us is available for our kids and our grandkids” (“Affordable Health”). This American dream in Boehner’s mind is inevitably tied to freedom from government interference and it is the obligation of Congress to stop any legislation that will encroach on the ambition and success of the people. Intriguingly, it’s usage alongside his God-terms and pragmatic emphasis aligns to the “materialistic myth” of Fisher’s American Dream (“Reaffirmation”).

The materialistic end of the American dream is characterized by individual freedom, social mobility, and hard work. Boehner invokes this argument at both the beginning and end of his speech indicating that he wants to convince the representatives that this bill is un-American, meaning that is against the values for which the country strives.

Argument from the legality and constitutionality of the law's employer mandate

Next Boehner presents an argument founded on the idea of contract and constitution, certainly an abstract view. The U.S. Constitution is a bond which holds this country together and in his view, must be respected and obeyed. When he states of the infamous employer mandate, “now, this is the most unconstitutional thing I’ve ever seen,” he is making an idealistic appeal to the rule of law and the protections of citizen’s freedom that it has (“Affordable Health”). So whatever desirable outcomes which a piece of legislation may wish to attain (in this case universal health care), it must be within bounds of the contract. Of course it was over this question the Supreme Court split 5-4, when the swing vote from Chief Justice John Roberts declared the mandate Constitutional if seen as an employer “tax.”

Argument from the will of the people and the ideal goals of healthcare legislation

It is interesting here that Boehner combines his two most common definitional arguments into one. He states, “The American people want two things from health care reform: They want lower cost and they want more choices. I think the underlying bill here tonight does exactly the opposite” (“Affordable Health”). So he outlines what the bill *ought* to produce but he also uses the American people as the source for the bill’s proper goals. So it is this fusion which he employs to give his argument greater strength. And of course these determining criteria, lower insurance and more choices, are not met—but the results are really a pragmatic consideration. Hence the idealistic and the pragmatic or the definitional and the consequential are almost never mutually exclusive. This synthesis of argument leads to his last plea.

Defining and framing the ‘true’ choice

The final argument, in which he uses the definitional strategy of framing, is meant to contrast the two options as a clear choice. That choice is between a “commonsense approach”

and big government which must necessarily involve restricting freedom restriction and financial waste (“Affordable Health”). If the representatives vote for the bill, they would be violating the spirit of American freedom.

There is no doubt that freedom is the abstract god-term in this speech. And in order to better promote it, he uses an argument from similitude to show that the Affordable Care Act represents the opposite.

Similitude

Similitude is by far the least frequent kind of argument employed by Boehner in the speeches so far. This speech represents the first time it has represented a major factor in his reasoning. In his dissection of the underlying bill, Boehner comes across the “Health Choices Commissioner.” This individual holds significant power over American citizens as patients in the proposed health care system. Seeing this individual as powerful to the point where he infringes on the rights of Americans, Boehner equates him with an all-powerful ruler—the “Health Choices Czar” in his words.

This “Health Czar,” will “decide which treatment patients could receive and at what cost...regulate all insurance plans both in and out of the exchange...decide which physicians and hospitals get to participate in the government run plan” (“Affordable Health”). Boehner employs this analogy liberally to highlight the intrusion of freedom he claims will ensue. It is meant to create an intimidating view of the legislation, equating it with a big brother feel almost Orwellian. So if Boehner’s idealistic god-term in the speech is freedom, then the Affordable Care Act serves aptly as the devil-term. In this way, similitude can be seen to provide additional support for his definitional and genus based arguments.

It would be wrong to think that this fourth speech was merely about the concept of freedom. Certainly Boehner went out of his way to demonstrate the threat to personal liberties that would ensue under the Health Law (strains of consequence), but Boehner spent much more time on how the proposal would be to America's great disadvantage.

Consequence and Circumstance

This is now the second time that Boehner systematically picks apart a piece of legislation proposed by the Democrats as the majority party. His consequential objections take up the bulk of the speech as he verbalizes his main objections of the 2000 page bill. While Boehner's reservations are quite numerous, they can fall under the two broad headings of negative economic effects and increased intrusiveness. The objections falling under the latter category are strongly connected to Boehner's idealistic vision of freedom which this law transgresses. The purely pragmatic strain comes from the foreseen economic impact which is his most wielded reasoning overall for cause and effect.

Among his economic objections are the cost of over 1.3 trillion dollars, which "will kill millions more American jobs," a destruction of the private sector, the increased tax burden, and a reduction of work hours ("Affordable Health"). He also complains that citizens will not be able to keep their insurance plans. But it seems that he stresses the unnecessary mega-bureaucracy that will develop to control lives as the least desirable effect. For the first time then, a broken principle is among the worst consequences.

So in review, circumstance is nowhere to be found in this discourse. Similitude takes its first major role as a way to demonstrate the terror of big government. And finally, this is the first speech which features both idealism and pragmatism prominently through definition and

consequence respectively. In the first three speeches analyzed he favored one or the other. This fourth speech is both concerned with economic and libertarian devastation.

This last oration closes the analysis on Boehner individual's speeches in the minority party. So far in each of these orations, Boehner has opposed some legislation presented by the majority Democratic Party. There are clear discernable patterns from these four speeches: the prominence of consequential reasoning, what has been labeled as the definitional and consequential triumvirate, a common reservoir of arguments which align to the Materialistic myth of the American dream, and the emergence of more ideological rhetoric in line with the emergence of the Tea Party Movement against 'Obamacare.' These will be dealt with specifically and compared to those from his time as Speaker of the House in the "synthesis, strategies, and structure" section. Now this analysis will turn to Boehner in the representative majority.

For Boehner's time as Speaker of the House, this criticism will look for many of the same patterns while comparing and contrasting them to his speeches in the minority party. Whereas these speeches are generally shorter because the Speaker of the House speaks less frequently, they are still at significant enough length to discern the implications necessary for this study.

SPEECH FIVE: ELECTION OF SPEAKER

The fifth speech, given on the 5th January 2011, gives the first glimpse of ceremonial oratory given by Boehner. The overwhelming majority of rhetoric in the House is what Aristotle labeled "deliberative" because they are debating bills. But the oration given on this night is one of both celebration and renewal for the House of Representatives because it kicks off the new year of proceedings and Boehner was elected Speaker of the House. This speech was his opening remarks for the new session.

Because the nature of this speech as ceremonial or “epideictic” rather than deliberative, it is reasonable to suspect that the argument types favored and strategy in employing them would differ, and that expectation is met. It makes sense then that this speech is teeming with idealism and principle as a way to set the standard for the upcoming year and inspire the Representatives. Still, this speech is important to analyze because both the principles he appeals to and the pragmatic arguments he invokes can give insight.

Summarized simplistically, Boehner outlines the culture, principles and attitude he desires from the House of Representatives. It is probably no coincidence that the principles he earlier claimed the Democrats violated while in the minority party are the very ones he is calling for a renewed emphasis on. And as a speech focused on the model functioning of the legislative body, the pragmatic concerns that manifest in consequence and circumstance are all but omitted.

Genus/Definition

Definition of the ideal House of Representatives

“This is the people’s house. This is their Congress. It’s about them, not about us. What they want is a government that’s honest, accountable, and responsive to their needs, a government that respects individual liberty, honors our heritage, and bows before the public that it serves” (“Election of Speaker”). Here Boehner builds upon his favorite rhetorical resource, the American people, to build his conception of House of Representatives. The responsibility to serve and reflect the will of the people situates congress within its proper bounds. The people’s will determines the principles for which the legislative body must strive.

Definition of the rules package

Next, proposing a package of rules to govern the proceedings of the House, Boehner casts it as being the logical fulfillment of the House’s aforementioned values. In his words the package

will give way to “real transparency, greater accountability, and a renewed focus on our Constitution” (“Election of Speaker”). So Boehner first endorses the spirit and proper function of the House of Representatives and then relates this second argument as a way to promote the spirit. This spirit is necessary to create excellent legislation.

The ideal of excellent legislation

When Boehner spoke on the determining characteristics of quality legislation, he also used definition. To do this he discarded the “conventional wisdom that bigger bills are always better,” replacing it with the goal of manageable bills which can be read, scrutinized, and fine-tuned as more desirable (“Election of Speaker”). Necessary to this process are the values of openness, fairness, honesty and respect, so that a free flow of ideas and debate couched in goodwill can work toward unity.

So overall, Boehner should be seen as casting his vision of future congressional proceedings in idealistic terms. Consequence and circumstance are each merely mentioned once to build the drama so to speak of the events unfolding and again to bring attention to the gravity of the situation, the necessity to get things right. And the way to get things right are to do them right, by following the principles he outlines.

While most of the idealistic sentiments can be explained due to the ceremonial nature of the event, it could reasonably hint to an emersion of change in rhetorical strategy. Boehner in proposing his rules package gave little attention to its consequences but rather the envisioned principles it was chasing. The following speeches will better help determine if proposing legislation is correlated to Boehner using idealistic means as compared with his opposition of legislation, which was characterized more of practical means.

SPEECH SIX: SCHOLARSHIPS FOR OPPORTUNITY AND RESULTS ACT

For this sixth speech, the legislation in question is the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act, also known as D.C. School Choice. The bill is a renewal of a bipartisan program created seven years before the speech to give students an opportunity to go to the better schools in their region, if their local public schools are not up to par. Boehner as Speaker of the House took the opportunity to speak in defense of the bill, and he was successful in getting the program reauthorized for five more years.

His speech centered on providing opportunity to all students no matter their economic situation because no child *ought* to be put at an educational disadvantage. It is the job of Congresspersons to assure the American Dream for future generations. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program was a successful way of reaching this ideal, so he reasons it should be renewed. Idealism and pragmatism are both well represented in this speech as the ideal of equal opportunity for the American Dream is established as the goal, and the Act is the means. It is perhaps the best speech analyzed so far as it relates to both ends of the dichotomy working together.

Boehner makes a few idealistic remarks but the one of greatest importance is that of “quality education” and equal opportunity. It is the goal for which the legislation strives. Similitude, however, is once again absent, further confirming the hypothesis that to him it is merely accessory.

Genus/Definition

Definition of quality education as the corner stone of the American dream

If the American people and their will are a God-term for Boehner, the ‘American dream’ too is emerging as an accompaniment. And while Boehner never explicitly defines the American

Dream, possibly because it is multifaceted and gains its rhetorical strength through its ambiguity, it can be inferred that here he is referring more to the materialistic dream of hard work and ascendency (the pragmatic emphasis). Yet for him, there is something noble, even ideal in this idea of material ascension, and that comes from the principles of freedom and opportunity. He states, “If we want to protect the American Dream, there is no substitute for a quality education” (“Scholarships for Opportunity”). So Boehner establishes quality education as a fundamental requirement of preserving the American Dream. Consequently, he equates the bill as necessary for the ideal.

Definition of ideal education reform

Having now established the link between the American Dream and education, Boehner establishes the criteria for what education reform must accomplish. He states:

My view has always been that education reform starts with giving children a way out of our most underachieving public schools. Of course, that does not mean we abandon those schools. It means we take some of the pressure off them while they work to turn themselves around. (“Scholarships for Opportunity”)

This definition accomplishes two things. First, it establishes the necessity of better opportunity for quality education. This becomes the primary objective of reform. Second, through the process of dissociation, it engages in proleptic argumentation via dissociation to define what the bill is not. A possible objection to the bill would be that it abandons the poorer schools but because of Boehner’s definition, it is merely allowing competition to assist the schools in “turning around.”

Definition of “the right thing to do”

Another emerging pattern for Boehner is establishing his idealistic definitions, but doing it through the mouth of the citizens. For example, in the previous speeches Boehner invokes what the American people want as the guiding criteria for drafting legislation. Here he uses a similar strategy when he reveals a series of letters sent to him asking congress to do *the right thing*. And the right thing, of course, is to renew this piece of legislation.

This strategy of defining through the mouth of regular citizens is intriguing. It has the effect of guising his own definitions and making it appear he is a servant reflecting the will of others. Assuredly, however, they are still his definitions, for there is never a complete consensus on anything and he is therefore obliged to choose the persuasive definition that suits his purposes.

So it can be seen that in this speech Boehner used the arguments from genus and definition to idealistically frame the bill. It is now necessary to examine his counterpart strategy, which argues that this bill is the best practical way to pursue the goal.

Consequence

After determining the ideal goal of the legislation Boehner makes his first consequential argument in all of the speeches analyzed from ‘observed’ consequence. His previous cause and effect claims hypothesized on the future outcomes the legislation would bring about, and they were usually negative. In this speech, however, Boehner uses the argument from consequence to show that the bill *already* has made positive contributions to everyday life for thousands of kids. He states that the program has been for the families both “effective and cost effective” (“Scholarships for Opportunity”). In his mind this is evidence toward renewing the legislation. Before it was law many children were within miles of great schools but were unable to leave

their own subpar circumstances. Now with the help of the legislation, all students will be able to access quality education.

It is noteworthy that Boehner switches from exclusively using foreseen consequences to ones that are discernable at the time of the speech. To be sure, much of this is related to the nature of the act in question, as the program had already existed for seven years. But it is possible that it could be related to the difference between attacking and proposing legislation. It will be necessary to turn to the final two speeches to see if there is a correlation.

In summary, Boehner implemented his idealistic and practical arguments in a complementary fashion with the argument from definition outlining the goals, and the argument from consequence showing how to get there. Neither circumstance nor similitude was employed.

SPEECH SEVEN: INTEREST RATE REDUCTION ACT

Delivered on April 27, 2012, this speech spoke in favor of a new bill which would stop the interest rate of student loans from doubling on July 1. Because of prior legislation, the law stated that the rates should increase and Boehner thought this would be detrimental for students, especially during difficult economic times. Yet the debate which should have been a bipartisan issue was too polarized, and it seemed that no legislation might be passed. Boehner decided to show the ‘real root’ of the conflict, partisanship, and argue that political bickering should not impact the American citizens. In this way this speech defined the conflict and demonstrated the negative implications it would have if it were not overcome for the good of the people. The bill passed in the House but ultimately did not become law.

Genus/Definition

Unlike previous speeches, Boehner has only one main definitional argument, from which he has several sub-definitions. His main ideology could be summarized as *an appeal to the true*

nature of the conflict, which he defines as essentially a pseudo-conflict: “It’s a fight being picked over an issue that there is no fight over” (“Interest Rate”). So then in his mind, either misunderstanding or deliberate politicizing is responsible for any dissent from the bill.

To further establish his characterization of the conflict, he traces it to the root which he sees as a “clip in the law,” inserted several years ago by Democrats which would more than double the student loan interest rate on the first of July. He exclaims, “I don’t know why they did it, but they did” (“Interest Rate”). Since the legislative conflict is due only to an unfounded clip in the law, Congress needs merely to keep the interest rate low and avoid this partisan conflict. The fact that it is an election year gives additional support to his claim.

In Boehner’s mind, the only reason the Interest Rate Reduction Act is yet to be passed is because of this pseudo-conflict created for political gain. He cites the example of “the so-called ‘war on women,’ entirely created by my colleagues across the aisle for political gain (“Interest Rate”). One can see here a sort of anti-definition or argument *about* definitions in the terminology of Schiaapa (“Arguing about Definitions”). The biggest disagreement was not that interest rates should remain low, but in how the government was to fund the program. The Democrats saw the Republican option as hurting women and consequently the Democratic Party constructed a term to characterize Republican efforts as a “war on women.” Boehner attempts to discredit the construct as not an account of Republican policy, but a fictitious definition hiding ulterior motives of political ascendancy. This argument *about* definition is offered as a rhetorical proof that there is no real conflict, and therefore all should put politics aside and vote for this bill.

Boehner’s final idealistic appeal under his definition of the conflict is a call to transcend it. He enlists an argument from the “dignity of the House and the dignity of the public trust” to put this pseudo conflict behind them and reduce the student loan interest rate (“Interest Rate”).

Boehner's idealistically-oriented strategy then was to define the conflict by denying there was one. It is a new type of strategy to this analysis and one that is only completed when the pragmatic argument is included.

Consequence and Circumstance

If Boehner denies the partisan conflict, he must admit that if it is not resolved American students will suffer. The price of not transcending the quarrel is undesirable financial burden. Boehner uses this future consequence as a means of identification and as a call to leave the pseudo-conflict behind. He states, "Nobody wants to see student loan interest rates go up," but that is the effect which must inevitably ensue if the House continues partisan conflict ("Interest Rate"). So this consequence which will start the first of July by law, serves as a form of identification because nobody wants it. He has thus given a practical rationale to give up the false conflict in service to the American people.

Additionally, there is the insertion of a circumstantial argument to reinforce the practical end of his argument. If the whole legislative body can agree that increasing interest rates is disagreeable, then "especially when you have recent college graduates of which 50 percent are either unemployed or underemployed" is it a bad idea ("Interest Rate"). In other words, the way the circumstances aligned were disadvantageous to the already negative consequence. So in this role the argument from circumstance serves as further support for the argument from consequence.

The strategy of this speech overall is to define the real conflict within the conflict, and to show that if it is not transcended, negative consequences will follow. Because nobody wants these negative consequences, the bill must be adopted. The form presented here is a strong example of blending idealistic and pragmatic strategies so that they naturally stem from one another. When

comparing it with the previous speech, the pattern is somewhat analogous in that a definition sets the framework, and consequence is used to show the practical implications. There certainly seems so far to be a different style for Boehner when advocating legislation as opposed to discouraging it. With that in mind, the final speech can be analyzed.

SPEECH EIGHT: CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS RESOLUTION, 2014

Four years after the Affordable Care Act was passed it was still an issue of incredible political importance and controversy. Republicans in control of the House of Representatives had tried unsuccessfully to repeal the law 46 times. In a move that was probably ill-advised the congressional budget became tied to an effort to defund the health law. Democrats refused to accept a budget limiting 'Obamacare' and Republicans refused to pass one without the Affordable Care Act being defunded for a year. The result was a political stalemate in which the American people suffered. The government shutdown that ensued kept appropriations from all government employees considered non-essential.

This situation obviously infuriated American citizens, many of whom could not report to work during the shutdown, which lasted two weeks. Speaker of the House John Boehner, knowing that Republicans were taking the brunt of the blame for the shutdown, sought to end it by passing the Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2014 which funded the government. It did pass but not with provisions to defund 'Obamacare.'

In the speech Boehner attempted to both end the shutdown and defund the Affordable Care Act, while presenting the Republican Party in a better light. In so doing, he was forced to both justify the shutdown while despising it, make the Republicans look noble and the Democrats look base, and show that the American people were the true victims. To accomplish this, he found it necessary to use both idealistic and pragmatic means.

Genus/Definition

Argument from the will of the people

It is a simple and repeated enough argument that it would not need much explanation, but Boehner begins by making clear that “The American people don’t want a shutdown, and neither do I” (“Government Shutdown”). The Representatives should then end it as soon as possible while also adhering to the principles of “a smaller, less costly, and more accountable federal government” (“Government Shutdown”). Unfortunately, the health law violates each of those principles and Republicans were forced to stop it.

Boehner then leads into a series of consequential arguments which are incredibly important to the speech because they in essence justify the causes that lead to the shutdown in the first place, but they will be examined shortly. He concludes his oration by attempting to frame the entire situation in terms of a broken ideal, fairness.

Argument from the principle of fairness

In this argument, Boehner asks how it is fair the unions and big business can get a waiver from the health law while the constituents must suffer from it. The actions by the President’s administration, in Boehner’s view, represent unfairness. But the underlying bill which defunds the Affordable Care Act for a year while returning appropriations to the government represents true fairness to the American people. In his words, the bill says “let’s treat them the way we would want to be treated” (“Government Shutdown”).

So Boehner uses definition to both lay out what the American people want and to promote the legislation as representing what is fair, and consequently what is right. The missing part of his argument, however, is the justification for why the shutdown happened in the first place and why this resolution must be passed.

Consequence

For Boehner, the government shutdown is a direct result of the Affordable Care Act and the terrible things happening in response of it. He makes clear that the Health law is responsible for many negative implications, however, he fails to mention exactly what they are. He is in this speech purposefully ambiguous when describing the effects: “a law that’s causing unknown consequences and unknown damage to the American people and to our economy...having all types of consequences...causing big problems” (“Government Shutdown”). Boehner is no longer proclaiming foreseen consequences but ones that are already evident, though in the speech he does not specifically name one. In his defense this is explainable to due to a variety of factors. For one the Republican objections to the law after four years were well known. Additionally, Boehner only had limited time to speak. Regardless, the consequences of the Health Law are severe enough in Boehner’s mind to warrant the political fights that resulted in the shutdown.

And it is unfair, in Boehner’s eyes that the American people are being stuck with the negative effects of the health law they never wanted while businesses are getting waivers. It becomes apparent that the fairness is related to the negative consequences not being spread evenly. Therefore to alleviate all American’s from the burden this law should be passed. It seems clear that this speech was practical in focus but it was embedded in the idealistic term of fairness. While consequence was of primary concern, definition was needed for additional support.

In sum, his speeches as Speaker of the House continued such rhetorical habits as the primacy of consequence, the materialistic myth of the American dream, and the outlining of goals. Emerging as unique were the definition through the American people, increased role of idealism, and the greater synthesis between transcendental and transient ideas.

This concludes the analysis of the speeches as separate entities. Each was different in the way they invoked strategies amongst argument type as it relates to idealism and pragmatism. Yet at the same time, clear and discernable patterns began to emerge when comparing them by their situation and tactics. And while analyzing them as separate entities is beneficial to understand the individual speeches on their own, a wholesome portrait comes when they are looked at unabridged. The next section of this chapter makes sense of all the emergent patterns and themes beginning to surface in this analysis.

Synthesis, Strategies, Structure

This piece, minus the research questions, is the emergent section of analysis. Any patterns, strategies or themes that surfaced will be considered here. The objective is to “make sense” out of the individual speech criticisms. First, the research questions from which this study started will be acknowledged followed by other considerations which developed.

The central research question of this study, as indicated in the methodology is as follows: How does John Boehner incorporate rhetorical idealism and rhetorical pragmatism in his speeches? To articulate an answer to this question is complex to say the least, and the goal of the “Synthesis, Strategies and Structure” section is to do just this. In shorthand, one could write that his speeches had an ultimate pragmatist basis with the argument from consequence being the primary method, with idealism reinforcing it through the use of definition; that his idealism relies on common topics such as freedom, fairness, responsibility and the accountability to the American people stemming from the materialistic myth of the American dream; that he often used definitional arguments to speak of pragmatic concerns while consequential concerns often have their footing in idealism; that the arguments from similitude and circumstance are both rarely used but serve to bolster the definitional and consequential arguments respectively; and

that Boehner uses these arguments often in the same organizational structure. This is an accurate summary, however, the intricacies must be demonstrated and explored. In order that the complexity is appreciated, it must be thoroughly examined rather than giving a summarization.

Through answering the primary research question, the subquestions too will to be answered. To begin, each specific argument type—consequence, circumstance, similitude and genus—will be considered for their particular use by Boehner. Then, a few conclusions that may be drawn from them will assist in framing overall what characterizes Boehner’s idealistic and pragmatic elements in his rhetoric. Then to close this section, any other relevant considerations and emergent themes and strategies will be explored.

CONSEQUENCE

The most common and important line of reasoning used by John Boehner was the argument from consequence. No matter the specific legislation in question, whether in the majority or minority party, and whether he was predicting positive or negative results, consequence was always prominent, if not the sole consideration. And while definition may have been used frequently to attack the manner in which legislation was drafted or to advocate for a law, the primary concern for Boehner is this: what consequences will this decision have for the American people? Hence as will be argued, above all Boehner’s orientation is to the practical. This does not mean that he has no ideology or that it is unimportant; rather it is that Boehner’s rhetoric gives a slight preference at its core to pragmatism. Within the realm of consequence, there are three chief patterns Boehner uses: economic implications, the systematic dissection, and the preference of foreseen consequences.

Economic Implications

Among the consequential arguments that characterize Boehner's rhetoric, those economical in basis carry a tremendous weight. The lone speech to be void of these fiscal concerns was his election as Speaker of the House as a major premise. Economic concerns in that speech laid the foundation, through circumstance, for the urgency and importance of the House proceedings.

In all other cases, economical consequences were either the main concern, or one of pronounced importance. Hence in his various speeches he claims that the stimulus package will not save jobs, Cap-and-Trade will kill already existing jobs, 'Obamacare' will destroy healthcare and these are reason enough to reject the legislation. Conversely, he holds that D.C. school choice is affordable while effective; low college interest rates keep students from defaulting; and the Republican alternative bill is more economical and manageable. He infers that these economic consequences are reasons to pass the bills. It is clear that for Boehner in the realm of consequence, those dealing with the fiscal state for America and its citizens are paramount.

Systematic Dissection

One of Boehner's most effective tactics was to systematically derail an underlying act by working his way through the entire document (such as the three hundred page manager's amendment added to the Cap'n Trade legislation in speech two) and showing the negative consequences that will occur because of the law. To be sure, this may at times have been done with multiple motives such as wanting to make a point of the unethical Democratic drafting process. Despite this, it is better understood as an effective strategy with a practical-orientation.

Perhaps the reason that it is effective is because it shows that Boehner knows the law, instead of simply arguing against it in a partisan spirit. Systematic Dissection paints Boehner as an expert on the law who is concerned with the everyday wellbeing of the American people. It becomes Boehner the hero of the bourgeois on a crusade against big government, which either by ignorance or malice is looking to harm the common people. Systematic dissection also seems effective because it allows Boehner to be *specific* rather than general with his *foreseen consequences*. For example take this quote from speech four:

Page 1182, section 1904 provides for \$750 million in Federal funding for a new entitlement program to offer ‘knowledge of realistic expectations of age appropriate child behaviors’ and ‘skills to interact with their child.’ So not only is the Federal Government going to legislate what is good medical practices, now were going to put \$750 million into a program to help legislate how parents should parent...But still we have more. Page 25, section 1-1 authorizes the Secretary of Health and Human services to reduce benefits, increase premiums, and establish waiting lists to make up for funding on the shortfalls of high-risk periods. That’s right there in the bill, ‘establish waiting lists.’ (“Affordable Health”)

Arguments from consequence such as these give more credibility to Boehner’s claims. When conversely Boehner contends that the Affordable Care Act will ‘hurt jobs and lessen health care quality,’ although he may or may not be right, he is less convincing. The specificity that comes with ‘systematic dissection’ of consequences then enhances both the credibility of Boehner as expert on the bill and his claims as founded on evidence.

Foreseen and Observed Consequence

In the literature review Perelman and Tyteca made a useful distinction between *foreseen* and *observed* consequences, which helped to discover another pattern in Boehner's rhetorical strategy. When opposing a bill Boehner used predominantly negative *foreseen* consequences, while proposing a bill Boehner used significantly more positive *observed consequences*. For example his charges against the Economic Stimulus was that it *would* hurt jobs and create useless spending; the Affordable Care Act *would* ruin health care quality, lead to layoffs, and cost the people more money; the American Clean Energy and Security Act would be "the biggest job-killing bill that has ever been on the floor" ("Affordable Health"). In all of these cases, Boehner predicted the negative consequences that would ensue were the legislations to be passed. The problem with relying on so many predictive claims is determining whether the foreseen consequences will actually come true. It is plausible that someone could vote against a law only because they believe negative effects will occur, while they actually do not. In addition, anyone can make up a consequence to any event, which explains why sequential reasoning may be to some at times unconvincing. These reservations are one additional reason why consequential argument is important, but alone is not enough, and other methods of argument are needed to supplement or round out a claim to be the most persuasive. Hence, there is the need for both idealistic and pragmatic arguments in Boehner's speeches even though they are mostly practical in nature.

If he employs primarily foreseen consequences when opposing legislation, then *observed* consequences are useful when advocating for some bill. This is not to say that hypothesized effects have no role in proposing laws for they do, but observed consequences, which have almost no role in his speeches as Minority Leader, take on a great importance as Speaker of the

House. For example, when trying to pass D.C. School choice legislation he appeals to the success that has already occurred from similar laws and when debating the Interest Rate Reduction Act he states both the positive observed consequences of keeping interest rates low and the terrible impact raising them will have. This shift may be because it is necessary to demonstrate some proof that an act will have the desired results, and observed consequence allows for some tangible evidence. This consideration also partially answers the third research subquestion: Does he shift his rhetorical idealism/pragmatism based on outside circumstances such as party power or elections?

CIRCUMSTANCE

Reinforcement of Consequence

The circumstantial argument was included second because, although it was used relatively infrequently by Boehner, its role was important to pragmatism and consequence. Circumstance was never offered as rhetorical proof on its own; instead, it always served as support that bolstered his practical consequential claims. Or put another way, using the terminology of Stephen Toulmin, the argument from circumstance was *backing* to his consequential *warrant*, determining the pragmatically founded *claim*.

This would seem to indicate that circumstance is not actually a determining factor for Boehner per say, but it is not something to be ignored either. It is less important than consequence, however, the current circumstances have some impact on how the consequences will play out. Because of this concern for pragmatic implementation, circumstance is worth consulting. Consider the example of Boehner when he predicts that ‘Obamacare’ will limit access to doctors for citizens with Medicare and cause Americans to lose their health plan. He continues “in this economy, with this unemployment, with our desperate need for jobs and

economic growth, is this really the time to raise taxes, to create bureaucracies, and burden every job creator in our land?” (“Health Care”). His objection is founded on the bad consequences that the Affordable Care Act will cause and the economic recession is just further reason why it is a bad idea. So if the argument from circumstance is by its nature a subvariety of consequence, in the same way Boehner circumstance as a subconcern to strengthen the consequential claims.

Rowland and Jones explain why this strategy is effective: “thus a rhetoric based on particular circumstances is much more likely to be persuasive when tied to an ideological system. In this context, the explanation of cause and effect is linked to fundamental definitions about the way that humans behave in society” (“Brandenburg” 30). It simply cannot stand alone. While this is the primary use of circumstance and most relative to this study’s focus on rhetorical idealism and pragmatism, it is worth noting that Boehner used circumstance for two other roles: urgency and identification.

Urgency and Identification

As critic, the distinction here is merely for conceptual understanding because in Boehner’s practice, the two are inseparable. If it be conceded that demonstrating importance and getting attention are two of the most important phases of creating an oration, then circumstance can be seen to have weightiness in Boehner’s discourse even though it is not high in numeric representation. At times, Boehner would use idealistic sentiments to open a speech and almost always to close it, but more often he would implement circumstance in the introduction to demonstrate need and create identification. Take for example his speech when ascending to the speakership when he proclaims, “We gather here at a time of great challenges, when nearly one in ten of our neighbors is out of work. Health care costs are still rising for American families. Our spending has caught up with us...” or in the Cap’n Trade tirade, “My colleagues, we’ve

been through a very difficult time in our economy. We've had the great economic shocks of last fall, and we've seen unemployment climbing month after month" ("Election"; "American Clean"). Here Boehner is not founding his oration on a circumstantial premise, he is drawing the audience in by situating the events in their historical context, developing the gravity of the situation, and implying 'we are all in this together.'

Using circumstance in this opening role implies that in order to save the quality of life for Americans, the House of Representatives must be abreast of current events and act in accordance with them. Therefore, while his decision to support or fight a bill is not founded on circumstance, it shows deference to the practical state of affairs and positions the House of Representatives on a practical premise.

It is after this analysis where the first research subquestion can be answered: *Does John Boehner favor one type of argument over another?* Yes, John Boehner favors practical based arguments over idealistically founded ones. While the idealistic argument from genus is still important as the second most utilized form, when the two compete it ultimately bows to consequence, which will be shown. The argument from consequence is the central and defining premise of Boehner's congressional rhetoric supplemented by other argumentative forms. There are still questions to be answered, however, and two more argument forms to consider—similitude and genus.

SIMILITUDE

Reinforcement of Genus/Definition

The rarest of all argument types in Boehner's rhetoric, similitude takes on a limited role of framing. This framing is meant to bolster the idealistic arguments from genus/definition. In instances when he does employ similitude, such as the continual uses of the term "health choices

Czar,” he frames the way the audience is supposed to understand the legislation. For example in that speech, Boehner idealistically defines the bill as big government. ‘Big government’ is abstract enough where it may not be convincing to all or it may not be fully conceptualized. His enactment of similitude by referring to the “czar” illustrates big government in a way that seems more real and overbearing and scary.

It is apparent that in the same way that circumstance was used as backing for consequence, similitude is backing for genus. An illustrated version of Boehner’s rhetoric would thus have consequence and genus standing paramount with circumstance and consequence directly underneath them respectively.

The results also prompted an interesting question of whether historic events, if used as comparison with the current state of affairs, should be considered similitude. For instance, is not an orator comparing the fall of Rome to America’s decline using similitude as reasoning? In this way Boehner used similitude when comparing the legislative practices of the Democrats to those in his mind nobler such as Jefferson and Moses.

Perhaps Boehner’s distance from similitude reflects the negative stigma which it holds as an untrustworthy method of argument. Another reason could be the difficulty and creativity develop a convincing analogy. It is also possible that Boehner just simply does not see the world through the way which similitude reasoning demands. Regardless similitude’s role in Boehner’s rhetoric is subservient to the final argument type, genus.

GENUS/DEFINITION

Although Boehner’s rhetoric ultimately has a pragmatic slant shown by the deference to consequence, any belittling of the argument from definition would be a misinterpretation. The idealistic elements of Boehner’s congressional rhetoric are fundamental to his speeches and they

are encapsulated in the argument from definition. The strategic roles of definition could be framed as follows: the transgression triumvirate, definition through the American people, and the idealistic God terms within the materialistic myth of the American Dream.

Transgression Triumvirate

In what may be the most interesting rhetorical strategy implemented by Boehner, the argument from definition consistently outlined the objectives of a legislation from which it should be evaluated. Illuminatingly, his criterion which used in the idealistic form of definition was not always idealistic in content but sometimes voiced pragmatic concerns. To demonstrate it is first necessary to explain what is meant by the “transgression triumvirate.”

The principle is simple enough in practice. First, Boehner uses definition to outline the *desired* goal of the legislation. These goals need not be idealistic. For example, the most frequent goal used to judge the value of a bill was the creation of jobs. But often the criteria were idealistic such as preserving the freedom of Americans. Whatever the specific goal is, Boehner uses definition to outline the ideal sought after. The second element of the transgression triumvirate was showing how the bill or actions taken to draft the bill did not meet the outlined principles. For example, Boehner believes that bills should be drafted openly with accountability and after outlining this principle as necessary, he rejects the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 because it violates this principle (“Health Care”). So the second step is to show the *transgression* of the definition. Finally, Boehner offers a solution which meets the demands or *fulfills* he outlined in his definition of the legislative goals. Generally, this solution is the Republican alternative bill. This is an archetype definition strategy because it creates a class (good legislation for whatever issue) and then uses it as the determining judgment of value.

It is necessary to mention that the *desired*, *transgressed*, *fulfilled* stages are a clear and

discernable strategy when Boehner is opposing legislation, but less so when defending it. In those cases he uses the same pattern, however the transgression step may be omitted. For instance, in his remarks on D.C. School Choice there is no transgression of principle. Yet in his speech on the Interest Rate Reduction Act he shows the transgression, but it is not done by the underlying bill but rather the actions of the Democratic Party.

The pattern of transgression through the argument from definition is among the most important persuasive strategies used by Boehner but it is best understood as a supplement to consequence. This is because his “defined” objectives often were not principally-founded but practically oriented. Whatever idealistic objections he may have had to a bill (frequently the process), the practical objections overshadowed them. This is not to say Boehner lacks principles or that they are unimportant to his rhetoric, for that is the opposite of the truth. His idealism, whether from conviction or ornament, is integral for a well-rounded argument, and successful persuasion.

Definition of the People, for the People, by the People

In outlining the criteria that should be used to evaluate the bill, Boehner often appropriated sentiments of the American people. For one, his arguments from the will of the people and the responsibility of the Representatives to their constituents were the most reoccurring principles. He took this to the next level, however, by mixing the supposed will of the people with his definitional criteria. For example, he states matter of factly, “the American people sent us here to help the economy”; “the American people don’t want a shutdown”; and “we have failed to reflect the will of our constituents” (“American Clean”; “Government Shutdown”; “Health Care”). In all of these examples, the will of the people becomes the deciding factor. At times he even explicitly uses the people to define his own criteria as if there was

unanimous consent, such as when he says American people want three things from health care reform and uses that as the guiding standard.

Obviously Boehner sees some idealistic connection between the will of the American people and his decision on whether to support a bill. When public opinion is considered, however, it is really a circumstantially founded argument and therefore a practical approach. If the will of the constituents must be followed, then temporal opinion becomes the driving force—but opinion changes. Following that principle, if the people want healthcare reform he should vote for it and if not then he should reject it. This alone gives no consideration of the merit of the legislation. Whether Boehner actually uses public opinion as the major driving force is for his decisions conjecturable. Surely his high regard for the constituents has something to do with his desire to stay in office and there must be some deferment to the American people, but when and how much? Boehner is successful at using this means of argument enough but not in a way that inhibits other considerations. The American people should be considered a God-term of Boehner, to which other terms capitulate. It is necessary to now consider these God-terms.

God and Devil Terms within the Materialistic Myth of the American Dream

God-terms are the words or phrases which take on such great power and significance that the other ideas must yield to them (Burke; Weaver, *Ethics*). Devil terms, meanwhile, are terms of repulsion which have the opposite effect. Of all the arguments which Boehner makes and all his rhetorical strategies he takes, the prominent God-terms are ‘Jobs,’ ‘Individual Freedom,’ and the aforementioned ‘American people.’

The importance of the American people need not be expounded upon again. If a proposal does not help the people or reflect their will (in Boehner’s definition of *help* and *will*) then it simply will not do. Likewise, if a proposal has a negative impact on ‘jobs’ or the ‘economy’ it

too, whatever other good results it might bring, is inadequate. Furthermore 'freedom' is an ultimate term as well. Hence jobs and individual freedom becomes more important than universal health care and clean energy, even if he sees them as desirable. Other less important but still significant terms include 'fairness,' 'openness' and 'accountability.'

As for his devil-terms, 'big government,' 'waste' and 'irresponsibility' top the list. For Boehner these three limit freedom, hurt the economy and violate a trust with the American people and can best be seen in his speeches against 'Obamacare'. Any time a bill is associated with these three terms, Boehner is sure to reject it. His idealistic terms are unsurprising, as they are in line with traditional conservative doctrine indicating that the party influence on his idealism is strong.

His God-terms and common lines of reasoning show remarkable similarity to the materialistic myth of the American dream, as explained by Fisher. The myth celebrates the opportunity to ascend and be materially successful in this country through practical hard work, individual freedom and doing things 'the right way.' It is a myth in the practical ability of humanity to succeed. Hence it is an ideal of the material, or a fusion of ideological honor with pragmatic success.

In review, Boehner used definition to frame the criteria for which a bill's merit should be evaluated; he always gave preference to the will of the American people, individual freedom and jobs. As can be seen, each of the four types of argument served a different role for Boehner as it relates to persuasion and the idealistic-pragmatic considerations. Now the emergent patterns falling outside the domain of one specific argument type will be analyzed.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Ideological Rhetoric and the Tea Party Movement

The emergence of the Tea Party Movement coincides with a greater role of idealism in Boehner's speeches. The increase is probably better understood as a correlation than causation, however, the issues of limited government so integral to the movement became major concerns for Boehner. Of course throughout his long tenure Boehner has always espoused the principle of limited government, but his overall reputation was as a deal breaker. Whether from a frustration with liberal policy or support of Tea Party enthusiasm (or both), ideological beliefs took on a more prominent position and he seemed to become less willing to compromise. It appears the Tea Party forced him to take a few steps to the ideological right.

Idealism and Epideictic/Ceremonial Oratory

The sole speech epideictic or ceremonial in nature was the outlier in Boehner's discourse. Each other oration, legislative in focus, had similar patterns and strategies, but his election as speaker prompted a drastic shift to genus and idealism. This indicates that the epideictic genre of rhetoric is more inclined to idealism rather than pragmatism. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca allude to this in their description of the genre when they write, "epideictic oratory has significance and importance for argumentation, because it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds" (50). So epideictic rhetoric may be an exception to the rhetorical balance of America, because it demands idealism.

Genus and Consequence as Counterparts

As much as a distinction has been made between genus and consequence, and rightfully so, in the actual discourse they work together as counterparts in structure. Every ideal is related to the real world and all materialistic conceptions have at least some relation to the perceived

Good. For when Boehner advocates for a policy, he builds the two upon each other. Boehner used genus to establish the ideal being aimed for while consequence provides the means to attain to it. Hence the idealistic and pragmatic arguments are not contradictory, but necessary for one another. It shows that idealistic and practical thinking does not have to be in competition.

While opposing a policy, Boehner still finds a way for genus and consequence to work together with a 'rhetoric of transgression.' Earlier in the analysis Boehner's 'transgression triumvirate' was explained and this concept builds on that idea. Genus and consequence complement each other, this time by showing the ideal and how *not* to pragmatically attain it. Once again, concern with the abstract and the tangible does not have to be contradictory.

As can be seen, Boehner's rhetoric, and any rhetoric in congress for that matter, is intricately complex in the way it handles the competing visions of idealism and pragmatism. Boehner has identifiable patterns and tendencies which confirm the importance of the dichotomy to American Rhetoric, allowing for the research questions, implications, and conclusions of this study to be given in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5- DISCUSSION

Research Questions and Considerations

By now the research questions have been answered by the analysis. For the sake of clarity and organization, they will be formally acknowledged in summarization here. Then a possible explanation for these answers and habits will be given. Concluding will be a review of the study and its findings and limitations. Finally the study's implications on congressional rhetoric, Richard Weaver's model, and the American Rhetorical tradition will be examined including any future research that may be precipitated.

Central Research Question: How does John Boehner incorporate rhetorical idealism and rhetorical pragmatism in his speeches?

First, Boehner uses a complex system of synthesis where the ideal consideration is often in the practical form of argument and the practical consideration is often in the ideal form. Both pragmatism and idealism are present in the arguments from consequence and genus, however, he often inserts practical considerations into genus, and idealistic considerations into consequence.

In addition, Boehner will use genus to cast the ideal and consequence to show the means to reach it. Or consequence will show how the proposed means will not reach the ideal.

Generally the ideals are established and uncontested which then makes consequential considerations the deciding factor. This synthesis allows there to be no contradiction between Boehner's abstract and material appeal. The two arguments are complementary, not contradictory. Ultimately, his preference is for consequence and practically founded rhetoric, which is the most frequent and the deciding consideration.

Research Subquestion One: Does Boehner favor one type of argument over another?

Boehner favors the argument from consequence followed closely by the argument from definition. Both the argument from circumstance and from similitude played minor roles, mostly

in support of either consequence or definition. Definition increases in usage while he is in the majority party but consequence is still the major consideration.

Research Subquestion Two: Does Boehner shift his rhetorical idealism/pragmatism based on the issue?

In short, no. Boehner uses the same method of argument despite the issue. He is remarkably consistent in the way he argues across a spectrum of questions. The only exception is his ceremonial speech after ascendancy to the role of Speaker of the House. Here he relied almost exclusively on idealism which seems to reflect the nature of the oration as epideictic more than speaking to his characteristic method of arguing. As Perelman and Tyteca make clear, epideictic oratory is characterized by values, so it makes sense that Boehner must speak in an idealistic manner.

Research Subquestion Three: Does Boehner shift his rhetorical idealism/pragmatism based on majority or minority party status?

Yes. Pragmatic consequence is the preference while Boehner is the Minority Party Leader and he frequently invoked the transgression tactics. When he became Speaker of the House idealism took on a much larger role as complementary to his earlier pragmatism. Much of this could be explained on the basis of whether he was promoting or attacking a bill. It makes sense that when a rhetor is trying to sell a piece of legislation he or she would focus more on the idealistic elements than one who is criticizing it.

Now that the research questions have been answered, and the speeches analyzed, a solidified portrait of Boehner's rhetoric is discernable. These strategies dealing with Weaver's four kinds of argument and the idealistic-pragmatic tradition of America are not insignificant, but

rather penetrate into the way many Americans think. First, one must consider what these patterns mean and why they exist.

Boehner's rhetoric is characterized by a chief concern for the practical through the argument from consequence. Still important but complementary to consequence is idealism through the argument from definition. Much of his success is related to his ability to make his rhetoric seem more balanced than its actual state.

In many instances ideology is missing where it could have been inserted. This is explainable because with the formation of political parties, and the fact that he sees the same individuals nearly every day, they are already aware of where the philosophically and politically stand. There is little need then to argue from ideology. In addition, much of this ideology is divisive in that one cannot easily persuade a person or a group idealistically if they have an ideal which is contradictory, unless of course it involves ideological synthesis. Consequence then is more persuasive and useful to Boehner because even if the opposing party does not agree on ideology, they can agree on the positive and negatives of most effects. Practical consequential reasoning then provides a common ground and an avenue toward identification. This common ground becomes the only way of persuading other representatives. It is even more important when one is in the minority and needs to sway members of the majority in a different ideological group, giving a possible explanation to why it was more prevalent when he was Minority Party Leader. Because of the lack of power in the minority, consequence becomes the only way to reach them. When one is in a greater position of power in congress, however (such as Boehner as Speaker of the House), consequence is still important in maintaining common ground, but common ground is less necessary because one already has enough support from their ideological

majority to pass legislation. Hence there is the greater reliance upon the argument from definition and ideological rhetoric.

To counteract the strong slant toward pragmatic evaluations, whether intentionally or not, Boehner puts much of the practical into idealistic terms or idealistic methods of argumentation which gives it the *appearance* of being idealistic, when in actuality it is utilitarian motives hidden in abstract clothing. This has the positive effect of making Boehner's rhetoric look more idealistically balanced than it actually is. In fairness to Boehner, the congressional vocation is inherently practical. The job of Representative is ultimately to pass legislation which optimizes living while protecting rights. This necessarily demands a consideration of the practical effects of bills. So it is safe to assert that Congress requires an important role for pragmatism.

Still ideologies are clearly in Boehner's rhetoric, but they are infrequently defined and left as an assumption or "values shared by their audiences-not as ideals that need to be defined or defended" (Gilles 133). This results in an emphasis upon consequence and pragmatism. When Carroll Arnold said that "to succeed in the United States, rhetors have almost always had to be at once transcendently confident in some visible ideal, systematically, doctrinally cogent, and at least apparently practical," it seems Boehner has switched it.

Overall in Boehner's rhetoric, instead of the good principle providing the good consequence, the good consequences prove the merit of the principle. The distinction may seem trifling but it is quite profound, in that it reveals the predication of pragmatism over idealism. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca mention in *The New Rhetoric* that oftentimes good consequences are offered as proof for the truth of some principle of proposition. This seems an adequate description of a strong if subtle force in Boehner's rhetoric.

To be sure, there are idealistic beliefs behind the focus on consequences. For example he wants jobs and clean air, but does not state why it is good and valuable. Perhaps jobs are important because of some metaphysical conception that work is a “philosophical good” or nature should be saved because it is of some philosophic importance. Whatever the idealistic reasons though, they are left unstated so it initially appears there is no philosophic system of thought. It in turn forms an enthymeme of his conservative ideals which may give them impression of being less idealistic than it actually is. It is better than to say that it *appears* pragmatism, what will have the best results and consequences, is the highest concern of Boehner’s congressional rhetoric.

Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research

When considering the implications of this analysis, or ‘what does it really mean,’ it becomes apparent that there are influences on the way several rhetorical topics are understood. Among these are congressional rhetoric, Richard Weaver’s hierarchy of arguments, and America’s rhetorical idealistic-pragmatic tradition.

CONGRESSIONAL RHETORIC

This analysis claims that Boehner’s rhetoric though balanced, is more typified by consequential considerations. This begs the question concerning the House of Representatives and other congressional bodies: Does the argument from consequence necessarily typify the highest concern of congressional rhetoric? For Boehner this pragmatism materializes, but is it reasonable to believe that this would be the major tendency in congressional rhetoric?

Diversity of opinion within a legislative body is sure to exist, so it would be reasonable to suspect at least some to use idealistic means. But as a whole, it is possible that because of the nature of their position, consequential pragmatism must be a major consideration. More research on this topic is needed.

In addition, it is plausible that certain issues may dictate the type of argument used. For example, debate centering on civil or gay rights may take a more idealistic tone than one concerning a federal budget. So is there an inconsistency when issues change? It is once again possible that Representatives already know the position that they are going to take and they will use whatever persuasive means are available to them—idealistic or pragmatic—to defend the position they already hold. These questions and ideas are worthy of investigation.

Finally, this study's results indicated that the level of idealism and pragmatism was impacted by the nature of the speech as being legislative or ceremonial. This project analyzed almost exclusively deliberative speech so future studies should place greater emphasis on those orations more ceremonial in nature.

RICHARD WEAVER'S HIERARCHY OF ARGUMENTS

Richard Weaver has remained controversial for good reason. His ideas on rhetoric may have been politically influenced but is that any different from feminist and postmodern rhetorics of today? Weaver's ideas should be judged on their own merit. This analysis shows that while he may not have developed a "well-rounded critical methodology," and he did not intend to, his ideas can still be applied effectively (Johannesen).

In evaluating his ideas from the results of this analysis, one criticism is supported. The four kinds of argument are not mutually exclusive, but instead frequently work together in ways that cross over and synthesize. Sometimes reasoning from consequence actually delivers the rhetor's ideals and definition delivers consequential considerations. So the argument types generally but not always show an inclination.

There too seems to be a new concern about the frequency of argument types. In this analysis, genus and consequence were employed considerably more often than either similitude

or circumstance. Are certain ways of arguing just more natural or common or is this a characteristic of Boehner? More research is needed to answer this question.

The greatest strength of Weaver's ideas is that they allow the scholar to think critically and implicitly discern the values of the speaker. The four argument framework gives a reasonable structure and method of organization with which to construct rhetorical ideas in a way that makes sense and encourages the critic to approach the work from a different perspective.

AMERICA'S RHETORICAL IDEALISM AND PRAGMATISM

A major motivation behind undertaking this study was the lesser attention paid to congressional bodies as it relates to rhetorical idealism and pragmatism. It has been firmly established that to be successful, American orators must reach out to both ends. Boehner may ultimately defer to consequences, but he frequently invokes principles to round out his persuasion as well as couching what are at their root pragmatic considerations in idealistic terms. As it relates to the ongoing discussion, this analysis is a first step toward more research of Congressional rhetoric. Boehner's continuing to invoke appeals to jobs, individual freedom and hard-work indicates that he identifies more with what Fisher labeled the "materialistic" element of the American dream, which without coincidence is the practically-oriented myth ("Reaffirmation"). It is possible that conservatives more often identify with the materialistic end and liberals with moralistic end, but more research is necessary to either affirm or disaffirm it.

The results of this study should help to establish a foundation for the study of diverse settings in the idealistic-pragmatic tradition. With that being said, it is not without weaknesses. First, this project examined only the one individual, John Boehner, and only eight speeches at that. While beneficial, it is a limited sample size. Eight speeches are enough to begin an understanding of congressional rhetoric but more studies on Congressional Representatives are

needed to work toward a more comprehensive picture. For example, this study looked at an establishment Republican. Other studies could look at Democrats such as Nancy Pelosi or third party candidates to compare their rhetoric. Or one could look at Tea Party and Libertarian Republicans to see if they had a greater idealistic focus.

In addition, other models besides Weaver's forms should be used to allow for diverse findings. No specific model is without limitation but taken collectively they can neutralize each other's weaknesses. For example, one could examine idealism and pragmatism by using Burke's rhetorical pentad with the term *agent* reflecting an idealistic focus and the term *agency* reflecting a pragmatic focus.

One of the difficulties in this study was separating idealistic and pragmatic arguments into exclusive categories. While it was necessary for this study's purpose and methodology, in practice many of these arguments are inseparable. Furthermore, it is impossible to ascertain how much influence party politics and partisanship exerts on idealistic and pragmatic arguments. A different methodology may be able to alleviate some of these limitations.

Another weakness of this study became apparent in the speeches selected. Each one analyzed from when Boehner was in the minority party was him opposing a piece of legislation. This limited the optimum diversity and may have impacted the results discovered. Additionally, like any other study, the influence and bias of the critic is inseparable from the work. This thesis was written from one particular worldview and critics from another may find different results.

Finally, in future studies, it may be beneficial to look at only one issue to see the progression of idealistic-pragmatic rhetoric in it. Hopefully this study leads to more interest in the American dichotomy.

Summary:

In review, stemming from the Puritans and leaving its mark on American history, has been an almost contradictory synthesis of idealistic and pragmatic rhetoric. Despite any disfavor 'idealism' as a term may suffer from, it is a necessary component in American political rhetoric alongside pragmatism. In modern day, this dichotomy is well represented in the materialistic and moralistic myths within the American dream, and all politicians should find a way to meet both. Most contemporary studies dealing with the subject have concentrated their research in Presidential discourse, in turn leaving legislative rhetoric less-analyzed.

In this study, eight speeches of John Boehner using Richard Weaver's four types of argument were analyzed looking for strategies of idealism and pragmatism. The analysis showed that Boehner's primary argument was one of consequence, which is practical in orientation, meaning that it predicts the material impact a piece of legislation will have on the American people. This was complemented by idealistic arguments from genus that while ultimately inferior to consequence, was still a major consideration with implications on the merit of legislation. His primary idealistic arguments dealt with the individual freedom and moral responsibility to the American people. These two arguments, consequence and definition, are the major considerations of Boehner. Both circumstance and similitude played minor roles which supported the major considerations of consequence and genus respectively.

In all, Boehner's rhetoric gives but another example that American persuasion must have both the appearance of idealism and pragmatism, even if it is ultimately founded on just one. Pragmatism seems to have the greater weight with Boehner and it may be that way with much of congress. This reflection may be related to the fall in idealism and modern age's preoccupation with the material. More inquiries into all of congressional rhetoric and specifically the idealistic-

pragmatic tradition will help discover a less studied field and answer many of the unmet questions.

Perhaps too the inclination to denigrate abstract values and verities as untrustworthy can be reexamined. For if there is to be consistency, Americans must acknowledge that they are not motivated purely from a pragmatic perspective or else these idealistic elements could be forewent. The “spiritual” longing of humanity strives for something that transcends the particulars, as much as it is absorbed in those particulars. So there is still some role for the abstract to touch the strings of the heart and for rhetoric to be that carrier of affect, and allow it to guide practical behavior, even in a materialistic society.

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